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CALLED TO BE A PUBLIC CHURCH

ELCA
CIVIC PARTICIPATION
& VOTER EDUCATION
GUIDE

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ELCA CIVIC PARTICIPATION & VOTER EDUCATION GUIDE

A resource guide to encourage, empower, and equip Lutherans for responsible civic engagement based on their faith values.

“Called To Be a Public Church” is intended to encourage congregations to participate in voter registration drives, voter mobilization campaigns, and poll monitoring. This guide also contains nonpartisan issue briefs on issues related to the ELCA social statements.

Learn more about the ELCA's advocacy ministries at www.elca.org/advocacy.

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Though this study guide has been designed with ELCA Lutherans in mind, members of other denominations can easily modify it for their own use, by incorporating pertinent materials from their own faith traditions and national church offices.

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Disclaimer

The information provided in this guide is accurate to the best knowledge of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Washington Office. While we have done our very best to provide you with current, non-partisan information regarding churches and election law, no resource guide can substitute for checking with the IRS, federal and state agencies administering election laws, and your attorney regarding the extent to which a church and/or its religious leaders can be involved in specific political activities.

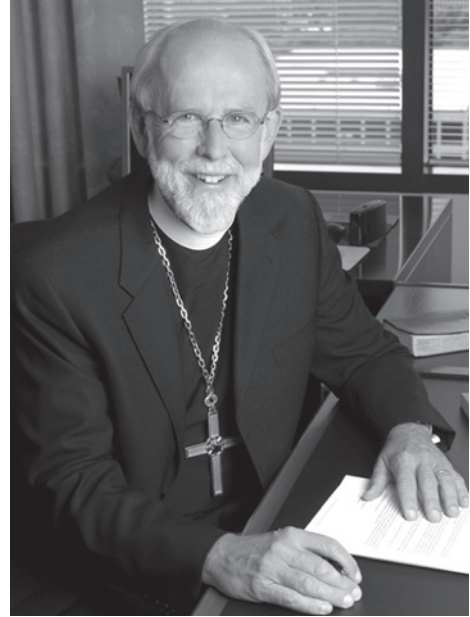
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FOREWORD

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*
(Micah 6:8)

As a public church called to witness to God's love for all God has created, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) affirms the importance of participation in society by all people, including people of faith. The ELCA social statement, *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, which guides our public speech and ethical actions, commits us to "work with and on behalf of the poor, the powerless, and those who suffer, using [this church's] power and influence with political and economic decision-making bodies to develop and advocate policies that seek to advance justice, peace and the care of creation."



Scripture reveals God's presence in all realms of life, including political life. This church understands government as a means through which God can work 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."

An important part of faithful civic engagement is abiding by the law: any participation by churches in the electoral process must be strictly nonpartisan. This guide will aid you in keeping your electoral activities transparent, nonpartisan, and legal. Following and engaging with the issues that come up during the electoral process is an excellent way to get

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to know our local and global neighbors and their concerns, and become better equipped to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God through our actions in the public square.

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 www.elca.org/socialstatements on the Web. The issues addressed in this guide grow out of these social statements and can be raised with candidates in all forums. Each community will have its own particular issues of concern beyond those on the national and global scale, of course, which require careful thought. These issue briefs are intended to be a resource to you as you engage in conversation, Bible study, reflection on Lutheran theology, and discussion of the ELCA social statements, as well as your personal, prayerful discernment about how you will vote.

It is my hope that this guide will be a useful tool as you and your congregation wrestle with faithful responses to difficult issues in this election cycle and those to come. Remember that voting is the first step towards faithful civic participation; many more opportunities to use your voice on behalf of those in need are available at www.elca.org/advocacy.

May the Holy Spirit guide you as you consider how to use the voice given to you by God and the vote given to you by this country.

In God's grace,

The Reverend Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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INTRODUCTION

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 this mean for the church? 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, hosting candidate forums, 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.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), like other houses of worship and nonprofit organizations in the United States, enjoys benefits from our nation's government. Perhaps the biggest benefits are that contributions to our church are tax-deductible for most donors, and our congregations have tax-exempt status. These benefits, however great, do have a few catches. Most Americans, legitimately, do not want tax-exempt organizations supporting partisan political agendas. The ELCA affirms this need for a separation from partisan political activities around the electoral cycle. As people of faith, driven by our Lutheran heritage, we have a responsibility to speak truth to government by engaging in this expression of our democratic process. In other words, let's get out the vote!

While reading this resource guide it is important to understand that transparency (openness) in program and budget planning is essential for our participation in political activity of any kind. All of the suggested activities throughout this guide are nonpartisan and do not encourage the promotion of any one party or candidate for public office.

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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! Our Christian faith guides our understanding of the world around us, aides us in our decision making, and molds us into the people that we aspire to be. It is therefore logical that we allow our faith to assist us in our pursuit of positive civic participation. The ELCA highly encourages you, your campus ministry group or congregation to get involved; discussing public issues and encouraging your communities to become motivated and mobilized to vote.

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.

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WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is intended for the use of lay leaders who are interested in engaging members of their communities in elections at all levels; campus ministry leaders seeking to build youth development initiatives and raise the political and civic consciousness of fellow students and peers; ELCA synod staff and affiliates as a tool in their continued outreach and communication with regional congregations and extended networks; and Lutherans who want to inspire the mobilization of people, grounded by faith, to engage in the electoral process.

WHY WAS THIS GUIDE WRITTEN?

Churches have a unique role to play at election time. With all of the cynicism and apathy that exists around politics and the electoral system, your efforts can act as a beacon of light encouraging those around you to support a process that ultimately selects decision makers, at all levels, who will directly affect your day-to-day life.

This guide is intended to provide three things.

1. To make sense of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax code for 501(c)(3) organizations and provide a “how to” guide for congregational interaction with electoral politics while speaking truth to our government.
2. To provide logistical information and best practices on how to go about your civic engagement activities.
3. To assist you and your constituencies in learning about and educating others about important issues affecting your local and global communities.

What do people of faith think about participating in the electoral process?

- The Gallup Organization conducted a study in 2004 which showed that people of faith do not believe that they have much effect on the political process. 61 percent said that they “only make a little” or “no difference at all” in the political process as it currently operates.
- In another poll taken by the Zogby International organization, 76 percent of Americans disapprove of religious leaders endorsing candidates from their pulpits or in any official capacity on behalf of their house of worship.

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According to research conducted by the Interfaith Alliance, most Americans believe houses of worship should encourage people to vote and engage in civic participation. The IRS and federal government allow houses of worship to be involved in both of these activities, with certain restrictions. For example, clergy and religious institutions are not permitted to tell people who to vote for, without exception. As long as we keep all of our activities around elections nonpartisan and transparent, we can play an extremely valuable role supporting our country's democracy and encouraging faith-filled civic participation, without compromising the principles upon which this country was founded.

With this said, you know your congregation better than anyone, so we will not presume to tell you what the Lutherans in your community think. So please apply our suggestions as generalizations, and, if you choose to, only conduct activities that you and your community will be comfortable with.

- In a 2001 Gallup poll, people of faith disapproved of religious leaders supporting the preparation and distribution of candidate-specific voter guides by a margin of 30 percent (53 percent against to 23 percent for).

- One activity that most Americans agree on is the important role for religious leaders in increasing voter participation. 66 percent of people of faith think that religious leaders should promote voting as a substantial component of responsible civic participation.

Data collected and used with permission from the 2006 publication of "One Nation, Many Faiths. VOTE 2006" written by staff at The Interfaith Alliance.

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IRS GUIDELINES FOR CHURCHES WITH 501(C)(3) TAX-EXEMPT STATUS

Why is it important to understand my tax status when planning political activity?

Before you begin any political activity, it is extremely important that you understand what parameters exist under IRS guidelines. At first glance, these guidelines might seem a bit daunting, so throughout this section it is extremely important to remember that congregations, synod offices, seminaries, ELCA colleges or university campus ministry groups can, and should, play a vital role in encouraging your communities to vote. However, before you begin, it is also important to know which political activities are permissible and which are unacceptable under the auspices of your 501(c)(3) tax status. **Non-compliance with IRS Tax Code 501(c)(3) can mean a loss of your institution's tax exempt status, so it is important to read this section thoroughly.**

Helpful Hint

Need a definition for a term or phrase? Check out the glossary on page 61.

Examples of activities that are permissible:

1. Distributing nonpartisan voter guides encouraging voting, deepening voter education through issue discussions, and inspiring other meaningful opportunities for civic participation.
2. Facilitating debates, hosting screenings or discussions of publicly-broadcasted debates.
3. Facilitating equal-opportunity speeches or bipartisan debates. This can be facilitated by representatives from campus groups with partisan affiliation. For example, have the president/representative of a campus' student Republican organization and the president/representative from a campus' student Democratic organization give speeches to raise voter awareness on relevant issues.
4. Canvassing neighborhoods for participation in the election.
5. Organizing Get-Out-The-Vote campaigns.
6. Organizing voter registration drives.
7. Organizing letters to local newspapers on the importance of civic engagement.

(For more detailed information on how to get involved in these activities, please reference the next section, "Election Activities For You, Your Campus and Your Congregation.")

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Examples of activities that should be avoided by churches and church leaders acting on behalf of the church:

1. Contributing to candidates or campaigns specifically geared towards an individual candidate or political party. In other words, in an official capacity as a leader or on behalf of the church, you may not raise funds or give money to candidates or political parties.
2. Allowing candidates to raise funds for their campaign on your church's property, Web site, newsletter, or other publications.
3. Any form of direct endorsement or indirect endorsement of a candidate or political party. In other words, keep your activities unbiased and nonpartisan.
4. Explicitly or implicitly endorsing a candidate, potential candidate, political party, third-party movement or candidate draft effort.
5. Permitting political signs favoring a candidate or party to be posted on church property.
6. Focusing voter registration or other election-related activities in specific geographic areas because they are influential, crucial or partisan districts or wards. (However, your congregation may target a geographic area because it is convenient to your location, or because many members of your congregation live there, as long as it is not intended to incite unfair electoral participation.)
7. Coordinating voter registration, Get-Out-The-Vote campaigns, or other election-related activities **with** a candidate or political party. Do not allow political parties to suggest the timing, messages, audience or location of any of your political activities.
8. Organizing groups to work for a candidate or party.
9. Asking a candidate to pledge support for a religious denomination's position on an issue, publicizing a candidate's position on an issue, or publicizing a candidate's independent decision to support or oppose the denomination's position.
10. Providing anything of value, including space, equipment, mailing lists or staff time, without charging full market value and allowing equal access to opposition candidates. If you are making your space available to any candidate, it's a good idea to send a courtesy letter offering the space to all other candidates. It is also a good idea, if you are offering your space for use by political candidates, that it also be available to the general public.
11. Providing space for the distribution of partisan materials, such as candidate flyers, on church property.



Helpful Hint

When deciding whether a potential activity is IRS permissible, you should research the issue and use this guide, as well as the IRS Web site. If you feel that a proposed concept might be perceived as being biased or partisan, run the idea past a legal professional before committing to a project. It is always better to be safe and transparent than to be put in an uncomfortable situation.

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The following chart is a visualization of what activities are acceptable by either individuals, in several capacities, or by churches in terms of the acceptability of their election-related activities.

Election Activities	Churches: as institutional bodies¹	Clergy: as representatives of a congregation	Clergy: as individuals²	Church members: as individuals³
Discuss the positions of all candidates on public issues	Yes ⁴	Yes	Yes	Yes
Endorse political candidates	No	No	Yes	Yes
Contribute to political candidates	No	No	Yes	Yes
Commit to in-kind expenditures, meaning gifts or volunteer hours, in support of or against political candidates	No	No	Yes	Yes
Contribute to political action committees	No	No	Yes	Yes
Have a political candidate speak at a church meeting or service	Yes ⁵	Yes	N/A	N/A
Pay expenses for candidates for appearances at church meetings or services	No	No	N/A	N/A
Distribute at church:				
• Nonpartisan candidate surveys	Yes ⁶	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Voting records of all candidates running for office	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Candidate's political statements	No	No	Yes ⁷	Yes ⁷
• Nonpartisan voter education guides ⁸	Yes ⁹	Yes ⁹	Yes ⁹	Yes ⁹
Hold voter registration drives	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hold nonpartisan ⁸ Get-Out-The-Vote drives	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

¹ Please review the definition of “Church” in this context as is defined by the IRS in the glossary on page 61.

