



Cultivating Relationships with Local Election Officials

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) considers civic engagement to be a public good, a responsibility for residents of the United States, and part of our calling as Christians. This engagement with God's work in the political sphere is based on careful discernment that transcends partisanship. Congregations and rostered ministers must ensure that activities related to the electoral process are [transparent, nonpartisan and legal](#), yet even within these boundaries, there is much we can do. Cultivating relationships with local election officials can be an important support for the individuals, communities and generations impacted by the outcomes of U.S. elections.

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People Make the Election Processes Work

Administration of elections in the United States is a highly decentralized process. Elections are primarily administered by thousands of state, territory and local systems rather than a single, unified national system. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission supports state, territory and local election officials in their efforts to ensure accessible, accurate and secure elections. Yet your state, county and local election officials bear the primary responsibility for fair and secure elections.

Many tasks make up that process, such as maintaining voting infrastructure, ensuring a smooth and accessible election period, and reporting, canvassing and certifying the results. The National Association of Counties notes, "Counties are responsible for funding and managing over 100,000 polling places staffed with over 630,000 poll workers each election

cycle.”¹

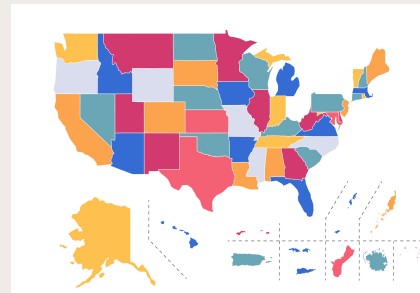
In recent years there has been a troubling rise in threats and harassment directed toward election officials,² which has significantly stressed those entrusted with safeguarding our democratic processes. Supporting these public servants is vital to ensuring that they can carry out their work with safety, integrity and confidence. According to a recent report from the Brennan Center for Justice, “32% of local election officials have experienced threats, harassment, or abuse because of their job” despite most of these public servants being motivated to take the job “to serve their communities and safeguard the electoral process.”³

Role Recognition

Lutherans recognize that one way in which Christians express their vocation is through dedicated, competent public service. By cultivating constructive relationships with public servants in election-related roles, faith leaders and congregation members can honor those vocations and support the critical work these people undertake. At the same time, they should advocate for systems that protect every citizen’s right to participate and contribute to the integrity and stability on which civic life depends.

“The ELCA is called as a church body to discern nonpartisan means of civic engagement. As a church we affirm the importance of government, specifically democratic self-governance,” reads the ELCA social message “[Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy](#).” “In this affirmative role, this church should support public servants and elected officials in their vocation to wield authority for the good of all” (p. 16).

Synods, congregations and other faith groups can reach out to their local election officials to begin relationships; read on for advice on making those connections and maintaining a meaningful exchange.⁴ Local election officials are very busy, but a thoughtful engagement from faith communities



How about in your location?

Elections are usually administered at the county level, though in some states, cities or townships have responsibilities. Use an online search engine to investigate “[your county]” and “election officials,” and see what you discover!

1 “The County Role in Elections: How Counties Administer Secure Elections,” National Association of Counties, October 30, 2024, <https://www.naco.org/resources/county-role-elections-how-counties-administer-secure-and-accurate-elections>.

2 Ruby Edlin and Lawrence Norden, “Survey Finds Election Officials Remain Concerned About Safety, Lack of Government Support,” Brennan Center for Justice, April 13, 2026, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/survey-finds-election-officials-remain-concerned-about-safety-lack>.

3 “Local Election Officials Survey 2026,” Brennan Center for Justice, April 13, 2026, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/local-election-officials-survey-2026>.

4 ELCA synod bishops who organize synod connection with secretaries of state can build upon strong relationships and guidance from their ELCA-affiliated State Public Policy Office.

can provide valuable neighborhood connections and help foster trust and civic participation.

Showing Up to Support and Accompany

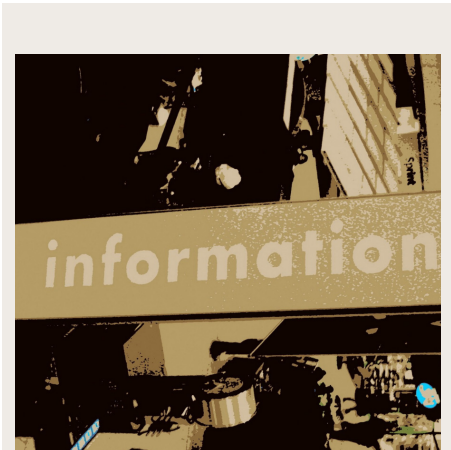
One reason to cultivate relationships with local election officials is to express gratitude for their service. “Vocation to government service is one concrete way to love the neighbor that deserves support from the church,” wrote the Rev. Amy E. Reumann, senior director for ELCA Witness in Society, in the 2025 “God’s work. Our hands.” Advocacy Resource. Consider extending a word of thanks as a sign of your commitment to work with election officials for a more peaceful world.

