



ELCA Conference of Bishops calls for cease-fire in Gaza / stands in solidarity with migrants

ITASCA, Ill. (March 7, 2024) — The Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) added its voice to concerns about international and domestic situations during its meeting Feb. 27-March 5 at Eaglewood Resort in Itasca, Ill. The conference is an advisory body of the ELCA that comprises 65 synod bishops, the presiding bishop and the secretary.

In key business the conference:

- Issued a [statement](#) and sent a [letter](#) to President Joe Biden calling for a permanent bilateral cease-fire in Gaza and urging the president and legislators “to do everything in their power to bring an end to the current suffering and lay the foundation for lasting peace with justice.”
- Issued a [statement](#) of solidarity with migrants in Texas that expressed concerns about the fate of Annunciation House, a place of welcome for immigrants in El Paso. “Annunciation House’s work with the marginalized in society resonates with us as leaders in the ELCA, a church with a core immigrant identity, for whom welcoming the stranger is a significant part of our baptismal covenant,” the statement read.

In his report to the conference, the Rev. Michael L. Burk, presiding bishop pro tempore, spoke about his approach to working with ELCA churchwide organization staff. “My goal in working with them is to be both strategic in thinking about our shared work and pastoral in our evolving relationships,” he said. “I think that approach has allowed us to continue to move forward together on behalf of this church and in keeping with the directions that have been set by Bishop [Elizabeth] Eaton.”

As a former synod bishop serving the Southeastern Iowa Synod from 2008 to 2020, Burk told the bishops, “The Conference of Bishops is at its best and is strengthened when the gathering around the means of grace is understood to be the center of bishops’ life together. The ministry of oversight begins and ends with the proclamation of the gospel. Welcoming that gospel, depending on it, expecting the good news to be resident at the center of this shared life, sets the stage for the safe, trust-building space necessary to take full advantage of what it means to be in this together.”

In other business the conference:

- Received an update on Holy Communion practices led by Deacon John Weit, executive for Worship, and the Rev. Laurie Jungling, bishop of the Montana Synod. The report reviewed the varied thoughts about communion practices throughout the church and presented reflective questions for the conference to consider as it continues the work called for in the memorial “Holy Communion Practices in Unusual Circumstances and in Pandemic Times,” approved by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.
- Received an update and engaged in conversation on the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) led by the Rev. Regina Hassanally, bishop of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, and the Rev. Matthew Riegel, bishop of the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod, who are members of the CRLC. The commission was established as called for in the memorial “Restructure the Governance of the ELCA,” adopted by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.
- Received updates from the Candidacy Leadership Development working group and engaged in conversation on a proposed process put forward by that group. Established during the conference’s

spring 2022 meeting, the working group is a diverse collection of 12 leaders from across the ELCA who are exploring ways to adapt the church's candidacy process to the church's current and future needs.

- Engaged in conversations around the revised first call process for rostered ministry. At its fall 2020 meeting, the conference approved the implementation of a revised process that was created to be more flexible and to respond better to the changing dynamics of the church.
- Received an update on synod diversity goals from Judith Roberts, senior director for ELCA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The report focused on the work being done in synods as called for in the continuing resolution adopted by the 2016 Churchwide Assembly, which requires each of the church's expressions annually to assess its ethnic and racial diversity.
- Engaged in learning and deliberations on white supremacy and patriarchy in a session led by Ms. Jennifer De Leon, director for racial justice, and Dr. Mary Streufert, director for gender justice and women's empowerment. The bishops reviewed the conference's work in 2023 on racial justice and gender justice and upcoming work of the church related to white supremacy and patriarchy. Small group discussions focused on white supremacy and patriarchy throughout the church viewed through a lens of faith, particularly through ELCA social teaching and policy.
- Engaged in a learning opportunity on ELCA social statements, social messages and continuing resolutions with Rev. Dr. Roger Willer, director for Theological Ethics, and Dr. Ryan Cumming, program director for Theological Ethics, community engagement and education. Cumming also updated the conference on the process for reconsideration of the social statement [*Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*](#). The task force will begin its work in 2024.
- Received an update on AMMPARO from its director, Mary Campbell. AMMPARO is a holistic, whole church response from the ELCA to address the plight of migrants forced to flee from their homes. The report included the global expansion of AMMPARO.
- Adopted recommendations from the Roster Committee granting extensions of leave, non-stipendiary calls, and exceptions to the bylaw that requires an initial three years of congregational service for ministers of Word and Sacrament.
- Received reports from the ELCA secretary and treasurer and updates from the conference's various committees.

About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with 3 million members in more than 8,700 worshipping communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of "God's work. Our hands.," the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA's roots are in the writings of the German church reformer Martin Luther.

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