2024 Election Talking Points for Synod Communicators

Prepared by ELCA Strategic Communications

With the election season nearing its November 5 end, ELCA Strategic Communications is overseeing three main messaging strategies:

1. **Voting**: Encouraged as an essential step in faithful civic engagement.
2. **Holding Respectful Conversations**: Engaging in dialogue with empathy, avoiding media hype and political spin in our conversations.
3. **Civic Engagement**: Involvement in political and nonpolitical community efforts as part of our baptismal vocation.

Voting

- Informed voting is a vital first step in our faithful civic engagement. As highlighted in the ELCA's social message, *Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy*, "Lutherans recognize government as a gift from God to serve the common good" (p.1).
- By voting, we act as responsible citizens called by God, seeking that everyone benefits from the government's good.
- For more details, please refer to
    - The ELCA's *Civic Engagement Guide*
    - *Government and Civic Engagement* social message

Holding Respectful Conversations

- The ELCA encourages respectful debates and conversations in order to understand opposing viewpoints without media or political spin. This reflects our calling to live out Christ's love through understanding and reconciliation, as emphasized in the *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* social statement (p. 9).
- Instead of praying for a particular candidate's success in public worship, we should pray for discernment and readiness to be agents of God's love, healing, justice, and reconciliation—no matter who wins.
- We are called to be both a "prophetic presence" and a "reconciling and healing presence" in the world, both denouncing sin and mediating conflicts to serve the common good (*Church in Society*, pp. 3-4).

Civic Engagement

- Beyond informed voting, there are other ways to get involved:
    - **Volunteer** at polling stations: Poll watchers, coordinators, and, in some states, registrars are all essential tasks at polling stations.
    - Become an **election judge:** Election judges aid voters and manage polling places throughout the day.
    - Help with **voter registration**: Organizations throughout the country help register new voters, in some states right up to Election Day

- **Attend or organize candidate forums:** Forums are great ways to help voters hear directly from candidates.

As noted in the ELCA's social message, *Government and Civic Engagement*, this involvement extends beyond partisan lines, contributing to both political and nonpolitical processes for justice and peace.

501(c)(3) Status and the Johnson Amendment

The ELCA as a church—encompassing its synods, congregations, and the churchwide organization—is a 501(c)(3) organization and bound by the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits religious organizations from endorsing political candidates or engaging in partisan politics. However, the ELCA can still participate in issue advocacy, such as advocating for the poor, and nonpartisan political activities, such as serving as a polling place or hosting voter registration drives.

- Ministers can endorse candidates for election when it is clear that they are doing so in their individual capacity and not in their official capacity or on behalf of any organization (congregation, synod, ELCA, etc.) that they currently serve or formerly served. This means that if they are posting or publishing on any social media, it must be on their personal accounts, not on the ELCA (or synod) social media pages, and they should not be using any official titles, emails, or other ELCA-related details that could suggest endorsement. They cannot use church resources, like listservs, to broadcast personal political views or endorsements.
- Detailed guidance on permissible political activities for ELCA organizations can be found in Being_A_Public_Church.pdf (elca.org) and Political_Activity_and_Tax_Status.pdf (elca.org).

Additional Information

Upcoming Videos from the Presiding Bishop

- On October 18, Bishop Eaton released a video encouraging people to vote. This video focuses on voting as a faithful aspect of our civic life.
- During the week after the election, Bishop Eaton will release another video that focuses on how the work toward repairing a divided nation is just beginning and that we should remain steadfast in pursuing God's call to care for others and be united in Christ.

Resource Page for Your Benefit

- ELCA.org/civicengagement will lead you to all the Presiding Bishop's videos regarding the elections, links to resources at *LivingLutheran.org,* the ELCA's social statements and messages relating to civic engagement, and other valuable resources and guides from our Witness in Society partners.

Election Scenarios

While many scenarios could play out on Election Day, there are five main scenarios that we are preparing for:

- Donald Trump wins by a considerable margin, resulting in a quick Harris concession.
- Donald Trump wins by a narrow margin, meaning the election will not be decided until later that week, after absentee ballots have been counted, with a Harris concession following.
- Kamala Harris wins by a considerable margin, resulting in a quick Trump concession.
- Kamala Harris wins by a considerable margin, but Trump refuses to concede, and with dwindling support, the issue becomes a non-issue, leading to the Inauguration.
- Kamala Harris wins by a narrow margin, but Trump refuses to concede, creating a situation similar to or more acute than 2020.