

ELCA Task Force on Government and Civic Engagement: *Information About Membership Commitment and Expectations*

The task

The 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly authorized “the development of an ELCA social statement on government, civic engagement and the relationship of church and state that will allow thorough attention to scriptural, historical, theological, and social issues as a means to probe for shared convictions and establish this church’s comprehensive teaching.” Social statements are the ELCA’s primary documents to address significant social issues. They are intended to aid reflection and shape conscience and to set forth the ELCA’s teaching and policy on the major social institutions and questions of contemporary life. An ELCA task force provides primary leadership for the statement’s development, using an established process of widespread participation in theological and moral deliberation.

Individuals sought

Members of the ELCA are sought who can bring a range and diversity of knowledge, insight, political perspective, and competencies related to civic life in contemporary church and society. Such individuals would include, but are not limited to, those familiar with Bible, government, law, politics, political theology, social sciences, advocacy, social action, social ministry, congregational life, and ethics. Interested individuals should complete an application form by Feb. 20, 2020, available upon request by contacting Heather.Dean@elca.org.

The task force

Approximately 15 individuals will be selected for a task force that reflects a balance of competencies and the various constituencies and multiple perspectives within the ELCA. The selection process will give attention to ELCA commitments to diversity regarding gender, race, language, geography, and other factors. Individuals are sought whose perspectives and personal styles are passionate and energetic, yet thoughtful and collaborative.

Membership commitment in brief

The task force will begin its work in fall 2020 and complete its work in February 2025. Task force membership requires attendance at meetings (typically, two a year) held at the Lutheran Center in Chicago. It assumes commitment between meetings to do assigned readings and willingness to provide leadership at selected events. Beyond this baseline of commitment, individual participation varies according to the phase of the task force’s work and the particular competencies of individuals, such as writing skills.

(More detailed information can be found on the reverse side. Questions should be directed to Heather.Dean@elca.org)

Membership Commitment: Detailed

The ELCA holds high expectations for and grants significant trust to a task force that leads the development of a social statement. The task force leads this work on behalf of the whole denomination, and the process comprises several phases during its four-and-a-half-year existence. Each phase contributes significantly toward a faithful outcome, and members are engaged during each phase:

- *Listening*: Listening occurs in ad hoc situations and at organized listening events at which church members have a chance to share their insights and concerns about the social statement's topic (in this case, government and civic engagement) and about the social statement process. Task force members are expected to host at least one listening event.
- *Study*: This entails readings outside of meetings and engaging with presentations from specialists.
- *Resource production*: The task force may provide resources of various kinds and crafts a major study that provides means for church members to engage the issues and provide feedback.
- *Draft*: Task force members provide direction for the development of a draft social statement and leadership of hearings on that draft. Task force members are expected to attend/host at least two hearings, preferably more.
- *Proposed*: The proposed statement is the final phase of task force work. Task force members offer direction for revisions to the draft based on feedback and then sign off, sending the revised draft to the Conference of Bishops and Church Council for review and further action.

Potential members of the task force must be prepared to devote significant time and energy toward the tasks with which they might be entrusted. Over the course of the task force's life, membership commitment entails:

- Attendance and contribution at each of nine or 10 face-to-face task force meetings. (There are generally two per year, but there will be one year with three.)
- Leadership in the various feedback activities: Listening events (years one and two), use of the study document (year three), draft hearings (year four).
- Reading in advance of each meeting—such preparation includes articles or essays (early on) and stakeholder response forms and reports (following the draft comment period, for instance).
- Other leadership as opportunities present themselves, such as hosting a booth at the ELCA Youth Gathering.