² This category is intended to identify and encourage pastors and clergy members to participate in election-related activities. As affirmed by the IRS, clergy members may use their title as Reverend as a professional title. However, it is not permissible to affiliate one’s self with a specific congregation or denomination when engaging in partisan political activities.

³ This category is intended to demonstrate what activities congregants can engage in when it comes to their political participation and activities. However, it is extremely important to note that it is not permissible to affiliate one’s self directly with a congregation or denomination, or attempt to speak on behalf of either of the aforementioned entities. To do so would be in violation with Tax Code 501(c)(3).

⁴ A church is well within its rights if it chooses to hold an educational session in which opposing positions on political issues are discussed. It is important, however, to remember that all political opinions must be expressed equally, within reason.

⁵ A political candidate may speak at your church. The appearance of candidates before and after church services is limited by law. There must be equal representation from any other candidates for the same office allotted. If, for any reason, you are unable to get representation from a majority of the candidates for that particular office, you must cancel the event. All events, however informal, MUST be nonpartisan, and the religious institutions may not favor or denounce any candidate or party under any circumstance. NO campaigning or fundraising may take place during the event.

⁶ A church may publish and distribute the results of surveys of candidates on public issues. Said surveys must be nonpartisan, offering equal opportunity for all potential candidates running for office. The results MUST be in a “Yes” or “No” format and should not suggest or specify a desired response or outcome. Be careful not to use words that would endorse or detract support for any individual candidate, and consult a lawyer to clarify that your actions are both directly and indirectly nonpartisan.

⁷ While this is technically permitted, you are urged to use extreme caution. The church should take pains to make it clear that the distribution of candidate materials is neither sanctioned nor endorsed by the congregation.

⁸ Please note difference between “nonpartisan” and “bipartisan” in the glossary, found on page 61.

⁹ Voter guides can be a great tool to keep your congregation informed on the ongoing issues-based discussions held by political candidates, but it is our recommendation that if you are planning to create a guide, you consult legal council before beginning distribution.

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GUIDELINES FOR NONPARTISAN ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES AND LOBBYING

Nonpartisan electoral activities and lobbying activities are two different things and are subject to two different sets of rules. The rules depend on several factors:

1. The type of lobbying activities conducted during an election season
2. The type or nature of the political or campaign activity being conducted
3. The issues or themes of the activities
4. The scope or amount of time and resources being put towards the activity

For our purposes this guide will be presented for churches and organizations that fall under tax code 501(c)(3) exclusively. For additional information that includes other tax groups designated to other non-profit organizations, such as 527 and 501(c)(4), or churches with “integrated auxiliary” components (see glossary for definition), we recommend that you seek assistance directly from the IRS or guidance from a legal professional.

What lobbying activity can the ELCA conduct during an election season?

Lobbying, or attempting to sway elected or appointed officials to vote for or against a specific piece of legislation, is a legal activity for nonprofit organizations, even during an election season—as long as the lobbying activity is not intended to influence an election. Also, organizations may involve themselves in issues of public policy without the activity being considered lobbying. For example, organizations may conduct educational meetings, prepare and distribute educational materials, or otherwise consider public policy issues in an educational manner without jeopardizing their tax-exempt status. The ELCA’s advocacy staff throughout the country conduct legislative lobbying activities which are completely permissible under tax law. Issues that the ELCA focuses on, such as poverty eradication and the care for creation, are not election-specific issues for our church. They are issues of concern that are part of the ELCA’s work for the entire calendar year. Also, when applying the Substantial Part Test, these lobbying activities make up an extremely small part of the ELCA’s broad scope of work.

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Is the ELCA at risk for penalty under the IRS's Substantial Part Test?

The Substantial Part Test is the standard applied to determine if a 501(c)(3) is in compliance with lobbying regulations. If a substantial amount of a 501(c)(3) organization's activities are considered to be an attempt to influence legislative decisions, the organization's tax-exempt status may be reviewed for potential violations. The legislative lobbying activities of the ELCA are just a small part of the broad scope of the work of our denomination, so we are not in jeopardy.

What constitutes nonpartisan electoral activity?

According to the IRS, "all section 501(c)(3) organizations are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office." IRS language can seem insurmountable and overwhelming, but this guide attempts to break down legal text into digestible bites, and opens up many opportunities for things that you CAN do, as long as they're nonpartisan.

Focus on activities that are intended to encourage people to participate in the electoral process. These can include, but are not limited to, nonpartisan voter registration and Get-Out-The-Vote campaigns.

But remember, voter education or registration activities conducted by the church are not permissible if they show evidence of a bias that: (a) would favor one candidate over another; (b) oppose a candidate in some manner; or (c) have the perceived effect of favoring a candidate or group of candidates.

What issues can I focus on while remaining nonpartisan?

Our recommendation for issue-based sermons or voter education around the electoral process is to use the issue briefs contained in this guide. All of the issues represented, such as peace and conflict, hunger and poverty, caring for creation, and immigration are supported by ELCA social statements, which are formulated through a rigorous process involving the Scriptures, our theological tradition, and the practice of moral deliberation. These statements are then debated and voted on under a parliamentary process at general assembly gatherings. These issues subsequently stand as a foundation for the principles that we represent in all advocacy activities conducted in affiliation with the ELCA. However, to ensure that you remain nonpartisan when discussing these stances, do not mention how candidates stand in relation to these issues.

What activities can I organize as a church leader?

Religious leaders and other church officials may take positions on important issues facing their community, as long as they do not favor



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-Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson

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IRS Enforcement Steps Up

Since the 2004 election, the IRS has stepped up its enforcement of the ban on partisan electoral activity by charities and religious organizations. The results have been:

1. A number of controversial audits by the IRS—most notably the All Saints Episcopal Church case.
2. New informational guidance and fact sheets from the IRS.

Unfortunately, while legal precedents are still being decided, some ambiguity on specific activities has led to:

3. Additional questions from 501(c)(3) organizations addressing the standards used by the IRS in their decision to investigate possible tax violations.
4. The need for further clarification on procedures used when complying with election-related audits.

Fortunately, facts and circumstances behind these questions can be considered case-by-case, by your legal representation or by contacting the IRS directly.

any candidate or party. With our tradition in mind, issue-based appeals might best be discussed in the context of a formal service. However, depending on the comfort level of your congregation, another effective forum for discussion might be at an informal meeting after a service or other opportunity outside of your sanctuary. The IRS permits either, as long as the speaker is clearly nonpartisan with their presentation. Even implicit suggestions are unacceptable.

Issue discussion can be risky, particularly when social issues are being discussed and especially when the issue is sharply divided on party lines. Even a well-intentioned sermon, for example, can be interpreted as partisan when particularly contentious issues are being discussed. The ELCA Washington Office recommends that issue discussions focus on the issue briefings provided in this guide on page 35, as a clear ELCA stance has been established. Again, it is always a good idea to seek legal assistance when questions of the legality of the content of sermons or discussions arise.

Can I invite a candidate to speak at my church?

Churches may invite political candidates to speak to their members without risk of jeopardizing their tax-exempt status, if they follow a few IRS rules. These rules are all dependent on the facts and circumstances of the event. Political candidates may be invited in their capacity as candidates, or individually (not as a candidate). However, if you invite a candidate to speak as part of their campaign, you must invite their opponent(s) to speak and give them equal time and prominence. Also, most of the invited candidates must agree to participate. If there are only two candidates in a race, and one declines to speak, you may not hold the event.

If candidates are invited to speak in a debate or forum, questions must cover a broad range of issues to ensure that the selective choice of topics do not favor one candidate over another. So, for example, it would not be fair to deliberately slant issues covered to benefit one candidate, or permit one candidate to always have the last word.

When the candidate is introduced and/or flyers or bulletins are distributed announcing a candidate's intended participation in an event, it is always a good idea to state explicitly that the event is nonpartisan and should not be construed as an indication that the church supports or opposes any individual or party. It is also essential to make certain that no political fundraising occurs at the event or on church property.

For further guidance on how to host a political candidate or a political forum, see page 21 of this guide.

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An organization may also invite political candidates to speak in a non-candidate capacity. For instance, a political candidate may be a public figure because:

- ✓ He or she currently holds, or formerly held, public office.
- ✓ He or she is considered an expert in a non-political field.
- ✓ He or she is a celebrity or has led a distinguished military, legal, or public service career.

When a candidate is invited to speak at an event in a non-candidate capacity, it is not necessary for the organization to provide equal access to all political candidates. However, the organization must ensure that:

- ✓ The individual speaks only in a non-candidate capacity.
- ✓ No campaign activity (including distribution of campaign literature) occurs in connection with the candidate's attendance.
- ✓ The organization should clearly indicate the capacity in which the candidate is appearing, and should not mention the individual's political candidacy or the upcoming election in the communications announcing the candidate's attendance at the event or at the event itself. **Note:** Churches should clarify (repeatedly if possible) all the above with speakers well in advance and keep a record of the clarification.

How do I ensure equal opportunity for all candidates and maintain my own impartiality during election activities?

There are two major, and sometimes overlooked, components of planning a truly nonpartisan event.

1. The nature of the event to which the candidates are invited (in other words, where and when is the event taking place?)
2. The manner in which the event is handled

Both of these components can be presented in a nonpartisan fashion as long as you remember that circumstances, questions, and time given must be the same for all candidates.

For example, if you invite one candidate to speak at a well-attended annual banquet, but invite the opposing candidate to speak at a sparsely-attended general meeting, your church will likely be found to have violated the political campaign prohibition, even if the manner of presentation for both speakers is otherwise neutral.

If you are inviting several candidates to speak at a public forum, it may qualify as an educational activity and not a political activity. In order to make certain that your event does not take on an unintended bias, you should ensure that:

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- ✓ Questions for the candidates are prepared and presented by an independent, nonpartisan panel.
- ✓ Topics discussed by the candidates cover a broad range of issues of interest to the public and are directly applicable to the office the candidate is seeking.
- ✓ Each candidate is given an equal opportunity to present his or her views on the issues discussed.
- ✓ Candidates are not asked to agree or disagree with specific positions, agendas, platforms or statements of the ELCA as a church body. You can, however, ask about issues contained within those statements. So, for example, you could not ask a candidate if he/she agrees with all points in the ELCA *Caring for Creation* social statement, but you could ask a candidate about his or her stance on global warming.
- ✓ Moderator comments on the questions, or otherwise, do not imply approval or disapproval of the candidates.

As plans for an event or a series of events are being formulated, it's recommended that you seek legal guidance to ensure that you are doing everything within the parameters of the law. Again, it is always better to be transparent and open throughout this process.

Can our congregational Web site link to another Web site with candidate-related material?

Although your church does not control the content of the linked Web site, the church does control whether or not it establishes a link to another site. Communicating through the Internet is a widely used medium. If information is posted on your congregation's Web site favoring or opposing a candidate, it will be treated the same as distributing print material that favors or opposes a candidate.

Likewise a link to another site will depend on a number of factors. If your church decides to link to another Web site with candidate-related material, here are some guidelines:

- ✓ All candidates should be represented through their web pages.
- ✓ Monitor the linked content and adjust links accordingly.
- ✓ Linking to candidate-related material does not necessarily constitute political campaign intervention. Circumstances such as the directness of the link from your congregation's Web site to a specific Web page that favors or opposes a candidate will be a deciding factor.

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NONPARTISAN ELECTION ACTIVITIES FOR YOU, YOUR CAMPUS, AND YOUR CONGREGATION

POLL ASSISTANCE AND POLL MONITORING

What is a “poll assistant” or “poll monitor”?

