

Receive with Thanksgiving!

A Congregational Study on Economic Life, for use with
Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All
A Social Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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A Congregational Study on Economic Life

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To be used with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's social statement on economic life, *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, 1999. ISBN 6-0001-1605-5; www.elca.org/dcs/economiclife.html.



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The Fourth Petition

Give us today our daily bread.

What is this?

Answer. In fact, God gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving.

Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*



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This guide will assist those who intend to participate in a study of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's (ELCA) social statement, *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*. It includes:

- Detailed directions for conducting nine one-hour sessions for adults or adults with youth;
- Suggestions for supplementary activities as well as ways to adapt the model for use in other settings; and
- A listing of additional resources and organizations.

The study process is designed both to help participants understand the statement and to reflect on its implications for themselves and their congregation.

As leader, you will need a copy of this guide and a copy of *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*. Participants should have their own copies of the statement to study and mark. The ELCA grants permission to copy the social statement for congregational study, providing each copy displays the copyright found on the back page of the booklet. Or you may order copies by calling Augsburg Fortress at 1-800-328-4648 and asking for ISBN 6-0001-1605-5. You may also download the statement off the Internet by visiting the Department for Studies' Web site at www.elca.org/dcs/studies.

What is the ELCA's Social Statement on Economic Life, *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*?

The ELCA's statement on economic life, *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, was adopted by vote of the Churchwide Assembly in Denver in 1999. This marked the culmination of a process that began in March of 1994, when the board of the Division for Church in Society approved a plan to develop an economic social statement and named a task force. Eighteen listening posts were held throughout the country in the fall of that year. The task force reviewed the findings and after two years produced a study and then a draft of the social statement on which hearings were held.

The church bodies which formed the ELCA had taken an interest in economic life in the past, and the Lutheran Church in America had issued a comprehensive statement on economic justice. *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* seeks to continue that tradition and address present economic realities. This is a document to be shared by the church in discussion, deliberation, and teaching.

Steps to Planning and Leading a Discussion

This study offers a detailed plan for **nine one-hour sessions** that might be done at any convenient time, including the Sunday morning "Bible class" hour.



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Aims for the Study

Through this study, participants will:

1. Become acquainted with the contents of the ELCA Social Statement *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*;
2. Deepen their awareness of the biblical and theological basis for our calling to seek sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all;
3. Explore the implications of this calling for their lives as people of faith and as citizens and for our church;
4. Increase their understanding of the many dimensions of economic life; and
5. Provide an opportunity for participants to support one another in their calling to seek sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all.

The Setting for the Study

This study might also be used in:

- A one-day workshop, combining the nine sessions into four time blocks divided by coffee and lunch breaks;
- An overnight retreat, organized in a similar manner; or
- Three Saturday morning sessions for three hours each.

If one of these options is used, you will need to make the necessary adjustments so that participants may do the necessary preparatory work for each session.

For Further Study

The nine-session study model presented here does not include time for discussion of the many policy issues raised. If your group has interest in discussing one or more specific policy issues, such as U.S. foreign aid, we encourage you to schedule an additional session(s).

Laying the Groundwork

1. Begin your process of personal preparation by reflecting on your own experience and concerns related to issues of economic life.
2. Assemble or order the resource materials that you will need to lead the study, including copies of the statement for yourself and all the participants in the study.
3. Read carefully the statement *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* and review this guide prior to session planning, paying particular attention to the “Guideposts to Learning” section on page XX. Change and adapt the plans suggested in this guide to your particular audience and setting.
4. Work closely with your parish education committee, director of Christian education or others responsible for education in your congregation so that this study will fit with the overall educational plan.
5. Decide on your intended audience and the time frame for the study.
6. Develop a plan for recruiting participants. You will want to include persons of diverse backgrounds, ages, political perspectives, etc. Publicize the study opportunity well ahead of time through your church newsletter and bulletin.

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7. This guide offers specific suggestions for a brief opening devotion at the beginning of each session. You and/or members of the study group might offer a closing prayer at the conclusion of each session.
8. If your room and group size permit it, arrange the chairs so that participants can face one another.
9. You will need an easel with a large pad of newsprint (or a blackboard) for each session as well as wall space to post several sheets simultaneously. When the sessions call for recording ideas on newsprint, you might designate some one to assist you with this task.
10. You might also make or purchase a tri-panel cardboard display board (or poster board) to display newspaper and magazine clippings.
11. Before each session, review what you need to prepare and assemble the materials you want to bring.

