

Watchfulness and Response  
A Message from Bishop Rick Jaech

January 28, 2025

*What does the Lord require of you but to do justice,  
and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)*

Dear Members of the Southwestern Washington Synod,

As citizens of the United States and as followers of Christ, it is our duty to monitor the actions of every leader in order to support them when they are just and ethical and challenge them when they are unjust and unethical. About this Martin Luther was clear: Christians should be outspoken in holding governing officials accountable to serve the good of the common people. Luther wrote over 1,000 letters to the governing authorities of his day.

As I write to you, I want to be clear that I am not speaking for the entire Southwestern Washington Synod or the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Within these two bodies there are many people with a variety of opinions about the topic I address. I am speaking from my own conscience as a Lutheran bishop and as a committed citizen of the United States.

As President Donald Trump begins his new term of office, I urge you to join me in remaining alert and watchful to his actions as president in the time ahead. I have deep concern that President Trump has shown a pattern of unjust actions both in his private life and in public office. For the sake of our country, we, as citizens, must not let that pattern continue unopposed or uncorrected during his next term.

My family's origins are in the Lutheran Church of Germany. Therefore, my conscience is informed by the failure of the German Lutheran Church to speak out against the increasing atrocities committed by Adolf Hitler when he came into power in the 1930s. While we are not currently experiencing the same degree of horror as the Hitler regime, the failure of the Church to speak out at that time compels us to be prepared to speak now, when necessary. Within our recent history, it has been necessary to confront two previous presidents, Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton, who were rightly accused and faced impeachment for lying to the nation.

As I write this, two things are important to clarify:

- I am not saying that President Trump's Inauguration was invalid. The presidential election took place in a lawful way. Fair elections are a central element of our democracy and the outcome of this recent election should be honored.
- When I state my criticisms of President Trump, I am not making the same blanket criticism towards those who voted for him. The American public cast their votes based on a variety of viewpoints about many different issues, including the economy, immigration, jobs, abortion, foreign policy, and the environment. All these issues are complex and require continued conversation. I respect the fact that, in a democracy, we will often be in different places on many topics, even as we search for fair and effective ways to walk forward together.

I am deeply concerned, however, about the unethical patterns of behavior that President Trump has shown in the past and I am also concerned about actions that he has indicated he will take in his coming term. For example:

1. President Trump has repeatedly treated women in cruel, demeaning, and abusive ways in both words and actions. In fact, he has [openly bragged about his mistreatment](#) of women. In a public trial, a jury found [President Trump liable](#) of sexually abusing a woman. This abusive behavior cannot continue.
2. On his first day in office, President Trump [pardoned roughly 1500 people](#) convicted of violating the law on January 6, 2021, when they forcibly entered the US Capitol. These convicted attackers injured 150 Capitol police and Washington DC police officers, with three police officers dying from causes related to the attack. This violent invasion of the Capitol necessitated Vice President Pence and members of Congress to be evacuated for safety. President Trump's pardon and praise of these criminals is an attack on our system of law and order. For the record, I also condemn President Joe Biden for pardoning his son, Hunter Biden, of criminal charges.
3. President Trump has ridiculed and insulted men and women who serve our country in the military. This has been reported by multiple first-hand witnesses. He [ridiculed Senator John McCain](#) for being a prisoner of war in Vietnam. When in France, President Trump refused to visit two cemeteries for [US soldiers killed in World War I](#) because, he was reported to have said, the cemeteries were "filled with losers." As Commander in Chief, the President must show respect and support for all military personnel and their families, inclusive of gender and sexual orientation, who serve our nation.
4. During his first term, President Trump's administration [blocked basic job protections](#) for LGBTQIA+ people, insisting that employers should be free to fire workers for their sexual orientation or gender identity. His Department of Health and Human Services also [eliminated basic health-care nondiscrimination protections](#) for LGBTQIA+ people who had received this coverage through the Affordable Care Act.
5. As I write this letter, ICE agents and vans are patrolling the streets of our cities making mass arrests and deportations of immigrants. [Families from Afghanistan](#) and elsewhere, who are here with legal refugee documentation, are being cut off from all further church-agency assistance by order of President Trump. I agree that, as a nation, we need to thoroughly review and revise our immigration laws so that they function in a manageable, effective and compassionate way. However, we must treat all people, including immigrants and refugees, with [the respect they deserve as God's dear ones](#). "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt." (Leviticus 19:33-34) President Trump, in public statements, has repeatedly grouped and [labeled the majority of immigrants](#) coming to the US as "terrorists" "murderers", and "rapists", and furthermore said that they are [poisoning the blood of our country](#)." This broad attack is false and a sin against the Eighth Commandment. People of many different categories and circumstances are newcomers to the US, including immigrants with visas, refugees, asylum seekers, students, temporary workers, tourists, and people entering without documentation. The current mass arrests put all newcomers at risk, including the

risk of [children being forcibly separated from their parents](#), which President Trump implemented in his first term.

