

To congregations & leaders in the Saint Paul Area Synod

This morning a letter signed by all the Lutheran and Roman Catholic bishops in Minnesota was delivered to the Governor and members of the legislature in St. Paul. Hard decisions are now being faced and the lives of many in the state will be affected by those decisions. In this letter the bishops of these two church bodies share a concern for the common good, especially the most vulnerable among us. The letter is *(attached/linked...)*.

Recently I heard the church referred to as “one of the last neutral grounds” we have for discussing these matters. I encourage you to invite your members – and those who represent you in the legislature – to discuss these matters. To that end, I am also *attaching/linking* a Discussion Guide that came from the Lutheran bishops last spring, endorsed and circulated by the Catholic bishops, seeking to frame the kinds of questions facing us on a deeper and more fundamental level, removed from particular party or legislation. While a few references may be outdated, the issues remain essentially the same.

Together, the Lutheran and Catholic bishops of the state commend these matters for your discussion and engagement. You are free to use/distribute them as you may.”

What I would add would be this.

First – This is a time to hold our state legislative leaders, our governor as well as our local governmental leaders in our public prayers. They have a challenging vocation before you get to the current serious challenges facing us.

Secondly – We are all called to be Disciples of Christ Jesus. In a democracy, as disciples we share the responsibility of being stewards of our society. In a time of difficult decisions, we can share our thoughts, but I would ask that we do that with respect for our legislators and governmental leaders. If debate or negative in congregational meetings, one voice can make a huge difference by inviting the community back to a healthy conversation. In the same way we as Christians can be a fruitful voice in our families, in coffee shops, at hearings and city council/or township meetings. We can share our best thoughts for resolution of our challenges while at the same time doing that with respect and civility.

Third, in my daily Bible reading I am deep in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. There is a deep concern for those who are weak and poor that is repeatedly voiced. We often don't talk about poverty in our mostly rural culture, but it is a concern for people of faith in rural and city contexts.

I know some are concerned whenever our church body's leaders speak into the public issues of our time. I try to do this with care and deep thought. I am equally concerned about the faith community being silent as crucial decisions that will shape our society and lives are made.

May God guide us as we work through this difficult and tender time in our country's and state's life. May God guide us so we might be faithful stewards of the gifts we have inherited and so that we might continue to build a future where “fairness,” “equality” and justice are deep values of our common life.