

## 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly begins

MILWAUKEE (August 6, 2019) — Gathering under the theme “We Are Church,” members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) are meeting in Milwaukee for the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly — the highest legislative authority of the ELCA.

In his sermon during Monday’s opening worship, Rev. William “Chris” Boerger, secretary of the ELCA, emphasized how the assembly theme is central to the assembly’s purpose.

“We are church,” said Boerger. “We gather here in Milwaukee with this theme. We are church. But we do not say, ‘We are the church.’ We know the church of Jesus Christ is much larger than the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. But we are part of it.

“We are the church because of what is happening here among us ... the gospel is being preached, the sacraments are the center of what’s happening here this week. ... We are the church because of what God is doing.”

Referring to the day’s text, Boerger said, “Jesus is the living water. ... Jesus is telling his followers that their job is to let this living water flow through them. The church is the water fountain for a thirsty world.”

During the week, the assembly participants will spend time in worship, Bible study and plenary discussions as they deliberate how to go about God’s work in this church.

“We’re here because the Holy Spirit has called us to be here,” said Boerger in his sermon. “Faith is a gift that we share and is a gift from God. It is important for us to remember, as we begin these days of deliberation and decision-making, we are the church because the Holy Spirit has called, gathered, enlightened and made us holy with the rest of the Christian church. So with this understanding, much of the work we will do in the coming days is asking, ‘How will we make this living water available to the world?’”

Opening the first plenary session, Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, presiding bishop of the ELCA, welcomed the assembly to Milwaukee.

“We celebrate the many people who first called this land home: Potawatomi, Ojibwe, Odawa [Ottawa], Fox, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sauk, and Oneida. We remember the tragedies they endured and find inspiration in their resilience in overcoming ongoing struggles today. We honor their place in and contribution to the shared story of this land. At our last Churchwide Assembly, this church body repudiated the doctrine of discovery. This was a first step into making right relationships. We have begun to engage in a time of learning and of humbling of ourselves.”

During the plenary, the assembly received the final report of the ELCA’s first major fundraising campaign, *Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA*, which concluded June 30. The 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly vote to approve the \$198

million campaign to help sustain and grow the ministries of this church, citing four priorities: congregations, hunger and poverty, leadership, and global church. The campaign focused on growing this church's communities of faith, forming new leaders, welcoming our neighbors, overcoming malaria, confronting hunger and poverty and accompanying our global churches.

Christina Jackson-Skelton, executive director for ELCA Mission Advancement, reported to the assembly, "Six years ago, at the 2013 Churchwide Assembly, this church set the bold and daring goal of raising \$198 million for existing and new ministry initiatives.

"Since the campaign's launch, ELCA ministries have witnessed amazing generosity and support from synods, congregations, members and volunteers. Thank you for what you have done to contribute to such an incredible impact across this church."

Campaign steering committee co-chairs Loren and MaryAnn Anderson announced to the assembly that the campaign has raised \$250 million in cash, multiyear commitments and planned gift commitments.

Jackson-Skelton and Rev. Ron Glusenkamp, director for the campaign, provided the assembly with an overview of its impact:

- Since 2014, the campaign contributed towards the approval of 281 new start congregation. There are currently 365 new ELCA ministries under development in the United States and the Caribbean.
- Through the ELCA's Young Adults in Global Mission program, 450 young adults were encouraged to serve in more than ten country programs around the world.
- Through the ELCA's International Women Leaders program, 189 women leaders from our global companions were awarded academic training opportunities, from weeklong seminars to full-tuition scholarships at ELCA colleges and universities.
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church Africa Mission in South Sudan was established, and in Juba, the capital city, the Reconciliation Lutheran Church Community Center and Primary Health Care Clinic opened its doors in November 2017.
- Through ELCA Fund for Leaders, more than 1,300 students were provided with seminary scholarships.
- Income for ELCA World Hunger in 2018 exceeded its income in 2013, the year preceding the campaign, by more than 20%.

“There is no doubt that we have been changed by this campaign,” said Glusenkamp. “The generosity of this church and the ability to be about deepening our mission impact brings to life our campaign theme, which was inspired by 2 Corinthians 5:17: ‘So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!’”

The assembly also cast the first ballot for ELCA presiding bishop. Results of the ballot will be announced during the second plenary.

Other key actions to be considered by the 927 voting members of the assembly include:

- Electing a secretary.
- Voting on the proposed, recommended social statement “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action” and the related implementing resolutions. The recommended, proposed social statement covers a range of issues on which the ELCA is called to action, including gender-based violence, workplace discrimination, and economic inequality.
- Voting on the policy statement “A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment.” The proposed document underscores the ELCA’s long-standing commitment to interreligious relations and provides a framework for common application and theological reflection across the varied contexts of this church.
- Voting on a constitutional amendment that would make ordination the entrance rite for ministers of Word and Service and no longer count deacons as laypersons in observing the ELCA’s representational principles.
- Voting on budget proposals for the 2020, 2021 and 2022 fiscal years.
- Voting on recommendations presented by the task force for strategic authentic diversity. This is in response to the 2016 Churchwide Assembly having directed the Church Council to develop a strategy to equip congregations and synods to work toward becoming more authentically diverse.
- Receiving a declaration of the ELCA to people of African descent. Included in this document is a confession of this church’s bondage to the sins of slavery, racism, discrimination, white supremacy and quietism, and a commitment to begin the work of repentance, which this church confesses to be “the chief topic of Christian teaching.”

Live video of the plenary sessions will be accessible at [elca.org/cwa](https://www.elca.org/cwa).

<https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/7997>

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**About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:**

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with nearly 3.5 million members in more than 9,100 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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