

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.” John 15:26-27

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As our Nation prepares for Election Day, chances are good that you are overwhelmed with televised debates, opinion poll analyses and feature stories tracking the presidential candidates. It's easy to become sidetracked by the political mudslinging and partisan bickering, unless we consider how our faith can focus our need for informed civic engagement.

In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther describes ‘government’ as a means through which God works to preserve creation and to help maintain a peaceful and just social order in a sinful world. Our faith values should guide how we look at public issues and interpret what is happening in political life. The ELCA is called to be a public church and we have the gift of a heritage that sees government structures in their instrumental role. Thus, we have a responsibility to engage potential political leaders on the values and ethics affirmed by our faith. This is what the ELCA calls the ministry of advocacy.

The ELCA’s efforts are not about partisan politics. In fact, in order to protect religious liberty and our nation’s democratic system, we must remember that it is not the church's role to promote or belittle any single candidate or endorse any activity that will provide any form of partisan gain. Our ELCA advocacy offices hope to encourage Lutherans to get involved and vote as they become more aware of issues of importance to our church community. Now is the time to think critically about our civic responsibility, including voting, and prayerfully and thoughtfully evaluate political issues as we keep the promise for a faithful democracy.

To assist you in reflection, ELCA advocacy staff have developed a series of bulletin inserts grounded in our shared Christian values such as care for creation, concern for people in poverty, hospitality to strangers, and peacemaking. The inserts are also based on issue briefs found in our election and voting resource “Called To Be A Public Church: 2008 ELCA Voting and Civic Participation Guide.” These inserts will be available consecutively with a new insert available each week for five weeks. The subject of the inserts will address the following issue areas: (1) Hunger and Poverty in the U.S. (2) global poverty and hunger, (3) global warming, (4) immigration, and (5) peace and conflict.

This project is not about WHO anyone casts their vote for. It is about building knowledge regarding our mutual pursuit for a common good. Thanks for reading!

.....

*** For further information, you can access “Called To Be A Public Church: 2008 ELCA voting and Civic Participation Guide” at www.elca.org/advocacy or you can order it at www.augsburgfortress.org. You can find the social statements of the ELCA at www.elca.org/socialstatements. See also the “Lutheran Letter To The Candidates,” dated July 8, 2008 (<http://archive.elca.org/bishop/messages/candidatesletter.html>) signed by Presiding Bishop Hanson and the leaders of Lutheran partner organizations.

Global Hunger and Poverty

“Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’” Luke 4:17-19

“The power of God’s suffering, self-giving love transforms and challenges the Church to stand with all who are overlooked for the sake of economic progress or greed. Confession of faith ought to flow into acts of justice for the sake of the most vulnerable.”

-- *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*

From the message of the Old Testament prophets to the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Bible declares God’s outrage at the plight of those living in poverty and suffering from hunger. As a result of God’s expressed concern for the poor and oppressed, the Bible presents a unique challenge to people of faith to respond to economic disparities in our world so that all people experience the fruits of the earth and live with dignity.

Additionally, the ELCA social statement *For Peace in God’s World* affirms that “our nation has responsibility to contribute a portion of its wealth to people in poorer nations through effective economic assistance,” and that the purpose of such assistance “should be to reduce hunger and poverty in sustainable and environmentally sound ways.”

In concrete terms, we have to deal with the fact that more than one billion people suffer in poverty today. One-fifth of the global population goes to bed hungry every night, and six million people die each year from HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria - all preventable illnesses. Most of these cases happen in the so-called developing countries.

While the United States gives the largest volume of official development assistance when compared to every other country in the world, its giving is second to last in terms of percentage of gross national income. Even a 1% increase in giving would make a big difference around the world (it would add \$29 billion in aid). Furthermore, the United States could significantly help in the fight against poverty by canceling some decades-old debts of the world’s poorest countries, supporting fair-trade, and helping finance education campaigns throughout the world.

As a Church that “serves when it holds power accountable, advocates justice, stands with those who are poor and vulnerable, provides sanctuary, and meets human need” (*For Peace in God’s World*), we want to ask our electoral candidates at all levels to create and support policies that greatly reduce poverty throughout the world. Prayerfully consider: What plans do they have to help and create self-sustaining opportunities for people living in poverty abroad?

*This insert is based on the issue brief on global poverty and hunger in “Called To Be A Public Church” (see www.elca.org/advocacy). It is grounded in the ELCA social statements *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* (adopted 8/1999) and *For Peace in God’s World* (8/1995). You can find these social statements at www.elca.org/socialstatements.

Global Warming*

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” Genesis 2:15

“Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they should be found trustworthy.” I Corinthians 4:1-2

“The earth is a planet of beauty and abundance; the earth system is wonderfully intricate and incredibly complex. But today living creatures, and the air, soil, and water that support them, face unprecedented threats. Many threats are global; most stem directly from human activity. Our current practices may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner we know.”

