



Our Staff and Council Leadership

The Rev. Rick Kremer, Pastor
rickkremer@aol.com
Nilda Bolorin, Parish Administrator
officeatgrace@sbcglobal.net
Dorothea Glatte, Lay Minister
Lloyd Smith, Lay Minister
Louisa Barton-Duguay, Religious Worker
Artist in Residence for Outreach

Barbara Ruhe, President
Barbara Calogero, Secretary
Dale Eberhardt, Treasurer
Janice Potter, Financial Assistant
Dale Eberhardt, Organist
Walter Scott, Sexton

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A Pastoral Letter Regarding the Churchwide Assembly Vote to Become a Sanctuary Churchbody

Dear friends in Christ,

In the middle of last week, the Churchwide Assembly voted to designate the ELCA a "sanctuary churchbody." Over the next several days, news organizations picked up the story; the coverage was mostly vague.

When I returned home from worship this afternoon, I learned that Fox News aired a short panel discussion on the Churchwide Assembly's decision. I assume that this piece will make the usual social media rounds over the coming days, and I write to you today in hopes of addressing any concerns that might be raised by the segment.

After repeated viewings of the panel, I can state definitively that Fox News misreported the facts both about the ELCA's position and about undocumented immigrants. Fox News did not have a representative from the ELCA on the panel and implied that ELCA congregations would simply ignore US law. This is not true. One of their guests also implied that undocumented migrants carry disease and pose a public health risk. This is also not true.

The ELCA's designation as a "sanctuary churchbody" means that our denomination will continue to support refugees as they are resettled in the US through our partnership with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, provide legal assistance to immigrants pursuing their legally-protected right to seek asylum, and ensuring that undocumented immigrants are aware of their rights under US law. Moreover, it means that the ELCA will continue to advocate for just and humane treatment of detained immigrants, such as calling for adequate housing at detention centers and accompanying minors through immigration court as part of [the ELCA's AMMPARO program](#). Congregations that have the resources to do so may provide food, shelter, and financial assistance to migrants in need. Finally, it also means that the ELCA will speak out against xenophobia, racism, and fear-mongering against all people.

You may notice that these are long-standing ELCA practices. As I have mentioned many times before, ours is an immigrant faith: transplanted from Europe into the US and Caribbean by wandering Germans, Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes.

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Pastor's Message – September 2019

YOUR TIRED AND YOUR POOR...

In this issue we are focusing on an increasingly scary reality for immigrants, refugees and the poor in general. There is an all-out assault on these vulnerable people and we can be thankful that our church body, the ELCA, recognizes it and is trying to do something about it. We may together give thanks for that but also realize that this step has little meaning if we don't act accordingly in our churches and communities. It is time. Not, simply our time; it is God's time.

For it is written (Isaiah 52:7): "how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, Your God reigns." Our country's leader has become increasingly disturbed and is taking actions and making statements that are concerning all of us. We must pray for him, but also take actions to support, advocate for and care for those vulnerable people that he is harming, with willful intent or by way of his being in a job that is bigger than he can handle or understand.

In this issue you will read about the steps the ELCA has taken, the way those steps were misinterpreted by Fox News, and read a "Pastoral Letter" written by an ELCA pastor in Macon, Georgia in regard to the decision made by our church body. All of us should understand the decision our representatives made and the power of it. We also need to know how to correct those who might inadvertently or intentionally misrepresent what we are saying and doing.

Within a day of the burials following the mass killing in El Paso, Texas, by a white supremacist who explained himself on social media using the exact words our country's leader employs during his ever-more frequent "rallies," ICE stormed chicken processing plants in Mississippi arresting 700 and taking them away in buses. These fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, aunts and uncles had worked in these plants for as long as 24 years, and some of them were actually U.S. Citizens. The others had long toiled for the lowest wages imaginable in places where people would not choose to work unless they were desperate.

Both of these acts of cruelty targeted Mexicans. In Mississippi, as people in El Paso were mourning those killed and injured, ICE decided to arrest 700 Mexican parents and other relatives on the first day of school. They did not even think of the impact this raid would have on the innocent children of these family members. There was no coordination with the school system, or anyone else in the community. Many of the youngest could be seen crying on the sidewalks not knowing what to do.

