

Gathering at the Gate for Justice  
September 21, 2025

Pastor Kristin Schultz  
All Saints ABQ



*“Feed us with hunger for justice; feed us with thirst for peace”* (sung)

Wednesday morning, I stood with a group of ELCA pastors, deacons  
and lay leaders in Upper Senate Park in Washington DC, singing this song.  
We were there to make public witness and call for justice  
on behalf of vulnerable people in our nation,  
as part of a two-day advocacy training and action event called  
Gathering at the Gate.  
I was blessed to be there, and to carry with me the support and care  
of this congregation.



The Gathering was an incredible experience for me.  
We worshiped and sang and prayed for justice in our world.  
The witness of the community and hope in our faith was inspiring.  
The staff of the ELCA Advocacy office was there  
to offer training and encouragement.  
They reminded us that in an environment where most lobbyists come  
asking favors for themselves,  
our witness of faith in asking on behalf of others makes a difference.  
As people of faith, we bring the conviction that all people  
are created in the image of God,  
and deserve basic human dignity and human rights.  
All are beloved of God.

Amy Reumann, Director of the ELCA Advocacy office, shared their tag line,  
*The God who justifies expects all people to do justice.*  
As she spoke, she came back to that again and again –  
The God who justifies expects all people to – what? **Do justice!**



On Wednesday, I visited with staff in the offices of both NM senators.  
I delivered the letters many of you wrote on paper plates –  
empty plates to symbolize the many Americans  
whose plates will be empty due to cuts in SNAP benefits.  
Katie Mertens, in the office of Senator Ben Ray Lujan,  
was so glad to hear voices of faith raising concerns of justice and care.

She asked to be connected with the Advocacy office for future partnerships. Aria Campos, in the office of Senator Martin Heinrich, shared that the senator sees a real crisis coming for New Mexico as federal funds for food assistance and Medicaid are cut. She was particularly moved by the witness of the empty plates – a tangible sign of the faith and support of all of you.



The Gathering was also challenging, as it brought our full attention to the suffering caused by our current administration with regard not only to planned budget cuts, but also to ICE detention and attacks on the LGBTQIA+ community. When we gathered in public witness in Upper Senate Park on Wed. morning, we sang and prayed and lifted our voices in lament and demand for justice. We gathered around an empty tablecloth and waved our empty plates to remember those who are and will be hungry; we gathered around an empty first aid kit to remember those are and will be denied access to basic health care; we gathered around an empty chair to remember all who have been disappeared, detained or erased.

The bishop of the DC area synod was there, and he read an open letter to Congress. I have copies available if you'd like to read the whole thing, but here are parts of it:

*We are a group of pastors, bishops, deacons, and lay leaders from Lutheran churches around the United States. We are here because we love our country and are concerned that recent decisions made here 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 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 own 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.*

*We are outraged and grieved that our country's resources – the money from our pockets collected in the form of taxes – are being used to pay for more weapons of war, more masked and unidentified law enforcement on our streets, and huge detention centers, while greater and greater numbers of people go hungry and perish of preventable, treatable illnesses because they cannot pay for care.*

*Our Christian faith compels us to see every human being as Jesus sees them: as children of God, worthy of love, care, food, life, dignity, and health, simply because they, like us, belong to God. We are here to remind us all of the humanity of every child of God. We call on our representatives, leaders, and public servants to resist using cruel rhetoric, and policies and practices that dehumanize people in need.*



Today we read a small part of the story of Jacob –  
the younger twin who steals his brother's birthright from their father Isaac,  
and has to flee from home.

Jacob is running away from the anger of his family,  
and the wrong he has done his brother.

It's easy to imagine that God seems far away.

He may wonder if God – the God of his father and his grandfather Abraham –  
will go along with him.

And Jacob has a dream –

the sort of dream that is a vision from God, and a gift of grace.

He sees a ladder connecting heaven and earth,  
and angels moving up and down the ladder.

When he wakes up, he declares, "Surely God is here, and I didn't know it."

Jacob's vision of God's realm come near to his own life  
gives him a new awareness of the presence of God,  
even in the midst of his troubled circumstances.

This is the same Jacob who, after many years away,  
after he marries sisters Leah and Rachel, will return home.

Anxious about the reunion with his brother,

Jacob will wrestle with an angel, and receive a blessing and a new name.

He will become Israel, and his twelve sons the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Again and again, across the generations, the people of Israel –  
descendants of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob, Leah and Rachel,  
will know the presence of God in all their hardships.



The Gathering at the Gate brought us to a place that is troubled and discouraged, where polarization rules,  
and hateful rhetoric is being normalized.

Yet we, too, could say - God is with us here, in this troubled place –  
during our prayer and song and in powerful sermons we heard,  
but also when we walked the halls of congressional office buildings  
and engaged in challenging conversations with congressional staff.  
As we stood in the park on Wednesday and sang for justice and peace,  
I felt the presence of God,  
like a ladder between heaven and earth, and angels there with us  
to give us courage and steadfastness and hope.

I have worked for almost 20 years with LAM-NM  
and I have experienced for myself what former director Ruth Hoffman  
used to say, that doing the work of advocacy is like tending redwoods.  
It is slow, and requires so much patience.



On Tuesday morning, before the Gathering started,  
I visited the National Arboretum.  
There I saw a Bonsai tree that is 400 years old.  
It is called the Peace Tree, and it has an amazing history.  
The tree was cared for by a single family in Japan, generation after generation,  
beginning in 1625.  
In 1945, the tree was just two miles from the epicenter of the atomic bomb strike  
in Hiroshima – yet it survived, as did the family who cared for it.  
In 1976, the tree was given as a gift to the United States for the Bicentennial.  
A sign of reconciliation and peace,  
and a sign of what lasts through the centuries.  
I gazed at the tree and felt God was reminding me that we are all in God's hands,  
that history is larger than the painful now,  
and that gestures of hope have power.

The Gathering at the Gate was a moment of protest,  
of accompaniment, of learning – a reminder of God with us now –  
and an expression of hope for a future we know God holds.  
Thanks be to God.