

Greetings to our Beloved Community!

My mother is a lifelong Lutheran and a Social Worker dedicated to ensuring that community members living with a developmental disability have the educational, living, and occupational opportunities they need to thrive. From childhood, she taught me that people need three things to live full, abundant lives: *safety, belonging, and purpose*. Though not stated in traditional church terms, the life and mission of Jesus Christ displayed a single-minded commitment to meeting these needs. The radical love of God embodied in Christ grounded his every action in compassion for all God's creatures and demanded that our individual lives and society be grounded in that same compassion. Motivated by the compassion of Christ and having consulted its congregation members and leaders, Immanuel Lutheran Church feels called to offer the following response to our nation's current immigration crisis:

Safety

Then Jesus said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ~ Read Mark 3:1-6

As a Prophet, Jesus demanded justice based on God's love and compassion rather than on strict adherence to the law. One story that highlights this is Jesus' healing of the man with a withered hand on Sabbath in the Synagogue. Like the prophets before him who demanded Israel care for widows, orphans, and foreigners, Jesus demanded that those who are most vulnerable be protected and cared for even if it meant setting aside the law prohibiting work on the Sabbath. Leaders of his time responded by seeking to destroy him. But Jesus' declaration from Mark 2:27 remains, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath." Through Moses, God gave the people of Israel the law so that all – the Israelites, their families, slaves, animals, and foreign residents – might experience rest. The purpose of this rest was not to control people, but rather so the image of God within each person might be respected (Ex. 20:8-11) and those most vulnerable – slaves and animals – would be safe from being worked to death (Deut. 5:12-15). To be truly safe, people need to have stability, food, healing, and opportunities. In order to create a society where such safety exists, compassion needs to be of ultimate importance. As Jesus demonstrates throughout the gospels, compassion is meant to be the foundational basis of all laws governing human community and compassion is also the measurement against which all laws are to be evaluated.

Belonging

Jesus said to [the Samaritan Woman at the Well], "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship. ~ Read John 4:5-42

As the Messiah/Christ/Savior, Jesus offers grace that frees us from individual and societal sin and brokenness through the power of forgiveness. Such forgiveness restores our relationship with God and with one another, giving us belonging as God's beloved children in community with others. The stories in Genesis proclaim a profound truth that humans were made to be in relationship with God and other creatures, but they also provide examples of how we build divisions between groups of people. In Jesus' time a major division existed between men and women as well as Jews and Samaritans. Jesus walked across this human-made division into Samaritan territory to share water, conversation, and promises with a foreign woman. He shared with her that God is not concerned with where and how she worships, her gender or past experiences, or her status as a person considered unclean by faithful Jews of their time, but rather God is concerned with bringing her into the community of believers who know God and support one another. Compassion is the foundation upon which Christ builds a sense of belonging for all people in a beloved community of God.

Purpose

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" [The lawyer] said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." ~ Read Luke 10:25-37

As our Lord, Jesus is the one Christians declare ultimate allegiance to before all else. This commitment means that faith in Christ defines the way we live – how we think, speak, and act as individuals and how we work together to structure society. Lutherans call this vocation, which means that each disciple of Christ is called to actively live out faith in our daily lives. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of our Lord Jesus Christ is that he is constantly lifting up the vocation of the most unexpected people of his day such as those who are poor, disabled, sick, foreigners, and those considered sinful or unclean. While the religious leaders of his day discounted God's call of such people - often declaring them sinners or cursed by God - Jesus invites them to follow him, gives them a role in God's mission, and lifts them up as examples of those who faithfully live out God's purpose for them. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the story of the Good Samaritan in which Jesus tells a lawyer that to inherit eternal life he must love God and neighbor and to love neighbor he must be like the Samaritan who shows mercy to a wounded, hurting person. Talk about the radical, inclusive love of God.

In order to live in God's community of abundant, eternal life the Jewish lawyer must be like his Samaritan enemy who knows his purpose in life is to share compassion with those in need regardless of who they are.

Immigration: Our Response

Right now, in our country, we have people living here – citizens, legal residents, and non-legal residents – who do not feel safe, are denied a sense of belonging, and are told they have no purpose here. We also have immigrants seeking asylum from violence, oppression, and war in their own countries being detained and prosecuted as criminals, separated from their children, and sent back to dangerous situations. Such situations create more trauma for people who have already experienced hurt and fear. Jesus died largely because he demanded that each person be treated as a beloved child of God regardless of who they are, where they come from, and even what they have done in the past. As Christians, it is that radical love of God that compels us to demand that all people be offered safety, belonging, and purpose. Therefore, as Christians, our response to our nation's current policies on immigration and asylum seekers must be guided by the inclusive compassion of Christ that remains faithful to Christ's mission of providing safety, belonging and purpose for all people. As an ELCA pastor and congregation, we make the following response to this national crisis:

- It is wrong to separate children from their parents, holding them in cages in overcrowded shelters or using foster homes intended for unaccompanied minors to take children from their families. We support the decision made by national leaders to end this detrimental policy.
- We urge for the rapid reunification of families already separated.
- All asylum seekers must be treated with compassion and respect during a process of evaluation rather than detained and prosecuted as criminals.
- We call on our national leaders to stop mass deportations and instead focus on developing immigration policies that treat people with compassion, honor the integrity of families, and offer a path to citizenship in a reasonable time-frame.
- We urge our national leaders to work together across party lines to develop a comprehensive approach to immigration that:
 - works with other nations to mitigate crises and improve living conditions
 - and establishes compassionate laws within our country that respect individuals, families, and the welfare of our entire nation.

Immigration: A Call to Action

It is critical for compassionate Christians to have a strong voice in this national conversation, so we urge all followers of Christ to find a way to act in faith. Below are some ideas:

- We can contact lawmakers to demand that they work together to develop an immigration system that treats people with compassion
- We can join peaceful protests against inhumane practices such as separating families and detaining children
- We can make prayerful, well thought-out, and constructive public statements to put pressure on leaders to change unjust policies and develop just policies
- We can model beloved community by creating space for everyone to be heard in these conversations

Above all, we lift up prayer to God for all immigrants and asylum seekers throughout the world, for our national leaders charged with the difficult task of protecting the public good and caring for all people, and for the compassion and safety of all our nation's people.

May Compassion Guide Us Always!

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