



Lutheran Advocacy - Minnesota

In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, we advocate for wise and just public policies to overcome hunger and poverty, and steward God's creation!

The 2024 Lenten Letter Challenge

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for loving the world so very deeply. Help us to see the brokenness that now mars what you created as perfect, and the struggles of people you created in your image. Help us to reflect your love by loving and serving our neighbors and our vulnerable planet. Please help us be your advocacy ambassadors, bravely lifting our voices with, and for, those whose wellbeing is threatened. Give us the right words to share with our leaders, so that they, too, may see and hear and understand the brokenness, as well as how you are calling them to respond. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Lent (*"For God so loved the world..." John 3:16*)

We know the challenges our world faces. The season of Lent emphasizes and helps us remember that God is not through with us, or this world. Our Lenten disciplines remind us that we are called to "pick up the Cross" and follow our merciful God into the neglected, forgotten, broken places where others do not wish to go. It is, as God's servants and ambassadors, to do God's work of mercy, justice, and compassion for "the least of these," those who are vulnerable, who experience hunger, poverty, or homelessness. It is to repent of being destroyers, consumers, and flawed, broken "keepers" of the beautiful lifegiving earth God created. Rather, we must heed God's call to be shepherds of this vulnerable place, following in the steps of the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. We must remember our call to love the earth, its creatures, and its people with the kind of love that God shows each of us. Importantly, we must remember that that this is not our work, but God's work using our hands (and voices, and pens/paper)...and that God is drawing us, and all that has God created, toward resurrection and restoration.

Advocacy (*Our advocacy seeks to influence public policy toward justice for all that God has created*)



Advocacy, as defined by the dictionary, is "to speak or plead on behalf of another." We ourselves are beneficiaries of advocacy. Jesus is our advocate (1 John 2:1), as is the Holy Spirit (John 14:26).

Throughout history, we see examples of God's people acting as advocates by calling upon their leaders to act justly and protect the most vulnerable. Moses was an advocate for his people with Pharaoh, who was the most powerful political leader of his day. The Old Testament prophets were consistent advocates as they called the leaders and the people back to right relationship with God, which includes seeking justice.

Motivated by God's love for us, we carry on that tradition. We can share a vision of the world as God wants it to be, and help shape the laws and policies that define how we live together in God's world. We can contact our leaders and lift our voices with, and for, those whose voice is not usually heard in the halls of power. Advocacy is an extension of the church's practice of loving our neighbors, and being good stewards of God's creation.

Letters to Legislators (for Lent or Anytime!)

We need you – your **congregation, campus, youth group, confirmation class, WELCA group, church committee**, or whatever – **to be in contact with your Minnesota state representative and senator!** It is in relationship with their constituents that our legislators know what we care about, and why.

Letters can be written during a special time in worship, before or after a meal, as part of a forum or in small groups. It is effective to collect the letters as an offering to God, and to pray that legislators will be moved by them. Remember that we do this as part of our faith, acting as God's advocacy ambassadors for love of neighbor and creation. Notecards, rather than big impersonal pieces of paper, help make the letters/notes feel more personal to the legislator and assist in the relationship-building process. **Use the following pages, which can be printed back-to-back by issue, to organize letter offerings with your group.** Or send the pages out in advance and encourage people to bring their letters to your next meeting or gathering to dedicate them jointly.

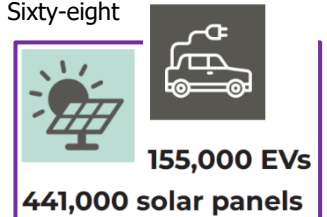
Issue: Electronic Waste

The Problem: Electronic waste is the fastest growing waste stream in the world, growing 3-5 percent per year. In fact, around 20 percent of waste globally is from e-waste, while it comprises 70 percent of toxins in landfills. Yet, most anything with a cord, battery or circuit board can be recycled. Out of 266 million pounds of e-waste generated annually in Minnesota, only about 24% is captured, recycled, and reused.



This presents a significant health risk, as well as an economic loss. E-waste in landfills leaches toxins into water supplies, while that burned in garbage incinerators puts dangerous toxins into the air we breathe. Some e-waste causes fires in waste hauling vehicles, landfills, buildings, and more. This adds expense to collection fees and taxes, not to mention damage to the health of nearby residents.

