

HUNGERING *for* JUSTICE

Luther and the Economy

A STUDY GUIDE



ELCA World Hunger
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

Session One: A Household Economy

Dear leaders,

We are providing this background information to help you feel more informed when you teach the session. Please read this material beforehand as a preparation for teaching. You can refer to this additional information when participants raise questions or want more resources during the sessions.

WHAT IS A HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY?

The word "economy" comes from the ancient Greek word "oikonomia," which literally means "management of the household" (from the two words, oikos = household; and nomos = law, rule or management).

Starting with the Greek word "oikonomia" in this study is helpful for two reasons:

- 1) Thinking of the world as a household lifts up the ways we're connected to each other.
- 2) Oikonomia implies a form of stewardship, a way of managing resources that ultimately are not our own.

The ELCA social statement, *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, defines economy as the pattern of relationship, processes, institutions and regulations, together with the values underlying them, by which the activities of production, distribution and consumption are carried out in and among societies and cultures. This includes:

- relationships between workers and employers;
- laws and policies about wages, benefits and hiring;
- trade agreements and policies;
- income inequality;
- the rights of workers to organize for collective bargaining;

- the relationship between industry and God's creation; and
- the causes of and responses to hunger and poverty; and
- our behavior as consumers.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

In Genesis 2:15-17, we read of the Garden of Eden, a bountiful paradise where all the first humans' needs could be met with ease. We also hear in Genesis 3:1-7 of the fall and their journey out of the garden and into a world of naked vulnerability. Yet, even after sin enters the world, God does not abandon us. We may not be able to merely pluck from the garden to fill our needs, but as we will learn this week, God creates community among humans and all creation to ensure that our needs will still be met – through an economy.

WHAT IS THE HUNGER CONNECTION?

How we see the economy and hunger depends a lot on whether we think there is **scarcity** or **abundance**.

- **Scarcity** means there are not enough resources for everyone to use and enjoy at the same time.
- **Abundance** means there are more than enough resources for everyone to use and enjoy.

When it comes to hunger, we often start with a picture of **scarcity** – a famine in a remote country or an

empty cupboard in our home. But as people of faith, we know that God provides **abundance** for our every need, our daily bread. We know, for instance, that the world produces enough food for every person to have more than 2,700 calories per day.

In a well-run economy, every member of a community has access to God's abundance, the goods necessary to live. The market, where things are bought and sold, ideally allows everyone to participate and benefit from the economy. Unfortunately, that is not always true. When we see the world as a place of scarcity, the market can become a place of competition and selfishness, where each of us thinks only of ourselves.

The economy can affect how people get access to food. When incomes are low or when people have no income, they can't afford to purchase food. When land is not owned, or is damaged by harmful environmental practices, farmers may not be able to grow enough food for their families.

Of course, the economy helps us get more than food. The things we produce – from food to shoes to new technology – are examples of the creative and productive gifts God gives to each person. For people in developed countries, safe and efficient technology can seem commonplace. But in developing countries, gaining access to technology can be life-changing. People can move from a cycle of hunger to a cycle of well-being. (See page 6 for activity and graphic handout.)

WHAT WERE MARTIN LUTHER'S VIEWS?

In Martin Luther's day, high prices and low incomes made it hard for families to buy the things they needed. Luther criticized merchants who were greedy and took advantage of people who were in poverty. He believed that greed came from a belief that all people

were competing over resources like wealth. In the Large Catechism, Luther wrote:

Daily the poor are defrauded. New burdens and high prices are imposed. Everyone misuses the market in his own willful, conceited, arrogant way, as if it were his right and privilege to sell his goods as dearly as he pleases without a word of criticism.

Luther believed that God had provided enough for everyone. The market was God's gift to humans to help them organize a way to make sure everyone had access to what they needed to live. When people acted out of greed without thinking of their neighbors, the market became a harmful place, rather than a sign of God's grace and abundance.

HOW CAN WE SUMMARIZE SESSION ONE?

- As Lutherans, we believe that "God has created a world of sufficiency for all, providing us daily and abundantly with the all the necessities of life."¹
- The relationships, practices and policies that are part of an economy can help everyone enjoy the abundance of God when the economy is functioning well. But when human sin, especially the belief that our world is a place of scarcity, makes us compete with one another, we can often lose sight of the abundance of God's household.

¹ELCA, "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All: A Social Statement on Economic Life" (1999)

Session One: A Household Economy



OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, you invite us to reflect on our need for your grace. Grant us sight to see the brokenness of our communities and our economy; grant us courage to work together for a just world in which all are fed and grant us hope in your promises for today and for the world to come. In the name of Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Savior, amen.

THE BIG WORD FOR SESSION ONE: ECONOMY

The economy is relationships
processes
institutions
regulations
values

working together for 1) production, 2) distribution and 3) consumption.

Write "economy" on the board with the definition above.

