

ELCA National Bishop Visits Pilgrim

Please join us on Wednesday, May 13th at 10:10 a.m. for a special school chapel service as we welcome Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton to Pilgrim! She will be sharing a greeting with us during chapel, and then participating in a “Question and Answer” session with our upper grade students.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton was elected as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s (ELCA) fourth presiding bishop in August of 2013. A Bishop is someone who serves as a Pastor and Leader of a large group of Christians. Rev. Eaton has been featured in Time Magazine, the Huffington Post, and has been in the news most recently for her statements on racial tensions in communities like Baltimore and Ferguson and for her recent trip to China.



The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with more than 3.8 million members in nearly 10,000 congregations 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. Pilgrim is one of the congregations in the ELCA.

Born in Cleveland on April 2, 1955, Eaton earned a Master of Divinity degree from Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass., and a Bachelor of Arts degree in music education from the College of Wooster in Wooster, Ohio. Eaton’s husband, the Rev. T. Conrad Selnick, an Episcopal priest, is vice president for advancement and church relations at Bexley Seabury Federation. They are parents of two adult children, Rebeckah and Susannah.



Bishop Eaton meets with Pope Francis in the Vatican, having been invited by the Pope to talk about ways the Lutheran and Catholic churches can better work together.

We don’t disengage from the world,” Bishop Eaton said, “and I think it makes it a lot clearer for those who are of different Christian denominations, different world religions, and those of no religion. If we are clear about who we are, I think it makes it a lot easier for us to engage with other folks and for them to engage with us.”

The ELCA affirms women in leadership, and has opened the door for gays and lesbians in committed relationships to serve as Pastors as well. Even though other Lutheran and Christian churches do not agree with these values, Bishop Eaton does everything she can to

work with other Christians, to maintain unity in the Body of Christ.

“You've got some parent and their little child's out in the rain because a hurricane's devastated their house, they don't really care about any arguments between Lutherans. They really don't care, and we shouldn't, either, at that point.” She wants all Christians to work together to bring resources to those in need.



ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton (center) visits Holy Trinity Church in Shanghai.

Eaton, along with a group of ELCA leaders, was in China, April 1-6, 2015. The Protestant Church of China thanked the ELCA for its immediate disaster response efforts after the 2008 earthquake struck Wenchuan (Sichuan), China. Eaton has said that “most American Christians and Lutherans would be surprised by the large Christian presence in China.” There have been 40,000 to 50,000 baptisms each year since 2012, with a total of more than 25 million Protestant believers. The church faces many challenges with the rapid growth they are experiencing. The church needs to train more pastors and lay workers together with meeting social needs.

Citing recent events across the United States, the Rev. Eaton noted that “we are not living in a post-racial society.” In a March 25 letter and video message to the 3.8 million-member church, Eaton expressed the need for conversation – not only among Lutherans but “all Americans” – about racism in “honest and productive ways.”

“I know it's difficult to talk about race because too many Americans do not want to believe racism still exists in our country,” Eaton said. “Yet, as always, Christ promises to be alongside us, even in the most difficult of times, working for our reconciliation. Because of God's promise, we can and must have a deep, honest and even painful conversation about racism. As a church called to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we must continue to listen deeply, to speak out about racial equity and inclusion, to respect and uplift the dignity and humanity of every person and to join with others in organizing for change.”

“In baptism we have become part of the body of Christ and in Christ there is no barrier between us. I pray that our Lord will use us and this moment to make this baptismal promise a reality in our lives and in this church.”