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February 4, 2025

Dear Immanuel Members and Friends,

I am deeply disturbed that on February 3, 2025, FALSE accusations were made on X (formerly twitter) regarding government funding to Lutheran organizations. The claims were those of money laundering and illegal payments. **The purpose of this letter is to give you correct information and to encourage you to speak about it to your fellow Lutherans, family, friends and neighbors.** In fact, our Lutheran Service Organizations are highly respected by the communities in which they serve and by the government agencies with whom we partner. There are over 2.7 million ELCA Lutherans in the United States; we have the power to make our voices heard.

These same Lutheran Service organizations have done the same work for 85 years, in serving LEGALLY admitted refugees and immigrants alongside providing professional, confidential and affordable services to people and families of all ages, faiths, races and economic status.

In addition, our Lutheran Service Organizations provide: pregnancy counseling and adoption services, disaster response, behavioral health services, financial counseling, mentoring of youth and adults in schools and communities, foster care, residential and shelter care for runaway and homeless youth, childcare and parenting education, independent living coaching for at risk youth, and much, much more.

In fact, it is estimated that 1 in 50 people in the U.S. have been touched by a Lutheran Service Organization. This is who we are and what we do, and we do it with integrity.

From ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton on 2/3/2025:

The ELCA seeks to be witness to Christ by feeding people who are hungry, caring for those who are sick, and advocating for justice, peace, and the dignity of all people. This has been the calling of the church for over 2,000 years.

Despite misinformation and baseless doubt cast today on funding that supports Lutheran organizations across our country, the ELCA remains steadfast in our commitment and work with our many Lutheran partners and expressions of our church. The ELCA is also concerned for other faith-based communities and organizations who have similarly come under attack

Hear the Bishop's full and poignant message at www.elca.org.

From Montana Synod Bishop Laurie Jungling on 2/3/2025:

In response to the false claims placed on X (formerly twitter) regarding the funding of LSS organizations I encourage you to consider the following.

- None of the claims were accompanied by proof to support the false and dangerous notion that Lutherans use religion to launder money or that grants to support the work of Lutheran organizations for decades are in any way illegal.
- The Lutheran organizations targeted by name in these false claims on X have done the same work for 85 years in serving legally admitted refugees and immigrants.

Share the Love of Christ with All!

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- As church, we follow the 8th commandment from the Scriptures, which states, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”
- Last October, the ELCA Conference of Bishops released a statement about the need to speak the truth and a refusal “to accept the ongoing normalization of lies and deceit.” Statement: <https://www.elca.org/news-and-events/8247>.
- The ELCA strongly urges political leaders at all levels of government to use their offices and platforms responsibly and consider the impact of misleading statements and speculation.
- The ELCA remains committed to our core mission of feeding people who are hungry, caring for those who are sick, and advocating for justice, peace, and the dignity of all people. This has been the calling of the church for over 2,000 years, and that will not change.

**A Message from the (Lutheran Social Services (LSS) of South Dakota
By President/CEO Rebecca Kiesow-Knudsen**

2/3/2025 LSS Responds to False Statements on Federal Funding

Over the weekend, LSS of South Dakota became aware of tweets from prominent federal individuals falsely claiming that Lutheran organizations, including ours, have illegally received federal payments and engaged in money laundering. The tweets indicated an intention to defund our organization as a result. These accusations are completely baseless and inaccurate.

LSS of South Dakota is a nonprofit social ministry organization that has provided essential services to children, youth, and families across the state for over 100 years. Our work is carried out through legally awarded contracts and grants with local, state, and federal agencies that have entrusted us with these essential services. We are fully licensed by the state of South Dakota and accredited by the Council on Accreditation, maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards.

Our services are wide-ranging and include behavioral healthcare, financial counseling, mentoring, adoption and pregnancy counseling, early intervention and prevention programs, psychiatric residential treatment for youth, shelter care, alternatives to detention, disaster response, education, re-entry support, interpretation services, and refugee resettlement. Every day, we work to strengthen our community by serving the most vulnerable, guided by our core belief that God’s love calls us to serve.

We are deeply concerned by any effort to misrepresent our work and jeopardize the funding that enables us to fulfill our mission. Nonprofit organizations like LSS are critical to the well-being of communities across South Dakota. Defunding legal, government-awarded grants and contracts will have significant consequences, limiting our ability to provide vital services to those in need.

We urge our supporters to contact their Congressional representatives to voice their opposition to these unfounded claims and any efforts to disrupt our ability to serve our communities.

Thank you for standing with us.

Beloved Community, I encourage you to pray for our Lutheran Service Organizations, their leaders, and most especially, the vulnerable ones whom they serve. Please consider contacting our Montana Congress people to tell them of your concern for withdrawing funding and the false information that is being shared. Financial Gifts may be made for LSS organizations through our website or offerings; please include the memo “LSS”.

Rev. Molly A. Sauer-Johnson