Ask for synonyms for relationships (connections), processes (systems), institutions (organizations), regulations (rules) and values (beliefs).

Give an example of something that is produced, distributed and consumed. For example, paper towels. Ask for more examples. With each example, ask about the people, organizations and rules involved in each step. For example, you might mention workers in manufacturing facilities, retailers, users, rules about health and safety, etc.

Write the word "**oikonomia**" on the board and invite participants to guess what it means. Explain

that this is a Greek word from which the word economy comes. The word means "management of the household." oikos = household; nomos = manage

The word "oikonomia" was closely tied to the role of a property manager.



THE FAITH CONNECTION

Read Genesis 2:15-17, where we hear of the Garden of Eden, a bountiful paradise where all the first human's needs could be met with ease.

Read Genesis 3:1-7, where we learn of the fall and humanity's journey out of the garden and into a world of naked vulnerability.

Even after sin enters the world, God does not abandon us. God creates community among humans and all creation to ensure that our needs will be met – through an economy.

For the church, the word "oikonomia" includes the ways in which God ordered the world and history. The whole world was called a household and God managed its creation. So:

- 1) Thinking of the world as a household means we are all connected.
- 2) Thinking of managing an economy is what we call stewardship.



THE MARTIN LUTHER CONNECTION

Martin Luther believed that God created a household economy, "oikonomia," to help ALL people enjoy the gifts of God's good creation.

In Luther's day, high prices and low incomes made it hard for families to buy the things they needed. Luther criticized greedy merchants who took advantage of the poor. In the Large Catechism, Luther wrote: "Daily the poor are defrauded. New burdens and high prices are imposed. Everyone misuses the

market in his own willful, conceited, arrogant way, as if it were his right and privilege to sell his goods as dearly as he pleases without a word of criticism."

Summarize three things Luther believed about the economy and ask participants to repeat the following three things. Were folks surprised that Luther wrote about the economy in this way?

- 1) God provided enough for everyone.
- 2) God gave us the economy to help us organize for what we all need.
- 3) When we act out of greed, we mess up God's economy of grace and abundance.

ACTIVITY: MORE THAN FOOD

(10-15 minutes)

In spite of God's economic intentions that everyone would have enough, not everyone has access to the goods available to others. For people in developed countries, safe and efficient technology can seem commonplace. But in developing countries, gaining access to basic technologies can be life changing.

Show a video about how ELCA World Hunger and Padhar Hospital, the ELCA's local partner in India, are working together to replace dangerous, unhealthy wood-burning stoves with efficient cookstoves.



You can access the video, "Saroj's Story," at vimeo.com/channels/elcaworldhunger.

After viewing the video, ask participants how this video illustrates Luther's ideas about the economy that we have outlined in Session One:

- 1) God provided enough for everyone.
- 2) God gave us the economy to help us organize for what we all need.
- 3) When we act out of greed, we mess up God's economy of grace and abundance.

Explain that Saroj's community was vulnerable to health problems in ways that wealthier communities were not. These health problems made it difficult for people to work and earn money to feed their families. This created a cycle of hunger.

Health risks associated with wood-burning stoves

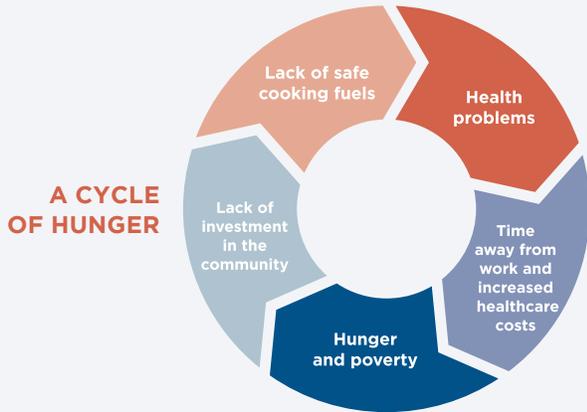
asthma respiratory problems
eye infections
pulmonary disease
pneumonia

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES, DEPENDING ON TIME

ACTIVITY: THE TWO CYCLES

(10-15 minutes)

Provide each person with a copy of the two graphics "A cycle of hunger" and "A new cycle of well-being." In small groups, discuss the differences between the two models. Ask each group to write a summary word in the center circle of each graphic and share it with the larger group.



ACTIVITY: THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY

(10-15 minutes)

A household is one way to understand how we relate to other people and to our property. Our household economy is how we make, distribute, and use these things at home.

Draw a picture of a house on the board. Leave some space around it. Write answers to these questions around the house.



Ask:

What resources do you have in your household? For survival? For fun?

Who gets to use these things?

What happens if someone in the household needs something?

What happens if everyone's basic needs are not met?

Summarize

Write the three signs of a safe and healthy household economy under the house:

- 1) Every member can use the basic resources – food, water, electricity, etc.
- 2) Every member is healthy, safe and secure.
- 3) Every member shares with one another so that no one is lacking.