Expand that introduction with an offer of accompaniment. Ask how you can strengthen the election process in your community. Your local election officials may point out a local shortage of poll workers, for example. In the United States, this trend presents a challenge as older workers retire from the role and others are discouraged by inadequate pay, harassment and requirements for partisan balance. Yet the service is critical and upbuilding. Your local officials may alert you to other priority needs as well.

Showing Up to Learn and Share

In some localities, first-person learning opportunities may open up — such as a tour of a polling location, a presentation of the tallying process or a demonstration of voting equipment. Not only are these interesting events; they can also equip us to be trusted messengers of what we have learned.

False information — be it misinformation (false or inaccurate information) or disinformation (false information which is deliberately intended to mislead) — is a continual challenge during the election season. It can spread quickly and have an eroding impact. “[Election misinformation] menaces election officials, with 64 percent reporting in 2022 that the spread of false information has made their jobs more dangerous,” reports the Brennan Center for Justice. “It interferes with voters’ ability to understand and participate in political processes. And it has been weaponized by lawmakers to justify new voter suppression legislation.”⁵



Before, During & After

False information and disinformation is a continual challenge during the election season. Being in relationship with elected officials can position faith leaders before, during and after an election to support the sharing of true information.

⁵ “Election Misinformation,” Brennan Center for Justice, accessed May 2026, <https://www.brennancenter.org/election-misinformation>.

One antidote to false information is research aimed at getting closer to the facts. Being in relationship with elected officials can position faith leaders before, during and after an election to support the sharing of true information.

The ELCA strongly affirms voting, guided by faith-based values, as an exercise in citizenship.⁶ Following are tips for your congregation, ministry group or faith-based coalition, led by careful discernment that transcends partisanship, to cultivate relationships with local election officials. Informing ourselves and building up these relationships can strengthen our credibility as trusted messengers in the community. By better understanding current election processes and identifying areas where we may be helpful, we can be good neighbors ensuring that election procedures continue to support safety, accessibility and public confidence.

Invitation, Best Practices and Questions When We Show Up

Invitation

You may be able to approach election officials through email or existing personal connections, but a formal business letter can also be used to get a public official's. See the Appendix for suggested language; your ELCA synod office or [ELCA-affiliated State Public Policy Office](#) may be able to help you connect.

Best Practices for Outreach as Trusted Messengers

Effective engagement with public officials begins with clear intentions, mutual respect and commitment to the common good. The following best practices can help ELCA leaders build constructive, credible and collaborative relationships with election administrators — and other civic leaders.

- 1. Lead with relationship and respect.** Public officials carry heavy responsibilities, especially in election seasons. You can set a positive foundation for constructive dialogue by approaching them with respect for their role, acknowledging their human dignity and demonstrating appreciation for their service and openness to a genuine relationship. Begin with introductions, express gratitude for their work and keep the tone nonpartisan and solution-focused.
- 2. Clarify your purpose and priorities.** Before and during your outreach, identify the key concerns or values guiding your engagement. Whether you are offering pastoral or community support, seeking information, advocating for accessible voting, or encouraging community partnerships, clarity ensures that the conversation will be focused, grounded and productive.
- 3. Listen first.** Approaching conversations with curiosity and humility invites local election officials

⁶ ELCA social message “[Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy](#),” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, July 13, 2020, 16.

to share the challenges they face, the needs they see in the community and the support they believe necessary to strengthen election administration. Listening builds trust and helps ELCA members respond to actual needs.

4. **Stay Nonpartisan and Values-Driven.** Faith-based engagement is most effective when rooted in widely shared values such as fairness, dignity, integrity and the common good. Maintaining a nonpartisan posture helps ensure that interactions do not appear to favor or oppose any political party or candidate, and reinforces the credibility of the church's public witness.
5. **Offer support.** Offering community support, pastoral care and partnership opportunities can be a helpful counterbalance to the stress and strict scrutiny often faced by public election officials. Avoid approaches that feel adversarial or demanding; instead, emphasize collaboration and your shared commitment to a trustworthy democratic process.
6. **Demonstrate working together.** Being part of a group during a meeting can add significant strength. Congregational, ecumenical and interfaith groups can share purpose and priorities, add supporting perspectives and broaden lived experiences from the community.
7. **Be accurate and informed.** Familiarize yourself with basic election procedures in your state and locality before initiating conversations with your local election officials. Through being prepared, you can create meaningful dialogue, avoid misunderstandings and demonstrate respect for the complexity of the work.
8. **Amplify.** By reflecting publicly on your experiences in building these relationships, through educational forums, newsletters, social media and local media, you can help demystify election processes and build confidence in the integrity of elections. Work with faith partners to amplify accurate information within their own networks and to the public. As more people engage directly with those who administer elections and share what they learn, trust grows through personal relationships, firsthand experience and deepened understanding of how the election system works.
9. **Follow up.** After meeting with public officials, send a brief note of thanks for their time and commitment to public service and outline any agreed-upon follow-up items.



