

Faith Confronts Authoritarianism: Prophetic Voices of our Time

Lutheran leaders and interfaith voices
address the public issues challenging our
teachings and beliefs

April 3, 2026

Martyrdom of Martin Luther King Jr.

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Preface

We are living in a time of political confusion. The social climate has shifted in radical and unexpected ways. The political center where a stable consensus holds sway in relation to the far right and left has vanished. Commentators refer to the shifting “Overton Window,” the range of positions or ideas acceptable to the mainstream public. The media landscape has created a fractured society where there is no longer a shared narrative for a significant portion of our population. While modern society and advances in communications technology makes some of this inevitable, the United States is uniquely polarized and is one of a number of countries with a populist front that is challenging democratic norms and institutions.¹ We see a populism that has displaced a set of partisan positions with a reign of personality and flexing of power. We no longer debate the merits of a policy or law. We no longer analyze data and scrutinize results and trends. There is a lack of moral formation and conversation. Statements are made and positions are taken purely for the way they can undermine an opponent and shift the discourse toward or away from a desired outcome.

What follows is a collection of statements and blog posts that represent voices of faith bringing their traditions to moral and ethical discussions around war and peace, law and order, bigotry and bias. We see an emerging Christianity which serves as superficial identity, symbols and labels, flags to rally around and seemingly tribal displays. We don’t hear Christians referencing things like, “put away your sword”, “welcome the stranger”, “love your neighbor”, “turn the other cheek,” or “love your enemies.” Instead we hear about a Christianity that emphasizes male headship, “traditional” families, western civilization and racial purity. Christianity has a lot more to say about public and private morality, about personal integrity and public responsibility and there is a history of a broad range of positions and arguments.

This collection is meant to bring recent efforts at moral discernment and engagement with spiritual resources and religious thought together to aid more engagement and wrestling, more thought and study.

- Jim O’Hanlon

¹ “In 25-Country Survey, Americans Especially Likely To View Fellow Citizens as Morally Bad: 53% of U.S. adults say Americans have bad morals and ethics.” Pew Research Center, March 5, 2026.

Moral Mondays CT/Fairfield County Statement of Principles

[Rabbi Michael Knopf](#)


March 9, 2026

INVITING PEOPLE OF FAITH: COME WITNESS

MORAL Mondays

AT STAMFORD SUPERIOR COURT | 123 Hoyt Street, Stamford CT
Every Monday, 12:30-1:30 pm

JOIN US FOR THIS TIME OF SOLIDARITY AND WITNESS. SPREAD THE WORD!

 *Faithful Witness for Immigrant Justice* | @MoralMondayCT

The graphic features a white background with a blue vertical bar on the left and a red horizontal bar at the bottom. The text is centered and uses a mix of blue and gold colors. There are decorative curved lines in the top right and bottom left corners.

Every Monday, a growing interfaith community gathers at the Stamford Superior Court to bear moral witness — peacefully, visibly, and persistently — in defense of immigrant dignity, the rule of law, and basic human rights.

We believe every person possesses infinite worth. We believe the law must protect everyone equally. And we believe that silence, in the face of injustice, is not an option.

Today we are releasing our formal Statement of Principles.

We invite you to read it — and to join us:

Mondays, 12:30–1:30 p.m., Stamford Superior Court, 123 Hoyt Street, Stamford, CT

A Statement of Principles

*Moral Mondays CT/Fairfield County
Faithful Witness for Immigrant Justice*

- We believe every person possesses infinite worth.
- We believe the law must protect everyone equally.
- We believe silence, in the face of injustice, is not an option.

Every Monday, 12:30-1:30 p.m. | Stamford Superior Court, 123 Hoyt Street, Stamford, CT



Who We Are

We are clergy and community members, people of faith and people of conscience — representing different spiritual paths but united by a single shared conviction: that every human being possesses inherent dignity, and that what happens to our neighbors is our concern.

Every Monday, we gather at the Stamford courthouse to bear moral witness — consistently, visibly, and peacefully affirming and amplifying that conviction with prayer, with song, and with presence. We believe that silence, in the presence of injustice, is not an option. We refuse to normalize what must not become normal, and we insist on a community with liberty and justice for all.

Why We Gather at the Courthouse

In the fall of 2025, ICE agents were engaged in enforcement operations in and near this courthouse. People who came here to navigate the legal system, to appear before a judge, to do exactly what the law asks of them, were seized on these grounds. We began our vigil in response — to bear public witness, to raise awareness, and to provide protective presence.

We continue to stand here each week because this courthouse is where the law is supposed to mean something — where rights are supposed to be protected, where every person is supposed to find equal protection regardless of origin or status. We stand here to hold our leaders accountable to that promise: to insist, week after week, that law lives up to its own stated purpose.

We stand here to declare, plainly and publicly, that immigration enforcement which operates through fear, without transparency, without due process, is not upholding the law. It is betraying it. Moreover, we stand here to support and protect our neighbors, and to ensure equal justice for everyone in our community.

What We Believe



We believe that every person possesses inherent dignity — without exception. Our traditions name this differently: the image of God, the sanctity of life, the equal and infinite worth of every human being. Across every tradition represented here, and in the conscience of those with no particular religious affiliation, the conviction is the same: human dignity is not granted by governments and cannot be revoked by them. It belongs to every person — regardless of where they were born, how they arrived, or what documents they carry.

We believe that law exists to protect the vulnerable — or it has failed its purpose. We believe in law. We believe in borders and governance. And precisely because we take law seriously, we insist it apply equally — to every person, without exception. A legal system that

operates by different rules for different classes of people is not upholding the rule of law. It is corrupting it. When enforcement operates without judicial oversight, without transparency, without accountability, it is not the law being served. It is power.

We believe that cruelty is not security and that fear is not strength. Seizing people without warning, separating families, treating entire communities as suspect — these do not make anyone safer. They destroy the trust that makes communities function and corrode the moral fabric that gives law its legitimacy. A society that sacrifices the vulnerable in the name of security has not become safer. It has become less worthy of the name.

