

**THE PRESBYTERY OF MILWAUKEE**  
**OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

**A Social Witness**

**“Bearing Faithful Witness with Justice, Mercy, and Hope”**

*Adopted by the Presbytery Assembly on 24 February 2026*

Grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the greater witness of Holy Scripture, the Presbytery of Milwaukee assembled on this day affirms that God sends the Church into the world to work for justice, to exercise its power for the common good, and to seek dignity and freedom for all people. This calling arises from our confession that God alone is Lord of the conscience, that every human being bears the image of God, and that the Church is accountable first to Jesus Christ, who identifies himself with the least, the stranger, and the vulnerable.

In recent months, anxiety has deepened across our nation and within our local communities. Immigration enforcement practices, the tone of public discourse, and the lived experiences of fear among neighbors have strained relationships and eroded trust. These anxieties have been intensified by recent deaths in our neighboring state of Minnesota, which have shaken many and renewed grief, sorrow, and moral concern throughout Wisconsin. We name these realities not as abstractions or as expressions of a particular political ideology, but as pastoral and public concerns that touch families, congregations, and communities entrusted to our care.

We recognize that religious leaders across Milwaukee and Wisconsin, including leaders within the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee, have spoken with notable consistency in recent weeks, emphasizing the dignity of every human life, the moral obligation to welcome the stranger, the need for humane and just approaches to immigration, and the responsibility of faith communities to resist fear, dehumanization, and indifference. Their shared witness reflects long-standing Christian teaching and pastoral concern for those most vulnerable. The Presbytery of Milwaukee receives this broader ecumenical witness with gratitude and understands its own statement as part of that larger Christian moral conversation within our region.

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), our social witness tradition affirms that God sends the Church both to minister directly to immediate human needs and to address the conditions that give rise to suffering. Our constitutional standards call the Church to show compassion in the world while also bearing public witness to justice, dignity, and peace. This includes concern for immigrants and refugees, for families living with fear and uncertainty, for children and elders, and for those whose mental health is strained by trauma, violence, or prolonged anxiety. Such witness is not partisan advocacy, but faithful obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, our public witness is formed at the font and at the table. In Baptism, we are claimed by God's grace, united with Christ in his death and resurrection, and incorporated into one body across every human boundary, such as nation, status, and language. In the waters of Baptism, God names us not by citizenship, productivity, or power, but as beloved children, called to live for Christ's sake in the world. Baptism, therefore, shapes a *public theology* that resists all forms of dehumanization and insists upon the dignity of every person, for whom Christ lived, died, and rose.

At the Lord's Table, we are gathered not by merit or security, but by grace. Holy Communion proclaims that Christ feeds a diverse and often-frightened people with his own life, binding us together in a covenant of mutual belonging. Around this table, strangers become neighbors, and neighbors become kin. The Eucharist forms us to recognize that none are disposable, none are beyond concern, and none are outside the reach of God's reconciling love. The Lord's Table in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) is inclusive, and a symbol of unity in diversity. From this table, the Church is sent into the world to practice hospitality, seek justice, and embody peace.

Therefore, shaped by Baptism and nourished by Holy Communion, we reject rhetoric and actions that dehumanize, scapegoat, or instill fear among vulnerable populations, including immigrants, refugees, racialized communities, the poor, and those living with trauma or uncertainty. Such rhetoric and actions contradict the gospel we proclaim and the sacramental life we share in Christ.

At the same time, we acknowledge that fear and anxiety are not limited to those most visibly marginalized. Many within broader communities, including those who may be part of a cultural or numerical majority, experience genuine fear for their own welfare, their neighbors' well-being, and the stability of their livelihoods. Economic uncertainty, violence, rapid social change, and the erosion of trust affect entire communities. Our social witness must therefore be marked not by contempt or dismissal, but by pastoral attentiveness, truthful engagement, and a refusal to pit neighbor against neighbor.

Therefore, the Presbytery of Milwaukee declares the following:

We affirm that empathy is not a sin but a Christian virtue, grounded in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who entered fully into human suffering, listened before he spoke, and drew near to those who were afraid, wounded, or uncertain.

We affirm that immigrants, documented or undocumented, are our neighbors, created in the image of God, and deserving of dignity, respect, and humane treatment.

We call for immigration practices and policies that prioritize preserving family unity, protecting children, and ensuring the safety and well-being of communities.

We reject rhetoric and actions that dehumanize, scapegoat, or instill fear among vulnerable populations.

We affirm the responsibility of faith communities to offer pastoral care, accompaniment, and practical support to those experiencing fear, trauma, or mental health distress related to government actions, violence, or public uncertainty.

We commit ourselves to prayerful vigilance, truthful speech, and faithful action, trusting not in certainty of outcomes but in the abiding presence of God.

As witnesses of Jesus Christ, we continue to pray, to watch, to speak, and then to act. We raise the voice of a God who demands justice and mercy and compassion for the stranger, for the poor, for children, for the sick, the marginalized, the homeless, and the incarcerated. We do so because we trust the One who has promised to be with us always.

In adopting this Social Witness statement, the Presbytery Assembly acts in accordance with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its Manual of Administrative Operations. This statement represents the prayerful discernment and witness of the Presbytery Assembly of Milwaukee alone. It is not binding upon any other council of the Church, upon congregations, or upon individual members. Other councils, such as sessions, as well as church leaders and members, are invited to receive this statement as a resource arising from prayerful discernment and, as they deem appropriate, to adapt or adopt it in forming their own social witness based on their vocation, faith, and witness to Jesus Christ.

May the God of justice and peace strengthen the Church to live faithfully in anxious times, to love boldly, and to bear hopeful witness in word and deed.

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## Sources

Lev. 19:33–34; Deut. 10:18–19; Mic. 6:8; Amos 5:24; Matt. 25:35–40; Luke 4:18–19; Luke 10:33–37; Matthew 9:36; Hebrews 4:15–16; Romans 12:15; James 1:27; Heb. 13:3; Matt. 28:20; Rom. 8:38–39.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Book of Confessions (2016), *The Confession of 1967*, 9.15; 9.18–9.19; 9.31–9.32, 9.45; *A Brief Statement of Faith* (1983), lines 35–38; 38–40; 69–71; *The Confession of Belhar* (1986), arts. 2–4; *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 69–74; Q. 75–82; Q. 107.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Order* (2025–2027), W-3.0102; W-3.0409; W-3.0414; W-5.0303; W-5.0304; F-1.0404; F-3.0101.

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