



A Letter of Support for the Jewish Community in Montana

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we enter into these Holy Days of the Christian faith, we begin with Maundy Thursday, the day we remember Jesus' last meal with his disciples. During this meal, he again stated the command that God has given since the time of Moses: the command to love one another as God has love us. (Jn 13:34)

Jesus and his followers celebrated this meal as part of the Jewish Celebration of Passover when every year the Jewish people remember how God liberated them from slavery in ancient Egypt. (Ex 12) In this meal and in so many other ways, the Jewish and Christian faith traditions are intertwined. We share a common ancestor in Abraham and Sarah, share a common heritage in the Hebrew Scriptures, worship the one God who created heaven and earth, and recognize the humanity of all as created in the image of God. We are siblings, children of the same God, care-givers to the same world.

In honor of this abiding inter-relationship with our Jewish siblings, **the Montana Synod Council and I ask you for your support of the Jewish community in Montana** in a particular way during this holy time for both of our religious traditions. We invite your financial support for the Montana Jewish Project (MJP) centered in Helena but serving throughout the state.

The Montana Jewish Project is trying to repurchase the synagogue in Helena that was sold more than 100 years ago and has passed through several hands over the years. An opportunity has risen for them to buy back this important place of Jewish heritage in order to develop it as a community educational center for all Montanans (and others) to learn about the Jewish experience in Montana, to grow in a relationship of mutual support with the Jewish community, and to experience the Jewish faith as they practice and cherish it. ([See here for more info](#))

The Montana Synod Council has already given \$4000 toward the project in the spirit of relationship with our Jewish neighbors. In this way, we are fulfilling the ongoing pledge we as the Montana Synod made in the "Agreement between Montana Synod Lutherans of the ELCA and Montana Association of Jewish Communities" signed in June 1995. Through this gift, we also stand with the wider ELCA in its "Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community," originally adopted in 1994 and then reaffirmed by the Churchwide Council in 2021 and the "Declaration of Inter-Religions Commitment" adopted by the Churchwide Assembly in 2019. ([You can find these documents here](#))

And we would ask you and your congregation to join together with the rest of the Montana Synod to match the council's \$4000 so that we can increase our support to \$8000. In this way we can continue our ongoing work of building mutually encouraging relationships with our Jewish siblings

We are hoping to raise this money by May 15, 2022. **You may donate by [clicking here](#) and selecting Montana Jewish project or sending a check to the Synod office with “MT Jewish Project” in the memo line.** Whatever gifts we are able to gather, we plan to give to the leaders of the MJP before the end of June which is an important deadline for them in purchasing the property.

This is important and loving work that we are doing. We know that throughout its history, the Christian church and its members have done deep harm to the Jewish people and their communities. Anti-Judaism and, later, anti-Semitism have been prevalent in the words and actions of Christians. This mistreatment is seen especially in Martin Luther’s horrific diatribes and violent recommendations against the Jews in his later writings, in the silence of the Christian church (including Lutherans) during the Holocaust and its aftermath, and in too much overt and subtle bigoted behavior by Christians everywhere including here in Montana and N. Wyoming.

Sadly, this anti-Semitism is rising again in our polarized society through acts of violence and prejudice toward Jews and their communities. People who claim to follow Jesus are causing needless suffering and fear among our Jewish neighbors and their families with hate speech and prejudice, for instance seen the recent experience of a neighborhood in Great Falls throughout which anti-Semitic tracts were spread. Perhaps this has happened in your community as well.

Such behavior by Christians is wrong and contrary to the gospel of God’s love for the whole world as well as God’s command to love the neighbor -- *all* of our neighbors including our Jewish siblings. As witnesses to the good news of new life in and through Jesus Christ, Christians are called to seek peace, justice and the well-being of all God’s children. We are called to work for the common good in our communities alongside people of other faiths and religions. We are called to confront bigotry directed against those who worship and believe differently, “playing an active role in dispelling fear...and standing with those who are targets of fear, discrimination, hatred and violence.” (Declaration of Interreligious Commitment, 2019)

And we are called to repent of our previous behaviors and the actions of our ancestors by returning to the Lord our God so that we can better build healthy and supportive relationships with our Jewish neighbors. We are called to learn through respectful conversation, dialogue, growth in friendship and cooperation with people of other faiths, including the Jewish community and people.

During this time of learning, building relationships and cooperation in serving our community, creation and world, let us seek mutual understanding, discovering not only factual knowledge about the commonalities and differences of our respective traditions but finding beauty in another religious tradition as well as our own. For in seeing how our Jewish neighbors love and cherish their own tradition, we as Christians may renew our love and understanding of our own faith and tradition.

And so we ask for your [support](#) for the Montana Jewish Project, so that together we can show the love we have received from God by following God’s command to love our neighbors.

May God bless and keep you during these Holy Days,
Rev. Dr. Laurie Jungling
Bishop, Montana Synod, ELCA