

Church Supports Peaceful Rally

There are times in the life of a church when it looks beyond its walls, its church family, and maybe even its comfort zone to open its arms wide *In Mission for Others*. One of those times came for **Augustana, Edmonton** early this spring.

In January, Augustana received a courtesy call from the manager of corporate security, Workers' Compensation Board-Alberta (WCB-A) to inform them about an upcoming rally being planned by the Canadian Injured Workers, Alberta Chapter (CIW), for Feb. 29 to March 2. The church is directly across from the WCB-A building.

To better understand the issues, Augustana's pastor, **Matt Lyseng**, and council chair **Carl Sorensen** met first with WCB-A and then with members of CIW. Sorensen raised CIW's concerns with Augustana's Church Council, who agreed to support the group.

Communication between all parties was kept open, Edmonton Police Service was notified of the event, and the rally for injured workers went ahead, complete with political and media representation as well as social justice activists, Occupy Edmonton and The Raging Grannies.

"We did not initially expect the Augustana Parish to allow us to use the church property for our rally," said CIW members **Randall** and **Donna Oberik**. "When we heard they would support us, it buoyed our spirits and became a consolidating factor for our members."

Sorensen wrote, "Apart from any perceptions and concerns we might individually have with injured workers and their difficulties with the WCB-A, people who have concerns with government institutions have a right to speak to those concerns in public and address decision-makers. The church has an obligation to assist those individuals as they speak. That is simple justice, and right for the church."

The Sunday after the rally, members of CIW worshipped at Augustana. They said they will be "forever grateful" for the support they received. It was the first time they were able to gather injured workers together to share in their suffering, comfort each other, and speak in a collective voice.

Augustana chose to step out of its comfort zone to help the CIW hold this and then a second event on April 20 in a civil and non-violent manner. They provided a venue

and power for the PA system so that the voices of injured workers could be heard. They chose to show solidarity with those individuals who feel the system is not helping them. They chose to enter the mission field and found it—just outside their door.

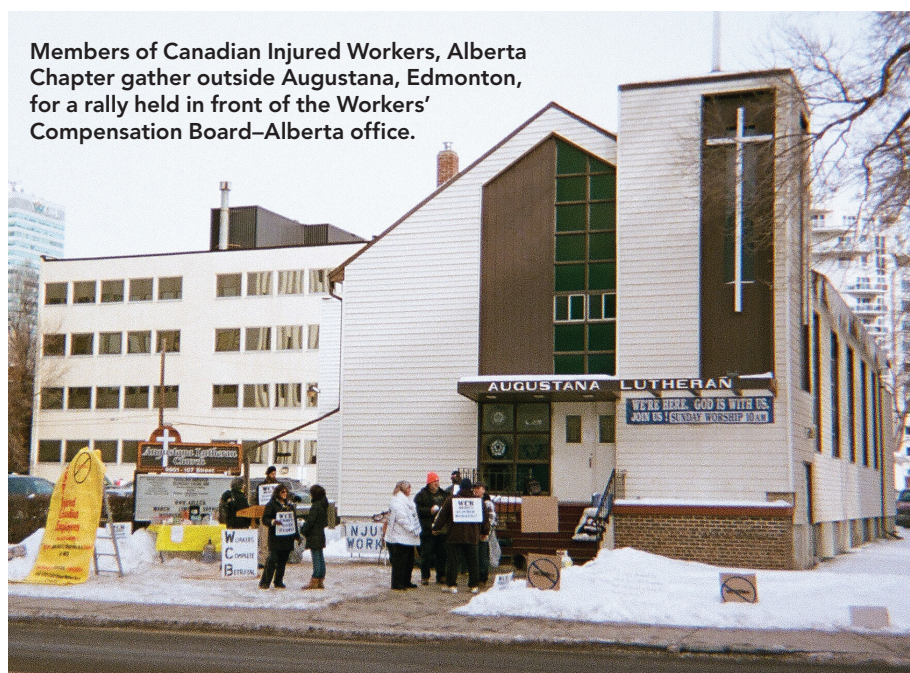
—**Colleen McGinnis, Synod Editor**

The issues behind the rally

The CIW believe they have been abandoned by the WCB-A, and that the system has failed them by disallowing legitimate claims and rewarding doctors who give a medical opinion that can be used to deny a claim. Disallowed claimants must then look for assistance through Alberta taxpayer-funded social programs like Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped. For more, visit www.canadianinjuredworkers.com/.

According to WCB-A, injured workers are entitled to fair treatment and fair compensation benefits. If a worker disagrees with a WCB-A decision, there are many options to ensure the Workers' Compensation Act has been applied correctly. WCB-A is subject to scrutiny from the Office of the Auditor General, Alberta's ombudsman, the freedom of information and protection of privacy commissioner, the Alberta government, and their board of directors.

Shawn Friedenberger, spokesperson for WCB-A says, "The majority of our clients (82 per cent in 2010) are satisfied with the fairness of our decisions and are able to return to work successfully. We learn from every case we manage, and are constantly refining our processes to be better. For more, visit www.wcb.ca/.



Members of Canadian Injured Workers, Alberta Chapter gather outside Augustana, Edmonton, for a rally held in front of the Workers' Compensation Board-Alberta office.

PHOTOS BY CARL SORENSEN.