



March 11, 2010

A Call to Prayer, Conversation, and Action from the Lutheran Bishops of Minnesota

“You are the light of the world.” (Matthew 5:14)

*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 help? (1 John 3:17)*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Our state leaders are engaged in the most challenging legislative session in recent history. The projected state budget deficit of \$944 million for the current budget and more than \$7 billion for the next biennium is unprecedented and comes on the heels not of robust surplus, but following several rounds of painful cutbacks. The policy debate often moves between two poles: one seeking smaller government and further reductions in taxes and spending on the state level and one that seeks to recapture a larger role for state government by returning to previous levels of tax income and support for social programs and local governments. Partisan disagreements result in sound byte posturing rather than thoughtful engagement with significant and complex issues.

It’s an important debate. People’s lives are at stake. People who care deeply for the well-being of our state reach different solutions. And some thoughtful leaders and analysts say that neither pole has adequate answers and that we need to consider new ways to live and shape our lives together for the common good. It may even be that new ways might involve religious institutions like ours, long involved in caring for people directly.

As Lutheran Christians, we have a place in the public arena. Though we might not be policy wonks or political strategists, we aspire to be thoughtful citizens, holding our public leaders accountable for shaping public policy in a way that serves the neighbor, seeks a just society, and cares especially for the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized.

The difficult choices we make reflect the values that guide our decisions. Arising from our own faith are values that center on the well-being of our neighbors—all of them—particularly the neighbors most in need. In a culture that promotes “me first,” our faith makes clear that caring for the poor contributes to the common good.

We believe the faith community—and particularly we as Lutherans—have a role to play in these decisions. Our leaders listen to their constituents. They pay attention to the political climate. We—the more than 800,000 Lutherans in this state—are part of that climate, though we are not all of one mind. We are Republican and Democrat, liberal and conservative, urban and rural, long-time residents and new arrivals. But we share a faith commitment that compels us to care for the well-being of all, not simply to get a big slice of the pie for ourselves. We can shape the debate and hold the proposed solutions accountable to these principles.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Martin Luther, whose name we bear, is said to have written more than 1,000 letters to public officials of his day. It's in our tradition to seek to be responsible and engaged citizens. Our citizenship arises from our being claimed by the God we meet in Jesus Christ and sent into the world to bear Christ's love to the world. We are called to let our light shine.

So the six of us—the bishops of the six synods in Minnesota—join today in calling for **A Call to Prayer, Conversation, and Action** on Sunday, April 18, 2010.

Prayer: We hope you regularly hold up our elected leaders in your public and personal prayer. We ask that on Sunday, April 18, every congregation in the state participate in this common effort. The God we have met in Jesus Christ has called us to tend to people's needs. Government is the vehicle we use together to shape the life that affects us all and expresses care for people's need. So we pray for faithfulness and wisdom for those public leaders who serve the public good. Pray for them; they face difficult choices and even more difficult decisions.

Conversation: We invite groups of people in all our congregations to discuss together the decisions under consideration by our elected leaders. We suggest the week of April 18, when the legislative process will have only a month to go and far-reaching decisions will be made. We will pose some questions for you to use in beginning that conversation, but you may shape it in ways that will be most effective in your setting. You may want to invite legislators from your community to be part of this conversation.

Action: Take time to communicate with your legislators your thoughts and concerns. You don't need to have all the answers. But many who are not powerful and who have little influence have much at stake in these decisions, and our faith calls us to be their advocates. Let your leaders know what kind of state you want this to be and how you want our communities to be healthy places for all of us. Speak your faith and your values. Over 25 percent of the 201 members of the House and Senate are Lutheran and most of our other legislators come from faith traditions that share these fundamental values. Speak up!

Minnesota has long been regarded as a state with a strong commitment to the quality of life that serves well all people across the economic spectrum. We have special concerns this year that in the midst of hard decisions, our common life together remains strong and those on the margins are not forgotten.

We call on Lutherans to be heard. To be seen. To let our light shine.

Grace and peace,



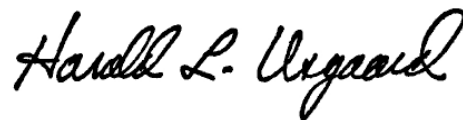
Bishop Tom Aitken
Northeastern Minnesota Synod



Bishop Peter Rogness
Saint Paul Area Synod



Bishop Jon Anderson
Southwestern Minnesota Synod



Bishop Harold Usgaard
Southeastern Minnesota Synod



Bishop Craig Johnson
Minneapolis Area Synod



Bishop Lawrence Wohlrabe
Northwestern Minnesota Synod