But we're still not finished. ICE raids are occurring all over the country, immigrants that have reason to have healthcare and food supports are going to lose these benefits, and our government is hard at work implementing increasingly more difficult and painful decisions impacting on these "tired and poor." SNAP benefits which help the poor, the elderly and the infirm are being cut. The senate is looking at ways to reduce Social Security benefits, again impacting the least of these the most.

For it is written (Matthew 25:40): "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

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Janet's Closet

Grace's clothing ministry

Janet's Closet is open to the community on Wednesdays from 11 a.m.—1 p.m.

Donations of all types of gently used and season appropriate clothing are requested and always appreciated. Donations can be dropped off at the church when Janet's Closet is open.

Can't make the donations when Janet's Closet is open? Call the church office, 860-527-7792. If we don't pick up use option 3 to leave a message, or email the church office at officeatgrace@sbcglobal.net

ELCA Churchwide Assembly declares ELCA sanctuary denomination

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Horne stressed the importance of this theme of oneness as the assembly considers the proposals and recommendations before them this week.

"I can be of one mind with you and still disagree with you on an issue. When we focus on the word, the meaning of our baptism and the eucharist, our life as Christians and our service to our neighbor, being of one mind helps us to navigate through the rough spots in living with each other," Horne said. "The distinctions that I may make in our relationship and interactions won't ever overshadow the oneness we share in Christ Jesus."

The assembly also received greetings from the Rev. Susan C. Johnson, national bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and the Rev. Panti Filibus Musa, archbishop of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria and president of the Lutheran World Federation. Dr. Philip Johnson, president of Finlandia University, Hancock, Mich., and president of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities, also greeted the assembly on behalf of the network.

A first ballot was taken for election of ELCA secretary. A total of 866 votes were cast and 646 votes were required for election. There was no election. Live video of the plenary sessions is accessible at elca.org/cwa.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.



Punitive public charge rule slated to take effect

The Trump Administration expanded public charge rule is a punitive measure that will stoke fear and increase suffering in immigrant communities. This new policy would impose an unprecedented income test on persons seeking legal entry to the United States and deny entrance if they are judged likely to be or ever in the future become a "public charge" entitled to assistance with nutrition, housing or healthcare. In addition, current lawful permanent residents may have their applications for citizenship denied solely based on using or ever having used certain public programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This policy will cause a cascade of negative impacts, including increasing hunger, blocking family unification and severely restricting immigration of people who want to come and contribute to our nation.

"This cruel policy change flies in the face of our commitments as a church to people seeking a new home here. Our social message on immigration commits us to 'work for policies that cause neither undue repercussions within immigrant communities nor bias against them,'" says the Rev. Amy Reumann, ELCA director of advocacy. "The public charge rule is an unneeded departure from current practice that prioritizes family unification and humanitarian needs and that values the vitality and contributions of all immigrants regardless of economic status."

We support benefits for lawful permanent residents as a public good, stating in the ELCA social message on "Immigration": "The denial of benefits to permanent residents favors wealthier immigrants and creates unwarranted barriers for poorer ones. Most permanent residents are an integral part of our society who abide by the law, pay Social Security and taxes, and contribute to the economic and cultural life of their communities. In order to help assure their well-being, especially of their children, we support legislation that gives them access to the same benefits citizens receive."

Hundreds of thousands of comments were submitted through a interfaith coalition that included our Lutheran voices when the public charge rule was proposed. The ELCA submission stated that the proposed regulation would harm families by forcing vulnerable people to choose between maintaining or obtaining legal immigration status and meeting their family's basic needs, including those of children who are citizens. It further noted that the rule would penalize immigrants for seeking the very programs designed to help them attain self-sufficiency. This message that the only 'worthy' immigrants in the U.S. are wealthy is not only contrary to the country's history but also a notion that stands against our faithful teachings as Lutherans.

The rule will go into effect October 15, 2019, unless constrained by Congress or the courts. Please follow along with ELCA Advocacy as we continue to oppose this punitive and unnecessary rule change.