Guideposts to Learning

To achieve the aims of this study listed in the previous section, it may be helpful to think of the study process as supported by three legs:

- The first leg is **the statement** *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*.
- The second leg is **the experience and the perspectives** that each participant brings to the study.

- The third leg is **the present context** in which the study process is taking place — what is happening in your congregation, the ELCA, the nation, and the rest of the world?

Each of these three legs is important to achieving the aims of the process. The statement is a tool to help this church and its members reflect upon the past and present and to discern opportunities for the future. You will want to take particular responsibility for keeping in touch with the three legs.

In your first session, assess your group and seek ways to build on its strengths. Recognize that your group will probably include those who have relatively little sense of personal connection to the issues of economic life as well as those who have a much greater sense of connection. With this variation in mind, you will want to affirm the importance of the statement and the study process for *all* participants, and the need for hearing the contributions of each member.

This topic may elicit the expression of strong feelings. Help participants affirm that it is all right to express their opinions. Remind people that emotions, by themselves, are neither right nor wrong; they are simply signs of our humanity. When strong feelings are expressed by a member of the group, encourage others to listen and to avoid judgmental responses.

Consider whether or not it is an appropriate time to invite others to share feelings on the issue under discussion. As group leader, you will want to give those expressing their feelings feedback that indicates they have been heard. A study group that provides a positive, “safe” environment for its participants to express diverse feelings and points of view is a blessing to each of its members and to the church!

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Session Objectives

In this session participants will:

- Explore why our church chose to make a statement on economic life;
- Discuss the impact of globalization on everyday life; and
- Discuss how market-based assumptions may create tension with our faith.

Prepare

Study: Read the passages from Martin Luther's *The Small Catechism* and Matthew and discuss them in small groups using the questions below.

Give us today our daily bread

God gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving.

What then does “daily bread” mean?

Everything included in the necessities and nourishment for our bodies, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm, fields, livestock, money, property, an upright spouse, upright children, upright members of the household, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors and the like.¹

Matthew 6:31-34

“Therefore do not worry, saying ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or

‘What will we wear?’ for it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

- What would you say is the greatest gift God has given you on earth? Why would you say that?
- What gift of God are you most thankful for?
- In your daily life, do you think more about your “treasure in heaven” or your “treasures on earth”? Offer evidence of your response.
- How does telling us to “strive first for the kingdom of God” help us make economic decisions?

Important Words to Know

Sufficiency and Sustainability

The terms sufficiency and sustainability were both used in the 1993 social statement *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice*. They describe ways to enjoy the fruits of the earth without abusing the earth. Here is what the statement says about *sufficiency*: “The earth and its fullness belong to the Lord. No person or group has absolute claim to the earth or its products. The principle of sufficiency means meeting the basic needs of all humanity and all creation.” In describing *sustainability*, the social statement recalls the Hebrew traditions of rest for humans and the earth in Sabbath and jubilee, which “remind us that we may not press creation relentlessly in an effort to maximize productivity. The principle of sustainability means providing an acceptable life for present generations without compromising that of future generations.”

Reflect on the Social Statement

Have the facilitator summarize the statement from the first sentence up to “Our obligation and ongoing tensions.”

How would you describe the reasons this statement was written? What topics would you expect to see discussed in a church statement on economic life?

Notice that the statement begins with the First Commandment. Why? Why does the statement begin with a confession by the church?

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Hymn

For the Fruit of All Creation

For the fruit of all creation, thanks be to God. For these gifts to ev'ry nation, thanks be to God. For the plowing, sowing, reaping, silent growth while we are sleeping, future needs in earth's safekeeping, thanks be to God.

(LBW 563, WOY 760)

Consider

Take a few moments for people to read the section titled “Our obligation and ongoing tensions.” Discuss the list of tensions presented in the section. Discuss how you think the first part of the statement might describe our economic system. Go back and discuss the tension between the first and second segments of the statements. Have each person choose one statement and describe how that statement challenges him or her. What other assumptions might you hold which are in tension with your faith?

