AMMPARO



SACRED CROSSROADS

The Intersection of Faith and Immigration in the 2024 Election

Use this nonpartisan resource to explore key facts about immigration (one of the most important issues informing the upcoming U.S. national election) reflect on how Christian values compel us to pursue justice, help the oppressed, promote human dignity and human flourishing, and pray for a government that serves all neighbors.

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Legal Considerations

An important part of faithful civic engagement is abiding by the law. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) "Civic Engagement Guide" states.

> "Any participation by congregations in activities related to the electoral process must be strictly nonpartisan and abide by Internal Revenue Service (IRS) guidelines. According to the IRS, 'All section 501(c)(3) organizations are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office.' Noncompliance with IRS Tax Code 501(c)(3) can cost your institution its tax-exempt status. Congregations and rostered ministers must ensure that activities related to the electoral process are transparent, nonpartisan and legal."
>
> For additional information, please see this reference guide, "Guidance for churches and clergy participating in the electoral process."

This guide is for civic engagement and education. It is non-partisan and does not involve endorsement of candidates nor political parties. Through this guide, AMMPARO seeks to promote civic participation within its networks and educate candidates and the public about the importance of the moral imperative to have just and humane immigration policies.

Publicly Engaged Church: Immigration and Civic Life

Learning from History

Immigration is one of the most fiercely debated topics this election season. Misconceptions and even animosity towards newcomers have sprung up alarmingly quickly in this highly polarized climate. Yet this rhetoric is not new. Throughout the history of the United States, racial discrimination and prejudice against immigrants have increased in intensity with each new group of immigrants. Often, this has led to long-lasting consequences. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, along with the earlier Chinese Exclusion Act, are two examples of legislation enacted during a period of increasing anti-immigrant sentiment in U.S. history. Drawing on experience and speaking out clearly against hate as a community can help serve as a bulwark against the rising tide of xenophobia--and the ramifications this has on immigrants and families in the U.S.

The latest rhetoric targeting immigrants, particularly in the vein of “Great Replacement” or “Great Replacement Theory” has roots in white supremacist ideology. Speaking out against discrimination and hate are key priorities of the ELCA. In 2019, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted a resolution firmly condemning white supremacy.

> “Our religious and political leaders have a moral responsibility to condemn racist rhetoric and to speak with respect for the innate dignity of all persons, regardless of their race, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, or faith tradition and we call our leaders to honor this responsibility; and... Language that refers to people of color or immigrants with words like "invasion" or "infestation" or "white replacement" is racism and we condemn it..”— Condemnation of White Supremacy and Racist Rhetoric [CA19.04.18]

Leading with Faith Values

Americans are highly polarized on the issue of immigration. Expanding our understanding of the other—learning to discern amid the polarization—is needed now more than ever to follow Christ’s call to love our neighbor. Discernment is a practice that seeks wisdom from God’s Spirit in order to make a decision not according to our own desires but as much as possible according to God’s will (ELCA “A Study Curriculum on Civic Life and Faith”). This can be especially challenging in times when neighbors don’t see eye to eye on the issues.

The German theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote extensively about basing our behavior on the humility of Christ as a model for Christians. He wrote that:

> "It remains an experience of incomparable value that we have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed and reviled, in short from the perspective of the suffering." — Letters and Papers from Prison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

In today's polarized climate where migration and immigration are often met with fear, Bonhoeffer's striking words are more relevant than ever. They urge us to reflect and consider the issue from the perspective of the migrants themselves and the church's commitments to accompany migrants.

Too often, we fail to take into consideration the experience of our neighbors, especially those forced to flee their homes. According to the U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees, 117.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order at the end of 2023. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reports that conflict-driven displacement has been the primary factor behind the global rise in displacement over the past five years. Behind these numbers lie the stories of people whose lives have been destabilized by war, chronic poverty, environmental disaster, and many other, often interrelated factors. In Gaza, for example, UNRWA, the main UN agency for Palestinian refugees, estimates that up to 1.9 million people have been displaced within the territory.

The issues, far from being merely topics for debate or theoretical constructs to test our faith, are real. They don't just impact us on a personal level--they impact people on the margins here in our own country like undocumented immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and millions of people around the globe on the verge of having to leave behind the only life they've ever known.

Civic Engagement

Drawing from a long tradition of caring for refugees and immigrants, the ELCA is uniquely poised to seek reforms on immigration that acknowledge the humanity and dignity of our neighbors as well as support the search solutions of human suffering around the world. This is a key pillar of the AMMPARO strategy. The ELCA also strongly "affirms voting, guided by faith-based values, as an exercise in citizenship." Voting is one way to actively engage in civic life and work towards the common good for the welfare of all neighbors. There are many ways to become an informed voter, faithfully reflecting on the impact of our vote on migrant neighbors. In the United States, citizens and naturalized citizens have the right to vote, so if you're eligible, vote!

Prayers for Discernment

The Bible tells us to love God and our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). To be witnesses of God's love, we must extend our love and compassion to everyone we meet, including migrants, treating them with the same care and respect we would want for ourselves. Consider Matthew 25:40 which connects the plight of the migrant to Christ, stating, "And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."'

