

Sharing the Good News

from the pen of the Mission Interpreter



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Advocacy

In John 15 Jesus introduces the Spirit of Truth with the word *parakletos*, meaning Advocate, one who is a counselor, guide, helper. On Pentecost that Spirit came upon the disciples in a profound way; they became Advocates. We, likewise, have been called by the Spirit to be Advocates—counselors, guides, helpers—assisting those who need our support. An advocate is a positive force, speaking **for** something, a protagonist, never an antagonist.

We can do that in our own personal way, of course, but how does our church, the ELCA of which we are members, advocate on the larger issues that we hear about in the news? Do we get political? Well, yes, to a degree. We, as a church, should be involved in public policy. We are, after all, citizens of two kingdoms, one divine, one secular, and that divine one needs to have some influence on the secular if we pray in earnest that “God’s will be done on earth as in heaven.”

“Public church” is an important phrase for advocacy workers, for it means making the views of the ELCA public and in places where they can make a difference in what happens in society. It is a wide-ranging effort, touching on issues all the way from local food pantries to international issues like migration and climate change. Advocates work with government representatives, other churches, nonprofit agencies and civil society groups to bring the concerns of faith into discussions about social policy. It is not political in that it has no attachment to any political party or ideology. However, by identifying needs and problems, faith-based groups can advocate for solutions. Then when a solution becomes viable, advocates can help it be enacted into law or applied in public policy.

Lutherans have a history of being a public church. Martin Luther himself, together with his colleagues, helped pass the first “social welfare ordinance” in Wittenberg, Germany some five centuries ago. This provided interest-free loans for small businesses, aid to orphans and widows, and health care for the poor. Luther advocated that while the church decidedly must be charitable, “the prince”, *i.e.*, “government,” *is responsible both to and for the welfare of citizens under its rule*. In the twentieth century Lutheran churches were leaders in resettling refugees after World Wars I and II and later in countries where people fled their homes because of war or famine. Lutherans are known nationally and internationally for this work. When Bishop Eaton visited Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon, people knew “Lutheran.” And we continue to advocate for economic and social justice, human rights, food and water security, among other things. Sometimes advocacy is dramatic and very public when rallies and demonstrations are organized around certain issues. More often, however, it is quiet and slow, involving months or even years of work with government and social agencies. The ELCA helped get through Congress the Global Food Security Act, a bill aimed at improving agriculture, water resources and other food-related conditions around the world.

All of the ELCA’s advocacy efforts are based in ELCA social statements approved by churchwide assemblies after study and prayer. They focus on the things the ELCA as a public church says Jesus would care about—the hungry, the sick, strangers, prisoners, children, orphans and widows.

As baptized Christians we know we have been saved by grace, we have an **Advocate**, namely Jesus, who intercedes in our behalf. As ELCA members we respond to that remarkable gift in many ways to serve others. Through our benevolences and prayers we also support advocacy, thereby reinforcing “public church.” We are **sharing the Good News!**

