

INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

The ELCA CONSTITUTION contains the following direct references to advocacy:

4.02.c. “.....advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs.”

4.03.l. “.....develop programs of ministry and advocacy to further human dignity, freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

16.11.E97.i. The Division for Church in Society shall “direct and implement this church’s public policy advocacy to national and international governmental bodies in consultation with other churchwide units, and coordinate its public policy advocacy to state governmental bodies.”

(Three locations and arrangements for this advocacy are listed: Washington, D.C.; New York; establishment, in partnership with synods and social ministry organizations, state public policy offices- currently there are 20 such offices plus several associated partner offices.)

16.11.E97.j. The Division for Church in Society shall “give expression to this church’s concern for corporate social responsibility, both in its internal affairs and its interaction in the broader society.”

(This function is exercised at the direction of the Church Council. An Advisory Committee gives counsel and advice. The work is undertaken ecumenically.)

The Division for Church in Society has implemented these Constitutional references by establishing a Department for Advocacy within which there are four sections: the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs, the Lutheran Office for World Community, the coordination of the State Public Policy Offices, and the Corporate Social Responsibility function.

The most fundamental resource for implementing the advocacy of this church is ELCA social policy. This policy is expressed in this church’s social statements, messages, Churchwide Assembly actions on synodical memorials and voting member resolutions, and Church Council actions on synodical resolutions. Similar historical documents from the predecessor church bodies serve as a policy base in instances where the ELCA has not enacted policy, as long as predecessor body statements or policies are not in conflict with one another.

The document "Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" delineates how policy is developed, and the roles of the Churchwide Assembly, Church Council, Office of the Presiding Bishop, board of the Division for Church in Society, and staff of the division.

WHY IS THERE A BIENNIAL PLAN FOR THIS ADVOCACY MINISTRY?

The biennial plan serves three major purposes:

- It functions as a management tool to assure that the division is giving comprehensive coverage to ELCA social policy commitments, coordinating adequately the work of the four sections within the division's advocacy department, managing well the financial and human resources committed to this work, supporting the board in its program monitoring role and the Church Council in its program review and unit evaluation roles.
- It functions as an educational resource which describes the scope and particularities of ELCA advocacy, and the points of contact within the division for partners in implementing this church's public policy and private sector advocacy. Accordingly it is shared with all synodical bishops and the Church Council.
- It functions as one benchmark for the division's monitoring of the appropriate use of world hunger funds in its budget.

HOW IS THE BIENNIAL PLAN DEVELOPED?

There are three converging initiatives that influence the issues addressed.

- There is the public sector's initiative in taking up policy issues.
- There are the commitments made in ELCA social policy.
- There are initiatives of the ecumenical/interfaith community.

These converging initiatives disclose public and private sector policy issues which this church is called to address. An imperative is that there be ELCA social policy which calls for or permits such advocacy.

The plan itself is dealing with a constantly changing landscape of public and private sector issues. Some issues may become dormant. The plan can be interrupted by international or national crises not known at the time the plan was developed.

FROM POLICY ACTIONS TO ADVOCACY MINISTRY identifies the ELCA social policy action and then briefly describes anticipated advocacy ministry responding to those actions. Constitutionally, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Division for Church in Society has responsibility for:

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)

Gives expression to the ELCA's concern for corporate social responsibility.
Seeks to enable equitable care, distribution, and management of what God has created and entrusted to humankind.
Works collegially in ecumenical partnership with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility.

LUTHERAN OFFICE FOR GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS (LOGA)

Witnesses for social justice on domestic and foreign policy issues facing the nation.
Educates, informs, and enables effective interaction between the ELCA and the federal government.
Represents the ELCA's positions within the arena of public debate.

LUTHERAN OFFICE FOR WORLD COMMUNITY (LOWC)

Advocates ELCA (and upon request, Lutheran World Federation [LWF]) public policy views to the United Nations, related international organizations, and governments.
Monitors world community issues and United Nations discussion, recommending actions consistent with ELCA policy.
Assists ELCA members, congregations, synods, regions, institutions, and agencies of the church to understand and become involved in world community issues.