ACTIVITY: SCARCITY AND ABUNDANCE

(10-15 minutes)

News stories about hunger and poverty can make it seem as if we live in a world of scarcity rather than abundance. Write the word "scarcity" on one side of the board and "abundance" on the other.



Scarcity

Ask for synonyms for scarcity and write them down under the word.

Write down participant answers to these questions:

How would we act if we thought there wasn't enough food for everyone?

How might we treat each other if there wasn't enough food to eat?

Abundance

Ask for synonyms for abundance and write them down under the word. Explain that abundance means there are more than enough resources for everyone to use and enjoy. Remind participants of Luther's first principle: God provided enough for everyone.

Write down participant answers to these questions:

How would we act if we thought that there was plenty of food for everyone?

How might we treat each other if there was enough food for everyone?

Print the following four statements on cards for participants to read aloud:

- 1) When it comes to hunger, we often start with a picture of scarcity.
- 2) As people of faith, we know that God provides for every need.
- 3) We know that the world produces enough food for every person to have 2,700 calories a day.
- 4) There are nearly 800 million people around the world who are hungry.

Name some reasons people are hungry:

lack of income to buy food

lack of land to grow food

lack of access to markets to purchase food or see food

food waste and loss

Go back to the words scarcity and abundance on the board. Underline these letters – A, C, C, E, S. Write them at the bottom of the board, crossing both columns (scarcity and abundance). Add a final S to the word and say it stands for Salvation. Point to the word and ask participants to read and repeat three times – access, access, access. Stress to participants: A mindset of scarcity results in not everyone having economic access. A mindset of abundance opens economic access across communities, nations and groups.

Summarize

- 1) **Access** is a key benefit of a just economy.
- 2) In an economy of abundance, every member has access to God's abundance, which is the gift necessary to live.
- 3) In an economy of scarcity, we give in to competition and selfishness, thinking only of ourselves. In so doing, we keep others from gaining access to what they need.

WRAPUP: SESSION ONE

Ask three participants what they remember from this session. What could they tell someone at home about what they've learned?

Ask everyone:

What was "the big word"?

How can we use "oikonomia" in a sentence?

How is "oikonomia" different from what we usually think of when we hear "economy"?

What did Luther say about the economy?

How many people in the world face hunger?

What can you bring to prayer from this session?



CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious God, you provide abundantly for our every need. Forgive us for our lack of faith in your abundance. Cleanse us from the greed that blinds us. Help us grow as stewards of your goodness. Amen.

BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

Session Two: An Economy of Grace

Dear leaders,

We are providing this background information to help you feel more informed when you teach the session. Please read this material beforehand as a preparation for teaching. You can refer to this additional information when participants raise questions or want more resources during the sessions.

WHAT IS AN ECONOMY OF GRACE?

When we see the economy as a system that distributes rewards (like wealth) for good behavior and punishments (like poverty) for bad behavior, we are looking through a lens of **merit**.

For Martin Luther and for Lutherans, God's world is a place of grace, not reward and punishment. This includes the systems God has established, including the government and the economy. When functioning well, systems like the economy and government help us experience well-being in our lives and are examples of God's grace. This invites us to look at the economy through the lens of **grace**.

Seeing the economy through the lens of grace does not mean that we believe everything we can buy should instead be free, or that we shouldn't have to work. Instead, it changes our perspective on the purpose of our economic activity. Merit makes us look to ourselves and our own good. Grace helps us focus on others and the good of our whole community. The good of our whole community is sometimes called the "common good."²

Viewing the economy through the lens of grace challenges us to ask hard questions about the economy: How are vulnerable people protected? Does everyone have a fair opportunity to enjoy the benefits

of the economy? Are things like economic risk and opportunity experienced equally by all people?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

In John 3:1-16, Jesus affirms to Nicodemus God's love for the world, in the midst of its brokenness and sin. Jesus reveals that the salvation of the world will not come via the world's obedience to the law but through the love of God, its creator and redeemer. God sends the Son in love that the world might be saved. The salvation of the world – indeed, our whole existence now and our promised future – depends on the grace of a loving God, not the merit of a worthy people.

WHAT WERE MARTIN LUTHER'S VIEWS?

On Oct. 31, 1517, a young monk named Martin Luther sent the archbishop of Mainz (Germany) a list of disagreements he had with the Catholic Church about a popular practice: the selling of indulgences.

In the medieval Catholic Church, a Christian who had died without repenting of all their sins would be in purgatory, a sort of temporary condition, in which they would undergo punishment for their sins prior to being allowed into heaven. The church, however, as the minister of God's gift of grace, could remit a Christian's sins and allow them to escape purgatory.

² This is captured in the ELCA's social statement on economic life by the phrase "for all." "For all" refers to the whole household of God – all people and creation throughout the world" (SSL, 4). As a church, the ELCA calls Lutherans to "assess economic activities in terms of how they affect 'all,' especially people living in poverty" (ibid).

