



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

September 2020

Concerns about Climate Change and Caring for God's Creation

Thank you for your service in the legislature. Approaching a new budget cycle, I realize you have many concerns. We hope that one of your policy priorities will be to protect our environment. Below is a letter showing some of the concerns we hope that the legislature will address and is signed by all six of our bishops with congregations in Wisconsin and several other of our members from across the state. Thank you for your attention to this:

As members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) we have deep concerns about environmental problems threatening God's creation. We applaud the efforts of the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change as well as the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality. And now it is time to act. We call upon our state to make needed changes to protect current and future generations and all creatures, keeping in mind those who are most vulnerable to environmental problems.

Renewable Energy, Biodegradable Products, and Jobs: We support policies that move us in the direction of utilizing renewable energy with the goal of diminishing greenhouse gas emissions at least 50% by 2050. A couple of examples of how to achieve this would be to require Wisconsin electric utilities to develop plans to phase out all coal-fired power plants, and help utilities meet customer demand by requiring them to offer community solar options.

Increasing dependency upon solar and wind energy will open more employment opportunities. We support policy-based efforts to help citizens who have traditionally struggled to secure employment, for example, individuals who have been incarcerated and people living in poverty, to find jobs in the renewable energy sectors.

Explore replacing plastics with biodegradable products such as compressed cardboard. This would lead to jobs in the recycling paper/cardboard industry.

Farmers and the Land: Dramatic shifts in weather patterns, indicative of climate change, make farming extremely difficult. This, coupled with significant swings in commodity prices make farming far riskier. Tillage-induced carbon dioxide release creates a multitude of issues including an increased volume and speed of runoff, increased sheet and rill erosion, and water cycle-infiltration problems. Our lakes and rivers are filled with nutrients and sediment.

We support financial assistance that enable farmers to make changes needed to protect drinking water and mitigate other practices that foster climate change. We support offering education on soil practices and ways to sequester carbon dioxide emissions to farmers and to those preparing for that profession, but also making funding available to them. For example, no-till farming, adding cover crops, and

creating margins (ditches) that are covered by solar panels require capital. Already over-stressed farmers should not have to manage this alone. We cannot afford not to protect our land and water.

We support planting the types of plants and trees that sequester carbon dioxide, mold, and other toxic fumes from the air.

Energy Efficient Restoration of Buildings Exempt from Tax Credits: We have many large church buildings that would benefit the environment by becoming more energy efficient, but without tax credits this is difficult to make happen. We support state grants to help with these efforts.

Infrastructure: Our church has a long history of offering assistance to people who have experienced great loss because of natural disasters. We recognize the science that teaches us that flooding in particular has increased in Wisconsin as a result of climate change. Please expand and strengthen programs to help communities plan for and respond to climate change impacts from flooding, droughts, heat and other extreme weather events.

Transportation: Establish dedicated funding for biking and walking infrastructure. Also, increase funding for and encourage people's use of public transportation where appropriate.

We support encouraging the trend of allowing employees to work more remotely after pandemic to reduce commuter traffic that causes greenhouse gas emissions.

Resource and Education: Many environmental efforts are already working in Wisconsin. Please create a database with places such as cities, counties, colleges and universities, school districts, businesses, churches/congregations, etc. that have been successful at utilizing renewable energy, and make that resource easily available to the public. Please use the database as a resource to proactively educate people about why it is important to take action to protect Wisconsin and our planet.

Thank you for your consideration and God's blessings upon your work,

Bishop James Arends Bishop, La Crosse Area Synod
Bishop Paul Erickson, Greater Milwaukee Synod
Bishop Katherine Finegan, Northern Great Lakes Synod
Bishop Gerald Mansholt, East Central Synod of Wisconsin
Bishop Peter Rogness, South-Central Synod of Wisconsin
Bishop Laurie Skow-Anderson, Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

Lutheran Office of Public Policy in Wisconsin Climate Team and Advisory Council:

Ms. Joyce Anderson, Eau Claire
Rev. Adam Arends, Ettick
Dr. James Boulter, Eau Claire
Rev. Cindy Crane, Director Statewide
Rev. Barb Girod, Wautoma
Dr. Marie Fellbaum Korpi, Manitowoc
Ms. Jane Harrison, Platteville
Ms. Lisa Hassenstab, Madison
Rev. Lucas Ladnier, Beldenville
Mr. Kyle Minden, Middleton
Chief Meteorologist Bob Lindmeier, Oregon
Rev. James Lynch, Kenosha

Mr. Willian Mattson, Rhinelander
Ms. Debbie Nelson, Madison
Mr. Evan Sadlon, UW-Madison
Ms. Eleanor Siebert, Richland Center
Ms. Irene TenEyck, La Crosse
Rev. Andy Twiton, Madison
Rev. Nick Uthphall, Madison
Ms. Jill Westberg, Madison