

Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey
Weekly Witness | September 12, 2017

In this week's parable from Matthew, we hear a story of a merciful boss who forgives an offense of a subordinate. Because of the mercy shown to him, that employee becomes very loyal to the boss. However, when he sees another employee commit a similar offense, he shows no mercy. Rather, he holds her to the rules, following protocol and punishing her according to those rules. News of this inconsistency travels back to the boss, and when she hears that he failed to show mercy to a coworker, she decides to implement the original punishment for his offense.

There are two systems of management operating here:

1. Good employees are cared for, even when they make mistakes.
2. Good employees are punished when they make a mistake.

Which of these systems creates a healthy productive work environment? Which system reflects the Kingdom of God?

"Well . . . it depends," you might say. It depends on liability--what are the legal implications? And what about union contracts? It also depends on how tight the labor market is right now. . . .

As Jesus tells us in this parable, "it depends" on other factors too--ones that our current economic system does not always consider. According to the teachings of Jesus, we must consider which system does the best job of:

- Avoiding actions that cause others to "stumble" (18: 6-9),
- Caring for the most vulnerable (18: 6, 10, 14),
- Restoring those who go astray (18: 12-14, 15-17), and
- Forgiving others without limit.

Parables such as this one raise questions and get us to think critically about what it means to be a follower of Jesus in our everyday life. This parable in particular can help us conceptualize the importance of paid family leave in fulfilling Jesus's "it depends" criteria. Instituting systems that ensure payment when workers are the most vulnerable--when they or a family member has fallen ill--is one way to show the mercy first shown to us by Jesus.

A bill to strengthen [paid family leave](#) was vetoed by the governor this summer. This measure is designed to provide paid leave for up to twelve weeks when workers have family members in need of their care. Additionally, the bill would expand benefits to those caring for siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, or in-laws, in addition to children, spouses, parents, or domestic/civil union partners who are currently covered. This paid family leave would be paid for through a payroll deduction.

You can still call New Jersey lawmakers to let them know that you support this legislation. You can urge them to reintroduce the bill--to the benefit of all workers and all of us. All of our lawmakers are running for re-election this fall. Now is a good time to talk with them about your values and what you want them to accomplish.