

JUST LOVE. JUST ACT.

JUSTICE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHWEST SYNOD OF WISCONSIN

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SUPPORTING REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT FROM NORTHWEST WISCONSIN

BY BEA EVANS

During the last half of August 2021, life changed in Afghanistan. Thousands of Afghans were evacuated. Thousands more wanted to depart but couldn't.

Since then, more than 43,000 Afghans have arrived in the United States needing to build new lives.

Approximately 850 Afghans will do so in Wisconsin. Consider becoming a part of the Long Welcome.

How You Can Help:

Support a possible community of Afghan neighbors in Eau Claire.

Three asks – An ecumenical group of individuals from Northwest Wisconsin began gathering regularly via Zoom in early December. Our goal was to explore how to accompany our Afghan neighbors and their co-sponsors in Wisconsin. The group, Welcoming New Neighbors – NW WI Refugee Resettlement, continues to grow as does the vision!

Refugee resettlement typically takes place within 100 miles of an agency resettlement office. Lutheran Social Service's (LSS) office is in Milwaukee.

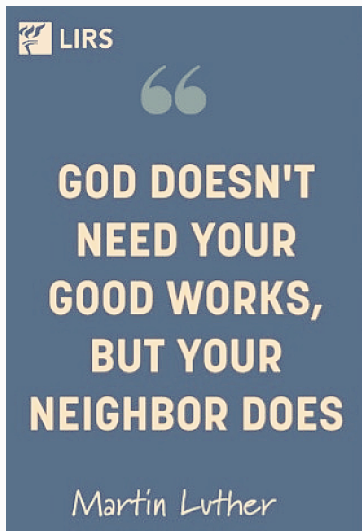
Welcoming New Neighbors learned from LSS that an exception might be possible if they could commit to resettling three to five Afghan families. On January 12th, the group committed to move forward on a journey of resettlement. The steps along this journey are many and often simultaneous.

The first involves submitting the necessary paperwork to LSS. LSS then presents the request to the State Refugee Resettlement Coordinator. Locating housing for three to five families in Eau Claire is next on the list.

Ask #1: If you have a lead on any rentals in Eau Claire near bus routes, please contact Bea Evans (beaevans2@gmail.com.)

Ask #2: New Neighbors NW WI Refugee Resettlement group is raising funds to settle Afghan refugee families in Eau Claire pending approval from the State Refugee Resettlement Coordinator. If approval is not obtained or funds received are beyond what is needed locally, New Neighbor Funds will be used to support special needs of new Afghan neighbors in Wisconsin. Should you wish to donate to the New Neighbors fund, please make out checks to Eau Claire Friends Meeting (a 501c3 organization) with a note in the memo "Refugee Resettlement".

Send to:
Eau Claire Friends Meeting
c/o Grace Lutheran Church.
PO Box 965
Eau Claire, WI 54702-0965



Ask #3 – Become a member of the Welcoming New Neighbors email distribution list. Doing so, you'll learn about efforts related to refugee resettlement and become a part of this village of welcome. To join, email Bea Evans (beaevans2@gmail.com).

Volunteer at Fort McCoy – Fort McCoy near Sparta, WI is the largest Afghan processing center in the U.S. Last fall, around 14,000 people were living there. As of the end of January, about half of those people have left the base for communities around the country where they will resettle.

Many organizations provide service to the evacuees at Fort McCoy. Catholic Charities of LaCrosse oversees centers that focus on recreation, learning, sewing, and socializing. Volunteers are needed to staff these centers.

Rev. Peder Johanson, Volunteer Coordinator with The Wisconsin Council of Churches, is connecting with potential volunteers to provide background information, answer questions, and receive volunteer applications. The completed applications are given to the Catholic Charities volunteer coordinator who is responsible for scheduling volunteer assignments.

Only volunteers who are willing to commit "long-term", either coming for a week at a time (housing is provided) or scheduling a regular day(s) for a period of 6 weeks or so (i.e. every Thursday; every Friday Saturday) will be considered. It takes a lot of work and staff resources to get volunteers approved for base access, and it's important to make sure that system is not overwhelmed by those attending for just one day.

All volunteers must be 18 or older, provide a State ID or drivers' license, phone and email information, and proof of vaccination against COVID-19. Masks are required at all times on base as well.

