



# Star on the Hill

The Newsletter of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Lanesboro, Minnesota

July 2025

## Contact us at:

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P.O. Box 314

Lanesboro, MN 55949

507-467-3344

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website:

[www.staronthehill.com](http://www.staronthehill.com)

Facebook: Bethlehem  
Lutheran Church, Lanesboro

## Pastor Lisa Shank

608-797-6954

[lisadshank@gmail.com](mailto:lisadshank@gmail.com)

## Watch our worship on Facebook Sunday mornings at 10:00 am

Bethlehem Lutheran Church,  
Lanesboro

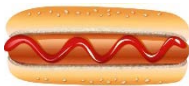
## Financial Summary

Year to Date thru May 2025

**Income: \$79,859**

**Expenses: \$68,914**

## Rhu-dog Stand Updated



Bethlehem Church Rhu-dog  
stand Raised \$1,005.00 to go  
to our Roof Fund.

Thank You to Nate Boyum,  
Tom & Sue Holst & Tim  
Kiehne for Coordinating and  
working the stand and to  
Pastor Lisa for Donating the  
Beautiful Star cookies.  
Working together made this a  
Success!

## Happy 4<sup>th</sup> Of July



Let us pray: *Holy Trinity, one  
God, you show us the  
splendor of diversity and the  
beauty of unity in your own  
divine life. Make us, who  
came from many nations with  
many languages, a united  
people that delights in our  
many different gifts. Defend  
our liberties, and give those  
whom we have entrusted  
with authority the spirit of  
wisdom, that there might be  
justice and peace in our land.  
We pray in the name of  
Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*  
(Prayer for The Nation, ELW  
page 77)

## Buffalo Bill Days

**August 1<sup>st</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup>**

**\*\*Volunteers Needed**

Bethlehem is responsible for  
staffing the Beer & Brat Stand  
at Sylvan Park, for the  
2:00 to 6:00 pm shift on  
Sunday, August 3<sup>rd</sup>.  
Please sign up on the sheet in  
the fellowship hall or contact  
the church office.



Calling all families – parents,  
children, grandparents, aunts,  
uncles and family friends!  
Bethlehem and Fountain  
families are invited.

Bethlehem wants to start a  
Wednesday Family Night  
beginning September  
10. We'd have a light meal at  
6 p.m. with learning to  
follow. We will end our time  
together by 7:30 p.m. There  
will be options for elementary  
age youth, confirmation age  
youth, high school youth,  
parents and other  
adults. We'd have a short  
devotional service to close our  
time together.

Watch for more information as  
the time comes closer.



**July 12  
August 9  
September  
13**

## At 6:30 in the Park

Bethlehem Lutheran will be  
hosting **Campfire, S'mores,  
and Song**. We will roast a few  
marshmallows and sing some  
of those songs you learned at  
Bible camp.  
We may even teach you a few  
new ones. Come with your  
lawn chair and be prepared to  
praise God in God's  
Cathedral. If there is rain, we  
will meet in the church, without  
the campfire.

## Pastor's Letter

This was part of the devotional piece I used at Bethlehem's council meeting on June 11. It comes from a devotional from the Southern Ohio Synod of the ELCA.

*. . . In the end, it was fear that closed [that church] down. For the last twenty years of their life, they were afraid that each year would be their last and none of the leaders wanted to close "on their watch." It's fair to say that their mission during that time was almost entirely "keeping their doors open," and that mission was so exhausting that they had nothing left for anything else. Their fear permeated everything they did – but they were unable to see how that fear eclipsed their joy and undermined their witness. . . .*

*It doesn't help that fear is pervasive in our society and amazingly contagious – and chameleon-like in its appearance, often taking on the veneer of virtue, masquerading as caution, "good sense," or even "good stewardship."*

*That spirit of fear is a liar: it denies the victory that Jesus has already won for us over everything that deals with death and blinds us to the abundant life that God continues to create all around us. Fear whispers caution as new opportunities present themselves and magnifies challenges until they seem insurmountable.*

*Fear denies that God is with us, that Jesus walks with us, that the Spirit empowers us with exactly the gifts we need to do the work God is calling us to do.*

