



+Lent Blog Reflections +Lutheran Hill Visits
+Visit to Central America + Lutheran Advocacy efforts across the country

ELCA Advocacy Office, Washington, D.C.

Stacy Martin, Director

www.elca.org/advocacy

Lenten Blog Reflections: As we journey through this season of Lent, ELCA Advocacy policy staff will be sharing weekly reflections on ways in which we can act together to affect long-lasting changes in our communities through self-reflection, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Follow our Lenten series by signing up for ELCA Advocacy alerts, or by following our Advocacy Blog.

Lutheran Hill Visits: This year, ELCA Advocacy policy directors have continued to work on building connections with Lutheran lawmakers and their staff in Congress. Since the beginning of March, we have had productive conversations with nearly 20 Congressional offices from both sides of the aisle, working to highlight Lutheran policy values and reaffirming significance of faith-based advocacy. Our office looks forward to connecting with all of Lutherans in Congressional services and continuing to strengthen connections.

Selma, Alabama: This weekend marks the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights march from Selma to Montgomery, and the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. ELCA leaders, including staff from the offices of ELCA Advocacy and ELCA Racial Justice Ministries, will be joining civil right leaders from across the country in Selma to commemorate this historical event. The ELCA's participation in this event comes as part of a greater effort of reaffirming our values towards fighting racial injustice. Be sure to follow this event on our social media pages!

Visit to Central America: In February, members of our office joined other ELCA church wide leaders on a trip to El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala to understand the push factors behind increased migration of children and families, and to learn about their repatriation process. The trip reaffirmed our commitment to raise our voices together to ensure the stories we heard are not forgotten. Continue to learn more about our advocacy efforts for migrants and new initiatives as a result of this trip.



Lutheran Office for World Community, United Nations, New York, N.Y.

Dennis Frado, Director

United Nations: The fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women will take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 9 to 20 March 2015. This is the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration & Platform of Action and the theme will focus on the current challenges that affect its implementation and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. LOWC is expecting to host 31 Lutheran delegates (6 international and 25 ELCA members) and two side events.

Augusta Victoria Hospital: LOWC staff has been working with other colleagues with responsibility for the Peace Not Walls Campaign on various advocacy actions related to the financial (cash flow) crisis being faced by the LWF-operated Augusta Victoria Hospital. Specific requests have been made to about 33 synod bishops in each states and House districts as well as on the Ready Bench. Capitol Hill appointments for the Rev. Mark Brown and Dr. Tawfiq Nasser are foreseen for early and late March respectively with support from the ELCA Advocacy office and LOWC.



California

Mark Carlson, Lutheran Office of Public Policy

www.loppca.org

Valentine's Lobby Day: Participated in a Health and Human Service Coalition Valentine's Day "Break Up With Poverty" Lobby Day, along with a Lutheran lay leader with a chronic disease and limited mobility. The agenda included increasing the minimum wage, and allowing undocumented immigrants to participate in the Covered California health plans.

High Speed Rail: Held the mock controls of a high speed rail locomotive, part of a Siemens' exhibit at the Capitol. 25% of California's cap-and-trade funds are allocated to High Speed Rail (HSR). Although it has become politicized, LOPP-CA supported the original HSR bond financing measure approved by voters, a part of California's climate action plan.

Child Care Rally: Saw a lecture by the UC Santa Barbara author of an [award-winning study](#) on the difference between informal and formal child care for children of immigrant families (formal care makes a big difference in school readiness and avoiding an achievement gap!). \$1 billion also lost during the recession for childcare.

Ahead: Annual conference of the California Budget Project and the annual in-person meeting of the steering committee for California Interfaith Power & Light.



Colorado

Peter Severson, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry – Colorado

www.lam-co.org



Tom Luehrs delivers the keynote address.

Faith Advocacy Day: Colorado Faith Advocacy Day 2015 took place on Monday, February 16. Nearly 100 advocates gathered to hear keynoter Tom Luehrs, Executive Director of the St. Francis Center, and panelists B.J. Iacino from the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless and Keith Singer with Family Tree House of Hope, a shelter for women and children. Thanks to all who attended for a powerful witness of the church's call to advocacy.

Legislation: Several notable hunger and poverty bills have emerged in both chambers. SB 12, which would allow child support payments to be received by families on Colorado Works instead of by county governments, is in Senate Appropriations. SB 79, which would use a county clerk document fee to fund a new Affordable Housing Investment Fund, is awaiting an initial committee hearing. HB 1080, which would have reduced participation in the school breakfast program and was opposed by Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-Colorado and many other hunger groups, was defeated in committee.