For further information, contact Rev. Peder Johanson at johanson@wichurches.org.

Advocacy – Many Afghan evacuees are in the U.S. as humanitarian parolees. This temporary status does not provide a clear path to U.S. citizenship. Currently, those who received humanitarian parole are subject to deportation in as soon as two years. If the Build Back Better package is signed into law, this could extend the federal benefits and protection for ten years. But that protection does not allow for citizenship.

In the past when evacuees arrived from Vietnam and Cuba, Congress passed an Adjustment Act. It is imperative Congress introduce and pass an Afghan Adjustment Act. This would allow Afghan evacuees to adjust their status and apply for a Green Card (Permanent Resident Card). Call on Members of Congress to Support the Afghan Adjustment Act (1).

Tens of thousands of Afghans are at-risk. An estimated 40,000 applications for humanitarian parole have been filed since the evacuation. *Urge the Biden Administration to Protect Afghans Left Behind* (2).

Background Information

The last half of August 2021 changed thousands of lives forever. By the end of the month 120,000 US citizens, citizens of U.S. allies, and Afghan allies of the United States were evacuated from Afghanistan. Many are still waiting to leave.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, 43,000 Afghans arrived in the U.S. by December 16, 2021. Typically, when someone flees their country of origin due to persecution, they go to a second country where they apply for refugee status in a third country. The application process involves paperwork, documentation of persecution, and many interviews. Not until an individual's U.S. refugee status is approved, can they travel to the United States. Upon arrival, refugees are assigned to a Refugee Resettlement Agency. Refugees are able to apply for a Green Card after one year of receiving this status and can apply for U.S. citizenship after residing in the country for five years.

Some of the people who left Afghanistan had been granted Special Immigrant Visas by the U.S. government. These individuals will receive a Green Card and can apply for U.S. citizenship after residing in the U.S. for five years. Most of the Afghans who fled Afghanistan in August are evacuees. They do not have permission (or a visa) to be in the U.S. They do not have refugee status. Rather they are in the U.S. as humanitarian parolees. The government processing necessary for them to be in the U.S. is done on the military bases where they are housed prior to community placement coordinated by Refugee Resettlement Agencies. At this point, individuals with humanitarian parole status do not have a clear path to citizenship. (The Long Welcome will require Advocacy!)

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(1)<https://www.votervoice.net/LIRS/ca/mpaigns/89654/respond>

(2)<https://www.votervoice.net/LIRS/ca/mpaigns/88742/respond>

JUSTICE AND JOY

BY BISHOP LAURIE SKOW-ANDERSON

In April of 2021 the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin met in assembly under the theme Justice and Joy. We reflected on how God has called us through the waters of baptism to do justice. In the baptism service parents and sponsors promise to raise the child in the Christian faith...they promise to:

- bring the child to worship and Holy communion,
- teach the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments
- give them a Bible, and help them grow in faith and prayer, so that the child
- may learn and trust God,
- proclaim Christ through word and deed,
- care for others and the world God made, and
- work for justice and peace.

As a synod, as congregations, as children of God, we are called to live out those Baptismal promises in our daily lives. At that assembly we approved significant resolutions that reflected our theme: JUSTICE and JOY. I invite you to learn more about these five resolutions, pick one and take some action in 2022.

1. CARE OF CREATION

Action: Seasons of Creation & Confirmation Curriculum; encourage care of creation.

Progress:

- Zoom Seasons of Creation Test Studies were held in August/September 2021.
- Confirmation curriculum is available on the synod website.
- Congregational Action Question in annual report to bishop. (Due 2/15/22.)

2. GENDER JUSTICE

Action: Anti-sexual harassment & equality in compensation & benefits materials for congregations.

Progress:

- Materials are available and will continue to be shared with congregations and call committees.

“
When justice is
done, it is joy for
the righteous.”

- PROVERBS 21:5

3. LGBTQIA+ EDUCATION

Action: Information and resources for call committees; referrals to Reconciling Works as a resource.

Progress:

- In NWSWI 8 out of 198 congregations+3 campus ministries that are RIC. That is >5%.
- Our goal is to have 25% of our congregations (about 40 more) engage in conversation about creating a wider welcome for members of the LGBTQIA community in 2022.
- 1st step is BIC workshop. register: <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/trainings/bic/>

4. RACIAL JUSTICE TRAINING

Action: Offer training to all rostered leaders and SAMs every year.

Progress:

- 50 leaders have begun the IDI process (1/3 of our active leaders.)
- Several synod council members using modules of the TWP course.
- Racial Equity statement video created and available online. (Will create guide to use with lay leaders.
- Cross Gen Conversation about race curriculum is completed. (Contact Deacon Laura Ramlow to lead the cross gen event in your church. lrmlow@nswi.org.)

5. HUNGER CHALLENGE

Action: \$1,000,000 by 2024

Progress:

- Update on the amount given to date announced in February 2022
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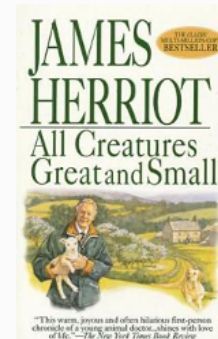
+ NWSWI Social Justice Resources:
<http://nswi.org/social-justice-advocacy>

CREATION CARE RESOURCES

ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

BY BISHOP LAURIE SKOW-ANDERSON

Do you remember the classic story All Creatures Great and Small and the author's love for all the animals? James Herriot understood his responsibility to care for them.



Similarly we read in Genesis 1:28 (The Message), that Adam and Eve were created by a loving God and gifted with the responsibility for all things great and small on planet earth.

He created them male and female.
God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce!
Fill Earth! Take charge!
Be responsible for fish in the sea and
birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on the
face of Earth."

God created us to be responsible for the tiniest single cell creature in the sea and the greatest blue whale and everything in between in the air and on land too. We respond to this responsibility in big and small ways.

CREATION CARE RESOURCES

(Continued)

SMALL WAYS

As one individual or one family we are responsible for the earth by our small decisions when we ride a bike instead of driving, reduce our use of plastics, recycle, compost, and reuse as much as possible. As a church our councils can encourage the use of reusable or compostable paper cups for our coffee fellowship, reduce the amount of paper used in bulletins and newsletters, and do an energy audit of our building, replacing lightbulbs and installing energy efficient equipment. Some of our congregations have installed solar panels.

There are hundreds of small ways that families and congregations have found to take responsibility for the gift of God's good creation.

What is one new way you might care for creation this year?

GREATER WAYS

As individuals, congregations, synods, and churchwide we are advocates for responsible policies that protect God's good creation.

April 17, 2021 the NWSWI Assembly approved a "Resolution in Support of Creation Care" that urges "all members to exemplify personal and institutional care for Creation by practicing energy conservation, purchasing energy efficient items, investing in renewable energy, and eliminating single-use plastics;"

At the November NWSWI synod council meeting a resolution was passed to ask the ELCA "to continue to advocate for the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act, or similar legislation during the 117th United States Congress to reduce carbon emissions and protect our planet."

We take our responsibility seriously. These are the bigger ways our church works to care for the earth that was gifted to us by the creator. This is not new or politically motivated.



Photo Credit: Matt Smith on Unsplash

The ELCA created documents in 1991, "Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective," in 1993, "Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice," and in 1999 "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All," that call for environmental justice which would protect God's creation. These are bigger ways that we have attempted over the years to responsibly care for the gifts God entrusted to us.

Click here to read the 1993 social statement on the Environment.

- <https://www.elca.org/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Caring-for-Creation>

In great ways or in small ways I encourage you to consider how you, your family, and your church are responsibly caring for the creation that God has gifted to us for the sake of the generations that follow.

For more information about the bigger ways the church advocates for environmental justice see:

- <https://elca.org/Resources/Advocacy>
- Lutheran Office of Public Policy of Wisconsin, LOPPW, <https://www.loppw.org/>

RACIAL JUSTICE IN NORTHWEST WISCONSIN

RACIAL EQUITY STATEMENT

BY BISHOP LAURIE SKOW-ANDERSON

The ELCA is a very white denomination, as is the NW Synod of Wisconsin. Our church and our synod aspire to become more diverse.