STATE PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY

Establishes, maintains, and coordinates (in partnership with synods and social ministry organizations) the activities of the ELCA state public policy advocacy offices.

LUTHERAN OFFICE FOR GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS



History

The year was 1945. United States military service personnel were returning to live the hopes and dreams of post-World War II America. It was the year that the churches of the National Lutheran Council (NLC) moved from their wartime ministries to add another dimension of service.

As a ministry to those returning veterans, the eight ELCA predecessor churches began an official presence with the federal government in Washington, D.C. During those early years, the international aspect of church-state relations played a significant role as a succession of German church leaders conferred with State Department officials about the problems of German reconstruction.

1948 marked a ministry turning point. The NLC expanded its service to its participating bodies in order to keep them informed of important congressional activities and to channel information about the churches and their work to key government officials. Special relationships between the churches and the government developed around programs of relief and rehabilitation, and movement of refugees.

The focus of the nation turned to civil rights and racial equality in the 1960's. The Lutheran churches spoke out through their Washington office as staff worked with Lutheran legislators and ecumenical colleagues on civil rights and justice issues. At the beginning of the decade, the eight NLC churches merged to become The American Lutheran Church (TALC, then simply ALC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA). The office now represented a two-church presence.

From 1967 to 1987, the ALC and LCA were joined by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) in the cooperative work of the Lutheran Council in the USA (LCUSA). The Office of Public Affairs continued the functions of representing the interests of the church bodies, analyzing public issues, informing government officials of church body positions, and planning and conducting seminars.

Since 1988, the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) has served as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Washington, D.C. office for advocacy to the U.S. and foreign governments.

LOGA seeks to enable effective interaction between the church and the federal government. Through providing education and information, it

- witnesses for social justice on domestic and foreign policy issues facing the nation
- educates, informs and enables effective interaction between the ELCA and the federal government, and
- represents the ELCA's positions within the arena of public debate.

LOGA is a program area of the ELCA's Division for Church in Society, working in cooperation with others.



The Mission Statement

Faithful to God's call, the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs fulfills the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's witness for social justice on domestic and foreign policy issues facing the nation, and through it, the world. With a commitment to a prophetic vision which stands with the poor and the powerless, the office represents the church's positions within the complex arena of public debate. To achieve effective interaction between the whole church and the federal government, the office educates, informs and enables full involvement of the church in this ministry.

How Does The ELCA Engage in Advocacy?

The work of the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs is grounded in the Scriptures and Lutheran confessional writings. Its involvement in specific issues is based on social statements of the ELCA or social statements of the ELCA's predecessor churches when those statements are in agreement.

Through participation in the church's Advocacy Department, the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs staff help to prioritize issues for the church's public policy activity. The Advocacy Department develops the ELCA Advocacy Plan for review by the Division for Church in Society's Board and Church Council, setting the direction for church wide advocacy efforts for a two year period.

Included in a sampling of issues currently addressed by the plan are an emphasis on

alleviating domestic and international hunger and poverty, human and civil rights concerns, various health care and disability programs, economic justice, Native American concerns, foreign aid reform and funding, the Middle East peace process, and U.S. immigration and refugee policy.

The staff of the governmental affairs office monitors these and other issues and becomes directly involved in efforts to support measures consistent with the Advocacy Plan when deemed timely and appropriate. Such efforts could include letters to members of Congress, contacts with the Administration, visits with House or Senate staff, appointments with Representatives or Senators, presentation of testimony before key committees, and phone calls to contacts in specific congressional districts or states to encourage their involvement on a particular issue.



What is Advocacy?

- If you are a citizen,
- who has nothing personal to gain from the issue,
- and represents the interests of a person or group who is disenfranchised,
- you are an advocate.