If you call the sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the Lord honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
serving your own interests
or pursuing your own affairs,
then you shall take delight in the Lord,
and I will make you ride upon
the heights of the earth. Isaiah 58:13

A Pastoral Letter Regarding the Churchwide Assembly Vote to Become a Sanctuary Churchbody

(continued from page 1)

These immigrant communities maintained their customs in this new country and shaped the ELCA as it is today. After World War II, one in six Lutherans was either displaced or a refugee. And over the years, our faith has become more diverse, made up of Lutherans from Central and South America, Africa, India, the Middle East, and every corner of the map. On a typical Sunday, Lutherans in the ELCA worship in more than thirty different languages. Because we are the spiritual heirs to a wandering Aramean, roving Germans and Danes, and displaced Christians from across the globe, our denomination has long been committed to welcoming the stranger. We do so in the belief that what we do unto the least of these, our sisters and brothers, we do unto Christ himself.

The Churchwide Assembly's actions, then, re-commit us to this long tradition.

If you have further questions or concerns about what it means to be a "sanctuary churchbody," please do not hesitate to ask me directly. I will gladly set aside time in my week to meet with you in person for extended conversation.

Grace and Peace,
Pr. Andrew+
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, 390 Pierce Avenue, Macon, GA 31204

We are building thousands of detention centers all over the country. These are privately owned and operated. The country that imprisons more people than any country in the world is now imprisoning more children, separating them from their parents and distributing them to these for-profit businesses all over the country. It is time. It is God's time.

Your council president and I joined Al Dornan on the corner of Goff and Wells in Wethersfield to hold signs that spoke the truth. "Immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than the general population." "Remember to love." "Families belong together." It was on Al's day 572 of protesting our treatment of immigrants... he can no longer walk the 2.2 miles/day as he is physically impaired and unable to do so. He has found a very busy intersection right near his house where he can walk to, sit and hold a sign for 1.5 hours every day. We joined him for that day. I took him to Fresh Start which he has supported, and showed him the shop. We then went to lunch at Tangiers. As we were eating a young woman and man sat at the table next to us.

She recognized Al, got up, went over to him and told him how deeply what he was doing meant to her. There were tears of gratitude and concern in her eyes. She is an immigrant from Indonesia yet one could not have diagnosed her place of origin. She explained how lucky she was that she did not look as she was. As we left to return to his home he said this interaction would keep him going for at least a month. He has two thousand followers on Facebook.

This issue speaks of what we are doing. With Pastor Alba Perez with us, we are hoping to be able to offer Spanish-speaking church at Grace. First, there will be Bible-study in Spanish. She is talking with people from our communities who are increasingly afraid of what may happen to them or their friends and families. It is a natural thing for our immigration church to welcome all people from all lands throughout this earth.

Let's be proud of our Church, and proud of our church. Let us remember every day how suffering is being promulgated in our names at our borders, in the dark rooms where white supremacists gather for purpose, and in the social media filled with lies and treachery placed there with the goal of division and hate by foreign and domestic instigators. It is time. Not, simply our time; it is God's time. AND NO, OUR "leader" IS **NOT** THE CHOSEN ONE.



ANOTHER ORGANIZATION SUPPORT OF THE ELCA

Add your name to support bold church actions against Trump's immigration policies

Dear Faithful America member,

Here's something to be grateful for: The country's largest Lutheran denomination just became the first U.S. denomination to declare itself a "sanctuary church body"!

The bad news is, they're already under attack from Fox News and the religious right.

On August 8, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America took a bold stance in response to President Trump's inhumane border policies. Not only did the ELCA declare its support for migrants and refugees, hundreds of leaders marched on an ICE office for a prayer vigil.

This is truly the Gospel in action -- but the religious right wasted no time in pouncing.

Appearing on Fox News, Dallas pastor Robert Jeffress (a top Trump adviser) accused the ELCA of "breaking the law." He even twisted Scripture into the dangerous nationalist claim that "to resist government is to resist God himself."

We can't let Donald Trump's favorite pastors scare pro-immigrant churches into submission. **Let's show the ELCA that Christians across the country are behind their faithful mission to welcome the stranger!**

Add your name: Thank the ELCA for declaring itself a "sanctuary church body" >>

<https://act.faithfulamerica.org/sign/elca-sanctuary/?t=1&akid=2086%2E58471%2EsKEfw3>

Thanks for everything you do to love your neighbor.

