



ELCA

REGION NINE BISHOPS STATEMENT

A Statement on Hope in Action

Dutch Jesuit Priest, Henri Nouwen once wrote, “There is always reason to hope...even when our eyes are filled with tears.”

As leaders of Christian traditions across many states from Virginia to the Caribbean, we are people of hope. But our hope is not one that sits idly by while injustice and oppression unfold before us or upon us. Rather, our hope is one that acts, moves, marches, prays, and proclaims in solidarity with and for the most vulnerable in our communities and churches. Our hope is in a God of mercy and love (Psalm 33:22) and not in princes (Psalm 146:2).

As leaders of faith, our hope and call is to live and lead as Jesus Christ teaches: to feed the hungry, give a cup of water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the imprisoned (Matthew 25:35f), forgive and be forgiven (John 20), and many other ways that humanize our neighbors and ourselves.

We believe that every single human being, regardless of their country of origin or immigration status, sexual orientation or gender identity, is created in the image of God and has inherent dignity and worth. No partisan policies can change this truth and gospel.

We know, in our very bodies, what it feels like to love our neighbors and be loved by them. We understand what it means to live hospitality to the seekers of faith and searchers for safe living. We show up for ourselves, families, and friends who are marginalized and discriminated against. We have tasted and seen that the Lord is indeed good. No hate-filled rhetoric can change these embodied proclamations.

Jesus’ parable of the Merciful Stranger (Luke 10:25-37) shows us that caring for people in need is central to who we are as Christians. The parable also challenges us to acknowledge the goodness in all people because the “stranger” in the story is the one who acts in the most Christlike way.

Together, we advocate for immigration and LGBTQIA+ policies and actions that reflect Christ’s love, recognizing that all people deserve respect and protection. Our traditions emphasize both mercy and justice.

Justice requires everyone, including immigrants, to be treated fairly and equitably. While upholding the rule of law is important, it must not be done in ways that dehumanize or exploit vulnerable people. We are gravely concerned that places of worship, hospitals, and schools may be targeted for immigration enforcement. Policies that permit or encourage such raids at sensitive locations increase the suffering not only of undocumented adults and children but also the many people who fear being unjustly targeted and would therefore avoid those critical places. Denying people, the opportunity to attend worship, be educated, or receive medical treatment violates individuals’ fundamental rights. However, even with tears in our eyes, we will continue to hope in action. We strongly urge those in government and law enforcement to act with mercy so as not to perpetuate trauma, especially against women and children.

We respect the right of our country to secure the country and its borders, and greatly appreciate the work of law enforcement, however, these new changes are disturbing many families and could end up not making us safer but could separate families or make them not show up to church, or school or the hospital when they need assistance. That is not in the best interest of our country.

Justice requires everyone, including members of the LGBTQIA+ community, to receive the same rights and access to care as they see fit. Marriage equality and access to medical care are constitutional rights. We are all members of one human family. Therefore, we approach immigration and LGBTQIA+ rights not merely as a political or legal issue, but as matters of human solidarity. However, even when tears fill our eyes, we will continue to hope in action, together.

As people who have received God's mercy and grace, we are called to extend that same mercy and grace to others. This looks like offering opportunities for pathways to citizenship for those who have lived in the U.S. for years, contributed to the country, and become our family, friends, and neighbors. It should also guarantee protection for those fleeing violence or persecution in their country of origin, ensuring that immigrant families remain united, and making sure that children are not punished for their parents' actions.

And so, we choose to live our faith and hope in action: doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). We implore you as elected officials to do the same and to remember that each and every time you don't, you have caused harm to God's children.

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