



Office of the Bishop
New Jersey Synod, ELCA
God's work. Our hands.
1930 Hwy 33, Hamilton Square, NJ 08690

January 28, 2026

Dear Siblings in Christ of the New Jersey Synod,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, who is our light and our salvation.

My heart cannot keep pace with the news. Each day I feel the whiplash turns from hope to grief to anger to resolve. I often find myself holding all of these feelings at once. Perhaps you do too.

This Sunday in the Revised Common Lectionary we hear Matthew's version of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). You'll notice that the word "righteousness" appears more than once: "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled... Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" As I consider what is happening in Minnesota, in Maine, and throughout our own state, I wonder: What might righteous look like in this moment?

Yesterday was International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Many people during the Holocaust watched as their Jewish neighbors were rounded up; some even conspired to turn over their neighbors to the German authorities. Others, however, made a different choice. They risked their lives to save their Jewish neighbors by hiding them, providing for their needs, and aiding their escape. Those courageous few are called by our Jewish siblings "the Righteous Among the Nations," and they are remembered today as faithful friends at a time when the risks of helping were dire. Sometimes righteousness looks like risking our own safety to protect the safety of the most vulnerable.

Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in his 1939 volume *Life Together* that one of the most important ways we live as the body of Christ is in *the ministry of bearing*. As Galatians 6:2 reminds us, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Bonhoeffer explains: "It is the fellowship of the Cross to experience the burden of the other...To bear the burden of the other person means involvement with the created reality of the other." Bonhoeffer's teaching urges us to understand what our immigrant neighbors, our neighbors of color, and our indigenous neighbors are experiencing each and every day. When we understand that lived reality, we cannot help but respond with love and compassion. Sometimes righteousness looks like holding a deep empathy that guides our daily actions.

In this moment many of our neighbors are living in fear. They are afraid to leave their homes, afraid to go to school or work, afraid to seek medical care, afraid to come to church. We are called to stand with them in whatever ways we can – to console, to provide what is needed, to accompany people to school and work, to deliver groceries to our neighbors' doors, to defend them against pervasive violence, to advocate for a just approach to immigration reform in our country. Sometimes righteousness looks like finding the one next faithful step that we can take on behalf of our neighbors.

It is easy to feel helpless and overwhelmed. So here are some other faithful steps we can take. No one person can do everything, but each of us can do something. We remember in all of this work that we are not the saviors. Jesus is our Lord and Savior, the One who gives his life so that we are freed to love and serve all people.

- Pray, pray, and pray some more. Pray for those being persecuted, and pray for those who are doing the persecuting. Pray for those in authority, that they might make decisions guided by wisdom and compassion.
- Study God's Word and what it has to say about welcoming the stranger and about our vocations as citizens. The ELCA social message on Immigration and our new ELCA social statement on "Faith and Civic Life" are helpful resources. (See links below.)
- Reject any language that dehumanizes people, remembering that all of us are created in God's image. See below for a link to a document titled "Created in the Image of God: Affirming our Shared Dignity."
- Communicate with your elected representatives and urge them to make decisions that are consistent with the commitments of our faith.
- Connect with local experts and networks of care. Now is the time to strengthen our relationships with each other, with ecumenical and interfaith partners, and with organizations in our community who already know the most effective approaches to locally-based communication and advocacy.
- Seek moments of beauty, joy, and connection. The ministry of bearing one another's burdens can be exhausting. Make sure you are finding ways for your soul to be nourished.

Among our ELCA Worship Resources is a "Blessing and Sending for Public Witness." In closing, I offer this prayer, adapted from that resource:

Blessed are you, O Holy One, for you formed us in love, claimed us in baptism, and set us free for lives of service and witness. Strengthen us to fulfill the promises of baptism—to proclaim Christ through word and deed, to care for others and the world you made, and to work for justice and peace. Bless those who accompany others with compassion. Let our steadying presence be a shelter in weary places, and our faithful witness be a sign of your solidarity with all who suffer. To you, O God, Source of life, Companion on the way, Fire of the Spirit, be all glory and praise, now and forever. Amen.

With prayer and hope,



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Resources

Blessing and Sending for Public Witness:

<https://resources.elca.org/worship/worship-resource-blessing-and-sending-for-public-witness-doc/>

ELCA Advocacy: <https://www.elca.org/our-work/publicly-engaged-church/advocacy>

“Created in the Image of God: Affirming Our Shared Dignity”:

<https://resources.elca.org/ammparo/created-in-the-image-of-god-a-conversation-guide-on-dehumanizing-rhetoric/>

ELCA Social Statement on “Faith and Civic Life”: <https://www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/current-social-writing-projects/civic-life-and-faith>

ELCA Social Message on “Immigration”: <https://www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-messages/immigration>

Other resources from AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities): <https://www.elca.org/our-work/relief-and-development/ammparo>

The New Jersey Coalition of Religious Leaders: <https://njcrl.org>

Faith in Action: <https://faithinaction.org>