



**New Jersey Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

November 7, 2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

Tomorrow is Election Day -- I hope you've made a plan to cast your ballot. Lutherans believe that God works through good government in protecting the most vulnerable and enacting just laws.

I am distressed by the harsh rhetoric and demonization of candidates towards each other that has dominated campaigns in this and previous years. I have listened to many political ads which tell me nothing about the actual stances a candidate may have on important issues but only resort to name-calling and fear mongering. Words have power, and the continued use of hateful and violent speech leads to hateful and violent action.

This past Thursday evening, the FBI put out an alert because they had received credible threats of violence against synagogues in New Jersey. Read that sentence again. Having learned of this, I was in touch with Rabbi Matthew Gewirtz of Temple B'nai Jeshurun (TBJ) in Short Hills. Matt is one of the leaders of the NJ Interfaith Coalition of which I am a part. I reached out to assure him and the congregation that I stand against antisemitism and would be holding them in my prayers as they gathered for services on Friday evening.

I also offered to provide a peaceful presence of Lutherans at TBJ during Shabbat services as a sign of solidarity and love. Rabbi Gewirtz, who is in Israel leading a congregational trip, responded with gratitude. Some of you in the area quickly responded to my invitation to join me in Short Hills. Thankfully, the threat was mitigated, and a suspect identified by midday on Friday, so we cancelled the vigil.

While the immediate threat of violence against synagogues has ebbed, fear and anxiety remain. The sins of antisemitism, bigotry, white supremacy, and racism are all too real. The suspect in this case, like in so many others involving threats of violence, holds "radical, extremist views" which are fueled by the language we use to talk about those who may be different from us and with whom we disagree.

Tomorrow, on Election Day, and in the days ahead, I hope we will witness to a kinder way of being neighbor to those with whom we disagree. I hope we will stand against hateful and violent language that demonizes the other and diminishes our common life. I hope we will model the way of peace in Jesus' name which welcomes and honors the most vulnerable among us.

Serving with you,

*Tracie L Bartholomew*

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew

*O God, you crafted the universe as a divine tapestry in which the well-being of the entire cosmos is forever intertwined. On this election day, give us hearts and minds focused on nurturing all that you have made. Forgive us when we are unjust or accept unjust behavior in our leaders. Remind us of your call to not withdraw from the world, but to be in the world as your very own broken and beloved people. Ignite in us a passion for the welfare of those who are most vulnerable and empower us to lead with a love that reflects your love revealed in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen. (ELCA Prayer Ventures)*