



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

September 18, 2020

“As Christ on the cross did not lose his dignity, but in fact revealed himself fully in vulnerability, every human who is being mistreated retains the image of God that confers dignity. A society should not deny a person's dignity for any reason.” —ELCA social message “Human Rights,” p. 4

On Monday, Sept. 14, I learned of the very disturbing account of human rights violations against immigrant women in custody in the privately run Irwin County Detention Center in Ocilla, Ga. The center is run by LaSalle Corrections under a contract with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The whistleblower complaint that was filed on Monday by a licensed nurse practitioner revealed a pattern of medically unnecessary hysterectomies and medical neglect that violated women. Too often, the Christian community has given its tacit or explicit consent to acts of gender-based violence.

God holds each of us responsible for the welfare of our neighbor. We therefore condemn these acts of coerced sterilization as a form of gender-based violence. This is especially true when the perpetrators wield significant power and control over women who are at elevated risk of injustice, abuse and violence.

The ELCA acknowledges that “migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers often suffer more when they are women, girls, or gender non-conforming people” (ELCA social statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*). Further, the ELCA urges support for legal reforms, humane policies, and adequate services for migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, especially those who experience intersecting forms of oppression.

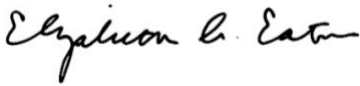
This statement affirms previous ELCA teaching and policy that stress fairness and generosity in responding to newcomers in the United States through the biblical instruction to “welcome the stranger.” The ELCA’s commitment to U.S. legal and policy reform includes several social-policy resolutions anchored by compassion, justice and wisdom. Those resolutions prioritize addressing the root causes of mass migration, the unification of families, and just, humane enforcement.

As a member of Christ’s body, I share in the anguish and outrage evoked by these revelations of abuse and violence. Since Monday, we have learned that at least 17 women have come forward with stories of unwanted medical procedures, including sterilization, which itself carries a significant history of sin in our country against immigrants, people of color, Indigenous women, people with disabilities and many others.

The sin of violence against the bodies of women cannot continue. People of all nations suffer violence inflicted upon them by others for gender-based reasons. We all have a responsibility to speak out against gender-based violence, to ensure that women and men, boys and girls, are safe in worship, at home, in the care of the state—in all places in our societies. That is why the ELCA is actively participating in #ThursdaysinBlack, the World Council of Churches' global ecumenical campaign to end and prevent gender-based violence.

As the ELCA we strongly condemn gender-based violence and violations of human rights wherever they occur. We pray especially for the courageous women who have come forward. We look ahead to the expeditious investigation of these reports by the Department of Homeland Security as urged by members of Congress, to be completed by Friday, Sept. 25, 2020.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth A. Eaton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with 3.3 million members in more than 8,900 worshiping 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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