



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

February 5, 2020

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:33-34)

Dear Church,

Last week, on the third anniversary of the original executive order, the administration extended the travel ban to the United States from seven majority Muslim countries to thirteen. The ban suspends the issuing of immigrant visas that can lead to permanent residency for those from Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar and Nigeria, as well as visas available through a diversity lottery for applicants from Sudan and Tanzania. This announcement comes on the heels of several other rule changes restricting travel to the U.S.

As Lutherans, these actions should concern us. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has set us free from ourselves to serve our neighbor. This expanded policy separates families from loved ones already here. Further, it prevents people – especially those escaping perilous or life-threatening situations in several of these nations – from coming to safety in the U.S. It does not enhance our safety or reflect our vocation as Christians.

Our church has a strong history of hospitality for refugees and immigrants. After World War II, when one out of every six Lutherans in the world was a refugee or displaced person, Lutherans resettled some 57,000 refugees in the United States (ELCA social message on [“Immigration”](#)). Today, with more than 60 million displaced people in the world, we continue God’s work of welcoming refugees through advocacy and our vital partnership with [Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service](#).

The ELCA also has companion Lutheran churches in many of these countries that are, with us, member churches of [The Lutheran World Federation](#) (LWF). (In several instances our church has developed strong partnerships with these churches over many decades.) The current president of the LWF, with whom I serve as a vice-president, is archbishop of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania is one of the world’s fastest-growing Lutheran churches. Accompaniment of these ELCA partners requires our solidarity and advocacy with them.

The expanded policy also reflects racial and religious discrimination. Over the past three years, the targeting of Muslims has had a direct and negative impact on our interfaith partners, who are harmed not only by the policy, but by the rhetoric surrounding it. Together with other

Christians and Jews, we are standing with Muslims through the [Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign](#). We are inviting [advocacy](#) as a means for helping those affected now, while preventing discrimination in the future. This is one way of embodying our commitment to opposing “all forms of religious bigotry, violence, discrimination, and persecution and stand in solidarity with those who experience them, whether they are Christian or of another religion or worldview” ([“A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A Policy Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America”](#)).

The travel ban and its extension do not promote our values of mutual respect of all God’s children, each created in God’s image. Furthermore, these bans contradict our church’s and our nation’s commitments to be a place of welcome and safety for others. Federal courts have recognized this already by blocking significant portions of the ban, finding them discriminatory, anti-Muslim or unconstitutional.

The ELCA social statement [“For Peace in God’s World”](#) reminds us that “the church is a disturbing presence when it refuses to be silent and instead speaks the truth.” On this policy, we as Lutherans cannot be silent. The history of our church, the life-giving relationships we share with other Lutherans worldwide, and our commitments to and with inter-religious partners are the basis not only for our concern – but for our continued accompaniment, advocacy and action.

In peace,



The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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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 nearly 3.5 million members in more than 9,100 worshipping communities 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.

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