

Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey
Weekly Witness | June 27, 2017
“From Tolerance to Hospitality”

In the early years of Europeans living in New Jersey, the Swedish Lutherans and Anglicans cooperated, shared pulpits, and had joint ministries in Salem and Gloucester counties. Then, when the colony came under English control, the established denomination was the Church of England. Nonetheless, New Jersey's first constitution in 1776 contained clauses citing that "no person shall ever, within this Colony, be deprived of the inestimable privilege of worshipping Almighty God in a manner agreeable to the dictates of his own conscience...".

Tolerance of religious diversity is part of our state's history.

Beyond merely tolerating diversity, this week we are reminded that in ancient times, hospitality was viewed as a pillar on which the moral structure of the world rested. It was a highly valued moral practice, seen as an important expression of kindness, mutual aid, neighborliness, and a response to the life of faith. "Hospitality addressed the physical needs of strangers for food, shelter, and protection, but also included recognition of their worth and common humanity" (*Hospitality, a practice and a way of life*, by Christine Pohl). As followers of Jesus, we are called to show kindness and to respect the dignity of those who may be different and unfamiliar to us.

Unfortunately, New Jerseyans have not always been faithful to our history of tolerance. Faith communities who minister with the LGBTQ persons, immigrant communities who worship as Muslims, and our Jewish brothers and sisters have experienced intolerance in our state, especially recently. There is a need for more hospitality and greater security for many communities of faith in New Jersey.

Your assistance is needed to reach out to Governor Chris Christie and members of the New Jersey Legislature in support of an allocation in the FY 2018 state budget to re-establish a "New Jersey Nonprofit Security Grant Program." A \$2 million appropriation is requested in order to accommodate our at-risk institutions in all 21 counties. The budget is being finalized this week, so please do not delay in [taking action!](#)

As part of your response to the Gospel this week, engage in an act of hospitality in your community. Host a potluck picnic for your neighbors. Collect kid friendly food to help families struggling to feed their children not in school over the summer and donate it to your local food bank. Attend a Pride Week march or rally and affirm that God loves all people. Invite friends to join you in calling the state government to help to make New Jersey a safer place for all faith communities.

To read more reflections on the spiritual practice of hospitality, read this article by Dr. Christine Pohl, Professor of Church and Society at Asbury Seminary, "[Hospitality, a practice and a way of life.](#)" She has written widely on the subject, reflecting theologically and spiritually and sharing much about how our congregations can offer better hospitality.