

A 60-DAY JOURNEY TOWARD JUSTICE IN A CULTURE OF GUN VIOLENCE

Introduction

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is saddened by the all-too-frequent occurrences of gun violence in this country. We mourn the loss of life. We grieve for the victims and their families, who often feel silenced. And we lament for those who have done violence to others and often feel removed from a community of faith.

Our baptismal covenant calls us to strive for justice and peace in all the world. As a church, we look for ways to bring healing to those affected by violence as well as those unjustly caught up in the criminal justice system.

As a community of faith, we strive to be visible witnesses and agents of change in addressing the root causes of violence. We recognize that, in many cases, discrimination is a factor in gun violence, and we acknowledge the toxic intersection of anti-Semitism, xenophobia, racism, and white nationalism.

With this 60-day resource we ask you to journey with us through daily observances that revolve around prayer, education, and advocacy. Through daily readings we lift up the many ways in which the ELCA has spoken out, through statements, social teaching and social-policy resolutions that address gun violence, violence prevention, and criminal justice. We are not alone in this work; we seek ways to work with our ecumenical and inter-religious partners, with other faith groups, and with other organizations that share our goals.

Meeting in 2018, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council acknowledged that churches hold fast to a message of peace while living in contexts of violence. The LWF general secretary implored member churches “to accept these challenging times as a Kairos to be the church, a

time to draw from the deep sources of faith so as never to be driven away from the message of the liberating grace of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.”

In some ways we have become inured to gun violence. We must become re-sensitized. This 60-day resource of prayer, scripture, church teaching, and information bids us to face the painful truth about gun violence and to work for its prevention through the message of Christ for the sake of the gospel.

We hope this resource will help guide us as a community of believers to follow Jesus’ call to be peacemakers, to pursue justice, and to protect the vulnerable.

October 4

The long journey toward justice and peace

Adopted in 1994, the ELCA social message “Community Violence” urges us to become more involved in countering the reality and fear of violence in our communities and our neighbors’ communities, pursuing justice and seeking peace no matter how long the journey or complex the challenge.

The message states: “Before God, we all are in captivity to sin, and in need of God’s mercy. Some have committed acts of violence. Others have been sinned against through acts of violence. Still others are overwhelmed by fears of violence. In proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ’s forgiveness, healing, and new life, the church addresses the ultimate root of violence. Through his death, Christ broke down the dividing walls of hostility, fear, and violence between people, reconciling us to God and one another (Ephesians 2:13-17). God’s reign of peace has come in Jesus Christ, and will be complete in a ‘new heaven and new earth’ where death and pain ‘will be no more’ (Revelation 21:1,4).”

October 5

Let us stand against this scourge

We are not a church that stands by silently in the face of hatred, violence or tragedy in the world. —Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, April 29, 2019

On Saturday, April 27, the last day of Passover, another shooting occurred at a synagogue—this time, Chabad of Poway, in California. [Responding on behalf of the ELCA](#), Bishop Eaton expressed our care, support, concern, and solidarity with the victims:

“We continue to grieve the shooting six months ago at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh; the mosque shootings six weeks ago in Christchurch, New Zealand; the arson one month ago of three historic Black churches in Louisiana; and the church bombings on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka.

“We find ourselves, like the psalmist, crying out to God that ‘the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary’ (Psalm 74:3b). We know that these incidents, together with others, are not isolated. They are linked through a tangled web of religious bigotry, violence, hatred and white supremacy that is meant to divide us—from each other and from God.

“Therefore, our actions to address anti-Semitism must oppose all deadly workings in our midst. This is hard work but also holy work. An attack on one faith community is an attack on all. As a sign of God’s liberating promise, let us stand against this scourge by standing together. May it be so.”

October 6

Gun violence: A widespread crisis and challenge

Gun violence is more widespread than we might realize, affecting communities in every state of our nation. Awareness and knowledge are important tools for helping us discern how to respond and take action as people of faith.

In 2018 there were 57,235 gun-related incidents in the United States (including 340 mass shootings), which resulted in 14,746 deaths and 28,202 injuries, according to data compiled (as of May 2019) by Gun Violence Archive, an independent research group.

Of the total fatalities, 667 were children (up to age 11) and 2,843 were teenagers (ages 12 to 17).

Maps, charts, and statistics of gun violence—past and present, from across the country—are accessible online at [Gun Violence Archive](#). Search under the “Chart & Maps” and “Reports” tabs.

October 7

Letting others know where we stand and what we're doing

Our church's statements, pastoral letters, resolutions, messages, documents, and resources help us bear witness to our faith, theology, values, and concerns for the world and humanity. They emerge from our study of Scripture, prayerful reflection and discernment, lively discussions, diverse perspectives, involvement in our communities, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

These writings are not just printed or digital documents but tools helping us respond as children of God to the difficult challenges of everyday life, out of concern for our neighbor and the wholeness of our communities and world.

The following [pastoral letter](#), adopted by the Conference of Bishops in March 2013, articulates our leaders' concern and our church's values and priorities, inviting us to join together in the work of ending gun violence.

A Pastoral Letter on Violence adopted by the ELCA Conference of Bishops

"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" (Jeremiah 31:15 and Matthew 2:18 NIV).

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Every faithful caregiver who sits with victims of violence knows what we know—as God's church, we are called to reduce violence and should, in most cases, restrain ourselves from using violence. Whether or not statistics show that overall violence has declined in recent years, every person wounded or killed is a precious child of God.

As bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we lament the tragedy of gun violence in our country. We are grieved by the way violence threatens and destroys life. We affirm the current soul searching and shared striving to find a way to a better future.

While the church grapples with this call to reduce violence and make our communities safer, we recognize that before God we are neither more righteous because we have guns nor are we more righteous when we favor significant restrictions. Brokenness and sin are not somehow outside of us. Even the best of us are capable of great evil. As people of God we begin by

confessing our own brokenness—revealed in both our actions and our failure to act. We trust that God will set us free and renew us in our life’s work to love our neighbors.

In this time of public attention to gun violence, local communities of faith have a unique opportunity to engage this work. As bishops, we were thankful to recognize the many resources our church has already developed (see below). We begin by listening: listening to God, to Scripture, and to each other. Providing a safe place for people to share their own stories, together we discern courses of action. Together we act. And together we return to listening—to assess the effectiveness of our efforts to reduce violence.

In the Large Catechism Luther says, “We must not kill, either by hand, heart, or word, by signs or gestures, or by aiding and abetting.” Violence begins in the human heart. Words can harm or heal. To focus only on guns is to miss the depth of our vocation. Yet, guns and access are keys to the challenges we face.

We recognize that we serve in different contexts and have different perspectives regarding what can and should be done. But as we live out our common vocations, knowing that the work will take many forms, we are committed to the work of reducing and restraining violence. This shared work is a sign of our unity in Christ.