We believe that our neighbors are not abstractions. The people whose dignity we defend live here — in Stamford, in Fairfield County, in our neighborhoods. They work alongside us, worship alongside us, and raise their children here. When a father is seized without warning, when a child disappears into a system without transparency, when families live one knock on the door away from catastrophe — that is not a distant policy debate. It is a moral emergency in our own community. As Jesus teaches in the gospel of Matthew, “Just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40). How we treat the most vulnerable among us is the measure of who we are as individuals and as a community.

What We Demand

1. **We demand local and state noncooperation with federal immigration enforcement.** Our local police, courts, and public institutions exist to serve all residents — including the undocumented. Trust between communities and local government is a public safety asset that belongs to everyone. We demand that the state of Connecticut, Fairfield County, the City of Stamford and neighboring municipalities refuse to use local resources, personnel, or data as instruments of federal immigration enforcement.
2. **We demand due process and equal protection for all.** We demand that immigration enforcement comply with constitutional standards — judicial authorization, due process, and humane treatment — for every person on American soil. No agency and no administration stands above the law. Equal protection is not a privilege of citizenship. It is the foundation of law itself.
3. **We demand an end to enforcement designed to intimidate.** Arrests in courthouse parking garages, raids in homes and workplaces, operations designed to produce fear rather than uphold the law — these are not legitimate law enforcement. We demand that enforcement actions be conducted within constitutional limits, with judicial authorization, and with full public accountability.

4. **We demand protection of our asylum and refugee system.** The United States has legal and moral obligations to people fleeing persecution and violence. We demand those obligations be honored — not circumvented by administrative procedure or abandoned in the name of deterrence. The right to seek asylum is a legal protection that must be upheld.

5. **We demand dignity in word and deed.** We demand that public officials speak about and treat everyone — including but not limited to our immigrant neighbors — as the full human beings they are. Dehumanizing rhetoric is not merely offensive. It licenses cruelty and makes violence easier to justify. Words from those in power have consequences, and we hold our leaders accountable not only for what they do, but also for what they say.

Our Commitment

We commit ourselves to the moral imperative memorably expressed by the Hebrew prophet Micah, *"You have been told what is good, and what is required of you: only to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly"* (Micah 6:8). Therefore, we will return — every Monday, in rain and cold, in weeks when the news is overwhelming and weeks when it is quiet — until, in the words of the Hebrew prophet Amos, *"justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream"* (Amos 5:24).

Adopted March 2026, Stamford, CT

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Conference of Bishops Emphasizes the Need to Speak the Truth

October 1, 2024

In a perfect garden, created by God for the sake of humanity, evil entered in the form of deception and lies. Christians refer to this story, found in the biblical book of Genesis, as the *fall of humanity*. This foray into human sin began when Adam and Eve, the first humans created in the image of God, were deceived.

Humans have contended with the powers of deception ever since.

Yet we are a people who know and proclaim the power of God at work in the world. We proclaim the power of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, the one who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

We know that the power of truth is greater than the power of deceit.

We, the members of the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, speak with one voice to condemn the hateful, deceptive, violent speech that has too readily found a place in our national discourse. We lament the ways this language has led to hate-fueled action.

We refuse to accept the ongoing normalization of lies and deceit.

We recommit ourselves to speaking the truth and pointing to the one who is truth. We find courage in our collegiality and implore the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as well as our partners and friends, to join us as we:

- Pledge to be vigilant guardians of truth, refusing to perpetuate lies or half-truths that further corrode the fabric of our society.
- Commit to rigorous fact-checking, honoring God's command to "test everything; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).
- Reject the use of humor that normalizes falsehood, remembering that our speech should "always be gracious" (Colossians 4:6).
- Boldly advocate for the marginalized and oppressed, emulating Christ's love for the least among us.
- Courageously interrupt hate speech, standing firm in the knowledge that all are created in God's image.
- Lean in with curiosity, engage with those who think differently and "put the best construction on our neighbor's action" (Luther's explanation of the Eighth Commandment).
- Amplify voices of truth.

Emboldened by the Holy Spirit, may we resist deception and lift up the truth that all members of humanity are created in the image of God.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all as we respond to the Spirit's invitation into this intentional commitment against deception and for truth.

In Christ,

The Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Curry Issues Statement on Iran War

March 4, 2026

Dear siblings in Christ,

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isaiah 2:4)

In our Lenten journey, we are reminded of our dependence on God, and we are sustained by hope in the future peace God has promised. As war involving the United States, Israel and Iran intensifies and spreads, we lament how far off that promise seems. We do not know how many people have been killed, but we know the number will continue to grow. Early reports indicate that more than 100 Iranian schoolgirls and several U.S. service members are among them.

The church of Jesus Christ is called to proclaim the peace of God's eternal reign and to work for an earthly peace here and now. The ELCA social message “Living in a Time of Terrorism” states that this earthly peace is a “precious yet fragile good.” Its existence depends on leaders who prioritize diplomacy over military engagement and deterrence over war, and on citizens who hold government accountable whenever military action is considered.

With many of you, I am distressed that a robust, public discernment through congressional authorization did not occur prior to the United States' engagement in this war. As Lutherans, we affirm that government and the order that just laws provide are gifts of God for our safety and well-being. This war does not represent the promotion of this just order but rather its failure.

The costs in lives and safety of this failure will be borne by those least able to avoid it — children, families and those without the means to flee. Its deadly toll has been, and will continue to be, paid with the lives of our neighbors, including our siblings in Christ in the Middle East.

This moment underscores the urgent need for robust, well-resourced diplomatic and humanitarian efforts. Our companions in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land have asked our church to pray fervently for peace and safety and to advocate for the dignity and security of all people. ELCA Witness in Society will continue to provide opportunities for this advocacy.