A poll assistant or volunteer works to facilitate a fair and efficient voting experience for those registered and wishing to participate in the electoral process. Duties vary, and training is generally provided by local government offices.

A poll monitor, on the other hand, is a volunteer whose role is to observe how the voting process is being conducted, and act as a check and balance for activities such as, but not limited to, the counting of ballots, the procedure in which the public is asked to vote, the transparency and fairness of implementation of the electoral process, and execution of a person’s right to vote in privacy.

► Getting Started:

How can you get involved in either poll monitoring or volunteering?

Volunteer requirements and responsibilities should be available through your local government representatives or at the state governmental level. Specifics on this information can be found either online (see list of government Web sites on pages 69 and 70) or by visiting your local government offices.

Access to this information will vary from county to county and state to state, so once you have gathered some of the logistical information on how to volunteer in your community, pass it on and encourage others to get involved as well. You can post notices regarding opportunities in your campus newspaper or congregation’s bulletin. You can even set up an information table in your student union, narthex, or community space providing further information on the importance of civic participation in the electoral process.

CANDIDATE OR PARTY FORUMS

How do I plan a nonpartisan forum for a candidate or political party?

Many people choose not to vote because they do not feel connected with political life. Holding a candidate or party forum provides an



Helpful Hint

Visit your state’s elections Web site to learn how to sign up to be a poll volunteer. A complete list of state election Web site addresses is printed on pages 69 and 70 of this guide.

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opportunity for a community to invite party representatives or political candidates to gather for informational meetings or public debate. There are many ways of handling these political forums at a church that are all permissible under IRS tax codes. There are also many options in which you can request representation from either partisan or nonpartisan organizations. This is an opportunity for voters in your community to engage in the electoral process and do what is needed to educate themselves on the issues being discussed.

► Getting Started:

Step One: Consider what level of government will be invited. You can invite local officials, state officials, those running for Congress, or facilitate a conversation about the presidential race. It is more realistic for candidates running for local positions to accept an invitation, due to the volume of requests others receive, but you can certainly still extend an invitation to state or federal candidates.

Step Two: Talk with other nonpartisan organizations in your area to see if there is room for collaboration in this endeavor. Many social service organizations and pro-democracy groups mobilize in election seasons to promote civic participation for all eligible voters. (**Hint:** check to see if there is a Lutheran social service organization in your area, and ask if they have election activities planned.) Otherwise, a list of organizations can be compiled with a simple Internet search.

Step Three: Consider the location of your forum. It is crucial to keep your space neutral. This might mean holding the event in a community room or fellowship hall as opposed to a sanctuary. Consider all background elements, even those not directly behind the candidates, which could potentially be in photographs or videos of the dialogue.

Step Four: The planning process should begin well before the forum is scheduled to occur. Identify individuals to form a logistics committee to monitor the content of the forum and keep things running smoothly. Once the committee is formed, choose a date and location for the forum. Understand that you will have to make this approximate, as you will have to work with the schedules of the invited candidates.

Step Five: When organizing any event, it is always important to keep the audience in mind from the beginning. Among your first steps should be to build a promotional strategy to get people to your event. Make sure that advertising the event is one of the first steps taken once a date and site have been secured. Be sure to invite the whole community: consider using your local newspaper, flyers around town, and public service announcements to spread the word.

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Step Six: When drafting the invitation letter to candidates, it is important to keep the following in mind:

- ✓ Send the invitation well in advance of the event.
- ✓ Make sure to invite candidates from all legitimate parties to your forum.
- ✓ Have an RSVP deadline for candidates, so that the planning committee can maintain an accurate planning timeline.
- ✓ State the time, date, and location of the event.
- ✓ Include the name and contact information for a coordinating member of the planning committee. This person will be responsible for fielding any questions and making follow-up calls to confirm the participation of candidates.
- ✓ List rules pertaining to campaign literature. For example: “Note: campaign literature should be distributed only outside the facility.”
- ✓ Ask that all candidates sign a contract or waiver saying that they will not use their appearance to seek support for their candidacy or misuse photographs taken of the candidate in the church building or with a religious leader to portray an endorsement of the candidate.
- ✓ Ask for each candidate’s written remarks in advance, so that you can review them to be certain they say nothing inappropriate.

Step Seven: Plan the format of the event. The format of your forum plays a vital role in ensuring that the conversation remains nonpartisan. Many formats have been used effectively; it is your responsibility to decide which one will work best at your event. The following are a few formats that have worked well in the past:

- ✓ Allow candidates to give opening and closing remarks with free-flowing questions from the audience.
- ✓ Allow candidates to give opening and closing remarks, and encourage the audience to come with index cards that can be passed to a forum facilitator/proctor to read to the candidates.
- ✓ Allow candidates to give opening and closing remarks with questions prepared by the planning committee that best address the concerns of your congregation and citizens of the community.

Step Eight: In order to ensure the format is nonpartisan and tax code compliant, please consider the following:

- ✓ Each candidate should be given equal time and treatment.
- ✓ Questions should cover a wide range of issues.
- ✓ Check and double check that all lights and microphones are in working order. Accidents will happen, but you should do everything you can to prevent technological difficulties. It is important to be mindful of both direct, and in this case, the perception of promotion or degradation of potential candidates.

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Remember to familiarize yourself with the IRS Tax Code section of this guide before you begin any activity around the electoral process. Also remember to document your efforts to maintain neutrality throughout the planning process. If you are unsure whether an activity is nonpartisan, please seek guidance from a legal professional.

BIRD DOGGING: ASKING QUESTIONS AT POLITICAL FORUMS

What is bird dogging?

Bird dogging is a tactic of posing pointed questions to political candidates in public forums or debates. These questions are intended to elicit public promises from the candidate for the betterment of policies that address issues of concern within a constituency.

► Getting Started:

Read through the end of each of the issue briefs provided, starting on page 35. The issues laid out have been carefully drafted by our public policy and advocacy staff to give you a solid perspective on the ELCA's advocacy work. Questions provided at the end of each issue brief are grounded by our Lutheran social statements and theological principles, do not divide along partisan lines, and meet the Substantial Part Test by reflecting the issues on which the ELCA advocacy offices primarily work. Feel free to personalize the questions so that they reflect your experiences and understanding of the world around you. You are, of course, welcome to ask questions about issues that are of importance to you; however, if you are speaking as a person of faith, it is our recommendation that you stick with the questions that we suggest in the issue briefs. This will ensure that your words are nonpartisan and reflect other questions being asked by Lutherans around the country. If you choose to identify your congregation or campus as you introduce yourself, be sure not to phrase it in such a way that makes it sound like you are speaking on behalf of the congregation, campus, or denomination. Also, avoid drawing comparisons between the official positions of the ELCA and of the candidate on issues.

When preparing your question, remember these four W's – key ingredients of a great question!

Who you are: Identify yourself by name, city, state, and other important community or social networks you belong to.

For example, "Hi, my name is Sarah Jones from Bloomington, Iowa. I'm a member of St. Mark's Lutheran Church and am an active member of ONE: The Campaign to Make Poverty History."

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What you know: Educate the candidate, audience, and the media with a fact or figure about the issue.

For example, "One of the issues I care about as a person of faith is clean water. It is estimated that more than 1 billion people in the world do not have access to clean water and roughly one child dies every 15 seconds from sanitation-related diseases."

Why you care: Share a moving story that puts a human face on the issue you raise.

For example, "Last year I went to Tanzania in East Africa to visit our church partners and saw for myself how challenging it is for people living in extreme poverty to access clean water."

What you want: Your "ask" should involve a specific commitment, linked to a specific dollar amount or policy.

For example, "This is a moral issue, and I believe the United States should demonstrate its leadership by providing our proportionate share of resources necessary to meet the Millennium Development Goal target for clean water, which is estimated at \$1.3 billion per year. If elected president, would you commit to \$1.3 billion per year to help people throughout the world access clean water?"

VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVES

What is a voter registration drive?

There are many obstacles that keep people from getting out to the polls during elections, and lack of knowledge about voter registration is unfortunately one of the biggest. The good news is that it is not very difficult or time consuming to do your part to end this problem. A voter registration drive is an effort that seeks to sign up those who are eligible to vote, but are not registered.

By hosting a voter registration drive at your church or campus:

- ✓ You will be empowering people to take the first step in engagement with government at all levels. Plainly stated, a person who does not vote is not likely to write, call, or visit their members of Congress or engage in advocacy efforts. **Your registration drive can plant a seed, which will make them more socially aware and willing to speak truth to power.**

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- ✓ Your presence will remind those who are already registered to begin to think critically about who best represents their personal political stance.

► Getting Started:

Step One: Form a committee that will handle the logistics and create a timeline that clearly lays out your intentions.

Step Two: Contact your local governmental offices to pick up official voter registration cards. Refer to the chart on pages 69-70 to find your state government's election Web site address.

Step Three: Learn about and create a fact sheet about the registration process of your state.

Step Four: Get information about deadlines and legal registration moratoriums and inquire into your state's policies for absentee ballots or voting by mail options.

Step Five: Many states require that voter registration cards be submitted within a few days following the dates when they were signed, so establish volunteers who can carry the cards to the offices of your local government for submission in a timely fashion.

Step Six: If your church has social service programs (i.e. a food pantry, after school program, homeless shelter, food delivery service or soup kitchen, day care or school) you might consider talking with the coordinator to offer to provide voter registration information and cards in addition to the other services being offered.

Step Seven: Encourage your pastor to get involved in your efforts by making announcements about your voter registration drive during the service. Submit announcements for bulletins or newsletters and set up a table for additional information in your congregation's narthex or reception area.

Step Eight: Hold a registration phone-a-thon where you ask a group of volunteers to divide your congregation, campus or community's directory and build relationships with each member of your community to get them all registered and out to the polls when the time comes.

Step Nine: Track your progress throughout your effort by making posters, goal maps, or charts. Consider setting up an e-mail distribution list to send out success stories and other points of interest.

Your goal should be 100 percent of your eligible church membership registered and ready to vote. It is important to market your drive widely, and to keep things transparent and nonpartisan. And remember to have fun and celebrate your successes!

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GET-OUT-THE-VOTE (GOTV) INITIATIVES

What is a Get-Out-the-Vote campaign?

Simply stated, a Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) campaign encourages people to go to the polls on Election Day.

► Getting Started:

A GOTV effort can be constructed in many different and creative ways to facilitate actions based on the needs of your community. This can mean anything from canvassing your communities to providing transportation assistance to the polls on Election Day. Below are some ideas for how your effort could take shape.

- ✓ **Hold a strategy session that focuses on why people choose not to vote.** If some of the barriers in your community are seemingly avoidable, brainstorm what you can do to help alleviate those obstacles. For example, if you are on a college, university, or seminary campus and you decide that your peers are not voting because they are apathetic to American politics, perhaps you can focus your GOTV campaign on voter awareness. Or if the members of your community are not voting because they cannot get time off work, find child care or have no means of transportation, perhaps your GOTV campaign should be aligned to provide assistance to address these problems.
- ✓ **Open a polling place at your church or on your campus.** You will need to start organizing this well before the election. Rules and regulations for potential polling places may vary from county to county and state to state, so you will need to visit your local government offices to ask how to begin the process. Also, if you are on a college, university, or seminary campus, make sure that your administration is aware of your intentions and has approved your aims; this will also greatly increase the likelihood of approval for the designation of a polling site.
- ✓ **Search for and target potential voters.** If you are conducting your efforts from a campus ministry group, you can engage your community and peers, challenging them to make informed votes. If you are working with a church, focus your energy on your congregation and your immediate community. In this capacity, your GOTV campaign can work hand-in-hand with your voter registration drive, which will target new potential voters to register so they are eligible to vote.

Study: What is the most effective way to get out the vote?

In 2000 and 2001, Yale University conducted a study on the effects of GOTV drives on young people (18-to 24-year-olds) and first-time voters. The quantitative evaluations received during the study indicated that peer-to-peer contact through neighborhood/campus canvassing increased the likelihood of voter mobilization by eight to ten percentage points, and phone bank activities increased their likely participation by three to five percentage points.

