

ELCA leaders call on Congress to pass U.S. Citizenship Act

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CHICAGO — The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), has joined more than 500 ELCA rostered ministers and the CEOs of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and Lutheran Services in America (LSA) in calling on Congress to support the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021. In a March 4 letter, the leaders urge lawmakers to work collaboratively to advance legislation "around a long overdue solution that reflects our shared values as a nation."

The ELCA, LIRS and LSA recognize the need for legislative action based upon their historic service to and accompaniment of communities with migrant and refugee populations. Lutherans respond to people who are caught in conflict and face persecution, and they advocate for compassionate, just and wise immigration policies, driven by God's love for all people and a biblical commitment to welcome the stranger.

"Guided by our faith values and biblical teachings, we believe that immigration policies must prioritize and honor the God-given dignity of each person, especially those who live on the margins of society," the letter states. "We regard the family as an indispensable social institution and stand firmly against policies that cause the separation of families. We are therefore pleased to see that the proposed legislation works to recognize these values."

ELCA social teaching and actions insist on family reunification, upholding human dignity and rights, driving cooperative responses to the root causes of forced migration, and stressing inclusion and equity across federal immigration policy. Several provisions of the legislation advance these commitments.

Across an expanding network, welcoming congregations of the ELCA, for example, closely accompany migrants in the United States through ministry and advocacy. Lutherans across the country also participate in resettling refugees who have been admitted with the support of LIRS. Reacting to a Supreme Court decision on the popular Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program last summer, the ELCA continued to press for permanent protection for Dreamers and just treatment for other undocumented communities. The U.S. Citizenship Act makes a promising contribution toward ensuring a just immigration system.

"Making progress on these long overdue immigration reforms is important to us as leaders who serve in church and society," the letter states. "We ask God to guide our nation and grant the grace of a welcoming heart. To that end, we ask you to work collaboratively, with haste, to promote this comprehensive legislative solution through Congress and provide lasting solutions that will strengthen our nation for generations to come."

About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with nearly 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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