Discover

Have people break into small groups and discuss these questions.

- Take a look at the tag in the back of your shirt — where were your clothes made?
- What are some of your favorite foods? Are your favorite foods and all their ingredients grown in the United States, or are they grown elsewhere?
- Where does most of the oil we use in the United States to run cars and heat homes come from?
- What benefits do you receive from the economic system which provides us with these things?
- What are some of the drawbacks of this system?

Taking It Home

Split the group into two, assigning one group to research domestic poverty and the other group to research poverty internationally. The goal is to find out what some of the causes of poverty are. Compare at least two organizations to see if they give slightly different answers.

Examples of *international organizations* with Web sites:

- **Catholic Relief Services** (www.catholicrelief.org)
- **Jubilee USA** (www.jubileeusa.org)
- **Lutheran World Relief** (www.lwr.org)
- **Oxfam** (www.oxfam.org)
- **The World Bank** (www.worldbank.org)

Examples of *domestic organizations* with Web sites:

- **Bread for the World** (www.bread.org)
- **The National Council of Churches of Christ** (www.nccusa.org/poverty)
- **Poverty USA**, The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.povertyusa.com)
- **The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families** (www.acf.dhhs.gov/index.html) where you may search for “causes of poverty” using the site’s search engine.

Endnote

1. Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 357.

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Session Objectives

In this session participants will:

- Examine their attitude toward poverty;
- Explore Luther's understanding of the Ten Commandments; and
- Consider poverty in their community.

Prepare

Discuss the following questions with one other person or in small groups: Describe what effects these factors could have on poverty:

education level, shortage of housing for lower-income groups, drug or alcohol abuse, low wages, lack of employment, personal work ethic, racism, single-parent families, poor access to health care, extended family members who are often in need, lack of jobs skills, problems with transportation, problems finding and affording child care

Reflect on the Social Statement

Read together, or have the facilitator summarize, the first four paragraphs under the section titled "For all: especially those living in poverty" (p. 4).

Matthew 25:40

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Consider

The Fifth Commandment

You are not to kill

What is this?

Answer: We are to fear and love God so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of life's needs.¹

Mostly we think about commandments six through ten as telling us what *not* to do. But according to Luther these commandments involve both not doing and *doing*.

To follow properly the commandments prohibiting stealing or committing adultery, we are supposed to help our neighbor improve property and treat our spouses with honor. To really claim we are using the Ten Commandments as a guide, Luther tells us we have to be willing to think of them as a minimum we can do for others, not the maximum of what we are expected to do.

In the *Large Catechism*, Luther says, regarding the Fifth Commandment,

"This commandment is violated not only when a person actually does evil, but also when he fails to do good to his neighbor, or, though he has the opportunity, fails to prevent, protect, and save him from suffering bodily harm or injury."²

List ways you keep the Fifth Commandment, both by *not doing* and by *doing*.

Prayer

God, open our eyes to the needs of our neighbors. Turn our hearts to care for them and offer our hands to serve them. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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Discover

Poverty as Communal Reality

In your experience, what does poverty mean? What does poverty look like where you live? In what ways does your congregation respond to the needs of those living in poverty? Are there people in your town, city, or state living in poverty? What about your community might contribute to poverty?

Taking It Home

Before the Next Session

Choose one of the following options: Gather statistics concerning income levels in your community. What percentage of your neighbors lives below the poverty level? Some places you could start research:

- The U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services has a Web site which explains to the reader how poverty levels are computed: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/01poverty.htm>.
- The Census Bureau publishes estimates of poverty rates through its small area income and poverty estimates. Try looking at the state and county estimates. www.census.gov/hhes/www/saipe/estimatetoc.html.

- The ELCA's Department for Research and Evaluation maintains a Web site which allows the browser to enter zip code, region number and synod letter, and congregational ID number, and get the results of the 2001 census. Click on www.elca.org/resources.html and find "Demographic Data for Your Zipcode" under the "For Members and Staff" heading.

or

- Create a budget for a working parent with one child who earns six dollars an hour. Include housing, transportation, food, health insurance, child care, and utilities.

Endnote

1. Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 352.)
2. Ibid.



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Hymn

For the Fruit of All Creation

In the just reward of labor, God's will is done. In the help we give our neighbor, God's will is done. In our worldwide task of caring for the hungry and despairing, in the harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.

