*"See what great love God has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"*

– 1 John 3:1

Dear Ones,

This past week, the President of the United States declared that there are only two genders: male and female. This declaration does not only go against what we understand about science and about who we are as created beings, but it tries to erase the humanity of our transgender, non-binary, and non-conforming siblings.

As people of faith, our identity is directly related to who God is; it is in 1 John that we are reminded of our calling as children of God. There is no executive order or person who can take away the identity that is the core of our being. Our identity as a beloved child of God transcends the two genders contained in the executive order issued recently.

In 2019, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America published a social statement entitled *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action.* It is in this social statement that we are reminded, "Studies of humans reveal rich diversity, showing that individuals do not neatly fall into two categories. Some people are intersex: their bodies are neither male nor female. People have a diversity of characteristics, most of which cannot be assigned exclusively to one sex or gender or another. Among humans, sex and gender are more accurately characterized as multidimensional." (pg. 32). This political action has left our siblings who do not fit inside the binary feeling erased and afraid.

As your bishop, and as a beloved child of God, I stand with my transgender, non-binary, and non-conforming siblings who have wrestled and struggled and wept and wondered about their gender identity. They remain beloved children of God, who are deeply and powerfully known by God, as attested to by Jesus. In the remarkable complexity of human experience and creation, we trust that the beauty of God's handiwork is made known in each person and in their experience of their own gender identity and expression.

At the 2024 Northern Illinois Synod Assembly, a resolution passed that invited us into discernment on becoming a Reconciling in Christ synod. The Task Force will lead several conversations in the coming months that will discuss what it means to be a Reconciling in Christ synod and how we are called to being a place where all feel and understand their identity as a beloved child of God. The work that this team has been tasked to do has not changed given the recent executive orders.

What we will not debate is the full humanity and beloved identity of God's children, the ones that look like us and the ones that are inviting us into seeing the beautiful tapestry of God's creation. We all live and move and have our being in the image of God.

To those who are transgender, non-binary, or non-conforming: I see you. I love you. Know that you are precious and that your life is valued.

To the families of those on this journey: I walk with you. The church is not a perfect place, but I am here to support you and continually remind you that God has declared not only you but also the ones you love as beloved.

+Bishop Dawn Zahn