



Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

August 2019

Beloved siblings in Christ,

Last week at our Churchwide Assembly, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America recommitted itself to walking alongside immigrants and refugees as a matter of faith. This Assembly action affirmed our history as an immigrant faith in the United States and the Lutheran church's long history of assisting strangers in our land.

We live in a time when the immigration system in our nation is stressed to the point of breaking, and the legal processes for dealing fairly with those seeking refuge and asylum in America is overwhelmed. As immigration is part of our national debate, our ELCA is emphasizing the biblical and historic basis for walking with one another in the form of accompaniment, and the increased opportunity for diversity and inclusivity as we build relationships with global immigrants. To be light to those who are in darkness through separation of parents and children and the threat of deportation of loved ones, we are called to be beacons of hope. This is truly "God's work. Our hands."

The Churchwide Assembly proclaimed that the ELCA aspires to be "a sanctuary denomination." The Assembly acted to lean into our prophetic call to provide support and comfort to immigrants, recognizing that "sanctuary" will be embodied differently across the church. Sanctuary may include providing information about undocumented persons' rights, connecting them with legal assistance, providing food, funds or housing – or simply having faithful discussions of immigration issues in our churches. In the months and years ahead we will, together, determine how expressions of the ELCA offer "sanctuary."

Let me be clear that this Assembly action in no way encourages Lutherans to break any immigration laws (as some news media outlets have suggested). In fact, this decision by our church to recommit to working for the rights of migrants and refugees in no way compels any congregation to take a particular course of action.

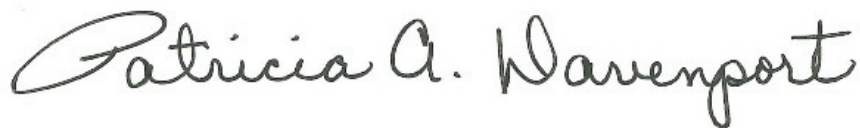
Instead, I encourage you to consider this decision a call to consider how you and your congregation engage with immigrant populations and to discern how you could meet local needs and/or advocate for laws that reflect the biblical values of loving our neighbors and seeking the welfare of immigrants in our midst.

God's work. Our hands.

This action should not be construed as a “top-down” decision by ELCA leaders. This issue was placed before the Assembly by an action from the Metropolitan New York Synod, and the language about “sanctuary denomination” was added from the Assembly floor. Discussion was civil and rooted in Scripture and our Lutheran heritage. This grassroots initiative was affirmed by more than 900 voting members elected from each of the ELCA’s 65 synods.

I have included below bullet points prepared by the ELCA that explore the meaning of this decision. I encourage you to read them, pray about them, and discuss them in your community of faith. If you have further questions I encourage you to converse with me at bishop@sepa.org.

In Christ’s love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia A. Davenport". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Patricia A. Davenport,
Bishop