Trusted Messengers

It's not just the *why* we do advocacy as people of faith, it's also the *how* we do it that our communities notice. These best practices for outreach help convey your values and strengthen your message alongside the information exchanged when approaching nonpartisan election engagement.

10. Engage consistently. Consistent communication following your original outreach and meeting will strengthen relationships over time and signal that the church is a reliable, thoughtful partner. Outreach only during moments of controversy or tension can appear reactionary; establishing regular communication — before, during and after elections — builds continuity and trust.

Questions to Get Conversation Started With Local Election Officials

Relationship builders:

How long have you served in our community in this capacity?

What do you wish more people knew regarding your role and this work?

How can the faith community support the work of safety, free elections and fair representation?

What are the best ways members of my faith community can stay connected and informed?

Can you share with me more about:ent logic and accuracy testing?

- Upcoming election board meetings?
- Upcoming community events with local election officials?
- Opportunities to serve at the polls (e.g., as a chaplain)?

[If your church is a polling place]
What should we be thinking about in anticipation of the elections?

Election administration clarifiers:

What should I know about the election administration process here?

Are local jurisdictions solely responsible for election administration, or do they share this responsibility with state officials?

What role is played by the office of the secretary of state?

What resources or funding is devoted to this work?

How uniform is election administration across the state?

“I’m an election judge and have confidence in our Minnesota elections, but I hear people in my community — and even my church — raising concerns based on social media or comments of some lawmakers. What can I use to help educate people and help them feel confident in our elections and the safeguards being taken?”

—Question presented by a participant in a meeting organized by Lutheran Advocacy—Minnesota, spring 2026

Policy, processes and safety exploration:

What policy issues are likely to pose a challenge in our community this year, and how can I prepare our congregations?

How does the county/state plan to respond if violence is threatened?

What process is in place here to address noncitizen voting? Is this an issue in our state?

Has our state/county agreed to access the Department of Homeland Security’s Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) database to check records that lack proof of citizenship?

How must voters identify themselves at in-person polling locations? For absentee/mail-in voting?

How is the voter tally certified in our locality?

If the certification process is interrupted, invalidated or compromised, what is the contingency plan?

What role does the court play in litigating recounts and disputes?

How does the county/state plan to respond if violence is threatened or takes place?

Guided by Faith-Based Values

Lutherans understand government to be God's gift because it does what churches, families, individuals and businesses cannot do on their own. The ELCA strongly affirms voting, guided by faith-based values, as an exercise in citizenship in the United States. Elections provide a structured way for people to shape policies, choose leaders accountable for the well-being of all and ensure that all voices are heard, especially those of people on the margins.

Consider cultivating a relationship with local election officials as an act of nonpartisan civic engagement to encourage a free and fair process for all.

Additional Resources

In the ELCA Resource Center (<https://resources.ELCA.org>) use TOPIC: ADVOCACY to locate several additional ideas for election engagement, including these:

- [ELCA Election Engagement Toolkit](#)
- [Prepared to Vote Checklist](#)
- Civic Engagement Guide ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- [Craftivism as Advocacy](#)
- [Being a Public Church in the Electoral Process - A Guide for Churches and Rostered Ministers](#)

There are many other resources available from other organizations, like this podcast:

- [High Turnout Wide Margins](#) - from Missouri election administrators.

See also the final section in the ELCA Election Engagement Toolkit, "But What About..."

Appendix – Template: Invitation by Letter or Email

Subject: Meeting to Discuss Election Administration

Dear [title] [last name],

My name is [first and last name], and I am reaching out as a registered voter in [county name], [state abbreviation], and as a member of [congregation name] of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). *[Insert additional synod or coalition-specific information here as appropriate: your congregation will serve as a polling place, your congregation will host a voter registration drive, etc.]* *[Describe the group participating in the invitation, e.g., a group from your congregation or a community coalition to which your congregation belongs]* would like to meet with you at your convenience to express appreciation for your service and find out how we, as a faith community, can support you and your staff ahead of the 2026 election.

The ELCA strongly affirms voting, guided by faith-based values, as an exercise in citizenship. We wish to inform ourselves about local elections and to build up our relationships with election officials because we believe this will strengthen our credibility as messengers in the community. We want to better understand current election processes and identify areas where we may be helpful so we can ensure that election procedures continue to support safety and accessibility and to enjoy public confidence. We understand government to be God's gift because it does what churches, families, individuals and businesses cannot do on their own. Because of this, we welcome the opportunity to hear your perspective and learn about any challenges or opportunities you are navigating.

Please suggest dates and times in the coming weeks when we might connect for a 30-minute conversation, virtually or in person.

Thank you for your commitment to serving our community and for your continued leadership in local election administration. We look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

[First and last name]

[Phone number]

[Email address]