

**Government and Civic Engagement in the United States:  
Discipleship in a Democracy**

Lutherans care about government because it is a gift from God intended for the safety and flourishing of human life. ELCA social teaching holds that all residents of the United States have a responsibility to make government function well—not to abandon our democracy but to engage it in a spirit of robust civic duty. For Lutherans, this responsibility is lived out as a calling from God, expressed in the discipleship described in our baptismal promises. **It is based on our understanding of how God governs human society.**

**God's Two Ways of Governing**

**The Right Hand of God**

Through which God instills faith in Jesus Christ to actively redeem those who recognize their sin and trust in God's promise.

- \*God acts through 'inner' or personal dimensions of our lives through God's promise given in Word and Sacraments.
- \*Conveys tangible power of God's love and forgiveness to people of faith, which stirs us to forgive others, mutually love and care for others, and strive for justice.

**The Left Hand of God**

Operates in the 'outer' social, political, economic world.

- \*God works through human roles, structures, institutions.
- \*God's intent is to work through human activity to order and provide earthly justice and enough for all.

Both are Necessary  
and  
Interrelated  
*Luke 7:1-10*

- 1. God's law is God's will for human life.
- ⇒ Theological use of the law
- ⇒ Civil use of the law

*Matthew 22:37-39*

- 2. God's rule in both hands is marked by equality.
- ⇒ All have sinned; all are in need of redemption
- ⇒ All people have fundamental dignity and rights

*Romans 2:1-11*

- 3. God's right-hand rule inspires a powerful impulse of empathy.
- ⇒ Empathy includes the capacity to recognize and honor every human being with dignity and rights.

*Matthew 25:31-46*

- 4. God has concern for justice in both ways of working
- ⇒ Left-hand involves fair and proportionate punishment for wrongful deeds.
- ⇒ Right-hand justice and reconciliation

*John 8:7-8 Luke 10:27-37*

- 5. God imparts purpose to the roles of worldly government.
- ⇒ Gifts to be exercised with integrity and respect for the well-being of human communities

Even in the midst of the interconnected themes, it is clear that serious tensions mark the two ways in which God governs, due to the enduring power of sin.

**Three Temptations:**

1-The belief that God's two ways are entirely unrelated

2-The dismissal of government as unnecessary or wholly evil

3-The temptation for any government, country, political movement or party to claim a privileged relationship with God or special status in God's plan for redemption.

**Lutherans adopt a more complex approach, a middle way confessing that government is of a fallen people, by a fallible people, but nonetheless intended by God for blessing all people.**

**Government Roles and Functions**

One simple but all-encompassing question:

*Is the neighbor being served?*

**Fourteen Guides for assessing the performance of government**

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|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 1. Consent of the governed        | 2. Unrestricted participation            | 3. Public service as vocation  | 4. Functions and roles for public benefit    |
| 5. Equity for public servants     | 6. Neighborly service to strangers       | 7. Respect and dignity   | 8. Adequate regulation                       |
| 9. Reform of government           | 10. Calling attention to abuses of power | 11. Maintaining the distinction between the role and the person filling it | 12. Recognizing neighbors, not just citizens |
| 13. Protecting individual freedom | 14. Accepting limitations on freedom     |  |  |

**A Call to Civic Engagement: *Jeremiah 29:7, Romans 13:1-7***

The ELCA holds to the biblical idea that God calls God's people to be active citizens and to ensure that everyone benefits from the good of government. Although we may disagree about the best ways to achieve the public good, we do not disagree about our shared responsibility to seek it.