

...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. Luke 10:27

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Freed by grace we ask how to respond to the commandment to love our neighbor. We witness some answers to that question in the many generous outreach ministries and donations ELCA parishes offer in Wisconsin. Advocacy is also a response to the question of how to love one's neighbor and can be a significant accompaniment ministry to the outreach work we are already doing in our churches.

LOPPW is one of the ELCA advocacy ministries addressing the problem of poverty. Because we cannot diminish poverty on our own we get involved with partners and governments. LOPPW staff and advisory council members directly make contact with legislators and we seek ways to assist others to find their own authority to advocate. We also serve as an educational resource to congregations and pastors. LOPPW does all of this in partnership with the Greater Milwaukee Area Synod and five other synods with congregations in Wisconsin.

In the last year we placed an emphasis on assisting youth victims of sex trafficking and also on juvenile justice for 17-year-old nonviolent offenders. LOPPW Council Member Venice Williams and the director met with Representative LaTonya Johnson to discuss the problem of trafficking in Milwaukee and the state.

At our annual LOPPW retreat we heard directly from Senator Jerry Petrowski about his 2014 attempt to pass a bill returning nonviolent 17-year-old offenders to the juvenile system. LOPPW Advisory Council Member Pastor Jay McDivitt and the director followed up with a visit to Senator Petrowski's office to discuss his bill and other issues related to poverty.

We held a half-day Poverty Summit with a Focus on Youth in Marinette that included

Representative John Nygren, and organized a half-day Safe Harbor Campaign conference on human trafficking in Menomonie (near Eau Claire); both of these events could be duplicated. In March we held a Safe Harbor Rally in Madison that drew people from around the state. At the educational hour of the rally preceding our visits with legislators at the capitol, Representative Jill Billings talked about the Safe Harbor bill that she and Representative LaTonya Johnson are writing; the bill will clarify that youth under the age of 18 found engaging in commercial sex be recognized as victims rather than criminals. We also support the \$2 million budgeted for trafficked youth in the Governor's proposed budget.

Venice Williams has offered to organize an LOPPW Awareness Day at the Body & Soul Healing Arts Center on April 25th. The LOPPW director will help lead the event.

On a federal level we worked with our Washington D.C. advocacy office to support the Environmental Protection Agency's call for lower carbon dioxide emissions in each state.

We also address poverty issues as they arise. Most recently we have been advocating for our government to accept federal dollars for BadgerCare and to not require drug testing for recipients of FoodShare. Federally we are supporting the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization.

LOPPW has developed new resources online to assist people in doing advocacy from a faith perspective. We are also available to speak at events and in congregations.

Together as a synod your support helps to sustain this ministry. We are grateful for the leadership of Bishop Barrow and the synod staff. We are also fortunate to have Pastor Jay McDivitt and Ms. Venice Williams as your representatives to the LOPPW Advisory Council.

Sometimes justice work can take a toll on us and change can seem far away. Remember that we are not alone. We are part of a greater community with God at our center.

Yours in Christ,

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