"Blessed Trinity, you call your people to responsible citizenship for the sake of your world. Help us to be faithful disciples who care as you do about the common good. We give thanks for the aspirations of this society toward democracy and justice for all, even while admitting our fears and acknowledging failures. Be with each of us as together we study these topics relevant to civic life and faith. May our thoughts and words be honest, insightful, and faithful. In all that we say and do, may we strengthen each other as siblings in Christ. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen." (ELCA"A Study Curriculum on Civic Life and Faith")

Study ELCA Social Teaching on Immigration

Theme	Quote	Social Teaching
On protecting refugees	"We…will advocate for just immigration policies, including fairness in visa regulations and in admitting and protecting refugees. We will work for policies that cause neither undue repercussions within immigrant communities nor bias against them."	Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture
Recognizes the special status of refugees	"We support compassionate survival assistance for refugees and vigorous international protection for them"	For Peace in God's World
Supports generous refugee and immigration policies	"We support a generous policy of welcome for refugees and immigrants. We pledge to continue our church' historic leadership in caring for refugees and immigrants."	For Peace in God's World

Facts About Immigrant Neighbors

The United States has economically, culturally, and socially benefited from immigrants. The increased focus on the border has led to greater emphasis on the number of immigrants in the U.S., with policies aimed at curbing immigration often referencing an "influx." However, these views may be biased. More accurately, the statistics may be misunderstood, taken out of context, or even used to promote White Supremacist ideology. Like other misconceptions that go mainstream, the rhetoric of invasion is harmful. It's on us to learn the facts and learn to identify and counter misinformation and disinformation.

Statistics

- According to the Pew Research Center, immigrants account for 14.3% of the U.S. population, compared to the 1970's when it was 4.7%. This is still a lower proportion than in the 1890's when immigrants made up 14.8% of the U.S. population.
- According to the Pew Research Center, many immigrants have temporary legal protections, which include Temporary Protected Status of which there 650,000 immigrants; Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals of which there are around 600,000; asylum seekers with pending applications; and others in different categories.
- The number of undocumented immigrants is around 10.9 million according to estimates from the Center for Migration Studies of New York.

Economic Contributions

Acknowledging the economic contributions of immigrants does not diminish their inherent dignity, which exists independently of their labor.

- Learn more about the economic contributions of immigrant essential workers during COVID from the Center for American Progress.
- On July 23, 2024, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office revised its 10-year economic and budget forecasts to account for increasing immigration rates. The CBO report says that immigrants will boost the U.S. GDP by $8.9 trillion over the next decade.
- The American Immigration Council finds that 46 percent of Fortune 500 companies in 2024 were founded by immigrants or the children of immigrants.
- The U.S. Department of Labor Health and Human Services finds that refugees and asylees contributed $123.8 billion to the US economy from 2005-2019.
- The American Immigration Council 2023 Map is an excellent tool to explore the amazing contributions of our immigrant neighbors. What is the impact in your state?

Facts About Immigrant Neighbors

Explaining Claims of Non-Citizens Voting

The false claims of widespread voting by non-citizens have gained significant attention. However, the instances are exceedingly rare. A Heritage Foundation database of election fraud cases identified just 23 instances of noncitizen voting between 2003 and 2022. A survey from the Brennan Center for Justice with election officials found that votes improperly cast by noncitizens made up just 0.0001% of votes cast in the 2016 election in their jurisdictions—40 of the 42 jurisdictions surveyed reported no incidents. Federal law makes citizenship a requirement for voting in federal elections.

Election integrity is strengthened by accurate reporting on the facts. Federal and state laws should increase confidence in our systems working by providing eligible citizens equal access to the ballot box--not removing access.

More Resources

- ELCA Votes – https://ELCA.org/votes and https://ELCA.org/civicengagement
- Interfaith Immigration Coalition – www.interfaithimmigration.org
- American Immigration Council – www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org
- Washington Office on Latin America – www.wola.org
- Justice for Immigrants – www.justiceforimmigrants.org
- General Voter Information in English and Spanish

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raed.abujries@elca.org

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Questions for Personal Reflection

Consider the impact of your vote with the issues at stake this election. Use these questions to reflect on the issues relevant to you and how your faith applies.

What are the key issues on immigration that matter to you? What are the positions of candidates for elected office, and the ballot measures, initiatives, and referendum related to immigration this election?

What are you doing to prepare to exercise your right to vote?

As Christians prepare to vote, to what extent should your faith values influence how you vote? How do your values apply to you as you prepare to vote?

Are there other stories of Scripture or other reflections that specifically guide you in the pursuit of justice for immigrants?

Questions for Candidates for Elected Office

Voting is an essential tool for holding candidates accountable. Use these questions to ensure that candidates for elected office work for a society where everyone can flourish.

Our immigration system is generally acknowledged to be broken. Our faith calls us to emphasize our common humanity with dignity and respect for all humans as well as welcome to the stranger. What is your vision for immigration reform?

How do the reforms you are suggesting respect the fundamental human rights of migrants?

How can the U.S. best provide refuge for asylum-seekers who come to our borders?