As members of the body of Christ, join me in prayerful, hopeful solidarity with our siblings and neighbors who suffer today.

Together,

- We mourn the rush to war and the combatants and noncombatants who have lost their lives.
- We yearn for creation's fulfillment in "a new heaven and a new earth" where death and pain "will be no more" (Revelation 21:1, 4).
- We strive for justice and peace in all the earth, strengthened by faith in the crucified and risen Lord to persist.
- We trust that, through God who sustains us, our weariness and fear will not overcome us.

In Christ,

The Rev. Yehiel Curry

Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Curry Joins Faith Leaders in Letter to Congress Regarding the National Outcry Against I.C.E.

February 9, 2026

Dear member of Congress,

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? (Isaiah 58:6).

The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God (Leviticus 19:34).

United in faith and rooted in love, the nine undersigned Christian denominations and organizations composed of millions of people across the United States, grieve the ongoing assaults on the dignity, rights and well-being of our immigrant members and neighbors through aggressive immigration enforcement.

Our churches have decried denial of due process and recent violence by federal law enforcement agents, including the shootings of Keith Porter Jr., Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti by federal immigration agents. We call for investigation, accountability and justice in these cases.

We also see this as a critical moment to legislate immigration policies that are just, humane and respectful of the dignity of immigrants who, like all people, are beloved children of God. We are grateful that Congress heard the national outcry and did not vote hastily for a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) budget that would have provided additional unchecked funding to ICE and other immigration enforcement agencies.

As you negotiate meaningful reforms in the coming weeks, we urge you to prioritize language that preserves the freedom to worship, to live in safety regardless of race or background, to love our neighbors, and to meet the basic needs and rights of all.

In particular, we ask that you emphasize the following in your negotiations:

- Codify protections from immigration enforcement for our churches and other houses of worship, as well as schools, hospitals, courthouses, and other sensitive locations. We grieve the fear that keeps our siblings and neighbors away from essential religious services and practices. We ask for the sanctity of worship to be respected by prohibitions on immigration enforcement at or near sensitive locations.

- Limit excessive funding for immigration enforcement. Federal immigration enforcement received over \$170 billion in summer 2025 to supercharge enforcement activities. This surge has led to widespread and indiscriminate detentions, detention facilities operated by private companies that fail basic standards of care and liberties, and intimidation and violence against U.S. citizens and entire communities. More funding for ICE is neither fiscally responsible nor morally defensible. We ask that DHS prioritize funding for programs that support the common good, including funding to reduce the USCIS case backlog.
- Reaffirm restrictions on federal immigration agents' targeting of people based on race, language or country of origin. Federal immigration agents' activities have targeted U.S. citizens, permanent residents and other immigrants because of their appearance, how they speak or where they work. We call for an end to indiscriminate enforcement efforts and an end to surge presences in Minneapolis and other cities.
- Require due process for immigration agents and consequences for failure to follow these processes in their interactions with immigrants and those supporting them. This includes independent investigations of ICE violence that result in meaningful consequences.
- Ensure standards in immigration detention facilities and disallow funding used to detain children. These standards must include adequate medical care, clean water, food, access to religious practices and services, and contact with families and lawyers. The standards must protect the dignity and safety of all. We also call for a total halt to the detention of children.
- End the arrests and traumatizing reinterviews of lawfully present refugees. We affirm our commitment to the U.S. refugee program and urge the protection and ongoing welcome of our refugee neighbors. Reopening cases is unnecessary, cruel, and destabilizes the lives of families that were promised safety by the United States.

In the coming Christian season of Lent, our churches will follow the journey of God's people displaced from their homes and wandering in the desert. Again and again, God provides for their needs, and when they are settled, issues a command: "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:34).

Thank you for considering our requests.

Sincerely,

Rev. Yehiel Curry, Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Jihyun Oh, Stated Clerk
General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)

Richard Santos, President and CEO
Church World Service

Eddy Aleman, General Secretary
Reformed Church in America

The Provincial Elders' Conference
Moravian Church, Northern Province in America

Bishop Tracy Smith Malone, President, Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO
Global Refuge

Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, President and General Secretary
National Council of Churches

Rev. Teresa "Terri" Hord Owens, General Minister and President
Christian Church (Disciples in Christ) in the United States and Canada

Why I Spent 90 Minutes Steaming an American Flag

By [Nadia Bolz-Weber](https://thecorners.substack.com) thecorners.substack.com

April 13, 2026



Yesterday I spent a good hour and a half steaming the creases out of an American flag.

I slowly moved our cheap \$24 steamer over each inch of the 5x9.5 cotton, removing its creases and thinking of my father and the 23 years he left for work each morning in his crisp blue uniform. While proud of his military career, and maintaining great affection for a childhood spent on Air Force bases, I'm not normally an American-flag kind of girl. So yesterday I was surprised by how very beautiful I found it as a physical object in my hands and on our dining table. The sturdy fabric. The rich, saturated crimson and blue. The perfect embroidered stars.

Beautiful.

But if I see a pick-up truck with American flags flying behind its cab while belching diesel fumes into the street, I do not think that person has a commitment to liberty and justice for all. I think, *There are so many people in my life who would not feel safe around that person.*

Because the distance between what I think this flag should represent—a continually unfurling commitment to the dignity of all, protection from tyranny for both our citizens and our allies, and a government of the people, by the people—and what it is so often used to hide

behind—the anxious and delusional so-called supremacy of a single race and a single religion, the contraction of rights, a cultish tyranny pawned off as patriotism—makes it difficult to claim this symbol as my own.

But I do love my country, damnit. I love that we set aside the most beautiful parts of this place to belong to all of us in our state and national parks. I love how many languages we speak. How many places we come from. How many ways we pray. I love that there are truths in the U.S. Constitution that even those who penned it could not possibly have understood the full power of.