Economic Opportunity: A recent study discovered that if 100 percent of Minnesota's e-waste were recovered, it **could generate \$2.8 billion** and **create almost 1740 directly related jobs** (and many indirect jobs). Sixty-eight different minerals/metals are recoverable, the most valuable of which include Palladium, Platinum, Gold, Copper, Tin, Lithium, Iron, Aluminum, Silver, and Ruthenium. Enough silver can be recovered for 441,000 solar panels, and enough copper for 155,000 electric vehicles. [See [The Economic Potential of E-Waste Recycling in Minnesota: A Pilot Study](#) - p. 6 element charts; pictures/facts from p.7].



Past Legislation: Minnesota's Electronics Recycling Act, passed in 2007, is out of date. Some of what it defined as e-waste included electronics like CD/DVD players, VCRs, and other electronics that are no longer popular. Meanwhile, items like Bluetooth ear buds did not even exist until more recent years yet include lithium batteries and circuit boards. E-cigarettes didn't start infiltrating the U.S. market until the late 2000s (and in the case of disposable vapes, aren't even rechargeable). Also, smart phones which most of us now carry (and replace every couple of years) started gaining wide popularity in the years after the introduction of the iPhone at the end of June in 2007 (after the end of the legislative session which passed the Electronics Recycling Act).

At its peak, under the 2007 legislation, around 40 million pounds of e-waste was collected, but by 2021 that was down to only 20 million pounds. Currently, residents and businesses must pay fees (sometimes hefty amounts) to do the right thing by depositing e-waste for recycling. Limited drop-off locations and items collected present further barriers.

2024 Legislative Proposal: Lutheran Advocacy-MN is joining other organizations to pass legislation that would...

- 1) **Change the definition of e-waste** to include any device covered by electricity (This is a broad and flexible definition, which covers any device into the future, including those not yet conceived of)
Exclusions:
 - Lead acid batteries (a car battery buyback program already exists, resulting in a 95% recovery rate)
 - Electronic Vehicles & Infrastructure (recycled by a different process and different stakeholders)
 - White Waste – Refrigerators, washers, dryers,
- 2) Provide **free accessible drop-off or collection** of e-waste statewide for residents AND businesses
- 3) Collect **fees at the point of sale** of electronic items (3-4% of item cost) **to cover collection costs** including disposal, shipping, up to two employees per collector, and an additional incentive per pound.

[See KARE 11 News Coverage of the Study](#)

Sources:

1. Maria Jensen: Repowered (Environment, Health, & Safety); Recycling Electronics for Climate Action (RECA); Areas of Study: Public Health (Research Methods); Environmental Toxicology & Public Health. Presentations: MEP Climate & Energy Cluster; [Ely Tuesday Group](#)
2. Lucy Mullany: Eureka Recycling. Presentations/Discussions: MEP Climate & Energy Cluster
3. Jensen, Maria; Roopali Phadke; Keith Steva; Marlise Riffel. "[The Economic Potential of E-Waste Recycling in Minnesota: A Pilot Study](#)." Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability; Repowered; Macalester College. August 2023.
4. "[Harnessing the Economic Potential of E-Waste Recycling: A New MN Study](#)." Repowered.
5. Smieja, Jon. "[The Enormous Opportunity of E-Waste Recycling](#)." World Economic Forum. March 24, 2023.

What is Needed for a Good Advocacy Letter?



As you try to get the attention of your legislators, you'll want to **use your own words** and **personalize** your letter as much as possible. They want to know what YOU think. **Notecards** or **stationary** can make the letter feel even more personal. A simple personalized letter, note, or email is usually worth more than hundreds of form letters. Contact Lutheran Advocacy-MN for updates and bill numbers (as available), or check the website for additional resources. ****[Who Represents Me? <https://www.gis.lcc.mn.gov/iMaps/districts/>]****

A good letter will also include the following elements:

- 1) **Your Name & Address on Envelope & Letter:** Legislators want to know that you are their constituent and where you live (or where you go to church, if you are writing to the legislator from that district).
- 2) **Who You Are:** Mention something about yourself, like what church you are from, and if you have first-hand experience with the issue.
- 3) **Ask for Specific Action:** "Please support..." If there is a bill number, this is the place to include it.
- 4) **Give a Reason or Say Something About Why You Care:** Speak from your heart, elaborate from the talking points, or tell a story.

