



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

February 9, 2018

Immigration is an ever-present topic at our dinner tables and in our congregations as Congress continues to discuss long-overdue protection for thousands of our community members who lack permanent legal status. Scripture calls us to welcome the sojourner. God commanded of the Israelites: “The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:34).

Today, I renew my call to all of us as Christians to recognize our neighbors as made in the image of God, and to our nation’s elected leaders: Enact policies that provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented young people who arrived in the U.S. as children, known as Dreamers, and do so without harming other vulnerable immigrants.

As Lutherans, we live out our biblical calling by serving in ministries with migrants and refugees in our communities and advocating for laws that reflect this commitment. I am troubled that policies under consideration will protect some of our community members while, at the same time, harming others. While recognizing the right of all countries to control their borders, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) social teaching affirms that “border policies should always respect the human dignity of all persons.” I’m especially troubled by policy proposals that harm:

- Family unity: “Our advocacy will continue to insist that family reunification should be the primary objective of immigration laws” ([“Message on Immigration,” 1998](#)).
- Vulnerable people seeking safety in the U.S. through our asylum system: “We oppose practices that create unreasonable obstacles and unattainable standards of proof for those seeking asylum” ([“Message on Immigration,” 1998](#)).
- Children: “Immigrant children in federal custody ought to be treated in accordance with child welfare principles consistent with their best interests” ([Toward Compassionate, Just, and Wise Immigration Reform, a social policy resolution, 2009](#)).

I encourage policymakers to reflect upon Martin Luther’s challenge: “How do we know that the love of God dwells in us? If we take upon ourselves the need of our neighbor.” I also call upon Lutherans throughout the country to lift our voices through our [Advocacy network](#) and [Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service](#) to urgently call for legislation that provides a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers without harming others.

“As we journey together through the time God has given us, may God give us the grace of a welcoming heart and an overflowing love for the new neighbors among us” ([“Message on Immigration,” 1998](#)).

Sincerely,

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