



Greater Milwaukee Synod

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📅 July 28, 2025

A Pastoral Letter

Immigration Lawsuit



Update 7/29/25: *We have received inquiries regarding the financial costs of the synod's participation in the lawsuit that was filed yesterday regarding ICE activity in churches. Please be assured that the law firms we are working with are doing this work pro bono; the only cost to the synod is the time and energy we have spent preparing the declarations.*

Friends in Christ:

I am writing today to inform you of a decision recently made by the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council to join a lawsuit that challenges the reversal of what is commonly referred to as the "sensitive locations policy." We are joining a large coalition of faith groups in the **lawsuit** against the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Secretary Kristi Noem over the sweeping and aggressive immigration policy that gives free rein to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to conduct enforcement actions in and around houses of worship and other "sensitive locations." The lawsuit argues that the policy violates the First Amendment, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and the Administrative Procedure Act.

For over 30 years, the federal government restricted immigration enforcement at houses of worship and other sensitive locations, acknowledging that to carry out raids, arrests, and surveillance at those locations could deny people of faith access to their places of worship and violate religious freedom rights.

Soon after taking office, the Trump-Vance administration abruptly reversed course and abandoned these longstanding protections, giving ICE agents discretionary power to use their "common sense" and decide whether to carry out enforcement actions at or near houses of worship.

The Greater Milwaukee Synod is one of five synods participating in the lawsuit. The other synods are New England, Sierra Pacific, Southwest California, and Southwestern Texas. Additionally, there are two denominations who have chosen to participate: the American Baptist Churches USA and the Metropolitan Community Churches. The decision to join this lawsuit was made by the synod council, meeting on June 28, and is based on our commitment to walk with our immigrant neighbors and the experiences of our five congregations that offer worship services in Spanish. This policy has had a significant, harmful impact on the ability of our congregations to worship and serve as we are called by Christ to do.

Each of the plaintiffs was asked to contribute a statement for inclusion in a **press release** regarding this action. Here is my statement: "We are witnessing an unprecedented assault on religious liberty, as ICE raids have created a climate of fear and division, preventing people of all faiths and citizenship statuses from gathering for prayer and receiving vital services. Silence in the face of such oppression is simply not an option."

I expect this filing will generate media attention. I ask that you pass along to the Synod Office any local media requests and inquiries you receive as this is a lawsuit requiring attorney-client privilege and confidentiality. As the named declarant on behalf of the Greater Milwaukee Synod, I will be the spokesperson authorized to speak officially about the lawsuit and I will take my guidance from our lawyers. If you choose to speak to the local press, please state explicitly that you are offering your personal comment and are not authorized to comment officially about legal proceedings. I will share information directly with you as the lawsuit proceeds and will keep you informed to the best of my ability.

I also ask for your prayers, for this process, for our nation, for our congregations, and most importantly, for those whose lives have been upended and who are unable to enjoy the freedoms we believe everyone is entitled to, regardless of citizenship status, language, identity, orientation or anything else. We are all created in the image and likeness of God, and we must work together to build a society that more closely reflects God's will for all of creation.

In Christ,
Bishop Paul D. Erickson

Contact Us

 1212 S. Layton Blvd. Milwaukee, WI 53215

 P O Box 341695, Milwaukee, WI 53234

 414-671-1212

 Email us

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