

Standing up to state violence, professional-managerial clergy, and more reader feedback

Letters & Comments in the [January 2026](#) issue

Published on December 12, 2025

## **Standing up to state violence**

Thank you for your editorial “[Facing fascism](#)” (December). I believe it is necessary for thought leaders to speak at this time, and I take courage from it. This short letter does not convey the depth of my feeling, but thank you.

—Brad Van Fossen

*Milwaukee, WI*

Regarding your editorial, I am concerned about your advice that, when we encounter ICE, we should in essence “run toward” the violence. Is this really what you mean? Your qualification “if you yourself feel comparatively safe” doesn’t mean much when ICE pepper sprays ministers in clerical garb or agents run their cars into groups of peaceful protesters. No one is safe. Are you really advocating that people potentially risk their lives?

—Craig Mindrum

*Oak Park, IL*

## **The editors respond:**

Brevity is key in an editorial, and there’s no question that the six words “if you yourself feel comparatively safe” are doing a lot of work in this one. Some people’s identity markers make them more likely to be targeted than others; some have health conditions that make unpredictable situations particularly dangerous; some have caregiving duties that mean they can’t risk arrest. As Michael Woolf acknowledges in this issue, “some Christians are especially vulnerable right now, and others won’t feel that such direct action is for them” (see “[When Caesar gets demanding](#)”).

All that said, the answer is yes: We absolutely are advocating that those of us who are in the best position to risk our lives must do so, in a variety of ways, for the sake of our suffering neighbors. This is at the heart of Christian discipleship, and our moment demands it.

And as Woolf goes on, “there is something for everyone to do at this moment.” At the Chicago area protests he’s writing about, pastors and other activists have followed the practice of dividing into groups, with different roles based on risk tolerance. (Woolf himself has participated as part of the highest-risk group and has been both assaulted and detained.) We commend all of their efforts.

## **Reading Peterson**

I am so grateful for Katherine Willis Pershey’s article “[Please, liberal Christians, read Eugene Peterson](#)” (November). It was delightful to read about her journey and appreciation for Peterson. I admit I was nonplussed,

however, to learn that many liberals are not reading him. I have gone through several copies of *Working the Angles* and have given it as a gift to newly ordained colleagues. Peterson's writings have repeatedly been both challenging and clarifying for me.

I love how Pershey's conversation with Peterson's work means more than agreement. Good conversation evokes insight in new directions. Peterson has often let me look at a different facet of ministry afresh even when I do not agree with him. Thank you for this article.

—Hans Jorgensen  
*Saint Paul, MN*

I thoroughly enjoyed Pershey's reflections on Peterson. A couple years ago I traded in my (as it turns out) not-so-trusty Revised Standard Version for Peterson's *The Message* for my daily devotions. In doing so, I've discovered a new eagerness within me, thanks in large part to Peterson's use of the modern vernacular. In its preface, he explains that he undertook *The Message* simply because he wanted to get more people to read the Bible who had been turned off by other translations. In that task, I believe Peterson succeeded. As a longtime Bible reader, I'm hooked.

I echo Pershey's plea: Please read Peterson.

—Jim Ketchum  
*Port Huron, MI*

### **Solidarity in suffering**

My thanks and prayers abound to Rachel Mann for her October column ("[The silent, suffering God](#)"). I am an older "Crohn" who was diagnosed in childhood over half a century ago and who lives with some of the same chronic complications she mentions. We are not alone in these times of despair when God feels so silent. Mann so beautifully and viscerally articulated some of my own prayerful pondering about God's compassion and wounds, and how they relate to my own grief and dark nights.

The first week of October also included World Ostomy Day, the theme of which was acknowledging both our invisible disabled guts and our visible perseverance. Despite treatment complications, elusive cures, and heartaches, across the world we are not alone.

—Gillian Swanson  
*Columbus, OH*

### **Professional-managerial clergy**

Julian DeShazier's struggle with the professionalism of pastors seems to be a consequence precisely of his having placed them among the professional-managerial class ("[Pastors and professionals](#)," November). I read James Glasse's *Profession: Minister* not long after it came out in the late '60s. The turmoil of those times included a youth-led cultural revolution. Pastors went from receiving automatic deference to having their heretofore secure place in the cultural schema challenged and diminished.

In years following I observed how pastors appropriated corporate nomenclature. Suddenly, “senior pastors” emerged. Now and then, larger congregations even exhibited “executive pastors” along with their “preaching pastors.” These trends affected churches of all sizes; I recall when the lone minister at a tiny congregation styled himself the senior pastor. Some pastors relish an opportunity to elevate their status, and this practice has become commonplace over the last several decades.

Having decided to identify themselves with the ascendant PMC—with all its insecurities and privileges—pastors often separated themselves from working-class people and their concerns. Having watched their pastors turn into professionals, many church folks turned to religious movements focused on a gospel of wealth. I wonder if these professional pastors, their congregations, and the communities in which they are called to work might be better served by taking to heart the notion of not being conformed to the pattern of this world.

—Robin Kash  
*Topeka, KS*

I appreciate DeShazier’s column. Most denominations require pastors to earn a master of divinity degree and be trained extensively enough to consider themselves professionals, yet most new pastors enter ministry with no clear idea what their role entails. The problem is often made worse by personnel committees made up of laypeople who also don’t have a clear idea of the pastor’s role—or any training in managing employees. I’m a pastor, and my own annual reviews have often included recommendations that I not eat during online Bible studies, scoldings about church attendance not increasing, and requests to itemize how I spend my work days. Micromanaging often replaces collaboration between pastors and other church leaders to discern what the church’s needs are and how the pastor can take a leading role in addressing those needs.

Laypeople tend to see their role as preserving the institution of the church, maintaining the church building or bank account, and managing the pastor as an employee. Part of the problem, I think, is that the process of training and discernment before ordination doesn’t necessarily include discussion of what exactly the pastor and lay leaders are called to do. Recently I’ve found myself reading and discerning on my own to clarify how to pastor a church faithfully and manage the expectations that laypeople put on me. Hopefully our denominations will seek ways to help pastors and congregations think more deeply about the work we do together.

—Steve Allman  
*Monmouth, ME*

## **Perfectionism recovery**

The October issue’s placement of Timothy Larsen’s poem “[How to Become a Saint When You’re Not a Perfectionist](#)” right after Melissa Kuipers’s story about Teen Mania’s Honor Academy (“[Shiny happy confrontations](#)”) was perfect. And the timing for my reading them was also perfect. I am a recovering addict when it comes to perfectionism, and I’ve been dealing with those old temptations lately. I needed these reminders that the life of faith is about grace and not rules. (Yes, even we Lutherans slip from grace orientation to law.) Thank you.

—Ann Larson  
*Essex, VT*