



Providing a Prophetic Voice in the Nevada Legislature for the Least Among Us

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Nevada (LAMN) is making a difference by speaking up on issues of concern to poor and vulnerable people, who would otherwise be forgotten in the give and take of the current session at the Nevada Legislature.

Based on biblical scriptures, the ELCA Social Statements, Lutheran confessional writings, including covenants made at baptism, Lutherans believe that loving our neighbors, seeking peace and justice, and caring for creation are fundamental responses by which we live out our faith, through concrete acts such as feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, visiting those in prison, clothing the naked, and giving hope to the least among us. In giving voice to the needs of the poor and vulnerable, Lutherans call upon legislators to respect the moral imperative underpinning the legitimacy of government, which is a commitment to the common good and to the assurance that everyone in society will be treated justly and provided an opportunity to seek and obtain a sufficient and sustainable livelihood.

In 2011, the Nevada Legislature is facing historic challenges that threaten to destroy the safety net of public services that enable the poorest and most needy citizens of the State to have adequate food, shelter, medical care, and access to essential services. Proposed budget cuts would eliminate programs for the mentally ill, troubled youth, sick and disabled people who cannot afford the cost of medical care, and students from poor families who are struggling to get a decent education required for the jobs available in the emerging economy of their economic future.

LAMN is a voice of conscience for legislators, who might otherwise forget that government plays a critical role in helping the most vulnerable in society, many of whom are children and seniors. LAMN also speaks up for those who have lived on the margins of society but desire to turn their lives around and begin the journey back to wholeness. An example is LAMN's support for a bill that would allow courts in Nevada to vacate the judgments of conviction of persons who have engaged in prostitution or pandering but who have done so as victims of human trafficking and who have been involuntarily trapped in a life of dependence on the sex trade for a living. Because people of faith believe in human redemption, compassionate legislation such as this gives people a chance to turn their lives around and regain their human dignity.

In a similar way, LAMN has led the effort in Nevada to assure that people who have been imprisoned and have paid their debt to society are released back into society with valid identification, so they have a chance at getting a job and qualifying for housing and other benefits, thereby becoming self-supporting citizens. In 2010, LAMN initiated an effort with RAIN to obtain voluntary contributions from individuals in congregations throughout Nevada that were deposited in a special revenue account created in 2009 in the Nevada State Treasury for the purpose of supporting reentry services. As of May, 2011, over \$15,000 has been raised, over a third of it from Lutherans, including a portion of the free will offerings at the 2010 Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly. Because of this effort, Nevada legislators have become more supportive of efforts to develop reentry services designed to reduce recidivism among those released back into society.

Because of LAMN and other advocacy ministries of the ELCA, our church has a voice in the public square, speaking up for the values we hold dear and urging legislators to embrace policies and enact laws that reflect these values. Society will be the better for it. As stated in one of LAMN's brochures: “. . .and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6: 8)