(LBW 563, WOV 760)

Session Objectives

In this session participants will:

- Explore what poverty means in the United States and worldwide;
- Reflect on how the church has responded to poverty; and
- Have an opportunity to think about how powerless we may feel in the face of economic trends

Prepare

Discuss the following questions with one other person or in small groups:

- What choices did you have to make when you conducted the budgeting exercise? What kinds of choices do you have to make in your own budgeting?
- What is the least every person should have? (Rather than just saying “food and shelter,” talk about what kind of food and what kind of shelter.) What proportion of people in your community have this much?
- How does poverty affect your community, your congregation, and the choices you make?
- What are some of the effects of poverty over the long term?

Reflect on the Social Statement

Read together, or have the facilitator summarize, from the last paragraph on page 5 (starting with “Today, well over a billion people. . .”) until the top of page 7 (where the “Livelihood” section begins).

The statement tells us that when a developing country becomes heavily indebted, the poorest people are often affected the most. Describe a time when an economic trend in the United States (such as a decrease in government funding for a program you depend upon, a tax hike, or inflation) affected you or others, and you were powerless to stop it.

Consider

How might poverty be experienced in the life of the ELCA?

Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota discovered many families in rural North Dakota had been suffering economically because a series of natural disasters (11 Presidential Disaster declarations in the last 9 years) and crop disease contributed to making farming very risky. High costs for producing the crops and low prices for their sale exacerbated the problem.

In the midst of the abundance of farming communities in North Dakota, pantries were giving out food to many more people, and people were unable to buy anything they didn't produce themselves. Whole communities were affected. Farm families had to give up health insurance so they could buy food, and rural communities were emptying out as families moved to different areas to survive economically.

Important Words to Know

Church: includes congregations, synods, the churchwide organization, and where relevant, affiliated organizations such as seminaries, schools, colleges and universities, and social ministry organizations.

Poverty: The U.S. government measures poverty by comparing a person's income level and the number of people supported by that income to a certain standard of living, adjusting every year depending on how much prices have increased.

Economic trends: Use this term as broadly as possible when discussing this chapter. The term is used here to describe a whole range of possibilities, from the price of groceries to unemployment statistics, to government funding for programs such as health care or job training or school funding.

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Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota recognized the pain in the rural communities and arranged to give vouchers to families in need to spend at privately owned local grocery stores. Pastors, church elders, social workers, and store owners were contacted to distribute the vouchers and extend care from the church.

Imagine you live on a farm your family has owned for generations, and your farm is deep in debt. You can either sell your farm, or try to continue farming but cut back on your expenditures. What would you give up first? What might prevent you from asking for help? How would this affect your emotional life? What sorts of emotions might you feel?

What kind of support would you want from your congregation if you were in this position? How would you hope your pastor would help you? How would you hope other people in your congregation would help you? Have you or has someone else you know had an experience when your church supported you when you were in need? Have you had an experience where the church did *not* see your needs?

Discover

One of the contributing factors to the farm crisis was the high cost of production for the farmers compared to the low prices their crops were getting. Sometimes economic trends which originate elsewhere can affect us in a very personal way, for better and for worse.

When a well-known author spends a month working as a waitress in Florida, she surveys her co-workers and finds that they generally cannot afford to rent an apartment for themselves. One shares a room in a flop-house, one shares a two-room apartment with his girlfriend and two other unrelated people, one lives with her mother, the highest-paid worker has been able to buy a trailer and pays only a lot fee, one couple has to stay at a hotel at \$60 a night because they don't have a car, and another worker lives in a van.¹

Despite working full time, these restaurant workers were at the mercy of a housing market which did not provide many alternatives to people who did not have the means to buy a trailer, or pay a month's rent and a security deposit up front.

Why are some people affected more than others by economic trends? Think of farmers in North Dakota crippled by the high cost of farming and the low price of crops after so many disasters. Think of a single working mother who depends on government subsidies for child care so she can work. Think of the people in developing countries who are the most affected when their countries are in debt. What are ways to change this economic vulnerability?

Taking It Home

Before the next session

Read the service of baptism from the Lutheran Book of Worship. Make a list for yourself of all the responsibilities that parents, godparents, and the congregation have as a result of participating in the service. How would you say these describe your vocation as a Christian?