WAYS TO INFLUENCE PUBLIC POLICY

1. Develop relationships with your Senators and Representative. They especially value people who are genuinely concerned about issues and people.
2. Develop a relationship with the DC staffer and field (for Senators) or district (for Representatives) office staffer who handles your issues. Be able to offer them information or other assistance they need. If you want to be effective, don't just take the staffer's time. A grassroots activist with unique expertise can be extremely valuable to the staffer.
3. Assemble citizen groups to meet with your Senator or Representative regarding your issues. These can be either in the field or district office or the DC office.
4. Write letters to the editor. Praise good Senators and Representatives and point out policies you disagree with. Praise any legislators when they do something you support.
5. Raise your issue at Senators' and Representatives' town hall meetings. This helps to educate the elected official and the others present.
6. Write letters in your own words to your Senators and Representative.
7. Call DC or field or district office to express your opinions.

Note: These ways are all important; some will be more effective in certain circumstances - some in others. Remember, as an individual citizen you have the right and responsibility to be politically involved. Work with others to support policies which are important to those in whose behalf you are speaking.



HOW TO VISIT A LEGISLATOR

A personal visit with your Representative or Senator, either at home or in your state/federal capitol can be anxiety-creating, exciting and rewarding. The following are some steps and tips to make such a visit most effective.

BEFORE YOUR VISIT:

1. Make an appointment:
 - a. By letter or by phone, for home district office or the capitol office.
 - b. Confirm appointment by phone or mail.
 - c. Appointments with legislative aides are also valuable.
2. Brief yourself about your legislator:
 - a. General extent of the district.
 - b. Committee assignments.
 - c. Number of terms served.
 - d. Professional background.
 - e. Voting record on issues of your interest.
 - f. Views stated publicly on issues of your interest.
3. Define the objectives of your visit:
 - a. Is your objective to get acquainted, express general views, or discuss specific issues?
 - b. Limit the number of issues to be discussed.
 - c. Brief yourself on the facts surrounding the issue and your views on it.
 - d. Briefly outline your comments and/or prepare written summary.
4. Anticipate:
 - a. Appointment may start late.
 - b. Legislator may be in session and unavailable - Plan to either wait, meet with staff, make new appointment, meet legislator at place of meeting.
 - c. Lengths of meeting may range from ten minutes to an hour.
 - d. Going as a group has advantages, especially if representing a broad base of people and organizations. But, remember they are often in tight office space, so keep your group manageable.
 - e. Who (if group) will be spokesperson, introduce group, guide conversation, provide summary of issue, etc. Assign specific roles to each participant.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE:

1. Introduce yourself, giving BRIEF information on:
 - a. Place of residence and that you are a registered voter.
 - b. Length of residence.
 - c. Church membership.
 - d. Occupation, student status, volunteer involvements, etc.
 - e. Voter/political involvement.
 - f. Group you are representing (if any).
 - g. Your experience and expertise relevant to the issue for discussion.

2. Set climate of visit:

- a. Be on time.
- b. Be positive and friendly - not argumentative.
- c. Acknowledge areas of agreement.
- d. Acknowledge areas of appreciation.

3. State reason for visit:

- a. Be concise, accurate, and specific.
- b. State position and recommendation on issue.
- c. Identify your position or that of group which you represent.
- d. Leave a written summary of your position (if available), reference material, calling card, but don't overwhelm them.
- e. Ask for related legislative materials: copy of bills, analysis of bill, brochures on Senate or House, etc.

4. During the conversation:

- a. Meet and write down names of staff person assigned your issue of concern.
- b. Don't let questions or comments derail your purpose.
- c. Admit you need to think more about a new point raised; ask if they will consider written response later, find out who to get back to.
- d. Ask specific questions; request specific responses.
- e. Explore options of attending committee meetings or hearings, visiting galleries, etc.

5. At the close:

- a. Make sure your 'ask' has been clearly stated.
- b. Review what will be done next (information to provide, etc.).
- c. Express thanks for their time and interest.
- d. Make no promises you can't keep.

AFTER YOUR VISIT:

1. Debrief:

- a. With members of group or another person about the experience.
- b. Determine possible next steps.
- c. Inform others about what learned.