Other issues: Governor John Hickenlooper's special task force on oil and gas sent nine recommendations to the governor's desk. Urban and suburban communities on the Front Range have been battling oil and gas companies over development near homes and schools. Recommendations include incentivizing mediation between the two sides to avert costly legal battles, increasing state health department staff to monitor air quality compliance, and encouraging the legislature to approve new pollution control measures.





Minnesota

Tammy Walhof, Lutheran Advocacy – Minnesota

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Clean Energy & Jobs Day at the Capitol: Lutheran Advocacy – Minnesota (LA-MN) was [host at Christ Lutheran](#) for the many partners and 400+ participants of our *Day at the Capitol*. The event included briefings, legislator visits, prayer circles, a youth meeting with Gov. Dayton, and a renewable energy study presentation. LA-MN Director Tammy was pleased with Lutheran participation. Many non-faith participants notably commented that they didn't realize church people cared for the environment.



Bishop's Breakfast with State Legislators: Though primarily about meeting and relationship building, the bishops also shared Lutheran Social Service (LSS) and LA-MN overlapping concerns related to the Homeless Youth Act and the Homes for All with legislators. [Each bishop](#) had a special role during the day, in leading prayer to open of the senate session, opening with prayer for day's different events, or speaking at a press conference.

Pastor's Day of Advocacy: The [joint LSS and LA-MN event](#) of 30+ pastors and parishioners, included briefings on housing, homelessness, youth homelessness, advocacy, a Youth Homeless Act press conference, and visits with legislators. LSS and LA-MN plan to make it an annual event.

Youth Homeless Act Press Conference (video on Facebook): One bishop served as emcee, while another shared about the LSS Duluth Homeless Youth Project. House and senate bill authors spoke, and a pastor shared about how churches can help. LSS intern, Ebony, shared her success story of becoming homeless by age 15, landing in an LSS shelter, and now getting a Masters of Social Work.

Nevada

Rev. Mike Patterson, LEAN Director/Advocate

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"ASHES TO GO" AT THE NEVADA LEGISLATURE: On February 18, Rev. Mike Patterson, an Episcopal priest and the Advocate for Lutheran-Episcopal Advocacy in Nevada, offered "*Ashes to Go*" inside the NV state legislative building. "*Ashes to Go*" is a practice that has gained popularity over the past few years, offering a brief liturgy in a public place and the mark of the cross on the forehead with ashes. "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" is the phrase with which we begin the season of Lent. It is a reminder of our transitory life here on earth, our bondage to sin, and our need to turn around (repent) and follow Jesus more closely. This year, Bishop Dan Edwards, who leads the Episcopal Diocese of Nevada, encouraged his priests to offer *Ashes to Go*. Rev. Patterson blessed about fifty legislators and legislative staff. Saying "remember you are dust and to dust you shall return" to a politician may sound like the stuff of stand-up comedy, but it is both encouraging and humbling to learn that elected officials came to be blessed.

New Jersey

Sara Lilja, New Jersey Synod

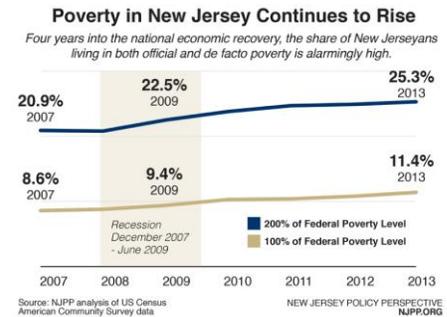
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Poverty in NJ: While New Jersey's official poverty rate obscures the true scope of the current economic struggle in New Jersey because of the state's cost of living. An income of 200% Federal Poverty Level comes closer to the actual income to meet basic needs. 1 in 4 New Jersey residents are struggling, and this percentage of the population is rising! The Governor released his 2016 Budget this past week, with seemingly no new plans as to address this growing concern.



Income Woes: The state's high long-term unemployment rate and slow job growth mean that this is still a difficult time for many middle- and low-income families. The Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry is working to promote policies like restoration of EITC, Earned Sick Days, and Feeding programs to help reduce the pain of this difficult economic situation.

Working for Change: We work diligently to change the landscape of the criminal justice system. Currently we are advocating for new regulations on the use of Solitary Confinement in New Jersey's jails and prisons.