Mail the letters to these addresses:

Sen. _____, Minnesota State Senate, MN Senate Building, 95 University Ave. W., St. Paul, MN 55155

Rep. _____, Minnesota House of Representatives, 100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55155

Talking Points & Sample Letter: E-Waste

Legislative "Ask":

Please support the bill to update Minnesota's 2007 Electronics Recycling Act to

- Expand the **definition of e-waste**
- Provide for **statewide free e-waste drop-off**
- **Incentivize** e-waste collection, recycling, and refurbishing

Possible Talking Points (choose a couple):

- I believe we must be good stewards of all that God has created.
- E-waste leaches toxins into our water and air.
- Anything with a lithium battery is a fire hazard in the trash, including air pods, singing cards, and e-cigarettes.
- The 2007 Minnesota Electronics Recycling Act is out of date as many new technologies are not covered or collected.
- Research shows that people are more likely to turn in old electronics if drop-off sites are free and accessible.
- Electronic waste contains high value metals like copper, platinum, silver, gold, & iron that can and should be recycled.
- Of 266 million pounds of e-waste produced in Minnesota annually, only about 24% gets collected and recycled.
- The minerals in Minnesota's e-waste would be worth 2.8 billion annually if captured and recycled.
- In moving from fossil fuels toward cleaner options to address the climate crisis, these minerals are increasing in demand.
- Recycling (or mining) of e-waste could add more than 1700 jobs across Minnesota.

Example (please use your own words)

Date
Dear Rep. _____ (or Sen. _____),
We've been learning about e-waste at our church (2 nd Lutheran, Lovelytown) and want to be able to recycle our old electronics rather than throwing them away. Putting them in the trash is both a fire and health hazard, as toxins leach into our water and air.
There aren't any electronic drop-off sites in this part of the state, and even where there are, not all electronics are collected or recycled. Only about 24% of 266 million pounds of e-waste annually produced in MN are collected, recycled, and reused due to outdated laws.
It's time to update our 2007 Electronics Recycling Act to expand the definition of e-waste, provide accessible and free drop-off or collection, and incentivize collection & recycling. <u>Please support</u> the bill recently introduced.
This is important as the world works to move away from fossil fuels since the minerals and metals in e-waste are increasingly in demand. Not only that, it would be an economic boon for MN, worth \$2.8 billion annually and creating more than 1700 jobs.
Thank you! Name Address

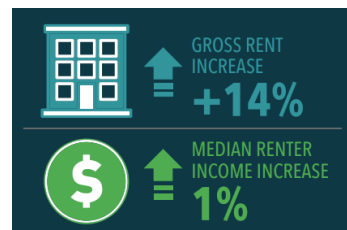
Issue: Affordable Housing

The Problem:

Minnesota has had a housing crisis for several years. There is not enough housing, much less housing that could be considered affordable. The Homes for All Coalition, in which Lutheran Advocacy-MN plays a very active role, believes...

...that no full-time employee should have to choose between paying rent or filling prescriptions. No working parent should have to cut back on food for their children to make the mortgage. But that's a daily reality for more than 580,000 Minnesota households who pay more than 30% of their income on housing and don't have enough left over to make ends meet to cover basic necessities, like transportation and groceries. (*Homes for All Handout*)

In fact, almost 250,000 Minnesota households pay more than 50 percent of their income for housing, including 22 percent of all renter households and 7 percent of owner households. Since 2000, rent has increased 14 percent, while median renter income has increased by only 1 percent. [Find your county's [housing profile](#) from Minnesota Housing Partnership (MHP) / Graph borrowed from [MHP State of the State's Housing report](#), p.5].



