



**Northwest Washington Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

**Regarding Sanctuary Denomination, the message below was received  
from the NW Washington Synod on August 13, 2019**

Dear Siblings in Christ,

Grace and Peace to you.

As you may have heard, this past week was the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. One of the actions taken by the voting members was a decision for the ELCA to become a sanctuary denomination. Because of some questions concerning this, I wanted to let you know what this action means for you and for your congregation.

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. Being a sanctuary denomination is about loving our neighbors. While we may have different ideas about how to fix this broken system and may have different ways of loving our neighbors, our call to love our neighbor is central to our faith.

Of course, being a sanctuary denomination will look different in different contexts. It may mean providing space for people to live; providing financial and legal support to those who are working through the immigration system; hosting English as a Second Language (ESL) classes; marching as people of faith against the detention of children and families; having thoughtful conversations about what our faith says about immigration; or supporting other congregations and service providers. Whatever your local congregation decides to do, please note that we cannot mandate or direct our congregations and ministries to respond in specific ways. Each must

work out what this means for you in your context. **Please understand that no congregation in the ELCA is being asked, expected, or required to break any law.**

If you so desire, I encourage you to read the actual memorial which can [find here](#) (scroll down the page to the section on Sanctuary).

As you will see from this memorial, the ELCA continues to support the work of Lutheran Immigration Refugee Service (LIRS); to advocate for fair treatment of migrants and refugees; and to work to close the child detention centers and end the practice of separating families from one another. These are all things Lutherans have been doing for as long as there have been Lutherans. Many congregations have refugee resettlement experiences in their past and many congregations support the work of LIRS. Our decades long work with immigrants and refugees is how we practice our faith in the world.

I am excited to continue the work that we have done as Lutherans since our beginning: loving God and loving our neighbor - the two greatest commandments.

May God's peace and love be with you.

Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee

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OSLC Office Note: You may wish to go online to [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org). Put *sanctuary church* in the search box for more information.