As a step toward diversity, in 2021 members from the Synod Youth Board and the Racial Justice Team co-authored a Racial Justice and Equity Statement that was approved by the Synod Council in March 2021, read at the Synod Assembly in April 2021, and a video of the statement was created in the fall of that year.

It is intended to be used as an aspirational document and a starting place for conversation and education across the synod.

Here is the link to the document and video.

- <http://nswsi.org/social-justice-advocacy/racial-justice-equity-statement>

At this year's assembly we will roll out a study guide and resources to support conversation about race in congregations.

In this statement we confess to our siblings in Christ, Black, Brown, Indigenous and People of Color, the sin of racism. We condemn racism. We acknowledge our role in the wrongs of the past and commit to work toward racial justice in our synod.

We will not all agree on how we work together toward racial justice, but I sincerely believe that we all know that racism is a sin and we are called by our baptism to *care for others and the world that God made and work for justice and peace in all the earth.*

We are called to live out the greatest commandment, Matthew 22: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind...and you shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

I am hopeful that together we can move to a more racially just society and racially diverse church.

In invite you to examine the other antiracism resources on our synod's website.

- <http://nswsi.org/social-justice-advocacy/racial-justice>

CIVIL RIGHTS PILGRIMAGE

BY BISHOP LAURIE SKOW-ANDERSON

January 22-26, 2022 eleven members and friends of the NWSWI immersed themselves in the history of the civil rights movement by visiting some of the famous sites in Alabama.



Pilgrimage participants: Laurie Skow-Anderson, Randy Skow-Anderson, Joanne Sorenson, Karen Ressel, Sandy Johnson, Nancy Hanson, Nancy Amacher, Dorothy Sandahl, Donna Kringle, Dale Kringle, & Barbara Johnson

We began in Anniston and Birmingham by learning about the Freedom Riders 1961 (John Lewis was one of the riders) and their peaceful attempt to integrate the interstate bus system and the violent attacks against them. In Birmingham we visited the 16th Street Baptist Church and met a survivor of the church bombing that killed four young girls in September 1963. We stopped by the police station where Martin Luther King wrote his famous letter from the Birmingham jail to white pastors, and we visited Kelly Ingram Park, site of the Children's Crusade (1963).

Next stop was Montgomery. Here we visited the Rosa Parks museum, Dexter Street Baptist (MLK's first church), and the Alabama State Capital. We learned that the civil war and the civil rights movement both began on the steps of that state capital. Jefferson Davis, the president of the confederacy was inaugurated there and the voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery ended there. Later that day we were in Selma to walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge.



The final and most difficult day was spent at the Legacy Museum and Lynching Monuments. We learned that 12 million enslaved people were transported by force from Africa across the Atlantic by 1808 and that 4000 people were lynched, murdered without trial in this country by 1950. The monument was created so that we never forget the terror inflicted on human beings.

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History, despite its wrenching pain cannot be unlived, but if it is faced with courage it does not need to be lived again.

- MAYA ANGELOU

Learning this history is essential so that we don't repeat it. "History, despite its wrenching pain cannot be unlived, but if it is faced with courage it does not need to be lived again." (Maya Angelou) We hope to repeat this powerful trip in the fall. Learning these lessons and understanding our past is essential so that we can move forward in God's mission to create a more equitable and just world.



A STORY OF FIRST STEPS

BY DALE KRINGLE

July 6, 2016 -that date changed my life for involvement in race relations. Growing up on a farm in northern Wisconsin I basically had no contact with anyone that was not white.

I remember hearing of riots, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy. But those were as far away as the Vietnam War. I was in grade school. I lived in a bubble through most of my life with my family that continued into adulthood.

July 6, 2016 is the day that Philando Castile of St Paul, MN was shot and killed in what started as a minor traffic stop for a taillight that wasn't working. When I heard the news the next day I felt like I was punched in the gut. I remembered being stopped for a burned out headlight 6 months earlier, and though I made multiple sudden and unannounced movements in front of the officer I drove away without incident.

There was a small God voice in the back of my head telling me to seek answers to questions I didn't know how to ask. I needed to talk to somebody in the black community. Through several worship and service retreats with confirmation students prior to this, I felt comfortable enough to visit Pilgrim Baptist Church in St Paul.

