



We are called to conversation and prayer around our role as U.S. residents and as people of faith in ensuring our election systems promote dignity and respect for all.

We are called to act by speaking out as advocates and engaging in local efforts to guarantee the right to vote to all citizens.

To sign up for up-to-date information on ELCAvotes, visit: <https://goo.gl/xg7gNk>

ELCAvotes is an initiative to:

Expand the role of the church in encouraging faithful and non-partisan voter participation by providing faith based resources around voting;

Provide a framework for all Lutherans to understand and speak out about the intersection of voting/elections, racial/gender and economic justice;

Provide young adults the tools to understand and speak about what it means to be a young person of faith who is civically engaged; and

Engage with and equip ethnic communities to talk about voting rights and race and their connection with elections today.

"[It is] resolved, that members, congregations, and synods of this church be encouraged to "promote public life worthy of the name" by speaking out as an advocate and engaging in local efforts such as voter registration and supporting legislation to guarantee the right to vote to all citizens"

Social Policy Resolution, "Voting Rights to All Citizens" adopted August 2013

Learn more about ministries of the ELCA that are leading this effort:

ELCA Advocacy

Website: ELCA.org/advocacy

Email: washingtonoffice@elca.org

/ELCAAdvocacy

ELCA Racial Justice Ministries

Website: [ELCA.org/Our-Work/Publicly-](http://ELCA.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Racial-Justice-Ministries)

[Engaged-Church/Racial-Justice-Ministries](http://ELCA.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Racial-Justice-Ministries)

ELCA Young Adult Ministry

Website: [ELCA.org/Our-](http://ELCA.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Young-Adult-Ministry)

[Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Young-Adult-Ministry](http://ELCA.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Young-Adult-Ministry)

/ELCAYoungAdults

CALLED TO BE A PUBLIC CHURCH

Connecting our faith to our involvement in government.

How are we called to civic engagement through participation in the electoral process?

Voting is one of the most important ways Americans can be involved in our representative democracy. Through the simple act of casting an informed vote, we have the opportunity and responsibility to help make decisions that will affect our lives and the lives of our families for the next two to eight years.

What does civic engagement mean for the church?

Scripture reveals God's presence in all realms of life, including political life. This church understands government as a means through which God works to preserve creation and build a more peaceful and just social order in a sinful world. The electoral process is one way in which we live out our affirmation of baptism to "serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus," and "to strive for justice and peace in all the earth."

For the church, the effort must include Bible study and consideration of faithful decision-making. But it also involves facilitating voter registration programs, getting people to the polls, encouraging poll watching and monitoring, instigating issue discussions, and providing holistic voter education opportunities. As citizens of the United States, we have the right, the privilege, and the responsibility to be involved in the political process. As people of God, we have been freed to love our neighbor, seek peace and justice, and care for God's creation. Faith should inform not only our participation but also how we look at public issues and interpret what is happening in political life.

Our Christian faith compels us to attend to the world through the lens of our relationship to God and to one another. As a public church, we have a responsibility to step outside our comfort zones and challenge ourselves to address issues that affect families, communities and neighbors throughout the world. As a church body, the ELCA uses its prophetic voice boldly to address important political, social and economic issues that affect local and global communities. This work grows out of our theological understanding of God at work in the world and is articulated in the social statements of this church, which you can find at ELCA.org/socialstatements on the Web.

The importance of nonpartisan civic engagement:

An important part of faithful civic engagement is abiding by the law: Any participation by churches in the electoral process must be strictly nonpartisan.

With this understood, it is still important to acknowledge that we have an amazing opportunity to strengthen the public debate around the electoral process by allowing our faith to ground our political ideals. As long as we educate ourselves about the laws surrounding our participation in electoral affairs, there are many activities that we can conduct that are both demonstrations of our Christian faith and are extremely valuable to our community and our nation!

The simple act of casting your vote can have a powerful effect. Your vote means that your elected officials are accountable to you. As a result, by voting you become an advocate for all of the change or consistency that you want to see in this country. This is the beauty of our electoral system.

VOTING RIGHTS AND RACIAL JUSTICE

Ensuring our election systems promote dignity and respect for all.

How far have we come in guaranteeing the right to vote?

Lutherans have long been involved in the fight to protect voting rights in the United States. Today, the ELCA is guided by our social statement: "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture," as well as the 2013 ELCA Social Policy Resolution: "Voting Rights to All Citizens," which directly calls on us to speak out as advocates and engage in local efforts such as voter registration and supporting legislation that guarantees the right to vote to all citizens.

Who is still left out of the process and what can we do about it?

From a history of voter suppression from the Jim Crow era of the 19th to the 21st century to the current climate of restrictive voter laws, many people of color face barriers to their right to vote. We encourage conversation about why this matters to us as a church and what we can do about it.

"When we rebuild walls of hostility and live behind them – blaming others for the problem and looking to them for solutions – we ignore the role we ourselves play in the problem and also in the solution. When we confront racism and move toward fairness and justice in society, all of us benefit."

ELCA social statement, "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture"

How can we as a church promote dignity and respect and honor all who reside in our communities?

As a church, we are committed to "a moral deliberation that deals openly with conflict and controversy." Election season is, unfortunately, a time in which negative rhetoric aimed at belittling others and instigating fear is the norm. The church of Jesus Christ is uniquely equipped to foster and model civil dialogue, invite trust in the midst of differences, and lead healthy community conversations to discuss issues of the common good.

MOVEMENT INTO ACTION

How you can participate in ELCAvotes this election year.

Using resources that will be provided by the ELCA and partner organizations as part of the ELCAvotes initiative, here are some ways to participate in ELCAvotes:

1. Hold discussions and Bible study in your congregation, synod or campus on:

- Our calling, as Lutherans, to participate in and engage with our government
- The social, economic and political root causes in denying the opportunity to vote
- How we as a church together can promote dignity and respect and honor all who live in our communities
- Offering regular prayer for elected leaders and good government

2. Mobilize participation in the electoral process by:

- Registering citizens to vote
- Conducting candidate forums
- Early voting
- Encouraging citizens to vote on Election Day

3. Join Lutherans in Washington, D.C., for Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2016

Join the ELCA at Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD), April 15-18 as we gather as a denomination during this event to engage around voting rights and racial justice. "Ecumenical Advocacy Days is a movement of the ecumenical Christian community and its recognized partners and allies, grounded in biblical witness and our shared traditions of justice, peace and the integrity of creation." (advocacydays.org) Through worship, theological reflection and opportunities for learning and witness, this event seeks to strengthen our Christian voice and to mobilize for advocacy on a wide variety of U.S. domestic and international policy issues. To learn more about EAD or to register for this event, visit advocacydays.org. The ELCA has limited scholarship funds available for participants of EAD (based on need). Contact washingtonoffice@elca.org for more information.

4. Advocate for an electoral system that guarantees the right to vote to all citizens

Help the ELCA Advocacy identify places around the country where the right to vote is still being denied and join our leadership network to help us create a course of action.

5. Follow #ELCAvotes on social media and participate in the conversation online

The ELCA will hold Twitter chats through ELCA Young Adult Ministry and will post updated information on our efforts on Twitter and Facebook throughout 2016.

2016 TIMELINE

Important events for ELCAvotes in 2016

Feb. 10 – March 24	Lent
Apr. 15 –18	Ecumenical Advocacy Days – Washington, D.C.
April – May	Synod assemblies
August	ELCA Churchwide Assembly and Grace Gathering
October	Voter registration closes, early voting begins
Nov. 8	Election Day!