



Southwestern Washington Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

The Rev. Richard E. Jaech, Bishop

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"O God, it is your will to hold both heaven and earth in a single peace. Let the design of your great love shine on the waste of our wraths and sorrows, and give peace to your church, peace among nations, peace in our city, peace in our hearts and peace in our homes." (ELW, Prayer for Peace, modified)

Over the last three days in our nation, grief has fallen upon grief. First, the tragic and unwarranted killing of two African-American men by police officers in Baton Rouge, LA, and suburban St. Paul, MN, (two miles away from Luther Seminary). Then on Friday night, the horrific killing of five police officers in Dallas and the wounding of seven more officers, who were at work to protect people having a peaceful Black Lives Matter march. The killer in Dallas was an Army veteran and reservist, who before his death stated that he was angry that white officers were killing African American people.

Fear leading to hatred; violence inciting more violence; people of different colors and faiths pointing the finger at each other as the source of the problem; guns everywhere accompanied by shouted debate over whether they are good or bad. As the psalmist writes, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

I confess that I barely know what to say about this. Over the last twelve months, I have sent out to Synod congregations and pastors five special messages in response to tragic events of violence in the United States. Each time it feels like we have reached the bottom and then an act of violence happens that is even worse. Most of us are saturated with numbness, fear, and reactive anger. What do we do with that?

In a time when our world truly seems to be fracturing and falling apart, we need to reach down into the bedrock of our faith and cling to our God, who promises to be at work making all things new. Jesus, who again and again revealed the power of God's grace, healing and justice, once again calls us to entrust ourselves to God.

Second, we must not let the fear and violence sweep us into even deeper division between white and black, citizens and police. I am thankful that in a number of cities and counties in our Synod, there has been meaningful dialogue among people of all colors, police officers, civic leaders, LGBTQ and faith groups. On-going efforts are taking place to address the very complex issues of injustice and violence that we all face. People who simply stay in their own like-minded group and shout accusations at the "other" only add to the violence. We need to practice community-building again, rather than tearing ourselves apart. The Holy Spirit, the One who draws us together as the "communion of saints", will help us do this.

Third, while dialogue and discussion is essential, we must move beyond words to action. Starting in our homes, churches and towns, we must find ways to reverse the tide of racism, economic uncertainty and gun violence. We must insist that our elected officials and candidates for office work diligently for fair, effective laws, rather than using the fears surrounding race and violence for their own political advancement. God wants shalom and healing for us at every level of our lives and calls us to join in the holy task of bringing new life out of the pain of this moment.

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The mission of the Southwestern Washington Synod is to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ by empowering congregations and Church leaders to grow in worship, education, outreach, stewardship and other ministries.

In the meantime, we pray and bring comfort to those who have lost loved ones; we surround them with love and support; we work as citizens for the healing of our nation. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

In Christ,

Bishop Rick Jaech

Additional prayers for your possible use, from the Evangelical Lutheran Worship hymnbook, page 76 and following.

National distress

Eternal God, amid all the turmoil and changes of the world your love is steadfast and your strength never fails. In this time of danger and trouble, be to us a sure guardian and rock of defense. Guide the leaders of our nation with your wisdom, comfort those in distress, and grant us courage and hope to face the future; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen

Time of conflict, crisis, disaster

God, our refuge and strength, you have bound us together in a common life. In all our conflicts, help us to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, to listen for your voice amid competing claims, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Time of conflict, crisis, disaster

O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where impossibilities close every door and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen