

PULLING CHILDREN FROM THE RIVER
A Brief History of Lutheran Advocacy in Pennsylvania

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A story is told of an African village situated near a bend in a mighty river. From time to time the inhabitants of the village would notice that children were being washed ashore at the river's bend, struggling for their lives, coming down the river from somewhere upstream. The villagers rescued the children, healed them, and gave them loving homes. As time passed, more and more children washed ashore and the village was hard pressed to find the resources to care for them all. Finally, a wise person suggested, "why doesn't someone go upstream and find out who is throwing these children into the river in the first place?"

-- African parable

Ever since the early days of Christianity, when a man named Paul organized a charitable giving campaign among Gentile congregations for the relief of needy widows and orphans in the church at Jerusalem, Christians have, in one way or another, been striving to pull the drowning children out of the river of injustice and need. These efforts have taken the shape of direct giving and services, person to person hands-on aid and assistance, and local, regional, national and international organizations that seek to provide food, medicine, and direct relief for persons in need. In the modern expressions of the Lutheran Church in the United States, congregations have long supported church-related service agencies that offer a wide range of human and social services while at the same time supporting and operating local food banks, neighborhood centers, and often opening church doors to give shelter to the homeless. Today, nationwide, Lutheran Services in America forms one of the largest charitable organizations addressing human need.

Still, in a free society where participatory government makes decisions and allocates resources for the public good, it has been long recognized that while rescuing the ones in immediate need, the church also needs to go upstream to seek to address the sources of the problems. By having a voice in the formation of public policy, the church can address the needs of those who have little or no public voice and little or no political clout in the public arena. It has been the ongoing effort to speak for the needs of the powerless and to more effectively pursue justice in public policy that forms the heart of the Lutheran advocacy movement. One expression of that movement was organized and began to take root in Pennsylvania in the late 1960s.

At the fourth biennial convention of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) (June 19-27, 1968), the Executive Council of the Church approved the development of a Joint Public Policy Committee (JPPC) with the Eastern Pennsylvania, Central Pennsylvania, and Western Pennsylvania – West Virginia Synods. This committee was charged "...to research and analyze legislation in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania," and further, "...to secure information on matters related to public policy... before the legislature or in process of implementation; develop a scale of priorities in these matters; and prepare and

submit reports to the synodical committee or board.” It was also noted that it would be the role of this committee to assist “the social ministry committees of the synods in Pennsylvania by securing information about, preparing analysis of, and determining implications, inherent in (1) proposed state legislation in areas of social ministry concern, and (2) proposed plans to implement already enacted legislation; developing a scale of priorities for possible approval by the cooperating synods; and as specifically authorized in individual instances, speaking publicly in behalf on (sic) one or more of the cooperating synods.”¹

Since the approval of this proposal, the Eastern Pennsylvania Synod reorganized to form the Northeastern and Southeastern Pennsylvania Synods, and both of the newly formed synods sought to participate. The first meeting of the Joint Policy Committee was held at the United Church Center in Harrisburg in June of 1970 with two representatives from each of the participating synods in attendance. Sister Betty Amstutz was elected chair of the committee. The committee identified the following public policy issues for focused study: taxation, environmental stewardship, welfare concerns, and problem pregnancies.² Partially as a result of the work of this committee, the four bishops of the Lutheran synods in Pennsylvania issued a joint public statement on abortion in February of 1971, citing the statement on Sex, Marriage, and Family adopted by the LCA in 1970 as a guiding document.

After meeting intermittently over the space of a few years, the group fell into disuse for a variety of reasons, not least of which was some confusion about its role and purpose. It was reactivated in March of 1976 with a broader base of involvement, including participation of the LCA’s Division for Mission in North America (DMNA). The reconstituted JPPC, chaired by The Rev. Charles Miller of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, identified the following action priorities: reimbursement by the state for the elderly and handicapped; Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission and the matter of school desegregation; food stamps / welfare reform; federal community services and the threat of extinction; resource mobilization services; state policy regarding juvenile justice systems; housing (i.e., attempts to re-locate formerly institutionalized patients in communities, zoning, red-lining, quality housing, etc.). The committee also called upon each participating synod to sign on to a “Contract of Accountability” that would ensure regular participation.

The following year, the JPPC changed its name to the Lutheran Public Policy Coalition (LPPC) and hired Don Raup of the Central Pennsylvania Synod as interim coordinator. Active dialog and cooperation on legislative issues was initiated with the Pennsylvania Council of Churches. As its mission grew and continued to take shape, the LPPC struggled with issues of authority and decision making, guidelines and framework of operations, and its working relationship with the LCA and the DMNA. Guidelines for accountability in making statements were drawn up and six areas of public policy

¹ Minutes of the Fourth Biennial Convention, Lutheran Church in America, June 19-27, 1968. Page 366.

² Minutes, Joint Public Policy Committee, June 1970. Jack R. Spooner, recorder.

concern were identified for action priority: welfare reform; reimbursement issues; church/state relationships in the field of social services; services to the aging; public education; and child welfare, particularly protective services.

