

August 12, 2019

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Our 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly ended this past Saturday. There is much to report from the Assembly. Look forward to this in our synod newsletter coming out next week or go to the ELCA website now.

National news outlets have drawn attention to two aspects of this Assembly that I am aware of. One is a prayer walk to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office in downtown Milwaukee. The prayer walk was organized by the ELCA's effort called Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO). "AMMPARO is a holistic, whole church commitment by the ELCA, as a church in the world, to accompany children today and in the future." (ELCA website). We prayed for the safety and wellbeing of migrant children and all who are fleeing violence and abuse; we prayed for ICE workers and government officials; we prayed for improved immigration policies for the sake of vulnerable refugees. Participation in the prayer walk was purely voluntary.

The second aspect is the adoption of a memorial identifying the ELCA as a sanctuary church body. The word "sanctuary" is broadly used to describe the sheltering of people in a place of worship. However, the nature of that sheltering varies. In 2016, the ELCA adopted the AMMPARO strategy which speaks about sanctuary as ranging from holding English classes to housing people to writing to congress – all of these are ways of being sanctuary. I can understand why people might be concerned that the designation "sanctuary church body" implies that the ELCA is recommending engaging or plans to engage in illegal concealment of undocumented persons. Please know that the ELCA Assembly action does not ask or encourage anyone to engage in illegal behavior. In fact, all the specific actions called for in the memorial and referred to in ELCA descriptions of AMMPARO are clearly legal.

Also, the memorial adopted at the Assembly applies only to the ELCA churchwide organization as such, not to congregations or synods. No congregation or synod is compelled to take on that designation. Any congregation or synod wishing to become a sanctuary entity is free to decide to do so, or to decide not to do so. If a congregation wishes to become a sanctuary entity, please also decide what that designation will mean in your context.

If you have any questions about this, please feel free to contact me. I'm sorry for the confusion. Thank you for reading through this letter. I trust that all of us fervently strive "to do justice, to love kindness, and walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8).

God's peace,

S. John Roth
Bishop
Central/Southern Illinois Synod (ELCA)
524 So. 5th St.
Springfield, IL 62701
217.753.7915
844.330.2747 (toll free)
Instagram: Bishop_John_Roth
www.csis-elca.org