In contrast, mass mailings like those of e-mail distribution lists and direct mailing campaigns have shown no significant increase in the likelihood of voter participation among 18 to 24 year-olds. Research consistently indicates that the more face-to-face contact you can establish with your community, the more people you are likely to engage in the electoral process.

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As you conduct these activities, the ELCA Washington Office would love to hear about it! Send pictures, articles, or stories about what you are doing to:
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✓ **Actively increase diversity.** Encourage the participation of your entire community, regardless of their political affiliation or allegiance. Making your GOTV campaign as inclusive as possible will help ensure that all of your efforts are nonpartisan and transparent. While many argue that politics can be divisive among people of different party persuasions, encouraging civic participation in the electoral process can unite members of your community and mobilize them to get out to the polls!

✓ **Compile a voter file.** A voter file is a list of registered voters in a district that includes their name and contact information. These lists are generally maintained by your local elections office. This information is public and can either be purchased for a small logistical fee, or you can compile your own list of individuals that you have registered through your efforts. Voter files are helpful in identifying which voters need to be reminded to vote. This list can be used as a starting list for your canvassing efforts or during a phone banking event. **Note:** The sample “pledge to vote” form on page 65 can be used to collect data for a voter file.

✓ **Host a phone bank.** People are much more likely to vote if they feel as though their vote matters. By making a personal call and encouraging people to vote on a one-to-one basis, your peers are much more likely to vote when the time comes. The phone call can and should be very brief; it is simply intended to remind people to get out to the polls. Remember that this cannot be a conversation about a candidate or party, and it must remain nonpartisan. A voter file is essential for hosting a phone bank (see above). Logistically, this effort can either be conducted in an office space with several phone lines, or you and your friends can use your free evening or weekend minutes on your cell phones (if your plan includes such a benefit), or you can divide your list and give it to volunteers to take home and make the calls at their convenience. A sample script is available on page 66.

✓ **As the election approaches, neighborhood canvassing can be a great way to rally support for participation.** Canvassing is an activity that involves walking through your campus or community, knocking on doors to instigate conversations about the importance of getting out to the polls. Again, you need to control what you talk about—keep your comments nonpartisan. But this can be a great way to meet people in your community and provide a cheap and effective way to distribute voter education material and registration information. A sample script is available on page 67.

✓ **Talk to your local or campus TV and radio stations about producing public service announcements on voter registration deadlines, election dates and locations.**

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- ✓ **Host an issue discussion barbeque, pizza party, debate, or nominating convention watch party or other election-related social function.** This can be particularly effective on college, university, or seminary campuses. **Note:** this activity needs to be bipartisan—providing equal opportunity to both major political parties. So, if you show the debates of one political party, you need to show the debates of the other, even if they are on different dates. You will also have to contact the sponsors to make sure that a public showing is not an infraction of copyright agreements. Use this setting to encourage conversations about the upcoming elections and have information on registration available. **Helpful hint:** If you feed them, they will come (particularly on college and seminary campuses!).
- ✓ **On Election Day, make yourself visible!** Make signs to encourage voting and hold them up near busy traffic intersections, place leaflets on cars, or hand out stickers. Again, as long as you do not mention a candidate or party, you can be as creative as you would like to be.

ABSENTEE BALLOTS

How do you find information about absentee ballots? Are you eligible to vote by mail?

Yes, if you are registered to vote and you are not able to make it to your polling site on Election Day, you may be able to vote by mail, or vote ahead of time at a designated location. Please note that in some cases, you will only be able to vote by mail if one or more of the following applies to you:

- ✓ You will be absent from the state on Election Day during the entire time the polls are open.
- ✓ You will be absent from the city or town of your voting residence during the entire time the polls are open because of your status as a student or spouse of a student at an institution of higher learning within the state.
- ✓ You are incapacitated to such an extent that it would be an undue hardship to vote at the polls.
- ✓ You suffer from an illness, mental or physical disability, blindness or a seriously impairing mobility.
- ✓ You are forbidden by the tenets of your religious faith from voting on Election Day.
- ✓ You are confined to a hospital, rest home, convalescent home, nursing home or similar institution, public or private.
- ✓ You are being detained while awaiting trial, or imprisoned for any cause other than final conviction of a felony.
- ✓ You will be temporarily absent from the state because of employment or service connected with military operations, or are a spouse or dependent of such a person.

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- ✓ You are employed by the State Board of Elections, Elections Division of the Office of the Secretary of State, a local board of canvassers, or you are an elector assigned to work at a poll outside of your voting district.
- ✓ Your state has “no-fault” absentee voting, which eliminates the need for any other excuse.

► Getting Started:

How and when do I apply for an absentee ballot?

Encourage the use of absentee ballots for people who can't make it to the polls. There is generally an application process to receive absentee ballots, but you can draft a template letter requesting the application and provide copies at your registration drives.

You may obtain an application for a mail ballot from your local board of elections. In most states, you must request an absentee ballot at least a month before the election. You can check for important election deadlines in your state through the Federal Election Commission Web site (www.fec.gov) or with your local elections office. Contact your city or county clerk to receive an absentee ballot. If you are overseas at election time, your nearest U.S. Consulate can help you get an absentee ballot. Military personnel should contact the Defense Department's Federal Voting Assistance Program at 703/695-9330.

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WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

How can I get media attention for my congregation's or campus's election efforts?

Local media look for stories focusing on community members contributing to the electoral process. This is your chance to show how people of faith are exercising their right to vote and encourage others to do so. If your congregation hosts or sponsors an event related to the election, be sure to tell your local newspaper, radio, and television station about it.

► Getting Started:

When working with your local media regarding the election activities you're conducting, remember:

- ✓ When pitching a story, anything you say might be quoted in the newspaper, on the radio or on television (even if it's off-topic). Practice what you will say ahead of time.
- ✓ Have basic facts about the event at your fingertips:
 - a. Who will be there?
 - b. How many people do you expect to attend?
 - c. When is it?
 - d. How long will it last?
 - e. Where is it? (Be specific—have an address, room number, etc. —as much detail as possible so they can find the place easily. Also remember to say where the event will take place in case of inclement weather.)
 - f. Why is this event being held?
 - g. What kind of visual appeal will there be? (This is especially important for television.)
 - h. Who are the speakers (if any)? What are their positions in the community or in the world at large?
 - i. Who is the primary contact for further information about this event? Be sure to provide a contact name and phone number (preferably a cell phone) in case the reporter has more questions, or if the reporter has difficulty locating the event.
 - j. Specify where the reporter can meet you or the contact person once they arrive at the event, so you or the contact person can introduce him/her to people willing to be interviewed.
- ✓ Create a press kit and bring plenty of copies to the event to distribute to reporters (be sure to bring copies for those who might show up without advance warning). A press kit could include:

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- a. A fact sheet, with unbiased background information related to the event (i.e. how many eligible voters do not vote each year, your congregation's membership, etc.)
 - b. The name and phone number of the contact you gave the reporter for further information about the issue
 - c. Full names and titles of each person speaking (if any) or of key people involved in the effort (remember to include your pastor)
- ✓ Identify ahead of time people who are willing to speak to the press, and have their names in the newspaper/on television/on the radio. Try to get people who have different relationships to the event (planners, speakers, participants, pastor)—and get a diversity of ages, ethnicities, and genders when possible.
 - ✓ Connect with the event speakers (if any) ahead of time and ask if they can meet the reporter(s) right before or after the event for personal interviews, and set up a time and specific location (i.e. next to the stage) where this can take place. Give this information to the reporter(s) in advance.
 - ✓ Have a designated contact meet the reporters when they arrive at the event and introduce them to the previously identified people who are willing to speak to the press, and remind them about opportunities to interview the speakers (if applicable). If you've made arrangements to meet with the press ahead of time, be prompt—be where you say you'll be at the time you say you'll be there, and stick around for awhile if the journalists are late.
 - ✓ Candidates come with press corps and supporters, and the candidate's presence may even draw operatives of rival campaigns to the event. Any of those people could misconstrue or even misrepresent what is said. So, when hosting a candidate or a candidate forum, we recommend you record the proceedings, on audio or video.

How can I write effective letters to the editor to encourage people to vote?

Writing letters to the editor of your local newspaper is a great way to raise issues that are of importance to you and your community during an election year. Did you know that the opinions page is second only to the front page of a newspaper in volume of readership? Also, congressional staff members, as well as state and local government officials, often read editorials in local newspapers to gauge the opinions of their constituencies. This can be a valuable tool for encouraging people to get involved in the electoral process.

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► Getting Started:

Effective letters to the editor:

- ✓ Do not exceed 250 words (2-3 paragraphs—check your local newspaper for maximum word count allowed).
- ✓ Use solid facts and attribute statistics. Have your resources handy.
- ✓ Do not assume that your audience has any prior knowledge of an issue, unless you are responding to or referencing a specific article that appeared in the same periodical.
- ✓ Contain specific, concrete action steps and who should take them.
- ✓ Are signed with your full name, full address and phone number. Many newspapers will not print anonymously-written letters, and those that do are less likely to publish them than those attributed to a specific person.

Be creative in your approach to encourage your college, university, seminary community or congregation to register and get out to the polls!

Tell us about it!

As you conduct these activities, the ELCA Washington Office would love to hear about it! Send pictures, articles, or stories about what you are doing to:

washingtonoffice@elca.org

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ELCA WASHINGTON OFFICE ISSUE EDUCATION BRIEFS

What is the ELCA Washington Office?

The ELCA Washington Office fulfills the ELCA's witness for social justice on domestic and foreign policy issues facing the nation, and through it, the world. It stands with the poor, the powerless and the vulnerable to achieve effective interactions between the whole church and the federal government. The office's efforts educate, inform, and enable decision makers and members of the ELCA alike on the stances of the church as they relate to the national political discourse. Subsequently, the office is the legal mechanism through which the ELCA, as an institution, is able to speak truth to power in this country.

Addressing issues that make up the majority of the office's portfolio, the following issue briefs are available to you as educational resources intended to supplement your thoughtful consideration of all issues being discussed in political forums. Each issue brief includes ELCA social policy on the issue, background information, and sample questions to ask at political forums, and is formatted to be easily photocopied and distributed.

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ISSUE BRIEF

DOMESTIC HUNGER

ELCA Policy Base

The Scriptures declare thematically God's special concern for the poor and oppressed, describe the ministry of Jesus as "good news for the poor" (Luke 4:18-19), and assert that the nations will be judged based upon our efforts to feed the hungry (Matthew 25; James 2). The prophet Isaiah tells us that if we offer food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then our light shall rise in the darkness (50:10).

The ELCA social statement on economic life, *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, reminds us that "the kingdom of God he [Jesus] proclaimed became real through concrete acts of justice: feeding people, freeing them from various forms of bondage, embracing those excluded by the systems of his day, and calling his followers to a life of faithfulness to God."

The 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Orlando passed a World Hunger Memorial declaring ending hunger to be a core mission of this church and reflecting language about poverty and nutrition in the ELCA's aforementioned social statement on economic life. Additionally, Lutherans have a long-standing public record of making a difference in the lives of hungry people through the ELCA World Hunger Appeal and charter involvement in Bread for the World.

Background

Hunger is a reality for many U.S. residents. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported that in 2007, 36.2 million people lived in food-insecure households, meaning people who are hungry or on the edge of hunger. Of those 36.2 million, 12.4 million were children. Over eleven percent (13.0 million) of U.S. households were food insecure at some time during 2007. The number of people in the worst-off households (previously called "food insecure with hunger" and now called "very low food security" households) was 4.7 million in 2007, up slightly from 2006 levels.

The food insecurity faced by many Americans is reflected in our church food pantries and food banks. According to the United States Conference of Mayors in 2008, cities surveyed reported an 18 percent average increase in the demand for emergency food assistance and a 5 percent average increase in the quantity of food distributed. The increase in demand for food assistance exceeded the increase in the amount of food distributed in 80 percent of the cities surveyed. Additionally, among members of the Feeding America's food bank network, 65 percent of pantries, 61 percent of kitchens, and 52 percent of shelters reported that there had been an increase since 2001 in the number of clients who come to their emergency food program sites.

