



DISCUSSION STARTER

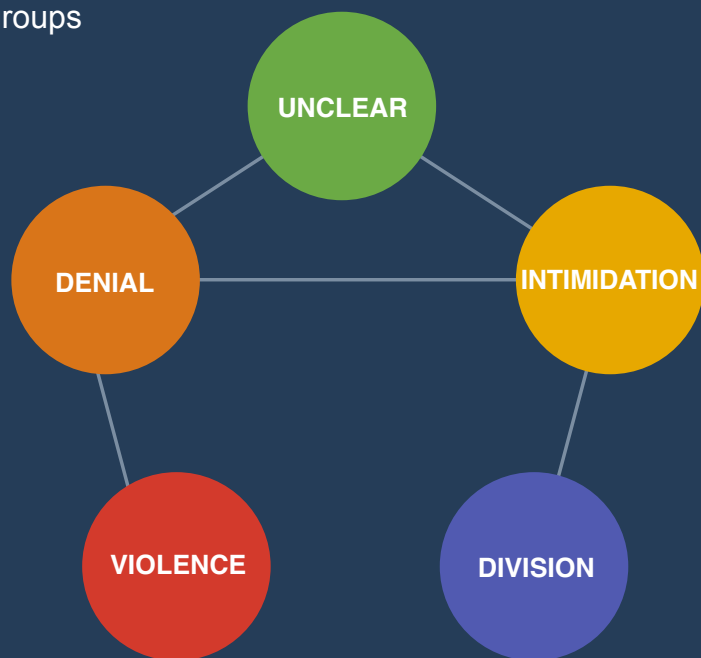
A Congregational Guide for Election-related Disruption

Preparing for uncertainty, misinformation, intimidation, violence or other extraordinary circumstances surrounding an election.

Designed for pastors and deacons, congregational councils, polling-site hosts, staff teams, adult forums, youth groups and ecumenical partners.

PREPARATION IS NOT PREDICTION

This guide is for serious election-related disruption. It complements—not replaces—ordinary post-election ministry such as thanking election workers, evaluating voter-engagement efforts, preparing for new legislatures and continuing issue advocacy.



Suggested session: 60-75 minutes | Checklist can be used independently in 20 minutes

Prepared by Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Arizona for informational and organizing purposes only. It does not constitute legal advice. Its authors are not legal experts. Laws, court rulings, and election procedures vary by state and locality and may change rapidly. Nothing here should be relied upon as a definitive statement of the law. If you encounter a legal issue on or around Election Day, contact a qualified election law attorney.

START WITH READINESS

Why prepare—and what should be ready?

The days surrounding an election may bring relief, grief, celebration, uncertainty—or no clear result at all. In extraordinary circumstances they may also bring disputed claims, intimidation, threats, vandalism, violence or an unexpected armed presence at a polling place.

PREPARATION IS NOT PREDICTION

Faithful stewardship means deciding in advance how we will tell the truth, protect our neighbors, resist fear and respond without becoming captive to partisan urgency.

Use the checklist first

If time is limited, gather the pastor or deacon, council president, communications lead, facility lead and pastoral-care contact. Work through these six essentials before Election Day:

- Name a small response team.
- Agree on trusted information sources.
- Record election, emergency, synod and community contacts.
- Authorize one spokesperson.
- Plan care for people who may be especially affected.
- Prepare a short holding statement.
- Check with your synod or, if present, your ELCA SPPO, about coordinated election-related work.
- Review the congregation's emergency procedures.
- Decide on an emergency communications protocol.
- Review the key elections timelines and procedures for your state and share them with the congregation in a variety of ways—posters to socials and emails, etc.

Theological grounding

The anchors in this guide draw from Scripture, Luther's explanation of the Eighth Commandment, and ELCA social teaching—especially *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All; For Peace in God's World; Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*; and *Voting Rights to All Citizens*. They are not generic civic principles. They express how the ELCA understands Christian vocation, neighbor-love and public responsibility.

DIGNITY

Every person bears God-given dignity. That means every voter, election worker, candidate, protester or political opponent.

TRUTH

The Eighth Commandment calls us to defend our neighbors and interpret their actions generously—while still naming verified falsehood and harm.

COMMON GOOD

Government is intended to protect and advance the well-being of people, communities and creation.

PARTICIPATION

The church supports nonpartisan democratic participation and equitable access to voting. It does not endorse candidates.

FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP

Christian nationalism must be distinguished from patriotism. No party, candidate or nation may claim the church's ultimate loyalty.