This remission – or forgiveness – of sins was called an indulgence. Practically, it was often a piece of paper that stated that the sinner did not have to do additional penance for their sins before going to heaven. The first indulgences often involved doing something extraordinary for the good of the church, but by Luther's time, the Catholic Church had started selling indulgences, effectively creating a way to "buy" grace. **It is important to remember that the Catholic Church's understanding of many of these issues today – purgatory, penance and grace – is very different than it was 500 years ago.**

Luther believed that grace was a gift from God, not something that could be earned by humans. He believed that the church should teach people that God forgives their sins because God loves them, not because they had done enough good works to earn grace or bought enough indulgences to purchase grace. His "95 Theses" – the list of his disagreements with the Catholic Church – highlighted the difference between grace – a gift – and merit, something that was earned.

WHAT ELSE DID LUTHER BELIEVE?

Luther's 95 theses were pretty clear that selling indulgences taught people wrong beliefs about God and salvation. But Luther knew that indulgences were not just theologically harmful; they were economically harmful.

Luther saw that preachers who sold indulgences especially tried to sell them to people who were in poverty, who barely had enough to afford food for their families. Believing that their eternal salvation, or the salvation of their dead loved ones, depended on owning an indulgence, poor peasants spent their meager money on indulgences instead of the things they needed to live each day. He also saw that people who had money spent it on indulgences rather than

using it to help their neighbors in need.

Luther also witnessed the beginnings of a market economy that left poor families vulnerable to wealthy merchants. Goods in the market were often overpriced, making it difficult for peasants to afford their basic needs – food, clothing and the like. High-interest loans were also common, leaving many workers in deep debt. Luther saw the exploitation of people in poverty by the church and by the economy as related – both arose from greed. By helping people see God's will that they be turned toward their neighbors in need, Luther hoped to inspire love and service toward all.

HOW CAN WE SUMMARIZE SESSION TWO?

- In an economy of grace, each person – from the most comfortable to the most vulnerable – can participate, both by sharing the fruit of the labor and enjoying the benefits of being part of the community.
- In the Bible, widows, orphans and strangers in the land are special subjects for the people's protection. In ancient Israel, they would have been particularly vulnerable to poverty, often having no land and dependent on other people for food and shelter. They also were the least likely to be able to protect themselves through the courts if someone took advantage of them.
- If the economy of a community is set up so that even the most vulnerable members are protected, then everyone can benefit. On the other hand, if an economy is set up so that some people can be exploited or taken advantage of, then everyone is at risk. As the ELCA's social statement on economic life points out, "Poverty is a problem of the whole community, not only of those who are poor or vulnerable" (p. 5).

Session Two: An Economy of Grace



OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, you invite us to reflect on our need for your grace. Grant us grace to see the brokenness of our communities and our economy. Grant us courage to work together for a just world in which all are fed. Grant us hope in your promises for today and for the world to come. In the name of Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Savior, amen.

REVIEW

In Session One of our study, we learned that one way to understand the economy is as a "household." We also learned that our faith calls us to see the economy through the lens of God's abundant gifts to God's creation and how this is different from a view of the economy based on scarcity.

THE BIG WORD FOR SESSION TWO: GRACE

What is grace?

Write the letters G, R, A, C, and E from the top to the bottom on the left side of a whiteboard. Ask participants to come up with words that begin with G, R, A, C, E. The words should signify something about grace. Add your words to theirs. Some examples are below to get started and to lead into the next part of the activity.

G – gift, God, gratitude

R – radical, revolutionary, redemption, retroactive

A – absolutely unearned

C – connection, costless, compassion, creed, caring

E – Easter, empower, economy

Use the words and letters to teach key points about grace:

G – gift: Grace is a **gift** from God given to us freely.

R – **radical**, redemption: The idea of being loved by a grace-filled God is radical in our society, because we assume we have to earn everything. Our **redemption** is a sign of God's grace.

A – **absolutely unearned**: Grace never has to be earned; it's God's gift to us.

C – connect: Grace **connects** us to others. We are meant to share God's gift of grace with our neighbors and those in need.

E – empower, economy: Grace **empowers** us to do good things. We talk about grace often in the Lutheran church. In this study, we're learning the connection between grace and the **economy**.



THE FAITH CONNECTION

Call on two people to read the following passages that offer a biblical perspective on grace: John 3:1-21; Romans 5:15-17.

Now, ask the readers to read the passages a second time and ask the other participants to listen for messages of grace in these passages.

Invite the participants to share with the group where they heard these messages in the readings.



THE MARTIN LUTHER CONNECTION

Introduce Martin Luther's reflections on grace and the economy by using this true/false quiz. Ask each question, wait for responses, and reveal the answers. (Refer to "Background for leaders" for more information to share as you answer each question.)

