



Starting a discussion in his congregation, one ELCA pastor wrote: “sometimes people use words to claim to stand for something people think of as good but actually stand for something different. ‘Christian’ nationalism may sound like a good thing because it uses the word Christian. And the people who advocate for ‘Christian’ nationalism do think of themselves as Christian. However, they stand for things we in our tradition identify as contrary to the Gospel and opposed to what it means to be Christian.” Whether in your church or with friends and family, it is helpful to be versed in Christian nationalism from a Lutheran perspective.

## WHAT IS CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM?

Christian nationalism is “a cultural framework that idealizes and advocates fusion of certain Christian views with American civic life. **This political ideology, whether explicit or not, includes the beliefs that the U.S. Constitution was divinely inspired and enjoys godly status, that Christianity should be a privileged religion in the U.S., that the nation holds a special status in God’s eyes, and that good Americans must hold Christian beliefs.** Proponents range from those who believe the United States should be declared a Christian nation ([approximately 21%](#) of the U.S. population) to those involved in more virulent strains that are openly racist, anti-democratic or gang-like. The symbols and ideology of Christian nationalism were widely evident during the Jan. 6, 2021, attempt to throw out certified U.S. election results.”<sup>1</sup>

## DOES THE ELCA OPPOSE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM?

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton has endorsed the [Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement](#) that reads, in part:

“Christian nationalism seeks to merge Christian and American identities, distorting both the Christian faith and America’s constitutional democracy. Christian nationalism demands Christianity be privileged by the State and implies that to be a good American, one must be Christian. It often overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation. We reject this damaging political ideology and invite our Christian brothers and sisters to join us in opposing this threat to our faith and to our nation.”

In a November 2022 video [Bishop Eaton stated](#): “Christian Nationalism identifies a human-made government with God’s will and seeks privilege specifically for Christians, and many times only white Christians. Lutherans teach that government should be held accountable to God, but never dictated as God’s will. We must remain committed to strengthening the public space as a just place for all who seek peaceful governance, regardless of religion or worldview, and we will defend the full participation of all in our religiously diverse society.”



Social media post.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO LUTHERANS?

The ELCA is committed to the common good — not for the good of Christians first — and to working with and learning

1 [“A Study Curriculum on Civic Life and Faith — Leader’s Overview & Materials”](#)

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from others.

In his *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther expounds upon the Eighth Commandment, writing that

“we are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead, we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.”

The ELCA social statement *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* (1991) includes this:

“The example of Jesus invites Christians to see people near and far away, people of all races, classes and cultures, friends and strangers, allies and enemies as their ‘neighbor.’”

It continues,

“As a reconciling and healing presence, this church is called to minister to human need with compassion and imagination. It strives to pioneer new ways of addressing emerging social problems and environmental degradation. This church has a responsibility to mediate conflict and to advocate just and peaceful resolutions to the world’s divisions. It should support institutions and policies **that serve the common good and work with and learn from others in caring for and changing global society**” (boldface added).

“[A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment](#),” an ELCA policy statement describing our entrance into interreligious relations, extends a commitment to common good with those who are nonreligious and assumes a posture of mutual understanding in interfaith dialogue:

“As we strive to show forth God’s vision, we are called to work toward justice and peace for all people and creation, that is, the common good. Religious diversity, when accompanied by mutual understanding and cooperation, enriches the whole. Through inter-religious relationships, we receive the gifts of our neighbors and experience more fully the exquisite realization that all are made in the image of God. A deep appreciation of the similarities and differences among religions and worldviews enhances working together for the common good. At the same time, cooperation can enhance both mutual understanding and the self-understanding of each participant. Seeking mutual understanding and the common good are active steps we can take toward God’s vision of life abundant for all.”

Further, ELCA social teaching calls us to wage peace, not war, as stated in the ELCA social statement *For Peace in God’s World* (1995):

“When the Church fulfills the mandates of its divine calling, it helps in word and deed to create an environment conducive to peace. When the Church forsakes these mandates, it also fails to serve earthly peace. Through



Photo courtesy of the ELCA Washington Office

What is your reaction? This photo was taken by a staff member and printed in the early 2000s as a postcard to thank visitors to the ELCA’s office in Washington, D.C.

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faithfulness in its life and activities as a community for peace, the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit becomes a presence for peace that disturbs, reconciles, serves, and deliberates.