I want to think of these things when I see the stars and stripes. I want to think of Sojourner Truth and Betty Soskin, Jimmy Carter and Dolly Parton, Amelia Earhart and Chita Rivera. I'm exhausted by seeing Old Glory and thinking instead of those who celebrate removing any mention of the Tuskegee Airmen from the Smithsonian's website.

I want to take back my country's flag.

And the term patriot, while we're at it.

Why can it not be considered a form of patriotism to believe so deeply in what the United States of America has always said it is about that we refuse to settle for less? That we refuse to abandon this country to those who support policies based in little more than small-mindedness and self-interest?

And maybe this is why I keep thinking about interpretation. About who gets to say what a symbol means. About who benefits from calling their reading the only faithful one.

I'm not a terribly sophisticated political thinker, and I do not make a practice of writing about that part of life. Others are far more skilled and informed than I am. Not to mention I am prone to a wee bit of blinding rage, which is no good for anybody, especially me. So I try to stay in my lane. But my lane and this conversation overlap in this way: "constitutional originalism"—the belief that the most faithful way to interpret the Constitution is to try to discern what the framers intended it to mean—feels eerily similar to the belief that the most faithful way to interpret the Bible is to say GOD wrote it, so we should take every contradictory word of it literally through a so-called "plain reading." I'm equally cynical about both, since the loudest proponents of these views have always been those who just so happen to benefit most from those particular interpretations.

Both approaches present themselves as simply “taking the text seriously.” But in practice, both can smuggle ideology in through the back door by pretending interpretation is not interpretation. And they get to hide behind these texts and say, Don’t be mad at me—this is what THE FRAMERS or GOD says. And then, as anyone who has studied history can attest, atrocities easily ensue.

But texts do not act by themselves. People interpret them. And when interpreters privilege the authority of dead men over the dignity of living people, the result is often that the vulnerable pay the price while the powerful call it faithfulness.

Not to mention that once a reading is labeled “plain” or “original,” dissent can be framed not just as disagreement, but as rebellion against God, law, order, or reality itself. That rhetorical move gives enormous cover to existing power.

But I DO dissent.

The biblical text, when treated as a Living Word and not simply a dead policy manual, allows meaning, comfort, and wisdom to unfold in both old and new ways for each community that studies it. It allows the Bible to surprise us, live in us, even interpret us.

Some may be tempted to walk away from the Bible altogether, and I understand why. I do. But I beg you to reconsider. Because as I’ve said before, scripture and theology are too potent to be left in the hands of those who only use them to justify their dominance over other people. We cannot cede our scriptures to them.

And perhaps the same can be said of the symbols and founding documents of this country. The cost of rejecting them feels too high when reimagining, redefining, and reclaiming are still available to us.

This last December, for his 83rd birthday, I gave my father a leather-bound copy of the U.S. Constitution and other foundational documents—inaugural addresses, Federalist Papers, speeches by Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, and, for some reason, the constitution of the New York Knickerbockers baseball club. He got a little teary, held it to his chest, and said thank you.

Maybe he understood something I am only now trying to say out loud: that love of country is not the same thing as uncritical loyalty. Sometimes it looks more like grief. Sometimes more like argument. Sometimes more like refusing to let a beautiful thing be used to bless our worst instincts.

So yesterday I patiently steamed the creases from an American flag and folded it into a perfect blue triangle on my dining room table, allowing myself to be affected by the beauty of this object before it is handed to my mother at my father's memorial service.

And so here I am—it's 4 o'clock in the morning—feeling unexpectedly tender toward a piece of folded cotton on my table, and still unwilling to surrender what it could mean. Maybe that, too, is a form of patriotism AND Christian faith: to hold something gently, grieve what has been done in its name, and still refuse to give up on what it could yet mean.

This last 8 months have been a doozie. I've had to step back from public life in most ways other than The Corners. I'm still here.

So thanks for sticking with me. Sending my love, Nadia.



Metropolitan New York Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

A Statement on Immigration Enforcement

January 29, 2026

Siblings in Christ:

These are overwhelming times.

We see the continuation of horrific violence in Minneapolis. Immigrants are harassed on the street by ICE agents, neighbors are kidnapped by people wearing masks, in unmarked cars and driven away.

Many are afraid to leave their homes. Last week, ICE officers detained a five-year-old child, Liam Ramos, and used him as bait to lure his family members out of their home. On Saturday, federal agents fatally shot ICU nurse Alex Pretti as he attempted to administer aid to a protester, following the killing of Renee Good earlier this month.

Feelings of anger, dread, and despondency live among so many of us. How could they not? But to acquiesce to hopelessness is not our call. These events must catalyze us to be the Body of Christ together, to renew our call to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

This past Sunday, we read together from the book of Matthew. After hearing that John has been put in prison, Jesus leaves Nazareth, taking up residence in Capernaum, and he begins to preach: “Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near.”

To our 21st-century, English-speaking ears, “repent” sounds like a call to atone for our wrongdoing. But in the original Greek of this passage, we read the word *metanoia*, which calls us to turn around and change our hearts and minds.

Jesus calls us, the body of Christ, to change our hearts and minds, and through that change, also change our world. We are called to be part of the work of making “Thy Kingdom come, on earth.”

We will stand together as a community of faith to oppose injustice wherever we see it. It has been inspiring to see photographs of faith leaders and everyday people, bundled up against the

frigid Minnesota cold, standing up and making their voices heard, protecting their neighbors.
Closer to home in Metro

New York, we see people gathering for vigils, accompanying their neighbors to immigration court appointments, and mobilizing their neighborhoods to respond to ICE raids across the five boroughs, Long Island, and the Hudson Valley.

I hope you will join me in taking action:

- Show up for each other. Organize and participate in demonstrations in your community that promote justice and peace. Many of our churches have organized vigils and sit-ins, or assembled contingents to attend marches and rallies together.
- Show up for your elected officials. Call your senators to demand that they stop further funding for ICE by rejecting a bill already passed by the House. Call all your Congressional representatives and demand the immediate deescalation removal of ICE in Minneapolis and all our cities.
- Show up in prayer for our siblings, who — out of fear of detainment, deportation, or worse — cannot join us in person. Theirs is the kingdom of God.

