



***A pastoral letter from the Texas bishops of the ELCA
in partnership with Texas Impact***

July 14, 2026

To the People of Faith in Texas and to All Who Grieve,

"When one member suffers, all suffer together." (1 Corinthians 12:26)

On the morning of Tuesday, July 7, 2026, Lorenzo Salgado Araujo was shot and killed by an agent of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Houston's East End. He was 52 years old. He was a husband and the father of three United States citizen children. For nearly thirty-five years he made his home among us, rising before dawn to build houses across this city and to give honest work to others. His family knew him as "El mundo entero" - the whole world.

We grieve as neighbors, as clergy and lay leaders, and as people who confess that every human being is created in the image of God. A father was killed on a Houston street on his way to a construction site, and his citizen children learned of his death, not from any official, but from a video circulating on social media. This is a moral wound to our whole community, and we will not look away from it.

We extend our deepest condolences and our steadfast prayers to the Salgado Araujo family, to the men detained alongside him - including his brother - and to the Magnolia Park and East End communities now living in fear and sorrow.

What We Know and What We Do Not Know

Federal authorities have stated that Mr. Salgado Araujo failed to comply with commands, struck a law enforcement vehicle, and moved his vehicle toward an officer, prompting an agent to fire in what the agency describes as self-defense. His family disputes this account. They say he was a careful man who knew what to do if stopped, and that he may have feared the unmarked vehicles surrounding him belonged to those who meant him harm. Public records reflect no criminal convictions, and his family says he was actively pursuing a work permit and lawful status.

The Department of Homeland Security has now confirmed that the federal agents at the scene had not been issued body-worn cameras. It remains unclear what other federal video evidence may exist, including any footage from government vehicles or other recording systems. No comprehensive video of the moments before the shooting has been made public.

These new facts raise urgent questions. How did an operation intended to apprehend someone else lead to the stop of Mr. Salgado Araujo's vehicle? What information did agents have before initiating that stop? What commands were given, how were the agents identified, and how did the encounter escalate to lethal force?

The Harris County District Attorney's Office has announced that it is conducting an investigation, while acknowledging that key evidence remains under federal control. The public still has little evidence with which to evaluate the federal account of what happened.

We do not stand in judgment of any individual before the facts are known. We stand for the truth. And the truth, in a matter of life and death, belongs to the public.

What We Believe

As (ELCA) Lutherans, we are members of a church with immigrants and with roots in immigrant churches in a nation of immigrants. Our faith shows forth in hospitality for the uprooted and is a way to live out the biblical call to love the neighbor in response to God's love in Jesus Christ: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). Recalling Martin Luther's admonition, we remember: "How do we know that the love of God dwells in us? If we take upon ourselves the need of the neighbor."¹

The use of lethal force against a human being, our neighbor, is a grave matter that must never be shielded from accountability. When it occurs in our streets, in our neighborhoods, and in the presence of our children, it demands not silence but a full and public reckoning.

What We Call For

In the name and Spirit of Jesus Christ, and out of love for our neighbors of every immigration status, we respectfully but firmly call upon federal authorities and our elected representatives to take the following actions:

1. An immediate, independent, and transparent investigation. We call for a genuinely independent investigation into the death of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, one not conducted solely by the agency whose officer fired the fatal shot. We welcome the Harris County District Attorney's investigation and call upon federal authorities to preserve all evidence and cooperate fully with local investigators. We also support credible external, inspector general, or congressional oversight of this case.

2. Full transparency regarding all federal evidence. We call for the prompt public release of all relevant evidence, including any vehicle-camera or other federal video footage, agent statements, radio and dispatch records, surveillance materials, the operational plan for the enforcement action, records explaining the identification and decision to stop Mr. Salgado Araujo's vehicle, and the autopsy findings, to the fullest extent the law allows.

The Department of Homeland Security has confirmed that the agents at the scene did not have body-worn cameras. Federal authorities should now state clearly and publicly what other recordings exist, including any footage captured by government vehicles or other federal recording systems, and preserve and release that evidence as permitted by law.

The family and the public have a right to know how an operation aimed at someone else resulted in the death of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo.

3. Meaningful policy change in ICE enforcement operations. We call for concrete reforms to prevent the next avoidable death, including:

¹ ELCA Social Message on Immigration (2018)

- An immediate review and restriction of the use of unmarked vehicles and plainclothes agents in routine enforcement stops, which sow confusion and fear and make peaceful compliance nearly impossible;
- Clear, enforced limits on the use of lethal force, and an end to vehicle-based enforcement tactics that predictably escalate to deadly outcomes;
- A binding requirement that federal immigration agents wear activated body cameras and visible identification during all enforcement operations;
- Prompt and humane notification of families when a loved one is injured, detained, or killed, so that no family again learns of a death through social media;
- Independent oversight of ICE operations and real accountability when agents violate policy or the law.

4. A restoration of trust and an end to enforcement that terrorizes communities. We call on our leaders to reject enforcement practices that treat entire neighborhoods as targets and that make our immigrant neighbors afraid to drive to work, report a crime, or seek help. We renew our long-standing call for just, humane, and comprehensive immigration reform that keeps families together and honors the dignity of every person.

Our Commitment to Our Neighbors

To our immigrant neighbors, and especially to the Latino communities of Houston and across Texas who carry this grief and fear today: you are beloved children of God. You are not alone. Our congregations remain places of welcome, refuge, prayer, and practical support. We will continue to provide pastoral care, connect families with trusted legal resources, share Know Your Rights information, and stand publicly for your dignity and safety.

We invite the faithful across our synods to pray for the Salgado Araujo family, to accompany immigrant neighbors in tangible ways, and to lend their voices to the call for truth and justice.

May the God of the widow, the orphan, and the stranger comfort all who mourn, strengthen all who seek justice, and turn the hearts of those in authority toward mercy and truth.

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

In Christ's peace and with a shared commitment to truth, justice and the dignity of every person,



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