

I'm David Carlson, pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church here in Duluth and Dean of the Lake Superior Conference of the Northeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today and share a word of thanks to the EPA from the faith community for your hard work, your faithful work. While I speak from a Judeo-Christian perspective, I hope that my words also find resonance with other faith traditions.

Our Scriptures begin with words that speak of the *ruah*, the breath of God or spirit or wind that moves over the face of the waters, waters in which God takes delight, waters that like the earth bring forth multitudes of living creatures (Genesis 1:2, 20). This is the same *ruah* that breathes into humanity the breath of life (Genesis 2:7), the same *ruah* that creates and renews the face of the earth (Psalm 104:30).

But the wind that blows over the waters today carries with it the burden of mercury and other toxic chemicals, which in even small amounts are linked to cancer, neurological damage, respiratory and other serious health problems. When mercury settles in the water through rain and is ingested by microorganisms, it becomes methyl mercury that accumulates in greater concentrations up the food chain, harming not only fish but also the health of those who eat them. Last week, when my 10-year-old daughter was writing an essay about such organisms, and we talked about what happens in the food chain when increasing amounts of mercury enter the system, poison fish, and cause health problems for people, even babies even before they're born, she made the observation that they can't help it. They can't, but we can.

For there is a new spirit, a new wind that has been gathering strength in EPA hearings around the country for the past several months, a new wind collecting input from 900,000 comments that is today given focused words and voice – a wind that limits toxic emissions at the federal level. Such limits in Minnesota have been effective at reducing mercury levels by 90%, according to your research, and reducing mercury and particle pollution on a national level will prevent hundreds of thousands of illnesses and up to 17,000 premature deaths each year. We sometimes think of rules as limiting our freedoms, but in the Scriptures rules like the 10 Commandments are given not arbitrarily but with the purpose that all life can thrive. This is the *theological* effect of the EPA's limits in the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards – so that all life can thrive, especially advocating on behalf of those whose life is being harmed. Farther on in Genesis, humanity is created in God's image, and in the next chapter is given a purpose in the garden: "to till it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). We might call such a purpose stewardship. We could also call it justice for other voices that are often not heard but whose voices we recognize in our prayers as people of faith – the poor, the rest of creation, and future generations. They can't help it, but we can.

It is in such a spirit of stewardship, justice, and voice for the voiceless, that your efforts toward the implementation of these federal Standards have been a top priority in the advocacy of my denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, made up of 4.5 million members in the U.S. Here are words from an ELCA statement: "Without these protections our neighbors, particularly the most vulnerable children, the elderly, those living in poverty and unable to afford health care will continue to suffer the harmful impacts of toxic air pollution. [We] urge the EPA to adopt the strongest standards possible for these pollutants and to continue its important work to defend our communities from environmental harm."

On behalf of the faith community, thank you for keeping your promise in adopting these Standards, a significant step toward the vision the Spirit of God intended from the beginning, for our good and the good of all creation.