

August 27, 2025

To the People of God in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod:

In the immediate aftermath of the mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas, the principal at my sons' elementary school wrote a letter to parents. She wanted us to know that she understood our anxiety and fear, and, she wrote, she would do *anything* to protect our children.

A few months after Uvalde, there was some concerning behavior displayed by a rather infrequent visitor at a congregation my children, spouse, and I sometimes attend. I found myself sitting in the pews on Sunday morning, thinking about exits and how to shield their four bodies with my one.

A few months ago, two of my sons and I, during music lessons housed in a local congregation, huddled in a corner while we called the police. An individual who had previously made threats of violence toward their instructor was in the building. One son started crying. The other sat in a ball in the corner. Their teacher was visibly trembling with fear. We locked the doors, stayed out of sight, and waited for help to come.

That letter from our principal brought me to tears. Not only was I overwhelmed by the force of the violence our society refuses to adequately address, and not only was I grieving for families to whom I had no connection but who reside in my own fears, but I also found myself thinking, *in what kind of world is a school principal required to write a letter like this?* We might ask a similar question today in the aftermath of horrific violence at a Catholic church. To be sure, I am not asking your pastors, deacons, or leaders to write that kind of letter. Rather, I want to pose a different question to all of us. A question for us to consider together as the body of Christ.

What kind of world indeed?

In April of 2024, the ELCA Church Council unanimously voted to adopt the social message titled [\*Gun-related Violence and Trauma\*](#). Reading this social message, I was introduced, for the first time, to the phrase “anticipatory trauma.” If you have not yet read the message, please do.

Regarding anticipatory trauma the statement reads,

Anticipatory trauma has been documented among violence survivors and people and communities that take steps to avoid becoming victims. It involves taking protective actions grounded in fear of sudden, life-threatening violence, a fear people know in different ways and degrees. Some people buy guns, whereas others purchase knives or pepper spray. Parents talk to their children about mass shooters or the police. Kids go to school wearing bulletproof backpacks and practice lockdown drills. Individuals avoid large crowds. Millions today anticipate trauma.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A social message on Gun-related Trauma and Violence, page 8.

It may surprise you to read this, but this is not a letter about gun control or regulation. This is a letter about abundant life.

In the gospel of John, Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life and have it in the full.”<sup>2</sup>

In his explanation of the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Luther writes, “in fact God’s kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us.” And I would add, in praying this prayer, we ask to locate ourselves as those who have been invited by God to share in the work of bringing about God’s kingdom.

Jesus has come to bring abundant life, and by the very nature of being a people who follow Jesus, we are called to be a people who work toward abundant life for all.

This was not the letter I intended to write today. Instead, I have been working on a letter as a means of marking the beginning of my second term as the bishop in this synod, introducing a call for a renewed focus on baptism. In my own leadership discernment, I have become increasingly convinced that we must become more consciously rooted in the promises of baptism and our identities as children of God. So that we might live more fully into the life of discipleship and be a people who, in the words of our baptismal liturgy,  
proclaim Christ through word and deed,  
care for others and the world God made,  
and work for justice and peace. <sup>3</sup>

This is the invitation that comes on the heels of the promise. We are, through the waters of baptism, named and claimed and unalterably God’s own people. We are also a people who must, “not grow weary in doing good,” but instead, “continue to run the race set before us,” not for our own sake but for the sake of the life of the world, for the sake of not just our abundant life but abundant life for all.<sup>4</sup>

A world in which millions live with anticipatory trauma is not a world in which we each or all equitably enjoy the abundant life God gives.

I do not know what the Spirit is going to do through us and among us in these next six years, the duration of my second term, but I know this: We must begin in a place of unshakeable understanding of who we are in Christ and what it means to be a follower of Jesus in this time and place, in this political, social, global, all too-often violent moment in human history.

Luther was right. God will bring about God’s kingdom, with or without our prayers. In the meantime, we are creating the world in which we live. A world not only for ourselves but for our neighbors, for all of creation.

As far as I can tell, the only way in which to live in this world faithfully is to begin with an understanding of who we are. At the end of the baptismal liturgy, we say, “You have been sealed

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<sup>2</sup> John 10:10

<sup>3</sup> ELW Liturgy for Baptism

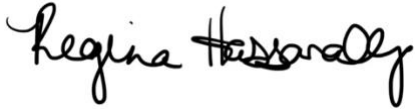
<sup>4</sup> Galatians 6:9 and Hebrews 12:1

with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ *forever*.”<sup>5</sup> Nothing can undo what God has done.

So, live boldly, dear church. Proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace even if it might cost you something. What is most important is already done. Through the work of God in Jesus Christ, we have been saved, death has been defeated, and we have the power with which to renounce “all the forces that defy God.”

Let’s renounce them. Loudly and unequivocally. In Christ, we find abundant life, and it is so, so good. But if we keep that abundant life to ourselves... well then what kind of world will we live in indeed?

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Regina Hassanally". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop Regina Hassanally  
Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

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<sup>5</sup> ELW Liturgy for Baptism, emphasis mine