

Reconsideration of the ELCA's Social Message on "Homelessness: A Renewal of Commitment" – Frequently Asked Questions (revised July 2026)

What is a "social message"?

Social messages are teaching documents that address social topics narrower in scope and complexity or of less controversy than social statements and are, therefore, generally briefer than ELCA social statements. Social messages address the contemporary situation in light of the Scriptures and Lutheran confessions. Social messages depend on and are to be consistent with the ELCA's social statements.

How are social messages used?

Social messages, as official teaching documents of the ELCA, provide guidance for policy and moral discernment in the church. They inform public statements and advocacy of the ELCA. They establish the stance of ELCA ecumenical and inter-religious relations. They also offer individual members guidance and support for their callings and participation in society. Social statements and social messages are often used in congregations, colleges, and seminaries for study.

How are social messages developed?

Social messages are developed through a process of ELCA-wide discernment. All members are invited to submit comments to the writing team. These comments, along with research and consultations, inform a draft text that is published for public comment. ELCA members are encouraged to study the draft and submit feedback through an online survey. Revisions are made based on this feedback. Following this, the ELCA Church Council takes action on a proposed text.

What is a reconsideration?

Reconsideration is the technical term for the process by which the ELCA can think again about specific elements in a social statement. Reconsideration is not a wholesale rejection of a previous social message. Instead, this process allows the church to thoughtfully, prayerfully, and communally re-examine particular parts of a social teaching document.

Why is the social message on "Homelessness" being reconsidered now?

When the original social message was adopted in 1990, our understanding of homelessness and the experiences of people who are unhoused was very different. Also, new ministries in the ELCA ministering with people who are unhoused have emerged in the years since 1990. These ministries have contributed to the church's knowledge of homelessness and growing understanding of the church's responsibilities to neighbors who are unhoused or precariously housed. In addition, changes in civil law and the economy present new challenges for housing in the United States.

What is being reconsidered in the social message on "Homelessness"?

The ELCA Church Council authorized reconsideration of two sections: "Remembering the Reality" and "Walking with People Who Are Homeless." Because a reconsideration for possible revision was authorized, there may be substantive changes to these two sections with attention to contemporary and systemic issues affecting housing in the United States and impacting individuals

experiencing homelessness. The reconsideration does not authorize substantive changes to the other sections of the social message.

What is the timeline for this reconsideration?

The process will begin in February 2026. A draft text will be posted for public comment from August to November 2026. The ELCA Church Council will take action on a proposed text in April 2027.

How can people get more information or share their comments?

Updated information will be available at [ELCA.org/homelessness](https://elca.org/homelessness). During the public comment period, there will be an online survey available at that site. Comments can also be emailed to DraftSocialMessage@elca.org at any time.

Wording of Authorization by ELCA Church Council, November 2025:

To authorize the substantive reconsideration of the sections on “Remembering the Reality” and “Walking with People Who Are Homeless” and other relevant references in “A Message on Homelessness: A Renewal of Commitment” (1990) with attention to contemporary and systemic issues affecting housing in the United States and impacting individuals experiencing homelessness. These issues may include, though are not limited to, matters such as the definition of homelessness, the right to housing, the needs and responsibilities of local communities, intersectional issues impacting homelessness, and the calling of this church. This work shall be done in light of existing social teaching and in accordance with “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018).