

Bishop Humphrey's Statement on Storming the U.S. Capitol

Like most of you, as we celebrated the Epiphany of our Lord, I watched in disbelief at the images of a mob of protestors storming the steps and scaling the walls of our U.S. Capitol. On a day when every available lawmaker, including the Vice-President were meeting inside to perform their constitutional duties, protest turned into insurrection and I felt fear, anger and anxiety. Perhaps you did too.

As someone who double majored in Political Science and History, I feel the inherent threat these actions pose to our democracy.. As a Bishop in our ELCA, I feel the inherent threat this action, (and the deeply divided nation it represents), poses to the critical role our church plays in this democracy. The church is called to be a voice speaking out loud and clear whenever we see injustice and as an example to the world of what it means to put God first, follow Jesus and love all.

The ELCA published a new Social Message on [Government and Civil Engagement](#) last summer. It is a timely document offering instruction based on Holy Scripture, our Confessions and current research. Here are a couple of quotes to consider in relation to this week's news:

- *Lutherans conclude that life in society involves honoring God's two ways of rule: the right hand, which channels God's forgiveness and unmerited love, and the left hand, which channels God's love into just governance on earth. (p.17)*
- *Government must always be held accountable. All public servants have a duty to ensure that government remains true to its purpose of protecting and fostering the common good. No function, organization, policy, or official is beyond reasoned, evidence-based criticism. Abuses of power must be named and challenged. (p.12)*
- *When government consistently acts against the public good or violates fundamental rights, citizens and other residents can raise these issues to the public view. (p.15) (An ELCA social message on Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy, adopted June 24, 2020.)*

President Trump and his supporters have declared public servants, the press, the courts and anyone else with whom he disagreed "evil," "enemies," "corrupt" and not to be believed or trusted. Words have consequences and these words helped build the movement that led to the attack on our U.S. Capitol. On Wednesday morning President Trump fueled the anger of his supporters, confirmed their fears and gave the orders to march. This cannot and should not be overlooked, excused, deflected or condoned.

Likewise, the clear demonstration of the power of racism was on display for all to see on January 6th. Racist shirts, flags and slogans inappropriately mixed with symbols of our faith were abundant. One group of protestors literally interrupted an ELCA-led prayer circle on church property by re-enacting the murder of George Floyd in their midst, slinging insults and posing for pictures mocking a "Black Lives Matter" banner. (Watch ELCA Metro DC Bishop Leila Ortiz's powerful [video](#)) This is all quite clearly repugnant and must be condemned by all who follow Jesus and proclaim the inclusive and abundant grace of God's love for which our Lord himself suffered insults, torture and death.

It is also quite hard to imagine that any group of protestors who were predominately persons of color would have been met with the same limited resistance which this group of primarily white protestors encountered. I am glad we in the Virginia Synod have already started a long process of facing, naming and praying for God's transformation of our own inherent racism. We need to challenge and change both our individual and systemic racism, including in our own congregations, synod and denomination.

While there is much to be considered and confronted, we must not allow our differences to divide us; our fears to paralyze us or cause us to turn on one another. No! As followers of Jesus we are called to unite in faith and action. Jesus said, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”* (Mt. 5:43-44 NRSV) And again, *“Do not be afraid, little flock...”* (Luke 12:32 NRSV)

In faith, not fear, we face the hard challenge of first repenting of our own complicity (through action and inaction) in creating/allowing the culture that made possible the attack on the Capitol. As Christians we are called to clearly denounce actions and words of which our Lord would never approve. As citizens and residents, we need to bind together to rebuild trust in our democracy, that has been badly damaged, so our government is safe, solid and serves the best interests of all who make our beloved land their home.

As Lutheran Christians we start most worship services by openly acknowledging “We are captive to sin... and cannot free ourselves.” As Lutheran Christians we have a rare opportunity as the church to bring together Democrats and Republicans; Liberals and Conservatives; young and old; those who identify as White and those who identify otherwise – all of us, sinners in need of God’s grace. As Lutheran Christians it is time to boldly proclaim and model what it means to love and serve both church and state for the sake of the world! May God continue to inspire and lead us to be FAITHFUL + BOLD + SERVING!

Bishop Bob Humphrey
Virginia Synod, ELCA
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