- *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice*

The situation before us is daunting. In a 2007 report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), leading scientists confirm that average temperatures are rising at an unprecedented rate, and they pin the cause of this global warming primarily on high levels of carbon dioxide in the earth’s atmosphere due primarily to human use of fossil fuels. As the concentration of carbon dioxide and other global warming gases grows, more heat is trapped by the atmosphere and less escapes back to space, causing altered weather patterns that can bring unusually intense precipitation, dry spells and more severe storms. (See www.ipcc.ch).

Though Americans make up just 4 percent of the world’s population, we produce about 25 percent of the world’s carbon dioxide pollution from our use of fossil fuels for energy, the largest per capita share of any country. Making the situation more urgent is the fact that the consequences of global

warming have fallen and will increasingly fall on those living in poverty, both within the United States and abroad. As a leading industrialized nation that has disproportionately contributed to greenhouse gas emissions, it is incumbent on the United States to rectify this situation.

As servants of the earth, we should urge our electoral candidates at all levels to create policies that ensure a significant reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (leading climate scientists say that we must reduce these emissions by 80 percent by 2050 in order to prevent the catastrophic impacts of rising temperatures in our environment – see www.pewclimate.org). Furthermore, we want them to ensure that the most vulnerable people do not suffer from either climate change or climate legislation. Prayerfully consider: What plans do the candidates have to care for our ailing planet? What policies have they proposed to help the poor and vulnerable through these turbulent times?

* This insert is based on the issue brief on global warming found in “Called To Be A Public Church” (see www.elca.org/advocacy). It is grounded in the ELCA social statement *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice* (adopted 8/1993), which you can find at www.elca.org/socialstatements.

Hunger and Poverty in the United States

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house...” Isaiah 58: 6-7

When we think about poverty, we may think of a distant problem that only affects people far away from us, a problem confined to inner-cities or third-world nations. However, we know that in every nation – rich or poor – fulfilling one’s God-given potential requires resources of various kinds: financial, physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, and communal. The sad reality is that many in America lack the necessary resources to fully live into who God has created them to be.

In 2007, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 37.3 million Americans (one in eight) are officially considered poor, including 13.3 million children. While this alone is shocking in a nation of such wealth, we also know that the current poverty measure fails to capture the true extent of economic hardship in America. Millions more face housing troubles, inadequate or no health insurance, and even hunger.

Are you surprised to discover that 58.5% of all Americans will spend at least one year beneath the poverty line at some point between ages 25 and 75?¹ Additionally, nearly 95 million Americans have housing problems of some kind, nearly 50 million Americans have no health insurance (with millions more underinsured), and over 35 million Americans are considered food insecure.

These problems are often hidden, and they defy stereotypes. We find them in cities, but also in rural America and increasingly in the suburbs. People are not just struggling to make ends meet on the other side of the world, but down your street and even in your pew.

Our faith teaches us that when any of us suffer, we all suffer. Martin Luther King, Jr. once reminded us that we are all “tied in a single garment of destiny,” and that “I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.”² Practical realities like rising consumer prices, the housing crisis, turmoil in the financial markets, growing unemployment, and skyrocketing health care costs affect us all and remind us that, indeed, we’re all in this together.

The ELCA’s social statement on economic life calls for sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all.³ How do we work toward this vision? To make that happen, all sectors of society must work in concert. Lutherans have a long-standing record of making a difference in the lives of poor and hungry people in this country through social ministries, disaster response, and charitable giving. These are important, but they alone are not enough. We must also address the systemic factors that contribute to poverty and erect the barriers that make escaping poverty so difficult.

Part of our responsibility, then, is to make sure that the decisions our elected officials make reflect our most deeply held values, including our belief that all people in America should have the resources they need to fulfill their potential and live a healthy life. If we truly desire to see an end to poverty in the richest nation on earth, we must strive for just public policies with the same passion with which we serve in our food pantries and give financially. What concrete and measurable plans will those running for office propose to reduce poverty and economic insecurity and create opportunity?

¹ Hacker, J. S. (2006). *The Great Risk Shift: The New Insecurity and the Decline of the American Dream*. New York: Oxford University Press.

² King, Jr., Martin Luther. (1963). *Strength to Love*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p. 70.

³ Available at www.elca.org/socialstatements.

Immigration*

In the book of Leviticus we hear God's command to Israel: "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as a citizen among you; you shall love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt..." (9:34).

"Welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed you, to the glory of God" (Rom 15:7).

