



Greater Milwaukee Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's Work. Our Hands.

A Pastoral Letter on these Troubling Times

*“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might, and come to save us!*

*Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.
O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure.
You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.*

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.” (Psalm 80:1-7)

Dear friends in Christ:

We live in troubling times.

I had been intending to send a pastoral letter on the continuing challenges of the Coronavirus pandemic and how we are struggling to make decisions about how we will worship, connect, study, and serve, especially since it now looks like we will be well into 2021 before we can even begin to imagine returning to our buildings for large, in-person gatherings. Our partners in the [Wisconsin Council of Churches](#) have issued updated guidance on returning to worship and the results of a recent survey of Wisconsin faith leaders and the numerous stressors of this time. They report that 25% of the pastors responding have considered resigning or retiring due to the stresses of leading in this pandemic. I beg you, I urge you, to please be gentle with your pastors and with each other as you try to make hard decisions. Lean into the values expressed by Paul in Colossians 3:12-14, “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” None of us has ever lived through a pandemic of this magnitude, and the only way we will make it is if we do it together.

I have also been involved in a variety of activities concerning the second major pandemic we are confronting, the ongoing pandemic of systemic racism. On Sunday, August 23, I helped lead a Day of Repentance and Solidarity regarding the sin of racism in the white church. The video of this event is available on YouTube ([linked here](#)) and various resources are available at www.weraceahead.com. These include the invitations to participate in a sermon series and in small group conversations that will cross denominations and race to take the next steps on the long road of repentance and reconciliation. I also invite you to make use of two documents prepared for this event, one that details some of the history of how the white church has been



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complicit in perpetuating the sin of racism ([linked here](#)), and the other the actual litany of repentance used on Sunday ([linked here](#)). You are free to use them as you see fit.

And now, the events of the last few days in Kenosha, stemming from the shooting of Jacob Blake and the resulting unrest, have broken my heart. How can anything I or we say or do possibly be adequate in response to all that is transpiring? As the pain and anger and fear swirl within and around us, I would invite us all to resist the temptation to try to understand or fix things too quickly. As I said in my sermon that was released for use this past Sunday ([transcript linked here](#)), any answer that is quick or easy is rarely trustworthy. We need to allow ourselves to experience the emotions of this time and pray that God's Holy Spirit will break open our hearts that we might weep with those who weep, even as we may not fully understand.

And then, I pray that we will rededicate ourselves to the tasks of these troubling times. We have a long road ahead of us, as a church and as a society, to rebuild the trust that has been broken and to create systems that bring us together in ways that honor the dignity and beauty of each and every person. Regardless of which pandemic or challenge we are confronting, we need to listen to each other, we need to work together, and, more than anything else, we need to call upon the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit to free us from our fears that we might step forward in faith, trusting that God has not brought us this far to abandon us now.

So, pray with me, dear church; weep with me; and then, walk with me, into the future that God is preparing for us now.

In Christ,

Bishop Paul D. Erickson