



Southwestern Washington Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

The Rev. Richard E. Jaech, Bishop

29 October 2018

*"A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children"*

Jeremiah 31:15

Once again we are horrified and in anguish following a mass killing in a house of worship. Last Saturday morning an intruder burst into the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA, killing eleven worshippers and wounding six others, including four police officers. The killer made his motives very clear. "I just want to kill Jews!"

This was the deadliest act of violence against Jewish people within the United States in our nation's history. It is not, however, an isolated event. Violence and abuse against Jewish citizens rose 57% last year and continues to rise again this year. This is accompanied by a rising level of assault and violence against US Muslims and all people of color.

The killer also targeted Tree of Life Synagogue because the congregation members actively support the work of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). HIAS does the same ministry as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, helping hundreds of deserving Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants enter the country. The killer believes that any effort to bring in immigrants endangered the "purity" of America and so he decided to kill the people who did so.

As members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Southwestern Washington, we must condemn this racist, religious violence and give our support to the Jewish community and all those who are in danger. An attack on one portion of God's family is an attack on all of us. As Lutherans, we must offer this support in a spirit of humility and repentance, remembering our own past sins: the violent verbal attacks made by Martin Luther against the Jewish people in his day and the failure of the German Lutheran Church to protect their Jewish neighbors in Nazi Germany. Recognizing our own past failures, we Lutherans are doubly committed to supporting and defending the Jewish community and all victims of violent and hate.

Therefore, I encourage you to speak and act in behalf of those who suffer and to actively seek the social healing that God desires for us. Here are some specific ways you can do that.

1. Pray for the Tree of Life victims and their families, asking God to bring them comfort and healing.
2. Make contact with Jewish neighbors and synagogues in your community and express your condolence and support. Ask them how you might help. If you have never made contact with them before, this would be an excellent time to reach out.
3. Call upon your political representatives and leaders and demand that they end the abusive and violent verbal attacks against others that we are hearing so much of in this campaign season. Such violent and demeaning words clearly prompt other people to commit physical violence.

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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.

4. **VOTE! Study the issues! Pick good leaders! VOTE!** Martin Luther clearly said that being an active, responsible **citizen** is one of the vocations to which God calls us. In his tract on *Temporal Authority*, Martin Luther said, “[The ruler] should picture Christ to himself, and say, ‘Behold, Christ, the supreme ruler, came to serve me...Therefore, I will use my office to serve and protect others, listen to their problems and defend them, and govern to the sole end that they, not I, may benefit from my rule.’” In the United States we are blessed to live in a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Therefore, we are all finally the rulers and decision-makers of how we will live together in our communities. To fail to vote is a rejection of the gift and responsibility that God has given us as citizens. Therefore, I want to emphasize this again, by midnight on November 6, **VOTE**.

As Martin Luther would say, our lives and our world are in the hands of a God who is “with us and for us.” In a shattered world, God hears Rachel weeping for her slain children and comes both to heal us and to catalyze us to live more fully in God’s grace, love and justice. In these days of anguish, may God bring us the peace that passes understanding and powerfully engage us to be peace-makers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard E. Jaech". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "In Christ,".

Bishop Rick Jaech