



Grow in God's Truth
Show Jesus' Love

**Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
Good Shepherd Lutheran School
& Little Lambs Preschool**

Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod
2101 Lor Ray Drive, North Mankato, MN 56003

Rev. Vance Becker, Pastor

Phone (507) 388-4336

Fax (507) 388-2160

e-mail: goodshepherd57@juno.com web: goodshepherdmankato.org

Dear Representatives,

I am the pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in North Mankato, a Missouri Synod congregation. Our congregation includes members who are well off and those who are struggling. I also happen to be the Circuit Visitor for the congregations of our denomination's Mankato area.

I am writing this letter in support of the JRLC's bill to address the marriage disincentive in the Minnesota Family Investment Program, House File 1453.

I have been a parish pastor for 35 years. Twenty nine of those have been spent in Minnesota, first in Glencoe and now in North Mankato. The churches I served each have a variety of programs serving preschool and elementary children. At Good Shepherd this includes several families from outside of the congregation, a high percentage of which are low income. Based on the numerous couples and families with whom I've worked, I firmly believe that marriage is one of the strongest tools to move families out of poverty, while helping the adults to remain employed and helping the children to be successful in school.

I have seen numerous couples, married and unmarried, deal with struggles and challenges. It is my observation that those who are married are more likely to stay together and work through these challenges, creating more stable homes from themselves and especially for their children.

I have worked with several couples who would have liked to be married but were not because they would have lost benefits that their families needed to meet their basic needs. These aren't families wanting state benefits to pay for luxuries - they are using the funds for things like food, rent and gas money to get to work. These single parents are struggling to care for children while trying to transition to full time work or going to school in order to be more employable.

As I understand the JRLC bill, it would allow families to continue to receive benefits for 18 months after getting married, allowing the family a year and a half to plan for their financial future without MFIP cash assistance. The family would not get additional funds for marrying, but could continue benefits after getting married for the 18 month period.

I believe this change would be significant in enabling couples who want to be married to do so. Based on my experience, I think that doing what we can to support marriage, especially of parents with children, is the most valuable thing we can do to reduce poverty and increase educational achievement. I encourage you to support this legislation.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Pastor Vance Becker