- 1) In Luther's time, the Catholic Church had started selling pieces of paper called "group-coupons."
False: They were called indulgences.
- 2) Indulgences provided a way for people to have their sins forgiven and not have to atone before going to heaven. True.
- 3) Indulgences were based on the idea that good works could "earn" humans God's grace. True.
- 4) Luther believed that grace is freely given and empowers Christians to do good things. True.
- 5) Luther drew on the words of St. Peter in Romans 5:15-17. False: Luther drew on the words of St. Paul.
- 6) In his "95 Pretty Good Ideas," Luther made it clear that selling indulgences gave people the wrong idea about God and salvation. False: Luther made this clear in his "95 Theses."
- 7) Luther did not think that indulgences were economically harmful. False: Luther saw that preachers tried to sell indulgences to people who were in poverty and could barely feed their families. They didn't have enough to feed their children or help other neighbors in need.
- 8) Luther saw indulgences as selfish. True.
- 9) Grace frees us to love and serve our neighbors; merit makes us focus on ourselves. True.
- 10) Luther believed that indulgences in the church and greed in the marketplace were not connected. False: Both indulgences and greed were based on the belief that humans can trust something or someone other than God to save them.

"95 THESES" ACTIVITY:

GRACE VERSUS MERIT (10-15 minutes)

Luther wrote about the connection between how we view grace and merit and how we act in the world, especially how we act within the economy. When we are turned inward toward ourselves and put our trust in ourselves, our work, or our possessions, we see other people as competitors. A focus on merit can make us selfish. When we trust in God, we are free to love and serve others, without thinking of only our own good. A focus on grace turns us outward to care for other people around us.

Work with your group to name basic differences between grace and merit. Some suggestions are below.

GRACE

comes from God
God's economy
focuses on others
unearned
common good

MERIT

comes from us
our economy
focuses on ourselves
earned
rewards and punishments

Pass out large sheets of paper with these words from the "95 Theses" printed in the middle of each sheet:

#37 – Every true Christian, whether living or dead, has part in all the blessings of Christ and the Church; and this is granted him by God, even without letters of pardon.

#43 – Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better work than buying pardons.

In small groups, participants can create collages surrounding Luther's words using pictures and words from your congregation's website and the ELCA website. The words and images should demonstrate the way the congregation is living out Luther's words.

Have small groups share their work with other groups. Display the collages on a bulletin board or take pictures of the collages and add them to your website.

THE HUNGER CONNECTION

Break into pairs and invite participants to read the following story aloud.

Times were difficult for Fyness Phiri (FI-ness FEER-ree), a married mother of four from the village of Chithope in the central region of Malawi. As she recalls, Fyness was “one of the poorest people in the village.” She struggled to provide for her family, often needing to ask her neighbors for money to buy food and clothing for herself, her husband and their four children.

That was before she started working with the Evangelical Lutheran Development Service (ELDS) Livelihoods Improvement and Empowerment Project, supported in part by ELCA World Hunger. ELDS accompanies women and men like Fyness to build community and overcome the challenges of hunger and poverty.

At a community meeting in 2013, Fyness joined other women to start a village savings-and-loan group. After some training and community-building meetings with ELDS, the group gave out its first loans. Fyness and the other women were able to start small businesses and purchase seeds and fertilizers for their farms. Eventually, the start-up money helped Fyness produce enough food to feed her family, pay back her loan, and sell some of her surplus at market. “Since I joined the project,” she says, “my life has completely changed. I have food in my house, and I’m able to send my children to school. Because of the knowledge [I’ve gained], I will be able to continue and help others even if the project phases out.”

In addition to loans, the women were trained in winter cropping and crop diversification using sustainable agricultural practices. Because of this training, participants like Fyness are realizing benefits that are life changing.

Now, Fyness has started her own businesses and used the money to increase her crops and build a new house. From the project, Fyness learned, as representatives from ELDS say, that “it is possible to

move out of poverty as long as you work with others and with dedication.” Fyness has not only changed her life, she now is a role model to other villagers.

“I am able to do whatever I want because I have the means,” she says. “I don’t want again to experience the tough life that I went through before the project.”

Talk about it.

- 1) How did the project help Fyness participate in the economy?
- 2) How did Fyness benefit by participating in her community?
- 3) What gifts, talents or skills did Fyness bring to others through her participation?

WRAPUP: SESSION TWO

Ask three participants:

What do you remember from this session?
What could you tell someone at home about what you learned?

Ask everyone:

What was “the big word”?
What’s the difference between grace and merit?
What inspired Luther to focus on grace?
What does grace mean for a congregational economy? A global economy?