*The spirit of adoption, on the other hand, reminds us of who we are and who we belong to: we are children of God, siblings of his son, Jesus, carriers of the Holy Spirit . . . That spirit of adoption empowers us, encourages us, and sustains us as we join in God's ongoing work of restoration in the world.*

*Questions to consider:*

- *Which spirit – the spirit of fear or the spirit of adoption is the "prevailing wind" in your life? In the life of Bethlehem?*
- *As you wrestle with difficult decisions, what fears cause hesitation? What hopes encourage you to move forward?*

Fear has been hardwired into us as humans from the very beginning. It is literally what helps us to survive. On the flipside, fear can also paralyze us and keep us from trying anything new. Even if that new thing is something wonderful and amazing and could bring us an abundance of blessings – fear can stop us from pursuing that new thing.

In case you haven't noticed, there is a LOT of uncertainty in our world today. There is also some uncertainty as the congregation is waiting to officially call a new pastor.

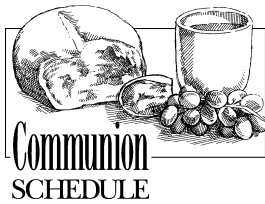
Uncertainty in any form can bring out the best or the worst in any of us. That uncertainty can cause divisions in the most loving of families, congregations, workplaces, and anywhere else we gather as people. Uncertainty can also draw us together as we have a "common enemy" in our uncertainty and fear.

In these days, I think we all need to lean into that spirit of adoption that tells us that we are part of God's family, along with even those who differ greatly from us. The spirit can help us to forgive those hurts. We lean into to the spirit of adoption who tells us that "we can" with the help of God. Incredibly, with the Spirit, we can do so much more than our imaginations can dream. Though we don't know what the future holds, God is already there, so we don't have to have any fear. God's Holy Spirit, also known as the spirit of adoption, cannot do anything in our lives contrary to the love God has for us. Even with the strongest of faiths, there will still be hard times, doubting times, and times when we want to just give up, but we can still courageously trust in our God whose love never ends.

'nuff preaching for today.

See you in church!  
Pastor Lisa





**\*Sunday, July 6<sup>th</sup>**

**\*Sunday, July 20<sup>th</sup>**



**\*Sunday, July 6<sup>th</sup>**

*First Reading: (NLT)*  
*Isaiah 66:10-14*

*Second Reading: (NLT)*  
*Galatians 6:[1-6] 7-16*

Doors: Wayne & Margaret  
Lukkason

Ushers: Laurie & Erik  
Overland, Vern Groen

Reader: Vern Groen

Altar Care & H/C:

Denise Dahle

Refreshments:

Wayne & Margaret Lukkason  
Laurie & Erik Overland

**Sunday July 13<sup>th</sup>**

*First Reading: (NLT)*  
*Deuteronomy 30:9-14*

*Psalm: 25:1-10 (NLT)*

*Second Reading: (NLT)*  
*Colossians 1:1-14*

Doors: Tim Kiehne

Ushers: Gary & Judy Kingsbury  
Tim & Julie Kiehne

Reader: Vern Groen

Refreshments: Chris Olson  
Tim & Julie Kiehne

\*\*\*\*\*

**\*Sunday, July 20<sup>th</sup>**

*First Reading: (NLT)*  
*Genesis 18:1-10a*

*Second Reading: (NLT)*  
*Colossians 1:15-28*

Doors: Tom Holst

Ushers: Tom Holst

Mike & Krissy Kelly

Reader: Karen Schreiber

Altar Care/HC: \*\*(Still Need)

Refreshments:  
Tom & Sue Holst  
Mike & Krissy Kelly

\*\*\*\*\*

**Sunday, July 27<sup>th</sup>**

*First Reading: (NLT)*  
*Genesis 18:20-32*

*Psalm: 138 (NLT)*

*Second Reading: (NLT)*  
*Colossians 2:6-15 [16-19]*

Doors: \*\*(Still Need)

Ushers: Tim & Jody Ruen  
Donnie & Charles Ruen

Reader: \*\*(Still Need)

Altar Care: Tim & Jody Ruen

Refreshments: Tim & Jody  
Ruen, Donnie & Charles Ruen

**August Service Group**  
**Please reach out to your**  
**Group Coordinators to**  
**sign up for a Sunday of**  
**Service.**

