

# Advocacy in Action



lutheran metropolitan ministry | November 2020

## The Results Are In, What's Next?



The election results are finally in, and the next slate of policymakers has been largely determined across the country. The election garnered the highest turnout in history, and despite the pandemic, and substantial concerns of voter interference leading up to election day, little disruption occurred.

At the federal level, after four long days of uncertainty, President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris were declared winners. This was an historical election, with many firsts - Vice President Elect Harris is the first woman, first African American, and first Indian American in the office of the presidency.

On the Congressional front, there were no changes to Ohio's representation. Neither U.S. Senator from Ohio was on the ballot and all incumbent members of U.S. House of Representatives won decisive elections. One of the largest outstanding questions is whether the Senate Republicans will keep its majority in the next Congress. There are two Senate races in Georgia on January 5, 2020 that will determine the outcome. If the republican candidates win either Senate race, republicans will keep their majority and we will have a divided government limiting President-elect Biden's ability to advance his administration's agenda. If Democrats win both races, and become the majority party, President-elect Biden will have control of both Congressional chambers. Another outcome in this scenario: Ohio's U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown would become the chair of the powerful U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs which would elevate the issue of 'housing' in Congress.

Across Ohio, the majority of the members of the General Assembly were up for reelection. Despite the high number of races, the composition of Ohio's governing body changed little. Republicans have maintained super-majorities in both chambers, and outside a local race where incumbent House Representative Dave Greenspan (R) lost to Monique Smith (D), LMM's statehouse representation remains the same. During the lame duck period – the time between now and the January 1st swearing in of new members – there is hope that criminal justice reform, which focuses on sentencing reform, will advance. Otherwise, LMM will continue to focus on Governor Mike DeWine's efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19 while also preparing for the FY2022-2023 biennium budget process.

Locally, LMM endorsed Issue 68, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District Levy, and Issue 70, the Cuyahoga County Public Library Levy, both which passed with 60% of the vote. This is great news as it means an increased investment in the region's education and workforce development infrastructure. All members of Cuyahoga County Council were re-elected, and outside the ousting of two sitting Common Pleas Court judges, Judge Wanda Jones and Robert McClelland, little changed regarding LMM's local representation. This is partly because Cleveland City Council and Cleveland Mayoral elections occur during off-year cycles. These upcoming elections will be a major focus in 2021, and will likely impact the productivity of City Council in the coming months as campaigns for these offices ramp up.

LMM will continue to keep a close eye on the transition of power across our state, and nation, and looks forward to working with the newly elected, and re-elected members of government.

## From the Desk of the Advocacy Director



Margie Glick

Dear LMM Community,

A few days prior to the 2020 election, I had the privilege of sitting in on a conversation with U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown and Charles See, a re-entry pioneer, who spent 44 years in LMM leadership before retiring. The conversation aimed to connect the civil rights movement of the past with the present moment, and in doing so, communicate to the LMM community the importance of voting.

This ad hoc conversation touched on the topic of voter apathy and how we got to a point in time where the people most negatively impacted by our public policies are the least likely to vote for change. To paraphrase the words of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown, *how do you get a young black man who isn't excited about either candidate, and doesn't see much purpose in voting, to vote?*

This conversation was prescient of what ultimately happened in Cleveland on November 3rd. While rates of voting were up across the nation, turnout in

Cleveland hovered around 53%, a rate below 2016, 2012 and 2008 general election turnout. In the election post mortem, local leaders accurately cited a variety of reasons why turnout was low, including a lack of investment by the campaigns, the pandemic, years of disenfranchisement and racism, and the general belief that the system – regardless of who is in office – is just never going to work in their favor.

So where do we go from here? Firstly, we must accept these explanations, but not accept the outcome or assume it was inevitable- look at turnout in Philadelphia, Detroit and Atlanta.

From there, Cleveland must move in a direction where residents feel empowered to affect change. This begins with advocates and policymakers doing a better job engaging residents in the policy-making process in-between election cycles. Locally, we must lower barriers to engagement at council meetings, and include more community members in places of authority, like on foundation and nonprofit boards of directors. Finally, it means improving government - at all levels. For many of LMM's program participants, the government is rightly viewed as an inefficient mix of red tape and bureaucracy. Until those feelings change, it should be little surprise that many Cleveland residents may feel unmotivated to cast a vote.

In making these improvements, we will also be able to better move those who are oppressed, forgotten, and hurting to a place of self-sufficiency, and once that happens, voter turnout is likely to follow.

Sincerely,

Margie

## Your Voice, Your Vote

A substantial focus of Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry's 2020 advocacy has related to civic engagement. Between the 2020 decennial census, the dramatic primary election, and recent general election, ensuring LMM staff, program participants, and the wider LMM community's voices were heard in government was a top priority at LMM. These efforts to encourage engagement ramped up significantly in the past three months. LMM issued frequent advocacy alerts stressing the importance of voter registration and sharing information about voting, issued support for two local levies – issue 68 and issue 70, and circulated videos from Ohio's two U.S. Senators Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman thanking LMM staff for their work, and encouraging them to vote. LMM's Men's Shelter was able to partner with with Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH) and ClevelandVotes to offer rides to the polls throughout early voting. LMM will continue to press the importance of civic engagement and raise the voices of those we serve.

## POLICY CORNER

# Fair Chance Housing

Do you remember the last time you applied for a rental property? At some point in the application process, you were probably asked to pay a fee for the property manager to run a background check. This step has become a routine part of the rental application process. However, for applicants who have a criminal record (or a household member with a record), it can be a major barrier to obtaining housing.