2. Write letter:

- a. Thank legislator for visit.
- b. Summarize the visit, comment on what was said by all parties present.
- c. Identify follow-ups steps committed by legislator and self.
- d. Respond to points unaddressed in visit.
- e. Reiterate issue, position, and recommendations.
- f. Express intention to continue dialogue.
- g. Itemize names, addresses, phone numbers, etc. of all participants in visit.

GOOD LUCK!



MAKE YOUR LETTERS COUNT

WHY WRITE

1. You have something to say, an opinion to offer, a story to tell, a request to make, a question to ask.
2. Letters Influence: Frequently mail is light on an issue, thus making your letter very significant. If mail is heavy, yours may be very important to offset heavy mail with a different opinion.
3. Constituent communications are more influential than the media, government information sources, lobbyists, and many other forms of communication.
4. Your stories and pleas both change attitudes and votes, but also support and reinforce.

WHO TO WRITE

1. Those officials you elected are always most responsive. Therefore, write your Senator, Representative, Governor, President.
2. Occasionally, the elected leaders within the Senate and House and the related committees also need to hear from you. Learn who those people might be for the issue that concerns you.
3. Members of the administrative or executive branch responsible for implementing the program or caring for the issue that concerns you.

WHERE TO WRITE

Write to either the Washington, state capitol, or home district offices. As a constituent, your letter may get more notice at the district office.

WHEN TO WRITE

1. Early in the session to raise the need for responding to a concern.
2. Later on to address specific legislation and the issues being debated.
3. As the legislation is being considered in committee, on the floor, or before the President or Governor for consideration.
4. Often enough to be known and respected - but not too often to be a pest. Get others to write to increase the chorus of voices on an issue.

WHAT TO SAY

1. Spell name of official correctly. Use accurate title.
2. Write your own letter, not a form letter. Handwrite personally and neatly or type.



HOW TO WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Other than the front page, the letters to the editor section is the most read part of your local newspaper. On average, 80 percent publish most of the letters they receive. Members of Congress pay close attention to letters, particularly if their names are mentioned. When you write your letter keep in mind the following suggestions:

1. **Keep your letter short.** It is recommended the length of your letter be about 250 words. Periodicals have a limited space and often receive more letters than they can possibly publish. If there is less editing for the editor it is more likely your letter will appear.
2. **Get to the point.** Letters should always state the specific issue, and what action should be taken. Include the name and/ or number of the bill you are commenting on. Mention the name of your Senator/ Representative and what action you would like them to take.
3. **Write in simple language.** Many newspapers have the motto “the readers of this newspaper move their lips as they read”. They are looking for letters that are understandable by a variety of educational levels. Writing an intelligible letter need not be complicated. Do not be afraid to address sophisticated subjects, just remember a “ball is a ball as well as a sphere.”
4. **Be sure to be credible.** If you use a statistic, cite your source. Check the number of your bill through the legislator’s office or call the Senate and House Bill Status number (202)225-1772 to see if the number has changed.
5. **Be timely.** Letters to the Editor need to be written as soon as you are aware of an action. Periodicals that are published daily, such as newspapers, treat news as “new” for only a short time. Editorials will be printed if they are current or if they reflect what will be happening in the near future.
6. **Sign your letter.** Newspapers will not publish your letter without a signature, although you may request that your name be kept anonymous. In considering this option remember that letters that are anonymous are often not considered credible. Include in your signature your residence and/ or voting district as well.
7. **Send a copy of your letter to the LOGA office.** We will use your letter as a resource to encourage others to write and will also be able to note others who support the position of the ELCA.

Another twist on this method is radio talk shows. Many of these call in programs have large listening audiences. It is good to have others with you to offer support and help should you get stuck on a question.



TIPS ON TELEPHONING YOUR LEGISLATORS

To find your legislator's phone number, you may use an online congressional directory or call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your Senator's and/ or Representative's office. Remember Senators are by State - Representatives by district (usually zip code + 4 will get you to the right one)

Remember that telephone calls are often taken by a staff member, not the member of Congress. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue about which you wish to comment. If they are not present, leave a short message with all pertinent information.

