



**Greater Milwaukee Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's Work. Our Hands.

**A Pastoral Letter on Recent Events**

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Siblings in Christ:

Events of recent days have been incredibly hard and painful to watch. First, the decision by the Kenosha County District Attorney not to file charges against the officer who shot Jacob Blake seven times in August was widely anticipated and, for many, deeply disappointing. While many feared a resurgence of the violent protests that took place following the shooting in August, it appears that the response has been mostly peaceful thus far. It is clear to me, however, that regardless of the decision whether or not to charge Officer Sheskey or take other actions against the individuals involved, we need to seriously reexamine how our police respond to tense situations, especially when people of color are involved. We also need to dismantle the economic and social structures that perpetuate injustice and often lead to these confrontations. Structural racism is real, and, while its impact can be fatal for those among us who are black and brown, it harms all of us.

Of course, the events in Washington, DC yesterday have quickly taken over the headlines and our attention. I found the images of people storming the halls of congress, violently seeking to intimidate our nation's leaders, to be quite distressing. That these acts were encouraged and fueled by words and actions of the President and his closest allies makes yesterday's events all the more troubling. Again, however, this should not surprise us; yesterday's events are the natural, logical continuation of the path that we have been on for quite some time.

As much as we may want to place the blame for the turmoil and unrest on specific individuals, we need to be clear that the path forward is not just about removing a few bad apples, and it's not about sawing off the diseased branch from the tree. We need to recognize that the very soil in which the tree is planted is toxic. Generations of racism and greed have resulted in acts of violence and division that sicken our souls and poison our communities. Those who work with toxic soil will tell us that it is possible to reclaim the soil and heal the earth, but it takes commitment, time, and lots of hard work.

If we hope to participate in God's mission to reshape our world, our country, and our communities to more closely reflect God's reign of justice, love, and mercy, we need to roll up our sleeves and get to work. We need to learn how to speak with courage, love, and truth; we need to learn how to listen with humility and compassion; and those of us with power and privilege need to learn when to use it to make a difference and when to release it and get out of the way.



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Through it all, I pray we will be grounded in faith, fueled by hope, and shaped by love. The road before us is long and filled with challenges and uncertainty, but God has not brought us this far to abandon us now.

*“Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”*

--Isaiah 43:16-19

In faith and hope,

Bishop Paul D. Erickson