



Greater Milwaukee Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's Work. Our Hands.

Pastoral Message on the Kyle Rittenhouse Verdict

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Greater Milwaukee Synod

November 19, 2021

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;

do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil,

but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Romans 12:14-18

Friends in Christ,

Like many across this region and the nation, I watched with concern as the verdict in the Kyle Rittenhouse case was read. While I recognize that reactions to the verdict will vary, and I do not claim to be an expert in the legal nuances of this case, nor the factors involved in mounting a claim of self-defense, I must confess that I am deeply troubled by the verdict.

That a 17-year-old child, who believed it was appropriate to carry an assault rifle into a volatile and chaotic situation, and whose behavior did not serve to bring peace but instead resulted in the death of two individuals and injuries to a third, was found to be not guilty, fills me with disappointment and deep concern. I am concerned that others may feel emboldened by this verdict, believing that taking matters into one's own hands and acting as a vigilante is acceptable behavior. I am concerned that the pain and brokenness that was revealed last summer, in Kenosha and across our country, will now deepen and persist. And I am concerned that those who long for justice and peace for all our communities will be driven more deeply into despair.

God's vision for our world, one in which love conquers evil and peace triumphs over fear, may seem more distant today, but I believe it still has the power to shape and guide us all. I pray we will find, once again, the courage, faith, and hope we need to do the difficult work in front of us, engaging in deep listening and honest reflection that bridges the social, political, and racial divides that continue to sharpen. I pray we can join together in dismantling the systems and challenging the behaviors that prevent God's vision of a beloved community from taking hold among us.