Reorganization efforts continued as broadening partnerships developed among the synods, the LCA, the DMNA, the social service organizations, and congregations. In 1978 the organization again changed its name, this time to the Lutheran Coalition on Public Policy (LCPP), and Kay Dowhower was hired as Director. A focused, overnight meeting was held in November of 1978, with Dr. William Lazareth, where a number of basic questions were aired – should the Director be a registered lobbyist? For whom does the LCPP speak? Does a stance taken by the organization reflect theology or constituency? Where does authority reside in speaking to public policy issues? – These questions proved too profound to be quickly answered. However, it was agreed that synods should take some specific action certifying the legitimacy of the LCPP as a joint ministry of the church, and that Lutheran theology and LCA social policies be the basis for any public positions that would be taken. A motion was also adopted affirming, “that it is the understanding of the LCPP that Kay relates to the LCA through DMNA and all of its Departments for accountability and to Arnold Tiemeyer for administration relationship, and that it is the responsibility of DMNA to make all of its Departments available as resources to her in her work.”³ Legislative priority issues were adopted relating to the needs of women, children, and the aging, and centering on adoption, divorce law reform, child abuse, protection of children and spouses, welfare, food and nutrition, institutions and deinstitutionalizing (sic) of persons, etc.⁴

Under the leadership of Kay Dowhower, over the next seven years the LCPP clarified its structure and identity as a partnership advocacy ministry of the LCA (DMNA), and the four Lutheran synods in Pennsylvania, recognized as an instrument for coordinated Lutheran impact on public policy in Pennsylvania. Working coalitions were developed with the Pennsylvania Council of Churches and other religious-based advocacy groups, relationships were nurtured with state legislators, communications with synods were cultivated, and a policy board was established, along with a Statement of Working Relationships that would be periodically reviewed and revised.

In 1983 a position paper was developed on state sponsored gambling, and the general legislative priorities continued to reflect concern for the needs of women and children. Kay Dowhower resigned as Director of the LCPP in the spring of 1985 to direct state and regional advocacy for the LCA. The Reverend Ronald A. Sell was hired as her successor.

Under Ron’s leadership, the LCPP underwent many organizational changes, due in part to the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the resulting new alignment of Pennsylvania synods. Funding structures supporting the ministry of the coalition continued to be an issue, as 60% of LCPP funding in the Central

³ Minutes of Lutheran Coalition on Public Policy Overnight Meeting, Trinity Spiritual Center, Camp Hill, November 26-27, 1978, Donald Raup, recorder. Page 2,

⁴ *Ibid.*

Pennsylvania Synod came from World Hunger contributions and, as such, dictated the priorities of the legislative agenda. This changed with synodical realignment in the new church. When Ron was director, the partnership of advocacy ministry was further broadened by a formal working relationship with the Pennsylvania Lutheran Agency Network (PLAN), a loose affiliation of Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations in Pennsylvania. Kathleen Daugherty served as advocacy developer for the LCPP from 1988 to 1990. Ron Sell resigned in December 1991 to become director of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, and the Reverend Russell Siler was chosen as his successor.

In November of 1992, reflecting the partnership with the Social Ministry Organizations, the Lutheran Coalition on Public Policy again reorganized as Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa). Implementing Resolutions describe the organization as "...a partnership effort of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through the Division for Church in Society; the seven synods of Pennsylvania: Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, Allegheny Synod, Lower Susquehanna Synod, Upper Susquehanna Synod; and the affiliated Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations serving in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. These partners share responsibility for the work of this office through their participation on the Policy Board, and their continuing commitment to providing for the funding and support of the office."

⁵ Synod Bishops began serving on the Policy Board (changed to Policy Council in 1999) on an annual rotating basis. Through all of the reorganizations, the legislative priorities continued to center on issues of poverty and justice – state sponsored gambling, public education, abortion, welfare reform, and an emphasis on children's issues.

In 1997 Kathleen Daugherty became director of LAMPa when Russ Siler moved on to the ELCA national Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) in Washington, D.C. With Kathleen at the helm, LAMPa established new interfaith advocacy on shared issues and enhanced its visibility with other organizations. The ministry has strengthened its capacity to impact legislation by engaging congregations and individual Lutherans through frequent staff-led discussion forums, direct mailings and email networking. The annual "Lutheran Day at the Capitol" has been expanded and strengthened into an event anticipated by legislators and advocates alike. With Kathleen's leadership, the relationship with social ministry organizations, formalized in 1992, has evolved into a broader LAMPa connection to all ELCA agencies and institutions, known as the Pennsylvania Lutheran Network (PLN).

Yet, with all the variations in structure and organization, amid changes in state administrations and within the church, some things remain much the same. The issues of funding, accountability, authority and partnership continue to be refined, debated, and revised. The legislative agenda adopted for 2003-2004 reflects the priorities originally established by the JPPC, issues now defined as: public education, taxation and spending, family self-sufficiency, violence in life and death, gambling, and environmental issues.

⁵ Implementing Resolutions, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania, November 13, 1992.

And one **basic** thing remains the same: children are still swept down the river and some are rescued, while some villagers head upstream. The ministry of advocacy for justice must go on.