



Address by **Rev. Sílvia Beatrice Genz**

To the 15th Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA

Milwaukee, WI, August 2019

Jesus says: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

I bring you greetings from Brazil and from the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil.

I want to thank you for your kind invitation. We are very happy to be here in this important moment for ELCA, also – and especially – because of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women. Congratulations to ELCA for being the Church you are. You have inspired and supported us in many ways.

WE ARE CHURCH

The Assembly's theme affirms YOUR (and OUR) commitment and task TO BE CHURCH. We want to get closer and closer to the ONE Church of Jesus Christ, where we will no longer be separated as IECLB, ELCA or any other denomination. In that spirit we accepted the invitation and we are here to learn and seek unity in the mission of God. We also bring our prayers and comfort to you for these days.

We are sure that our partnership described on the new Companionship Covenant we will sign together is an important way to strengthen our common work in solidarity, in a world that seems to be heading to the opposite direction – to individualism, to self-centeredness, to carelessness. Ours is a commitment to embrace each other in a world where the domination of the weak by the strong is the rule. That is not how we are. That is not what the church is about.

Yes, WE ARE CHURCH.

In affirming that we commit ourselves to what comes from God. Our witness is initially among us, with the people from our communities, and with the people from other churches. But our mission goes beyond that: we also want to testify the love of God to our countries, to the political world, to the governments, to leaders in general.

Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil

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Peoples and societies all over the world are suffering under violence, division, and hate. There is great need to hear the word of the gospel. There is great need to be the presence of Jesus Christ and do what he expects from us according to Matthew 25: give water to the thirsty and food to the hungry, welcome the stranger, visit the prisoner, dress the naked, care for the sick, bury the dead. The disciples asked then and so do we today: when do we do that? Are we doing that enough?

WE ARE CHURCH. How can we fight the strong forces that produce and disseminate evil? How can we together empower ourselves to be able to say **ANOTHER WORLD IS INDEED POSSIBLE?** How can we shout together the peace that Christ wants for all peoples? How can we walk together on the path where God's Kingdom will reach us in fullness? The gospel of Christ unites us and empowers us to bring strong word to the lives of every part of God's Creation.

For us ecumenism means focusing on what brings us together. Ecumenism is working together for life, for projects that favor the oppressed, the depressed, the hopeless, and the desperate people. Ecumenism means trusting in the love of God and in the defeat of death, and believing in the resurrection of Christ. We think, pray, and work together through the love of God in Christ grounded in the Lutheran foundation of Word - Grace - Faith.

There are many questions facing us. Some are old questions, some are new ones. One question in particular is huge and urgent: the question of climate change, climate justice. We know the Earth is unique; so far we only have this one planet, and it belongs to God (Psalm 24). We have to look after Earth, richly created by God. We certainly need natural resources to live and survive, but our care and preservation should be a commitment for today and tomorrow. It must still be available for future generations. We will be held accountable for today's carelessness.

God created human beings in God's image. That means ALL human beings are created in God's image, no matter color, race, ethnicity. And yet, there is so much discrimination among us. Particular skin color, particular gender, particular people seem to be more valuable than others. While the church is there for everyone, there is great need to pay attention to those in situation of vulnerability. We know it is not easy to side with the weak, the vanquished, the sufferer, the dead... But because **WE ARE CHURCH** we should never forget to be with them.

For all of this, we want to say to this Assembly and the ELCA as a whole: keep up with the good work, because **YOU ARE CHURCH**. You can keep praying and supporting your ministries, your mission, within and outside this beautiful country.

May God bless you all.

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