While many churches participate in charitable feeding programs to meet this vast need locally, federal nutrition programs are often the first response our nation has against hunger, reaching millions of Americans that qualify for assistance. The largest of these programs is the Supplemental Nutrition



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Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps. According to the USDA, on average, about 28.4 million people received food assistance each month in fiscal year 2008. However, the reality for many people who participate in SNAP is that the average benefit puts many healthy food choices out of reach, and SNAP benefits typically do not last all month. In addition, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities points out that the purchasing power of most households' food assistance benefits erodes in value each year, not to mention the adverse effects on consumers of recent increases in food costs that have coincided with broader economic troubles, including increased unemployment.

Sample Questions to Ask Your Candidates and Elected Officials

- ✓ What efforts have you personally been involved with to serve the poor and hungry? What impact, if any, have these experiences had on you? How will that effect how you care for the poor and hungry in America if you were to be elected?

- ✓ The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported that in 2007, 36.2 million people lived in households considered to be food insecure, including 12.4 million children. What are your specific plans to address these hunger needs in our nation?

- ✓ In recent years, many groups such as Catholic Charities USA have called the United States to set the goals of cutting in half the number of Americans living in poverty in the next ten years and ending childhood hunger by 2015. Will you endorse those goals, and if so, what concrete steps would you take to accomplish them?

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

ISSUE BRIEF

DOMESTIC HOUSING

ELCA Policy Base

The ELCA believes that all people should live in safe, affordable, and decent housing. As stated in the ELCA message, "Homelessness," "Housing is a fundamental human right."

The ELCA supports the preservation and production of affordable housing for people with low incomes, particularly older adults and people with disabilities. It is important for affordable housing to be available in rural, suburban, and urban communities. Different types of housing units should be available so that the diverse housing needs of people are appropriately met, including single-family housing, multi-family residences and in some cases, small group or community-living housing.

People who are without homes should be offered shelter and supportive services to help transition into permanent housing. Shelter and supportive services should be available to all populations, including single adults and adults with children.

Finally, the ELCA message, "Homelessness," reminds us that as Christians, we are called to "walk with the homeless... and join with others to voice deep concern about homelessness, ask hard questions, and advocate policies that seek to provide job training, employment opportunities, housing, education, health care, and support for the homeless." Indeed, "working for justice with and for homeless people is doing God's will."

Background

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, nearly 95 million people in the United States, in cities, suburbs, and rural areas—a third of the nation—have housing problems. These problems include high housing costs relative to income, overcrowding, inadequate living conditions, and homelessness. As with many other social problems, the poor and minority groups are disproportionately affected by these issues. Of the nearly 95 million people with housing problems in 2001, nearly 65 million lived in low-income households, earning less than 80 percent of the area's median income.

One issue faced by many is high rental housing costs. Rental costs have far outpaced incomes over the last four decades, particularly for low- and moderate-income families. Paying for housing often forces families to skimp on food and other necessities, including medical insurance. According to a 2007 report by the Center for Housing Policy, between 1997 and 2005, the number of low-income workers who rented their homes and spent more than half their income on housing more than doubled to 2.1 million from about 1 million. Additionally, too often, the only housing available for low-income workers is not near places of employment, adding higher transportation costs.

Homeownership, while desirable to many, is not necessarily an affordable alternative to rental housing for all, and it may require substantial subsidies to be a viable, long-term option for low-income households. Predatory lending and the recent mortgage crisis have added to this problem. Racial and gender barriers to homeownership persist.



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Most severely, some individuals and families end up homeless. The National Alliance to End Homelessness reports that in January 2007 an estimated 671,859 people per night experienced homelessness. In a given year, between 2.5 and 3.5 million people experience homelessness for some period of time (days to months). Families with children make up about half of the homeless population. Nationally, there are about 125,000 chronically homeless people. While some who are homeless require substance abuse or mental health treatment, many find themselves homeless for other reasons, such as domestic abuse, financial crises, natural disasters, or the break-up of a relationship. Forty-four percent of homeless people are employed.

The housing picture is further complicated by the recent recession and housing foreclosure crisis. A number of recent studies confirm that housing hardship and homelessness are growing. RealtyTrac's 2008 U.S. Foreclosure Market Report shows nearly 3.2 million foreclosure filings for 2008, an increase of more than 80 percent from 2007 and 225 percent from 2006. Home foreclosures have pushed both owners and renters into the housing market, driving up rents in some places and increasing competition for already scarce affordable housing. Vacant homes could lead to increased crime and neighborhood destabilization.

Sample Questions to Ask Your Candidates and Elected Officials

- ✓ In 2005, according to the American Community Survey of the U.S. Census, 31 million American households paid more than 35 percent of their income for housing. What would you do to make housing preservation, production, and affordability a priority to reach these 31 million households?

- ✓ The foreclosure crisis has seen shady mortgage practices that have resulted in people being approved for mortgages that they could not understand or afford. Foreclosure rates are at record highs. What can be done to help those who are facing foreclosure and those who have lost their homes?

- ✓ While the cost of rental housing has gone up, workers' incomes have been flat-lined at best. Section 8 Voucher waiting lists are long, and it often takes years for people to rise to the top of the list. What do you propose to do about the growing need for rental assistance among those who work but still pay disproportionate amounts for housing?

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ISSUE BRIEF

DOMESTIC HEALTHCARE

ELCA Policy Base

The ELCA's approach to health care flows from Lutheran understandings of God's love (agape) and justice. The ELCA's social statement on health and health care, *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor* (2003), states that the "Christian Church is called to be an active participant in fashioning a just and effective health care system." It asserts that "[a]t a minimum, each person should have ready access to basic health care services that include preventive, acute, and chronic physical and mental health care at an affordable cost." Specifically, the social statement calls for the following:

- "a comprehensive approach to health care as a shared endeavor among individuals, churches, government, and the wider society;
- a vision of health care and healing that includes individual, church, and social responsibilities;
- a vision of a health care system that is based on understanding health, illness, healing, and health care within a coherent set of services;
- equitable access for all people to basic health care services and to the benefits of public health efforts;
- and faithful moral discernment guiding individual participation and public policymaking in health care services."

In response to God's love and justice, therefore, we as the ELCA work to promote the health and healing of all people, which includes advocating for health care policy that reduces or eliminates the number of uninsured people while being financially responsible and sustainable. In the words of the social statement, "our common effort to provide access to health care for all is a matter of social justice for all people."

Background

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are currently 45.7 million uninsured people in the United States, over 8 million of whom are children. While the number of people without health insurance coverage declined from 47 million (15.8 percent) in 2006 to 45.7 million (15.3 percent) in 2007, the portion of the public covered by employer-based health insurance also diminished, and participation in public safety net health coverage increased by over 2 million. Even with the overall drop in uninsured Americans, the 45.7 million uninsured people for 2007 exceeds the combined populations of 24 states plus the District of Columbia. Not surprisingly, the poor bear the brunt of this crisis, being twice as likely to be uninsured as those above the poverty level.

Most of the uninsured are working. In a recent study, Families USA reports that four out of five individuals (79.3 percent) who went without health insurance during 2006-2007 were from working families. Many people work in jobs without health coverage, including temporary or contract jobs. Those without employer coverage often find it difficult to secure private coverage. One recent study by the Commonwealth Fund found that nine



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out of ten people who sought individual coverage never purchased a plan, either because they couldn't find an affordable plan, they were rejected for coverage, or they were offered a plan that excluded coverage for the very care they were most likely to need.

Skyrocketing insurance premiums also pose formidable problems. Families USA notes that between 2000 and 2006, premiums for job-based health insurance increased by 73.8 percent, while median worker earnings rose by only 11.6 percent. Consequently, employers face tough decisions. Some employers have decided to offer "thinner coverage" or drop coverage altogether, while others require employees to pay a greater share of the premiums. According to research by Harvard Medical and Law Schools, illness and medical bills are big reasons behind fully half of all personal bankruptcies.

The unemployed also face problems finding or keeping coverage. A January 2009 report by Families USA shows that, to maintain their employer-based health coverage under "COBRA," most unemployed people would have to devote an unrealistically high proportion of their incomes to health insurance.

Not surprisingly, there are numerous unfavorable consequences of being without health insurance. The Kaiser Family Foundation reports that regardless of health condition, uninsured individuals are three times more likely than those with insurance to report problems obtaining needed medical care. Further, those without coverage are unlikely to receive timely preventative care, and cost of care often makes it difficult to follow recommended treatment. Most extremely, Institute of Medicine estimates show that the number of excess deaths among uninsured adults between ages 25 and 64 is in the range of 18,000 a year.

The government safety net for the uninsured primarily consists of Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which provide health coverage to more than 60 million low-income people, primarily children and families. Although these programs are vitally important and effective, they do not reach all low-income and vulnerable Americans.

Sample Questions to Ask Your Candidates and Elected Officials

- ✓ The rising cost of healthcare in the United States manifests a gap between the haves and the have-nots. According to the Census Bureau, over 45 million Americans do not have health insurance, a majority of whom are poor but also working. What would you do to ensure that all Americans have access to adequate healthcare at an affordable cost?

- ✓ According to the Census Bureau, over 8 million children in America do not have health coverage. How will you ensure that all of our nation's



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children have access to the health care, mental health services, dental care and other supports they need to grow up strong and healthy?

✓ As employers shift a larger proportion of overall health care costs to employees, what do you propose be done to ensure that employer-sponsored health coverage is affordable for employers and employees?

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

ISSUE BRIEF

GLOBAL POVERTY AND HUNGER

ELCA Policy Base

From the messages of the Old Testament prophets to the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Bible declares God's outrage at the plight of those living in poverty and suffering from hunger. As a result of God's expressed concern for the poor and oppressed, the Bible presents a unique challenge to people of faith to respond to economic disparities in our world so that all people experience the fruits of the earth and live with dignity.

The ELCA social statement on economic life, *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, commits us to "scrutiny of how specific policies and practices affect people and nations that are the poorest," and calls us to advocate for "changes to make policies of economic growth, trade, and investment more beneficial to those who are poor."

Additionally, the ELCA social statement *For Peace in God's World* affirms that "our nation has responsibility to contribute a portion of its wealth to people in poorer nations through effective economic assistance," and that the purpose of such assistance "should be to reduce hunger and poverty in sustainable and environmentally sound ways."

The statement also acknowledges that, "While the United States has been generous in providing humanitarian aid, our nation dramatically trails the rest of the industrialized world in providing development assistance relative to our production of wealth."

Background

Today, extreme poverty traps more than one billion of God's children in a vicious cycle of hunger and disease. One-fifth of the global population goes to bed hungry each night, and 70 percent of those living on less than one dollar per day are women and girls. Six million people die each year from HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria—all preventable and treatable illnesses.

In 2000, 189 countries expressed their commitment to ending global poverty and fighting pandemic disease by signing the Millennium Declaration. Based on the declaration, eight inter-related targets toward the elimination of extreme poverty by 2015—the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—were established. The goals aim to achieve the following by 2015:

1. Reduce by half the proportion of people suffering from hunger and living on less than \$1 a day
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five
5. Reduce by three-quarters the maternal mortality ratio
6. Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Create a global partnership for development with targets on aid, debt and trade



GLOBAL POVERTY AND HUNGER ISSUE BRIEF

Developing countries are primarily responsible for achieving the first seven MDGs. Industrialized countries are primarily responsible for goal number eight – to create a global partnership with targets for aid, debt and trade.

In 2003, ONE: The Campaign to Make Poverty History was established as the U.S. expression of international anti-poverty movements inspired by the Global Campaign Against Poverty (GCAP). Today, ONE has more than 100 faith-based and humanitarian partners and more than 2.5 million Americans that work together as ONE through political advocacy to achieve:

- ✓ An additional ONE percent of the U.S. budget to address deadly poverty
- ✓ Debt relief for the world's poorest countries to help them meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
- ✓ Making the rules of international trade fair so all may benefit from the global economy

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has partnered with ONE and established the ONE Lutheran Campaign – the unique effort of the ELCA to engage Lutherans in the ONE Campaign. For more information on the ONE Lutheran Campaign, including information about ONE Lutheran congregations, visit www.elca.org/one.

