



*~From the Bishop...*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In this age of social media, I would guess that many of you have already received news of the resolutions, memorials, and social statements that were adopted and passed at the Triennial Churchwide Assembly that gathered in Milwaukee from August 5-10. With 960-some voting members and 500 visitors and volunteers, we gathered under the theme, “We Are Church.”

One of the actions of the assembly was to debate, amend, and eventually pass a statement that declares the ELCA a “sanctuary” body. While many people are receiving this news with joy and affirmation, there are many others who are concerned, and asking the very Lutheran question, “What does this mean?”

Again, in this age of social media and agenda driven news reporting, I will do my best to give you accurate information about what it means, and about what it does not mean.

First, I think it is important to understand the context of the conversation, both in terms of our Lutheran traditions and considering our current culture.

Lutherans have a rich history of ministry to and with the refugee and immigrant. After World War II, millions of people were displaced. Lutherans formed the Lutheran World Federation and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service to minister to the many who needed safety, welcome, and a new place to live. That ministry now extends not only to Lutherans, but to all who are displaced by violence and war. It has been a part of who we are as people of faith, that we welcome not because of who the refugee/immigrant is, but because of who we are as Lutheran Christians, welcoming the stranger for the sake of Christ.

As we gathered last week shaped by that tradition, the assembly considered the challenges and faults of our current immigration system. Wherever a person stands politically, I would hope we can agree that the

current immigration system and practice needs reform.

By declaring the ELCA a sanctuary body, the assembly has voted to take a public stand that walking alongside immigrants, offering support and compassion, is a matter of faith. That support can take many forms, and will no doubt be very contextual. Some possibilities:

- Providing financial support or legal counsel to those working through the immigration system.
- Hosting English language classes.
- Contacting our government representatives to protest the detention of children and separation of families.
- Collecting offerings for the ELCA ministry AAMPARO who not only accompanies minors through the system but works in communities on the other side of the border to alleviate conditions that cause people to emigrate.
- Learning about how to support the LIRS and border congregations and ministries that are on the front line of the humanitarian needs of those seeking legal entry.

What this declaration does NOT mean is that every ELCA congregation has now been mandated to provide housing and protection for undocumented people fleeing the law. As always, each congregation discerns where and how to apply its ministry energy and resources. But if a congregation does discern a position of civil disobedience, they should also understand that they assume any attending legal consequences.

Please hear the declaration as public support of those who are the most vulnerable. We can want border security and still attend to the needs of those who are fleeing violence and war, or simply seek greater opportunity. As we learn all that it means to be a “sanctuary” church body, we seek to live into all that Christ challenges us to become, people who live our faith, answer his call, and serve the purposes of God.

Yours in Christ, Bishop Katherine Finegan