

Letter from ELCA Bishop Bruce Burnside

February 17, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The breathtaking debate taking place in our legislature and throughout the public forum concerning the Governor's proposal to address budget issues in the State of Wisconsin not only presents major implications for collective bargaining and workers' rights, it also significantly affects Medical Assistance programs for the most vulnerable individuals and families in the state of Wisconsin. The Church has a voice in this debate.

The ELCA in Churchwide Assembly Action CA91.06.35 at the 1991 Churchwide Assembly in Orlando Florida passed a resolution which in its Resolve states that the ELCA:

offer support and prayer for labor and management....

urge[s] employers, ... workers to commit themselves to negotiated settlements

expresse[s] concern for workers and their families who endure hardship and job insecurity due to breakdown of traditional collective-bargaining practices

call[s] upon the churchwide, synods, congregations and members to support legislation that would strengthen the viability of negotiated settlements...

commit[s] itself to ... advocacy... to protect the rights of workers, support the collective bargaining process...

Additionally, the ELCA adopted a Social Statement on economic life "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All" at its sixth Churchwide Assembly on August 20, 1999 in Denver, Colorado. This Social Statement, intended for study and to be used as a resource within the Church and as the Church speaks to the world is an appropriate resource for congregations to use. I commend it to you.

Jesus picks up the voices of the prophets and continues to speak on these issues throughout his ministry. The church has addressed these matters from its very beginning and the Lutheran tradition has understood the whole human workplace to be a call from God to vocation. The Church does have a voice in this debate because Jesus has a voice in this debate. Paul speaks to the Church with these words calling for: "a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need...the one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little." (2 Corinthians 8:9, 13-15) And I John instructs by way of question:

"How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help?" (I John 3:17)

Whether Republican or Democrat, employer or employee, private or public worker, we who are shaped by the Word of God, share one holy calling to care for one another as one holy family loved by God. The Church has a voice in this debate.

For Christ's Sake,

Bishop Bruce Burnside

Synod of Wisconsin

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

South-Central