Sample Questions to Ask Your Candidates and Elected Officials

- ✓ While the United States gives the largest volume of official development assistance when compared to every other country in the world, its giving is second to last in terms of percentage of gross national income. Will you commit at least an additional 1 percent—roughly an additional \$29 billion in 2010 – of the U.S. budget for poverty-focused development assistance?
- ✓ Debt cancellation for the world's poorest countries is central to the fight against poverty and key to ensuring the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Many poor countries spend more each year to repay decades-old debt to the world's wealthiest countries and international institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) than they do on the fight against poverty, including stopping the pandemic of HIV and AIDS, putting children in school and ensuring access to clean water. Will you commit to expanding debt cancellation to all countries that need such relief in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals?
- ✓ Fair trade is a long-term solution that will help people in developing countries lift themselves out of poverty. Fair trade ensures poor countries achieve economic sustainability and self-sufficiency by allowing them to



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sell products more easily in the global marketplace. What will you do to help ensure that the poorest countries in the world have the opportunity to benefit from the global economy? Specifically, how would you address U.S. agriculture subsidies that depress prices and distort global markets?

- ✓ HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis claim more than 6 million lives each year. The poorest of the poor, especially those in Africa, suffer most from these preventable and treatable global health pandemics. We have the medicine and proven cost-effective strategies to address the pandemics. However, the moral and political will to dedicate the funding necessary to save lives are missing. Will you support providing one-third of the global financing required – at least \$9.4 billion in 2008 – to fight HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria?
- ✓ More than 10 million children die every year in poor countries from preventable and treatable causes, like diarrhea and respiratory infections. More than 500,000 women die each year during childbirth due to a lack of adequate health care resources. Will you support scaling up U.S. efforts to address child and maternal health and family planning needs in the poorest countries of the world by an additional \$2.9 billion by 2012?
- ✓ Education is vital to sustainable development. Today, more than 77 million primary school-aged children are not receiving the education they need for their future. Will you commit to the U.S. fair-share contribution of \$3.3 billion annually to help achieve universal primary education by 2015?
- ✓ It is estimated that more than 1 billion people in the world do not have access to clean water. Roughly one child dies every 15 seconds from sanitation-related diarrheal diseases. Would you commit to \$1.3 billion per year to help people throughout the world access clean water?
- ✓ More than 800 million people suffer from hunger in the world today. The U.S. helps sustain millions of those suffering from hunger by generously providing food aid, especially when emergencies strike in other countries. If not delivered properly, however, food aid can undermine local economies and damage the potential for long-term sustainable development. Will you allow countries that receive food aid to purchase food in local and regional markets when possible, instead of shipping food aid from the U.S.?



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ISSUE BRIEF

GLOBAL WARMING

ELCA Policy Base

The ELCA social statement on the environment, *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice*, says: "The earth is a planet of beauty and abundance; the earth system is wonderfully intricate and incredibly complex. But today living creatures, and the air, soil, and water that support them, face unprecedented threats. Many threats are global; most stem directly from human activity. Our current practices may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner we know."

The social statement recognizes the threat of "dangerous global warming, caused by the buildup of greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide" and commits the church to advocacy and to action on behalf of all creation. Already, global warming has damaged the precious balance of God's creation, including increasing the number of threatened species, causing long-term drought, and melting Arctic ice. It is crucial we heed the call to be faithful stewards and caretakers of God's creation by limiting the future impacts of global warming on God's Earth.

Global warming's societal impact already falls, and will continue to fall, most heavily on the people around the world who are least able to mitigate the impacts—people living in poverty in the United States and in developing countries. As a leading industrialized nation that has disproportionately contributed to greenhouse gas emissions, it is incumbent upon us to rectify this injustice. The ELCA is committed to "equitable sharing of the costs of maintaining a healthy environment," according to the social statement.

We can't achieve significant reductions in global warming emissions unless we make changes in our lifestyles, and particularly in our energy consumption. As the social statement says, "In a world of finite resources, for all to have enough requires that those among us who have more than enough will need to address our patterns of acquisition and consumption."

Background

Carbon dioxide and other global warming gases are collecting in earth's atmosphere like a thickening blanket, trapping the sun's heat and causing the planet to grow warmer. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), issued a report in 2007 written by leading climate scientists that confirms human use of fossil fuel is the main source of these gases and the primary cause of global warming. Every time we burn fossil fuels by driving a car, using electricity from coal- or gas-fired power plants, or heating our homes with oil or natural gas, we release carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases into the air.

Since pre-industrial times, the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide has increased by 31 percent. Over the same period, atmospheric methane, another global warming gas, has risen by 151 percent, mostly from agricultural activities like growing rice and raising cattle.



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As the concentration of these gases grows, more heat is trapped by the atmosphere and less escapes back into space. The increase in trapped heat changes the climate, causing altered weather patterns that can bring unusually intense precipitation or dry spells and more severe storms.

Though Americans make up just 4 percent of the world's population, we produce 25 percent of the carbon dioxide pollution from fossil-fuel burning—by far the largest share of any country. Coal-burning power plants are the largest U.S. source of carbon dioxide pollution—they produce 2.5 billion tons every year. Automobiles, the second largest source, create nearly 1.5 billion tons of carbon dioxide annually.

Global temperatures are already rising, and the impacts of this warming include loss of Arctic ice, melting permafrost, heat waves, and droughts. Some argue that increases in global temperatures have occurred in the past and that this is just such a “warming period.” However, although local temperatures fluctuate naturally, over the past 50 years the average global temperature has increased at the fastest rate in recorded history, and scientists confirm that this is due not to natural causes, but rather to human activity. Global average temperatures have risen over the twentieth century, and when scientists have attempted to reproduce these twentieth-century trends in their climate models, they are only able to do so when they include emissions from human use of fossil fuels in their models in addition to natural fluctuations in temperature.

Unless we curb global warming emissions, average U.S. temperatures could rise ten degrees by the end of the century. In order to prevent the catastrophic impacts of this increase in temperature, climate scientists say that we must reduce our emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases that contribute to global warming by 80 percent by the middle of this century. To accomplish this, we must make changes in our economy, our communities, our homes and our daily lives.

Sample Questions to Ask Your Candidates and Elected Officials

- ✓ Do you believe that global warming is happening? If your answer is yes, what do you believe is causing it?

- ✓ Scientists tell us that unless we curb global warming emissions, average U.S. temperatures could rise ten degrees by the end of the century. Would you support mandatory reductions in the emissions of carbon dioxide and other global warming gases?

- ✓ Reducing greenhouse gas emissions will require changes in our economy as companies and consumers switch to cleaner sources of energy and adopt energy-efficient technologies. In the short term, these changes are likely to increase consumer costs for electricity and for consumer goods like cars and appliances, and will result in job losses in



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some industries, although “green technology” industries will gain jobs. How would you address the impacts of increased energy costs and job loss on low-income Americans?

✓ People living in poverty in some of the world's most vulnerable countries are already seeing substantial impacts from global warming. Flooding in low-lying coastal areas of Bangladesh and drought in sub-Saharan Africa are examples of problems that will only become worse as global temperatures rise. Would you support increased international aid to poor countries to help them mitigate the impacts of global warming on their people, such as drought and flooding?

✓ Automobile and appliance manufacturers argue that increases in energy efficiency standards cost them money and lead to layoffs and other economic impacts. These standards can also lead to higher prices for consumer goods. But greater energy efficiency is an important way to reduce energy use and also allows consumers to save money over the long run. Do you support measures to save energy, such as increasing federal fuel economy standards for cars and trucks and setting energy efficiency standards for appliances?

✓ Very little of the U.S. electricity supply currently comes from renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar power. Would you support a requirement that electric utilities generate an increasing percentage of their electricity with renewable energy? Are there other ways that you would encourage people to switch to renewable energy sources?

✓ Funding for renewable energy and energy-efficiency research is currently a very small part of the federal government's research budget. Do you support increased funding for renewable energy research and energy efficiency measures?

✓ Nuclear power plants do not release carbon dioxide as they generate electricity. However, refining uranium for use in nuclear power requires large amounts of electricity, which currently comes primarily from burning fossil fuels. In addition, the waste from nuclear reactors is highly toxic and dangerous and persists in the environment for thousands of years. Do you believe that the United States should increase its use of nuclear energy and build new nuclear power plants?



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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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ISSUE BRIEF

IMMIGRATION

From Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS)

ELCA and LIRS Policy Base

The Scriptures command us to “Welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed you, to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7) and declare that every human being is a child of God made in God’s image and deserving to be treated with dignity and respect.

The presence of newcomers in our church and society helps us to become more appreciative of the gifts our new neighbors bring and of the barriers and opportunities they face. It deepens our belief that “all people are God’s creatures, sinners for whom Christ died” and our responsibility to respect the human dignity of all.

Lutherans have a strong connection to uprooted populations. After the end of World War II, one out of every six Lutherans in the world was a refugee or displaced person. Lutheran churches in the United States have since been a welcoming community for refugees, sponsoring 57,000 refugees after World War II and 50,000 after the fall of Saigon in 1975, according to the ELCA message, “Immigration.” Since passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service has welcomed over a quarter-million refugees, bringing the total number resettled to more than 351,000 since the agency’s inception in 1939.

In 1998, the ELCA Church Council adopted a message on immigration which called for just immigration policies and committed to work for “policies that cause neither undue repercussions within immigrant communities nor bias against them.” The ELCA’s view on immigration is consonant with its 1999 social statement on economic life, which identified the need for sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all as a moral imperative.

As Lutherans we understand that welcoming immigrants and refugees into our communities presents an excellent opportunity for us to examine our attitudes toward newcomers, to strengthen our church’s ministry for the most vulnerable, and to continue to advocate for immigration and refugee laws that are fair and humane.

Background

There are more than 12 million undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States. Each year an estimated 300,000 more documented as well as undocumented immigrants cross our borders. These are people who migrate here to join their families, to work, or to seek refuge from persecution, violence, and other horrors. However, the U.S. immigration system is not providing an orderly way for undocumented immigrants to make themselves right with the law, earn legal status, and integrate into American society.



IMMIGRATION ISSUE BRIEF

Our nation's immigration laws have not been updated over the last fifteen years, and while the number of immigrant visas available has remained the same, the demand has grown. This includes people in a wide variety of circumstances, from residents seeking to reunite with family members to employers looking to hire new workers. For workers who lack desirable professional skills, there are only 5,000 visas available each year. As large numbers of immigrants arrive every year, they are absorbed into American society. Faced with years or decades of waiting to reunite with family members or to obtain jobs to provide for their families, many immigrants are compelled to enter the United States without permission or use temporary visas to permanently stay in the country.

Increasingly, the government is conducting raids at work sites, homes or in public areas and detaining immigrants—including children and families—in facilities that provide inadequate medical care and services, according to the Government Accountability Office. By the end of the 2008 fiscal year, the federal government had detained over 300,000 immigrants in jail-like facilities that cost U.S. taxpayers \$2 billion. Currently, the government maintains more than 30,000 detention spaces for immigrants and is constantly calling for funds to increase that number.

In addition, while the United States has the sovereign responsibility to control its borders, it must also create migration policies consistent with its constitutional and humanitarian values. The large majority of undocumented immigrants are not criminals and should not be treated as such—illegal immigration is a civil offense. In cases where immigrants have engaged in criminal activity, they should be dealt with by our criminal justice system in a fair and balanced way. Currently, immigrants are being detained in substandard and crowded conditions, including in “tent cities” or local jails. The government's skyrocketing use of detention for immigrants and families who pose no danger or flight risk is costly, inhumane, and unjust.