We invite you, our sisters and brothers, to join us in this work:

- **The work of lament**—creating safe space for naming, praying, grieving, caring for one another, and sharing the hope in God’s promise of faithfulness
- **The work of moral formation and discernment**—listening to Scripture, repenting, modeling conflict resolution in daily life, addressing bullying, conducting respectful conversations, and discerning constructive strategies to reduce violence
- **The work of advocacy**—acting to address the causes and effects of violence

Knowing that we are not saved by this work, we undertake it trusting in Christ Jesus, who laid down his life for the world and who calls us to be peacemakers, to pursue justice, and to protect the vulnerable.

In this, as in all things, Christ is with us. Thanks be to God.

October 8

The causes of violence are complex

“Even when experienced as stark and brutal, the causes of violence are complex. Different forms of violence have distinctive dynamics and remedies. Social as well as individual factors

are involved. The collapse of families, economic injustices, breakdown of community institutions, unemployment, inadequate moral formation and guidance, personal irresponsibility, racism and sexism, inability to deal with anger and conflict, homophobia, low self-esteem, psychological problems, biochemical imbalances, and substance abuse—these and other factors lie behind the incidence of violent crime today. Fear, anxiety, and alienation are expressed through readily-available weapons of destruction.”

From the ELCA social message [“Community Violence”](#)

October 9

Three decades ago, a tragedy became a catalyst for action

Thirty years ago, on January 17, 1989, a 24-year-old gunman entered Cleveland Elementary School in Stockton, Calif., and killed five students and injured 30 other people.

This tragic event prompted the California Assembly to respond by passing the Assault Weapons Control Act, the first legislative restriction on assault weapons in the nation. It also was a catalyst for a number of ELCA actions and responses to gun violence, its root causes, and its impact on individuals, families, and communities—including the 1994 social message [“Community Violence.”](#)

In a letter to the community of Stockton in January 2019, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton wrote:

“As it states in the ELCA’s Community Violence message, ‘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.’

“But we can’t get there by ourselves. This is not our work, but God’s. And God is faithful. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God changed everything, a change no human effort could ever bring about. We do God’s work of seeking justice, reconciliation and healing, certain that Christ is with us.

“From the social message on Community Violence: ‘Guiding us is a vision of the age-to-come in which people are free from violence, justice is done, and the common good is realized. “They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord” (Is. 65:25). May that promise stir us to challenge and heal violence in our day.’”

October 10

Finding new ways to reduce violence and promote peace and wholeness

In the wake of the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Fla., that took the lives of 17 people, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton wrote [to the U.S. Congress](#) urging representatives “to work together to increase safety in our nation’s communities by preventing the easy access to assault style weapons and strengthening our system of federal background checks.”

Her letter expressed our desire for national legislation that is effectively enforced as part of a more comprehensive strategy to reduce gun violence in our communities, save precious lives, and create safe, thriving communities

October 11

A Prayer for Mass Violence

Let us pray:

Lord, we are bewildered.

More violence? Another mess of blood and debris on the screen?

We haven’t yet recovered from the last.

Some of us are paralyzed with fear.

We hear about bombs and guns and death, and our throats close up in terror.

We fear for our own lives, for the lives of our children and our children’s children.

We don’t know what has happened to the world we thought we knew.

We who fear confess our fear and ask for your forgiveness.

Fill us with your love, for your perfect love casts out fear.

You are with us. Your rod and your staff—they comfort us.

And we pray for the people whose lives are truly endangered,
who have more cause to fear.

Would you make safe havens for them?

Would you lead them out of the valley of the shadow of death
and into places of light and life?

Some of us are incensed with hatred.
The wars and rumors of war incite us to start our own.
Our instinct is to be overcome by evil, to take vengeance into our own hands.

We who hate to confess our hate and ask for your forgiveness,
Warm our hearts with compassion and help us pursue peace.
Grant us your wisdom as we seek your kingdom
by turning our cheek and walking another mile.

And we pray for the people whose hatred has led to death.
As you did with the apostle Paul, would you encounter them on the road?
Would you, with your very presence,
transform threats and murder into lives lived for you?

Some of us just feel numb.
The rising death tolls spin past our eyes, but our hearts no longer read them.
Years of images of violence have dulled our senses.
Another incident? We don't even flinch anymore.

We who are numb confess our numbness and ask for your forgiveness.
Sharpen our senses. Cause us to care,
even if that means feeling the pain of heartbreaking sadness.

Teach us empathy. Help us weep with those who weep.

And we pray for the people who weep.
Would you be their consolation?
You know the pain of betrayal, of abandonment, of death.
Would you heal wounds of all kinds?
Would you also—someday—give them cause to laugh?
On that day, we will laugh with those who laugh.

Lord of all, gather us up—your creatures, your world—
and bring an end to the violence.
Come, Lord Jesus.

Amen.

[“Prayer for Mass Violence”](#) is from the [Reformed Church in America](#), a full communion partner of the ELCA. Used with permission.

October 12

Facing the difficult decisions together

Though written in 1999, [“Talking Together as Christians About Tough Social Issues”](#) is still an excellent, adaptable guide for how to approach and facilitate conversations about divisive social issues such as gun violence prevention.

It describes the Spirit-driven work of sitting down together—face to face—to discuss, deliberate, pray, and make decisions about tough social issues in our faith communities:

“Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we grow in understanding and service as we talk together about the tough social dilemmas and challenges we face today. It isn’t always clear what we should do as Christians in these situations. When we as Christians face difficult decisions or situations in our personal lives, we often pray about them, read the Scriptures, or talk with a few trusted friends or a pastor. Likewise, when we face difficult decisions or situations as the church, we need to pray together, read Scripture together, study the Christian tradition, and talk together as the church about our situation and our experiences in order to seek some guidance from the Holy Spirit.

“Whether we do this individually, or with others, we are practicing what the Church has called ‘spiritual discernment.’ We discern together, trusting the Holy Spirit to work through Scriptures, Christian tradition, human reason, and our experience to speak to our situation and guide our conversation. We trust that we might come to understand what God may be telling us and leading us to do, and that the Spirit will empower us to do it.”

Another practical resource for guiding conversations is [“Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally: A Field Guide.”](#) revised edition, 2009.

October 13

The trauma changes you

On November 7, 2018, the Borderline Bar and Grill in Thousand Oaks, Calif.—a popular meeting place for university students, including those from nearby California Lutheran University—joined the growing national list of public spaces haunted by mass shootings. Thirteen people died, including the perpetrator and a police officer.

Desta Ronning Goehner, a member of the CLU staff, rolled over in bed late that night and saw her phone light up. “I had the feeling God or the Spirit was waking me up,” said Ronning, “and I

saw a bunch of texts from students and people saying 'I'm OK! I'm OK!' or 'Have you checked on this person or that person?' I wondered what was going on, and then I started piecing it together. My phone rang, and it was a local clergy friend of mine. She said there was a shooting at Borderline and that we needed to go there. ... That night changed me.

