

A MESSAGE FROM OUR ELCA CHURCHWIDE OFFICE!



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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ELCA approves Lutheran-Catholic ecumenical document

NEW ORLEANS (Aug. 10, 2016) – The 2016 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Churchwide Assembly took several significant steps Wednesday moving forward the mission of this church as a church for the sake of the world.

By a vote of 931 to 9, the assembly overwhelmingly accepted the “Declaration on the Way,” a unique ecumenical document that marks a path toward greater unity between Catholics and Lutherans. Following the vote, an emotional assembly stood to applaud the momentous decision.

At the heart of the document are 32 “Statements of Agreement” that state where Lutherans and Catholics do not have church-dividing differences on topics about church, ministry and the Eucharist. More tentatively, the document also explores differences that remain.

“Dear sisters and brothers, let us pause to honor this historic moment,” said ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton addressing the assembly following the vote. “Though we have not yet arrived, we have claimed that we are, in fact, on the way to unity. After 500 years of division and 50 years of dialogue, this action must be understood in the context of other significant agreements we have reached, most notably the ‘Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification’ in 1999.”

“This ‘Declaration on the Way’ helps us to realize more fully our unity in Christ with our Catholic partners, but it also serves to embolden our commitment to unity with all Christians,” said Eaton.

To honor the occasion, Eaton presented a gift of communion ware made especially for the assembly to Bishop Denis J. Madden, auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and co-chair of the ‘Declaration on the Way’ task force. ELCA Presiding Bishop Emeritus Mark Hanson served as co-chair from the ELCA. The task force had gathered and presented to the church agreements reached in dialogues between Lutherans and Catholics.

“I feel so privileged and so grateful to have spent these few days with you. Speaking with you, sharing time with you, and praying with you,” Madden said. “I thank you for allowing me and my colleagues to join you in the Eucharist celebrations which have been a great joy and always a remembrance that soon we will be celebrating these together as one body.”

The assembly expressed gratitude for the pioneering ecumenical text and commended the declaration (together with other ecumenical texts) as a resource “for the common life of the church as we approach 2017 and beyond.” Concerning the Statement of Agreements, the assembly’s action to receive the 32 common affirmations “recognized that there are no longer church dividing issues’ between Lutherans and Catholics with respect to these statements.

In another major consideration, the assembly voted 921 to 11 in favor of AMMPARO – the ELCA’s strategy to Accompany Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities.

The ELCA developed this strategy based on commitments to uphold and guarantee the basic human rights and safety of migrant children and their families; to address the root causes of migration in countries from Central America’s Northern Triangle and Mexico and the treatment of migrants in transit; to work toward just and humane policies affecting migrants in and outside the U.S.; to engage as a church with all of its companions,

affiliates and partners to respond to the migration situation and its causes; and to advocate for migrant children and their families.

The assembly also voted 895 to 23 to accept the 2017-2019 budget proposal approved and recommended by the ELCA Church Council. The budget proposal includes:

- a 2017 current fund spending authorization of \$65,296,005 and a 2017 ELCA World Hunger spending authorization of \$24.8 million;
- a 2018 current fund income proposal of \$64,057,220 and a 2018 ELCA World Hunger income proposal of \$25 million; and
- a 2019 current fund income proposal of \$64,151,175 and a 2019 ELCA World Hunger income proposal of \$25 million.

The assembly – the highest legislative authority of the ELCA – is meeting at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans. Meeting under the theme “Freed and Renewed in Christ: 500 Years of God’s Grace in Action,” the assembly’s business will include preparations for observing the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

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About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with more than 3.7 million members in more than 9,300 congregations across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of "God's work. Our hands," the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA's roots are in the writings of the German church reformer, Martin Luther.