Endnote

1. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 26.

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Session Objectives

In this session participants will:

- Discuss how the terms *profession*, *vocation*, and *livelihood* are used; and
- Explore what it means to have a vocation.

Prepare

Discuss the following questions with one other person or in small groups. Compare your lists of responsibilities you made from the service of baptism. Were the lists similar? Do you see items on that list in your daily life? How did you end up in your present profession? Was your career something you chose, or was it chosen for you? Did you feel a call to choose this profession? What else could you be called to do?

Reflect on the Social Statement

Read together, or have the facilitator summarize, page 7 to the top of page 8 (from “Livelihood: Vocation, work and human dignity” until “Work”).

What have you learned through relationships such as families, neighborhoods, and schools named in the statement?

Consider

It is easy to picture the Gospel being proclaimed in the gathered community. Imagine how the Gospel is proclaimed when church members are not together. There is one baptized member out selling real estate to a

young couple. Over there are two baptized members running a lawn treatment program with a dozen employees. Down the road is a baptized member supervising her children's play with the neighbors.

The Gospel prompts Christians to live their lives with integrity, do their daily work competently, and treat those around them fairly. They serve God when they provide loving care for those around them. They carry the Gospel into the world by the way they live.¹

What are the different roles (parent, student, employee, employer, child, sibling) you have in your life?

How does your faith influence what you do in those roles? What do you think God is calling you to do in those roles?

Discover

A policeman in Milwaukee told this story about his ministry in daily life: Shortly after we first came to this country from Puerto Rico, my sister got robbed and I had to go to the police station with her. She didn't speak any English, and there was no one to translate for us. My English wasn't very good, so it was really hard to communicate. I said to myself, “Someday I'm going to change that!” Now Officer Reyes, one of the first Hispanic officers in the Milwaukee Police Department,

Important Words to Know

Profession: The field in which you work. Some familiar examples are: home-maker, lawyer, plumber, painter, clergy, mechanic, factory worker.

Livelihood: Your means of financial support. It may be a job, or it may be social security payments, or it may come through your family.

Vocation: Our call from God to worship and serve God whatever our situation in life. Look at the list you created from the service of baptism. How do you see those responsibilities appearing in your everyday life?

1 Cor. 12:4-6

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

Prayer

God, teach us to appreciate the gifts we are given in each other. Guide our thoughts into ways we can and do serve you in our everyday life. Amen.

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helps with translations. He starts every day asking himself “How can I help somebody today?”

In what ways do you serve others in your daily life? What sort of power do you have to minister to others?

How might thinking about your work as serving God change your work?

Taking It Home

Before the next session

Talk to someone from another generation (i.e., at least 20 years younger or older than you) and compare that person’s experience with working life to yours. Ask questions such as:

- How long will you/did you have your first job?
- Do you think employers have more or less loyalty to their employees than they used to have?
- Do you think people have more or less loyalty to their employers than they used to have?
- If your work takes place in the home, do you think your work is recognized and rewarded by society?

Endnote

1. Judith McWilliams Dickhart, *Church-going Insider or Gospel-carrying Outsider? A Different View of Congregations* (Chicago: Division for Ministry, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002), 71.



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Session Objectives

In this session participants will:

- Reflect on work: why we do it, and what we are called to do in work; and
- Reflect on why we all want to be rewarded with the fruit of our labor

Prepare

Discuss the following questions with one other person or in small groups:

How did the person you talked to last week have different experiences and expectations of working life from you?

Can the group come to some agreement about whether different generations have different expectations of work? For example, if more women work outside the home in one generation than the other, how does that affect our view of work in the home? Or for another example, do you find that older people tended to work for the same company longer than younger people?

Sociologist William Julius Wilson finds that work gives us an anchor in our daily lives which helps us adapt to the society we live in. On the flip side of this, the absence of work makes all of life, even family life, less coherent.¹

How do you find work orders your life? How do you order your life when you are not working?

Isaiah 65:22-23

“... and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain. . . .”

Prayer

God, we pray that the work we do is not in vain. Grant to us meaningful and rewarding work for ourselves and the vision to seek meaningful and rewarding work for all. Amen.