After identifying yourself and where you live, tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message, such as: "Please tell Senator/ Representative (Name) that I support/ oppose (S. __ H.R.8 __)."

You will also want to state reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Ask for your Senator's or Representative's position on the bill. You may also request a written response to your telephone call. Offer to provide further written information. Follow up with a letter.

Don't be intimidated. Remember you are a concerned citizen. You are talking to public servants who are there to help you and represent you.



I can't get to see my legislator-NOW WHAT?

Legislators are extremely busy. They often don't have enough minutes in a day to meet with all of the constituents who wish to see them. Each Member of Congress has staff to assist him/ her during a term in office. Remember legislators have staff at both their home/ field office and where they meet. To be most effective in communicating with Legislators, it is helpful to know the titles and principal functions of key staff.

Commonly Used Titles:

Administrative Assistant or Chief of Staff:

The Administrative Assistant reports directly to the Legislator. They usually have overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcome of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The Administrative Assistant is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.

Legislative Director, Senior Legislative Assistant, or Legislative Coordinator:

The Legislative Director is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. In some offices there are several Legislative Assistants and responsibilities and interests of the member. An office may include a different Legislative Assistant for health issues, environmental matters, taxes, etc.

Press Secretary or Communications Director:

The Press Secretary's responsibility is to build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the member, their constituency, and the general public. The Press Secretary is expected to know the benefits, demands, and special requirements of both print and electronic media, and how to most effectively promote the member's views or position on specific issues.

Appointment Secretary, Personal Secretary, or Scheduler:

The Appointment Secretary is usually responsible for allocating a member's time among the many demands that arise from Legislative responsibilities, staff requirements, and constituent requests. The Appointment Secretary may also be responsible for making necessary travel arrangements, arranging speaking dates, visits to the district, etc.

Caseworker:

The Caseworker is the staff member usually assigned to help with constituent requests by preparing replies for the member's signature. The Caseworker's responsibilities may also include helping resolve problems constituents present in relation to federal agencies, e.g., Social Security and Medicare issues, veteran's benefits, passports, etc. There are often several Caseworkers in an office.

Other Staff Titles:

Other titles used in a congressional office may include: Executive Assistant, Legislative Correspondent, Executive Secretary, Office Manager and Receptionist.

Remember these people are often young and want to make a difference. They are more accessible, yet still have a lot of influence. They may be extremely interested in your point of view to broaden and deepen their knowledge on an issue.

ATTENDING A TOWN MEETING

Legislators often schedule public meetings to update constituents and monitor constituent opinions. Other times local activists organize a meeting to share ideas with their legislator.

Tips for participation:

- Be prepared (organized and practiced) to speak up.
- Call the Legislators district office ahead of time to know the schedule.
- Sit near the front so the Legislator can see you when you speak.
- Begin with identifying yourself, including your name, representation, and faith group.
- Take a friend for support (event if they don't speak).
- Be polite, brief, and specific.
- If you don't get an answer, ask it politely again.

SMALL GROUP EXERCISE

SAMPLE ROLE PLAY

Social Concerns Committee Members of St. John By the Gas Pump

Roles: One person as committee chair
3 additional persons as committee members

You are a member of the Social Concerns Committee of St. John by the Gas Pump Lutheran Church. You have made a name in the community over the years because of your Come-and-Get-It Food Pantry and Next-To-New Clothing Shop.

The Chair of the Social Concerns Committee is a member of the Church Council. Two members of the committee are on the food pantry's Board of Directors.

The food pantry started in the mid-1970's as an emergency ministry for victims of a local flood. Through the 1980's, however, it developed a steady clientele from three groups. One group comprises public assistance beneficiaries whose benefits do not stretch for the whole month. They generally come in clusters to the food pantry the week before the welfare checks arrive. The second group comprises low wage workers. Their wages do not make ends meet and they come in any time. The third group is varied in make-up, yet they are generally victims of fires in their homes.

