



Grounded  
in Faith.  
Working  
for justice.

## 2015 State Legislative Priorities

### Ending Homelessness, Creating Low-Income Housing and Protecting Human Services

#### **Continue to Fund the Housing Trust Fund**

Support funding for the Housing Trust Fund (HTF), which is funded within the State Capital Budget, at the highest possible level. The Housing Trust Fund, leveraged flexibly with other resources, provides funding support for development of low-income housing by agencies and organizations in the State of Washington. Historically, King County (including the City of Seattle) has received 40 percent of the State Housing Trust Fund dollars.

#### **Preserve and Strengthen the Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) Program**

The HEN program ensures that people with temporary mental health or physical disabilities can meet their basic needs and access stable housing when facing extreme economic hardship. Recipients are also able to access essential basic needs, including transportation assistance and health/hygiene items, until they have recovered from their disability. The program has assisted over 16,801 adults with incomes below 35% of the federal poverty level since it was implemented in November 2011. The Church Council seeks to preserve, improve and sustain HEN assistance.

#### **Support and Increase the Aged, Blind and Disabled (ABD) Cash Grant**

The ABD program provides over 23,000 extremely low-income adults who have a permanent mental health or physical disability with \$197 monthly cash-assistance while they are applying to the federal Supplementary Security Income (SSI) program. When people transition to SSI (often a multi-year process), the state is retroactively reimbursed by the federal government for the full cost of the ABD cash grant. This program also provides support to a small number of extremely low-income elderly and disabled immigrants.

#### **Create a Medicaid Benefit for Tenant Support Services in Permanent Supportive Housing**

The Church Council asks that the State of Washington submit a waiver or amendment to create this benefit. No action was taken in 2014 on establishing a permanent supportive housing benefit. Rather, approximately \$1.5 million in funding for mental health services was restored, leaving a gap of \$5.6 million for mental health and \$3 million for substance abuse below previous funding levels.

### Shared Prosperity

#### **Statewide Minimum Wage**

The Church Council of Greater Seattle has created a set of Living Wage Principles that include working toward the goal of a "sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all (ELCA)." The legislature can enact a measure to responsibly phase in a raise in the minimum wage to at least \$12, phased in over 4 years, and then to continue inflation-indexed increases.

### **End Wage Theft**

Even in this modern day, many workers are denied the wages they are owed for work they have provided. Addressing wage theft will put millions of dollars back into our economy, improve the fiscal health of our local communities, and put wages back in the hands of working families across the state. The Washington House of Representatives passed a package of four wage theft bills in 2014 and should move forward toward a Governor's signature in 2015.

### **Justice and Equity in Jobs and Contracts**

The State of Washington is responsible for ensuring that jobs and contracts emanating from the state Departments of Transportation and Commerce include minority workers, businesses and contractors. Concrete actions that result in justice and equity for minority workers, especially the African American community and businesses, as reflected in the budgets and oversight of the Departments of Transportation and Commerce, are needed in this biennial cycle so that the whole community is served.

### **Reform Washington's Broken Legal Financial Obligations (LFOs) System**

The current LFO system imposes crushing debt burdens that are unfair and impossible to pay for many of those who want to pay. The Church Council supports prioritizing both the collection and payment of restitution to victims and the support of successful reentry of individuals coming out of the criminal justice system. Eliminating the current 12% interest rate during and shortly after incarceration is one of a number of positive steps that can be taken which will reduce disproportionality in the system and provide meaningful alternatives to ensure that no Washington resident is jailed for being poor.

### **Allow for Inmate Postsecondary Education**

The Department of Corrections may offer postsecondary degree opportunities within current funding. Research has demonstrated the benefits of educating inmates, 97% of who are eventually released back into our communities. 2SHB 2486 authorizes the state to offer inmates appropriate postsecondary education degree programs through partnership with the community and technical college system.