

## Bishop Laurie's Report from Churchwide Assembly August 2019

*For Everyone Born, a Place at the Table* (see the lyrics below) is the title of the choir anthem sung at my installation as Bishop of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin one year ago on August 25. This song reflects our core value as Christians of NEIGHBOR LOVE, love without exceptions. Jesus responds to the Pharisee's question about what was the greatest commandment with this: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind. This is the first and greatest commandment and the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* Matthew 22: 37-39

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So much of what happened and so many of the votes at our 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Milwaukee last week reflected our core value of NEIGHBOR LOVE. We approved the following:

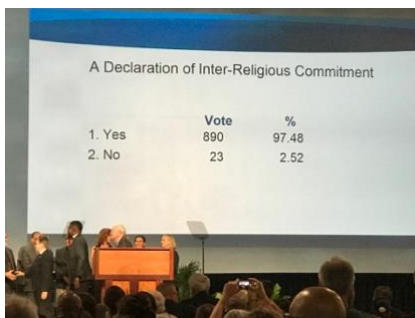
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One of the most inspirational moments was the announcement that the ELCA had exceeded its Always Made New campaign goal to end Malaria. \$15.5 million dollars was received for the Malaria campaign. This has made a huge difference in the lives of many people, in 14 countries with bed nets, education, medication, prevention, and treatment.



We are church and together we love our neighbors and care for those in need, no exceptions.

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**Inter-Religious Policy Statement** was passed while more than a dozen leaders from Jewish, Hindu, Islamic, African Episcopal Methodist (AME), Catholic, Moravian, Presbyterian, Episcopal and Lutheran faith communities held hands on the stage. It was a powerful witness to the strength we have as faith communities together!

*As a church, we must consider anew our calling and commitments in a multi-religious world. ...and participate in inter-religious activities such as theological dialogue, advocacy, and service, which build mutual understanding and advance the common good, defined as justice and peace for all of creation.... It is through authentic, mutual relationships that we can truly love our neighbors as people made in the image of God. This commitment includes confronting whenever possible the often-compounding oppressions experienced by people of various religions and worldviews on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and class.*

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Inter-Religious\\_Policy\\_Statement.pdf?\\_ga=2.96315544.564465009.1565636432-1957038871.1536083918](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Inter-Religious_Policy_Statement.pdf?_ga=2.96315544.564465009.1565636432-1957038871.1536083918)

We are church and together we love our neighbors and care for those in need, no exceptions. **An Apology to People of African Descent**-we apologized to our African American brothers and sisters who have been the historic victims of slavery and racism. We pledged to address white privilege and work to confront attitudes of white supremacy.

*“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).*

*The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) apologizes to people of African descent for its historical complicity in slavery and its enduring legacy of racism in the United States and globally. We lament the white church’s failure to work for the abolition of slavery and the perpetuation of racism in this church. We confess, repent and repudiate the times when this church has been silent in the face of racial injustice.*

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton said after the declaration was read. "This recommitment means working toward a deeper understanding of slavery and its legacy, of institutional and structural racism, of white privilege, and of attitudes and foundations of white supremacy. It means praying for the renewal of this church as disciples of the living Christ."

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Slavery\\_Apology\\_Explanation.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Slavery_Apology_Explanation.pdf)

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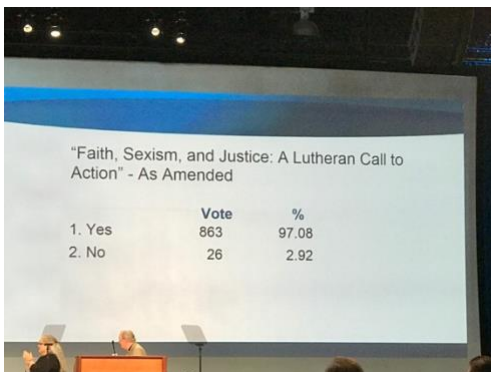
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**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ordination of Women in the Lutheran Church** We launched this year-long celebration with a festival worship service, banquet and speakers. Rev. Elizabeth Platz, the first woman ordained in 1970 and Rev. April Larson, first woman installed as Bishop in the ELCA both spoke and shared their ground-breaking stories of faithfulness. The ELCA has created a Bible study and worship resources for congregations to use in their celebration in the next year.

