



Southwestern Washington Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

The Rev. Richard E. Jaech, Bishop

30 December 2019

Dear Friends,

"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." Matthew 2:18

This past Saturday, which in the Christian calendar was the Day of the Slaughter of the Holy Innocents, a man forced his way into a Jewish rabbi's home in Monsey, New York, as he was celebrating Hanukah with his community, and the intruder began stabbing people. The next day, a man entered a Christian church in Texas with a shot gun and opened fire on the worshippers, killing one and critically wounding another, before he himself was killed by the church's security team.

It has become tragically routine in our country for people to be violently killed, even as they gather in their houses of worship. The Jewish community in the United States has become especially vulnerable to violence. The governor of New York stated that attacks against Jewish people occurred daily in his state during the seven days leading up to the Hanukah attack. This anti-Jewish violence is doubly alarming to my extended Jaech family because my cousin is the rabbi at a Jewish congregation less than twenty miles from where the attack happened in Monsey. Hate crimes against Jewish people in the US rose by 37% this last year, with hate crimes against Muslim people following close behind. With violence so rampant, none of us feel safe, not even Christian church-goers in a suburb of Ft. Worth, TX.

With all of this violence happening repeatedly around us, the Spirit of Christ comes to sustain us and keep us from slipping into numb despair. Jesus witnessed first-hand the slaughter of the Holy Innocents in his day and so comes to guide and strengthen us today, as, once again, Rachel weeps for her children. Here are some of the things we can do:

Pray for peace, **act** to address the root causes of religious violence, and **support** those who suffer from hate crimes.

As our Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton said in a letter she sent out today to the ELCA, "Twenty-five years ago, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America joined other Lutheran Christians worldwide in repudiating anti-Judaism within our own tradition. In our 1994 "Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community" we affirmed that "we recognize in anti-Semitism a contradiction and affront to the Gospel, a violation of our hope and calling, and we pledge this church to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry, both within our own circles and in the society around us."

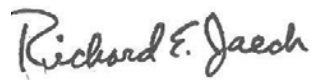
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The mission of the Southwestern Washington Synod is to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ by empowering congregations and Church leaders to grow in worship, education, outreach, stewardship and other ministries.

“This will require more of us than repeated statements. It will require building bridges of inter-religious understanding in our communities. It will require reaching out to our Jewish neighbors to offer our care, support, love, and protection. It will require our persistence in addressing the root causes of anti-Semitism, and its menacing companions of white supremacy and xenophobia.”

What can we do in our Southwestern Washington Synod? I encourage you to contact the Jewish synagogues in your area to offer your prayers and support. Send support as well to the West Freeway Church of Christ in White Settlement, TX, as they grieve. Contact our Synod office to request basic safety recommendations for congregations in view of increasing violence during worship. Work with your community neighbors to promote safety, end random or calculated violence, and provide support to those who are most often targeted.

It is through our concrete actions and prayers that the Prince of Peace is again born among us, so that all of God’s people will receive healing and peace. Blessings to you in this continuing and complicated season of Christmas.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard E. Jaech". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Bishop Rick Jaech