

Report on Recent ELCA Churchwide Actions by Pastor Coe August 14, 2019

The ELCA Churchwide Assembly took place in Milwaukee, the first half of August. There were plenty of memorials and resolutions passed and lots of other action taken, but there were a few that I thought might be especially relevant to Grace Lutheran, so I wanted to pass that news along.

1. **Presiding Bishop Re-elected** – Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton was re-elected to a second six-year term.
2. **A Commemoration of June 17** – The Assembly voted to commemorate June 17 as a day of repentance in the ELCA for the martyrdom of the Emanuel 9—the nine people who were shot and killed June 17, 2015, during a Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C. You may recall it was this event that prompted me to reach out to Emmanuel Apostolic Church in Bremerton and to begin our Koinonia relationship with our brothers and sisters there. I find this action to be powerful and reaffirming.
3. **Adopted a Resolution Condemning White Supremacy** – The Assembly adopted a resolution calling all ELCA congregations to engage in “study of the structures and rhetoric that empower and fuel racism and white supremacy and to take to heart the teaching of Scriptures, so we may all be better equipped to speak boldly about the equal dignity of all persons in the eyes of God.” I look forward to working on this at Grace Lutheran.
4. **Approved a Memorial Declaring the ELCA a Sanctuary Denomination** – Here is what the news release said about this action. *“The 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.”

This is a very bold statement by our denomination. This action makes me immensely proud of our denomination and the lengths it is willing to go to love our neighbors. However, I absolutely understand that some of you may have a very different reaction.

Our Southwestern Washington Synod Bishop Rick Jaech wrote to our churches with some further clarification. *“In its simplest form, becoming a sanctuary denomination means that the ELCA is publicly declaring that walking alongside immigrants and refugees is a matter of faith. The ELCA Churchwide Assembly declared that, when we preach on Sunday that Jesus tells us to welcome and care for everyone around us, then on Monday we will use our hands and voices to make sure it happens.”*

Bishop Jaech explained, *“The Churchwide Assembly’s declaration that the ELCA is a*

sanctuary denomination binds only the ELCA Churchwide Organization; it does not bind or obligate congregations, synods, or other organizations to be a sanctuary place. The Churchwide Assembly did not call for any illegal actions. All actions mentioned by the Churchwide Assembly are legal.”

Bishop Jaech’s full letter is available on the Grace Lutheran website at _____.
The Presiding Bishop has also provided some talking points on the sanctuary denomination issue and those are available on the Grace Lutheran website at _____.

What does this memorial mean for Grace Lutheran? As the Bishop explained, the memorial does not bind or obligate Grace Lutheran in any way. I think of it as leadership, encouragement, and an example.

I am fully aware that we have brothers and sisters within Grace Lutheran who are probably at all points on the spectrum on this issue. Here is my continuing commitment. I will continue to listen and engage with those who may differ from me on this issue. I value the diversity of opinion. I value each person within our congregation. And I ask all of us to do our best to listen, engage, and understand. In a recent sermon we were encouraged to ‘bear with one another.’ Here is a great opportunity to do just that. I love you all!

God bless,
Pastor Coe