

Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey
Weekly Witness | May 24, 2017

A rabbi and a soap-maker once went for a walk together. The soap-maker said to the rabbi: "What good is our faith? After thousands of years of teaching about goodness, truth, justice, and peace, after all the study of Torah, and all the fine ideals of the Prophets, look at all the trouble and misery in the world! If our faith is so wonderful and true, why should all this be so?"

The rabbi said nothing. They continued walking until he noticed a child playing in the gutter. The child was filthy with soot and grime. "Look at that child," said the rabbi. "You say that soap makes people clean, but see the dirt on that youngster. What good is soap? With all the soap in the world, that child is still filthy. I wonder if soap is of any use at all."

The soap-maker protested and said, "But, Rabbi, soap can't do any good unless it is used!" "Exactly!" cried the rabbi. "So it is with faith. It isn't effective unless it is applied in daily life and used!" —Jewish Folktale

Jesus's prayer in John 17 is also about faith in daily life. Jesus knows human division, he has experienced firsthand that human fear and power-seeking behavior lead to evil decisions and deeds. Jesus prays for his disciples, the early church, and for us, that we might be one. Jesus prays for the faith community, which is divided over race, gender, sexuality, and class, that we might come together and be for the world an agent of justice and healing.

How do we put our faith into practice? How can we live as sisters and brothers in faith, promoting the welfare of all? Advocacy, relationship building, and working to dismantle racism are all ways to live out your faith.

This week in New Jersey, the Senate will vote on [S677](#) (Racial Impact Legislation). This legislation will require that all bills pertaining to the criminal justice system be screened by the Office of Legislative Services to identify potential racial impacts if the measure is adopted.

Encouraging the governor to sign this legislation is one way we can put our faith into action. Racial disparities within the criminal justice system in New Jersey are some of the worst in the United States. The Sentencing Project recently released a [report](#) detailing that the Garden State puts black residents behind bars at twelve times the rate of white residents (the national rate is closer to 5 to 1). This disparity causes division, promotes stereotypes, and destroys lives. As people of faith we need to move into action. The racial impact legislation will not completely dismantle this racial disparity, but it is a step along the journey.

Learn about the criminal justice system and the Lutheran church's social statement [here](#).

Call the governor's office at (609) 292-6000 and let him know that people of faith support this legislation.

Pray for the end to racial disparities and work to build unity among faith communities of color. Plan an outdoor picnic with the worshipping congregation down the street. Eat together, sing together, and pray together so that we might be one as the Father and Jesus are one.