CLOSING PRAYER

Holy God, Grant that we may be instruments of justice to help reveal your grace. Forgive us for those times when we have blamed others for their poverty while praising ourselves for our wealth. Help us to be advocates and neighbors of all who are marginalized and excluded, to accompany one another in this world you have created. In your holy name, amen.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES, DEPENDING ON TIME

ACTIVITY: GOD'S HEART FOR THE VULNERABLE (10-15 minutes)

God's grace is intended to serve the vulnerable in society. Assign readers for each of these passages. (You can also divide the group into small groups or pairs and give each one of the passages.)

After each reading, ask:

To whom does God offer special protection in this passage?

Why might these groups be of special concern to God?

- "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:17-19).
- "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans" (Exodus 22:21-24).
- "Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.' For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors for ever and ever" (Jeremiah 7:4-7).
- "The word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying: Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another. But they refused to listen, and turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears in order not to hear" (Zechariah 7:8-11).
- "When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:15-17).

ACTIVITY: GRACE AND MERIT ROLE PLAY (10-15 minutes)

To demonstrate how radical grace seems in our economy of merit, do two role-play job interviews.

- In the first interview, the employer wants the potential employee to talk about why she or he merits a job with the company.
- In the second interview, God is the interviewer and asks the interviewee about the role of grace in their life and work career.

ACTIVITY: GRACE, MERIT, SCARCITY AND ABUNDANCE (10-15 minutes)

Read the story in the "Hunger connection" again. During this second reading, have participants underline examples of concepts discussed during the first two sessions of this study – grace, merit, scarcity and abundance. Have them write questions they would like to ask Fyness and her community about how they are doing and how a savings-and-loan group works.

BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

Session Three: An Economy of Vocation

Dear leaders,

We are providing this background information to help you feel more informed when you teach the session. Please read this material beforehand as a preparation for teaching. You can refer to this additional information when participants raise questions or want more resources during the sessions.

WHAT IS AN ECONOMY OF VOCATION?

As we work, we participate in the economy and we are affected by the economy, both in positive ways (such as when economic upswings or new technology contribute to growth) and negative ways (such as when recessions or new technology put our jobs at risk.) How we experience the economy and economic institutions such as companies or industries greatly affects our satisfaction and security in our work. It also affects how we experience and use our freedom and creativity in our work.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

In Exodus 17:1-6, water pours from a rock to quench the thirst of the Israelites. While we know that all gifts – food, water, shelter, sunlight and rain – come from God, Lutherans also know that we participate in the sharing of God's good gifts through our work. Martin Luther wrote, "God gives food, not as God did ... when God gave manna from heaven, but through labor, when we diligently perform the work of our calling." Our sustenance remains a gift from God, but we are invited into a deeper gift – the gift of participation in the life-giving work of God through our vocation.

WHAT WERE MARTIN LUTHER'S VIEWS?

Before Martin Luther, the medieval church divided common work from "vocation." The church believed that all people had to work, but only certain workers fulfilled a sacred vocation or calling. While farmers, merchants and workers in the home went about the daily business of their lives, priests, nuns and monks were doing "God's work." Their jobs were sacred callings that made them closer to God.

In one of his most important reforms, Luther did more than just break down this barrier; he reversed it! Ordinary work, he believed, was ordained in the Bible, while life as a monk or a nun was not. In his writings on the book of Genesis, Luther wrote: "Thus every person surely has a calling. While attending to it, he serves God ... when a maid milks the cows or a hired man hoes the field – provided they are believers, namely, that they conclude that this kind of life is pleasing to God and was instituted by God – they serve God more than all the monks and nuns, who cannot be sure about their kind of life" (LW 3:128, 321).

Not only did Luther believe that every person has a sacred calling or vocation, he believed that doing this work was "pleasing to God [and] instituted by God." A person's work was the means through which God cared for the world. German theologian Gustaf Wingren (VIN-grin) wrote that Luther believed "There

is a direct connection between God's work in creation and [God's] work in [humans' daily jobs.]"²

WHAT ELSE DID LUTHER BELIEVE?

A mask of God

Luther named some work a "mask of God," meaning a way that God cares for creation while being hidden. "God gives all good gifts; but you must lend a hand and take the bull by the horns; that is, you must work and thus give God good cause and a mask" ("Luther on Psalm 147," LW 14:115).

The labor humans must use to enjoy the gifts of God – including those gifts like creativity, which provide new and useful tools or art – is not meant merely as punishment for sin (Genesis 3:17-18). It is, for Lutherans, a way that our faith turns "outward," toward our neighbors. Through our work, we can show love and concern for other people in our communities. This is part of what Luther means by being a "mask of God."

When Peter and Andrew were called to be disciples, they left their jobs as fishermen and followed Jesus. Some early Christians believed that, like Peter and Andrew, all followers of Christ must leave their jobs to serve God. Luther, though, believed just the opposite: We don't serve God by leaving our work, but by doing it with integrity and faithfulness.