Reflect on the Social Statement

Read together, or have the facilitator summarize, pages 8-9 (from *Work* up to *Human Dignity*). The statement says, “We are freed from such economic captivity by the forgiveness, new life, and dignity that is ours in Christ.” Where do you see this freedom at work in your own life?

Consider

Read the following passages out of the Old Testament:

Genesis 2:15: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”

Genesis 3: 17 & 19: “And to the man he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, “You shall not eat of it,” cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. . . . By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.’”

Proverbs 13:23: “The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.”

What do these passages tell us about the nature of work? How is work described in these passages? Why? What do you feel about the work in your life? Is there work you enjoy and work you do not enjoy? What rewards do you get for your work? Are those rewards enough? Why would we want to enjoy the fruit of our labor? What is unjust about the situation described in Proverbs 13?

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Important Words to Know

Fruits of our labor: the fruits of our labor may be monetary, in being paid a wage that is appropriate to the work we do, or it may be more personal. Perhaps what we ask for is recognition and gratitude from someone we have served, or satisfaction in a job well done, or appreciation from others that we are dedicated to our work.

Discover

A Lutheran described a conversation with a woman she met while leading delegations of U.S. citizens to Mexico and Central America. "I met a strawberry picker who burns in my memory: 'Our children,' she declared, 'die of hunger because this land which ought grow their food, produces strawberries for your tables.'"²

Was this woman, who spent her life growing food for others, enjoying the fruit of her labor?

What are some of the ways we determine what fair rewards for labor are?

Who or what guarantees that you are fairly compensated for your work?

What groups of people do not have any guarantees they will be fairly compensated for their work? For instance, how are people whose work is in the home paid? How can people who work outside the economy ask for the fruit of their labor?

Taking It Home

Before the next session

What are the labor regulations where you work? Minimum number of hours? Maximum? Vacation time? Maternity leave? Medical care? Worker's compensation? If you work in the home, how much time do you spend working? If you don't like the conditions under which you work, what can you do?

Endnotes

1. William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 73.
2. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, "Journey Between Worlds: Economic Globalization and Luther's God Indwelling Creation," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, September 28, 2001 [www.elca.org/jle].



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Session Objectives

In this session participants will:

- Reflect on what human dignity in the work place means.

Prepare

Discuss the following questions with one other person or in small groups: What comes to your mind when you think of dignity in the workplace?

Describe a time when you felt your human dignity was either upheld or challenged.

What do you think are the two most important rules in a workplace that respects human dignity?

Reflect on the Social Statement

Read together, or have the facilitator summarize, beginning with “Human dignity” on page 9 up to “Sufficiency: enough, but not too much” on page 10.

Consider

In the workplace, this statement describes a few ways to preserve that human dignity.

1. Participation in decision making: People should have a role in decisions which affect their work — they should not have to accept passively the decisions made by others;

2. Conditions which do not endanger the lives and health of workers;
3. Responsible and reliable work habits from employees to show consideration to employers; and
4. Negotiation which is cooperative and accounts for power disparities, which may mean organized labor in some instances.

How do you see these four areas represented in your workplace? What ensures that these things are present or prevents them from being present? What would you add or change if you were asked to draw up a similar list out of your experience?

Important Words to Know

Human Dignity: We are all made in the image of God. Because we believe this, and because we believe that Christ died for all sinners, we treat all other people like the precious children of God they are.

Discover

One Lutheran church member worked in management for a large steel company, and had an experience in which he realized that he was so concerned about the institution he worked for, he forgot the people who worked in it. When a serious flood endangered the electrical machinery in a plant, workers at the plant worked hard to move it to where it wouldn't be harmed by water, and to close off the blast furnaces so they wouldn't explode when hit by water. The management expressed gratitude that no one was killed or injured, and the church member went home from work relieved. When the church member saw the evening news, however, he realized that people who were in the plant saving the equipment had seen their homes swept away by the flood. He was shocked to realize that, as he was sitting in the management meeting discussing

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Genesis 1:27

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Prayer

Gracious God, as we explore what it means to be made in your image, lead us to know you better, and to see the image of you in each one of us. Amen.

the fate of the plant, he had not thought about what happened to people once they left the plant. He felt ashamed that his vision had been so narrow.

Why do you think the people in the meeting did not discuss what was happening to people once they left the plant?