"It's almost been six months, and there's something I'm learning about trauma and compassion fatigue that usually happens around the six-month mark, where people in communities begin to realize that they're not OK, when they've been thinking that they were probably OK.

"If somebody came to Thousand Oaks or California Lutheran now, you probably wouldn't even know or hear about the shooting in most conversations. I'm trying to figure that whole thing out. It's changed me, and I haven't talked a lot about it outwardly—with other people.

"That night was really hard. I was changed, my family was changed, Cal Lutheran was changed, the community was changed. But if you come here, you probably wouldn't know that it had happened.

"The other thing I'm learning is, we had this shooting and then we also had, within 24 hours, the wildfires. I don't think there's a lot of data on trauma where people have had two traumas like a natural disaster and a man-made trauma in the same time frame. I think we're a little bit of a test case. The fires kind of stole our ability to deal with the fear and anger of the shooting—there was so much fear about the fires and people were having to evacuate.

"For about a week to a week and a half, everywhere you went, you saw people driving with the cars loaded up with all of their stuff. And people who lost loved ones at the Borderline also had to evacuate. Can you imagine losing someone you love in that way and then, within 24 hours, having to pack up your house where you have all of your memories, including packing up the room and all of the memories of the loved one you lost?

"It's been hard for me to figure out how to use my voice publicly to share my experience."

How do you move forward and continue to care?

"I feel like I'm going to have to use my voice, though," Ronning said. "I'm struck by how much of our world just moved on so quickly after this. ... Nobody is still checking in with us, asking,

'How are you doing now?' People just kind of move on, and everybody has their own stuff to deal with, but I think that I have to talk about it because I'm realizing that this is what happens to other people, not just related to gun violence, but all sorts of trauma: the rest of us move on, but it's still affecting people, families and communities, and we start to ignore it. I think that makes trauma worse."

Months later, Ronning is still working at and seeking ways to be attentive and present for students who continue to be affected, whose raw emotions resurface, often unexpectedly. “I’ve met with many students, and so have lots of other staff,” she said. “We’ve met with students, faculty, and staff to just sit and listen to them and give them space to talk about where they’re at and what they’re feeling and thinking.

“I try to ask questions or reflect back to them what I’ve heard them say. And I’m trying to follow up on a regular basis, so they know that I haven’t forgotten about them. I have an alarm set on my phone and in my calendar to check in with people so that I’m not forgetting. I’ve moved to this place, with some people, of saying you don’t have to respond, but if and when you want to, you can, so that they don’t feel pressured. I’ve also been saying, ‘Just give me a number between one and ten about how you are right now or whenever you feel like responding—ten is excellent and one is, today is horrible.’ They can call or text me, and that helps me know that, if they are a three today and last week they were a seven, I may need to try to get them more help or something.”

Ronning reminds us that many people, especially families and young people, will never be the same after a tragedy such as this. And the trauma and impact ripples out into the world and lingers, taking its toll along the way. What we can do is listen, be attentive to mental health issues, be present, be patient, and not forget those who are suffering in perceptible and unseen ways. And, we can learn to use our voices and every means possible to change what’s going on, to reduce and end the gun violence that is shattering our communities.

From a conversation with Desta Ronning Goehner, director of congregational relations, California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, Calif. Ronning is a member of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Thousand Oaks, has served on the staff of the Southwest California Synod, and is a trained and certified spiritual director.

October 14

ELCA youth raise their voices

Discover how Lutheran youth and youth ministry leaders are raising their voices with others in their communities to end gun violence, stir awareness and action, and change the culture of violence, hatred, anger, and fear in our country.

Read “[ELCA youth raise their voices against gun violence](#)” in the March 2018 issue of [Living Lutheran](#).

October 15

That they may, again, rejoice

We are a church of people moved by our faith in Jesus Christ and equipped by the Holy Spirit to share hope, compassion, and support in the world, especially with people who have suffered loss, are grieving, or live in fear of violence and injustice.

Prayer for those who have suffered abuse and violence

Let us pray:

Holy One, you do not distance yourself from the pain of your people, but in Jesus you bear that pain with all who suffer at others' hands. With your cleansing love, bring healing and strength to those who have been affected by gun violence, and by your justice, lift them up, that in body, mind, and spirit, they may again rejoice. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p.84)

October 16

How ENGAGE fosters genuine dialogue

Pitting people who own guns against those who do not, or people of different political perspectives and affiliations against one another, is not the intent or desire of our church as it works to end gun violence. In fact, we need each other's wisdom, spiritual gifts, diverse viewpoints, concerns, and help to make meaningful progress in reducing gun violence across our nation. Our congregations can be the safe, welcoming, respectful places where we gather under God's grace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to be honest with each other, have difficult conversations, care for one another, learn from each other, discern how best to be faithful to the Word of God, and embrace each other as brothers and sisters in Christ called to do God's work in the world together.

[ENGAGE: Lutherans for Gun Violence Prevention](#) is a public-witness committee on gun violence prevention, established by the [Saint Paul Area Synod](#) to meditate, educate, and advocate on gun-violence prevention in the nonviolent spirit of Jesus. It's a good example of how Lutherans—people who own guns and those who do not—can be represented, respected, and welcomed in pursuit of preventing gun violence.

"We represent diverse backgrounds and interests," the committee explains. "Our mission is to unite, not divide, and we want to encourage a balanced approach to gun violence prevention

and gun safety. Both gun-owners and non-gun owners are represented, respected, and welcomed. ENGAGE respects and affirms gun ownership rights for hunting, sport and personal protection. ENGAGE also recognizes how gun violence threatens and destroys life. As people of God, we confess our brokenness and affirm efforts to reduce gun violence, pursue justice, love our neighbors, be peacemakers, protect the vulnerable and trust in Christ Jesus.”

You can find resources for reducing gun violence, facilitating discussions and action, links to other organizations, and suggestions for getting involved on the ENGAGE website.

October 17

One bullet, many wounds

“[Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence](#),” a documentary produced by the [Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#), frames gun violence as a “disaster” and “public health” issue. It examines how one shooting affects individuals, families, and communities, and gives voice to the questions and insights that arise. In the documentary, all those scarred by gun violence arrived at the question “Why did this happen to us?” After looking at these in-depth experiences of gun violence, *Trigger* turns its attention to the bigger question: “What can we do to prevent gun violence?”

View the free 2017 online version of [Trigger](#), with new interviews and updated content.

October 18

Augsburg Fortress resources on violence

Searching for the term “violence” on the [Augsburg Fortress website](#) will lead you to a variety of books and resources, on violence and the Bible, violence prevention, trauma and healing, domestic violence, healing and hope, fear of Islam, healing violent men, peace, Jesus and nonviolence, and more.