New Mexico

Ruth Hoffman, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry – New Mexico

lutheranadvocacynm.org



Bishop's Legislative Luncheon: The 2015 Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM Bishop's Legislative Luncheon & Issues Briefing was held on February 10 in Santa Fe. Advocates gathered at Christ Lutheran Church to hear more about interest rate caps for storefront loans and hunger in New Mexico. Bishop Gonia talked about advocates as "[Stewards of the Divine Zoom Paradox.](#)"



At the luncheon, 150 Lutheran and ecumenical/interfaith advocates were in attendance. State Senator Peter Wirth was recognized as "Legislator of the Year" for his many years of good work on fair tax policy. Carlos Navarro, long-time Bread for the World volunteer, received the Chris & John Haaland Advocacy Award. Following the luncheon, a number of advocates visited the state capital, to speak with their legislators.

Pennsylvania

Amy Reumann, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania

www.lutheranadvocacypa.org

State Budget: In February, LAMPa staff, as part of the Coalition for Fair Education Funding, met with the governor's office and legislative leaders ahead of Gov. Wolf's inaugural budget address to unveil of the coalition's proposed funding formula. The student-driven formula would direct resources to students and districts with the greatest needs and calls for approximately \$3.6 billion in new state investments in public education to be phased in over six to eight years.

School Breakfast: LAMPa is also gearing up for National School Breakfast Week with partners in the Pa. School Breakfast Challenge. Relationships built through other work enabled us to bring the Pa. State Education Association to the table around child hunger. They have agreed to promote school breakfast through the statewide challenge and teacher training and have invited LAMPa to school breakfast participation at their annual leadership meeting. Additionally, LAMPa and PSEA have both been named to the board of Hunger-Free Lancaster County, which is working through Feeding America with the goal of being the first county in the nation to end the meal gap by 2018.

HUD: Staff also met with the chairman of the House Urban Affairs committee to encourage his support for expanding the state Housing Trust Fund. Subsequently, a favorable Senate bill was introduced in February,



and is expected to move out of committee the first week of March. Amy preached and taught at St. James, Gettysburg, to start a Lenten program focused on hunger.

Virginia

Marco Grimaldo, Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org

40 Bills in 45 Days: Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy worked on more than 40 bills over the course of this 45 day legislative session. All of our major legislation was killed early in the process – some never survived subcommittee. The good news is that we successfully countered anti-immigrant legislation and defeated a bill that would have made the process of executions in Virginia a secret, not even be subject to discovery in a court of law. We made some modest gains on the budget, including a bill that will provide school age children access to an additional \$100 from TANF for use on school supplies and clothes.

Immigration: Implementation of the DACA/DAPA program for undocumented immigrants is on hold but we are continuing to work on building a strong network to educate potential applicants. We have been working with LIRS at the request of our two bishops to help reach former Representative Wolf to help weigh in with Virginia Republicans about immigration and that work is ongoing.

Washington

Paul Benz, Faith Action Network

www.fanwa.org

Legislative Session: The public conversation on revenue and the state budget is just beginning. Our state Supreme Court decision, requiring full funding of K-12 public education, is hanging over the legislature's head. In terms of Faith Action Network's (FAN) legislative agenda some of our key policy bills are: Reducing Wage Theft, Increasing our Minimum Wage, Breakfast After the Bell (increasing school breakfast participation), Lifting the prohibition on providing Post-Secondary education in our state prison system, Family Unity Act (reducing ICE detainers and deportations), Preventing Human Trafficking, Better state regulations to prevent Oil Train disasters

Faith Based Organizing: FAN just completed four legislative forums/events around our state with good attendance. We are pleased to announce that FAN's 2015-2016 ELCA intern has been selected and will begin her work in late August. We are also grateful to the ELCA for being approved to be a Horizon Site. FAN participated in, and helped coordinate, an interfaith press conference recently at a Hindu Temple north of Seattle where there was a hate crime incident.

Wisconsin

Cindy Crane, Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin

www.loppw.org



Proposed Biennial Budget: Funding has been proposed for trafficked youth and six of our bishops had sent a letter to Wisconsin legislators and the governor supporting it. Additional financial support for mental health services and transitional jobs has also been proposed. We are challenged by the enormous cuts that would impact education, seniors, people with disabilities and our environment.

Right to Work: The senate passed a bill prohibiting as a condition of employment membership in labor organizations. LOPPW was quoted in the [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) on



the subject. LOPPW's [Statement on Right to Work](#) was edited and revised by the advisory council and Wisconsin bishops.

Safe Harbor Kickoff: LOPPW and Cherish All Children's kickoff event drew more than 40 people. Local police and members of our task force led the conference. We wrote letters to legislators and Bishop Hoyme blessed those letters.

Other Advocacy: The director led a workshop at Midvale Community Lutheran Church in Madison. For information about our rally on human trafficking: <http://www.loppw.org/events/coming-soon>

Let us know what advocacy efforts are happening in your congregation, synod, or state.
Contact us at Washingtonoffice@elca.org today!