Sample Questions to Ask Your Candidates and Elected Officials

- ✓ Immigration laws should be reformed to provide a path to permanent status for 12 million undocumented immigrants currently residing in the United States, and should afford undocumented men, women, and children equal opportunities to earn legal status. Moreover, by better documenting who is in our country, we can strive for smart enforcement, fair proceedings, efficient processing and targeted enforcement against those who want to harm us. Would you support legislation that helps undocumented immigrants to adjust their legal status if they agreed to pay fines and back taxes and learn English?

- ✓ Family unity has always been a cornerstone of U.S. immigration policy. Yet the immigration system's current backlog of family visas has kept thousands of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents separated



IMMIGRATION
ISSUE BRIEF

from their families, in some cases for as long as 20 years, according to the National Immigration Forum. Immigration laws should be reformed to eliminate visa backlogs and enable families to reunite with their loved ones. Would you support legislation that modifies visa caps, which currently keep spouses and minor children waiting for five years to reunify with their families here in the United States?

✓ The United States currently spends \$2 billion annually on detaining immigrants even though the government has the power to release asylum seekers, families with children, and other vulnerable groups that pose no flight or safety risks. There are also alternative monitoring programs that cost as little as \$10 per day—compared to the \$100 per day cost of detention—and yield high appearance rates at immigration courts. Immigration laws should be reformed to prioritize the use of release options and alternatives to detention that are less costly and more effective. Would you support efforts to promote more humane and just methods to enforce our immigration laws?

✓ The government's skyrocketing use of detention for immigrants and families who pose no danger or flight risk is costly, inhumane, and unjust. Families and children should never be detained in penal settings like those used in Texas and Pennsylvania. Would you support legislation to prevent the detention of immigrant families and children?

✓ Those who come to our shores in need of protection from persecution should be afforded an opportunity to assert their claim to a qualified adjudicator and should not be detained unnecessarily. The immigration system should be reformed to afford every immigrant a fair opportunity to apply for immigration status—including access to counsel and the right to review in federal court. Would you support legislation that provides immigrants with attorneys and the right to review in federal court?

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

ISSUE BRIEF

PEACE AND CONFLICT

ELCA Policy Base

Scripture declares God's intent for peace among nations and calls people of faith to work for peace and reconciliation. The prophet Isaiah described the expected messiah as a "prince of peace" and his message as a "gospel of peace." Jesus embodied subtle but compelling peaceful authority as he addressed the powers of his day and proclaimed that "peacemakers" would be called "children of God" in his Sermon on the Mount. Saint Paul worked tirelessly for peace among the early Christian communities and urged peaceful coexistence as a fruit of the Spirit and an ethic for Christian discipleship.

The ELCA's commitment to working for peace is informed by the Lutheran understanding that government should work for the common good. While affirming the legitimate role of governments to enforce laws and provide for the common defense, our social statement, *For Peace in God's World*, states that, "governments should vigorously pursue less coercive measures over more coercive ones: consent over compulsion, nonviolence over violence, diplomacy over military engagement, and deterrence over war."

In the face of ongoing and increasing conflict in the world, peace among all nations may seem like an idealistic dream removed from reality. Yet, as citizens of the United States we are guaranteed the right to participate in our government, and as people of faith, we are called to exercise that right. *For Peace in God's World* recognizes the "awesome responsibility political leaders, policy makers, and diplomats have for peace in our unsettled time. In a democracy all citizens share in this responsibility."

Christians are called to an especially difficult task in working for peace with justice. As Dr. Martin Luther King stated, "peace is not the absence of violence; it is the presence of justice." It is our faith in the crucified and risen Lord that, as *For Peace in God's World* states, "strengthens us to persist even when God seems absent in a violent and unjust world, and when weariness and hopelessness threaten to overwhelm us."

IRAQ

Background

Since the controversial invasion of Iraq by U.S. government forces in the spring of 2003, more than 4,000 U.S. military personnel and tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians have died. While the American public remains deeply divided over the conflict, it is clear that there are no quick fixes or easy solutions to the situation in Iraq.

The land mass that represents modern day Iraq has a long and complicated history. Mesopotamia, touted as the "world's first civilization," flourished on the land we know as present-day Iraq in 3000 B.C. The long and diverse list of rulers of the region includes figures like the Babylonian



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Hammurabi, Chaldean King Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus the Great. In the 16th century Iraq became part of the Ottoman Empire, which lasted until World War I when, in 1917, British forces were able to seize Baghdad and defeat the Ottomans who had aligned with Germany and the Central Powers.

French and British officials negotiated the borders of Iraq, guided by the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916. In 1920 the "State of Iraq" was established as a League of Nations mandate under British rule. During the British occupation, the Hashimite monarchy was imposed and little attention was paid to the traditional ethnic settlements or the differences between the various ethnic and religious groups in Iraq. The British generally favored the Sunnis, leading to the revolt of the Shi'ites and Kurds who both fought for their independence from Britain.

In 1932 Iraq became an independent state, but tensions and divisions between the various ethnic and religious groups that were exacerbated under British occupation resulted in little commitment by any of the various actors in the country to the central government. Between 1958 and 1979 Iraq was plagued by a series of coups and countercoups. In July 1979, Saddam Hussein was appointed by the sitting president to assume control of the country.

During its first decade of rule, Saddam's regime received broad support from Western powers, the Soviet Union and China, especially during the eight year Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988). This began to change during the early 1990s as Iraq invaded Kuwait over a long-standing territorial dispute. After failing to comply with various United Nations resolutions calling for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait, the Persian Gulf War was launched. In April 1991, after six weeks of intense aerial bombing, Iraq withdrew and agreed to a permanent cease-fire which included strict conditions for the destruction of all stockpiles of weapons.

Economic sanctions on Iraq remained in place throughout the 1990s, justified by the need for Iraq to comply with the removal of weapons of mass destruction (U.N. resolution 687). Nonetheless, the sanctions had a considerably negative humanitarian impact on much of the Iraqi population. After the September 11 terrorist attacks against the United States, momentum began building for a shift in U.S. foreign policy toward Iraq from maintaining its compliance with U.N. sanctions to the removal of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath government. The suggested presence of weapons of mass destruction and links between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda made by U.S. government officials at the time were later found to be non-existent by the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (also known as the 9-11 Commission).

In the absence of a U.N. Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force in Iraq, U.S. and United Kingdom forces invaded Iraq in March 2003. While Saddam Hussein was swiftly removed from power and subsequently executed, the newly-established Iraqi government continues to struggle to unite the people of Iraq in peace. Violence is persistent throughout the



PEACE AND CONFLICT ISSUE BRIEF

country, though in varying degrees depending on geographic area, ethnic population densities, and the location of external actors.

Based on ELCA social statement policy and Churchwide Assembly actions related to the war in Iraq, the ELCA calls on all candidates to unite the country behind a responsible plan to end U.S. military operations in Iraq, help broker a political solution to deep-seeded divisions among Iraqis, provide for those displaced by the conflict, and help rebuild security and stability in the region.

Sample Questions to Ask Your Candidates and Elected Officials

- ✓ How will you support Iraqi leaders in achieving a stable, representative government that promotes and protects human rights and the rule of law?

- ✓ What will you do for the millions of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons who have faced severe hardship because of the war?

- ✓ What will you do to restore confidence in U.S. policy among Muslims in the Middle East?

ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Background

The 2005 Churchwide Assembly encouraged participation in an ELCA campaign for engagement in Israel and Palestine called “Peace Not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land.” This campaign identified the three main elements of accompaniment, awareness, and advocacy as contributing to a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The ELCA bases its engagement in the region on the biblical mandate to love our neighbor. Where people are suffering, Christians are called to offer help and hope.

The ELCA supports the witness of indigenous Christian churches in the region, engages in theological dialogue around issues relevant to Israeli/Palestinian peace, and participates in multi-faceted economic and humanitarian efforts. In addition, the ELCA encourages the United States government to more fully facilitate conflict resolution between Israel and Palestine, bringing to bear its diplomatic and economic strength, and framing the dialogue within the regional landscape of other interested parties and nations. As in the past, it is unlikely that any progress will be made unless the United States is again willing to engage all parties at a high level on various aspects of the territorial dispute, including the need for a shared Jerusalem.

The ELCA calls on the U.S. government to act as a leader in the international community and to actively encourage negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian governments leading to the end of the Israeli occupation and a final status agreement resolving all outstanding issues and resulting in a comprehensive and lasting peace.



Sample Questions to Ask Your Candidates and Elected Officials

- ✓ How will you bolster U.S. diplomatic efforts toward the goal of achieving a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians?

- ✓ How will you work to build comprehensive peace throughout the region, particularly between Israel and its neighbors?

DARFUR

Background

Sudan has been plagued by internal conflict for nearly 40 years. A variety of complex factors, including race, ethnicity, religion, and economic disparities have fueled a 21-year conflict between the politically dominant Muslims/Arabs in the north and the more impoverished Christians/animists in the south. On January 9, 2005, the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) to end the civil war and begin a six-year Interim Period.

This significant step toward peace between northern and southern forces in Sudan, though imperiled at times, continues to be overshadowed by the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Darfur, the western region of Sudan. Tensions between African-Muslim ethnic groups and nomadic Arab ethnic groups in Darfur date back to the 1930s. For decades, Sudan's central governments in Khartoum have shown little interest in resolving these ethnic tensions or preventing Arab militias from attacking non-Arabs in Darfur.

Since the 1980s, a variety of non-Arab groups from the Darfur region have unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow the central government in Sudan. When Sudan's current government, the National Congress Party (NCP), came to power in the early 1990s they began arming Arab militias to disarm African ethnic groups in Darfur. In February 2003, two rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), rose in opposition to the NCP. NCP's support of Arab militias, including the Janjaweed, has steadily increased since that time.

In 2003, government-backed militias, known as the Janjaweed, began systematically committing mass atrocities in Darfur. Estimates of innocent civilians killed range from 200,000 to more than 450,000. More than 1,500 villages have been destroyed, leaving more than 2.5 million Darfurians displaced, with an additional 2 million dependent exclusively on humanitarian aid for survival.

Despite significant international outcry and the signing of various cease-fires and peace agreements, the government of Sudan has consistently demonstrated a commitment to propagating continued violence and suffering in Darfur. Furthermore, what began as an uprising by two distinct rebel groups in Darfur has splintered into more than 20 factions with disparate objectives and often violent consequences. Death and destruction



PEACE AND CONFLICT ISSUE BRIEF

in Darfur will not end without a sustainable political agreement that is negotiated between warring parties.

With more than half of 7 million Darfurians either internally displaced or exclusively dependent on external aid, coupled with the rising number of deaths due to violence, the U.N. and U.S. officials consider the humanitarian situation in the Darfur region to be one of the worst in the world. At the same time, the sustainability of the CPA, which is governing peace between the north and south, is increasingly fragile.

Sample Questions to Ask Your Candidates and Elected Officials

✓ Despite significant international outcry and the signing of various cease-fires and peace agreements, the government of Sudan has consistently demonstrated a commitment to propagating continued violence and suffering in Darfur, where at least 200,000 innocent civilians have already been killed. What will you do to simultaneously build the will for a political resolution in Darfur while bolstering the Comprehensive Peace Agreement currently governing Southern Sudan?

✓ The humanitarian situation in the Darfur region of Sudan is considered to be one of the worst in the world. More than half of 7 million Darfurians are either internally displaced or exclusively dependent on external aid. What will you do to help ensure the implementation of a hybrid African Union/United Nations peacekeeping force in Darfur in order to protect innocent civilians and create an environment where aid workers can deliver life-saving interventions safely?



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ELCA E-ADVOCACY NETWORK SIGNUP

✓ Visit www.elca.org/advocacy to sign up for the ELCA e-Advocacy Network!

Already a member? Please encourage others to join by using the signup sheet on the next page, or requesting the paragraph below to be published in your church's newsletter or bulletin!

Sign up for the ELCA e-Advocacy Network! E-Advocacy empowers Lutherans to learn about, reflect upon, and advocate on behalf of their Christian values. E-Advocacy makes it easy for each and every member of the ELCA to advocate for peace, for care of creation, and for people living in poverty and struggling with hunger. You'll receive timely updates from the ELCA on a wide variety of issues, including hunger, poverty, and the environment; and you can be confident knowing you are being asked to call or e-mail your elected officials only at the moments when your voice will make the most difference. Visit www.elca.org/advocacy to sign up.