Members of the August service group Nate & Sharon Boyum, Tom Brudvig & Pam Engebretson, Darrel Egge, Jeff & Carrie Hanson, Chris & Anna Hanson, Corey & Michelle Hanson, Winston & Christine Howerton, Mike & Kelly Lawstuen, Jim & Lolly Melander, Marlin & Ardella Miner, Luther & Corky Olson, Trent & Tracy Olson, Duane Peterson, Jon & Sarah Pieper, Ben & Darla Taylor, James & Stephanie Waldow, Jon & Barb Willford, Mike & Laura Willford. **Corky & Luther Olson are the August group coordinators.**

**Senior Dining Servers**  
**at Kenilworth Apartments**

**July 11<sup>th</sup>** : Phyllis Penheiter  
Denise Dahle

**July 18<sup>th</sup>** : Deane Benson

**July 25<sup>th</sup>** : Gwen Harmon  
Jennifer Wood



# Women of the ELCA

REMEMBER  
what God has done.  
PREPARE  
for what God will do.

Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly 2025  
semnsynod.org/assembly



## Our Confirmands

**10th grade:** Preston Clarke,  
Kaylee Gilbertson, Trinity  
Hareldson, Isabelle Peterson,  
McKenna Peterson, Henry  
Semmen, Prailey Willford

**8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade:** Lux Holst,  
Theodore Pruett, Oliver  
Hanson

## Those Living with Cancer

Diane Haugen,  
Tom Papenfuss,  
Carroll Gilbertson,  
Mavis Musselman,  
Cora Slominsky  
(niece of Matt & Stacy Schultz)  
Alex Hall

## Those Recovering From Illness or Surgery

Annette Kiehne

## Those Living in Care Centers

Jerry Johnson at River Bend  
Assisted Living, Rochester

Sandy Dybing at Birchwood  
Cottages, North Mankato

Lois Gilbertson,  
Marlin & Ardella Miner  
at Chosen Valley Assisted  
Living, Chatfield

*Katie Ruen  
Edward Ruen (Husband  
and caretaker)*

4015 N Stowell Ave  
Shorewood WI, 53211

## Our Members in the Military

Esme Decker, daughter of  
Sara Xavier and Eric Decker

Lisa Peterson Abell, daughter  
of Linda (Hareldson) Peterson

Leon Peterson, son of Linda  
(Hareldson) Peterson

Tom Moen, son of Lolly  
Melander

Claire Peterson, daughter of  
Joe & Jody Peterson

Devin Troendle, son of Pat &  
Chris Troendle, grandson of  
Ed Taylor

**\*\*\*\*Please notify the office if  
there are updates to any of  
these lists**

For a summary of the  
assembly, go to  
[https://semnsynod.org/event  
s/2025-synod-assembly](https://semnsynod.org/events/2025-synod-assembly)  
Geri Ann Hansen from  
Fountain, Sue Holst from  
Bethlehem, and Pastor Lisa  
Shank attended.

Some highlights:

- † Bishop Regina Hassanally was  
re-elected bishop of the SEMN  
Synod on the first  
ballot. Congratulations  
Bishop!
- † Budget was passed
- † Resolution for Expanded  
Preaching and Teaching on  
the Stories of Women in the  
Bible - Passed
- † Two resolutions were passed  
asking for continued support  
and work with Lutheran Social  
Services, Global Refuge, and  
AMMPARO, and asking for  
our personal advocacy for  
those in need.



I am sure most of you have  
noticed the exciting new  
Grocery Store that Lanesboro  
has been Blessed with, located  
on the corner of parkway and  
coffee street. They are open  
7 days a week 10-7.  
Stop in to say Hi to our very  
own Cynthia and Peter Ruen.

## Hospice Care at Home



## WELCA activities

No WELCA Quilting until  
September

NO WELCA Bible study  
until September



Anyone interested in taking part in the **knitting ministry** may contact Sue Holst at 507 676-3239 or Jacque Crutcher at 507 259-2453.



### WELCA Quilting

Anyone interested in joining the **quilting ministry** may contact Elve Albrecht at 507 467-2910 or Phyllis Penheiter at 507-272-8643.

### WELCA Outing

Plans are being made for July 16<sup>th</sup> to go to the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Spring Valley. Lunch plans are yet to be determined. Watch for more information in Sunday bulletins.

