



Office of the Bishop
New Jersey Synod, ELCA

Letter to Rostered Leaders

June 13, 2016

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I am writing with a heavy heart as again our country is mourning the senseless loss of over 50 lives at the hands of hatred and violence. This time, the particular target was the LGBTQ community. Later this week, we will mark the one year anniversary of the massacre at Mother Emmanuel Church in Charleston, SC, which resulted in nine black lives being taken. In between these two events, we have wept too often at the senseless violence that has penetrated our everyday reality.

While we may feel helpless, there are things we can do and say as people of faith in Jesus Christ. First, some of you have told me that your congregations are gathering for prayer. I encourage all of us to be in prayer and to invite neighbors and friends to join us in those prayers. We pray for the victims of violence, the families of those affected, the root causes that lead people to prey upon others, and even those who seek to do us harm.

Second, we can reach out to our Muslim neighbors to stand with them and support them in a climate of fear and suspicion. We know what it is to have religion co-opted by fundamentalists who would pervert the tenets of faith to justify killing. We stand with our Muslim friends in denouncing hatred and violence at any time, but especially in the name of God.

Third, we can proclaim a clear message of love and support to our LGBTQ community -- You are welcome in this church. There is a place for you at Christ's table of grace. You are beloved children created in the image of God.

Fourth, we can work to prevent and end gun violence in this country. I am not interested in a debate on gun control. I am concerned that as followers of Jesus Christ we do everything in our power to bring an end to the violence we inflict on each other with weapons that are too readily available to anybody with money to buy them. Our Bishop's Convocation in October will help us address this very issue. In the meantime, become educated about local efforts to end gun violence, join a coalition of those already working to make our streets and homes safer, contact LEAMNJ Director, Rev. Sara Lilja if you don't know where to turn for resources.

Finally, we can remember that we worship a God who defeated sin, death, and the devil. By the death and resurrection of Jesus, God made clear that the last word is life. We cling to this promise, even as we shed tears of sorrow for the lives lost in Orlando, Charleston, and in our own neighborhoods.

May the peace of Christ be with you,

The Rev. Tracie L. Bartholomew

Bishop

New Jersey Synod, ELCA
1930 Highway 33
Hamilton Square, New Jersey 08690
609-586-6800