October 19

Liberated and freed by the gospel to care and love

The ELCA’s social statement [Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective](#) identifies the true source of liberty and freedom—the gospel. With this gift of freedom and faith, we can be bold, responsible people of God, citizens who seek peace and justice, love our neighbor, mend

creation, strive to discern what is right and good, and advocate for justice and mercy in situations of brokenness.

The statement reminds us that “The Church, the baptized people of God, is created by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel to proclaim and to follow God’s crucified Messiah. As the gathering of children, youth, men, and women who hear, believe, and receive the living Christ in Word and Sacrament, the Church witnesses in word and deed to Jesus as Lord and Savior.

“The proclamation of the Gospel as the good news of God’s salvation given in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus distinguishes the Church from all other communities. The Gospel liberates from sin, death, and evil and motivates the Church to care for neighbor and the earth.

“The witness of this church in society flows from its identity as a community that lives from and for the Gospel. Faith is active in love; love calls for justice in the relationships and structures of society. It is in grateful response to God’s grace in Jesus Christ that this church carries out its responsibility for the well-being of society and the environment.”

October 20

Ministry of presence

From “[Ministry of Presence in Baton Rouge](#),” an ELCA blog post by Judith Roberts reflecting on the fatal shooting of Alton Sterling by police officers in Baton Rouge on July 5, 2016:

We believed that as a church sent for the sake of the world—the ministry of presence is about showing up in the community. Presence is also about accompaniment; we came to listen to voices and stories from the community. The third step is to discern where and how God is calling the church to respond.

(Former) Domestic Mission Unit Executive Director, Rev. Dr. Stephen Bouman knows about the need for the church to respond. Bouman served as Bishop of Metro N.Y synod during the attacks on the World Trade Center. “I learned the importance of the ministry of presence after the towers fell in New York. Two things happen by instinct. We wanted to pray and ritualize. We didn’t want to be alone. To have caring human beings show up and share the heat of the day is a deep spiritual gift. Incarnation means the real God takes on real flesh in the real world. The message of presence is that God is there. The message of persistent presence is that God will not leave until healing begins,” said Bouman.

October 21

Responding across religious traditions

In March 2019, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, and Tayyab Yunus contributed an [opinion article](#) to The Hill in response to the massacre in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The article called attention to how we grieve together, pray together, support one another, and must act together to counter discrimination and violence fueled by racism and hate—across our religious traditions.

“In the face of this kind of political violence, many people are wondering what they can do,” the authors wrote. “We need diverse faith communities to come together and support each other, and to develop plans for action. We pray and hope to model for others how this tragedy can lead us to unite and partner in creative ways. By showing up together consistently and confidently, we counter this hate and bring to life a better world together.”

October 22

Confession of Brokenness and Sin

We pray:

Merciful and compassionate God, we come to you broken and weary by the violence that surrounds us and the violence and fear that dwells within us.

We come to you, confessing that we perpetuate violence by denying its very presence in our own lives and refusing to hold accountable the institutions that live and move by violent means.

We come to you seeking mercy and forgiveness. Help us to name and claim all that separates us from you, from one another, and from the most vulnerable of your creation.

We come to you, praying for guidance and wisdom, that we might see your way, delight in your will, live as Jesus did, loving neighbors as ourselves, and be your presence for healing and justice in this world. We pray in the name of Jesus the Christ, our Way, our Truth, and our Life. Amen.

Used with permission. From the downloadable resource “[Worship Resources Following Public Violence in American Cities](#),” [Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#), 2016.

October 23

Why is advocacy important to our church?

As the ELCA, we believe God is calling us into the world to serve together. Through our direct service, we aid immediate needs before us. Through our advocacy work, we pursue systemic, long-lasting change.

The public policies written, amended, and ultimately adopted by our public officials can have ongoing effects on our neighbors who are struggling with hunger and living with poverty, and on God's creation. By telling our lawmakers how Lutheran ministries help the world and by urging them to advance legislation that reflects these commitments, we create opportunities to overcome poverty, promote peace and dignity, and defend God's creation.

Why does the ELCA understand advocacy to be part of its mission?

The ELCA social statement [Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective](#) explains, "This church must participate in social structures critically, for sin also is at work in the world. Social structures and processes combine life-giving and life-destroying dynamics in complex mixtures and in varying degrees. This church, therefore, must unite realism and vision, wisdom and courage, in its social responsibility. It needs constantly to discern when to support and when to confront society's cultural patterns, values, and powers. We are also a church that thinks of governments as helpful ways God is active in our world. This is clear from the very first generation of Lutheran reformers and their actions. When you write your public official, you are uniting with an apostolic community of Lutherans concerned with how public policies work for our neighbors as a matter of faith."

We are a church energized by lively engagement in faith and public life. We serve in response to God's love to meet human needs and protect creation. When we, as ELCA members, lift our voices together to influence policies that advance the common good, we further God's work in our world.

We are also a church that thinks of governments as helpful ways in which God is active in our world. This is clear from the first generation of Lutheran reformers and their actions. When you write to your public official, you are uniting with an apostolic community of Lutherans concerned with how public policies work for our neighbors as a matter of faith.

Learn more about advocacy, resources for becoming a more effective advocate, and what other Lutherans are doing at [ELCA Advocacy](#), and sign up to receive [ELCA Advocacy News and Alerts](#).

October 24

Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "I will not be dominated"

"All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be dominated by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12).

When the apostle Paul responds to his fellow believers about how to consider rules, traditions, and norms in social and public contexts, he speaks to us today as individuals and as a publicly engaged church.

Paul's teachings are especially relevant in our discussions about guns, gun violence, and laws as we—followers of Christ—reflect on the meaning and implications of freedom, liberty, rights, culture, self-sacrifice, and care for one another.

- How does Scripture enter into and influence your thinking, conversations, and public actions related to guns and violence in our society?
- When is it difficult or awkward to honor the word of God amid this complex and divisive public discourse?
- What or who gives you hope and encouragement for being a persistent, bold witness and advocate?

October 25

We Remember Them

At the rising sun and at its going down; We remember them.

At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter; We remember them.

At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring; We remember them.

At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer; We remember them.

At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of the autumn; We remember them.

At the beginning of the year and when it ends; We remember them.

As long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part of us as; We remember them.

When we are weary and in need of strength; We remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart; We remember them.

When we have decisions that are difficult to make; We remember them.

When we have joy we crave to share; We remember them.

When we have achievements that are based on theirs; We remember them.
For as long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part of us as; We remember them.

Written by Sylvan Kamens and Rabbi Jack Riemer and used at California Lutheran University following the 2018 mass shooting at Borderline Bar and Grill in Thousand Oaks, Calif.