## WELCA Requests Donations for Kits

The WELCA asks for your donations to fill kits for Lutheran World Relief. The drawstring bags along with a list of Items needed will be available in the narthex after July 4<sup>th</sup>. Items may be brought to church any time until the beginning of October to be included in this year's shipment to LWR.

Thank You for helping us with our mission.

### Thanks to all who donate and make quilts and kits for Lutheran World Relief!

Catastrophic weather has devastated our neighbors in the South and Midwest for weeks. **Tornadoes and flash flooding have caused dozens of weather-related deaths and billions in damages.** Many of those in the region, including Kentucky, are still reeling from the deadly tornadoes, wildfires and dust storms that left staggering damage in March.

**Lutheran World Relief is mobilizing a multi-state emergency response.** We are working with local partners to provide emergency assistance to more than **10,000 vulnerable people through direct financial support and distribution of essential supplies, including LWR Quilts & Kits.**

**IN OKLAHOMA, TEXAS AND  
OTHER HARD-HIT**

### COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE MIDWEST:

We're Supporting Neighbors With Life-Sustaining Support, Including Cash Assistance, Food, Water, Clean-Up Kits And Lwr Quilts & Kits.

### IN MISSISSIPPI:

We're reaching vulnerable families, who are experiencing massive flooding days after tornadoes turned their communities to rubble, with cash assistance, emergency aid and LWR Quilts & Kits.

### IN TENNESSEE AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES IN ARKANSAS AND MISSISSIPPI:

We're assisting devastated households with cash assistance, debris removal services and LWR Quilts & Kits.



We Have a New Book in our Bethlehem Library, Courtesy of Author and Bethlehem Member Jacque Crutcher. Her inscription reads as follows,  
"To my Bethlehem Family."  
Thank you, Jacque, and congratulations, on being a published Author!

# Opening a Faith-Based Conversation About AI

## By Andrew Pruett

As a member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, a warm, faithful, and close-knit congregation rooted in Scripture, service, and community, I believe it's time for us to open a thoughtful, faith-based conversation about artificial intelligence (AI).

AI is rapidly becoming part of daily life; from the smartphones we use to the headlines we read. Yet for many of us, it remains mysterious and raises important questions; personal, practical, and moral. To help us explore these issues together, I propose writing a series of articles for our church newsletter. Here are some of the key questions I will consider:

### 1. General Curiosity

- What exactly *is* AI?
- How does AI "think" if it's just a machine?
- Is AI the same as robots?
- Can AI make mistakes?
- Who controls AI?

### 2. Faith and Theology

- Can AI have a soul?
- Should Christians be worried about AI?
- What does the Bible say about things like AI?
- Could AI be used for evil?
- Can AI help spread the Gospel?
- Could AI ever replace pastors or teachers?
- How can we ensure we're using AI in a God pleasing way?

### 3. Everyday Life and Practical Concerns

- How does AI affect our jobs?
- Is it safe to trust AI with important decisions?
- What about privacy? Does AI know too much about us?

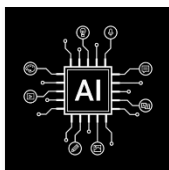
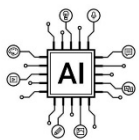
### 4. Ethical and Moral Concerns

- Can AI be biased or unfair?
- Could AI be used to control people?
- How do we ensure AI follows Christian ethics?
- What happens if AI becomes smarter than humans?
- How do we hold AI creators accountable?

### 5. Hope and Fear

- Will AI make the world better or worse?
- Could AI help solve problems like hunger, sickness, and loneliness?
- Are we creating something we can't control?
- How can we as Christians lead by example in using AI wisely and lovingly?

I don't have all the answers, only ideas to explore and many of my own questions to ask. My hope is that, together, we can navigate this new technology with faith, wisdom, and love. If you are interested in this conversation or have questions of your own, please feel free to reach out or share your thoughts.



## What *Is* AI?

By Andrew Pruett

Artificial Intelligence, or AI, is suddenly everywhere. It's in the news, on our phones, even helping doctors and farmers. But for many of us at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, it's not entirely clear what AI really is. Is it a robot? Is it safe? Should we be concerned? This is the first in a short series of articles meant to help us think together, faithfully and honestly, about AI, what it is, how it works, and what it means for us as Christians in today's world.

