



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Dear Bishop Carter, dear Council of Bishops,

As we gather for the spring meeting of our ELCA Conference of Bishops, your 2019 General Conference has just concluded. At this moment, we want to extend our abiding love and concern for The United Methodist Church and for you, its Council of Bishops.

We write as your full communion partners. This relationship has been a gift to us since 2009, when we voted to enter into this relationship with a near-unanimity which caught us somewhat by surprise. While the reception of this relationship has of course varied from place to place, we are grateful for the common witness and shared ministry it has encouraged. We remain committed to this relationship between our churches and thus to our relations with you.

Our ecumenical experience has showed us that the ministry of *episkope* has collegial dimensions that extend beyond the structures of each church body. We recognize the distinctively heavy responsibility which you carry on behalf of your church, and we want to take this opportunity to extend our support for you in the challenging work that lies ahead. We will not grow weary in our praying, or in our walking alongside you.

As you know, this church is no stranger to struggles around faithful response to questions of human sexuality. We too have known divisive debates and the wounds they leave behind. We also have seen departures of congregations and of members over the decisions of this church. We know the ways in which these difficult consequences lie especially heavily on the shoulders of bishops: we will not forget you. As you acknowledged in your remarks, as bishops you now carry the complicated responsibility “of outreach, especially to the progressives who feel hurt by what transpired.” We are with you also in this difficult task.

Our decisions, of course, have taken us in a different direction than the decisions made this week in St. Louis. We also have experiences to share of the gifts we have received from our decision; these also are part of our relationship now.

Please receive from us this expression of solidarity in prayer. Please also receive the invitation to pursue in your local contexts the conversations and collaborations with the ELCA synod bishop who is your closest neighbor.

In Christ,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. William O. Gafkjen
Bishop, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA
Chair, ELCA Conference of Bishops