



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN MAINE

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Advent Campaign for Bucksport Mill Employees

Dear Friends in Christ:

At the Eucharist of our recent Diocesan Convention in Presque Isle, I preached about the parable of the Good Samaritan and tried to grapple with the question Jesus posed, "Who acted as the neighbor?" With that question, Jesus shifted the focus of the ancient tale from the wounded man to the helper making it clear that the one who acts compassionately towards us is *our* neighbor. As neighbors, we are joined in reciprocal relationships based on mutual need and mutual compassion.

As we all know it gets dark early in Advent, this season of waiting in the dark for the coming of God into our midst. This year I invite Maine Episcopalians to expand the notion of God made real by acting as neighbors to the families of 579 employees affected by the imminent closing of the Verso Paper Mill in Bucksport in December. Shortly after the October 1 announcement of the closure, Maine clergy in the towns neighboring Bucksport engaged me in conversation about how we might support the mill workers' families as well as other families in the region who will be indirectly affected by the devastating loss of jobs and income.

The congregations of the Diocese of Maine have a rich history in supporting communities in need. In 2003, Maine Episcopalians donated more than \$90,000 to a voucher fund to cover food, fuel, and medicine for the families affected by the closure of Great Northern Paper in Millinocket. That program was administered by St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. Episcopalians also donated food and essentials to four drop-off points across the state, enough to fill seven large trucks. The effort allowed St. Andrew's to open a new food pantry in just one day.

The Bucksport mill closure poses a different set of issues than the 2003 closure in Millinocket: employees are spread out across at least three counties, and there are already established nonprofit organizations poised to assist families with fuel, food, utilities, and many other avenues of aid.

After studying where Verso employees live, we have decided to invite Episcopalians from across the Diocese to make donations to four different agencies committed to assisting the displaced workers and their families. Three of the four are Community Action Programs or CAP agencies that serve residents of Hancock, Washington, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Knox, and Waldo Counties.

The Washington Hancock Community Agency is working directly with the union to offer a wide range of supports to Verso employees through its Bucksport Mill Crisis Fund. Waldo CAP and Penquis CAP offer many services that residents of the counties they serve may use. The fourth agency is the Good Shepherd Food Bank, and we will deposit donated funds to the accounts of five well-established food pantries located in Bucksport, Searsport, Ellsworth, Blue Hill, and Orland. Please see the attached page, which describes the four agencies and the services they offer.

The Diocese of Maine has established an online giving account with Vanco Services, an online donation service used by many denominations across the U.S., including some of our congregations in Maine. (There is a box on the online donation form that you may check if you are interested in learning more about setting up online giving for your congregation.)

So that 100 percent of the funds donated to our Advent campaign go directly to the agency you designate, the Diocese of Maine will absorb all transaction fees and credit/debit card service fees.

Additionally I will ask Diocesan Council to give the remaining \$10,000 from the Emergency Discretionary Fund in the 2014 diocesan budget to this effort.

To donate to the Advent Campaign for Bucksport Mill Employees, go to the diocesan homepage at www.episcopalmaine.org and click the “Donate Now” button. There you will find not only a link to the online donation form, but also suggestions of other ways your congregation could contribute further: a gift from your parish Outreach Fund, a Boxing Day food drive for one of the pantries, as well as other ideas. Also available is a web button for your church website and a QR code for your bulletin or other printed materials.

This is a new way for us to do an old Maine thing: care for our neighbors in need. I ask you to share the news of this Advent Campaign for Bucksport Mill Employees widely among members of your congregation and with your community beyond.

In Advent we look forward to God showing up among us. We know God will come, but his arrival is always a surprise: a baby in a manger, a Samaritan along the road, and an electronic donation. Be part of the surprise of God’s presence among us by contributing generously to our neighbors: the millworkers of Bucksport and their communities.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Stephen".

The Rt. Rev. Stephen T. Lane
Bishop of Maine