## So... what exactly *is* AI?

At its most basic, AI is a kind of computer program that can learn from data and make decisions. Unlike regular software that just follows fixed instructions, AI systems can improve over time by recognizing patterns and adjusting their responses. You might encounter it when you talk to your phone's voice assistant, use a map app, or even get movie recommendations on Netflix. But AI is not magic, and it's not human. It's math, logic, and data, shaped by the people who build and train it.

## How does AI “think” if it's just a machine?

AI doesn't think like we do. It doesn't feel, imagine, or pray, yet. It doesn't think it has a soul, yet. But it can process information in ways that seem, at times, surprisingly human. It can analyze huge amounts of data and “learn” patterns, much like a student studies and improves through practice.

The more data it's given, the more accurate its responses can become. In short, AI mimics thinking but does not *understand* like a person does. It runs on algorithms, not emotions (but it can accurately mimic and read emotions).

## Is AI the same as robots?

Not quite. Robots are physical machines, like the arms that assemble cars in a factory or the vacuums that clean your floors. AI is the brain; the robot is the body. Some robots have AI built in to help them navigate or interact, but AI itself can live inside software with no physical form at all. For example, ChatGPT is an AI you talk to through text, no robot body, just words on a screen.

## Can AI make mistakes?

Yes. AI can absolutely make mistakes, and sometimes big ones. Because it learns from the data it's given, if the data is flawed, limited, or biased, the AI can come to incorrect conclusions. Even when it's working well, it can misunderstand context or give answers that sound right but aren't. That's why we must use it carefully, critically, and with accountability.

In the same way we wouldn't blindly trust any one person's opinion without testing it against Scripture, reason, and experience, we shouldn't blindly trust AI either.

## Who controls AI?

This question might be the most important one of all. AI is created by people, companies, researchers, and developers, who decide how it works, what it learns from, and how it gets

used. This means the values and intentions of those people shape the AI's behavior. And as AI becomes more powerful, the question of control becomes more serious.

Who sets the rules? Who ensures fairness? Who watches for harm? These are not just technical questions; they are moral ones. As Christians, we should be part of the conversation not to reject the technology, but to help guide its use toward love, justice, and truth.

This is just the beginning. In upcoming newsletters, we'll explore questions like:

- Could AI ever replace teachers or pastors?
- What does Scripture say about wisdom, creation, and responsibility?
- Can AI help us serve our neighbors more effectively?

If you have questions you'd like to see addressed, feel free to email me or talk with me after worship. Let's learn together, with curiosity, compassion, and faith.

May God bless you and keep you safe in every place that you are.

Andrew Pruett  
Email Questions  
To: [ReadBooksByA.Pruett@gmail.com](mailto:ReadBooksByA.Pruett@gmail.com)  
In the subject please put “AI Questions” so I don't miss the email.  
Text questions to 507-993-8069

## MINUTES

Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Lanesboro, MN

Council Meeting

6:00 PM Wednesday, June 11, 2025

Present: Carrie Hanson, Brett Clarke, Nate Boyum, Tom Holst, Julie Kiehne, Tom Brudvig, Pastor Lisa.

Absent: Andrew Pruett, JoAnna Pruett

Others present: Deane Benson

Established Quorum

Call to Order by Tom Brudvig 6:07 pm

**Custodial Update:** Dean Benson reported that some shingles were flapping on the roof of the original building. Suggests we wait to see if any shingles fall off, or if the summer sun helps to adhere them.

Mowing the Church – could we consider landscaping with rocks/plants to reduce the amount of mowing (especially on the steep side).

Cement for steps – Deane is getting a bid.

Motion to purchase a new vacuum cleaner for church use – approximately \$200, moved by Carrie & seconded by Nate. Motion carried.

**Secretary's Report** – reviewed the May minutes submitted by JoAnna Pruett.

**Treasurer's Report** – financial reports provided.

Nate reported that the Rhu-Dogs at Rhubarb Fest made a net profit of \$1,000.

**Pastoral Report** – Pastor Lisa provided her monthly activity report, and also shared a reading and devotion.

**Worship and Music** –

Campfire Songs & S'mores events at Sylvan Park: June 14, July 12, Aug 4, Sept 13 at 6:30 pm.

