



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Statement on Venezuela by the ELCA Conference of Bishops

The Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) stands with and holds up in prayer the people of Venezuela during the current multifaceted crisis within their nation. We care about the consequences of this crisis as already felt in neighboring countries and about its wider impact on international peace and security.

We fervently support our companion church the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Venezuela (IELV) and second the call from the Rev. Dr. Nestor Friedrich, vice president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for Latin America and the Caribbean Region, for “a negotiated, peacefully constructed resolution” of the crisis. (Letter from the Rev. Friedrich to IELV Pastor President the Rev. Gerardo Hands, January 31, 2019.) In that regard, and in light of the history of U.S. military interventions in Latin America, we are concerned about statements from the U.S. presidential administration that do not rule out military options. We also support the LWF statement, issued on January 29, 2019, that notes the hazards of “external interference, including threat of intervention and military action” and the benefits of utilizing “the existing multilateral UN and Organization of the American States mechanisms to peacefully address the current crisis in the country” and to “provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela.”

In view of the crisis, the ELCA Conference of Bishops joins the LWF in calling on all parties to respect internationally recognized human rights, in calling for a halt to the deportation of Venezuelans currently in the U.S and in calling for a new presidential election in Venezuela as soon as possible, one that will be administered by new electoral authorities, conducted under international supervision, and overseen by a neutral government.

We affirm the ways that our church has already been assisting Venezuelans within and outside their country through our ELCA International Disaster Fund, including the following support offered:

- to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Venezuela, to distribute food at its children's home, its preschool and the food pantries of its congregations;
- to the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELU) in Argentina and Uruguay, to assist Venezuelan migrant families arriving in Posadas, Misiones, Argentina;
- to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO), to create a humanitarian assistance center for Venezuelan migrants in Colombia;
- to Educación Popular en Salud (Popular Education in Health), to provide humanitarian health assistance to Venezuelan immigrants in Chile;
- to the World Association for Christian Communication, to respond to the Venezuelan migration crisis in Colombia;

- to the LWF-World Service office in Colombia, to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to Venezuelan migrants in Saravena-Arauca settlements; and
- to Lutheran World Relief in Peru, to assist in providing humanitarian assistance to and advocating for migrant rights for Venezuelans in Peru, in partnership with Iglesia Luterana del Perú.

We also affirm with gratitude the other significant work being done by our companion churches and their partners in Colombia, Peru, Chile and Argentina as they receive and support refugees from Venezuela.

Cognizant of Venezuela's location in the Caribbean Basin, we remember our **Churchwide Blueprint for Action in Central America and the Caribbean** (adopted by the ELCA Church Council in 1990), which calls us to “work for justice and peace, including supporting a negotiated solution to the conflicts, ending all U.S. war-related aid to the region, and advocating for unrestricted humanitarian assistance.”

ELCA Conference of Bishops, March 2019