



Office of the Bishop
New Jersey Synod, ELCA
God's work. Our hands.

September 24, 2025

On the morning of September 14, I woke up with a heavy heart. The week's news had been too much. Threats made against historically black colleges and universities across the country. The assassination of Charlie Kirk. Another school shooting, this time in Colorado.

And so I posted a Prayer for Preachers on Holy Cross/Lost Sheep Sunday:

God of Wisdom, be with all who preach your Word this day. Grant preachers the clarity to speak to your people, so that we, as the body of Christ in all our diversity, might embody your goodness and grace in a world steeped in violent speech and action. Keep us steadfast in your Word, O Lord, calling us to experience the abundant life that only you can give as we are then freed to share abundance with our neighbors. In the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd who does not give up on us and who loves the whole world. Amen.

The next day someone with whom I went to college reached out because he took issue with my prayer. In particular, he insisted that there is no such thing as violent speech.

In my response to him I wrote: "Speech *can* be violent. We're hearing it now in many examples of dangerous rhetoric about 'going to war.' I know countless people who have been harmed by speech directed at their very identities; such language creates conditions that permit others to carry out violent actions...I know pastors who are receiving death threats simply for speaking on behalf of the vulnerable as their ordination vows compel them to do."

As Lutheran Christians, words matter to us. We are people of Word and Sacrament. We trust what God can do with words – call forth the diversity of creation, proclaim justice, declare forgiveness, imbue ordinary things with promises and presence. *The body of Christ, given for you...The blood of Christ, shed for you...I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

The world is often reckless with language, quick to declare war or to promise vengeance. But we are stewards of *God's* Word, and so we have a responsibility to use language carefully. We can ask ourselves before we speak: *What might be the consequences of these words? Am I speaking the truth in love, or am I speaking with other motives?* Most of all, we can embody God's promises of love for the whole world in what we say and what we do. As Proverbs 12:18 reminds us, "Rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."

I'll be the first to admit that I don't always choose words that bring healing. My years in Jersey have given me some more colorful language, especially when someone cuts me off in traffic. But I keep trying to learn a better language, a language that points to the One who is the source of our hope in these troubled times. I invite you to join me in practicing that kind of language too.

Walking with you in the Word,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christa".

Bishop Christa Compton