The Chosen – consider watching this series 1 hour each Wednesday of Lent (in place of Regular Lenten Services) and have a meal following with discussion.

Church by the River – Sept. 21 at 10 am at Gene & Renee Bergstrom's w Potluck following.



**Education –**

Considering the best confirmation schedule to begin in September.

Carrie & Julie will assist in contacting families with confirmation age students.

Discussed the opportunity to start “Family Nights”, light meal and education for all age groups, on Wednesday nights at 6 pm starting in the fall.

Motion to approve all Reports moved by Brett, seconded by Nate. Motion carried.

**Old Business**

**Call Process Update** – committee is active and still in process.

**Constitution Update-** Rhonda emailed it to Synod.

**Copier** – Motion made by Nate to purchase a new printer at approximately \$715, motion seconded by Carrie. Motion carried.

**Lock on furnace room** – Dean reported it's complete and church has two keys.

**New Business**

**Buffalo Bill Days** – Bethlehem has a shift on Sunday 2-6 pm, beer and brat tent. Council participation is encouraged, plus we need other members; also sell raffle tickets.

**Highway clean-up-** we have one more year to fulfill.

Adjournment Brett moved, Nate seconded. Motion carried.

Closing Prayer – Lord's Prayer

**Submitted by: Julie Kiehne - “published but not approved”**



## **Bishop Eaton Statement on Gaza Hospital Attack**

June 10, 2025

[The Lord] heals the  
brokenhearted and binds up  
their wounds.  
—Psalm 147:3

Dear church,  
Last week, we heard from our  
partners on the ground in the  
Holy Land about another  
attack in Gaza on the Al Ahli  
Hospital — a close partner of  
the Augusta Victoria Hospital,  
which is operated by the  
Lutheran World Federation  
(LWF). The Al Ahli Hospital is  
part of the Anglican Diocese of  
Jerusalem, a sibling church to  
our direct partner the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church  
in Jordan and the Holy Land  
(ELCJHL).

Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar of  
the ELCJHL, my colleague  
and our brother in Christ, has  
issued a statement that I echo.  
As the ELCA, we join our  
ecumenical and global  
partners in “condemn[ing] in  
the strongest possible terms  
not only this latest attack on  
civilians at Al Ahli Hospital, but  
all attacks against hospitals,  
clinics, and other places of  
healing in Gaza,” as well as  
the repeated evacuation of  
already-vulnerable people.

The ELCA social  
statement For Peace in God’s  
World reminds us that “the  
Church serves when it holds  
power accountable, advocates  
justice, stands with those who  
are poor and vulnerable,  
provides sanctuary, and meets  
human need.” We call on the  
U.S. government to hold the  
Israeli government  
accountable for its clear  
violation of international law  
regarding endangerment of  
civilian life, health care  
facilities and their staff.  
We must raise our voices to  
affirm international  
humanitarian law, which states  
that hospitals are specially  
protected (Article 18, Fourth  
Geneva Convention).

We pray for the families of the  
four people killed in this  
horrific attack, and for the  
speedy healing of those  
injured. Time and again, the  
Israeli government has used  
claims of terrorist activity to  
justify attacks on Gaza’s  
medical infrastructure, and this  
attack was no different. The  
clearest result of this  
justification has been the  
killing of over 62,000 people,  
the majority of whom were  
women and children,  
according to the United  
Nations Office for the  
Coordination of Humanitarian  
Affairs (OCHA).

We join Bishop Azar in  
asserting that due protection  
of neutral medical facilities, a  
key principle of international  
humanitarian law, must be  
enforced absolutely. We  
express this with all urgency,  
considering that this principle  
has been violated numerous  
times throughout the  
catastrophe in Gaza under the  
guise of legitimate military  
operations. We reiterate our  
support for Al Ahli Hospital, its  
medical staff and the Christ-  
aligned work of healing the  
sick and vulnerable, especially  
in such unforgiving conditions.  
We call upon our elected  
government officials, medical  
institutions around the world  
and global faith leaders to  
strongly advocate for  
upholding international law, for  
instituting an immediate  
ceasefire and resuming  
humanitarian and medical aid,  
and for a justice-oriented path  
to peace so that all people in  
the land we call holy can live  
in safety and dignity.

