

LUTHERAN ADVOCACY MINISTRY IN PENNSYLVANIA

In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, we advocate for wise and just public policies in Pennsylvania that promote the common good. Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania is a shared ministry of seven Pennsylvania synods, the ELCA Domestic Mission unit, and Pennsylvania ELCA agencies and institutions. Through LAMPa, Lutherans in the Upper Susquehanna Synod are supported to voice their faith convictions in the public square with and on behalf of our most vulnerable neighbors and the world we share, while seeking to create a more just Commonwealth.

In 2016, LAMPa celebrated 37 years of advocacy ministry that supported and deepened your congregational efforts to address hunger, poverty, immigration, school funding inequity, racism and environmental injustice. Thanks be to God for the support of our Upper Susquehanna Synod Policy Council representatives, the Rev. David Byerly and Mr. Terry Brown.

LAMPa advocacy takes place through staff work in the capital, partnerships with coalitions and engagement of Lutherans in letter-writing, email and call-in advocacy, legislative visits, offering of testimony, editorial writing, social media campaigns, press conferences and rallies. In 2016, we identified seven issue areas around which to build teams of advocates: Hunger, Mental Health/Addiction, Racial Justice, Creation Justice, Immigration, Poverty/Housing/Employment and Education. Please consider offering your gifts or experience to any of these teams and contact LAMPa to become engaged!

Highlights of LAMPa advocacy in 2016 include:

Feeding the Hungry: Pennsylvania Lutherans helped secure a 4.1 percent increase in the line item that supports the commonwealth's most critical anti-hunger programs – one of the most significant funding increases in years in our fight against hunger in Pennsylvania. The State Food Purchase Program increased from \$18.438 million to \$19.188 million. SFPP remains one of the commonwealth's most important tools in the fight against hunger and a lifeline for food banks across Pennsylvania. Many of our Lutheran food pantries rely on this program to supplement their ministries. The program provides cash grants to counties for the purchase and distribution of food to low-income individuals, including seniors. For years, the program has suffered from stagnant funding even as need rose dramatically.

The SFPP line item is administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and supports programs such as the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). After completing a successful first year, PASS received \$1 million in continued funding.

In addition, staff continued to work with statewide anti-hunger advocates to inform the work of the Governor's Food Security Partnership. That partnership produced a "Blueprint for a Hunger-Free Pennsylvania" in the fall. LAMPa continues to work with policymakers and anti-hunger advocates to implement the recommendations found in the blueprint, and the governor's 2017 budget proposal included a \$2 million increase in funding for school breakfast.

Giving All Children a Better Chance at Academic Success – Pennsylvania Lutherans pressed lawmakers as part of the Campaign for Fair Education Funding to address the state's rating as the least equitable in the country for education funding. This inequity has been leading to widening achievement gaps between wealthy and poor districts, as well as along racial lines. The efforts saw a tremendous win in 2016 with the passage of HB 1552. The bill, which amends the Public School Code of 1949, requires all new funds in the K-12 allocation to be passed through the BEFC-approved formula, received overwhelming bipartisan support. The formula passed through the Senate with a vote of 49-1 and passed the House with a vote of 188-3. Although we sought an additional \$400 million, last year's budget did see a \$200 million increase in basic education funding – a step toward alleviating the state's inadequate and inequitable school funding situation.

LAMPa staff continued to work toward coalition building for policies to promote trauma-responsive schools.

Addressing Poverty: LAMPa continued to fight attempts by predatory lenders to gain a foothold in Pennsylvania through proposals to introduce payday lending to the state.

Standing for Welcome – LAMPa worked to successfully stop legislation that sought to punish municipalities that adopted policies against honoring requests from Immigration and Customs Enforcement to detain undocumented persons without a warrant. Many Pennsylvania municipalities adopted such policies, citing increased work and cost for local law enforcement erosion of trust between local police and immigrant communities – threatening public safety for all.

LAMPa advocated for the closure of the Berks County detention center, where immigrant families, including small children, are held while awaiting decisions on their requests for asylum. The administration maintains that the facility is not licensed for that purpose, but the operator is appealing the decision. LAMPa advocates have been attending vigils at the center to show support for the families inside.

Connecting Service to Advocacy: LAMPa provided information, resources and support for congregations and conferences participating in the Churchwide Day of Service in September. This practice is being lifted up church-wide for this year's Day of Service.

In 2017, LAMPa will again be developing service-and-advocacy projects for congregations to engage in for the Churchwide Day of Service on Sept. 10. We would be glad to help your congregation plan to make that day one of “God’s work. Our hands. Our voices.”

Public Witness: In 2016, LAMPa coordinated the first “Ashes-to-Go” at the state capitol to mark the beginning of Lent. Clergy and lay leaders from several denominations offered prayers and anointing on the sidewalk and in the rotunda and were extremely well received.

The traditional Lutheran Day in the Capitol became a two-day event in 2016, with a day of service, learning and an interfaith blessing of the waters on Sunday, followed by a day of preparation for advocacy on Monday. The event was an official part of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg’s Spring Academy, and featured participation by Lutheran Camping Corp. and ELCA Glocal musicians – collaboration that LAMPa seeks to grow as we work to be church together, for the sake of the world, in Pennsylvania.