



# Southwestern Washington Synod

## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

The Rev. Richard E. Jaech, Bishop

25 May 2022

### **The Slaughter of the Innocents**

“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)

Our hearts are torn open by the killing of 19 Fourth Graders and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas. This happens just ten days the racist killing of ten African American shoppers at a grocery store in Buffalo and eight days after the killing and wounding of Taiwanese Americans at a Presbyterian church in Southern California. My heart is filled with grief, outrage, and the necessity to act.

First, utter grief. I can only begin to imagine the raw grief of the parents in Uvalde who sent their children off to school in morning, fully expecting them to return home. As a parent, my heart aches with them. I know that no mere words can address this grief.

Second, I feel utter and growing outrage that we, as a nation, continue to be possessed by the power of three destructive forces: racism, emotional despair among many youths, and our acceptance of gun violence as a “solution” to our conflicts. The tragic and hate-filled slaughter of ten African American people is the abhorrent tip of the iceberg of the disrespect and outright violence that people of color experience every day. The majority of mass murders in our country have been carried out by young white males who are in varying stages of emotional disconnection and mental fragility. However, our public financial support of mental health programs remains minimal. Finally, caught up in our fears as a nation, we allow large-scale access to destructive arms designed for war.

When it comes to mass shootings, we Lutherans cannot simply point the finger at others. An ELCA Lutheran 12<sup>th</sup> grade boy was one of the two shooters who massacred 12 students and a teacher in Columbine, Colorado in 1999. The white supremacist killing of nine Bible Study participants at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC, was carried out by a 21-year-old man who was ELCA Lutheran. We are connected not only to those who suffer, but to those who cause suffering. Therefore, we both grieve and repent.

Finally, however, we must be moved to act against racism, against gun violence, and in healing support of all those who are in a place of emotional despair and mental illness. The slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem was Herod's fault. Today, in a democracy ruled by citizens, we

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must take responsibility for stopping the killing of children in our schools and the hate crimes that murder and wound so many.

I close with a prayer written by Rev. Scott Black Johnston, a Presbyterian pastor in New York City, in response to the murder of students in Uvalde.

“Save us, O God, from vacuous promises.  
Give our society a collective spine.

Compel us to watch these funerals.  
Help us feel the weight of tiny coffins  
carried down the center aisle of limestone churches  
where little ones were promised, “You’ll be loved.”

Imprint the image of sobbing mothers and fathers,  
sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts, grandmas and grandpas  
in our so easily distracted heads.

Make us look. And remember.

And then give us strategies and gumption and trust for each other.  
Give us everything we need to stop this violence.  
Fix resolve in our hearts with your fierce love.

Surely you hold these lambs, these precious lambs, this night.  
Do not allow us to forget those who have suffered and died in this terrible season.  
Save us. Save us and the children who deserve our collective care.  
Amen.”



Bishop Rick Jaech