



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 Lutheran 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 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.

Lenten Letters

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! [**Who Represents Me?** <https://www.gis.lcc.mn.gov/iMaps/districts/>] It is in relationship with their constituents that our legislators know what we care about, and why.

Lenten 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.

The Issues

SACRED TINY HOME COMMUNITIES: "Housing First" emphasizes stabilizing those experiencing homelessness in homes before attempting to address the myriad of other issues they face. The nonprofit organization, Settled, builds on this idea with a **"Community First" model**, using research from the University of Minnesota which recognizes the trauma many people have experienced, the need for healing, and the important role of community. Residents live in a tiny home for which they pay nominal rent and follow rules set out in a "Good Neighbor" agreement. Volunteers, called "Intentional Neighbors" or "Missioners" live in the community with those who have experienced chronic homelessness. The first settlement, at Mosaic Christian Community, is now open following housing code exemptions by the City of St. Paul.

This **bill would allow faith communities**, like churches or other places of worship, **to create "Sacred Communities" of tiny homes on their property in partnership with Settled**. It would **change the Minnesota Building Code** to allow tiny houses to serve as permanent housing and prevent local NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) bans. Although the dwellings would not be fully plumbed, full bathrooms, showers, laundry and a communal kitchen would be available in a common space. Residents could cook in their homes if they choose. (No government funding is sought through this bill).

The bi-partisan bill was introduced in March with bill numbers [HF1872](#) (House) & [SF2471](#) (Senate), and may be heard in the House Labor Division (committee) during the week of March 13. **Legislators need to hear from constituents across the state in support of the concept and the legislation**, which is endorsed by the Homes for All Coalition. [Background photo from Settled]

FUNDING FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING PRODUCTION, REHABILITATION, & SHELTERS: The housing crisis Minnesota faced before the pandemic has become even worse. There is not enough housing, much less housing that could be considered affordable. As a result, many households pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing, the level above which households are considered to be "cost burdened." 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. (Source: Minnesota Housing Partnership).

Unfortunately, previous bipartisan investments passed by the legislature did not fill the gap and have not kept up with increasing demand and the amount of Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) lost each year – usually older buildings. Further, prior to the pandemic, **only 7 of Minnesota's 87 counties had enough shelter beds** for people experiencing homelessness, and homeless rates continue increasing. Safe shelter is desperately needed while people wait to transition to permanent housing.

With a **historic budget surplus** (more than \$17 billion), the Homes for All Coalition is calling for a **one-time investment of at least \$1 billion for affordable housing** production, rehabilitation, preservation, manufactured home park infrastructure, and more. Additionally, **\$200 million should be made available for shelters**. The programs through which this money would be funneled already exist but need to be ramped up to meet the need. These requests are in various bills, but **legislators need to hear the general message that it's time to make a major investment in alleviating the affordable housing crisis**.

[Background photo from Lutheran Social Service of MN – Groundbreaking, Center for Changing Lives, Duluth]

CLEAN CARBON-FREE ENERGY, RESILIENCE, & TRANSITION: Due to fossil fuel pollution, significant climate changes have already occurred, disrupting agriculture, and causing or expanding droughts, floods, famine/hunger, poverty, and migration. Warming has intensified storms, and changed insect habitat, escalating MN rates of Lyme disease and West Nile Virus.

Minnesota, like many other states and countries, **has already been shifting to a clean energy economy**, surpassing the 2007 Renewable Energy Standard (25% renewable electricity by 2025) several years early. However, **reductions of emissions** damaging to the atmosphere and climate **are not on track** and must be greatly accelerated. Although changes are **bringing new economic and job opportunities**, **transition will be difficult for some** industries, workers, and communities. Attention must also address adaptation and resilience (like in storm water management and elsewhere).

A 100% Clean Energy/Carbon-Free Electricity bill (requiring 100 percent by 2040, with benchmarks specifying progress) made its way at record speed through both legislative chambers and was signed into law by Gov. Walz already on February 7. This is **a great step, but far from all that needs to happen**. As negotiated with utilities and passed by the legislature, it includes varying definitions of what constitutes clean or carbon-free electricity, as well as several off-ramp options, exceptions, and carve-outs. It includes some language to protect workers and vulnerable communities, but more is needed to ensure smooth transitions. It is important to **recognize the vital step that has occurred**, while **still encouraging further action**. *Note: There are clean energy champions in both major parties. However, the rapid process used by the majority to advance the bill in just a few weeks, after years of being blocked by special interests and specific legislative factions, caused these votes to fall along partisan lines.

