



📅 October 9, 2025

A Pastoral Message

A Letter from Bishops of the ELCA to the Church



Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), we write to you in this moment of national and global tension with clarity and conviction. Our faith compels us to stand where Jesus stands—with and for those whom society often seeks to exclude, erase, or diminish.

Our shared confession that every person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) grounds us in the conviction that all people possess inherent dignity. The incarnation of Jesus Christ reveals God's profound solidarity with humanity—especially with those who are marginalized or oppressed. The gospel we proclaim insists that our neighbor's need is the occasion for our love and that our public life is shaped by justice, mercy, and a commitment to the common good.

Further, we have a shared tradition in our social teachings which grounds us. The ELCA's *Social Message on Immigration* reminds us:

"We are to respond to newcomers as we would to Christ—welcoming them, meeting their immediate needs, and advocating for justice in our laws and policies."

Likewise, our recently adopted Social Statement *Faith and Civic Life* affirms that Christians are called to be "a public witness, holding leaders accountable when they fail to protect the vulnerable."

We are living through a time when vulnerable communities are being scapegoated and attacked. Immigrants and refugees are vilified, though Scripture commands us to welcome the stranger.

People of color continue to bear the devastating weight of racism woven into the fabric of our society. Transgender people, beloved by God, are being targeted with laws and rhetoric that deny their dignity and even their right to exist. These assaults on our siblings are not political abstractions—they are deep wounds in the body of Christ.

In this time of division and fear, we, as people grounded in our faith, insist on love. This commitment flows from our faith in Christ crucified and risen—the One whose love breaks down barriers, confronts hatred, and transforms hearts.

Love insists on the *dignity of every human being*.

Love insists on *justice* for the marginalized and oppressed.

Love insists that the *church must reflect God's diverse, life-giving community*.

Love insists that we *listen, speak, and act with respect*, even in disagreement.

Love insists on *hope*, trusting that God's kingdom of justice and peace will prevail.

This love also compels us to speak clearly against Christian Nationalism, which our Churchwide Assembly named as a distortion of the Christian faith and an unhealthy form of patriotism. Christian Nationalism confuses the Gospel with political power, turns God into a mascot for the state, and privileges some people over others based on race, religion, or birthplace. This is not the way of Jesus. The kingdom of God is not a nation, not a culture, not a political ideology—it is God's reign of love, justice, and mercy for all people.

Therefore, as bishops of this church, we declare that the ELCA cannot be silent. Our call is clear:

- To proclaim the God-given dignity of every human being.
- To resist systems and ideologies, including Christian Nationalism, that oppress, dehumanize, or erase.
- To stand shoulder to shoulder with those who are targeted or harmed.
- To bear public witness that the love of Christ is stronger than fear, stronger than hatred, and stronger than death.

We call on all members of the ELCA to join us in prayer, advocacy, and action:

- Pray for those who are vulnerable and for all who work for justice.
- Advocate in your communities, legislatures, and Congress for laws that protect migrants, advance racial justice, and safeguard LGBTQIA+ people.

- Engage in the holy work of hospitality, creating spaces of safety, affirmation, and belonging for all God's children.
- Model respectful dialogue in a polarized world, seeking understanding rooted in love.
- Hold fast to hope, trusting that the Spirit is still at work renewing creation and reconciling the world to God.

In baptism, we are marked with the cross of Christ forever. That cross is not only a sign of our hope—it is also a summons to follow Jesus into solidarity with those who suffer.

In the power of the Spirit, let us be bold. Let us be faithful.

Let us Insist on Love—in our words, our actions, our public witness, and our life together.

Together in Christ,

Bishop Kevin Strickland – Southeastern Synod
 Bishop Susan J. Briner – Southwestern Texas Synod
 Bishop Becca Middeke-Conlin – Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod
 Bishop Vivian Davila – Caribbean Synod
 Bishop Donna Simon – Central States Synod
 Bishop Bill Gohl – Delaware-Maryland Synod
 Bishop Anne Edison-Albright – East Central Synod of Wisconsin
 Bishop Pedro Suarez – Florida-Bahamas Synod
 Bishop Deborah Hutterer – Grand Canyon Synod
 Bishop Paul Erickson – Greater Milwaukee Synod
 Bishop Felix Malpica – La Crosse Area Synod
 Bishop Stephen R. Herr – Lower Susquehanna Synod
 Bishop Wayne Miller – Metropolitan Chicago Synod
 Bishop Katrina D. Foster – Metropolitan New York Synod
 Bishop Philip C. Hirsch – Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod
 Bishop Jen Nagel – Minneapolis Area Synod
 Bishop Scott Alan Johnson – Nebraska Synod
 Bishop Nathan Piphio – New England Synod
 Bishop Christa Compton – New Jersey Synod
 Bishop Emily K. Hartner – North Carolina Synod
 Bishop Julie Schneider-Thomas – North/West Lower Michigan Synod
 Bishop Kevin Jones – Northeastern Iowa Synod
 Bishop Amy Odgren – Northeastern Minnesota Synod
 Bishop Laura Barbins – Northeastern Ohio Synod
 Bishop Christopher deForest – Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod
 Bishop Katherine Finegan – Northern Great Lakes Synod
 Bishop Stacie Fidler – Northern Illinois Synod
 Bishop Erik Gronberg – Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod
 Bishop Meggan Manlove – Northwest Intermountain Synod
 Bishop Martin Halom – Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
 Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee – Northwest Washington Synod
 Bishop Daniel G. Beaudoin – Northwestern Ohio Synod
 Bishop Kristen Papson – Northwestern PA Synod
 Bishop Laurie Larson Caesar – Oregon Synod
 Bishop David Nagler – Pacifica Synod
 Bishop Meghan Johnston Aelabouni – Rocky Mountain Synod
 Bishop Jeff R. Johnson – Sierra Pacific Synod

Bishop Ginny Aebischer – South Carolina Synod

Bishop Joy Mortensen-Wiebe – South-Central Synod of Wisconsin

Bishop Amy Current – Southeastern Iowa Synod

Bishop Bryan Penman – Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Bishop Brenda Bos – Southwest California Synod

Bishop Melissa L. Stoller – Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod

Bishop Keith Marshall – Southwestern Washington

Bishop Tracey Breashears Schultz – Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod

Bishop Craig Miller – Upper Susquehanna Synod

Bishop Lee M. Miller II – Upstate New York Synod

Bishop Phyllis Milton – Virginia Synod

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