



Northeastern Minnesota Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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A Pastoral Letter regarding our Neighbors and the Gospel

To: All Northeastern Minnesota Synod Congregations

Greetings to you in Jesus' name:

You are a member of a church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Together, we are able to tackle difficult social issues with grace and courage. This is because we have been set free by the gospel. The core biblical and theological truth of God's love in Christ, demonstrated through Jesus' teachings, healings, the cross and resurrection, gives us confidence that we are justified by God's amazing grace that sets us free to live like him.

Over the past couple of years, many of you engaged deeply in the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Sermons were given all across this synod about Martin Luther's incredible and life-changing biblical insights which free us from worrying about whether God really does love and save us. Like Luther, we are so empowered by this truth that we now use our lives and energy to love the neighbor; whoever that neighbor may be.

With God's love, we can courageously love and serve our neighbor and even learn to reconcile differences regardless of whatever religion or creed. In the culture we live in right now, we all know how dangerously volatile the attitudes are of some toward Muslims, Refugees, People of Color, Native Americans, LGBTQ persons and other marginalized individuals. Christians offer a different model to the world in how to deal with our neighbors.

I commend all of you who have been in or are engaged in utilizing bible studies from our partners at Lutheran Social Service: And Who is My Neighbor? My Neighbor is Muslim, My Neighbor is Not for Sale, Not Even One Night (homeless youth). All resources are downloadable and can be found on the LSS Minnesota Website.

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

-2 Corinthians 5:16-21

You are empowered by Jesus to live like him. This is the promise of our baptism and the Holy Spirit's work. His courage is in us. His gifts of compassion are already planted in our hearts. Be bold in the good work of compassion, understanding and blessing. Offer the world around you an alternate way of dealing with people who are different from you rather than the racism, bigotry, degradation, misrepresentation, fear and hatred we so often hear. Offer the way of the Christ who lives in you.

In Christ our Lord,

+Bishop Thomas M. Aitken