

“Living in a Time of Terrorism”  
A Message from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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April 18, 2004*

“Because earthly peace is a precious yet fragile good, there is reason for all to be vigilant, self-critical, and active in preventing and suppressing terrorism, holding terrorists accountable, and addressing what gives rise to terrorism. Complacency and wishful thinking endanger peace; pride and self-righteousness endanger peace as well.” (See pg. 3)

“Lawful governments are authorized by God to protect society and secure the blessings of just order. Without minimal civic peace, people cannot carry on their daily activities that allow life to go on or attain the benefits of a just society. “We also advocate an earthly peace that provides security from violence and aggression, seeks just order in place of tyranny or anarchy, checks unrestrained power, and defends and enhances the life of people who are poor and powerless.”” (See pg. 4)

“Governments often abuse and violate their authority under the guise of seeking security. They may deny the rightful aspirations of an oppressed group, violate human rights, or inflict their own unjustifiable violence on people in the name of fighting terrorism. They may use terror to guard the interests of an elite ruling group instead of protecting the security of all citizens. In their counterterrorism activity, governments have the obligation to adhere to basic human rights, the rule of law, and just war standards.” (See pg. 5)

“The security that governments—including that of the United States—can provide from the threats of terrorism has limits. Human beings, finite creatures that we are, are always vulnerable; eliminating vulnerability would also do away with freedom. Governments cannot provide perfect or total security; when they claim or seek to do so, they become agents of arrogant pride and the injustice and insecurity that flow from pride. If they are to secure freedom for vulnerable people, governments must recognize their limits in providing security.” (See pg. 5)

“Policy makers face risky and difficult decisions in calculating what kind of security is either too little or too much, determining priorities and allocating expenditures, and balancing security with other responsibilities of government. Public scrutiny is needed to ensure that the costs and burdens of security measures are shared fairly and that the needs of people who are poor and marginalized are met. Continuing public vigilance is essential to evaluate whether or not the security measures are needed, effective, and, above all, respectful of the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and in accord with the best of our country’s traditions.” (See pg. 6)

“Policies, practices, and attitudes that are hostile to immigrants living in the United States and that unduly curtail the legal arrival of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers fail to live up to our country’s tradition of welcoming newcomers in a fair and generous way.” (See pg. 6)

“Fear generated by the threat of terrorism may be a reasonable response to danger, alerting us to take steps to address it. Yet fear can become part of the fabric of society and make people its captives. Fear then paralyzes, divides people, fosters distrust, and clouds judgments. The Gospel promises freedom from living in debilitating fear. Through Word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit surrounds children, youth, and adults with God’s unfailing love. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). In faith we may carry on our lives with the confidence that nothing—including terrorism—“will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). Living from the security of faith in God, Christians in a fearful society may exhibit courage to evaluate soberly the threat of terrorism without ignoring it or becoming all-consumed by it.” (See pg. 8)