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**Social Statement on Faith, Sexism and Justice** was an amazing witness to our church’s stand against workplace discrimination, gender-based violence, patriarchy, and economic inequality. As a church we “*seek and encourage faithful dialogue, discernment, and, when possible, joint action on issues of patriarchy and sexism with other members of the body of Christ and with partners of other religions and worldviews. As a member of a global communion, the ELCA affirms the Lutheran World Federation’s “Gender Justice Policy.”*

[https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS\\_Gender\\_Justice.pdf](https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS_Gender_Justice.pdf)

<https://www.elca.org/womenandjustice>

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One of the most moving moments of the CWA was the prayer march and vigil. 700 Lutherans picked up banners and signs and marched to the ICE office in Milwaukee to pray and ask that the love of neighbor be extended to all people, especially those seeking refuge. Then we, the voting members, passed a memorial making the **ELCA a Sanctuary Church**. This was perhaps the most powerful and controversial

decision of the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. We are 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. This was not a politically motivated vote. This was a vote about our core value of neighbor love. Welcoming people is not a political issue for us, it is a matter of faith. This action does not ask or require a congregation to do anything and certainly nothing illegal. It does however open the door to a conversation and actions around neighbor love for migrants.



[https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/8000?\\_ga=2.128328712.564465009.1565636432-1957038871.1536083918](https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/8000?_ga=2.128328712.564465009.1565636432-1957038871.1536083918)

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We live in a time of deep polarization, left and right, liberal and conservative. Under the umbrella of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), there are many opposing opinions about all the items listed above. We strive to be a church that welcomes all, without limit and without exception. We strive to listen carefully and respectfully to the opinion and thoughts of our neighbors. And most of all we strive to listen to God. In the midst of all the discussions this past week, I heard voting members ask, “What would love do?” They asked “What does the love of God look like in this situation? How do we best love our neighbor today?”

Please know that if you have questions or concerns about any of the decisions made by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly you can contact me by email or phone. I have time. I will listen.

*~Bishop Laurie Skow-Anderson*

**Hebrews 13:1-2** *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

**Deuteronomy 10:19** *You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

**FOR EVERYONE BORN**  
**BY SHIRLEY ERENA MURRAY**

For everyone born, a place at the table,  
for everyone born, clean water and bread,  
a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing,  
for everyone born, a star overhead, REFRAIN

For woman and man, a place at the table,  
revising the roles, deciding the share,  
with wisdom and grace, dividing the power,  
for woman and man, a system that's fair, REFRAIN

For young and for old, a place at the table,  
a voice to be heard, a part in the song,  
the hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled,  
for young and for old, the right to belong, REFRAIN

For just and unjust, a place at the table,  
abuser, abused, with need to forgive,  
in anger, in hurt, a mindset of mercy,  
for just and unjust, a new way to live, REFRAIN

For everyone born, a place at the table,  
to live without fear, and simply to be,  
to work, to speak out, to witness and worship,  
for everyone born, the right to be free, REFRAIN

For gay and for straight, a place at the table,  
a covenant shared, a welcoming space,  
a rainbow of race and gender and color,  
for gay and for straight, the chalice of grace, REFRAIN

Refrain: and God will delight when we are creators  
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:  
yes, God will delight when we are creators  
of justice, justice and joy!

Neighbor Love. No exceptions. No limits.



+More details from the churchwide  
assembly can be found at:  
**[nswi.org/leadership/churchwide-  
assembly-2019](http://nswi.org/leadership/churchwide-assembly-2019)**