A LUTHERAN POSTURE

Called to be a community for peace

Our calling

In baptism, Christians are called into daily life to love and serve the neighbor. In moments of public uncertainty, the church gathers around Word and Sacrament, prays, speaks truth, equips people for responsible action, protects those at risk and sustains relationships across difference.

We do not defend a party, candidate or preferred outcome. We do not investigate crimes, command polling operations or become vigilantes. Our public witness remains nonpartisan while being morally clear about intimidation, racism, dehumanization, violence and attacks on democratic participation.

Four forms of faithful presence

DISTURBS

Refuses silence when truth or human dignity is under attack; names idols, deception and injustice.

RECONCILES

Keeps lines of communication open and brings people together without demanding false equivalence.

SERVES

Meets human need, stands with people at risk, advocates justice and holds power accountable.

DELIBERATES

Creates a setting of freedom and respect where people with different perspectives learn and reason together.

These roles come directly from the ELCA social statement, "For Peace in God's World", which describes the church as a faithful presence that "disturbs, reconciles, serves, and deliberates."

★ **Consider exploring what being a 'faithful presence' might look like under each of the 6 scenarios presented.**

The church as a trusted messenger

Congregations often possess something scarce in a crisis: relationships of trust. That trust is not a platform for being first, dramatic or certain. It is a vocation to communicate with care, accuracy and humility.

PRESIDING BISHOP YEHIEL CURRY

“Churches and faith leaders are uniquely positioned to seek out and share accurate information, correct misinformation and help neighbors participate confidently because trust grows when communities know we care.

A trusted messenger:

- ✓ Leads with care for neighbors who may be frightened, harmed or confused.
- ✓ Distinguishes verified fact, responsible projection, allegation and opinion.
- ✓ Names the source and date of information.
- ✓ Corrects error without humiliating the person who shared it.
- ✓ Says "we do not yet know" when facts remain incomplete.
- ✓ Uses one authorized voice while ensuring pastoral care comes from many people.
- ✓ Updates or corrects an earlier statement transparently.

Trusted messenger question

★ **Will this message increase understanding, protect a neighbor and help people take a responsible next step?**

FACILITATOR PREPARATION

Open the conversation—and prepare to communicate

Begin here

Watch the supplied Vimeo video. Invite participants to listen for the kind of public witness the church may be called to offer after an election. Then read Micah 6:8, Romans 12:9-21 or Ephesians 2:13-22. Before your discussion, read the covenant aloud.

Conversation covenant

- ✓ Speak from your own experience; do not assign motives to a group of people.
- ✓ Critique claims and actions without degrading persons.
- ✓ Listen to understand, especially when impact of an event is not the same for everyone.
- ✓ Do not repeat an alarming claim merely to discuss it. First identify its source and whether it has been verified.
- ✓ Protect confidentiality, but never promise secrecy about a credible threat of harm.
- ✓ Anyone may pause or step out. The facilitator may stop discussion that becomes threatening or dehumanizing.

Discussion prompts

- ★ *What emotions do you expect to carry on November 4? Which emotions might be present in your neighbors or congregation?*
- ★ *What is the difference between being nonpartisan and being silent about intimidation, violence, racism, lies or attacks on democratic participation?*
- ★ *What would make your congregation a trustworthy place in a moment of public anxiety? What could cause it to lost trust?*

What is a Holding Statement?

A holding statement is a short, temporary message used while important facts are still being verified. Its audience may include members, neighbors, news media or the public. It acknowledges the situation, states what is known and unknown, expresses care, identifies responsible sources and says when an update will come. It is not a complete analysis, accusation or final institutional response.

ADAPTABLE EXAMPLE

We are aware of reports concerning [brief neutral description]. We are checking information with [responsible authority]. Our immediate concern is the safety and dignity of [people affected]. We urge people not to share unverified claims. We will provide an update by [time/channel].

Resources for facilitators

Links below are interactive.

- ✓ [Faith and Civic Life - Seeking the Well-being of All](#) - Churchwide social statement adopted in 2025.
- ✓ [For Peace in God's World](#) - Source of the disturbing, reconciling, serving and deliberating roles.
- ✓ [A Call to be Trusted Messengers in this Election Season](#) - Presiding Bishop Curry's pastoral message and practical invitations.
- ✓ [ELCA Election Engagement Toolkit and Civic Engagement Guide](#) - Nonpartisan voter education, election protection, candidate forums and legal guidance.
- ✓ [ELCA Advocacy Starter Kit, Session 1: What is Faith-based Advocacy?](#) - A specific session guide for grounding advocacy in faith, identifying decision-makers and communicating effectively—not merely the general Witness in Society webpage.
- ✓ [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, DOJ, FBI and Election Protection](#) for current election-process, safety and reporting guidance, or ideally, refer to your [State and local election office](#) for election administration and public safety matters.

