

## **A Resolution Rejecting Christian Nationalism and Affirming the Gospel's Call to Public Witness and Civic Engagement Rooted in Christ Alone**

WHEREAS, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul reminds us that “our citizenship is in heaven,”<sup>1</sup> grounding our identity in Christ rather than any one nation, ethnicity, or political ideology; and

WHEREAS, Lutheran theology affirms that God works through secular institutions and structures in order to benefit the wellbeing and protection of humanity but also rejects any authority that compromises the gospel and demands allegiance away from God<sup>2</sup>; and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s social statement “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective” teaches that the church “has the obligation to name and denounce the idols before which people bow, to identify the power of sin present in social structures, and to advocate in hope with poor and powerless people,”<sup>3</sup> and

WHEREAS, the ELCA social statement “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Wellbeing of All,” teaches that the church “affirms healthy forms of patriotism” and “it opposes unhealthy, distorted forms of patriotism that divide a country and endanger it, including religious nationalism,”<sup>4</sup> and

WHEREAS, in the United States, at the current time, “Christian nationalism is the dominant distorted form” and “fuses an imagined conception of a Christian nation with a false vision of God’s ultimate will. It confuses the kingdom of God with a particular government,”<sup>5</sup> and

WHEREAS, Christian nationalism in the United States promotes the false claim that Christians should hold privileged civic status and often correlates with anti democratic attitudes, racialized exclusion, and threats to religious liberty<sup>6</sup>; and

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 3:20.

<sup>2</sup> Augsburg Confession XVI.

<sup>3</sup> “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective,” ELCA Social Statement, [elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Church\\_SocietySS.pdf](http://elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Church_SocietySS.pdf)., page 4.

<sup>4</sup> “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Wellbeing of All,” ELCA Social Statement, [elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Faith\\_and\\_Civic\\_Life\\_Seeking\\_the\\_Wellbeing\\_of\\_All\\_Social\\_Statement.pdf](http://elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Faith_and_Civic_Life_Seeking_the_Wellbeing_of_All_Social_Statement.pdf), Section 5, Article 38.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

WHEREAS, Christian nationalism distorts scripture by framing political power as divine mandate and cultural dominance as Christian duty<sup>7</sup>; and

WHEREAS, silence in the face of theological distortion risks allowing harmful ideologies to masquerade as Christian teaching; and

WHEREAS, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA is called to equip congregations and leaders for faithful public witness, responsible civic engagement, and love for neighbor in a pluralistic society<sup>8</sup>, by “encouraging congregations to respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society”<sup>9</sup>; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA clearly and publicly reject Christian nationalism as incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Lutheran confessional teaching, and the social teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod commits to working against the power of Christian nationalism in our congregations and communities by affirming that Christ alone is Lord of the Church and that no nation, ethnicity, or political ideology may claim divine authority; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod actively strives to affirm a vision of Christian public life grounded in humility, service, the cross of Christ, love of neighbor, and consistent with the social teachings of the ELCA - in particular: “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective” and “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Wellbeing of All”; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod commits to sharing resources for leaders and congregations, as appropriate and timely, such as: studies on Christian identity and public life, worship resources, and civic engagement opportunities especially as coordinated through the ELCA Advocacy Office and the Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod calls upon the Office of the Bishop to issue statements against Christian nationalism as it pertains to the life and ministry of congregations and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> SEPA Synod Mission Statement, [ministrylink.org/about](http://ministrylink.org/about).

<sup>9</sup> SEPA Synod Constitution, Chapter 6, S6.03.02.d.

communities in the synod and to share messages from the Office of the Presiding Bishop with the synod regarding the same; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod encourage rostered ministers and lay leaders to speak clearly against instances when Christian language, symbols, or scripture are misused to justify exclusion, violence, or political supremacy and to engage others influenced by Christian nationalist narratives with pastoral sensitivity, curiosity, and invitation for dialogue; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod encourage all rostered ministers to prayerfully and diligently address their congregations about the responsibilities of civic life by supporting “efforts to increase voter registration and access to polling places and early voting while opposing state efforts to raise barriers to the ballot box”<sup>10</sup> and to help dismantle structural barriers that limit voting rights and civic participation<sup>11</sup>; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod encourage all SEPA congregations and ministries to build bridges, foster reconciliation, practice communal discernment, provide opportunities for difficult conversations, and address polarization constructively in their communities; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod commits to partnering with ecumenical and interfaith organizations working to defend religious liberty for all people, consistent with ELCA social teachings and the Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment<sup>12</sup>, as opportunities arise; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod offers appreciation for the efforts in the ELCA and church-related organizations that contribute to healthy civic life through service, advocacy, and education.

This resolution is submitted by:

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<sup>10</sup> “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Wellbeing of All,” ELCA Social Statement, [elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Faith\\_and\\_Civic\\_Life\\_Seeking\\_the\\_Wellbeing\\_of\\_All\\_Social\\_Statement.pdf](https://elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Faith_and_Civic_Life_Seeking_the_Wellbeing_of_All_Social_Statement.pdf), Section 6, Article 46.

<sup>11</sup> “Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Disciple in a Democracy,” ELCA Social Message, [cdn.elca.org/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Government\\_and\\_Civic\\_Engagement\\_Social\\_Message.pdf](https://cdn.elca.org/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Government_and_Civic_Engagement_Social_Message.pdf), Section III, Number 1.

<sup>12</sup> See especially Commitments 3, 6, 7, 9, and 10 in the “Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A Policy Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” [resources.elca.org/wp-content/uploads/Inter-Religious\\_Policy\\_Statement.pdf](https://resources.elca.org/wp-content/uploads/Inter-Religious_Policy_Statement.pdf).

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