

## INFORMATION REGARDING THE “CONCEALED/CARRY” LAW COMING OUT IN WISCONSIN

August 24, 2011 – from the Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin

If your congregation is in conversation over the bill, we have gathered a few points you may want to consider. Please note that Concealed Carry affects more than just a person’s right to carry a gun, it relates to weapons: guns, electric guns, clubs, and knives (but not switchblade knives).

Although the legislation (SB 93) was signed into law, it will not take effect until November 1, 2011. Over the next several months, the Department of Justice will closely review the law and develop the emergency rules which will spell out the act in more detail. If your congregation intends on taking action by posting signs, it’s best to wait until more information is available. The exact language restrictions for signs are still being developed, and there are outstanding questions regarding the placement of signs in a church building. We do not know if there will be mandatory language or complicated posting requirements for our congregations.

Until we know more, the Wisconsin Department of Justice has a website dedicated to Concealed Carry and provides a list of Frequently Asked Questions. This website will be updated as the process moves forward. Keep in mind the bill was written without consideration to the unique needs of places of worship, and therefore many of the questions and answers are directed toward businesses and government entities. The website is:

<http://www.doj.state.wi.us/dles/cib/ConcealedCarry/ConcealedCarry.asp>

The bill presents a host of questions for congregations. Our churches are places of worship and are places of witness, and each ministry within your building (and other organizations who use it) will be impacted by the congregation’s decision to post a sign. Our churches are also employers, and we would encourage your leadership to review policy and procedure manuals, and how this legislation could affect employees and the congregation’s liability. The ELCA Secretary’s website contains information provided by Church Mutual on liability and security measures to consider. This is worth your time to review.

If you do intend to post a sign once the law takes effect in November, we encourage you to take the following steps before developing a congregation policy:

1. **Be thoughtful:** Do not solely make a decision as the pastor or rush a decision by your church council, but take the time to think through your response as a community of faith. If your building hosts other ministries, day care centers, or provides a meeting space for groups like AA, reach out to those partners and ask for their input on whether or not to post.
2. **Be prayerful:** Use this time to discern a response and the message it communicates to visitors, your community and neighborhood.
3. **Engage the congregation:** As Lutherans we are called to address social issues and to create the space to have an honest dialogue with one another. Seek input from the congregation and work toward consensus in determining a response. If you have a social concerns committee/team, they might take the lead on this. You, as pastor, might do this with forums,

newsletter articles, sermons, etc. Again, when guiding such a conversation, remember the bill is not just about guns, but concealed weapons.

4. **This a spiritual matter:** Where does Scripture help us to understand this current situation? Where is there confusion? The members of the congregation may have strong feelings about the legislation. If the congregation intends to post a sign or respond in anyway, please frame the discussion in a spiritual context to keep the conversation centered on our witness as Lutheran Christians, and not on partisan politics.

More detailed information will be available as we get closer to the date of enactment. In the meantime, we would encourage you and other congregations that are considering a response to first use this time until November for faith-filled conversations.