

Draft Timely Response

Primary audience: ELCA members

Secondary audience: Jewish and other partners

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February 22, 2016

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

These famous words attributed to the German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller have been on my lips in recent days: *“Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. ... Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.”*

In the face of anti-Semitism, we are called to speak out – as an expression of our love of neighbor and as our faithful response to the love of God in Jesus. In doing so, we become ambassadors of hope in the face of despair, imitators of Christ.

Our Jewish neighbors are once again living under threats, fearful for their safety and security. Over the weekend, a Jewish cemetery in St. Louis was desecrated, and on Monday, another wave of bomb threats was made to Jewish community centers across the country. This was at least the fourth round this year alone. As Christians, we affirm that Jews remain "beloved of God" and that an attack on them is an attack on those whom our God – the one God – has called "my people."

In many places, with leadership from across this church, we are reaching out and showing up with our Jewish neighbors, often with ecumenical and inter-religious partners. We can and should continue and expand these important ministries of presence.

There is also the critical long-term work. As a church, in our 1994 Declaration to the Jewish Community, we have pledged “to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry, both within our own circles and in the society around us.” This will not happen quickly. It will take concerted efforts to correct “the complicity of our own tradition within this history of hatred” and to seek deeper mutual understanding and cooperation between Lutheran Christians and the Jewish community. We have many excellent resources to aid us in these complicated but necessary tasks: <http://elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations/Jewish-Relations>.

So, let us continue to speak out, to reach out, to show up, and to root out this deadly bigotry of anti-Semitism. For the courage to do God’s will, and for the peace of our Jewish neighbors, we pray.

In peace,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton