

ELCA vows support for migrants

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Signaling its support for immigrants, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voted to declare itself a “sanctuary church body” at its Churchwide Assembly in Milwaukee. Later on August 7, assembly participants marched to the door of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement building in Milwaukee as part of a prayer vigil for migrant children and their families.

Both events came in response to President Trump’s policies at the United States border with Mexico and his pledge to deport millions.

“It just keeps getting worse and worse in terms of unaccompanied children, separated families, detention centers that are just horrific, and so what we wanted to say as a church body, as the Lutheran Church, we wanted to now act with our feet and take action,” said Evelyn Soto Straw, director of unit operations and programs for the ELCA’s Domestic Mission.

The assembly also reelected Elizabeth A. Eaton as presiding bishop. Eaton won 81 percent of the vote, becoming the first ELCA presiding bishop to win reelection on the first ballot.

Regarding the declaration on sanctuary, church leaders explained that the term sanctuary was being used in a broad sense and that the resolution did not mandate that any congregation provide living space for threatened immigrants or engage in illegal actions.

Being a sanctuary denomination “means that the ELCA is publicly declaring that walking alongside immigrants and refugees is a matter of faith,” said a memo from Eaton and other bishops, offering pastors a list of talking points. The church is seeking “to provide concrete resources to assist the most vulnerable who are feeling the sharp edges of this broken system,” the memo said.

Another resolution, calling on congregations, synods, and other church organizations to speak out against the “inhumane policies of harassment, detention and deportation implemented by the U.S. government,” also passed.

The assembly approved a social statement, seven years in the making, titled “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action,” which labels patriarchy and sexism as sins and acknowledges the church’s complicity in them. It calls on the ELCA to end gender-based violence, encourage women and girls to pursue ministry and leadership roles in their congregations, use “gender-inclusive and expansive” language for God, and address inequities in pay and hiring both inside and outside the church.

The assembly passed a resolution condemning white supremacy, specifically calling out language that uses words like *invasion* in reference to immigrants or people of color. It also endorsed a “Declaration to People of African Descent” that includes a confession of the church’s complicity in slavery and acknowledges that institutional racism continues within the denomination. —Religion News Service, *Christian Century* staff