October 26

Ending Gun Violence: A Resolution and Call to Action

The ELCA is one of 38 denominations partnering with the [National Council of Churches](#) “to offer common witness to Jesus Christ and to share in a ministry of reconciliation to the world in his name.” Together, through the NCC, we are a major ecumenical voice of Christian conscience to the nation, a collective voice focused on issues of particular importance to society and to people of faith—including ending gun violence.

In May 2010, the governing board of the NCC adopted “Ending Gun Violence: A Resolution and Call to Action,” which was [reaffirmed in 2018](#). Addressing the problem of gun violence in the United States, the resolution is part of a continuing response to the crisis, faithful to our shared biblical perspective.

October 27

Prayer for time of conflict, crisis, disaster

O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where impossibilities close every door
17
and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p.76)

October 28

The possibility in devastation

The following is excerpted from a [letter by Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton](#) in response to the mass shootings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 3, 2019. Our love,

concern, and support as a church in times of tragedy and need are not reserved for Christians, Lutherans, and full communion partners; they are shared freely with our neighbors of every faith, everywhere.

“Together with our ecumenical and inter-religious partners, we stand shoulder to shoulder in condemning hatred, bigotry, racism and violence whenever and wherever it occurs. We do so because all people are made in the image of God. Therefore, as an act of neighborly love, I urge you to reach out to your Muslim neighbors today and in the days to come to ask how you might offer solidarity and support—joining whenever possible with other ecumenical and inter-religious neighbors.

“I leave you with the words of Psalm 16:1: “Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.” This is my prayer—for our Muslim neighbors, for the people of Christchurch, and for all who mourn and are afraid. May we see in this devastation the possibility to be Christ’s presence with our neighbors in this world—to be present in their suffering and to be partners in God’s justice and peace.”

October 29

Prayer for day of mourning

O God, strength of those who believe in you, give comfort and clarity of vision to us in this time of need. Open our ears to hear your voice and obey your will; open our hearts that true justice and wisdom may abound; and open our hands that violent resolution of conflict may cease, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p.62)

October 30

Beating guns into garden tools

In April 2019, Christian activists Shane Claiborne and Mike Martin stopped at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Chicago to talk about gun violence trends and issues, the spiritual dynamics of fear and violence, and how to shape the dialogue about guns in America. Claiborne talked about his new book, [Beating Guns: Hope for People Who Are Weary of Violence](#), which argues against a world of rampant, commonplace gun violence. Attendees also heard from a young woman who was shot while riding in a car, the sister of a young man who lost his life to gun violence, and a local representative from Moms Demand Action.

Martin, a pastor and blacksmith, ended the evening by melting down a gun and hammering it into a garden tool, a poignant process recalling Isaiah 2:4b: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” Attendees who had been personally affected by gun violence were invited to take the first swings of the hammer.

Pilgrim’s event followed a particularly violent weekend in Chicago, leaving many participants to feel this was one of those “such a time as this” moments—God calling us individually and as a community to do what we can and not lose heart.

October 31

ELCA congregations respond to gun violence

Those wielding guns can control communities with fear, but Lutherans are bringing peace back into their neighborhoods.

“[Congregations respond to gun violence](#),” a November 2015 story from Living Lutheran, reveals how congregations in Cedar Rapids, Chicago, and Roseburg, Ore., reacted to acts of gun violence in their communities. Their responses, amid grieving and tragedy, involved members, neighbors, and other churches and organizations in bringing hope and healing to their communities and working together to end gun violence.

November 1

The role of the church in prison and reentry ministry

“One of the scariest things for people coming out of prison, particularly if they are a sex offender or have been convicted of a homicide, is the feeling of wearing a scarlet letter and being judged by everyone,” said Renae Griggs, a former police officer and homicide detective who now serves as executive director of Prison Congregations of America.

“Even if they have been in a church inside [prison], have found Christ and their faith is on fire, when they get out, they are absolutely terrified to walk into a church. To them, sadly, this is not the group of people that’s most readily going to receive them; it’s the group that is potentially going to judge and condemn them. We have to change that! It should be the opposite.

“We need an inside/outside approach where we build communities of faith both inside prisons and outside of prisons so that there is a continuum of pastoral care, so these folks know that

there's a welcoming for men and women when they come out of prison. ... [They need to know] that it's safe to walk through the doors of a congregation.

"One of my best friends in the world did 24 years on a homicide. She used to say, 'Jesus either took it all on the cross, or he didn't, including my murder.' We, as the church, need to take that approach and say we are all the same, God sees us all the same. There's no gradation; we're all at the foot of the cross, wrapped in God's grace and mercy—no matter what."

November 2

Resolving or de-escalating conflict

Many approaches to resolving or de-escalating conflict share common steps and advice. Yet every situation and the people involved in it are different. There is no one perfect formula for resolving conflict, but as people of faith centered in the gospel, we trust that the Holy Spirit helps us pursue mutual respect and care, reconciliation, forgiveness, peace, and healing.

Resolving conflict often depends on our ability to:

- manage stress quickly while remaining alert and calm. By staying calm, you can accurately read and interpret verbal and nonverbal communication.
- control our emotions and behavior. When you're in control of your emotions, you can communicate your needs without threatening, intimidating, or punishing others.
- pay attention to the feelings being expressed as well as the spoken words of others.
- be aware of and respect differences. By avoiding disrespectful or aggressive words and actions, you can almost always resolve a problem more quickly.
- remain concerned for the well-being of everyone involved and strive for resolution and reconciliation even though it may be time-consuming and difficult to envision.

November 3

Watch for the August issue of Living Lutheran

God's resolve for peace among humans is definite, but stories of violence are everywhere, from the Bible to the evening news. In 1994 the ELCA adopted the social message "[Community Violence](#)," calling for advocacy, ongoing deliberation, and an end to the cycle of violence. The church acknowledges that it's made up of people who have committed violence and people who have been affected by it, yet this still isn't too much for the gospel message to handle. We are all captive to sin and in need of God's mercy.

The [August cover story](#) in *Living Lutheran* will address how individuals and congregations around the country are reconciling with God and each other, and how the church continues to address the roots of violence 25 years after the adoption of “Community Violence.”

November 4

Pursuing our commitment to counter community violence

From the ELCA social message “[Community Violence](#)”:

“The cross and resurrection have broken the cycle of violence, freeing us for God’s future and for one another. We confess how we have sinned and been sinned against through violence. Through prayer and absolution, the power of what God has promised is able to disarm our captivity to violence. Gathered around word and sacrament, we remember and celebrate this gift of peace given the world in Jesus Christ. We are nourished and strengthened to make peace and to embrace:

- those who are victims of violence and often feel silenced. They need to speak of their pain and lingering fears, and to hear the word of new life in ways that are effective in healing the pain and overcoming the fears;
- those who have done violence to others, and their families, who often feel frozen out of the community of faith. They need to hear God’s law and gospel in their lives, so that they might turn and walk in the newness of life;
- and those who protect and defend society, enforce laws, settle disputes, and maintain domestic tranquility. They need to be supported as they live out their vocation for the sake of the common good.”