May this painful moment serve as a catalyst for a new world built on justice.

Signed,

Bishop Katrina Foster

(On How War in Iran is Not Part of God's Holy Plan)

Bishop Nathan Piphon, New England Synod (ELCA)

April 2, 2026

“Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” Matthew 26:51-52

Many years ago during the Vietnam War, the Rev. Charles Bergstrom, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Worcester, Massachusetts (1963-1977), chose his Easter Sunday sermon to publicly speak against the war.

Pastor Bergstrom chose a packed church on Easter Sunday to speak against the Vietnam War because he said that people of the resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be people of war. He told his hearers he offered his words not as a political “dove” (the label historically assigned to those opposed to military action), nor as a reformed political “hawk” (the label historically assigned to those in favor of military action). He told his congregation that he was no kind of bird, but he was a disciple of Jesus Christ and a child of the resurrection. As such, he could not justify the Vietnam War.

I think of Pastor Bergstrom's Easter Sermon as the United States is once again at war on Easter Sunday. Especially disturbing about this war with Iran is that the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) received over 200 complaints from members of the United States Armed Forces about superior officers justifying war with Iran as part of a holy war to bring about Armageddon and the return of Jesus Christ to earth. One combat unit commander reportedly told his troops that the war is “part of God's divine plan” and that “President Trump has been anointed by Jesus to light the signal fire in Iran to cause Armageddon and mark Christ's return to Earth.”

Let me acknowledge a few things ... international affairs, diplomacy, and decisions about war and peace are complex and policy makers must weigh countless factors. Sin exists and because sin exists there will be times when force must be met with force. Lutherans and people of faith serve honorably in the Armed Forces as a noble and patriotic duty. With that said, as a child of the resurrection let me be crystal clear:

Any belief that a self-chosen war in Iran is part of God's holy plan to bring about Armageddon and the return of Christ is a lie from the pit of hell that is to be repudiated and rejected as strongly as possible.

There is so much wrong and evil about such a narcissistic and heretical belief it's hard to know where to begin to repudiate and reject it.

[1] First, the belief is rooted in Christian Nationalism which is a nationalistic ideology that confuses the kingdom of God with a particular government. Christian Nationalism is defined by the belief that the U.S. Constitution was divinely inspired, that Christianity should be a privileged religion in the United States, and that this nation holds a uniquely privileged status in God's eyes.

For theological reasons, the ELCA repudiates Christian nationalism as a distortion of the Christian faith that crosses the line into idolatry." (Pg 57 – "Faith & Civic Life" ELCA Social Statement). Lutherans teach that the kingdom of God is not a nation, not a particular culture, not a racial grouping, not a form of government, and not even a denomination or a religion. (Pg 57 – "Faith & Civic Life" ELCA Social Statement). The kingdom of God is revealed in Jesus Christ and made known in the sacraments available for all peoples of Earth. That kingdom includes peoples from all tribes, languages, and nations and is so vast it cannot be counted (Revelation 7:9).

It is idolatry, and a violation of the First Commandment, when any nation claims a special blessing or a special call from God. The belief that United States military action can bring about Armageddon and the return of Jesus Christ is idolatry par excellence. Do the President and his military commanders really believe they have that much power to force God's hand to bring about their vision of Armageddon? If so, what becomes of God in such scenario? God is turned into a servant of this nation and President! The hubris of such belief makes the Israelites and their Golden Calf seem like child's play (Exodus 32). If Jesus himself didn't even know the time of his return (Matthew 24:36) then how do our policy makers think they themselves can impart that knowledge into Jesus? Ridiculous.

[2] Second, the belief about Armageddon is often closely tied to the idea of the rapture which is not supported by the Bible. For a faithful Lutheran response to the contemporary imagery of Armageddon and the rapture, I encourage you to read Dr. Barbara Rossing's book, "The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation."

Dr. Rossing writes that while the Book of Revelation does include some terrifying imagery about what God can do, it ultimately offers imagery of what God wants to do. The terrifying imagery is a reminder that God was more powerful than the most powerful empire on Earth at the time (the Roman Empire). But this imagery does not indicate God's desire to burn up Earth and replace it. Rather, God wants to renew and restore Earth in love and healing. Dr. Rossing points out that Revelation ends with the life-giving image of the river of the water of life flanked on either side by the tree of life bearing fruit with leaves for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1:2). Life, fruit, and healing is God's desire.

Yes, Lutherans do indeed preach and teach the final return of Jesus Christ. But, Lutheran

Christians do not believe in the rapture. We do not believe the faithful will be raptured away leaving sinners behind to suffer flames. Instead, Lutherans believe in an “already and not yet” theology. Already, today, Christ returns in the announcement of forgiveness to sinners received in faith, in the promises announced in the water and word of Holy Baptism, and in his real presence in the bread and cup of the Holy Eucharist. Alive in the Word and Sacraments the faithful are then sent as the body of Christ into the world to proclaim God’s love in our service, justice and advocacy. This makes the focus of Christian life not on escaping the world and looking towards the end times, but on our neighbors and world right now who need the love and mercy of Christ.

[3] Third, the belief is rooted in an Americanized, contemporary, and hyper-macho Jesus who favors war, aggression, and force that is not the Jesus found in the Bible. The Jesus found in the Bible healed the centurion’s daughter, taught his followers to pray for their enemies, and repudiated the Old Testament doctrine of an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth.

The Jesus found in the Bible told his followers to put down their swords when they attempted to defend him from arrest in the garden of Gethsemane ... knelt before his disciples to wash their feet and commanded them to do likewise for each other ... and then willingly gave away his earthly power on the cross in order to proclaim the way of life.

