



## Statement to the Presidential Candidates

*On September 29, 2020, the Commission on Presidential Debates will be hosting the first presidential debate of the 2020 general election in Cleveland, Ohio. Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry (LMM) is hopeful that this debate brings attention to the real issues facing residents in Northeast Ohio.*

Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry is a 51-year-old non-profit providing innovative social enterprise job-training, civic engagement strategies and safety net services in the city of Cleveland and across Northeast Ohio. LMM seeks that people who are oppressed, forgotten, and hurting be empowered, valued, and healed by its unwavering commitment to addressing chronic needs, enabling people to self-sufficiency, and advocating for system change. In 2019, LMM served more than 7,000 individuals.

- LMM believes homelessness should be rare, brief and non-reoccurring, and that individuals who are experiencing homelessness be treated with dignity and respect. Individuals, families and youth experiencing homelessness should have access to safe shelter, behavioral health supports, and the social services necessary to move toward stability and when appropriate, independence.
- LMM believes in second chances and that once an individual has completed their sentence, their rights should be fully restored. By having full and fair access to employment, housing, health care, insurance, education and civic engagement, returning citizens are able to move toward stability and normalcy.
- LMM believes that senior citizens deserve to be treated with respect, and kindness, and provided access to high-quality and affordable health care and behavioral health care. This is especially important for those who have limited financial resources, and are aging with a severe mental illness, or dementia or Alzheimer's.
- Finally, LMM believes that our nation's legacy of racism and segregation continues to directly influence today's policies related to housing, criminal justice & health care. To move our nation forward, we must first acknowledge our past, and craft policy solutions that both overcome this legacy of racism, and advance equitable solutions that benefit all citizens.

## Questions to the Presidential Candidates

**The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted Black and Brown Americans. If elected president what would you do to address the fact that Black Americans are more likely to contract and die from the disease?**

*The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced existing racial disparities in access to health care. For every 10,000 residents in [Cuyahoga County](#) there have been 43 COVID-19 cases among African Americans compared to 15 among white residents. Nationally, Latino and African Americans are twice as likely as their white counterparts to die from the virus. This is a direct reflection of existing systematic disparities in access to healthcare. Prior to the start of the pandemic, Black residents were [more likely](#) to have an underlying*

health condition like asthma, diabetes, or heart disease and more likely to work a low-wage job without health benefits and paid sick leave.

There are numerous factors that contribute to these health disparities, including a [dearth](#) of African American doctors, the prevalence of [food deserts](#) in minority communities, and historical public health emergencies like the lead crisis. These are all issues that need to be addressed. However, in the short term, it is critical that changes be made so that there is continued access to high-quality health care through the Affordable Care Act, increased access to COVID-19 testing, and work-place policies that include paid sick leave. Further, our nation must continue to invest in the infrastructure needed for telehealth. While the federal and state-wide advancements of tele-health are a step in the right direction, all residents must have access to high-speed internet for this to be truly equitable.

**In a pandemic, housing is health care. If elected president, what would you do to ensure that those who are homeless continue to have access to socially distant emergency shelter and over time, permanent affordable housing?**

Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry manages the Men's Shelter at 2100, the largest men's shelter in Ohio housing as many as 400 individuals nightly. During the pandemic, staff have worked hard to reduce census to allow for social distancing and limit disease transmission using a mix of financial incentives to encourage shelter residents to live with family/friends and the use of hotels. This approach, which has been supported through CARES Act funding, has been highly effective: the shelter remains at 50-60% capacity and COVID positive rates remain under 4% for residents which is below the national positive rate of 7%.

However, much of the CARES Act funding is set to expire in the coming months, and the eviction moratorium enacted by the CDC fails to include funding for rental assistance. When the moratorium expires January 1, thousands of Americans are going to face large rent bills or risk being evicted. Without a robust investment in rental assistance, the current policy will [disproportionately impact African American](#) renters who were more likely to be unemployed or underemployed prior to the pandemic and with [less savings](#) than their white peers. African Americans are also more likely to have [faced reduced hours or unemployment](#) as a result of the pandemic. It is critical that our elected officials take a proactive approach to continue reducing evictions now and in the future, without harming landlords. This can be accomplished through a \$100 billion investment in rental assistance, at least \$12 billion in funding for homeless services and a uniform federal eviction moratorium. Without these changes we anticipate a surge in evictions, and increased demand for emergency shelter.

**If elected president, what would you do to increase education and training opportunities for those currently incarcerated?**

Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry's Chopping for Change program is a comprehensive culinary training program for women currently incarcerated at the Northeast Reintegration Center (NERC). In addition to learning culinary skills participants receive trauma informed care and other basic education skills. The program is highly effective: upon release, program participants recidivate at a rate of less than 3%, and 80% are employed post-release with a 6-month retention rate of 90%. Unfortunately, few programs like Chopping for Change exist because of the 1994 Pell Grant ban. This ban makes it nearly impossible for the majority of those currently incarcerated to utilize Pell to access postsecondary education.

*This policy change would be a small step towards addressing the major racial disparities in our criminal justice system. Black Americans are [five to ten times more likely](#) to be incarcerated than their White peers. It is no coincidence that 41% of those incarcerated [do not have a high-school diploma](#) and of those without a high school diploma 44% are Black, 53% are Hispanic and 27% are white. Research demonstrates that overturning the Pell Grant ban and increasing educational opportunities will reduce violence amongst those incarcerated, improve the work environment for prison staff, and increase prisoner self-esteem. Post-incarceration, having some postsecondary education leads to greater employment outcomes, reduced rates of recidivism and cost savings; for every dollar spent on prison education, there is a five-dollar [return](#) during the three years post-release.*

**If elected president what would you do to end food insecurity amongst those most vulnerable, including children and seniors?**

*According to the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, in 2017, [one in six residents](#) from Northeast Ohio was food insecure and more than one in five children - nearly 83,000 – lived in a food insecure household. Cuyahoga County, where LMM is located, had the highest number of food insecure adults in the state. Unfortunately, COVID has further increased rates of food insecurity, especially among [African Americans](#). School closings made access to the federally funded free and reduced lunch program more difficult for children. According to a survey of mothers in May 2020, 41% of households in Cuyahoga County with children under 12 were food insecure. For [seniors](#), job loss combined with health concerns associated with going to the grocery store, and with dropping off food, also contributed to increases in food insecurity.*

*As the sole non-profit provider of guardianship services in Cuyahoga and Lorain Counties LMM staff serve approximately 600 individuals who are indigent and deemed incompetent by the state. The majority of these individuals are seniors and many suffer from mental illness or dementia. Throughout COVID, the wards have been monitored by staff to ensure their basic needs are met but this is not the case for all vulnerable older adults. Moving forward it is important that more be done to ensure that our seniors have access to nutritious meals.*