



THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH AND THE AMERICAN INDIAN

(A statement of the Seventh General Convention of The American Lutheran Church adopted October 15, 1974 by action GC74.15.172 as a statement of comment and counsel addressed to the members of the congregations of The American Lutheran Church to aid them in their decisions and actions.)

1. The American Lutheran Church is concerned, and rightly so, over racial discrimination and injustice, apartheid, and violations of human rights. The members of its congregations therefore are concerned about conditions affecting American Indians.

2. Numerous voices appear to be saying many, and conflicting, things about what the American Indian wants, needs, and deserves. Forms of organization, emphases, and strategies for reaching defined goals also differ among Indian people. This is to be expected. No one American Indian organization, group, or individual speaks for all Native Americans. Each has its own constituency, special interests, and record of credibility. Each must be heard in context in order to understand what is being said, why it is being said, and what is not being said.

3. Though definitions of the problems and proposals for solving them differ among American Indians, certain core areas emerge. Members of the congregations of The American Lutheran Church need to focus their hearing and attention on at least the following core areas:

a. *Broken treaties.* Agreements were negotiated with Indian tribes, as independent nations, to end hostilities and establish conditions for an enduring peace. The rights, protections, and services promised by these treaties frequently have been violated.

b. *Land base.* Even on their reservations, Indians have had their life-sustaining waters diverted or polluted, their minerals and forests exploited and exported, and their land damaged or sold away. The land base promised the Indians has been despoiled by human desires and greed.

c. *Tribal government.* Indians were promised the right to govern themselves. Structures for tribal self-government have been established, but in actual operation may be dominated by federal (and other funding) agencies. The role, power, and influence of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is a key issue.

d. *Double standards.* Indians cite many specifics of double standards of justice practiced by law enforcement agencies and courts—lenient for whites, punitive for Indians. These violate both treaty rights and fundamental protections guaranteed in the Constitution of the United States.

e. *Defective social institutions.* Indians suffer from education not geared to Indian cultures, from health services and medical care far below the standards in the white community, from sub-par housing, and unfair employment practices which cause poverty.

f. *Indian ethnic and cultural identity.* Amidst the diversity in Indian tribes and life styles, Indians desire recognition and acceptance of the positive, distinctive features in their Native American life styles.

4. The time is at hand for this nation to address itself responsibly and creatively to assure the rights of Indian people to justice, equity, opportunity, and their cultural heritage. The American Lutheran Church welcomes the efforts in the Congress of the United States to shape a constructive Indian public policy with the assistance of the many Indian organizations, groups, and individuals whose voices are being heard. This Seventh General Convention asks the members of the congregations of The American Lutheran Church to participate actively in the discussions seeking to develop an informed, sensitive, relevant public policy.

5. This Seventh General Convention notes with satisfaction that systematic efforts are underway whereby The American Lutheran Church is girding itself for more effective ministry and service with the American Indian. It recognizes and rejoices in the fact that many congregations already are ministering to and with the Indian people. It specifically urges upon all congregations careful attention to the six core areas cited in paragraph three. This General Convention anticipates and encourages further and more widespread evidences of constructive action under the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

6. This Seventh General Convention further reaffirms its appreciation of and confidence in the National Indian Lutheran Board (NILB) and

a. urges persons and groups within The ALC to seek the evaluation and counsel of the NILB whenever possible.

b. that groups seeking support from The ALC be informed that direct support for programs and efforts relating to Indian people be sought through consultation with the NILB.

c. suggests that the Program Committee for Development Assistance in the DSMA be urged to consider earmarking a portion of the Development Assistance Fund for Indian ministry.

The printing and distribution of this statement by the:

Office of Research and Analysis
The American Lutheran Church
422 South Fifth Street
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415

has been authorized by the General Secretary of The American Lutheran Church

Price: 2¢ per copy; 22¢ per doz.; \$1.80 per 100