

Lutherans issue voter guidelines for churches: Seven social justice issues

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The nation's largest Lutheran denomination has issued election-year guidelines for congregations and outlined seven issues, from hunger to health care, that reflect the church's emphasis on social justice.

The guide, "Called to Be a Public Church," from the 5-million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, suggests ways for churches to participate in the political process without endangering their tax-exempt status.

Unlike the "Faithful Citizenship" guidelines recently issued by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Lutheran guidelines generally refrain from addressing specific issues such as abortion. Instead, the document highlights broad topics that churches and parishioners could consider.

"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," Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson writes in introducing the 76-page document.

Hanson said the guidelines are meant to help steer—but not dictate—discussions in local churches. The document is careful to note that "all of the suggested activities . . . are nonpartisan and do not encourage the promotion of any one party or candidate for public office."

After reviewing basic IRS guidelines for tax-exempt churches, the guide suggests that churches participate in poll monitoring or candidate forums. It says that direct contributions, endorsements or get-out-the-vote efforts with particular candidates or parties are prohibited.

The guide also offers background materials from the ELCA's Washington office on domestic hunger, housing, health care, global poverty and hunger, global warming, immigration and peace.

“You know your congregation better than anyone, so we will not presume to tell you what the Lutherans in your community think,” the guide says. “So please apply our suggestions as generalizations, and if you choose to, only conduct activities that you and your community will be comfortable with.” -*Religion News Service*