There is nothing in the Bible that justifies an image of Jesus blessing the use of American missiles, bombs and tanks as part of God’s will. There is nothing in the Bible that suggests blessing upon United States Empire over, and at the expense of, any other country in the world. There is nothing in the Bible that suggests we effect the return of Christ by murdering our neighbors.

There is in the Bible, however, the repeated judgement of the prophets against Israel when the people of God forgot the plight of the orphan, widow and immigrant. There is in the Bible the judgment of Jesus upon those judged goats who in their failure to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, cloth the naked and visit the prisoners failed to serve Jesus himself found in these neighbors in need (Matthew 25). There is in the Bible the teaching of Paul that among the fruit of the Spirit is peace, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

On this Easter Sunday here’s the truth: Jesus Christ lives! Jesus Christ defeated death by refusing to participate in the ways of sin, violence, and Empire. This good news of Christ is not a gift for, nor blessing on, one people or country at the expense of all others. Rather the life of Christ is God’s gift of life poured out upon all peoples.

As a resurrection people, we are called to participate in the resurrection of Christ in acting and speaking life in places of death. Rather than senseless war, we are called to focused actions of

costly solidarity, service and justice. Rather than supporting indiscriminate murder and death through war justified with ambiguous and changing claims, we are called to be the intentional hands and feet of Christ's love for all peoples of earth.

Because Christ lives today, grace and mercy and forgiveness live today! Because Christ lives, God's gift of unconditional mercy and grace received in faith through no works or merit of our own lives! Because Christ lives, we live to freely spread Christ's mercy and grace in the world.

Friends, alive in Christ, be people of resurrection! Tell the story of Jesus, nurture relationships, and do racial justice for the life of the world.

Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

Bishop Nathan Piphio

A Pastoral Word in Response to Acts of Antisemitism

From Bishop Kevin L. Strickland

Southeastern Synod, ELCA

March 14, 2026

Dear Beloved Ones,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, the One who calls us to love our neighbor and to seek the peace of the city where we dwell (Jeremiah 29:7).

In recent days and months, we have seen a disturbing rise in acts of antisemitism across the United States. Jewish communities have endured threats, vandalism, harassment, violence, and rhetoric that wounds the dignity of our neighbors and spreads fear in places that should be safe for worship, learning, and community life. As Christians, we must speak clearly: antisemitism is sin. It is a betrayal of the God who created all people in the divine image, and it is a denial of the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has long confessed the church's historic failures and sins toward the Jewish people. We remember with humility the ways Christian theology and preaching have contributed to antisemitism through the centuries, including harmful interpretations of scripture and the writings of Martin Luther later in his life. Because of this history, we carry a particular responsibility to reject antisemitism wherever it appears and to stand publicly with our Jewish siblings. Silence is not an option for followers of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 12:15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." Today we weep with our Jewish neighbors who are living with fear and grief. We stand beside them in solidarity and prayer. Their safety matters to us. Their flourishing matters to us. Their place in our shared communities is a gift and blessing.

Scripture also reminds us of the sacred relationship we share with the Jewish people. In Romans 11:17–18, Paul writes that Gentile Christians are grafted into the rich root of Israel's covenant with God. Our faith is inseparable from the story of the Jewish people. Jesus himself was Jewish. The prophets, the psalms, and the promises of God come to us through the people of Israel. To harm Jewish communities is to dishonor the very roots of our faith.

As the Southeastern Synod of the ELCA, we reaffirm our commitment to building relationships of trust and mutual respect with Jewish communities across Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee. I encourage our congregations and leaders to consider ways to embody that commitment in tangible ways:

- Pray regularly for Jewish communities and for the peace of all people.
- Speak clearly against antisemitic words, conspiracy theories, and hateful rhetoric when they appear.
- Build relationships with local synagogues and Jewish organizations in your community.
- Offer solidarity and presence when Jewish neighbors experience threats or attacks.
- Educate our congregations about the history and dangers of antisemitism and the church's responsibility to resist it.

In this moment when fear and division threaten the fabric of our communities, the church is called to be a witness to God's justice, mercy, and peace. We do not stand against hatred simply because it is socially unacceptable; we stand against it because the Gospel compels us. Christ calls us to be people who resist violence, protect the vulnerable, and proclaim the dignity of every human being.

The prophet Micah reminds us of God's call:

"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

May we live that calling with courage and compassion.

Let us pray:

Gracious and merciful God, you are the Creator of every people and the source of all peace.

- We pray for our Jewish neighbors and siblings in faith. Surround them with safety, strength, and hope. Heal the wounds of hatred and fear that scar our communities. Give us courage to confront antisemitism and every form of bigotry. Make your church a witness to justice, compassion, and reconciliation for the sake of the world, you love.

Through Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Amen.

In Christ's service and hope,

The Rev. Dr. Kevin L. Strickland
 Bishop, Southeastern Synod
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

**Link ["Don't Blame the Jews"](#)
 and more videos from Pastor Jim**

(Regarding ICE Actions)

A Message from the Directing Deaconess of the Deaconess

Community By Sister Dottie Almoney

January 15, 2026

As Lutheran Christians, we are living in a season of deep sorrow and lament. We are witnessing the dehumanization of our neighbors—people subjected to physical violence and mistreatment by those acting under the authority of the state. Even those who speak out against this brutality are being targeted, and some have paid with their lives.

This is not about being liberal or conservative, red or blue. It is about faith. Our call to love our neighbors and seek justice does not fit neatly into political categories. Long before our current debates, Aristotle described politics as a shared human effort toward well-being and flourishing. In a similar way, our Christian faith teaches that God intends community to be a place where all can experience the goodness God desires for creation. Society is at its best when it reflects God's justice, compassion, and care for every person.

Martin Luther understood how deeply the world needs justice. He taught that while Christians are called to be responsible citizens, we are also called to resist rulers who violate moral and natural law. When laws and policies contradict God's command to love, our ultimate loyalty belongs not to human authority, but to God.

