

ELCA Overview of Earth Charter

The 2019 ELCA Church Wide Assembly endorsed the Earth Charter (Charter). The Charter is neither a theological or an environmental document, but an ethical foundational document calling for actions to build a more just, sustainable, and peaceful society. The [Earth Charter](#) articulates the values and principles for achieving sustainable development, and for demonstrating a mindset of global interdependence and shared responsibility, while offering a vision of hope and a call to action. The principles of the Earth Charter align very well with the ELCA social teachings. An overview of the Charter can be obtained by viewing this short video here: [Earth Charter: Turning conscience into action for a thriving Earth.](#)

Earth Charter and ELCA Social Statements

The Earth Charter consists of a preamble, four pillars (Pillar 1- [Respect and Care for the Community of Life](#), Pillar 2 - [Ecological Integrity](#), Pillar 3 - [Social and Economic Justice](#), and Pillar 4- [Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace](#)), 16 principles and a way forward. (See Table 1.) The principles are consistent with the ELCA social statements. For example, Pillar 1 of the Earth Charter calls for democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful. Similarly the "[Church in Society a Lutheran Perspective](#)" social statement provides guidance for the ELCA's participation in society such as setting forth the "basic affirmations that structure how faith is active in a love that calls for justice in relationships and structures of society". Pillar 2 (Ecological Integrity) aligns with the "[Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice](#)" social statement that details humanities' special roles on behalf of the whole of creation. The principles associated with Pillar 3 ([Social and Economic Justice](#)) contain values found in a number of ELCA social statements, including: "Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor"; "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture"; "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All"; and "The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries". Pillar 4 ([Democracy, nonviolence, and peace](#)) addresses global peace consistent with ELCA's social statement on: "For Peace in God's World".

What does Earth Charter Endorsement Mean?

Endorsement of the Earth Charter calls for a commitment to the Earth Charter; and promoting the Earth Charter and following the [Action Guidelines](#). As an endorser, ELCA commits to contributing to the Earth Charter Movement through projects that turn its vision into action; and implement the Earth Charter in all aspects of our ministries.

ELCA's endorsement of the Earth Charter in some instances represents an affirmation of work already being done by the Church while simultaneously offering opportunities for looking at our work and processes more creatively and offering different types and levels of engagements. Earth Charter International offers educational course opportunities; youth programs; and suggestions for incorporating the principles in every aspect of ELCA's ministry. The endorsement provides added opportunities for [incorporating](#) Earth Charter values and principles into the core Church operations with the goal of developing more socially and ecologically responsible communities.

Path Forward

ELCA Advocacy will steward implementation of the Earth Charter endorsement. Periodic updates will be issued to Church Council, to the broader audience of the Sustainability Table and to Churchwide. If

anyone has any questions or would like more information on the Charter, please contact Ruth Ivory-Moore at ruth.ivory-moore@elca.org.

Table 1: Earth Charter Structure

<p>Preamble</p>	<p>We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that amid a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. ...</p>
<p>Pillars</p>	<p>Principles</p>
<p>I. Respect and Care for the Community of Life</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity. 2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love. 3. Democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful. 4. Secure Earth’s bounty and beauty for present and future generations.
<p>II. Ecological Integrity/</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth’s ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life 6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach. 7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth’s regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being. 8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.
<p>III. Social and Economic Justice</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative. 10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner. 11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity. 12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.
<p>IV. Democracy, nonviolence, and peace</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice. 14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life. 15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration. 16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.

[The Way Forward](#)

Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.