Luther believed that we serve God by serving our neighbors, by being God's "mask" to each other. The doctor serves the neighbor not by leaving their job but by doing it well. The police officer serves the neighbor not by leaving their job but by doing it well. The baker, the farmer, the homemaker and so on serve the neighbor by doing their work well, too. Likewise, the employer serves the neighbor by creating and preserving paying jobs.

WHAT IS THE HUNGER CONNECTION?

Work, in the Lutheran perspective, has a broader meaning than just the tasks we complete or the titles we hold (or don't hold.) In the social statement on economic life, the ELCA affirms that "our identity does not depend on what we do, [but] through our work we should be able to express [our] God-given dignity as persons of integrity, worth, and meaning." Our work can be a way we express our deepest values and where our freedom and dignity are protected. As we have discussed already, work is a way we participate in God's gracious and creative care for the world.

Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Work can also be dehumanizing, oppressive and exploitative for employees and managers. Changes in technology and trade can create widespread insecurity. When work disappears from an entire community, the results can be widespread and long-lasting, as many former major manufacturing cities discovered when factories closed. The turn toward lower wages in many industries has also left a substantial gap between average income and cost of living for many people.

In the midst of this, the lens of vocation can be an important witness. Our Lutheran understanding of work is not that everyone, at all times, ought to have the perfect job. But we do believe that it is possible to have work that protects human dignity and provides opportunities for workers to see their labor as part of their vocation to serve their neighbors.

Some of the changes in the global and U.S. economy are structural (a term we will discuss more in future sessions). When a new technology is developed that improves efficiency, it may create new jobs in one sector while rendering obsolete many jobs in another sector. Other changes occur at the level of public policy, such as when state laws restrict collective bargaining activities and reduce the power of

²Gustaf Wingren, Luther on Vocation, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1954), 9.

Session Three: An Economy of Vocation



OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, you invite us to reflect on our need for your grace. As you walk with us, grant us sight to see the brokenness of our communities and our economy; grant us courage to work together for a just world in which all are fed, and grant us hope in your promises for today and for the world to come. In the name of Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Savior, amen.

REVIEW

- 1) In Session One of our study, we learned that one way to understand the economy is as a "household." We also learned that our faith calls us to see the economy through the lens of God's abundant gifts to God's creation and how this is different from a view of the economy based on scarcity.
- 2) In Session Two, we looked more closely at the difference between an economy of grace and an economy of merit and learned that grace helps us understand the importance of creating space for everyone to participate in the economy.

THE BIG WORD FOR SESSION THREE: VOCATION

Write the following words on a board or a large piece of paper:

- vocation
- calling
- job
- labor
- work

Ask what comes to mind when you consider each of these words. Write responses on the board or paper next to the words.

Circle the word "vocation." The word "vocation" comes from the same Latin root as "vocare," which means "to call." This is why a vocation is sometimes referred to as a "calling."

Ask participants to guess each other's vocation.



THE MARTIN LUTHER CONNECTION

- 1) Before Martin Luther, the medieval church divided common work from "vocation." On a board or a large poster, draw a single horizontal line. Above the line, write: "priests," "nuns" and "monks."
- 2) The church believed that all people had to work, but only certain workers fulfilled a sacred vocation or calling. While farmers, merchants and workers in the home went about the daily business of their lives, priests, nuns and monks were doing "God's work."

Write several other occupations under the line: farmers, merchants, sailors, builders, etc.

- 3) In one of his most important reforms, Luther did more than just break down this barrier; he reversed it! Ordinary work, he believed, was ordained in the Bible, while life as a monk or a nun was not.

On the board or another piece of poster paper, draw another horizontal line. Write "priests," "nuns" and "monks" below the line. Above the line, write the other occupations from the first list.

(Continued...)

Ask participants the following questions:

Imagine living in a world where only certain jobs were seen as “callings” for people of faith. How would this change the way you see your work?

How do you think Luther’s society accepted his reversal?

Do you think of your job as a calling?

THE HUNGER CONNECTION

The church testifies to the value of both work and workers and the need for protections that ensure work is meaningful, dignified and sufficient. That often requires advocacy for workers caught in a web of structural economic injustice.

ACTIVITY: STOLEN WAGES

(10-15 minutes)

In small groups, read the following account aloud:

Julie and her husband, Alonzo, were excited to find out they were expecting their first child, but they knew that another mouth to feed would put a strain on their tight finances. Alonzo had been working as a janitor at an elementary school, but his company recently lost its contract to clean the school. Alonzo spent days filling out applications before a local fast-food restaurant offered him a job as a cook. The hours were long, but Julie and Alonzo hoped that the new job would be enough to pay their bills.

The first few weeks at work went great, and Alonzo was given lots of hours, starting work early in the morning and finishing late in the afternoon. When he received his first check, though, his face dropped. “I had added up the hours I was working, from 7 in the morning until 6 at night most days,” he says. “For the first two weeks, that was about 100 hours.” At his state’s minimum wage of \$7.25, that should have been over \$700, not including overtime for the hours he worked past 40 each week. Yet, his check for the pay period was only \$450.