November 5

Talking with children and youth about race, identity, and diversity

“I don’t know the whole story, but I do know what I saw and heard through my kindergarten eyes and ears. I know what I learned from adults that day. And I know that it left an indelible mark and questions without satisfying answers. I can without a doubt remember the day in kindergarten when I realized that race was a thing that mattered and that I had one.”

This is the opening paragraph of [“Paying Attention to Discomfort: Identity, Race, Culture, Class & Faith”](#) by Deacon Claire Schoepp, posted October 26, 2018, by [ELCA Racial Justice Ministries](#). Schoepp serves as director of child and family ministries at Luther Memorial Church of Chicago and as administrative assistant at St. Luke’s Lutheran Church of Logan Square.

As people of faith, we must pay attention to and ponder more deeply what makes us uneasy about race and human diversity so that we can move forward in addressing gun violence, racial and socioeconomic disparities, criminal justice reform, and building up caring, respectful neighborhoods and communities. In her blog post, Schoepp offers simple suggestions and resources for talking about race and diversity with children and youth.

November 6

Caring for gunshot patients and those who treat them

“From a medical standpoint, traumas are always very emotionally hard for nurses, technicians, and physicians,” said Danielle Norman, director of Emergency Services and Critical Care at Saint Francis Hospital in Evanston, Ill. “Saint Francis is a ‘Level 1’ trauma center; we get a radio call when a trauma patient is on the way in, and there’s about five minutes of anticipation of what’s coming in. There’s always a lot of anticipation of what could come in because sometimes it’s not what we’re expecting, it could be multiple gunshot victims that come or some other situation.

“When the patient comes in, it’s all about the adrenaline; it’s making sure the patient is going to survive—checking the airway, checking circulation and trying to control the bleeding. When a nurse is going through all of that, they may not feel the emotional impact it has on them initially because it’s all about the patient.

“Once we have stabilized the trauma patient, that’s when everything starts to settle down and you’re having to look at the patients from a nonbiased standpoint. We determine who the patient is or if a gunshot trauma survivor is gang-affiliated or was the perpetrator that shot someone. You have to take your bias out of it when you treat them and be mindful that your role as a nurse is to make them whole and keep them safe in that environment. That can be very traumatic in itself.”

Norman has learned firsthand that, following any serious situation such as treating a gunshot victim, if administrators don’t address the situation afterward with nurses and physicians, those caregivers can internalize the trauma and stress, and that’s when the hospital begins to see burnout. “It’s very important after these situations that we take time to debrief, talk to each other, and ask each other: ‘Are you OK? How are you handling that? Is there anything you need? Can I send you on break?’ It’s more than just about when a patient comes in, it’s also about the

aftereffect it has. I think a lot about the newer nurses and how it can impact them. As an administrator, following up with them after a bad situation is a priority, otherwise you see nurses burn out trying to care for patients.”

Caring for the patient’s family members

Not only are staff trained for their medical work, they are also trained to assess the emotional state and responses of the family members of patients and to care for them, sometimes taking steps to de-escalate their anxiety, anger, or other emotions.

“We try to keep the family members updated about the patient,” said Norman. “You never want them sitting in the waiting room having no idea what’s going on with their loved one. ... We’re doing everything we can to let them know what’s going on, what we’re anticipating, what’s next, and to reassure them that we’re doing everything that we can to prevent any uncertainty or escalation of the situation.”

As a person of faith, Norman understands the importance of chaplains caring for and supporting the family members of patients, especially in these stressful, emotional moments. “The nursing staff and physicians are there to give quick updates, but we want someone there who can connect with family members from an emotional and personal standpoint. Having a chaplain there is extremely helpful and effective in these situations.”

Caring for the community

“Violent crimes have a huge impact on our communities,” said Norman. “As nurses, not only are we taking care of patients and families, but there is a whole community out there that is affected by violent crimes. We have to be mindful that we are taking care of a trauma patient, but the people who were not a part of the situation, not part of the violent crime, they’re also affected.

“When we are interacting with people in the community, they are well aware of all the gun violence that is happening—violent crimes are going up. We just want to reassure the community that we are a Level 1 trauma center ready to respond, we’re here and we’re out in the community doing gun violence prevention and community service. We talk to the community several times a year and we partner with the Evanston Fire Department as well as the Chicago Police Department on gun violence, gun safety, and gun buy-back programs.

“We are putting ourselves out there in the community—to be there with them, to let them know that we see what’s going on and that we want to change it. We’re not just here to save lives, but to also help them grow and change what’s going on in our community.”

November 7

Resources for prayer and worship in a time of tragedy

These [worship resources](#) for a time of tragedy were originally shared by Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod in response to the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, Conn. The Sandy Hook shooting took the lives of 20 children and six adults. The shooter took his own life as well as that of his mother.

The prayers and rites can be adapted and contextualized for communities and congregations experiencing grief, suffering, and outrage after incidents of gun violence.

Let us pray:

“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more” (Matthew 2:18).

O God, as you heard the cries of Rachel for her children, hear our cries for the people of _____—especially the children, teachers, and parents. Receive into your loving arms those who lost their lives far too soon; console all the parents and loved ones who are still numb with shock and grief; strengthen and direct the counselors, educators, religious leaders, and first responders who are helping the community grieve while processing their own loss. Let your light brighten and in time overcome the darkness of these days, as we look forward to the advent of your kingdom of peace and justice here on earth. Through Jesus Christ, your son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God forever. Amen.

November 8

A hymn lamenting gun violence

“335,609 (I Cried to God)”

I cried to God, “Three hundred thirty thousand!
Five thousand more, six hundred more, and nine!”
In just ten years, a truth we can’t imagine:
All died from guns, one loved one at a time!
And then I heard ... “Whom shall I send to grieve them?
Go tell the world: ‘I love them! They are mine!’”

I asked the Lord, “Why is there so much violence?”

If you are God, why don't you stop the pain?
God, won't you speak? For all around is madness!
Just say the word and make us whole again!"

And then I heard ... "Whom shall I send as prophets?
Speak out my truth! Shout till the killings end!"

I knelt and prayed, and wept for all the fallen;
So many lives, so many dreams now gone.
More than a name—each one was someone's cousin,
Or someone's child, or someone counted on.
And then I heard ... "Whom shall I send, who knew them,
To work for peace, to labor till the dawn?"

"Lord, here am I! And here are we, together!
No one alone can end this killing spree.
The powers of death pit one against another,
Yet you are God and you desire peace.
As mourners, prophets, laborers together,
Give us the strength to make the killings cease."

The title "[335,609 \(I Cried to God\)](#)" is derived from the statistics for gun-related deaths between 2000 and 2010. Biblical references: Exodus 20:13; Isaiah 6:8; Matthew 25:40.

