

**Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey**  
**Weekly Witness | November 30, 2018**

Happy New Year! This Sunday marks the first season of Advent and therefore a new church year. What resolutions can you and your church make for this next year on behalf of all the people of God?

In his sermon for this Sunday in the Episcopal Church's collection "[Sermons for Advent and Christmas 2018](#)," Father Barrie Bates asks, "What would this world be like if we, each of us, lived more and more into that sure and certain hope" of God's forgiveness, instead of living into fear?

In a time where fears abound and are broadcast daily—fear of Other, fear of war, fear of failure, fear of death—it can feel impossible some days to even imagine living into hope. But during this season of Advent, and particularly this first Sunday, where we take hope as a particular focus, we must encourage one another in hope. Father Bates writes, "The very heart of Christianity is inclusion and welcome and invitation. It is trust and contentment and hope that cannot be overtaken. It is serving and yielding and sacrificing."

Let us take up encouraging each other in hope as one of our New Year's resolutions. Let us "abound in love for one another" and for all of our siblings. As Bates [continues](#), "Let us strive to emulate Jesus. Jesus, who offers not fear but forgiveness. Jesus, who offers not hate but sacrificial love. Jesus, who offers not condemnation but life eternal."

#### ADVOCACY ASKS

Though it is "lame-duck" season in Congress, there is important legislation that can be passed that will begin the process of reforming the nation's prison system. The [FIRST STEP Act, S. 3649](#) is a bipartisan bill that makes important reforms. The bill is the result of years of ongoing bipartisan negotiations, and we need to make sure the Senate prioritizes the bill in the next month.

You can contact your senators directly using [this form](#). This bill is not perfect and will not impact as many lives as we hope to in the future, but it is a step in the right direction. It is a step toward showing grace, love, and mercy to our neighbors and encouraging them in hope.

And register to attend the Annual Immigrant Rights Summit on Dec. 18th and learn more about how we as a state, and your community can encourage all of God's people to live without fear in safety. Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal will be the keynote speaker. [Register here](#).