- Rev. Nathan and the Faithful America team

P.S. Faithful America's mission of mobilizing Christians to challenge the religious right and its dangerous alliance with Donald Trump is only possible thanks to members like you.

[Can you chip in to support our urgent work today?](#)

Faithful America is the largest online community of Christians putting faith into action for social justice. We can be reached through traditional mail at Faithful America, 206 Elm Street, Box # 202898, New Haven, CT 06520-2898. If you are receiving this message, it is likely because your email address was used either to sign one of our petitions or join via our homepage, faithfulamerica.org. We only want to contact people interested in receiving our emails, so while we hope you'll stick around and take action, [you can unsubscribe from this mailing list at any time.](#)

What A Wedding!

On Friday, July 26, 2019, Douglas Betts and LaToria Williams were married in a beautiful outdoor ceremony at Fazeli Cellars in Temecula, California. Douglas is the son of long time Grace member, Lou Oliver. One reason they chose this venue is because the wedding arbor was breathtaking, framed by the Palomar Mountains. Reminding us of how great Thy art! Fazeli Cellar's architecture is exquisite. The elegant towers, double grand staircase, water fountain, lush vegetation, old world wooden doors, framed with rolling hills and vineyard evoked an emotional, spiritual experience. The rose wedding arbor itself is framed by the Palomar Mountains.

Their journey began in 2012 after being introduced by a mutual friend and they feel truly blessed to have found each other at this time in their lives and give their thanks to God. Both are history buffs, enjoy traveling, and working out. She is a marathon runner. Their plans are to travel to Africa, (not sure of the country) next year for a delayed honeymoon. LaToria recently started a new job and did not have enough accumulated time for extensive traveling this year.



The Mom

The Family

The Couple

ELCA Churchwide Assembly declares ELCA sanctuary denomination

MILWAUKEE (August 7, 2019) — [In a key action this afternoon, the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted to approve a memorial that declares the ELCA a sanctuary church. This is the first North American denomination to declare itself a sanctuary church body. As a sanctuary church the ELCA is committed to serving and supporting migrant children and families in communities across the country.](#)

Earlier in the day, the Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, presiding bishop of the ELCA, joined more than 700 assembly members and others in a march and prayer vigil to the Milwaukee Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office. The march addressed concerns about the human rights of migrant children and families entering the U.S. along the southern border. Through the ELCA's initiative, Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO), this church is committed to work toward just and humane policies affecting migrants in and outside the U.S.

During morning plenary, the Rev. Chris Boerger, secretary of the ELCA, gave his report to the assembly. Boerger, who is retiring this fall, spent part of his report explaining the role of the secretary and the various responsibilities that come with the office.

"I believe that good structure is necessary for our life together and for the accomplishment of the work that God has given us to do," Boerger said. "I have said often that the primary focus of the church should be the mission that God has given us. The constitutions and policies of the church are to serve that mission. The mission should not be hindered by the constitution or policies of the church."

Boerger also gave updates on actions that were taken during the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, including that the denomination has made "little progress" in moving toward the commitment of authentic diversity. He reported that at the end of 2015, the ELCA was 92% white and at the end of 2018, it was 94% white.

"Until it really is a commitment for the congregations of this church, the prospects of this change are very dim," he said. "As a white church we say the right words. We, the majority population of this church, need to do more than talk."

Boerger's report also included statistics on baptized membership, which continues to decline. There was a 2.8% decrease from 2017, which he said is consistent with the trend the church has seen since its formation.

"We still have 3.4 million members," he said. "We are not an insignificant church."

Boerger closed his report by thanking ELCA members for entrusting him with the role of secretary, adding that he thanks God for this church and the people of this church.

"We are the clay jars that God has chosen to use to proclaim the gospel to this time and in our individual contexts," he said. "Thank you for this opportunity to serve our God, our world and our church. We are church. Thanks be to God."

Following his report, Boerger was presented with the Servus Dei award, which honors and expresses appreciation for ELCA officers as they complete their terms.

In his report, Bill Horne, ELCA vice president, spoke of unity in Christ as he reflected on this church's connection "as Christians, Lutherans, members of the ELCA and our relationship with our neighbors."

