



September 9, 2021

Dear church,

On this 20th anniversary of the September 11, 2001, tragedies, I invite us to remember, reflect and pray. Let us never forget the many lives lost or that many still carry the burdens of grief, trauma, illness, anger and regret. Those who perished that day were Indigenous people, U.S. residents and citizens of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, and foreign nationals. We remember especially the first responders and service personnel who made and make sacrifices for the public good. They are examples to us of our better angels, summoning us to stand together in sorrow and serve in common spirit.

As God's people we recall with thanksgiving God's presence and strength that have sustained us in these years. As Paul writes: "For I am convinced that neither death ... nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Drawing on such conviction, our church responded and continues to serve in the aftermath. Our pastors, chaplains, deacons and counselors provided care and support for victims and their families, first responders and their families, and service members, veterans and their families. The ministries of [Lutheran Disaster Response](#) and other organizations have provided for the needs of those most directly affected by 9/11. I am grateful that, through so many, we continue to reach out to people who have been traumatized and victimized in the wake of 9/11.

I also give thanks for our work of building bridges of peace as the way forward. The [Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign](#), a multifaith coalition of Jews, Christians and Muslims we formed together after 9/11 amid the rise in anti-Muslim bigotry and violence, has been such a bridge of peace. Our work together acknowledges that American Muslims have long been part of who "we" are as a nation and as people of faith. We are encouraged by our shared commitments, based on our common values and particular religious beliefs, to end cycles of violence, racism and religious bigotry.

Now, as then, let us pray that we will continue to hear our calling as church. This calling has been lived out by the preachers, teachers, bishops, liturgists, artists, musicians and ministers of presence who have supported our theological reflection, worship, prayer and healing work surrounding this tragedy. This calling has been made real by every church member who has drawn on the courage and freedom we have in Christ to love and serve all neighbors.

Like the first responders on 9/11, our church must be ever-present amid tremendous need, whether during a national tragedy, a natural disaster or a global pandemic. Even as our congregations gather in worship this weekend to proclaim the life, death and resurrection of



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Jesus Christ, many will go out into the world to serve as part of "[God's Work. Our Hands.](#)" Sunday. We are reminded that love of God and neighbor moves us from worship and learning into service and action.

As we remember the trauma of 9/11 and its aftermath, may we reflect on and hold fast to the promise that God has given us a future of hope. May we receive that gift with gratitude, embody it and invite others into its promise.

Merciful God through whose providing care we find strength for all seasons, turn our eyes to your mercy as we approach the anniversary of 9/11. Comfort us as we remember, acknowledge and serve; shine your light on those whose companion is sorrow. Teach us as your people to number our days that we might apply our hearts to your strength and our lives to the hope-filled future you intend for all; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

In remembrance and hope,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

REFERENCE DOCS AND POSSIBLE RESOURCE LINKS:

["Worship Resources in Remembrance of 9/11"](#) (ELCA, 2021)

["Pastoral Guidelines for Inter-Religious Observances of 9/11"](#) (ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Perspectives Blog, 2021)

["God's Work. Our Hands." day of service resources](#) (ELCA, 2021)

["ELCA Presiding Bishop Issues Statement in Observance of 15th Anniversary of 9/11"](#) (ELCA, 2016)

["Resources for Understanding and Responding to Terrorism and to Related Anti-Muslim Public Speech"](#) (ELCA, 2015)

["An Invitation From ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson"](#) (ELCA, 2011)

["ELCA Presiding Bishop, Synod Bishop Comment on Sept. 11 Fifth Anniversary"](#) (ELCA, 2006)

["Lutherans Planning to Remember Fifth Anniversary of September 11 Attacks"](#) (ELCA, 2006)

["Living in a Time of Terrorism"](#) (ELCA social message, 2004)

["How Has Preaching Changed Since September 11? Not at All, and Not Enough"](#) (*Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, 2003)



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

[“ELCA Leaders Commemorate September 11 Anniversary”](#) (ELCA, 2002)

[“ELCA Board Makes Recommendations in Light of Sept. 11 Attacks”](#) (ELCA, 2001)

[“ELCA Council Hears New Presiding Bishop's Concerns, Reflections”](#) (ELCA, 2001)

[“ELCA Bishops Respond to Sept. 11 Attacks, Aftermath”](#) (ELCA, 2001)

[“ELCA Bishop Urges Military Restraint, Attention on Terrorism Causes”](#) (ELCA, 2001)

[September 11 archives](#) (*Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, 2001)

[“Statement on Apparent Terrorist Attacks by the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA”](#) (*Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, 2001)