



Southwestern Washington Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

The Rev. Richard E. Jaech, Bishop

December 8, 2017

Dear Pastors, Deacons and Congregations of the Southwestern Washington Synod,

As we approach the celebration of the birth of Christ, I find my mind pulled between two images. On the one hand, I am drawn to see the beauty and peace of Bethlehem as I hear us sing, "Silent night, holy night; all is calm, all is bright." However, in the next moment, the violence and pain that has wracked the Holy Land for 2000 years immediately becomes so visible, particularly with the heightened danger that exists right now.

I must convey to you my distress and opposition to President Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In doing so, President Trump has ignored the pleas of the Christian and Muslim communities in Israel, as well as significant portions of the Jewish community and our closest allies around the globe. More lives are now at risk in the Holy Land and the peace talks are further endangered. Please know that I am firmly committed to supporting Israel in its right to have a safe and secure existence. At the same time, I am firmly committed to supporting the Palestinian people of the Holy Land to also have a safe, secure and legally recognized existence. In accordance with United Nations edicts, both Israelis and Palestinians view Jerusalem as their capital. Therefore, for lasting peace, both sides must negotiate that complex issue among themselves as part of a larger peace plan, rather than the United States taking sides and declaring the current Israeli administration the winner and "owner" of Jerusalem.

On December 6, the twelve leading Lutheran, Catholic, Orthodox and Episcopal bishops and patriarchs in Israel implored President Trump to not change Jerusalem's status as an *international city*. They wrote: "Mr. President, we have been following with concern the reports about the possibility of changing how the United States understands and deals with the status of Jerusalem. We are certain that such steps will yield increased hatred, conflict, violence and suffering in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, moving us farther from the goal of unity and deeper toward destructive division. We ask you, Mr. President, to help us all walk towards more love and a definitive peace, which cannot be reached without Jerusalem being for all."

Together with our ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, I call upon President Trump to rescind this action and to focus on bringing Palestinians and Israelis to the negotiating table for a peaceful settlement. I will communicate this to our Washington State congressional representatives and senators during the coming week, and I urge you to do the same. This is not merely a political cause. It is a crucial decision point for all of the people of God. If we intend to sing about the peace of Bethlehem in the days ahead, then we must also act to preserve and extend that peace.

In Christ, who comes to be born among us,

Bishop Rick Jaech

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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.