Have you experienced this limiting sort of vision as the church member describes it?

What sort of understanding would you want from the people at your workplace?

Taking It Home

Before the next session

Make a list for yourself of what you have enough of, what you have too much of, and what you wish you had more of. Be sure to include material things (cash, food, clothing) and non-material things (time with my family, time for myself).



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2 Cor. 8:13-15

I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little."

Prayer

God, you have given us so much, and in such abundance. Help us to see where that abundance is in our lives. Help us to respond to your generosity with generosity toward others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Session objectives

In this session participants will:

- Reflect on what sufficiency means;
- Read the commitment and calls outlined by this study; and
- Study the biblical basis for the church's commitments and calls

Prepare

Discuss the following questions with one other person or in small groups:

What does sufficiency mean to you? Do we have more than we need in some areas, yet less than we need in others — i.e., plenty of income, but no family time? Do we agree that everyone should have enough? Discuss the following list — do you have enough of these things?

Food, clean water, transportation, heat, time with my immediate family, time with my extended family, friends, people I really trust, self-confidence, rewarding and satisfying employment, time for worship, time for prayer.

Reflect on the Social Statement

Read together, or have the facilitator summarize beginning with "sufficiency: enough, but not too much" on page 10 to the bottom of page 12 and "Too much."

How are your economic needs related to your spiritual needs?

Compare the lists that you made before this session. How are they similar from one person to the next? How are they different? What sorts of conclusions can you draw from the similarities and differences?

Consider

Bible Study: Read the following passages:

Psalm 72:2: "May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice."

1 John 3:17: "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help?"

Isaiah 58:6-7: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bounds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?"

"**Sufficiency** means providing for people's basic physical and emotional needs so that they can live in dignity."¹

What are some ways you might see a brother or sister in need and give help?

When you do volunteer work, give donations to charity, or pay taxes, how are these acts a sharing of resources? What other ways do you share your resources?

What are ways in which the church shares wealth locally, nationally, and internationally?

What do you think it means, in Psalm 72, to "judge your poor with justice"?

What do you think the instructions are to the Church in Isaiah 58?

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Discover

In our country, where so many people have more than enough, many others live in poverty. They are living in towns, cities, and suburbs, poor for a multitude of reasons, disproportionately people of color and disproportionately women. Because poverty exists here and now, and because we are responsible for each other as parts of God's creation, the church makes commitments and calls.

(Re)read the *Commitments* and *Calls* sections found on page 12 of the statement for action.

Taking It Home

Before the next session

Reread the story in Matthew 19:16-22 of the young man who is told to go and sell all that he has. Why was he told he didn't need anything?

Endnote

1. *Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread: Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* (1996: Division for Church in Society of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), 36.



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Session Objectives

In this session participants will:

- Clarify what we mean when we distinguish wants from needs;
- Discuss how the two are often commingled; and
- Consider how messages sent by society emphasize wants rather than needs

Hymn

For the Fruit of All Creation

For the harvests of the Spirit, thanks be to God. For the good we all inherit, thanks be to God. For the wonders that astound us, for the truths that still confound us, most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God.

(LBW 563, WOV 760)

Prepare

Discuss the following questions with one other person or in small groups:

What are some things that you (or your children, for example) classify as needs, but if our society were structured a little differently, might be wants, or just extra?

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the housing stock in the U.S. in 1940 was in very poor condition. Thirty-one percent had no running water, 35 percent did not have a flush toilet, and 44 percent did not have a bathtub or shower. In addition, overcrowding was a problem. Twenty percent of households were considered crowded in their homes, and another 9 percent were considered seriously crowded.¹

We have come a long way over the last 60 years. Today, 99 percent of housing is completely equipped with plumbing. Overcrowding has been reduced to 4 percent and serious overcrowding reduced to 2 percent.²

But what does today's house look like? Have we gone too far? Over the last 30 years, the median square footage of new single-family homes has increased from 1500 square feet to 2100 square feet even though average household size has declined. And the number of new homes built with two or more bathrooms now stands at 50 percent. All this has happened while average household size has been declining.

In 1970 there were 3.1 persons per household. In 1990 that number stood at 2.6 persons.³

Certainly overcrowding is still a serious issue for some. Many of the rest have to wrestle with the question, "How much is too much?" Where once physical conditions and overcrowding were our primary concerns, now affordability is our primary concern. But what are we trying to buy?

