



Loving Our Neighbors in a Time of War¹

A Letter from the Wisconsin Council of Churches

*'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'
This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'
(Mt 22:34-40, NRSV)*

Dear Siblings,

We have not previously written, because we have been without words for the magnitude of suffering in these days. What shall we cry, when nations weep over their young ones slain while dancing? What shall we cry when parents divide their children among family members for survival's sake, and elders wait for release? When the word genocide is spoken once again? When peace is broken and new parties are drawn in daily? When to name a nation, a geographic region, or a homeland in support of one of our members is to necessarily wound another? When our politicized identity takes prominence over the most beautiful promises of our faiths?

There are never enough ways to say, "We love you. We respect you. We want you alive." What shall we cry when good friends grieve and rage with every good reason, and talk of a common good seems so very far away? "I see you," we say. And "I'm sorry." And it is never enough, beloveds. "I stand with you" is both true and hard because it may imply I stand against someone else and the greater truth is this: we sit together in grief. We see the pain breaking our communities. We want an end to war and calamity. We want all of God's children on the earth to live.

Responding in Our Own Communities

Although we are not experts on foreign affairs, we know some things about loving our neighbors. It is on this basis we write today.

In 2014, the Wisconsin Council of Churches created a Statement on Interfaith Relations, spurred by religious violence in our own communities.² This statement recalls us to love of God and love of neighbor. These loves urge us to work with *all people* for the common good: my good, my neighbor's good, and the good of the whole creation. Such love upholds unreserved respect for others as neighbors and equals.

¹ We speak of the war currently taking place between Israel and Gaza, while also aware of other armed conflicts that are of deep concern to our member churches; situations into which these words may also speak a word. We write primarily to our member bodies, knowing that others are likely to witness these words. We pray you receive them in a spirit of love.

² "Loving Our Neighbors: A Statement of the Wisconsin Council of Churches on Interfaith Relations," adopted by the Board of Directors November 17, 2014.

The Statement sets forth virtues for respectful dialogue, each founded in the work of relationship. We invite our fellow Christians in Wisconsin to reacquaint themselves with [this document](#) and its invitations.

We especially ask you to undertake behaviors that reduce the risk of violence. Antisemitism and Islamophobia are real and terribly dangerous realities in the lives of our friends and neighbors. We must interrupt rising violence against Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, and other marginalized religious communities in the US. In the same terms as our interfaith statement, we ask you to:

- Condemn all forms of intolerance that turn religious differences into excuses for defamations, stereotyping, and violence; defend their victims; challenge and rebut statements about other faith groups or individuals that embody religious stereotyping, prejudice and bigotry.
- Uphold religious freedom for all persons, defending the rights and liberties of cultural, racial, and religious minorities in the same manner we defend our own.

We invite you to focus, as much as you can, on the relationships before you. In this age of social media, it is easy to be caught up in the news as an abstraction. Even in this globalized reality, we are called to ask, “How do we love our neighbors well? How do we care for those closest to us, and how can we be in relationship with them as the strands of war connect right into our own communities?” Conflicts in countries on the other side of the world have real impact on people in our own backyards. Be aware of generational trauma; old wounds are being torn open again. People are fearful for friends and relatives facing war and also of violence erupting here.

Double Down in Love. When we are fearful, we often shut down. Interpersonal and inter-organizational conflict arises easily. It is in these moments that we must double down in love. Check in on your interfaith colleagues, and those in interfaith relationships. Seek after their well-being. Be willing to be uncomfortable, for the sake of those who are particularly vulnerable at this time. When you are unsure, lean into curiosity so as not to jump to conclusions. Be patient, and persistent in loving and staying connected in undemanding ways.

The Wisconsin Council of Churches
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on our website at wchurches.org