

February 13, 2025

Representative Longmuir and Committee Members,

I am Rev. Gretchen Deeg and I serve a congregation with members from Bismarck, Mandan, Lincoln, and the surrounding areas. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. As an ordained Christian pastor, I urge a "Do Not Pass" on HCR 3020.

HCR 3020 is a direct violation of the freedom of religion. It was absolutely essential to our nation's founders that our government contain a separation of church and state. James Madison was strongly opposed to opening congressional sessions with prayer. Thomas Jefferson sought to create a "wall of separation between Church & State." Many of our founding fathers experienced religious persecution by Christianity controlled by the British government. When Christianity becomes combined with Empire, it ceases to be Christian.

However, if you are still considering the passage of this resolution, allow me to remind you what that means.

When asked, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:35-40).

To proclaim the Kingship of Jesus Christ means to love your neighbor as yourself. Our neighbors are people of all abilities, ages, ethnicities, genders, races, religions, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic statuses. To love your neighbor as yourself means to put others above your own selfish wants. It means to treat all people with dignity and respect regardless of the color of their skin or their country of origin. It means to welcome all people as you would welcome Jesus Christ. For as you do to the least of these, you do unto Christ. (Matthew 25:40).

In modern day, this means dramatically increasing support for those who struggle to have their everyday needs met. It means putting the wellbeing of all people above the demands of capitalism. It means prioritizing the health of our land, water, and air over profit and desire to make a name for our state. It means letting go of our egos and ensuring that all people are able to live their healthiest life.

To proclaim the Kingship of Jesus Christ means to welcome the stranger as our beloved neighbor. In modern terms, that means making North Dakota a sanctuary state where refugees and immigrants from every country are protected from persecution and treated like citizens regardless of their citizenship status. It means pouring money into non-profits and social service agencies which support refugees and immigrants of all races, religions, and origins.

To proclaim the Kingship of Jesus Christ means to remove the yoke from our neighbors' shoulders. Predatory debt crushes the people of North Dakota. The poor struggle to afford rent and food. A single medical emergency can spiral into crushing credit card debt, job loss, and homelessness. In modern terms, proclaiming the Kingship of Jesus Christ means following the Biblical mandate of total debt forgiveness to all people every 7 years. This means forgiving student loans, car payments, mortgages, credit cards, medical bills, and all other forms of debt after a period of 7 years.

The biggest hurdle against tangibly loving our neighbors as ourselves is the hoarding of wealth and basic necessities. To proclaim the Kingship of Jesus Christ means that if you live above the poverty line, then you must go and sell all that you have. It means drastically increasing taxes on the wealthy and large corporations. It means increasing property taxes and further reducing the cost of rent for individuals who live below the poverty line. It means giving homes to the homeless. It means access to free meals to not just school children, but to all people. It means ensuring every single individual has access to truly affordable health care. Proclaiming the Kingship of Jesus Christ means never giving favor to the wealthy. But in fact, giving preference to the poor.

Should you proclaim the Kingship of Jesus Christ by the state of North Dakota, massive overhaul will be needed. North Dakota will need to become a state that welcomes and protects the refugee and immigrant, a state that tangibly cares for the poor, a state that treats ALL people, with no exceptions, as beloved children of God.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. Normally, out of respect for the separation of church and state, I would not offer the tenants of Christianity as a reason for passing a state resolution or bill. However, the consideration of this resolution encourages sermons from Christian leaders to be preached in committee hearings and on the session floor.

I will stand to receive public confession on the ways you have failed to love your neighbor as yourself in the past and how you will lead the work of loving your neighbor as yourself with absolutely everything that you have – materially, emotionally, and mentally – in our great state of North Dakota. It is not my place to invite the resolution sponsors to speak in this committee hearing, but I would encourage the committee to ask them to lead the offering of public confessions as their first act in proclaiming the Kingship of Jesus Christ.¹

Otherwise, I urge a "Do Not Pass" on HCR 3020 in committee and a "No" vote on the floor.

Rev. Gretchen Deeg
Bismarck, ND

¹ Every item in this document is a repeated command throughout the Old and New Testaments. These commands are started in the Old Testament and Jesus strengthens all of them in the New Testament. The full Bible would need to be quoted in order to include scripture references for this testimony. However, here is an incomplete starter list of scripture references: Lev. 19:34, Ex. 22:21, Jer. 7:5-7, Ps. 146:9, Prov. 19:17, Matt. 25:31-46, Luke 10:25-37, John 3:16-18, Rom. 12:13, Gal. 6:2, Eph. 4:32, James 2:15-16. I am willing to organize Bible Studies for all legislators at the State Capital should this resolution be passed.