

Key moments for day two of 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly

MILWAUKEE (August 7, 2019) — On day two of their gathering, the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly took key actions and received reports that set the stage for how the denomination wants to move into the future.

The assembly re-elected the Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton as presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Aug. 6. On the first ballot, 897 votes were cast and 670 votes were needed for election. Eaton received 725 votes, which is 81.19% of the vote. Eaton is the first ELCA presiding bishop to win re-election on the first ballot. She was elected to a first term as presiding bishop at the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Pittsburgh.

The assembly approved 26 en bloc memorials on topics including gun violence, engagement in the Holy Land and income inequality.

A Declaration to People of African Descent was presented to representatives of the African Descent Lutheran Association. The declaration was offered by members of the working group established by the ELCA Church Council to develop a document that expresses a confession of this church's bondage to the sins of slavery, racism, discrimination, white supremacy and quietism, and begins the work of repentance, which this church confesses to be "the chief topic of Christian teaching."

"This apology is a recommitment to the process of right and equitable relations within this church, and the flourishing of Christ's church universal," Eaton said after the declaration was read. "This recommitment means working toward a deeper understanding of slavery and its legacy, of institutional and structural racism, of white privilege, and of attitudes and foundations of white supremacy. It means praying for the renewal of this church as disciples of the living Christ."

In reply, the Rev. Lamont Wells, president of the African Descent Lutheran Association, said, "We must abandon our lust for oppressive power, wealth and even our own comfort for the sake of fulfilling God's fulfillment to love others. Throughout history, people have been hurt by this very particular sin. Therefore, we the people of African descent of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America can receive this apology as a divine mark of repentance that serves as a catalyst for change."

Eaton said the ELCA will name an annual Day of Repentance for congregations, synods and the churchwide organization.

The Rev. Wyvetta Bullock introduced the proposed triennium budget recommended by the ELCA Church Council. The proposed budget is for a current fund spending authorization of \$68,378,325 for 2020; a current fund income of \$68,442,034 for 2021 and \$68,507,018 for 2022; and an ELCA World Hunger income of \$21,500,000 for fiscal years 2020-2022.

"The budget proposal before you for the next triennium is about the mission to which we believe God is calling this church," Bullock said. "Each dollar represents the hope to touch a life and be part of God's transforming work in the church and in the world."

To underscore the impact of the church's mission in the world, Bullock introduced three people to the assembly: the Rev. Adama Isa, a pastor of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria who is pursuing a doctorate at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (she will be the first woman in her denomination to achieve a doctorate in theology); Laura Hermanns, a former participant in the ELCA's Young Adult in Global Mission program; Deacon Ryan Hostler, minister of word and service for music and worship at Our Savior Lutheran Church, Vero Beach, Fla.

In further business, the assembly received an introduction to the recommended social statement "Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action" and the related implementing resolutions. The introduction was presented by the Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld and Dr. Brad Wendel, co-chairs of the former ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice: One in Christ, established to help develop the social statement. The 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.

The assembly also received an introduction to the proposed "A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A policy statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" by the Rev. Patricia Lull, chair of the Interreligious Task Force. The proposed statement underscores the ELCA's long-standing commitment to inter-religious relations and provides a framework for common application and theological reflection across the varied contexts of this church.

A report from the ELCA Conference of Bishops was delivered by the Rev. William O. Gafkjen, bishop of the ELCA Indiana-Kentucky Synod and chair of the conference.

The Rev. Jasmine Tesdahl, chaplain and U.S. Air Force Reserve captain brought greetings on behalf of the ELCA federal chaplains.

Greetings were also received from the Rev. Silvía Genz, pastor president of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil.

Live video of the plenary sessions will be accessible at elca.org/cwa.

<https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/7999>

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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 worshipping 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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