

ELCA presiding bishop issues letter in response to Orlando shooting

6/13/2016 7:00:00 PM

CHICAGO (ELCA) – The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), has issued a letter in response to the June 12 shooting that claimed the lives of 49 people at a nightclub in Orlando, Fla. This is the deadliest mass shooting in U. S. history. In the letter Eaton states, "We must speak peace and reconciliation into the cacophony of hatred and division. We must live the truth that all people are created in God's image."

Eaton's letter follows:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

"So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them." Genesis 1:27

We are killing ourselves. We believe that all people are created in God's image. All of humanity bears a family resemblance. Those murdered in Orlando were not abstract "others," they are us. But somehow, in the mind of a deeply disturbed gunman, the LGBTQ community was severed from our common humanity. This separation led to the death of 49 and the wounding of 54 of us.

We live in an increasingly divided and polarized society. Too often we sort ourselves into like-minded groups and sort others out. It is a short distance from division to demonization. Yesterday, we witnessed the tragic consequences of this.

There is another way. In Christ God has reconciled the world to God's self. Jesus lived among us sharing our humanity. Jesus died for us to restore our humanity. God invites us into this reconciling work. This must be our witness as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The perpetrator of this hate crime did not come out of nowhere. He was shaped by our culture of division, which itself has been misshapen by the manipulation of our fears. That is not who we are. St. Paul wrote, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ" (II Corinthians 5:17-20).

Our work begins now. We need to examine ourselves, individually and as a church, to acknowledge the ways we have divided and have been divided. We must stand with people who have been "othered". We must speak peace and reconciliation into the cacophony of hatred and division. We must live the truth that all people are created in God's image.

This morning your churchwide staff came together to mourn and to pray. We prayed for those killed in Orlando and remembered the Charleston Nine killed only a year ago. We prayed for the family of the shooter, for our LGBTQ brothers and sisters and for our Muslim brothers and sisters who now face the threat of retaliation. And we prayed that the Prince of Peace will bring us to the day when we stop killing ourselves.

Your sister in Christ,

Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