I had a nice conversation with a gentleman that I had gotten to know previously. My heart was satisfied...for a couple months. Then that God voice returned. I went back to Pilgrim and began talks about developing an ongoing conversation between them and my congregation. Slowly, it did develop and we've had a few joint youth outings, temporarily paused by COVID-19.

When the Northwest WI Synod developed the Racial Justice team that God voice slapped me again. I needed to be part of the team. I needed to let people know the injustices happening. Happening in our own area, an area that I keep finding out is worse than I really thought. I also wanted to make sure we were telling the story and finding solutions from the black side not from what whites think blacks should need.

In January 2022 I will be participating in a Civil Rights pilgrimage with 11 others from the synod. Yes, the God voice was back. Selma, Birmingham, Pettus bridge, and other historic sites and museums are on the itinerary. Places of some of the worst hate seen in the United States of America, a level of hate I cannot understand. Places I hope that will answer questions I still don't know how to ask.

HUNGER JUSTICE

BY MICHELLE PRIDE

Did you know 1 in 10 people in the world don't have enough to eat? That number is staggering when we know there is enough food produced on the planet to sustain everyone many times over.

Last spring the NW Synod of WI passed a resolution establishing a giving goal of \$1,000,000 for ELCA World Hunger over the next 3 years. While the title of the organization includes the word 'hunger', its reach is much greater, both domestically and around the world.

Yes, immediate hunger relief is one of the ways basic needs are met. But ending hunger is about more than food. Health clinics, microloans, water wells, animal husbandry, community meals, and advocacy are all ways ELCA World Hunger responds to needs all over the globe, prompting long-term, sustainable change.



Many churches in the NW Synod participate locally in hunger relief, by hosting or supporting a food pantry, food distribution, or community meal. Some support children's programs through schools. A number of hunger relief organizations in our synod have received grants from ELCA World Hunger to ensure all our neighbors have enough to eat.

Please take advantage of the opportunities for individuals and congregations to learn more about the work of ELCA World Hunger online, and make sure we meet our financial goal.

ELCA WORLD HUNGER RESOURCES

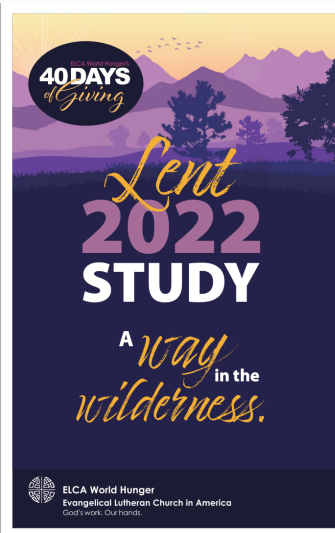
For a plethora of **Vacation Bible School** resources, please click this link:

- <https://www.elca.org/Resources/ELCA-World-Hunger#VBS>



Lenten resources, including a study guide and an action guide are here:

- <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/ELCA-World-Hunger/40-Days-Resources>



Watch for more ways to get involved at Walking Together and Synod Assembly this spring.

If you or someone you know is interested in joining the Hunger Justice Task Force, please contact the Synod office for more information.

PRAYER OF DISTURBANCE

BY RINA WINTOUR

Jesus, make me a channel of disturbance.
Where there is apathy, let me provoke.
Where there is compliance, let me bring questioning.
Where there is silence, let me be a voice.
Where there is too much comfort and too little action,
Grant disruption.
Where there are doors closed and hearts locked,
Grant the willingness to listen.
When laws dictate and pain is overlooked...
When tradition speaks louder than need...
When we refuse to take control of our own spiritual growth...
Our own mission...
Our own poor,
Disturb me, O Lord,
Teach me to be radical.

PRAYER FOR JUSTICE

BY PAT LAVERCOMBE

O Divine Master
Grant that I may seek rather
To do justice than talk about it;
To be with as well as for, the poor;
To love the hard-to-love as well as the lovely;
To kiss the children of the poor rather than the feet of the crucifix.
For it is in giving that we receive
It is in walking-with that we truly understand.
It is in challenging evil that we achieve justice.
It is in the struggles of this life that we touch eternity.
Lord, make me a channel of disturbance.



Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's Work. Our Hands.