This is partly because criminal background is not a protected class (like race, gender, or disability) under the Fair Housing Act. In other words, property owners have a right to deny someone housing based solely on their record. However, in 2016 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development issued guidance that challenged the legality of criminal background screening, using a “disparate impact” analysis. This guidance acknowledged the racial disparities embedded in the American legal system, and illustrated how those disparities impact access to housing.

Despite this guidance, past involvement with the criminal justice system remains a major barrier to housing. This is true in many cases regardless of the offense, the time elapsed since release, or who in the household has the record. At LMM, we serve with many individuals marred by these collateral sanctions, which can make finding an affordable and safe place to live incredibly difficult. This is especially problematic as someone with access to stable housing is less likely to reoffend, and more likely to achieve financial and personal stability. In the time of COVID-19, when housing is such an evident form of health care, such barriers could additionally mean the difference between sickness and health.

In January 2020, the Greater Cleveland Reentry Leadership Coalition, of which LMM is a member, issued *A Never-Ending Sentence*, a report which specifically assessed barriers to housing for individuals seeking project-based Section 8 housing. LMM and other coalition members analyzed over 100 Tenant Selection Plans (TSPs) from throughout Cuyahoga County and found that criminal convictions (even misdemeanors) severely limit access to safety net subsidized housing in our community. The same is true for individuals renting housing on the private market, where denials are commonly issued without explanation, and only after background check fees are paid.

Across the country, cities and states are adopting Fair Chance Housing Ordinances, which take additional steps to prevent landlords from using criminal background to deny housing opportunities. LMM believes that the local advancement of such policies would help thousands of individuals secure safe and stable housing, contributing to a stronger and healthier community. Our Advocacy department is working with a team of local partners and experts to bring awareness to the impact of criminal background screening, and promote local protections that would positively impact our program participants and broader community. More to come in 2021!

## Featured Advocacy Partner:



The Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH) seeks to eliminate the root causes of homelessness in our community, and that involves organizing people to push local government, service providers, and the NEO community to address policies and conditions that lead to homelessness.

NEOCH's advocacy work went statewide back in March to push local and state elected officials to provide emergency rental assistance to protect renters economically impacted by COVID-19. Alongside partners like LMM, we are currently educating and advocating with municipal and county officials to adopt “pay to stay” legislation, which would prevent eviction for renters who pay rent late, as long as they pay it in advance of their hearing. This helps ensure that emergency rental assistance is not the sole protection for renters during a crisis.

Through NEOCH's educational workshops, we continue to build race and class consciousness to increase awareness of systemic oppression and inequity, and we are working to embed that educational framework into the foundation of our housing and homelessness systems. Further, NEOCH hosts a Homeless Congress space on the east and west side. Although the pandemic has affected how we meet, we are working with Homeless Congress members to complete a proposed Homeless Bill of Rights that would protect people from being criminalized due to their housing status.

Over the past few months, NEOCH hosted a series of “pop up” events to make sure that people in shelters and hotels could register to vote and request vote-by-mail ballot applications. NEOCH also partnered with LMM to provide rides to the polls during early voting. To ensure that every person counts, NEOCH also worked with staff of the Cleveland area Census office to ensure that street outreach workers accompanied Census staff to outdoor locations where unsheltered people stay in our community.



## 5 Numbers to Know: Voting



lutheran  
metropolitan  
ministry

listening. serving. empowering.

4515 superior avenue • cleveland, ohio 44103

### Our Mission:

To promote shalom (peace, well-being) and justice (right relationships) through a Christian ministry of service and advocacy with those who are oppressed, forgotten and hurting.

### Link with LMM



@LMMCleveland



@LMMCleveland



Facebook.com/LMMCleveland



YouTube.com



E-newsletter sign-up at  
[www.lutheranmetro.org](http://www.lutheranmetro.org)



Latest news at  
[www.lutheranmetro.org](http://www.lutheranmetro.org)

*On November 3, 2020 the general election occurred. Here are some key numbers-to-know regarding the election results and voter turnout.*

**63%**

of the eligible voting population in the United States voted in the 2020 election, an increase from 60.1% in 2016

**65%**

of the eligible voting population in Ohio voted, an increase from 62% in 2016

**68%**

of eligible voters from Cuyahoga County voted, compared to 53% in Cleveland

**61%**

of voters supported Issue 68, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District Levy

**60%**

of voters supported Issue 70, the Cuyahoga County Public Library Levy

## The Ongoing Fight Against COVID

It is a heartbreaking reality that due to the continued spread of COVID-19, our traditional family gatherings at Thanksgiving and Christmas may look different than usual this winter. At LMM, we are doing our part to stop spread by closely following the guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Governor Mike DeWine.

LMM requires mask wearing and social distancing for staff and program participants, and continues to provide COVID-19 testing opportunities. LMM also continues to advocate for expanded unemployment benefits, rental assistance to limit evictions, and funding for the hotel hub strategy. Finally, LMM is actively monitoring state policies pertaining to telemedicine, nursing homes and group homes.

As COVID-19 continues to surge in the state and nation, LMM is committed to doing our part to keep staff safe while continuing to provide crucial services to LMM program participants. In doing so, we hope to be able to return to our normal gatherings and celebrations next year.

## What We're Reading

[The Atlantic: A Battle Between the Two Souls of America](#)

[Cleveland.com: Why Rep. Marcia Fudge wants to be Joe Biden's Agriculture Secretary](#)