In peace,

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



## **Bishop Eaton Statement on Travel Ban**

June 5, 2025

*"When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."*

—Leviticus 19:33-34

June 5, 2025

Dear church,

Yesterday the Trump administration announced a travel ban to the United States from 12 countries, several of which are majority-Muslim countries. The ban is scheduled to take effect on Monday, June 9, and will suspend issuing of immigrant visas that can lead to permanent residency for those from Afghanistan, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Myanmar, Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. This proclamation will also impose visa restrictions on another seven countries, including Cuba and Venezuela in the Americas.

As Lutherans, we should be concerned by these actions. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has set us free from ourselves to serve our neighbor. This expanded policy separates families from loved ones already here. Further, it prevents people — especially those escaping perilous or life-threatening situations in several of these nations — from coming to safety in the U.S.

It does not enhance our safety or reflect our vocation as Christians.

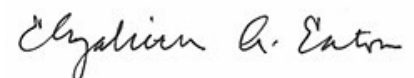
Our church has a strong history of hospitality for refugees and immigrants. After World War II, when 1 out of every 6 Lutherans in the world was a refugee or displaced person, Lutherans resettled some 57,000 refugees in the United States (ELCA social message "Immigration"). Today, with more than 60 million displaced people in the world, we continue God's work of welcoming refugees through advocacy and our vital partnership with Global Refugee. Through AMMPARO, the ELCA welcomes and accompanies asylum-seekers and refugees already in our country from many of these same countries.

The ELCA also has companion Lutheran churches in many of the countries affected by the ban, churches that, like us, are members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Over many decades our church has developed strong partnerships with several of these churches. Accompaniment of these ELCA partners requires our solidarity with and advocacy for them.

Because many of these nations are majority-Muslim and predominately Black and Brown communities, the expanded policy will have the impact of racial and religious discrimination. Over the past several years, the targeting of Muslims has had a direct and negative impact on our interfaith partners, who are harmed by not only the policy but also the rhetoric surrounding it.

Together with other Christians and Jews, we are standing with Muslims through the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign, embodying our commitment to opposing "all forms of religious bigotry, violence, discrimination, and persecution and [to standing] in solidarity with those who experience them, whether they are Christian or of another religion or worldview" ("A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A Policy Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America"). The travel ban offends our values of mutual respect for all God's children, each created in God's image. Furthermore, this ban contradicts our church's and our nation's commitments to be a place of welcome and safety for others. The ELCA social statement For Peace in God's World reminds us that "the church is a disturbing presence when it refuses to be silent and instead speaks the truth." On this policy, we, as Lutherans, cannot be silent. The history of our church, the life-giving relationships we share with other Lutherans worldwide, and our commitments to and with interreligious partners are the basis not only for our concern but also for our continued accompaniment, advocacy and action.

In peace,



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

**Bishop Eaton Issues  
Statement on Fatal  
Shooting of Two Israeli  
Embassy Staff in  
Washington, D.C.**

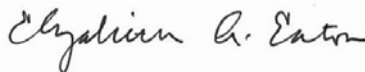
May 22, 2025

CHICAGO — We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America join our ecumenical and interreligious partners in expressing deep concern and sadness over the deadly shooting of two Israeli Embassy staff outside an event in Washington, D.C. This is yet another example of the rising, deadly scourge of anti-Semitism in our society.

As a church, we have declared that “we recognize in anti-Semitism a contradiction and an affront to the Gospel, a violation of our hope and calling, and we pledge this church to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry, both within our own circles and in the society around us” (“A Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community,” 1994).

We are profoundly disturbed that these killings occurred in the context of an event hosted by the American Jewish Committee that featured speakers from the Multifaith Alliance and the humanitarian organization IsraAID.

These speakers were discussing avenues for ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches Gaza, precisely the kind of collaboration that is needed, and that the ELCA supports, as the people of Gaza face starvation and intentional mass displacement. We join in praying for the families, colleagues and communities of Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, for the Jewish people in our communities who live in fear, and for the people of Gaza, who desperately need humanitarian aid to stay alive. We continue to call for a ceasefire, for the release of hostages and those being detained, for access to humanitarian aid, for rejecting violence as a means of solving the ongoing destruction of the Holy Land, and for recommitments to dialogue, reconciliation and humanization. Above all, we pray for God’s peace and justice to prevail for all people.



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## *Star on the Hill*



*July 2025*