

Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey

Weekly Witness | July 5, 2017

Summer is the traditional time for a break from school; teachers and students alike look forward to the break from the routine, from homework, and from the stress of achievement. But let us never confuse a much needed respite from structured education and from learning.

In Matthew's text this week Jesus talks about learning, specifically learning how to be a disciple. The invitation to discipleship, however, is more than cognitive learning or overcoming a gap in knowledge; it is the adoption of a way of life. This way of life, unlike school, is easy and it provides rest because discipleship is rooted in a relationship that God has already graciously given to us. God has already claimed us, forgiven us, and sent us into the world to live as blessed and named disciples.

This way of life invites us to model our life after Jesus' example, living with deep regard for others, not just living for ourselves. Matthew's gospel teaches us about Jesus's regard for children and those who are most vulnerable in our society. Children, even ones that we do not personally know, require our love and care as Jesus taught us.

This past week the state budget was adopted. Even if incremental, the budget was a move to follow the 2008 finance law known as the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA). This funding formula has been underfunded by over two billion dollars for years, hurting many students and districts. In the end, the cuts to districts were minimized to no more than 2 percent of overall state aid, and increases were trimmed back by 10 percent. See how these decisions will affect your district [here](#).

At the same time, money was added for expanded preschool and for special education aid. Each received an additional \$25 million, the first such increase in seven years. Smaller sums were also added for a variety of other programs: \$23.8 million in nonpublic school aid for security, nursing services, and other programs; \$4 million for adult education in the state's county vo-tech schools; and \$3 million for vo-tech partnership grants.

The way of life of a disciple encompasses the needs of children for healthy food as well. The current federal budget proposed in Washington includes severe cuts to nutritional assistance. Every religious congregation in the U.S. would have to raise an extra \$714,000 annually for a decade in order to make up for cuts in the current administration's 2018 budget to programs that alleviate hunger.

When Congress returns to Washington, D.C. next week they will be finalizing their version of the fiscal year 2018 budget. Deep cuts to anti-hunger programs have led to budget negotiations, so our concern for children must be expressed now! The current budget proposal cuts SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) and other meals for children, which will increase hunger and harm children's development.

Call (800-826-3688) or [email today](#) and tell Congress that you have a deep regard for the children whom Jesus' loves. No child should be hungry or harmed by poor nutrition. Advocating for the needs of children is part of the way of life of a disciple.