You are aware of the fact that a proposal to increase the State Minimum Wage is now pending in the General Assembly. Although you have not taken stands on legislation in the past (on the philosophy that your role is to serve, not play politics), you have taken a positive vote on a proposal to advocate for the Minimum Wage Bill, which would raise the minimum wage 50 cents per year for the next five years. The majority of the committee reasoned that, in light of welfare-to-work efforts, minimum wage workers are not well served if the fruit of their labor amounts to depending on charity for their daily bread. The vote was not unanimous.

You have an excellent reputation for providing for the needy in your community. You have, in fact, been the subject of the feature articles in the local newspaper. Although the Social Concerns Committee and pantry Board of Directors had a picture of the food pantry taken with your state representative and senator when you got a commendation two years ago, you have never asked your Representative or Senator for any funding.

Your goal is to persuade your senator to support the Minimum Wage Bill. The Senator has not taken a position pro or con at this point. The Senator agreed to give you 10 minutes.

Social Concerns Committee Chair: When you spoke with your Pastor about the committee's action on the Minimum Wage Bill, she was not encouraging about visiting the Senator. She doesn't want the food pantry to lose its reputation for nonpartisan service. You responded to the Pastor that you want to be seen as caring about the total of your clients' lives, that sometimes just giving emergency food isn't enough, and that, for welfare-to-work to be successful, a minimum wage job just doesn't begin to make ends meet. Your Pastor responded that the business people in the congregation wouldn't be in favor of this legislation. You decided to carry through with the committee's recommendation and arranged the visit with the Senator.

SMALL GROUP EXERCISE

SAMPLE ROLE PLAY

State Senator and Legislative Assistant

Roles: One person as State Senator
One person as legislative assistant

You are in your fourth four-year term. Your career has been solid and unremarkable. You are Chair of the Senate Tourism Committee, which is more a tribute to your tenure than to your talents as a legislator or interest in tourism. Still you are no slouch. You have represented the interest of your constituents very well and pride yourself on constituent service. You have consistently won re-election by at least 15 % of the vote. Before being elected, you were a real estate broker.

In the last session of the General Assembly, you got a lot of heat for your vote against a senior citizen bill. You thought the concept was good, yet you were convinced the proposal was much too costly. For the first time since you came to the Senate, the opposing party has talked of fielding a strong candidate. You're not worried yet, just cautious.

The Minimum Wage Bill is one thing you don't need now. You don't want to alienate a group of voters in an election year. It seems that this legislation will force you to do that.

For the first time in 16 years, you appear vulnerable. If you misstep on the Minimum Wage Bill, your aggressive opponent may send you to an early retirement. You have the advantage of incumbency and a strong network of support built up over your previous terms. Your goal is to get re-elected.

You agreed to give the members of St. John By the Gas Pump 10 minutes of your time to talk about the Minimum Wage Bill.

Legislative Assistant: You have been on the Senator's staff since the second term. If there is a disagreement among the staff about a position, the Senator relies on your opinion to find the safe, center road.

Your sister is an active member of St. John By the Gas Pump. You and she do not talk about her church at all. Her spouse, your brother-in-law, is inactive and does not attend. He owns a dry-cleaning business with about twenty-five employees. He's complained to you often about his small profit margins and believes a minimum wage increase gives him two choices: lose profits or let some employees go.



SMALL GROUP EXERCISE

TOUGH QUESTIONS ROLE PLAY

In many settings our advocates get questions that are hard to answer. We need to be ready to think on our feet and deal with these situations. In triads have the interviewer (heckler) pick a question. Have the “ELCA Representative” try to answer. A third person should coach both sides and give feedback afterwards.

1. “Isn’t ‘advocacy’ just another word for ‘lobbying’?”
2. “My church shouldn’t be involved in politics – what happened to preaching the Gospel?”
3. “What if I disagree with the positions of my church? Who’s speaking on my behalf?”
4. “People aren’t going to listen to what the church has to say anyway, so why bother?”
5. “The church has been taken over by left-wing Democrats, and isn’t really in touch with how I feel.”
6. “How can the church know enough about these issues to make any sense?”

Debrief the role you played. Did you feel comfortable asking/answering? Switch roles and try again..