



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

January 2017

*“Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”
He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”
(Luke 10:36-37)*

On Monday, Jan. 16, our nation will be observing Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Dr. King’s work called us, all of us, to remember our neighbor. As a civil rights leader, he spoke about a vision of a beloved community and preached a message of love. In his last speech, Dr. King said, “Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness” and then spoke of the parable of the good Samaritan. The key of the parable is the man’s answer: Being a neighbor is about how you act when a person is in need. As children of God, we are all deserving of respect and dignity.

According to Pew Research, in the ELCA more than 90 percent of the congregations are involved in some type of food ministry whether it’s a soup kitchen, food pantry, community garden or other similar ministry. Through ELCA World Hunger, our congregations accompany communities toward a world of justice where all will be fed. We care for our neighbor in need, and Martin Luther King Jr. Day is another opportunity for us to be the church for one another.

We are called to be a church that embraces each person and confronts racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, age, gender, familial, sexual orientation, physical and economic barriers that can manifest themselves in unjust treatment, inequalities, exclusion and violence. Do we always get it right? No, we don’t. As a denomination that must do better at being a neighbor – we have work to do.

Dr. King once said, “There comes a time when silence is betrayal.” When we hear and witness actions that intimidate, degrade, make fun of or cause harm and choose not to speak up, we are equally complicit in the action. Whether it is on a school playground, a water cooler conversation, in the halls of Congress or in a congregation, we are called to be the Samaritan. We are to show mercy and break our silence of all forms of violence including those that stereotype groups, demean people and discriminate.

Next week our nation will be inaugurating the next president. No matter whom you voted for, we are all children of God. Through our baptism in Jesus Christ, we become part of the One Body; what happens to one happens to us all. When we all are allowed to thrive in a society that treats everyone with dignity and respect, we open ourselves up to endless possibilities for prosperity. When opportunities are awarded to everyone equally, then we will all have unity and social harmony.

In his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Dr. King wrote, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” We have an opportunity to continue the legacy and vision of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. not just on King Day, but every day, at all times and in all places.

God’s peace,

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