SCENARIOS 1-2

Unclear results and election denial

Six possible scenarios

1

No clear winner—and pressure to declare one

Election night ends without a clear result in several races. Social media posts claim the delay proves fraud. Members ask the pastor to denounce the count or announce a winner.

Discussion prompts

- ★ *How can leaders explain unofficial returns, counting, canvassing, audits, recounts and certification?*
- ★ *What sources will your congregation treat as authoritative? How will you correct a false claim without humiliating the person who shared it?*
- ★ *What can be said publicly before all facts are known?*

PAUSE BEFORE DECLARING

Use precise language: results may be incomplete, projected, canvassed, recounted or certified. These terms are not interchangeable.

Facilitator prompt

FOR EACH SCENARIO ASK:

- What do we know?
- What do we not know?
- Who may be at risk?
- What is ours to do?
- Who should be contacted?
- What should we refrain from doing?



2

Widespread election denial

Candidates and influencers make conflicting claims about the legitimacy of the election. Some members insist that loyalty to Christianity requires rejecting the result; others call every legal challenge anti-democratic.

Discussion prompts

- ★ *What evidence distinguishes a lawful challenge from unsupported denial? Who has authority to investigate or decide?*
- ★ *How can the congregation reject claims of divine favor for one candidate while allowing principled disagreement?*
- ★ *Where is Christian language being used to confer divine authority on a leader, party or nation?*

FAITH IS NOT A PARTY LABEL

A legal challenge should be evaluated through evidence and lawful process. No electoral outcome is God's verdict, and Christian loyalty does not require loyalty to a candidate, party or nation.

SCENARIOS 3-4

Intimidation—and an unexpected armed presence

3

Intimidation or disruption at the polls

A member reports aggressive questioning, photographing of voters or threatening conduct near a polling place. A video spreads, but its date and location are unclear.

Discussion prompts

- ★ *What reporting channels should members know? What details can a witness safely record without putting themselves in danger?*
- ★ *How will the congregation support targeted voters or poll workers while leaving investigation to election officials and law enforcement?*
- ★ *How can leaders avoid amplifying an unverified or decontextualized video?*

RECORD • REPORT • RETREAT TO SAFETY

Record details only when safe. Notify the chief polling-place official and election office. Do not confront an armed or highly agitated person.

IMMEDIATE DANGER? CALL 911.

Move people to safety. Do not confront armed or violent people.

4

Armed, militarized or federal presence

Armed personnel or people identifying themselves as federal agents or troops enter or gather at a church polling location, approach election workers, or seek access to voters, voting equipment or ballots. Their authority and purpose are not immediately clear.

Before election day

- ✓ Ask the local election office who may enter, who verifies credentials and who commands an emergency response.
- ✓ Identify the chief polling-place official, facility liaison, emergency exits and a private communications channel.
- ✓ Clarify in writing that election officials—not congregational volunteers—direct polling operations and control election equipment.

If it occurs...

- ✓ Do not confront, physically obstruct or attempt to disarm anyone.
- ✓ For immediate danger, call 911 and move people to safety.
- ✓ Quietly notify the chief polling-place official and contact the state or local election office; ask election officials to verify identity, authority and instructions.
- ✓ Document agency, insignia, names, time, location and actions only when safe and lawful; preserve original files.
- ✓ Consult your state's chief election official, state attorney general, state or local law-enforcement agency, and nonpartisan Election Protection partners for state-specific reporting procedures and election-security guidance.
- ✓ Do not speculate publicly about legality or motive. Use a holding statement until responsible authorities confirm facts.

IMPORTANT QUALIFICATION

An armed presence is not automatically unlawful: for example, National Guard members have sometimes served in election support roles at the request of state officials. Federal law also restricts troops at polls and interference by armed forces. Because authority and state law vary, congregations should not make an on-site legal determination; they should prioritize safety and defer operational questions to election officials.

SCENARIOS 5-6 + RESPONSE

Violence, division—and a faithful PAUSE

5

Violence, vandalism or property destruction

A protest becomes violent, or a campaign office, house of worship, election office or neighborhood business is damaged. Rumors identify a political or religious group as responsible before authorities confirm what happened.

