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Bishop Hirsch's Speech at the Rally that preceded the 21st Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Parade

January 19, 2026

When I was a child growing up in the *Lutheran* Church in the 1960's and 70's, there was a time when I thought that the *Lutheran* church was named after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I assumed that because of this, we were committed to civil rights and working together for a better world no matter what the cost. Dr. King's life and words spoke to me then and they speak to me now as a bishop of the *Lutheran* Church as they call us to the highest ideals of our country and the greatest love the world has ever known.

It wasn't until much later that I came to learn that Martin's father, then called Michael but also known as "daddy King," went to Germany and was so moved by the witness of Martin Luther as a reformer of the church and of society that he changed his name and his son's name. [I was blessed to have mentors like Henry and Ella Mitchel who were King fellows and still refer to him as Mike.]

So, I join you today in that great tradition of these reformers. Reformers of church and of society, by the power of a God who transforms the human heart, even of those who do harm. I am reminded that God's heart is with the poor, the marginalized, and the disinherited, and so is mine. Some Christian theology, namely of misguided white nationalists, needs to be repented of as contrary to the way of the cross.

We are here because we love our country and are concerned about the way decisions made in this past year are hurting people in our communities, especially those who are most vulnerable because they are poor, or because they are migrants, or because of who they love or how they identify. We have seen the blunt force trauma that mass deportations bring, and we want them to end.

We are here in obedience to the voice of our creator who is asking us the same question that was asked at the garden of Eden at the beginning of history: "Where is your brother? Where is your sister? Where are they?" Many have gone missing, have been kidnapped or arrested (we are not sure), have been deported without due process, or have been imprisoned in



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inhumane conditions. We have replaced compassion with crassness and cruelty at the very top of our government and have threatened our friends and allies.

We are here in obedience to that commandment that resonates across religious traditions and secular ethics alike, namely: “love your neighbor as yourself.” And, in our Christian tradition, Jesus added, in case there was any doubt about who we are meant to love: “love your enemies.” No one is excluded from our responsibility for care and concern. Even those who have committed crimes have the right to a fair trial, and to a certain level of dignity and human rights.

In these days, I commit myself to working together with anyone and everyone who cares about these things and to working for a better world that loves all our neighbors and seeks the common good and a more just and equitable society. I am here to say that I may not know better than anyone else what is coming, but whatever we face, I will face with you. I will keep showing up and bearing these days together in community. This is a new day in an old struggle, and we will see it together with God’s help.

The very nature of God is a community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each inextricably bound to one another. Your future and mine are bound together. If you suffer, I suffer; if you rejoice, I rejoice. If you are subject to violence and your voting rights are muted, our whole society suffers. If a president of the United States runs over the constitution, we all experience that loss.

And yet, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke not only of what he did not want to see and what must stop—he also painted a picture of what he was dreaming about for our world together. His dream still lives in us and it lives in me; it is God’s dream from the beginning of time and it will come one day not because I am so great but because God has all the power and glory and, in the end, God’s way will win; God’s judgement will prevail; and this world will be made new.

+ Bishop Phil Hirsch