



Northeastern Ohio Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

### **A Pastoral Letter: Faith Active in Love**

One of my alma maters went through a restructuring soon after I left it. It was a much-needed restructuring, to be sure. The way that the administration went about it, however, was chaotic, unclear, and created a great deal of fear among the faculty and staff. The way the change was orchestrated demonstrated that the administration had failed to realize there were individuals who had hopes and dreams, responsibilities and dependents behind each and every mandate.

As a country we have a new administration which is undertaking vast institutional change. Whether the change that is sought is needed is a matter of a diverse of opinion; there are faithful people within that range of opinions. And yet, it certainly appears that the people who are impacted by the numbers and programs have been forgotten: that their hopes, dreams, and lived experience are of no importance. As the orders have been issued, tweaked, and rescinded, fear and anxiety have been unleashed.

I can think of three specifics to Northeastern Ohio. First, our two Latino congregations in the heart of Akron and Canton. These two communities are where 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation citizens along with brand new members of our society come together to worship. The administration's swift and blanket orders regarding immigration leave all of them fearful about their safety because the orders are not clear. This leaves the pastor and leaders of this community wondering if they can provide a welcome to these children of God. (Hebrews 13)

Second, our LGBTQIA+ siblings sit in worship with us every Sunday. They faithfully lead worship, teach Bible study, serve meals to our community, lift their voices in prayer and song, work along side us in our communities. The compounded effect of all the orders has our siblings feeling targeted, exposed, and less. (Galatians 3)

Third, our social service agencies are wondering about the federal funding that they were legally granted and for which they budgeted. One of these agencies is Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries in Cleveland which provides shelter to the unhoused, helps incarcerated individuals gain life changing career skills, and feeds the hungry. That money, along with billions of other dollars for other agencies across the nation, was frozen, then released, and the distribution still remains in question. This leaves them questioning whether they will be able to tend to those who have no food, no clothing - to the incarcerated. (Matthew 25)

Most recently there have been irresponsible allegations made against "Lutherans" in general. The unfounded comments on X (formerly Twitter) about Lutherans "money laundering" through social service agencies, and then the amplification of those allegations by the new head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) saying that these payments are "illegal" - without any proof - is a flat out lie. Our denomination and these agencies specifically have a decades long history of being the legal agent of the US government to help care for the most vulnerable in our society.

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Again, our faith-informed perspectives about the necessity of these changes or even an audit of funds are not what I am debating here - or even that "in the long term" some of these may make for a better society. What I am speaking about is the way these changes are being rolled out rapidly and without clarity, along with seemingly no regard for the lived experience of real people.

As people of faith, we come at political policy from a variety of vantage points. But as a community of faith, as people who are called, gathered, and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we are profoundly interested in every child of God. We are compelled by our faith to see that each human bears the image of God in whom we see the face of Christ. Actions that create fear, chaos, and dehumanization are things that our faith compels us to call out.

I dare say that most of us as members of ELCA congregations in Northeastern Ohio are not directly affected by the confusion and therefore are not feeling afraid. But our neighbors are. Members of our churches are. Our siblings in Christ across the nation are feeling these days with profound fear and uncertainty.

I ask you, dear church of Northeastern Ohio, to join me in prayer for all people who feel that their hopes, dreams, and lived experiences are under attack. I invite you to reach out to those who are being affected by these orders. I invite you to look them in the eyes and let them know that you see them - and more, that God is with them.

I invite you to stay informed by getting opinions from various sources. We have set up a space on our webpage ([neos-elca.org/tpa](https://neos-elca.org/tpa)) where resources and sources will be housed as they are shared with us. There are advocacy links, talking points, and help as we navigate the rapidly changing federal landscape. As other resources like this become available, I will lift them up through Walking Together (our weekly e-news) and our socials.

We worship a God of hope and peace and, as disciples of Jesus, we live out our faith in the world. We invest in our societies, political systems, and communities. We have opinions and foundations that are born out of our faith. And yet, our faith also compels us to remember that every human is made in God's image. Every human is valuable to God. And just as God has shown mercy and grace, we are compelled to reflect that grace and mercy to all we meet.



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