Most people agree that immigration systems and health care structures need reform, and that many programs require thoughtful improvement. But how we treat human beings—especially those who are most vulnerable—reveals a great deal about what we truly value as a nation.

I feel the weight of our country's brokenness. Still, we are not powerless. We can pray, trusting that God is present and still at work. We can raise our voices—calling and writing our elected officials, speaking truth to power, and voting with justice in mind. We can stand alongside our neighbors, showing up for peaceful protest and bearing witness against violence and cruelty.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us, "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil... Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act." Speaking out takes courage. Standing up for justice always carries risk. Yet choosing to help our neighbors—especially when it costs us something—becomes a living testimony to the freedom, dignity, and justice God desires for the world.

May God give us courage to speak, compassion to act, and faith to keep showing up for one another—even now.

Sister Dottie Almoney, Directing Deaconess

Below is a letter from most of the Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the church. Please read what we have written and committed our public witness to be.

(Regarding ICE Actions)

A Letter from Bishops of the ELCA to the Church

October 8, 2025

Beloved in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), we write to you in this moment of national and global tension with clarity and conviction. Our faith compels us to stand where Jesus stands—with and for those whom society often seeks to exclude, erase, or diminish.

Our shared confession that every person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) grounds us in the conviction that all people possess inherent dignity. The incarnation of Jesus Christ reveals God’s profound solidarity with humanity—especially with those who are marginalized or oppressed. The gospel we proclaim insists that our neighbor’s need is the occasion for our love and that our public life is shaped by justice, mercy, and a commitment to the common good.

Further, we have a shared tradition in our social teachings which grounds us. The ELCA’s Social Message on Immigration reminds us:

“We are to respond to newcomers as we would to Christ—welcoming them, meeting their immediate needs, and advocating for justice in our laws and policies.”

Likewise, our recently adopted Social Statement Faith and Civic Life affirms that Christians are called to be “a public witness, holding leaders accountable when they fail to protect the vulnerable.”

We are living through a time when vulnerable communities are being scapegoated and attacked. Immigrants and refugees are vilified, though Scripture commands us to welcome the stranger. People of color continue to bear the devastating weight of racism woven into the fabric of our society. Transgender people, beloved by God, are being targeted with laws and rhetoric that deny their dignity and even their right to exist. These assaults on our siblings are not political abstractions—they are deep wounds in the body of Christ.

In this time of division and fear, we, as people grounded in our faith, insist on love. This commitment flows from our faith in Christ crucified and risen—the One whose love breaks down barriers, confronts hatred, and transforms hearts.

Love insists on the dignity of every human being.

Love insists on justice for the marginalized and oppressed.

Love insists that the church must reflect God's diverse, life-giving community.

Love insists that we listen, speak, and act with respect, even in disagreement.

Love insists on hope, trusting that God's kingdom of justice and peace will prevail.

This love also compels us to speak clearly against Christian Nationalism, which our Churchwide Assembly named as a distortion of the Christian faith and an unhealthy form of patriotism.

Christian Nationalism confuses the Gospel with political power, turns God into a mascot for the state, and privileges some people over others based on race, religion, or birthplace. This is not the way of Jesus. The kingdom of God is not a nation, not a culture, not a political ideology—it is God's reign of love, justice, and mercy for all people.

Therefore, as bishops of this church, we declare that the ELCA cannot be silent. Our call is clear:

- To proclaim the God-given dignity of every human being.
- To resist systems and ideologies, including Christian Nationalism, that oppress, dehumanize, or erase.
- To stand shoulder to shoulder with those who are targeted or harmed.
- To bear public witness that the love of Christ is stronger than fear, stronger than hatred, and stronger than death.

We call on all members of the ELCA to join us in prayer, advocacy, and action:

- Pray for those who are vulnerable and for all who work for justice.
- Advocate in your communities, legislatures, and Congress for laws that protect migrants, advance racial justice, and safeguard LGBTQIA+ people.
- Engage in the holy work of hospitality, creating spaces of safety, affirmation, and belonging for all God's children.
- Model respectful dialogue in a polarized world, seeking understanding rooted in love.
- Hold fast to hope, trusting that the Spirit is still at work renewing creation and reconciling the world to God.

In baptism, we are marked with the cross of Christ forever. That cross is not only a sign of our hope—it is also a summons to follow Jesus into solidarity with those who suffer.

In the power of the Spirit, let us be bold. Let us be faithful.

Let us Insist on Love—in our words, our actions, our public witness, and our life together.

Together in Christ,

Bishop Kevin Strickland Southeastern Synod
Bishop Susan J. Briner Southwestern Texas Synod
Bishop Becca Middeke-Conlin Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod
Bishop Vivian Davila Caribbean Synod
Bishop Donna Simon Central States Synod
Bishop Bill Gohl Delaware-Maryland Synod
Bishop Anne Edison-Albright East Central Synod of Wisconsin
Bishop Pedro Suarez Florida-Bahamas Synod
Bishop Deborah Hutterer Grand Canyon Synod
Bishop Paul Erickson Greater Milwaukee Synod
Bishop Felix Malpica La Crosse Area Synod
Bishop Stephen R. Herr Lower Susquehanna Synod
Bishop Wayne Miller Metropolitan Chicago Synod
Bishop Katrina D. Foster Metropolitan New York Synod
Bishop Philip C Hirsch Metropolitan Washington, D.C Synod
Bishop Jen Nagel Minneapolis Area Synod
Bishop Scott Alan Johnson Nebraska Synod
Bishop Nathan Piphon New England Synod
Bishop Christa Compton New Jersey Synod
Bishop Emily K. Hartner North Carolina Synod
Bishop Julie Schneider-Thomas North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Bishop Kevin Jones Northeastern Iowa Synod
Bishop Amy Odgren Northeastern Minnesota Synod
Bishop Laura Barbins Northeastern Ohio Synod
Bishop Christopher deForest Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod
Bishop Katherine Finegan Northern Great Lakes Synod
Bishop Stacie Fidler Northern Illinois Synod
Bishop Erik Gronberg Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod
Bishop Meggan Manlove Northwest Intermountain Synod
Bishop Martin Halom Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee Northwest Washington Synod
Bishop Daniel G. Beaudoin Northwestern Ohio Synod
Bishop Kristen Papson Northwestern PA Synod
Bishop Laurie Larson Caesar Oregon Synod
Bishop David Nagler Pacifica Synod
Bishop Meghan Johnston Aelabouni Rocky Mountain Synod
Bishop Jeff R. Johnson Sierra Pacific Synod
Bishop Ginny Aebischer South Carolina Synod
Bishop Joy Mortensen-Wiebe South-Central Synod of Wisconsin
Bishop Amy Current Southeastern Iowa Synod
Bishop Bryan Penman Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod
Bishop Brenda Bos Southwest California Synod
Bishop Melissa L. Stoller Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod
Bishop Keith Marshall Southwestern Washington
Bishop Tracey Breashears Schultz Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod
Bishop Craig Miller Upper Susquehanna Synod
Bishop Lee M. Miller II Upstate New York Synod
Bishop Phyllis Milton Virginia Synod
Bishop Scott Dalen Western Iowa Synod

