

April 20, 2015

Dear Rector/Vicar:



One of the major problems confronting our communities in California today is access to justice on the part of less fortunate Californians. Every day, poor and low-income persons in California are denied access to the basic rights to which they are entitled, simply because they cannot afford a lawyer. Justice does not just make a small difference for people in need – it makes all the difference. It can mean allowing a family to stay in their home, a veteran to receive earned benefits, or a woman to escape an abusive situation.

You are likely aware of how many homes have been foreclosed, jobs lost, and savings depleted by the weak recovery from the financial crisis that began in the fall of 2008. However, you may not be aware of the impact that the extremely low interest rates resulting from the crisis has had on access to justice for the poor. As part of the State Bar of California's effort to help secure adequate legal representation for the needy, their Legal Services Trust Fund Program distributes funds to 95 legal aid organizations throughout California. The program relies on the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) for a large portion of this funding. In 2008, IOLTA revenue reached \$22 million. Since then, the effects of the deep recession, weak recovery, and low interest rates have led to sharp reductions in that revenue, from \$22 million in 2008 to less than \$7 million per year for the past five years (approximately just \$5 million in 2014). While funding for critical legal aid has shrunk drastically, the recession has simultaneously increased the number of Californians living in poverty and the number of clients seeking assistance. This decrease in funding and increase in demand has caused as many as half the eligible individuals seeking legal assistance to be turned away due to lack of resources, with little hope for equitable resolution of their problems.

As part of our mission as Christians to care for the poor, parishes and missions in the Diocese of California have supported efforts such as providing food and shelter to the homeless. So it is likewise appropriate each parish and mission of the Diocese of California support efforts to help ensure adequate legal protection of indigent members of our community. We hope that we can count on your parish to support this important cause.



We suggest that the first step in supporting this effort is to enlist the assistance of one or more attorneys (or caring individuals if you do not have an attorney in your church) to take the lead and then organize a congregational Campaign for Justice to communicate to fellow parishioners the importance of access to justice. The goal is to raise awareness about the value of justice for each of us, and especially for the voiceless and poor. Secondly, it will be important for the Rector/Vicar to present to the congregation the need for funding legal aid agencies during a Sunday service, with follow-up references each Sunday during the campaign period, and also to promote the campaign in weekly newsletters. Finally, members of the congregation will be encouraged to contribute to a "Justice Gap" Fund at some point during the campaign. With your support and the support of members of your parish/mission, we can transform the abstraction of equal justice under the law into food, shelter, and safety for the vulnerable in our communities.

We appreciate your anticipated support and cooperation for this important cause. Please contact Elena Enzweiler at the State Bar of California at (415) 538-2532 if you have any questions about this proposal, or to arrange a call to discuss the matter in further detail. She is available to provide you with brochures, information packets, ideas, or anything else you may need to make this a successful campaign.

We thank you, and the people and families who will find new hope and healthy futures because of your assistance thank you as well.

Sincerely,  
The Rt. Rev. Marc Handley Andrus  
Eighth Bishop of California

Christopher Hayes,  
Chancellor of the Diocese of California