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GLOSSARY

501(c)(3): The section of the Internal Revenue Code that exempts charitable, educational, and religious non-profit organizations from paying taxes. Participation in partisan political campaigns (advocating for one candidate or one political party) disqualifies organizations from receiving 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.

Advocacy: Pleading the cause of another together with them and on their behalf. The ELCA calls people to advocate justice with and for those without power and voice in places where important political and economic decisions are being made that affect the lives of those who are marginalized.

Bipartisan: Relating to, or supported by two groups, especially by two political parties. In an American context, this means support from both the Democrat and Republican political parties.

Church: In terms of the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) Code, the term "church" applies to all houses of worship, not just those faiths that refer to their houses of worship as "churches." There are several characteristics used to identify a "church" for the purposes of the IRS. They include:

- ✓ distinct legal existence
- ✓ recognized creed and form of worship
- ✓ definite and distinct ecclesiastical government
- ✓ formal code of doctrine and discipline
- ✓ distinct religious history
- ✓ membership not associated with any other church or denomination
- ✓ organization of ordained clergy
- ✓ ordained clergy selected after completing prescribed courses of study
- ✓ literature of its own
- ✓ established places of worship
- ✓ regular congregations
- ✓ regular religious services
- ✓ Sunday schools for the religious instruction of the young
- ✓ schools for the preparation of its clergy.

(In other words, if you are in any way affiliated with a faith-based institution, such as a Lutheran university, you and your organization are subject to this classification).

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Direct endorsement: To support, back or give one’s approval to a specific political party or individual candidate in any fashion. For example, churches (as defined by the IRS—see page 61) *may not*:

- ✓ issue letters of endorsement or opposition printed on congregational letterhead
- ✓ distribute campaign literature at congregational events
- ✓ display campaign signs on congregation property
- ✓ engage in any other activity that could be construed as endorsing or opposing a candidate

Electioneering: Activities designed to influence the outcome of an election for public office.

Expenditure Test: A method for measuring lobbying activity of 501(c)(3) organizations. Under the Expenditure Test, the extent of an organization’s lobbying activity will not jeopardize its tax-exempt status, provided it normally exceeds an amount specified in IRS Section 4911 in its political activity. This limit is generally based upon the size of the organization, and may not exceed \$1 million. Churches are not eligible to request the Expenditure Test and must abide by the Substantial Part Test (see page 63). This test is provided to charitable and educationally-based 501(c)(3) organizations.

Express advocacy: Different from advocacy (see page 61), express advocacy is defined by the IRS in relation to political activities conducted by 501(c)(3) organizations, and consists of any type of communication, such as an advertisement, that promotes the election or defeat of a candidate.

Indirect endorsement: To support, back or give one’s approval to a specific political party or individual candidate in an inadvertent or suggestive manner. For example, to host a candidate forum where you give one candidate more time to speak than others based on the bias or allegiance of the hosting institution.

Integrated auxiliary of a church (or house of worship): A class of organizations or associations within churches that are not “churches” themselves, such as women’s groups, men’s groups, or youth groups. An auxiliary is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization that is affiliated with a church, convention or association of churches and receives financial support primarily from internal church sources, as opposed to public or governmental sources. Integrated auxiliary groups are also subject to the Substantial Part Test, and are subsequently subject to the same limitations in their political activity as other 501(c)(3) organizations.

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Lobbying: A specific type of advocacy, intended to sway elected or appointed officials to vote for or against a specific piece of legislation or a specific rule of law.

Nonpartisan: Unrelated to, or not supported by, a particular political party. For instance, a “nonpartisan” campaign does not endorse a specific political party or give allegiance to an individual political candidate.

Partisan: Adherent to a party or faction; esp., one who is strongly and passionately devoted to a party or an interest.

Substantial Part Test: The standard, or test, applied to determine if a 501(c)(3) is in compliance with lobbying regulations. If a substantial amount of a 501(c)(3) organization’s activities are considered to be an attempt to influence legislation, the organization’s tax-exempt status may be revoked. Whether an organization’s attempt to influence legislation constitutes a substantial part of its overall activities is determined by the IRS, who considers the amount of time devoted by the organization to the activity. The Internal Revenue Code does not provide a specific percentage that constitutes substantial activity.

Voter guide: A document distributed during an election cycle that provides information on political candidates’ stances on various issues. These guides may be distributed with the purpose of educating voters; however, they may not be used to attempt to favor or oppose candidates for publicly elected office. It is highly recommended that all election materials, especially voter guides, be vetted through legal council before distribution, to make certain that they are 501(c)(3) compliant.

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ELCA E-ADVOCACY SIGN UP

Name	E-mail	Sign up for ELCA e-Advocacy Network	Sign up for ELCA state advocacy list	State

Return completed forms to:
ELCA Washington Office, 122 C St. NW, Suite 125, Washington, DC 20001
Or fax: 202-783-7502

SAMPLE PHONE BANK SCRIPT FOR A GET-OUT-THE-VOTE CAMPAIGN

Hi, may I please speak to (full name)?

Hello, this is (your name) calling on behalf of (your church's name or campus organization's name). I am NOT calling to ask for money or to sell anything. I am a volunteer working with (your church's name or campus organization's name) in a nonpartisan way to promote your participation in the upcoming election!

Optional topics of conversation:

Have you received your voter card in the mail?

(If YES): **Great, do you have any questions about the voting procedure?**

(If NO): **Would you like information about what you need to have with you when casting your vote on November 4th?** (Have a copy of your state's voter requirements on hand; these can be found on your state government's Web site or at the Federal Election Commission's Web site (www.fec.gov).

Do you know how to find your polling location?

(If YES or NO): Have a map or computer handy to offer directions. If you have access to the Internet while you are making your calls, you can even offer to e-mail them directions.

Note: *Allow the conversation to flow as easily as you are able. Answer any questions posed politely and to the best of your ability. However, it is important to remember that you can discuss issues with people generally, in terms of pointing them to Web sites or local media sources that are able to answer their questions in greater detail (see the end of the guide for a list of other organizations that have nonpartisan voter information which might help answer additional questions), but be certain that you take a nonpartisan stance throughout your conversation.*

For example, if someone asks you who they should vote for, your response needs to simply state that answering that question defeats the purpose of your call. You simply want each person that you speak with to engage in the electoral process. Who they vote for is entirely up to them.

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End the conversation with:

Can we count on you to vote on November 4th?

(If NO): **Well, I am sorry to hear that. I hope that you will vote and talk to others about the conversation that we just had. Thank you for your time.**

(If YES): **Great! I hope that you will also remind others to vote, and thank you very much for getting out the vote!**

SAMPLE CANVASSING SCRIPT FOR A GET-OUT-THE-VOTE CAMPAIGN

Hello, do you have a second to talk about your participation in the upcoming election? (If you can get their attention) My name is __(your name)__ working on behalf of __(your church's name or campus organization's name)__. I am NOT asking for money or trying to sell anything. I am a concerned citizen working in a nonpartisan way to encourage you to participate in the upcoming election!

Optional topics of conversation:

Have you received your voter card in the mail?

(If YES): **Great, do you have any questions about the voting procedure?**

(If NO): **Would you like information about what you need to have with you when casting your vote on November 4th? (Have a copy of your state's voter requirements on hand; these can be found on your state government's Web site or at the Federal Election Commission's Web site (www.fec.gov)).**

Do you know how to find your polling location?

(If YES or NO): **Okay, if you have any questions, here is a link to our state government Web site. On the site you will find all the information that you need to identify your polling location and other voter details. (Have the address of your state's voter information Web site on hand.)**

***Note:** Allow the conversation to flow as easily as you are able. Answer any questions posed politely and to the best of your ability. However, it is important to remember that you can discuss issues with people generally, in terms of pointing them to Web sites or local media sources that are able to*

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answer their questions in greater detail (see the end of the guide for a list of other organizations that have nonpartisan voter information which might help answer additional questions), but be certain that you take a nonpartisan stance throughout your conversation.

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(If YES): Great! I hope that you will also remind others to vote, and thank you very much for getting out the vote!

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STATE GOVERNMENT ELECTION COMMISSION WEB SITES

Source: data collected from the Federal Election Commission (information specific to the 2008 presidential race). Information accurate as of October 2007.

State	Web site
AL	http://www.sos.state.al.us/
AK	http://www.elections.state.ak.us/
AR	http://www.sos.arkansas.gov/
AZ	http://www.azsos.gov/
CA	http://www.sos.ca.gov/
CO	http://www.sos.state.co.us/
CT	http://www.sots.state.ct.us/
DC	http://os.dc.gov/
DE	http://sos.delaware.gov/
FL	http://election.dos.state.fl.us/
GA	http://www.sos.state.ga.us/
HI	http://hawaii.gov/elections/
ID	http://www.sos.idaho.gov/
IA	http://www.sos.state.ia.us/
IL	http://www.elections.il.gov/
IN	http://in.gov/sos/elections/
KS	http://www.kssos.org
KY	http://www.elect.ky.gov/
LA	http://www.sos.louisiana.gov/
MA	http://www.sec.state.ma.us/
ME	http://www.maine.gov/sos/
MD	http://elections.state.md.us/
MI	http://www.michigan.gov/sos/
MN	http://www.sos.state.mn.us/
MO	http://www.sos.mo.gov/
MS	http://www.sos.state.ms.us/
MT	http://www.sos.mt.gov/
NC	http://www.sboe.state.nc.us/
ND	http://www.nd.gov/sos/
NE	http://www.sos.state.ne.us/
NH	http://www.sos.state.nh.us/

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State	Web site
NJ	http://www.state.nj.us/state/
NM	http://www.sos.state.nm.us/
NV	http://www.sos.state.nv.us/
NY	http://www.elections.state.ny.us/
OH	http://www.sos.state.oh.us/
OK	http://www.elections.state.ok.us/
OR	http://www.sos.state.or.us/
PA	http://www.dos.state.pa.us/
RI	http://www.sec.state.ri.us/
SC	http://www.scvotes.org/
SD	http://www.sdsos.gov/
TN	http://state.tn.us/sos/
TX	http://www.sos.state.tx.us
UT	http://www.utah.gov/itgovernor/
VT	http://www.sec.state.vt.us/
VA	http://www.sbe.virginia.gov/
WA	http://www.secstate.wa.gov/
WI	http://www.elections.wi.gov/
WV	http://www.wvsos.com/
WY	http://soswy.state.wy.us/

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OTHER ELECTION RESOURCES

FAITHFUL DEMOCRACY

The ELCA Washington Office is proud to be a part of an interfaith coalition called Faithful Democracy. This initiative was designed to encourage civic participation among people of faith in the 2008 presidential election. Faithful Democracy is a nonpartisan, predominately Web-based, campaign with the intention of facilitating:

- ✓ a resource geared towards all people of faith, particularly faith leaders, clergy, lay leaders, seminarians, or those affiliated with faith-based public service organizations
- ✓ a clearinghouse for resources outlining civic participation and electoral engagement for faith-based organizations
- ✓ a tool designed to assist faith-based organizations in their understanding of IRS tax code 501(c)(3) compliance in election-related political activities
- ✓ a multi-faceted forum in which people of faith can obtain theological understanding, from many different perspectives and traditions, discussing the importance of applying religious values to civic participation

Check out the Faithful Democracy Web site:
<http://www.faithfuldemocracy.org> for more information!

MORE ELECTION RESOURCES:

Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest: <http://www.clpi.org>

ELCA Legal Counsel - Political Activity and Tax Status:

<http://www.elca.org/legal/faq/politicalActivity.html>

Federal Election Commission: <http://www.fec.gov>

Internal Revenue Service: <http://www.irs.gov>

IRS Publication 1828: Tax Guide for Churches and Religious Organizations:

<http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf>

The Interfaith Alliance: <http://www.interfaithalliance.org>

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