Last Session's Accomplishments: Several Homes for All Coalition initiatives from the last several years passed. With other Homes for All partners, Lutheran Advocacy-MN helped generate broad statewide grassroots support for **significant housing investments** for

- new housing construction, rehabilitation, and preservation,
- rental assistance,
- down-payment assistance for new low-income or BIPOC homebuyers, and
- homeless shelter creation. (See the full summary of our [2023 session results](#)).

Lutheran Advocacy-MN also worked closely with Settled and Joint Religious Legislative Coalition to pass **Sacred Settlement legislation**, changing zoning laws to allow faith communities to host small settlements of tiny homes for people who have experienced chronic homelessness and "Good Neighbor" volunteers. **Several churches** are now working with Settled to consider being Sacred Settlement hosts or **partnering** in other ways **to support the settlements**. (See our "[Campaigns & Action Alerts](#)" page for more information on how your church can participate).

Crisis Not Over: Despite this success, much of the funding was a **one-time investment**, rather than ongoing. Shelter funding was only half of our request, and much **less than what is needed statewide**. These new funds, along previous bipartisan investments have not kept up with both demand, and the amount of Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) lost each year often due to investor buyouts which is then transitioned into luxury housing. Further, it is important to remember that **a crisis that is decades in the making does end with a few years of one-time allotments**. It is an entrenched problem that will take much more investment to overcome.

2024 Legislative Agenda: As part of the Homes for All Coalition, Lutheran Advocacy-MN continues to work for

- 1) Investments for **new housing production** and housing **rehabilitation**, whether through new direct funding or housing bonds (which can leverage \$3.00 to \$4.00 of private and other funds, for each dollar designated by the state),
- 2) More funding for **safe shelters**,
- 3) **Emergency Rental Assistance** (to keep people/households from losing current housing)



Sources:

Homes for All Coalition (presentations, handouts, coalition meetings, etc.)

[Minnesota Housing Partnership](#)

"[State of the State's Housing, 2021](#)" Report. Minnesota Housing Partnership Research, 2021.

[National Low Income Housing Coalition](#)

"[Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing](#)" Report. National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2023.

Extra: Check out the maps in the [State of the State's Housing](#) (pp. 60, 64, 68, 72, 76-79), & the maps/graphics in [Out of Reach \(Media Kit\)](#) to see how parts of our state/nation are impacted by housing shortages or the level of income needed to rent a basic apartment.

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Talking Points & Sample Letter: Housing

Legislative "Ask":

Please support funding for

- *Significant investment in **housing production, rehabilitation, & preservation**, as direct funds or through housing bonds*
- *At least **\$100 million** for the creation of **more safe shelters***

Possible Talking Points (choose a couple):

- In the Bible, God reminds us to protect people who are most vulnerable. Through the prophets, God calls many leaders to task for not caring for those who are poor.
- Children do much better in school when their family has a stable place to live.
- Housing is considered to be a "cost burden" when households spend more than 30% of their income on a place to live. Yet, in MN, 22% of renters spend more than 50%.
- Since the year 2000, rent has increased 14% while income for renters has only increased 1%.
- When people have homes, they are healthier, better able to hold a job, and much more stable overall.
- Only 7 of MN's 87 counties have enough shelter beds.
- Almost half of the people experiencing homelessness are children and unaccompanied youth under the age of 24.
- Seniors are the fastest growing population of homeless.
- The funding amounts allocated in the last few years are a good start, but much more needs to happen to dig out of the crisis.
- The housing crisis was decades in the making and needs a consistent ongoing commitment greater than we've had so far.

Example (please use your own words)

Dear Rep. _____ (or Sen. _____), Date

My church (2nd Lutheran, Lovelytown) has been very engaged in homeless & housing issues. Many families around here have difficulty meeting all their needs because they spend so much on housing. I know of 2 families that spend more than 50% of their income on housing (in one of those families, the parents have 4 jobs between them to try to make ends meet).

Significant investments continue to be needed for affordable housing. Please support funds to increase the amount of housing available, especially rental housing. In some cases, that means building more, and in other cases it may mean rehabilitating or preserving the housing that already exists.

Please also support at least \$100 million for homeless shelters. My county does not have enough shelter beds, and recently I learned that only 7 of Minnesota's 87 counties do have enough.

Thank you!
Name
Address