

STATEMENT IN SOLIDARITY WITH OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Our children and youth are like a young Jeremiah prophesying to the people: *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jer. 29:11)*

Recently, the students, faculty and staff at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida experienced tragedy. Seventeen people - students and teachers - were killed by a 19-year-old shooter. In response, students have invited their teachers, families and allies around the nation to join with them for a March for Our Lives on March 24, 2018 in Washington, DC; calling our country into a deeper conversation about school safety and second amendment rights and responsibilities.

We recognize this incident is the latest in a long list of tragic shootings in our country and young people have been calling for protest and change for many years. Some of those young voices have been ignored or silenced because of racial and economic injustice. We cannot let that reality keep us from acting now.

Adopted in 1994, the ELCA social message on *Community Violence* remains sadly relevant today. The message speaks about the causes of violence as complex and pervasive, and of how violence breeds violence. In proclaiming the forgiveness and love of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the church addresses the root of violence while being committed to social actions that respond directly to violence and the people it affects.

From the Social Message: *In the face of violence, God's resolve for peace in human communities is unshakable. Deliberate acts to harm or kill innocent people violate God's intention for human community. God's commandment is "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13). In proclaiming God's law, we declare that all people are accountable before God and the community to honor and respect the life God has given. Christians, as salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13) and light of the world (Mt. 5:14), are called to respond to violent crime in the restorative ways taught by Jesus (Mt. 5:38-39) and shown by his actions (Jn. 8:3-11). We are empowered to take up the challenge to prevent violence and to attack the complex causes that make violence so pervasive.*

According to Lutheran theology, society is to be ruled by the civil use of the Law. Government is responsible under God for the protection of its citizens and the maintenance of justice and public order. As citizens in a democracy, we have the responsibility to join with others to hold government accountable for protecting society and ensuring justice for all, and to seek changes in policies and practices toward these ends.

That social message was amplified by a social statement, *For Peace in God's World* (1995) which, as part of its adoption, offered concrete implementation actions, including: *To call upon the members and leaders of this church to support our youth in their struggle to define their identity and vocation as present and future peacemakers...*

The Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in solidarity with our children and youth, and in response to our common baptismal vocation: living among God's faithful people, hearing the word of God and sharing in the Lord's Supper, proclaiming the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, serving all people following the example of Jesus, and striving for justice and peace in all the earth; offer our support, partnership and prayers for the March for Our Lives, its satellite city events, and our children and youth who are leading us forward as peacemakers.

The undersigned members have given their names in public and personal support of the statement.

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The Rev. Abraham D. Allende, Bishop
Northeastern Ohio Synod, ELCA

The Rev. Jon Anderson, Bishop
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