“The Church is a **disturbing presence** when it refuses to be silent and instead speaks the truth in times when people shout out, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14). The Church is this presence when it names and resists idols that lead to false security, injustice, and war, and calls for repentance. We therefore denounce beliefs and actions that:

- elevate our nation or any nation or people to the role of God;
- find ultimate security in weapons and warfare;
- ordain the inherent right of one people, race, or civilization to rule over others;
- promise a perfect, peaceful society through the efforts of a self-sufficient humanity; and
- despair of any possibility for peace.”

### DOES THIS MEAN CHRISTIANS CAN'T BE PATRIOTIC?

Patriotism, a type of civic pride, is distinct from Christian nationalism. The ELCA’s [“Study Curriculum on Civic Life and Faith”](#) states that

“Christian nationalism is a political ideology and is **neither faithful to Christ nor patriotic**. It idealizes and advocates the fusion of certain Christian views with loyalty to one’s country and encourages enforcing upon the nation a particular and harsh understanding of certain Christian principles” (boldface added).

### WHERE DOES CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM SHOW UP?

Christian nationalist ideology asserts itself combatively through “culture war” topics regarding gender, sexuality, race and the role of government. These topics can be both symbolic and pragmatic. Examples include whether to place the U.S. flag in a sanctuary or post the Ten Commandments in a government space.

ELCA Worship is frequently asked, [“Are flags appropriate in church?”](#) People of faith grapple with these cultural conflicts. The FAQ response reminds us that, as Christians, “we live as both baptized people of God and citizens of a nation. Living as both members of the Church and citizens of a country has its challenges.”

Christian nationalist imagery was prevalent during the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and has become a persistent talking point in contemporary politics. For an illustrative but not exhaustive examination of Christian nationalism’s role in

### CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM STATEMENT

*As Christians, our faith teaches us everyone is created in God’s image and commands us to love one another. As Americans, we value our system of government and the good that can be accomplished in our constitutional democracy. Today, we are concerned about a persistent threat to both our religious communities and our democracy — Christian nationalism.*

*Christian nationalism seeks to merge Christian and American identities, distorting both the Christian faith and America’s constitutional democracy. Christian nationalism demands Christianity be privileged by the State and implies that to be a good American, one must be Christian. It often overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation. We reject this damaging political ideology and invite our Christian brothers and sisters to join us in opposing this threat to our faith and to our nation.*

continued at  
[christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org/statement](https://christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org/statement)

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the Capitol insurrection, visit “[What Is Uncivil Religion?](#),” a collaboration between the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Alabama and the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History.

### HOW CAN LUTHERANS RESPOND?

In your church and local community

The ELCA’s “[Study Curriculum on Civic Life and Faith](#)” provides a framework for exploring how civic life and our faith intersect.

Nationally

Many in the ELCA have signed the Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement, including Presiding Bishop Eaton who was an initial endorser. Add your name to the [Christians Against Christian Nationalism](#) statement.

What the ELCA is doing and saying

The ELCA is developing a social statement on civic life and faith, the relationship of church and state and related matters, consideration of which is anticipated by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. A [draft copy](#) for [feedback](#) is available, including Article 37 which addresses Christian nationalism. Presently in social teaching Christian nationalism is named in the ELCA social policy resolution “[Condemnation of White Supremacy and Racist Rhetoric](#),” which states:

Violent rhetoric against persons of color in the name of so-called “Christian Nationalism” is not a true Christian faith. It is idolatry and we condemn it.

Depolarizing Dialogue

If you are in a politically diverse or divided church or community, you may want to employ tools and practices for depolarization to approach constructive conversations about Christian nationalism. In addition to many ELCA synod, congregational and [ELCA-affiliated state public policy office](#) dialogue opportunities, the organization Braver Angels provides resources that can ease group and one-on-one conversations:

- “[How to Navigate Awkward Political Conversations at Thanksgiving Dinner After a Tense Election](#)”
- “[1:1 Conversations](#)”

### MORE

In addition to Presiding Bishop Eaton, representatives and individuals from all 50 states and more than three dozen denominations signed the Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement [within hours](#) of the campaign launch in July 2019. The “Learn” tab continues to add resources at [christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org](#), including ELCA and other denominational voices in podcasts and video.

### DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. Have you encountered the description of the United States as a “Christian nation”? If so, what was your reaction?
2. How do you see a difference between Christian nationalism and exercising citizenship as a Christian?
3. In what ways could a congregation or small group identify how or when an allegiance becomes more influential than their commitment to Jesus Christ?
4. How do you think engaging a neighbor who is different than oneself could combat Christian nationalism?
5. Where have you seen influence of Christian nationalism in your community?

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