Discussion prompts

- ★ *Who needs immediate safety, pastoral care, shelter, accompaniment or material assistance?*
- ★ *How can leaders condemn violence and repair harm without assigning collective guilt or calling for retaliation?*
- ★ *What is the difference between protected protest, civil disobedience, property damage and violence against persons?*

CONDEMN HARM WITHOUT SPECULATION

Protect life, summon help and support those affected. Do not identify a suspect or motive before confirmation.

6

A peaceful result—but a divided congregation

There is no public crisis. Some members celebrate, others grieve, and some fear the policies they expect. Worship is approaching, and leaders disagree about whether to say anything.

Discussion prompts

- ★ *How can worship name grief, fear and responsibility without implying that God endorsed an outcome?*
- ★ *Whose safety or dignity may be especially vulnerable?*
- ★ *What shared commitments remain possible without political agreement?*

A faithful response: PAUSE

P

PROTECT LIFE AND DIGNITY

Call 911 in immediate danger. Do not confront armed, violent or highly agitated people. Move people to safety.

A

ASSESS AND AUTHENTICATE

Separate observation from rumor. Check date, location, original source and responsible confirmation.

U

UNDERSTAND WHO IS AFFECTED

Listen to voters, election workers and communities most exposed to intimidation or hatred.

S

SPEAK AND SERVE FAITHFULLY

Use calm, accurate, nonpartisan language. Offer care, accompaniment and practical help.

E

ENGAGE FOR THE LONG TERM

Document lessons, strengthen relationships, advocate for fair processes and repair harm.

Remember

Protect neighbors and seek justice peacefully. Leave polling operations and investigations to responsible officials. The church's work is truth-telling, safety, care, justice-seeking, moral clarity and durable relationship.

PRIMARY TAKEAWAY

Ready for election season disruption

Before November 3

- ☐ **01** Name a response team: pastor/deacon, council leader, communications lead, facilities/security lead and pastoral-care contact.
- ☐ **02** Confirm emergency procedures, accessibility needs, insurance contacts and who may authorize closure or a public statement.
- ☐ **03** Record election-office, emergency, synod, interfaith and community-service contacts.
- ☐ **04** Agree on trustworthy sources and a rule against reposting unverified claims.
- ☐ **05** Prepare a factual, compassionate holding statement that is easy to update.
- ☐ **06** Plan pastoral availability, prayer or a listening space for November 4.
- ☐ **07** Identify people who may need particular support.
- ☐ **08** Review facility-use policies for vigils, shelter or public meetings.
- ☐ **09** Offer de-escalation, active-bystander, media-literacy and trauma-informed care training.
- ☐ **10** Schedule a later debrief focused on truth, repair and durable relationships.

Reporting pathways

IMMEDIATE DANGER

Dial 911

POLLING OPERATIONS

Chief polling-place official and state/local election office

VOTER HELP

Election Protection, 866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683)

VOTING RIGHTS CONCERNS

U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division

ELECTION THREATS/CRIMES

Local FBI field office or 1-800-CALL-FBI

CHURCH COORDINATION

Synod office and State Public Policy Office, where present.

Make a local response plan

TRUSTED INFORMATION SOURCES

SAFETY + REPORTING CONTACTS

PASTORAL + COMMUNITY CARE

AUTHORIZED SPOKESPERSON + BACKUP

NEXT UPDATE CHANNEL + TIME

Closing reflection

- ★ **What one step should our congregation take before Election Day? Who will take it, and by when?**
- ★ **What will faithful public witness look like here if the result pleases us? What if it disappoints or frightens us?**
- ★ **How will we remain connected to neighbors with whom we disagree while protecting people who are threatened or harmed?**

Prayer

God of truth and peace, still our fear without making us passive. Give us patience when answers are incomplete, courage when neighbors are threatened, humility when we are certain, and wisdom to recognize deception. Protect voters, election workers, public servants and all who gather in public. Keep us from hatred, retaliation and false witness. Make your church a disturbing, reconciling, serving and deliberating presence, so that our common life may honor the dignity of every person and seek the wellbeing of all; through Jesus Christ, our peace. Amen.

SOURCES TO VERIFY IMMEDIATELY BEFORE USE

ELCA.org election engagement and social teachings; **EAC.gov**; **Justice.gov** voting rights; **FBI.gov** election crimes and security; **866OurVote.org**; **state and local election offices**.

Procedures and phone prompts can change.