[Background photo from Fresh Energy]

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 Letters

Sacred Tiny Home Communities

Legislative "Ask":

Please support [HF1872](#) / [SF2471](#), the Sacred Tiny Home Communities legislation, to...

- change the Minnesota building code to allow tiny houses
- prevent local NIMBY bans (NIMBY = Not in My Backyard)

Possible Talking Points:

- Not many housing solutions provide options for those experiencing chronic homelessness. This does.
- Many people who have experienced chronic homelessness have had long histories of trauma, abuse, or mental illness, sometimes all the way back to childhood. They need a community setting where they feel safe and where they can heal.
- This community model provides support and stability with the inclusion of volunteer "intentional neighbors" who make up 33-40% of community residents.
- Churches and other places of worship must be able to answer their call to help homeless people without interference or local bans.
- A Sacred Tiny Home Community already exists in St. Paul and is functioning well.
- We are asking for building code policy change, not state funding.
- Faith communities are better situated than other types of programs to help create the kind of community needed by people who have experienced chronic homelessness.

Example (please use your own words)

Date
Dear Sen. _____ (or Rep. _____),
I'm a member of 2nd Lutheran Church in Lovelytown, MN, and have started learning more about homelessness through a study group at church. Did you know that many people who have experienced chronic homelessness come from traumatic or abusive backgrounds?
The Sacred Tiny Home Community bill, SF2471 (or HF1872) would allow churches or other houses of worship to create safe communities where healing can occur. Having volunteer "intentional neighbors" as at least 1/3 of the community residents will help provide stability and a listening presence for those who've experienced homelessness.
Please support the bill to change MN building codes and allow houses that are less than 400 sq. feet. It is also important that this legislation allows churches to discern how God is calling them to serve, and that local bans not be allowed.
Sincerely, Name Address

Example (please use your own words)

Funding for Affordable Housing & Shelter

Date _____

Dear Rep. _____ (or Sen. _____),

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).

I keep hearing about Minnesota's budget surplus. Before most anything else, significant investments should be made for housing. Please support \$1 billion in investment from the surplus or Housing Bonds 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 \$200 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 _____

Legislative "Ask":

Please support at least \$1 billion in housing production, rehabilitation, and preservation, as investments from the surplus and/or Housing Infrastructure Bonds.

Support \$200 million for the creation of more safe shelters.

Possible Talking Points:

- 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.

Clean Energy/Resilience/Transition

Example (please use your own words)

Legislative "Ask":

Thank you for passage of the 100% Clean Electricity Bill. Please continue to work for...

- dramatic reductions in harmful carbon & methane emissions.
- smooth clean energy transitions for workers and communities.
- funds for adaptation projects, like storm water infrastructure.

Possible Talking Points:

- God calls us to be good stewards of creation.
- Pollution emitted by coal & gas plants is linked to breathing problems, neurological damage, heart attacks, and cancer.
- Renewable energy keeps rates affordable & stable.
- More than 25% of Minnesota's energy already comes from carbon-free sources, but we're only using a fraction of the wind and solar potential.
- Clean energy helps preserve & protect our water, important in the "Land of 10,000 Lakes."
- Locally produced energy empowers local communities and adds tax revenue for counties to apply to local needs.
- Our state is already impacted by many climate changes. We need infrastructure improved to handle more intense storms with much more water.
- Minnesotans want a responsible plan that builds on existing laws to transition our state completely to clean carbon-free energy while also protecting and aiding the transition for those workers and communities that will be most impacted.

Date _____

Dear Sen. _____ (or Rep. _____),

I heard that you passed the 100% bill just weeks into session. I appreciate much about that legislation & celebrate its passage, even if it has multiple exemptions, carve-outs, and off-ramps.

As a Christian (& member of 2nd Lutheran Church in Lovelytown), I believe we have a responsibility to protect & steward the earth that God created as perfect. I worry about how, as humans, we've exploited & kind of trashed the place. We need to reduce harmful emissions rapidly, which the 100% bill sets us on the path to do, but our state has wind, solar & battery potential which isn't being tapped yet (including new types of batteries that don't need lithium).

As we transition, it's also important to consider impacts on communities where power plants are closing. Please examine options that aid the transition. Also, with more intense storms and deluges caused by climate changes, we need funding for adaptation infrastructure projects to handle the additional water.

Sincerely,
Name _____
Address _____