2020 Advocacy Agenda

• **Ending Hunger**
  - Improve access and usage rates for SNAP benefits for already-qualified individuals and support protection of the program on a federal level
  - Encourage greater participation in food and nutrition programs, particularly for children age 0-18
  - Support and collaborate with allied faith-based entities in local and regional work, including ELCA World Hunger, the Rocky Mountain Synod World Hunger Team and Bread for the World

• **Poverty Reduction**
  - Support the creation and implementation of a paid family and medical leave insurance program
  - Protect access to federal programs for people living in poverty
  - Support reform of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights to give elected representatives fiscal authority in taxation

• **Access to Housing**
  - Promote measures to expand and protect housing options for low-income individuals and families
  - Ensure that people experiencing homelessness have the right and responsibility to access robust services and support

• **Criminal Justice Reform**
  - Abolish the use of capital punishment in Colorado
  - Work with reform advocates on automatic record sealing and sentence commutation
• **Public Health**
  - Protect health care access as a **public good and human right** that should be available to everyone regardless of ability to pay
  - Support awareness of public safety in relation to **firearms**, and understanding firearm-involved deaths (homicides and suicides) as a major public health concern
  - Promote **access to care and treatment** for those suffering from opioid addiction

• **Migrants and Refugees**
  - Interpret and promote the **sanctuary denomination** decision of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly
  - Collaborate with Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Services and Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains

• **Caring for Our Environment**
  - Engage proactively with Colorado legislators (state and federal) to encourage legislation to **address the root causes of the climate crisis**, including greenhouse gas emissions
  - Support **incentive-building programs** to reduce global warming and grants to local communities to build renewable infrastructure, in the model of Lutherans Restoring Creation

**Overarching Advocacy Principles**

- **To ensure that assistance is available for people living in poverty** so they can meet basic needs. Adequate funding is required for basic assistance programs like Medicaid, Connect for Health Colorado, low-income housing, nutrition assistance, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.
- **To address systemic issues** that prevent people living in poverty from earning a self- or family-sustaining income. Issues to be addressed may include tax, labor, and wage policies; protection of the environment; and improving access to safe, stable and affordable housing.
- **To show heightened concern for those who are impacted disproportionately** by policy changes in our primary areas of work, including children & youth, young adults, communities of color, non-native English speakers, people with limited economic means and immigrants and refugees.
Theological Background

- Advocacy ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has an institutional mandate that is rooted in the church's constitution and in the actions and statements of the ELCA. The ELCA Social Statements, Messages and Resolutions provide the basis for the positions and issues for which Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-Colorado will advocate.

- The constitution of the ELCA authorizes and endorses advocacy when it states that the church is to “serve in response to God’s love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace [...] and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs.”

- The ELCA Social Statement Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective (1991) sets forth the church’s specific commitment to advocacy: “This church shall [...] work with and on behalf of the poor, the powerless, and those who suffer, using its power and influence to develop and advocate policies that seek to advance justice, peace, and the care of creation.”

- The Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA Constitution endorse state advocacy ministries by directing the Churchwide Office to “establish and maintain, in partnership with synods and social ministry organizations, state public policy offices for advocacy to state governments on behalf of this church.”

Context for Advocacy in Colorado

- The Census Bureau reports that approximately 8% of Colorado residents lived at or below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in 2018. More than 10% of Colorado children live in poverty.

- More than 25% of households in Colorado don’t earn enough to cover basic costs of living, with two-thirds of those families not meeting the official definition of poverty, according to the Self-Sufficiency Standard (Colorado Center on Law and Policy)
• Colorado is uniquely susceptible to the risk of cuts to human services programs at the federal level. The restrictions of TABOR mean that Colorado cannot raise revenue to make up for these cuts in the way other states can. Federal dollars constitute over $6 billion of our state budget.

• Nearly 1 in 8 Coloradans are food insecure, meaning that they have infrequent or irregular access to food, have cut back on or skipped meals, or have made changes in the quality or quantity of their food due to limited income.

• Income inequality has grown in Colorado, following national trends. Colorado ranks low in the Gini coefficient, which is a measure of income distribution. Between 1979 and 2007, the top 1% of earners captured almost half (48.7%) of all real income growth in Colorado.

• Colorado’s homeless population was 10,857 in 2018, the highest number in all states in the interior Mountain West, and 9th-most nationwide, according to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. Homelessness affects all communities, including metropolitan areas, mountain towns, and rural communities.

*Adopted on November 1, 2019 by the LAM-CO Policy Committee:*

_Holly Massie_  
_Rev. Todd Hawkins_  
_Dona Dalton_  
_Bonita Bock_

_Chad Nelsen_  
_Linda Jantzen_  
_Dennis Reynolds_  
_Peter Severson, Director_

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