



Northeastern Ohio Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

A Pastoral Letter: Gospel Witness in Public Life

Beloved in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus.

In this season of our life together, I find myself reflecting on the ways Christian language, symbols, and scripture are increasingly visible in our public life. As people shaped by the Gospel, this invites both gratitude and discernment. We give thanks whenever the name of Christ is spoken, and we also hold a deep responsibility to be clear about what that name means for us as ELCA Lutherans and for the world.

As Lutheran disciples of the ELCA variety, we are guided by our social teaching, including the recent [Faith and Civic Life](#) Social Statement. This statement reminds us that our engagement in civic life flows from our identity in Christ, not from any desire to claim cultural dominance or political power. Our calling is not to elevate Christianity as a favored religion within society, but to witness to God's grace in ways that uphold the dignity, freedom, and flourishing of all people.

Scripture itself calls us into this posture. Jesus teaches that the greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). The apostle Paul reminds us that in Christ "there is no longer Jew or Greek... for all of you are one" (Galatians 3:28). And the prophet Micah calls us "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). These texts do not point us toward privilege or exclusion, but toward humility, service, and expansive love.

In light of this, we affirm that our faith does not seek to diminish or vilify other religions or worldviews. Rather, we are called to live faithfully alongside neighbors of many beliefs, trusting that God's love is not limited by human boundaries. We also recognize that within Christianity itself there is a rich diversity of expression, and we resist any narrowing of the faith that would exclude or silence the breadth of Christ's body.

In recent days, we have been reminded of the fragility of our common life through acts of political violence. Such moments call us again to our deepest commitments. Violence, in any form, is contrary to the way of Christ. We are called instead to be people of peace, praying for all who serve in public life, for the world, and in our actions toward others. As followers of Jesus, we work toward a society shaped not by fear or harm, but by justice, mercy, and humility.

We are called to a public witness that reflects the heart of the Gospel: a witness marked by humility rather than boastfulness, by compassion rather than fear, and by

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love that reaches outward rather than drawing lines of division. We seek to be people who engage civic life thoughtfully and faithfully, advocating for justice, protecting religious freedom for all, and honoring the image of God in every person.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Laura L. H. Barbins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Dr. Laura L. H. Barbins, Bishop
Northeastern Ohio Synod, ELCA