



Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en América
La obra de Dios. Nuestras manos.



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

A STATEMENT FROM THE ELCA LISTENING TEAM REGARDING SIERRA PACIFIC SYNOD

The ELCA Listening Team was convened by Bishop Elizabeth Eaton to hear the narratives of people in the Sierra Pacific Synod in a time of turmoil, and to make recommendations for action. Sadly, the decisions that have been reached by the Office of the Presiding Bishop totally disregard the heart and intent of our report. We do not want it to be supposed that our work is aligned with or supports the proposed actions.

The word “racism” does not appear at all in “The Bishop’s Report to the Church.” Yet the Team’s finding was that racist words and actions caused trauma and great pain to many people of color in that synod. To characterize racist actions as simply “insensitive” or “misguided” is to validate the charge against the ELCA that we are blind to the pain we cause our siblings of color. When we do not name and confess the sin of racism in our institutions, we are doomed to continue in its power.

In order to address institutional racism, we need institutional courage. The compassion and justice work of individuals cannot by themselves bring about the needed transformation of an entire institution. All parts of that institution must look courageously through a gospel lens at their practices and policies in order to recognize the ways in which they are contributing to oppression. The ELCA has yet to find that courage.

From the beginning of our work, the Listening Team strongly recommended that the Presiding Bishop publicize the report and distribute it throughout the ELCA. We urge that this action be done as a step toward much-needed transparency. It will foster authentic partnership in the complicated situations that we face in our life together in a time of institutional distrust and continuing violence against people of color.

Our conclusions drawn from the many hours spent listening to what the Holy Spirit was saying through those whom we interviewed seem to have been set aside. We mourn with those who have been harmed, and now feel, once again, unheard by their Church.



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Personally, we are embarrassed and distressed in our relationship with the members of the Community of Misión Latina Luterana. Despite our best efforts to communicate the depth of the abuse that the Misión Latina Luterana community suffered, it feels that our words have fallen on deaf ears. The people of the community entrusted their stories of trauma and pain to us with tears and with gratitude for our listening. They trusted that we could fulfill our promise that the ELCA truly cares about their Community, and will take action to remediate the wrongs done to it. We continue to hope that it will do so.

Abiding in God's longing for justice –

The Rev. Margaret Payne, *retired bishop of the New England Synod*

The Rev. Constanze Hagmaier, *bishop of the South Dakota Synod*

Roberto Lara, *president of the Latino Ministries Association of the ELCA*