"The newcomers in our church from around the world remind us that all of us in the Church of Jesus Christ are sojourners, 'for here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come' (Hebrews 13:14). As we journey together through the time God has given us, may God give us the grace of a welcoming heart and an overflowing love for the new neighbors among us." –*Immigration Message*

Immigration is a contentious issue in the United States. There are currently more than 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S., and each year around 300,000 more legal and illegal immigrants cross our borders. Some people argue that so many immigrants, and especially undocumented ones, jeopardize the U.S. job market, culture, and safety. Others advocate for the needs of these immigrants, arguing that they are not criminals but rather simply people who migrate here to join families, to work, or to seek refuge from persecution, violence, and other horrors.

Regardless of where people stand, however, we must not forget our Judeo-Christian calling to treat all people with hospitality. Indeed, by welcoming the stranger we are welcoming Jesus himself (Mt 25:35). In the face of such hospitality, the way undocumented immigrants are detained is highly problematic: in the 2007 fiscal year, the federal government detained nearly 300,000 immigrants - this includes children and families - in jail-like facilities that provide grossly inadequate medical services to the detained. Equally problematic is the increasing number of raids on people's communities, worksites, and even homes, leaving immigrant families and their local communities traumatized.

One recent example of how traumatic a raid can be for a community is the raid that ICE

(Immigration and Customs Enforcement) conducted in Postville, IA on May 12, 2008. This is what Rev. Steven Ullestad, bishop of the Northeastern Iowa Synod, and the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service office had to say about the raid and its aftermath: "The impact on those arrested, their children and families, and the whole community was devastating, and more than two months later, the town continues to experience the fallout. In the days following the raid, an estimated 65 percent of Latino high school students and 90 percent of Latino students overall were absent from class. Some elementary classes shrunk from 25 children to less than ten. Children of U.S. citizen parents were also traumatized by the action. These children reported having nightmares about their own parents being taken away and some drew pictures including the words, 'Don't take my friends away.'" (see http://www.neiasynod.org/synod_news/pdf/LIRS.pdf).

As a church that takes seriously its call to be hospitable, especially to the most vulnerable among us, we encourage our electoral candidates at all levels to create and support immigration policies that are fair and humane. Prayerfully consider: What have the candidates said about the situations illegal immigrants face? How do they propose dealing with the undocumented immigrants currently residing in the United States? Is their stance toward immigration one that respects the human dignity of all?

* See also the Immigration brief in "Called To Be A Public Church" (www.elca.org/advocacy); The ELCA message "Immigration" (adopted 11/1998), and the ELCA social statement *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* (adopted 8/1999) (www.elca.org/socialstatements).

Peace and Conflict*

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” -- Matthew 5:9.

We wake up in the morning to headlines of conflict – wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and elsewhere, conflict in the Middle East and scattered bombings around the planet. Lives are lost and others are shattered by injury and sorrow. Many of us have loved ones serving in war zones -- our concern is personal, and our grief is heartfelt in the deepest sense. Often we feel helpless, unable to lessen, much less end, bitter and raging divisions.

Yet there are important ways that we can make a difference. Jesus promises that peacemakers are blessed. This is a hopeful message that invites us to rise above the discouraging signs around us to work for positive change.

Of all the war-torn places on the planet, the challenges in the region of Israel and the Palestinian territories seem perhaps the most intractable. Many who have engaged in the region, however, see possibilities for resolution and offer the message that the current impasse *can* be overcome. It is God’s promise to dwell precisely in the difficult areas that in itself gives us courage to get involved.

Therefore, the ELCA has made this region an area of special emphasis through the adoption in 2005 of a Church-wide Strategy for engagement under the banner, **“Peace not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land”** (see www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Peace-Not-Walls.aspx).

Through *awareness*, *accompaniment* and *advocacy* Lutherans are making a difference. *Awareness* involves learning about the region; *accompaniment* has to do with supporting our Lutheran partners in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and others who are working for peace and justice; and *advocacy* means being

active citizens, and using our voices for those who are not heard.

Turning our attention to government, we see that the ELCA statement, *For Peace in God’s World*, affirms the legitimate role of governments in law enforcement and defense. At the same time, this statement recognizes that, “governments should vigorously pursue less coercive measures over more coercive ones: consent over compulsion, nonviolence over violence, diplomacy over military engagement, and deterrence over war.”

As we exercise the privilege and responsibility of our citizenship this November, we should look for how the candidates address peace and conflict. What are their plans for U.S. military and diplomatic involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere? How will they address the Israeli/Palestinian situation and what will they do to build a comprehensive peace throughout the region?

* This bulletin insert draws from the issue brief on peace and conflict in “Called To Be A Public Church” (see www.elca.org/advocacy). It is grounded in the ELCA social statement *For Peace in God’s World* (adopted 8/1995, see www.elca.org/socialstatements), and relates to the ELCA document “Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine” (see <http://archive.elca.org/assembly/05/0813/IsraelPalestine.pdf>).