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## Two ELCA leaders call for immigration reform in a new book, 'They Are Us'

by Melissa Ramirez Cooper, ELCA News Service



Two leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) are calling on Americans, Lutherans in particular, to "welcome the stranger," making a case for [immigration](#) reform in their new book, "[They Are Us](#)." The book is co-authored by the Rev. Stephen P. Bouman, executive director for ELCA [Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission](#), and Ralston H. Deffenbaugh Jr, president, [Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service](#) (LIRS). Based in Baltimore, LIRS is one of the nation's leading agencies in welcoming and advocating for refugees and other immigrants. The book includes personal stories, theological and historical insights, and questions for reflection and discussion. It is available through [Augsburg Fortress](#), Minneapolis, the publishing ministry of the ELCA.

The Lutheran church in the United States is an immigrant church, according to Deffenbaugh. "I hope that Americans in general and Lutherans in particular will reconnect with their own history in a nation of immigrants, seeing the newcomers among us as their forbears were once seen," he said. "We Lutherans are particularly well-placed in the country in this time with such a contentious debate over immigration. It's been remarkable to me that compared with the populace-at-large immigration has been much less controversial in the church." Deffenbaugh said the debate over immigration is not new to the United States. "It's so important for people to know who they are. People can't know who they are unless they know where they came from." Deffenbaugh contributed chapters on U.S. law and the history of immigration.

Bouman served as bishop of the [ELCA Metropolitan New York Synod](#) during the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He said "something ugly has emerged" since that day -- "a hardening of the heart toward the immigrant stranger among us." Calling immigration the "meta-issue of what America will become," Bouman said the book advocates for a conversation on how to welcome the stranger from biblical, theological and social perspectives. "We are Lutheran, and we are pro-immigrant. The Bible is not equivocal on this, it's pretty clear -- a wandering economic migrant is our father in the faith." He said it's in "our self-interest to get this right. If compassionate imagination doesn't get you there, the evidence is clear that almost everyone who comes here has a high value for education for their children and are outstanding citizens contributing to our public welfare."

