

ELCA Presiding Bishop Issues Election Statement

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"God's care for human society calls us to rise again each day ... to appreciate — and do — the work of self-government." (From the ELCA social message "Government and Civic Engagement in the United States," p. 18)

This coming Sunday, Nov. 1, at 4 p.m. Eastern time, I will join many other religious leaders in the [Holding On to Hope National Prayer Service](#), to be held at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Please join me for this special occasion to pray for the good of our nation on the eve of Election Day. Even as we pray, we are called to participate in our nation's electoral process as one way God works through us to love and serve the neighbor (Matthew 22:39). Our vote is a choice about what will make our society a more just, more whole community where human dignity is honored and rights are upheld.

Throughout our church, many are experiencing heightened anxiety around the 2020 election. I confess that I feel it, too. Elections often raise tensions, but this season more than half of Americans say they are [stressed over the future of our nation](#). We are beset by negative ads, targeted by misinformation campaigns and worried by reports of foreign interference. We are seeing unprecedented numbers voting early and many concerned for safety on Election Day. There are concerns about voter suppression and voter fraud, the near-certainty of delayed results and fear of election-related unrest or violence. We experience all of this under the weight of a pandemic, in a year that has been filled with many crises, especially the ongoing scourge of racism and white supremacy.

But as an American, I am hopeful. Commitment to the common good is embedded in the ideals expressed in our nation's founding documents. These have assisted our country to transcend its bleakest moments, and I trust they will help us to do so now. We remain committed to fair and equitable voting as a bedrock for democracy. Respectful vigorous debate is part of the foundation and strength of our nation and an important step in our pilgrimage toward the horizon of "a more perfect union."

As a member of Christ's church, I am hopeful. We are stewards of public life for the common good. "The ELCA holds to the biblical idea that God calls God's people to be active citizens and to ensure that everyone benefits from the good of government" ("[Government and Civic Engagement](#)," p. 14). Aware of the urgent need for a "public life worthy of the name," the 2013 ELCA social policy resolution "Voting Rights to All Citizens" acknowledges that many people of color and other minority groups face barriers to their right to vote. Our church has long held that it is our responsibility to act to ensure the right to vote without intimidation or interference. Our public leadership as disciples of Jesus Christ matters at this important time. Our civic engagement is not motivated by politics or partisanship. It is a call to genuine service of the neighbor in need. It recognizes that we can disagree about political means yet become ambassadors of hope, healing, reconciliation and justice.

As I stated in [this recent video](#), it is imperative that we allow the election process to take place and ensure that every voice be heard and every vote counted. Our church is speaking up on the importance of [free and fair elections](#). There are many ways we can all be [involved](#) responsibly in stewarding the gift of government, including as poll workers and election monitors, by feeding those waiting in long lines, by disseminating accurate

information about voting, by sharing our appreciation with all those who serve to uphold our rights and responsibilities, by promoting patience so that every vote is counted, by planning ahead to address tensions and promote nonviolence, and through our fervent prayers.

Let us pray together for our nation: O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Help us in these days to elect trustworthy leaders, participate in wise decisions for our common life and serve our neighbors. Bless those we elect, that our nation may grow toward peace among ourselves and be a blessing to other nations of the earth; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

In Christ,

Elizabeth A. Eaton
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