

**Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey**  
**Weekly Witness | September 28, 2018**

In verse 42 of this week's text we hear Jesus continue the teaching about the welfare of children that he began last week: *"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea."* (Mark 9:42)

Children are uniquely faithful and vulnerable. They are born trusting and needing the care of loving adults. It is heartbreaking, therefore, that so many stumbling blocks are put in the way of expectant mothers and young children. The stumbling blocks in particular for black mothers, children of color, and all children born into families living in poverty are numerous. Advocating for quality prenatal care for all mothers and for policies that will support families living in poverty are important aspects of our call to ministry.

According to the research conducted by [Advocates for Kids NJ](#), babies born to black mothers are more likely to receive late prenatal care, be born with a low birth weight, or die before their first birthday than the state average. The state's infant mortality rate for African-American women was 9.7 per 1,000 births, compared to 3 for white women and 4.6 for Hispanic women. This is one of the highest racial disparity gaps in the nation.

Additionally, the stumbling blocks for children of color and all children born into families living in poverty are numerous. Some of the issues include limited choices of homes where the water pipes are lead free and safe, not being able to access paid family leave so that family members can stay home to care for newborns without risking the loss of their job, and not enough affordable, high-quality childcare for older infants and toddlers. In New Jersey, 35% of New Jerseyans are living in poverty (earning less than \$48,000 a year for a family of four). These are our neighbors, our classmates, our fellow church-goers, and beloved children of God, all of whom we are called to care for and show God's love to.

The people of God can remove stumbling blocks in large and small ways. As we care for the littlest ones, we reflect God's intention for all humanity. Bills are now in the legislature that would strengthen Family Leave Insurance and make it possible for more families to take advantage of this life saving insurance program. The bill numbers are [S2528 / A3975](#). Call your state representative or email them, urge the passage of this legislation.

As followers of Jesus, our engagement in public policy that provides support to all families is critical, but it is also important to reach out to expectant moms who are at risk. Support all moms in getting early and good prenatal care. Offer to help with transportation, child care of their other children, or provide them with this phone number: NJ FamilyCare Hotline at 1-800-701-0710 for professional assistance.

To learn more about these issues [click here](#) or [here](#). We, the community of God, who have been so richly blessed are sent to share this gift of love, compassion and service to the whole human family.