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Hungry People Face Another Threat, Please Help!

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) has proposed a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) rule that would eliminate an estimated 3.1 million children, families, disabled and older adults from access to SNAP benefits. This blockage of nutrition support for vulnerable and hungry people ignores the will of Congress when it considered this very issue in the 2018 Farm Bill. SNAP serves about 36 million people, the majority of whom are children, the elderly or people with disabilities. The rule eliminates broad based categorical eligibility ("Cat EI"), which is a mechanism used by states to reduce bureaucratic red tape and ensure that vulnerable populations receive the support they need. By eliminating Cat EI, states are forced to follow procedures that add to the cost of providing SNAP to low-income populations in areas of wide-spread poverty. People in serious need of healthy, life-sustaining food are qualifying for SNAP by Cat EI yet would be denied access if the proposed rule is adopted.

ELCA social teaching urges Lutherans to engage in service and advocacy for our neighbor in need of daily bread. These faith practices express our relationship with Jesus Christ, rooted in baptism that sends us out for the sake of the world.

“When we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Give us this day our daily bread,’ we place ourselves in tension with economic assumptions of our society. Rather than being self-sufficient, we need and depend on what God gives or provides through people, practices, and systems. ‘Daily bread’ is not earned by efforts of individuals alone, but is made possible through a variety of relationships and institutions [note to Martin Luther’s ‘The Large Catechism’]. God gives in ways that expand our notions of who ‘us’ includes, from people close at hand to those around the globe. In stark contrast to those who seek unchecked accumulation and profit, our attention is drawn to those who are desperate for what will sustain their lives for just this day.” – From ELCA social statement Sufficient, Sustainable Living for All.

ELCA World Hunger works to change the systems that perpetuate poverty based on extensive ministry with our membership, congregations and communities, knowing we can't do it alone. Elected officials must carry out the essential role government plays to help people who need nutritious food.

The comment period ends on September 23. Time is short, and your voice is essential now!

The proposed rule is harmful because it:

- Increases hunger for families by eliminating access to SNAP for 3.1 million vulnerable members of our communities
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Hungry People Face Another Threat, Please Help!

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- Ignores the will of Congress when it addressed this issue in the 2018 Farm Bill
- Harms grocery retailers and agricultural producers by reducing the amount of SNAP dollars available to spur local economic activity
- Threatens the health outcomes and learning potential of children


How you can help!

- Submit a comment that **shows your opposition to this rule.**
- **Speak out against the SNAP draft rule at a town hall meeting hosted by your senator or representative.**
- **Sign up for ELCA Advocacy Action Alerts from elca.org/advocacy/signup to receive the most up-to-date information on the SNAP rule.**

Want to learn more?

- About the ELCA social statement on economic life: read *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* (http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Economic_LifeSS.pdf) .
- About SNAP's role in improving nutrition and food security: read a Research Brief from our partners at the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) and a SNAP Fact Sheet from Bread for the World.

Register your opposition to the Proposed Rule by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) by making a public comment before September 23, 2018 on "Revision of Categorical Eligibility in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)" by writing or call your representatives



September Birthdays 2019

***May you all be blessed
as you celebrate your
special days!***

Name	Date
Rudolph Lewis	9/3
Jane Egan	9/4
Danielle Mathura	9/7
Paul Boodhoo	9/9
Lloyd Smith	9/10
Patrick Reiher	9/12
Carl Williams	9/13
Luis Santana	9/13
Ursula Sieg	9/14
Fély-Adrienne Yigle-Kaljob	9/14
Robert Kirschner	9/16
Trevor Merrill	9/18
Walter Scott	9/20
Timothy Reiher	9/20
Janice Potter	9/23
Herbert Reiher	9/26
Susan Larsen	9/26
Olivia McAdams	9/28
Elise Phelan	9/30

Happy Anniversary!

Roy & Beverly Nelson	09/14
Darrell & Nancy Urban	09/11
Carl & Gail Lindstrom	09/09

Did we miss your
birthday or anniversary?
Contact the office,
860-527-7792
or email
officeatgrace@sbcglobal.net
to update our records.