



Northern Illinois Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Jeffrey Clements

August 13, 2019

Dear members of the Northern Illinois Synod:

Grace, mercy, and peace be with you. I began my day in prayer for you, your congregation, this synod, and our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). We walk together. Every step. Every day. For the sake of the world.

The recent action of our Churchwide Assembly declaring the ELCA to be a “sanctuary church body” has generated headlines from *The Washington Post* to FOX News. The action has also given rise to rumors and misconceptions. I want you, as a member of this synod and the ELCA, to be well informed.

You may read the assembly’s action in the 2019 Churchwide Assembly Legislative Update for Wednesday, August 7 at <https://is.gd/legupwed>. You can find video recordings of all sessions at www.elca.org/cwa. Hearing the discussion that led to the decision may be of some help.

The ELCA press release stated, “As a sanctuary church, the ELCA is committed to serving and supporting migrant children and families in communities across the country.” We have already been involved in this accompaniment through the ELCA’s strategy called **AMMPARO** (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation, and Opportunities).

The ELCA has publicly declared that walking alongside immigrants and refugees is a matter of faith. What that looks like will differ from synod to synod and congregation to congregation because all ministry is contextual.

Let us be clear:

- In our interdependent polity, nothing in the Churchwide Assembly action binds a congregation, synod, agency or institution. It only binds the Churchwide expression of the church.
- The Churchwide Assembly action does not call for civil disobedience or any illegal actions. Any congregation that engages in illegal activity must be ready to accept the legal consequences. I urge congregations to seek legal counsel regarding these issues.
- The question of what it means to be a sanctuary church body will now have to be studied by the ELCA’s Church Council. We do not currently have a clear or commonly accepted definition. A report will come to the next Churchwide Assembly in 2022.

I see this action as an invitation for us to join together to pray and discuss. God bless you as you faithfully strive to love your neighbor.

Walking with you,

Bishop Jeffrey Clements