



**OFFICE OF THE BISHOP**  
NEW JERSEY SYNOD  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
*God's work. Our hands.*

June 18, 2018

Dear Church,

On Saturday night, my husband, daughter, and I went to Art All Night (AAN) in Trenton. As the name implies, this is a festival that lasts for 24 hours and features art of all kinds – painting, drawing, sculpture, music, dance, etc. We tend to go each year because we believe public art is essential to a healthy community. We go because we see and hear things we understand and love. We go because we see and hear things we don't understand at all but from which we learn. We go because the diverse community that gathers for AAN looks like the whole kingdom of God and it gives us hope to see a glimpse of it.

So, it was with a heavy heart I heard the news on Sunday morning of a shooting at AAN. As I write this, the details as to what happened are still unclear, but guns were drawn, shots were fired, people were killed and critically wounded, and fear reigned. The scene which only hours before had been one of joy and beauty, was now a "major crime scene"<sup>1</sup>. After hearing this news, I headed to church feeling angry, helpless, and sad.

Those have been my emotions far too often in recent weeks – anger, helplessness, and sadness. I have felt them watching the news of our government tearing babies and children away from their parents at our Southern border and then listening to our Attorney General mis-quoting Scripture and using our sacred texts to support this heartless practice. It is antithetical to life as a disciple of Jesus Christ to perpetrate such evil. It only adds to the atrocity trying to justify it by using the very words of the one who bids us to love the stranger and welcome little children.

In worship on Sunday, I heard Pastor Daniel Eisenberg say, "we worship a mustard Messiah". He went on to illustrate how Jesus shows up in unexpected places, getting into the cracks of life, much as a mustard weed grows in the cracks of a sidewalk or along a road or in places that seem impossible to sustain any kind of life. But our mustard Messiah brings life, even into the graveyard – even, and especially, into the places of violence and fear, of separation and hopelessness, of anger and sadness.

I am holding on to these words of hope and I am calling on you to join me. Together, blessed by our mustard Messiah, we have been given the joy of new life so that we are not left in our anger or helplessness. We are strengthened for service in Jesus' name and sent into the world to share the extravagant love we have received. We work for peace and risk befriending those who differ from us. We step into places of violence and fear to bear witness to the one who is the prince of peace. We go beyond expectation and love our enemies. We advocate for just immigration policies and challenge policies that betray our core values. We seek to be truth-tellers and learn the facts about seeking asylum so we can assist those trying to find refuge in our country. We live out our calling to be ambassadors for hope so that joy returns, and we do, indeed, get a glimpse of the kingdom of God here on earth.

Working with you in hope,

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew

Below are resources from our church:

Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry, New Jersey (LEAMNJ) [www.leadmij.org](http://www.leadmij.org)

AMMPARO – an initiative of the ELCA which works with unaccompanied minors crossing the border.  
[www.elca.org/ammparo](http://www.elca.org/ammparo)

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) [www.lirs.org](http://www.lirs.org)

Statement from Presiding Bishop Eaton on separating families at the border [www.elca.org/news](http://www.elca.org/news)

<sup>1</sup>As described in an NPR news report on Sunday afternoon.