



LUTHERAN OFFICE of PUBLIC POLICY -CALIFORNIA

September 2025

Dear siblings in Christ,

As Lutherans in California, you have come to trust the Lutheran Office of Public Policy - California for prayerfully-discerned Ballot Measure Voter Guides based in scripture and our church's social teaching. As members of the Policy Council, we take seriously our responsibility to understand the policies being proposed in our state and to apply the relevant teachings of our church in our assessment of those policies. Social Statements (as adopted by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly) and Social Messages (as adopted by the ELCA Church Council) contain decades of devoted study and expertise on wide-ranging issues of our common life.

This summer, *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All* was adopted by the Churchwide Assembly. This statement builds on the 2020 Social Message "Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy" and the 1991 Social Statement *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, among others. It notes that we are navigating "hyperpartisan polarization"¹ in our society, and calls each of us as baptized Christians to discern how we will participate in the public good of "robust civic engagement."²

On November 4, 2025, California voters will participate in a special election on Proposition 50. [You can read the text of Proposition 50 and the nonpartisan summary from the Legislative Analyst's Office here.](#) We find our role in offering a recommendation on this ballot measure to be among the more complex we have faced.

When considering the work of our government, "Lutherans ask one simple but all-encompassing question: is the neighbor being served?"³ The troubling rise of idolatrous Christian nationalism, the dismantling of many federal agencies and institutions, the militarization of major U.S. cities, and threats to vulnerable communities suggest that the neighbor is being actively harmed.

The ELCA has an "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."⁴ This church also insists that "government becomes oppressive when its goals, policies, and programs are designed or transformed into vehicles for oppressing the neighbor—such as voter suppression laws or gerrymandering."⁵

Proposition 50 seeks to counteract harm being done by the United States Congress by temporarily altering California's voting districts. Elected officials in California have put Proposition 50 before voters because they believe this is the appropriate response to voter disenfranchisement and authoritarianism in our federal government. However, this dramatic alteration to specific districts *is* gerrymandering.

The ELCA "stresses that self-determination *always* includes mutual, plural self-determination, which is also the sharing of power."⁶ Our role as the Policy Council for the Lutheran Office of Public Policy - California is never to take a partisan position or encourage Lutherans to vote for specific parties or candidates. Utilizing ELCA social teachings to assess this proposition, as we do with all California ballot measures, brings us to an unclear conclusion.

¹ *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All*, adopted by the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on August 1, 2025. Article 13, page 15.

² *Faith and Civic Life*, Article 48, page 46.

³ "Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy", adopted unanimously by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on June 4, 2020. Section III, Governmental Roles and Functions, page 9.

⁴ *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, adopted by the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, August 28-September 4, 1991. Page 4.

⁵ *Faith and Civic Life*, Article 44, page 42.

⁶ *Faith and Civic Life*, Article 23, page 24.



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It is our standard practice to recommend “strong support” or “strong oppose” where our social teaching is directly on point; “support” or “oppose” where the teachings are not directly on point but a good faith reading of them would tend to support or oppose the proposition; “no position” where our teaching is silent; and “neutral” where the issue implicates multiple contradictory statements. Under this established framework, we are compelled to recommend neutral on Proposition 50.

After faithful deliberation, prayer, and discussion, we are convinced this is the appropriate response under our mandate. And we lament this deeply. We know there is no “neutral” oval to check on the ballot; citizens who retain the right to vote (for now) must answer yes or no. This question feels simultaneously momentous and miniscule, and a recommendation of neutral feels insufficient.

Please know that we, as individual voters and people of faith, struggle with you in this. “It is sin when the power in social structures, such as government, is distorted so that it is not used for the common good of neighbors and creation.”⁷ We are deeply concerned about the sin of fascism in this country, and about what measures individual states will take to either preserve or further dismantle the common good. In the interest of humility and transparency, we are moved to share that we unanimously intend to vote yes on Proposition 50, as we endeavor to use fallible human systems to protect the well-being of all.

We are lamentably torn in our role as members of the Policy Council and as private citizens who vote in California. None of our Ballot Measure Voter Guides are mandates, merely aids in discussion and discernment for Lutherans who seek to vote faithfully.

We invite you to prayerfully discern, individually and with your faith community, how to cast your ballot in November.

In lament and hope,

Regina Q. Banks, JD
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⁷ *Faith and Civic Life*, Article 4, page 9.