

FEDERAL TROOPS IN US CITIES

Resources for social engagement

Resources from ELCA social teachings

[For Peace in God's World](#), ELCA Social Statement, 1993

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Because all are sinners before God, efforts to build earthly peace must recognize sin's persistent, pervasive, and subtle power. We easily deceive ourselves about our own righteousness. Even our best intentions can produce harmful results. Our efforts must take account of the human tendency to dominate and destroy, and must recognize those "principalities" and "powers" (Ephesians 6:12, RSV) that cause strife in our world. We also advocate an earthly peace that provides security from violence and aggression, seeks just order in place of tyranny or anarchy, checks unrestrained power, and defends and enhances the life of people who are poor and powerless.

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Political authority relies on both the consent of the people and the threat and use of coercion. In accordance with the Lutheran tradition, we affirm that governments may legitimately employ such measures as law and its enforcement, police protection, provisions for the common defense, and resistance to aggression. We also affirm that governments should vigorously pursue less coercive measures over more coercive ones: consent over compulsion, nonviolence over violence, diplomacy over military engagement, and deterrence over war.

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We seek guidance from the principles of the "just/unjust war" tradition. While permitting recourse to war in exceptional circumstances, these principles intend to limit such occasions by setting forth conditions that must be met to render military action justifiable.The principles for deciding about wars include right intention, justifiable cause, legitimate authority, last resort, declaration of war aims, proportionality, and reasonable chance of success. The principles for conducting war include noncombatant immunity and proportionality.

But, these can be cited on both sides of the discussion as to whether the feds are engaged in a police action or a military one.

[Human Rights](#), ELCA Social Message, 2017

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In the presence of sin, God preserves creation, orders society and promotes justice through the law. When the laws of a society do not order society for the good of all or promote justice, the members of this church are compelled in their faith to address those shortcomings. Conversely, God's people participate in God's will for society when they seek just laws that safeguard human dignity and promote the common good. This church teaches: "Along with all citizens, Christians have the responsibility to defend human rights and to work for freedom, justice, peace, environmental well-being, and good order in public life."

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Even now Christian people are slow to shoulder responsibility to address human rights abuses at home and abroad. Citizens of any country with a representative political system (such as the United States) bear some responsibility for consistent rights violations committed by their government.

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On the basis of ELCA teaching and in light of contemporary needs, the ELCA will:

- advocate for the U.S. government to protect and promote the equal rights of all people, as enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights;

[Community Violence](#), ELCA Social Message, 1994

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People of color or those who do not speak English have long been suspicious of the protection and justice that police and criminal justice systems claim to provide.

(There is similar language in the Government social message, as well.)

[Government and Civic Engagement in the US](#), ELCA Social Message, 2020

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This concern about dysfunctional government at federal, state, and local levels is widespread. Some experience government as a threat to personal freedoms when laws are enforced selectively or not at all. Some experience government as a danger to the safety and well-being of communities, particularly when law enforcement and the court system distribute justice unequally. Some see government violating moral norms by insufficiently protecting human life, or by giving some people unfair advantage over others.

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There are many examples of how government has betrayed the trust of the people and its mandate to protect. Many people of European descent think that political control has passed to distant elites contemptuous of their well-being. Many of African descent continue to experience the evil legacies, perpetuated by law and government, of slavery, legal discrimination, police brutality, and mass incarceration.

Notes and Resources from Advocacy

There is a lot of concern in D.C. around the actions in Portland and the possibility that other cities may be targeted. Many individual members of Congress have issued statements.

In terms of advocacy, the House voted recently (215- 190) to approve an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would add limits to the Insurrection Act after President Trump threatened to invoke it to deploy active-duty troops against recent demonstrations over racial injustice. The vote fell mainly along party-lines with a few crossovers. More here in [The Hill](#).

Philip Bump gives this analysis for the [Washington Post](#) on the “dubious” deployment of armed enforcers within the U.S.

Tom Ridge, the first US secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) who served in the George W. Bush administration, said deployment was “counterproductive” and that it was not the office’s mission to act as domestic law enforcement. More here: [Pennsylvania Capital-Star](#).

Defense Secretary Mark Esper has reportedly expressed concern about federal law enforcement officers wearing military-style uniforms while responding to protests and possible confusion with military. More here: [POLITICO](#).

[Just Security](#) editors write that the administration is working to develop a “playbook for using federal forces without state consent.”

Greg Sargent looks at the politics of the move in light of the upcoming election. More here: [Washington Post](#).

Acting Homeland Security Secretary Wolf said recently that his agency is not sending more federal agents to other cities to secure federal courthouses. More here: [Washington Post](#).