Tune: Jean Sibelius, 1899 ("Be Still, My Soul")

Text: Copyright 2015 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights reserved.

Email: carolynshymns@gmail.com; New hymns: www.carolynshymns.com/

Permission is given for free use of this hymn by churches and by ecumenical groups supporting efforts to end gun violence.

Gillette serves as part-time associate pastor of First Presbyterian Union Church in Owego, N.Y.

November 9

Love and peace in the midst of violence

"In response to increasing acts of violence, Americans witness and experience a range of emotions. Fear, sadness, anger, and mistrust are strongly felt in communities across the country. Each time news emerges of another shooting, whether against law enforcement officers or against civilians, we struggle to process what happened and how to respond. In July,

the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, wrote, ‘People are suffering because their uniform is blue, suffering because their skin is black and suffering simply because of their station in life.’ In light of this suffering, it is important to look at what can be done to promote peace, address racial tensions, and create a culture that values all people.”

From “[Love & Peace in the Midst of Violence](#),” Michigan Catholic Conference, August 19, 2016.

November 10

Recognizing and addressing stress and anxiety after a traumatic event

When trying to cope with stress or anxiety from a traumatic event—personal or in your community—a good first step is to talk to someone, such as a trusted family member, a friend, a counselor or therapist, your pastor or youth minister, or even your personal physician. If you don’t know what help is available in your area, contact your synod office, a [Lutheran social service agency](#), an ecumenical partner, or a school counselor.

“[Coping With Stress](#),” a web page posted by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), provides free public information for recognizing and reducing stressful feelings and symptoms following a traumatic event. Among the topics are:

- Healthy ways to cope
- Crisis hotline suggestions
- Helping youth cope with stress
- Tips for parents
- Tips for kids and teens
- Tips for school personnel

November 11

LWF shares pain, prayers, and solidarity over Las Vegas shooting

The [following story](#) was published March 10, 2017, on the website of the Lutheran World Federation. The ELCA is a partner in the LWF’s interconnected communion of churches.

“The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has expressed its solidarity and pledged prayers for those directly affected and to the entire American people following the Sunday night shooting in Las Vegas, United States, in which 59 people lost their lives and hundreds more were injured.

“It pains us, as your communion of churches to see your people repeatedly drawn into this deadly spiral, having to cope again and again with shootings and violence,’ LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Martin Junge wrote to Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

“Noting the shocking recurrence of such events and the vulnerability and fear they cause, Junge prayed that the ELCA will continue to find words ‘of both comfort and justice that help process and interpret this terrible event, and reconnect people with their sources of hope.’

“Citing Isaiah 2:4, the general secretary prayed that the church and the people would hold fast to the vision of God’s gift of peace. ‘He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.’”

November 12

What we talk about when we talk about guns

“[Can We Talk About Guns?](#)” is a free, 13-page conversation guide collecting five provocative articles from [Christian Century](#), with study questions to help stimulate thought and guide discussions about guns, gun violence, constitutional rights, and violence prevention.

November 13

Reforming our criminal justice system

It’s nearly impossible to make progress in reducing gun violence or addressing its systemic causes without examining, discussing, and advocating for reform of our criminal justice system.

Our church has a growing wealth of resources and help for understanding, talking about, and getting involved in criminal justice reform. Here are a few places to begin:

- ELCA social statement [The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries](#)
- ELCA [Resources and Documents](#); search “criminal justice”
- ELCA [Advocacy](#)
- ELCA [Racial Justice Ministries](#)

- [Living Lutheran](#); search for articles related to “criminal justice” and “prison ministry”
- *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* [archive of stories](#) related to criminal justice

November 14

Prayer for emergency workers

God of earth and air, water and fire, height and depth, we pray for those who work in danger, who rush in to bring hope and help and comfort when others flee to safety, whose mission is to seek and save, serve and protect, and whose presence embodies the protection of the Good Shepherd. Give them caution and concern for one another, so that in safety they may do what must be done, under your watchful eye. Support them in their courage and dedication that they may continue to save lives, ease pain, and mend the torn fabric of lives and social order; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p.85)

November 15

Everyday Americans finally get their say

This year the ELCA has invested in building relationships with [Everytown for Gun Safety](#) in its work organizing and mobilizing “mayors, moms, cops, teachers, survivors, gun owners and everyday Americans” to end gun violence and build safer communities.

The Everytown group [Moms Demand Action](#) has been particularly effective in advocating for gun sense in local communities and for an end to violence across the country. In addition to everyday moms, Everytown shares the [voices and stories](#) of mayors, students, and survivors.

Online resources include a current database of state gun laws and trends; graphics and statistics; fact sheets and reports on various aspects of gun violence, root causes, and prevention; and Everytown advocacy efforts and opportunities. Some of our [ELCA Advocacy](#) state-level offices have worked on such initiatives, for example, the [Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey](#).

November 16

A perspective from South Dakota

When you talk to Rev. David Zellmer, bishop of the [South Dakota Synod](#), you can’t help but be reminded of just how complex and diverse the ELCA is in its mix of people, life experiences,

contexts, cultures, and perspectives. And yet, as church, we believe that we journey forward in Christ *together*—with all our human commonalities and differences.

“I live in a state [South Dakota] where 60 percent of the homes have a firearm in them, maybe it’s a little higher than that even,” said Zellmer. “I know there’s more firearms than there are people in South Dakota. It’s a complicated issue.

“We have a new governor and new attorney general ... and the first bill the governor proposed at the legislative session was to allow universal concealed permit without a permit to carry. So, universal carry—concealed carry—without a background check, which was widely and wildly opposed, was passed and signed. She ran for office with significant support from the sheriffs, and they did not support it. There was good polling among firearm owners, and we came in at 84 percent to keep the existing system we had in place.

“We’ve not had much issue with open concealed carry in South Dakota, that’s just not been a real topic of concern. But truthfully, I was shocked. ... That’s kind of the playing field we’ve got right now.”

Because of their synod’s context and their anticipation of responses that might be negative or divisive, many congregations and pastors are not actively discussing gun violence prevention right now, or the role of the ELCA in addressing this social issue, but they have had to address and wrestle with other complex aspects of the issue with their members and communities.

“There have been significant debates about having armed teachers or administrators in our schools,” said Zellmer. “There are schools doing that, particularly in a number of our rural ones where if you had an issue, if you had an active shooter incident, it could be a solid half hour to get someone there to respond and, more than likely, it would be one deputy sheriff. Some of our schools are very remote and isolated.

“The bigger issue around this for us is mental health treatment and access to it. We are a state that doesn’t have very good access to mental health treatment, protocols, or programs. ... To me, having access to quality mental health treatment and pharmacology treatment protocols is important, but it’s tough in this state. I’ve worked extensively on suicide prevention for 21 years. I helped write South Dakota’s state suicide prevention plan, and it comes back to firearms—we have a lot of access. ... Almost every one of the suicides I’ve worked with has been firearm-related.”