Pick an example of a major expenditure in your life (home, car, food, clothes). What about it do you need, and what about it do you want, but not necessarily need?

Think of yourself in the place of the young man in the story from Matthew. Why is the young man told to sell all he has?

Reflect on the Social Statement

Read together, or have the facilitator summarize, from the bottom of page 12 beginning with "Too much" to the middle of page 14 up to "Sustainability: of the environment, agriculture, and low-income communities."

What people do you think are the most highly valued in our society? What makes you choose these people?

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Consider

Luke 12:15-21: “And he said to them, ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’ Then he told them a parable: ‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly.’ And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

What surprises you about this story? Why is the question asked, “And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” What would you say is the answer to that question? How does this parable differ from, for example, the story of Joseph advising Pharaoh in Genesis 41 to build up a supply of grain and ration it?

Discover

In 2001, the *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* (June 2001, 22, 179-184) published a study which suggested that kids who viewed less TV were less materialistic. Children who had their TV viewing cut by one third were much less likely to ask for toys than children who had not cut back on TV viewing.

- What do you see that might account for this?
- How does this affect a child’s relationship with his or her parents?
- How are these same sorts of signals sent to adults?

Taking It Home

Before the next session

Look up sustainable agriculture on the Internet, or in a newspaper or magazine archive. Find one example of sustainable practices in your place of work or household.

Endnotes

1. http://216.239.35.100/search?q=cache:-Sor8AQGttUC:landview.census.gov/apsd/www/statbrief/sb94_8.pdf+median+home+size+1950&hl=en
2. Ibid.
3. www.nahb.com/facts/nextdecadeforecast.pdf According to the National Association of Home Builders (citing the U.S. Bureau of Census *The Next Decade for Housing*. National Association of Homebuilders. P. 11.)

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Session Objectives

In this session participants will:

- Discuss what the concept of sustainability means;
- Discuss where the concept comes from in biblical terms; and
- Discuss how and why the church calls development sustainable.

Prepare

Discuss the following questions with one other person or in small groups:

- Do I ever feel like I “can’t keep up” the kind of life I’m living?
- Where do I get my energy from?
- How do I refresh and renew myself? How do I rest?
- How does my faith sustain me?

Reflect on the Social Statement

Read together, or have the facilitator summarize, pages 14 to 17.

Consider

Exodus 20:8-11: “Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work — you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or

the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.”

Isaiah 65:17: “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.”

Why would God choose to rest? Was God tired? What do we do that renews us and sustains us? What do the visions, as in Isaiah, of a new earth mean to us?

Discover

A book published in 1998 found that about one-third of the U.S. population described themselves as heavily or moderately in financial debt, one-third as slightly in debt, and one-third reported no financial debts at all, excluding home mortgage.¹

What do you think are the reasons so many people are in debt in addition to their home mortgage?

When do you think it is acceptable to go into debt?

Are there times when you find yourself spending more than it would be prudent to spend? Do you think this is a healthy practice? What might some of the consequences be of being in debt for you and for future generations?

Important Words to Know

Sustainability means providing an acceptable quality of life for present generations without compromising that of future generations. It gives attention to environmental concerns, requiring that we live within the bounds of the planet’s capacities, now and into the future (Study, p. 37).

Genesis 2:3

So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that God had done in creation.

Prayer

In our lives, may we learn to follow the example you set for us, God. Amen.

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Conclude

Think of at least eight situations (at least one of which corresponds to the topic of each session) where reading the economic life statement would help you think about what you should do and make a decision. Try to have a mix of situations which are local and personal, national, and international.

Go back and think about each situation in these terms:

What would I do as a Christian? as a member of a congregation? as a member of a 5-million-member national church? as a citizen who has a responsibility to participate in political decision-making?

Some examples of situations:

- Welfare laws are up for a vote — should I write my member of Congress? What should I say?
- A business in my area that employs a lot of people is closing.
- My area is about to become the home of a new business which will employ a lot of people.
- I am concerned about the labor regulations at my place of work.
- I notice people protesting the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle. Why are they doing that?
- What kind of standards should I apply to the products I buy and use?

Endnote

1. Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 72.



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