To the congregations, members, and friends of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Minnesota

January 15, 2026

We, the six ELCA bishops in the state of Minnesota, are writing today with a word we hope will anchor and sustain all of us in the days to come.

In recent weeks, several thousand ICE and Border Patrol agents have been sent to our state. Their tactics of stopping and questioning our neighbors and their aggressive interactions with the communities where we live have caused fear and anxiety. We grieve the killing of Renee Good on January 7.

All of this comes after other experiences of devastating violence in recent months and years.

We are tired, and our hearts are broken. Yet we are not deterred.

At every act of violence, we have seen you respond with compassion and resilience. This has been a season marked by profound grief. It is also a season in which we have refused to be defined by what the baptismal liturgy names as “the forces that defy God.”

To our pastors, deacons, chaplains and ministry leaders, we say this: we are with you. We give thanks for your faithful leadership, for your courage and discernment, and for all the ways you live into the vocation we share. Dear friends, we believe you have been called and anointed for ministry in this time and place. It is our honor to serve with you.

To all members of our congregations, and our neighbors throughout Minnesota, we say this: we commit ourselves to continue to pray, to advocate and act alongside you, and to use the resources and gifts we have to work toward the fulfillment of the reign of God, so that all may know the abundance of life Jesus comes to give (John 10:10). We encourage you to remain connected to one another and actively support the efforts in your communities to meet the needs of those directly impacted in this time of fear and intimidation.

This past Sunday, congregations across our state marked the Baptism of our Lord. It is a celebration and remembrance of the moment when Jesus himself was baptized, and the voice of God broke through the heavens to declare, “This is my Son, the beloved, with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

We believe the voice of God still speaks. We know that all our neighbors bear the image of God. Through the waters of baptism, we have been named and claimed as beloved children of God.

It is our sure confidence in this truth that sustains us. We know we are God's children, and we know that you are, too. We pray that this truth will continue to anchor, guide and compel all of us as we work for justice for all people in every place.

We also know there are voices around us that challenge the truth of who we are and who our neighbors are. It is our fervent hope that every one of us would remain deeply rooted in our identity as God's beloved.

To that end, we write with a word of encouragement: go to church or your place of worship, ground yourselves in Scripture, and surround yourselves with those who will echo the voice of God for you. This is the nourishment that will sustain us.

Along with Presiding Bishop Curry, we "join calls for a thorough investigation into this case, accountability for the shooting and a de-escalation of ICE enforcement across the United States."

When the challenges that surround us are overwhelming, we cling to what is true. We serve a God who sees us and who enters into the beauty and messiness of human life in the person of Jesus the Christ. Because of what God in Christ has done, we know that God is with us and we are not alone (Romans 8:38-39).

Until the day the reign of God arrives in full, we continue to work for justice and peace, grounded in prayer, rooted in Scripture, and compelled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In sure and confident hope,

Bishop Regina Hassanally
Southeastern Minnesota Synod

Bishop Patricia Lull
Saint Paul Area Synod

Bishop Jen Nagel
Minneapolis Area Synod

Bishop Amy Odgren
Northeastern Minnesota Synod

Bishop Dee Pederson
Southwestern Minnesota Synod

Bishop Bill Tesch
Northwestern Minnesota Synod

Social Statements

of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

“This church shall develop social statements ... that will guide the life of this church as an institution and inform the conscience of its members in the spirit of Christian liberty.” (ELCA social statement, “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective”)

ELCA social statements are teaching and policy documents that provide broad frameworks to assist us in thinking about and discussing social issues in the context of faith and life. They are meant to help communities and individuals with moral formation, discernment and thoughtful engagement with current social issues as we participate in God’s work in the world. Social statements also set policy for the ELCA and guide its advocacy and work as a publicly engaged church. They result from an extensive process of participation and deliberation and are adopted by a two-thirds vote of an ELCA churchwide assembly.

ELCA Social Statements:

- Abortion / *Aborto* (1991)
- Caring for creation / *Medio ambiente* (1993)
- Church in society / *Iglesia en la sociedad* (1991)
- The church and criminal justice / *La iglesia y la justicia penal* (2013)
- The death penalty / *Pena de Muerte* (1991)
- Economic life / *Vida economica* (1999)
- Education / *Educación* (2007)
- Genetics / English Only (2011)
- Health and health care / *Salud y asistencia sanitaria* (2003)
- Human sexuality / *La sexualidad humana* (2009)
- Peace / *Por la paz* (1995)
- Race, ethnicity and culture / *Raza, etnicidad y cultura* (1993)
- Sexism / *Sexismo* (2019)

Learn More

elca.org/about-the-elca/who-we-are/our-purpose/social-teachings

The most recent social statement is [Faith and Civic Life / La fe y la Vida Civica](#) (2025)