



# Southeastern Synod

## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

May 8, 2014

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Recently, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal signed House Bill (HB) 60, also known as the Safe Carry Protection Act of 2014, into law. This law, which takes effect on July 1, 2014, specifies where Georgia residents can carry weapons and includes provisions that change regulations related to concealed carry permits and weapons in some bars, churches, school zones, government buildings and certain parts of airports.

In response to questions that the synod staff have received regarding the implications of this legislation for congregations in the Southeastern Synod, I provide for your consideration the following comment on parts of the law pertinent to congregations.

Prior to the enactment of HB 60, “places of worship” were included in a list of places into which weapons (with a concealed weapons permit) could not be carried. The recent change to the legislation added the words “unless the governing body or authority of the place of worship permits the carrying of weapons or long guns by license holders” following “places of worship.” This means that, **unless a congregation takes an action to permit the carry of weapons into its building, it will continue to be unlawful to do so.** Illegally bringing a gun into a house of worship is still considered a misdemeanor.

In our ELCA polity, the “governing body” authorized to make this kind of decision is not the Synod Council or its bishop, but the Congregation Council or the Congregation in a regularly called meeting. Each congregation must decide for itself.

Given what we preach and pray every week in our worship, it is my own hope that our congregations will not become places where we arm ourselves against one another, but will be places of sanctuary where we seek reconciliation, justice and understanding for all those whom God loves and for whom Christ died.

This is more than a debate about “gun rights.” Engaging in intentional discernment about social issues and the consequences of our actions as people of faith is part of our Lutheran ethos. I hope that, as places of moral deliberation, leaders in our congregations will invite and encourage intentional conversation about this new legislation and its implications for our congregations and the communities of which they are a part.

Congregations will also need to decide for themselves how best to communicate publicly their decisions about allowing weapons in their places of worship. Already some of our congregations

have taken action to make it known that weapons are not allowed on their property through the use of window decals and other ways.

If you would like further information about Georgia's new law, you can read the legislation in its entirety at <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/display/20132014/HB/60>. You can also read and study the ELCA social message on Community Violence at <http://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages> and the ELCA social statement on Peace at <http://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Peace>. Both seem pertinent to the current situation in Georgia and would make for helpful conversations in congregations.

This legislation will have impact not only in churches in our state. Please keep all those who are affected in your prayers. As followers of Jesus, we continue to pray for those who make our laws and those who must enforce them, for the victims of violence, as well as the perpetrators. In all this, we seek as a church to be a voice for God's peace and justice in the world.

In Christ's peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Julian". The plus sign is positioned to the left of the name, and the signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. H. Julian Gordy  
Bishop