

The Church Cannot Stay Silent – a pastoral letter from Bishop Jeffrey Clements

August 15, 2017

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

I am sure that many of you watched events unfold in Charlottesville Friday night and through the day on Saturday as intently as I did. Lutherans, including the bishop and bishop-elect of the [Virginia Synod](#) and the bishop of the [Delaware-Maryland Synod](#), were participants in the counter-protest. I know many preachers scrambled to rewrite or revise their sermons before they were preached on Sunday to name the sins of racism, anti-Semitism and white supremacy. Several local solidarity events have already taken place in communities across Northern Illinois.

I find myself disheartened by the fact that such a blatantly racist protest could take place in 2017. It serves as further proof to me that we have not come very far in the efforts that were initiated in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. It simply horrifies me to see heavily armed Nazi and Confederate flag-bearing protesters marching as into battle. The photos depicting the hate and outrage of so many young men trouble me to my core. How have they learned to despise and fear “the other” so deeply?

Hatred, fear, racism, intolerance, bigotry, white supremacy, and violence were on full display in Charlottesville. I want to believe we are better than this. We aren't. Not now. I believe we can be, but we must stand together.

I am asking this synod to confront anew the sins of racism, anti-Semitism, and white supremacy.

As [Bishop Elizabeth Eaton said](#), “White supremacy has no place in the kingdom of God, only the love and healing of the reign of the Prince of Peace.”

I am very thankful for what many congregations are doing in their individual communities. Please continue to reach out, especially to our brothers and sisters in the African American community. Also, do not forget that the Muslim and Jewish communities are under attack as well. Let us continue to build bridges. Lutherans have been particularly good at this. Those of you who live in all white communities, please engage in the hard discussion about race in America. I believe the mainline churches, especially our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, can offer a clear voice of reason and reconciliation. Challenge the hate. Learn about white privilege. Seek opportunities for repentance and dialogue. The church cannot stay silent.

Walking with you,

Bishop Jeff Clements

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. 2 Cor. 5:18-19