Change involves listening to and caring for each other

So where and how do you start to get at the issue of gun violence in a state where sport hunting is popular and there are more guns than people? Where do you start anywhere?

Bishop Zellmer firmly believes “it still goes back to how we treat each person.

“I think it really does matter in those daily one to two opportunities to interact with folks—I think those matter. I’m a firm believer that we choose life or death with our words and our actions as we move through the day. I think the church gets confused that we think we can use the law to change people, when, in fact, our principal teaching is that the gospel is what changes people.

“So, the question for me is, how do we preach the gospel in a way that changes the behavior of individuals and how we interact with each other at a community level, and changes how we look out for one another.

“The principal thing is how we treat one another and the ability to listen and respond in ways that are helpful as you move through the day. I’m well aware that I interact with hundreds of people in the course of a day. What was that experience like for them? Was it one that made their day better or worse? Truthfully, I believe those things matter—from the young woman behind the Starbucks counter to the old guy at the gas station, take your pick.”

Rural, urban, suburban, or a mix of all three, Bishop Zellmer’s conviction is that what we do and say every day and the quality of our interactions with each other—friend and stranger alike—have a definite impact and influence on gun violence, the behavior of people we encounter, and the well-being of our communities as a whole—even if we don’t see it. Our public witness and interactions do make a difference.

November 17

Gun violence and Christian witness

With the frequency of gun violence and mass public shootings and the waves of public grieving and outcry, what has kept us from making significant progress in preventing gun violence and saving human lives?

“How have we, as a country, continued to accept the unacceptable level of gun deaths, thereby working against our own self-interest? Consider the tremendous change we have seen around the issues of tobacco and drunk driving. In both cases, Americans have mobilized against well-funded corporate lobbies (tobacco and restaurant industries). Both efforts have utilized legislative and legal strategies. Both smoking and drunk driving have been framed as public health issues and have effected widespread cultural change. The result of this multifaceted strategy is that the political and public will have changed, and thousands of lives have been saved each year. Why have we not seen similar responses to gun violence?”

*From “[Gun Violence and Christian Witness](#),” by Katie Day, *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, May 2014, Volume 14, Issue 5.*

November 18

Service of Prayer and Lament in Times of Violence

Let us pray. O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where impossibilities close every door and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Prayer for the Day from the "[Service of Prayer and Lament in Times of Violence](#)." This and other liturgical resources can be downloaded from the "[Liturgy](#)" section of the [ELCA Worship resource page](#).

November 19

Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the cost of discipleship

"Words and thoughts are not enough. Doing good involves all the things of daily life. 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink' (Romans 12:20). In the same ways that brothers and sisters stand by each other in times of need, bind up each other's wounds, ease each other's pain, love of the enemy should do good to the enemy. Where in the world is there greater need, where are deeper wounds and pain than those of our enemies? Where is doing good more necessary and more blessed than for our enemies?"

From Dietrich Bonhoeffer's The Cost of Discipleship (1937).

November 20

Maryland church visibly recognizes gun violence victims, remembers with communion

"A Maryland United Church of Christ congregation celebrated communion outdoors on Sunday, [March 24, 2019] in the midst of a haunting reminder of the human cost of gun violence.

“A memorial of 120 T-shirts, planted in the lawn outside Westmoreland Congregational United Church of Christ in Bethesda, each bearing the name of a person killed by gun violence in the Washington, D.C. area during the first part of last year. White shirts, each [of] which marks a life lost, with ages and death dates.

“Celebrating communion outside amid the shirts helped us visibly remember those whose lives have been lost,’ said the Rev. Timothy Tutt, church pastor. ‘Communion is a reminder that God is with us—feeding us when our souls are hungry and quenching the thirst of our grief—even amid pain. The cup also nurtures us and offers us sustenance to go forth in the world to work for peace and justice.’”

Read the [entire story](#) in the online *United Church of Christ News*. [The United Church of Christ](#) is a full communion partner of the ELCA.

November 21

A new sense of what it means to be church

“As talking together as Christians about tough social issues becomes a learned, ongoing practice, we begin to sense that this activity is an important aspect of what it means to be the Church and to carry on its public ministry and witness.

“At the birth of the Church at Pentecost (see Acts 2), the Holy Spirit enabled diverse people to communicate in ways that moved beyond the usual barriers. The Spirit continues to do so in ways that strengthen and deepen who we are in relation to God and one another. Those who are ‘other’ from us challenge us when we mistake our reason and experience as being the case for all people. With new eyes we begin to see how God is active in the world—in the people, the social issues, ethical challenges, the suffering, and the delights that we discover there. We find that our relationship with God grows stronger, our relationship with people in our congregation grows deeper, and our lives and the life of our congregation are transformed. As these things continue to happen, God works to transform the world around us.

“What we confess as the Church becomes embodied in how we are in relation with one another and how we witness to God’s action in the world. Through the Spirit we participate in Christ’s death and resurrection. The power of the cross emphasizes weakness and vulnerability, rather than dominating, controlling, or ‘being right.’ It is relational, incarnational, and generative of new forms of human connection and community. The conversation of the Christian community involves all the members of the community attempting to discern in every way possible what God is doing in our world, and what God is calling us to do, in congregations and other expressions of the church, as well as in our daily lives. That is why talking together as Christians about tough social issues is so pivotal in what it means to be the Church.”

From the ELCA resource "[Talking Together as Christians About Tough Social Issues](#)."

November 22

Resources on grief and trauma, hope and healing

- Jennifer Ohman-Rodriguez, "[Grief With No Warning](#)," Living Lutheran, May 15, 2017.
- Karen A. McClintock, [When Trauma Wounds: Pathways to Healing and Hope](#), Fortress Press: 2019.
- Courtney M. Armstrong, [Transforming Traumatic Grief: Six Steps to Move From Grief to Peace After the Sudden or Violent Death of a Loved One](#), Artemecia Press: 2011.
- ELCA social message, "[Suicide Prevention](#)."
- Brent D. Christianson, [Good Grief: The Complete Set](#), Fortress Press: 2019.

November 23

"So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all" (Galatians 6:9-10a).

The work of preventing gun violence began long ago in our church and communities and will continue far beyond these 60 days of posts until it bears fruit—lasting, life-nourishing fruit!

Continue to engage in, support, and partner with others in advocating for prevention and an end to gun violence by searching [ELCA.org](#), becoming involved with [ELCA Advocacy](#), subscribing to [ELCA Advocacy News and Alerts](#), contacting your synod office, talking to your ecumenical neighbors, and partnering with local community leaders and organizations.

This is an important time to seek out, create, and share resources and ideas—together. As bearers of God's hope, healing, and justice in the world, we keep moving forward: persistent, active, and committed to ending gun violence for the sake of protecting God's gift of life and fostering safe, caring communities everywhere.