In addition, President-elect Trump has openly discussed carrying out future actions that are unconstitutional and immoral.

1. In his Inauguration speech, President Trump said that, under his leadership, the United States will be a nation that [“expands our territory”](#). He specifically talked about taking the Panama Canal back. In other speeches he has talked about [taking control of Greenland](#) and did not rule out using military force to do so. Mobilizing our US military to take land from other nations would make us the same kind of aggressor as Russia is in Ukraine. Some people discount President Trump’s remarks, saying he is just prone to bombastic pronouncements or that he is cleverly applying diplomatic pressure. However, among international leaders, such threatening rhetoric can have explosive consequences.
2. At the same time that President Trump pardons criminals, he also talks about [prosecuting and imprisoning people who opposed him](#) during the past eight years. Using presidential power to take revenge on rivals and silence critics would be a clear violation of the constitutionally established right to freedom of speech. It would have ominous implications for the practice of democracy in this nation.

As I said at the start of this letter, our role as citizens and as followers of Christ is to support that which is just and oppose that which is unjust. We need to stay alert, then, to what is happening in public life and respond whenever necessary to defend justice. What are some actions we can take as we enter the coming time?

- **Pray.** I intend to pray regularly for President Trump and his administration, asking that the Holy Spirit will strongly guide them in all their actions. I urge you to do the same. Pray also for Congress and all judges in our judicial system, so that they will have the moral fortitude and spiritual strength to stand for what is just. Every person needs the Spirit’s guidance and those with power need it all the more.
- **Discuss issues** with other people, including people with whom you don’t initially agree, so that mutual learning can take place. Respectful curiosity and deep dialogue are essential for our communities and nation to heal and thrive.
- **At the federal level**, communicate regularly with your senators and representatives, both to support legislation that is good and to oppose actions and policies you feel are wrong. Federal budgets are moral documents that reveal what we value and want for our nation and the world. Join with and support advocacy groups such as [Bread for the World](#) that are speaking out on issues that are important to you.
- **Get involved at the state and local level.** Federal government may seem far away, but state and city policies are increasingly important in determining how issues will be addressed, including jobs, housing, immigration, human rights, and public protection. One productive avenue for getting involved here in Washington State is through the Faith Action Network (FAN), whose website is [www.fanwa.org](#) FAN is a coalition of religious denominations and faith groups who wish to serve the common good through advocacy with state legislators.

Our Southwestern Washington Synod is an active member of FAN. For further resources, go to the website of our national ELCA [Lutheran Public Policy Office](#) in Washington, D.C.

- Lutheran Community Services Northwest provides excellent resources to refugees and immigrants throughout our region, including at their offices in Vancouver and Tacoma. They work with local congregations to provide resettlement services, mental health support, legal assistance, and community integration programs. **Just last Friday, President Trump’s administration ordered Lutheran immigration agencies to immediately stop serving the 5,870 recently arrived refugees in their care.** This stop-work order means that government funding that provides food, housing, education, job placement, healthcare, and basic needs—has come to an immediate halt. With the other synods in ELCA Region 1, we are working to provide resources to support newcomers. For more information about the immigrant and refugee ministry of Lutheran Community Services Northwest, see their website: [www.lcsnw.org](http://www.lcsnw.org)
- ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation ([www.reconcilingworks.org](http://www.reconcilingworks.org)) provides educational and advocacy **resources in behalf of LGBTQIA+ people and families.** Sixteen congregations in our Southwestern Washington Synod are Reconciling in Christ congregations.
- Abortion and the rights of women will continue to be prominent issues at the federal and state level. I encourage you to **read two social statements** adopted by our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that provide good theological background for these issues:
  - Abortion: [www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements/abortion](http://www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements/abortion)
  - Faith, Sexism and Justice [www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements/sexism](http://www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements/sexism)

There is much debate in our country about what it means to be a Christian. As Lutheran Christians, we believe that an essential part of following the Way of Christ is to love our neighbors (both near and far) and to stand with those who are vulnerable to unjust exercise of power. Now, more than ever, we, as Lutheran Christians, are called to live compassionately and justly with our neighbors (in biblical terms, to “love your neighbor as yourself”). We expect our elected leaders to do the same. Therefore, we call upon President Donald Trump and his entire administration to govern lawfully and act morally in all that they do. We commit ourselves as citizens and as Christians to challenge them to fulfill their obligations and to support them when they do. We do this with courage and hope, filled with the presence of God who is constantly “making all things new.” (Revelation 21:5)

Thank you for reading this letter and for considering my thoughts. I welcome your responses and would be glad to dialogue further with you. You can reach me at my email address: [jaechre@plu.edu](mailto:jaechre@plu.edu)

May God guide us in this important time and give us the wisdom and courage we need each day.

In Christ,

Bishop Rick Jaech