When Alonzo asked his manager about the missing hours, his manager explained that he had adjusted Alonzo’s time at the start and the end of his shift. “If you’re just setting things up or cleaning them, you aren’t really working,” his manager explained. The manager had adjusted Alonzo’s timesheet by nearly two hours a day. Still, that didn’t explain the other missing hours or the lack of overtime.

The manager dismissed both by saying that “part-time” workers don’t get paid breaks or overtime. Only full-time workers do. Alonzo was disappointed, but he assumed a large restaurant chain like the one he worked for knew the law much better than he did. Plus, he couldn’t afford to quit with a baby on the way.

A few weeks later, Alonzo found a flyer at the library that described “wage theft.” Wage theft, the flyer read, is the failure of employers to pay employees wages they are legally entitled to. The inside of the flyer listed rights that workers like Alonzo have, such as the right to overtime pay for hours over 40 per week and the right to be paid for their work, including setting up workstations or cleaning up after a shift.

Alonzo brought the flyer to work and showed it to his manager. The manager threw the flyer in the garbage and showed Alonzo a stack of new job applications. “If you don’t like it,” the manager said, “you can quit. There are plenty of people who need a job.” Alonzo left the office dejected, knowing he could not afford to quit. By the end of the week, though, the choice was no longer his. When he picked up his paycheck, a letter of termination was with it. Alonzo was fired.

Talk about it

Our Lutheran understanding of work is not that everyone, at all times, ought to have the perfect job. But we do believe that it is possible to have work that protects human dignity and provides opportunities for workers to see their labor as part of their vocation to serve their neighbors.

Invite the participants to partner with another person and discuss the following questions. After a few minutes, invite them back together to share what they heard.

- In what ways do you feel dignified at work (either in paid or unpaid positions)?
- In what ways do you feel your dignity threatened by work?
- How do you respect the dignity of others you encounter in your work – for example, customers, managers, employees, co-workers, friends, colleagues, etc.?
- How can we help Alonzo?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES, DEPENDING ON TIME

ACTIVITY: THE MASK OF GOD

(10-15 minutes)

Luther believed that we serve God by serving our neighbors, by being God's "mask" to each other. For example, the doctor serves the neighbor not by leaving their job but by doing it well. The police officer serves the neighbor not by leaving their job but by doing it well. The baker, the farmer, the homemaker and so on serve the neighbor by doing their work well, too.

Using construction paper, markers and other craft items, participants create simple masks and draw images of their work on the front. They can explain their masks to others and talk about the following questions:

How does your work serve your neighbor?

In what ways does your work or the economy as a whole make it difficult to focus on the neighbor as you do your work?

ACTIVITY: WRITE ADVOCACY LETTERS

(10-15 minutes)

Low-wage workers like Alonzo are victimized by wage theft far too often. In fact, a 2014 policy brief from the Economic Policy Institute reports that a three-city survey found that over two-thirds of workers were victims of wage theft, with the average worker losing an estimated \$2,634 per year.³ Examples of wage theft include:

- failure to pay overtime to qualifying workers;
- forcing workers to work off the clock, without pay;
- failure to pay for breaks as required by law;
- theft of tips earned by employees; and
- failure to pay legal, minimum wage.

The work of ELCA Advocacy reflects the ELCA's call for "government enforcement of regulations against discrimination, exploitative work conditions and labor practices" and our church's call for employers to "compensate all people ... at an amount sufficient for them to live in dignity" ("Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All: A Social Statement on Economic Life," 1999.) It is also a reflection of the ELCA's commitment to accompany and advocate with people facing hunger and poverty. When workers' rights to wages are violated, one of the key routes out of hunger – dependable employment – is closed. Protecting these rights is one way ELCA members are working to end the cycle of hunger and poverty for good.

ELCA Advocacy is working in several states to support legislation that prohibits wage theft and holds employers accountable. Visit ELCA.org/advocacy to find out more. Write

advocacy letters in partnership with these organizations:

The **Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP)** – ELCA Advocacy's public policy office in Virginia – has convened a statewide wage-theft taskforce, comprised of the best advocates on wage theft in the state. Over the next two years, faith advocates and the taskforce will recommend administrative changes that could improve enforcement against wage theft and then will work to create and hopefully win a comprehensive new wage payment law in the state, which will include a provision for overtime pay. VICPP is also working to ensure that new legislation treats all workers fairly. The current Virginia law excludes occupations that were traditionally held by African Americans, such as farmworkers and domestic workers. Through VICPP and its partners, ELCA congregations in Virginia are working toward justice for all workers in their state.

Faith Action Network, ELCA Advocacy's state public policy office in Washington state, and Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-New Mexico have also been active in protecting workers' wages, encouraging enforcement of current laws and advocating for passage of comprehensive legislation.

³<http://www.epi.org/publication/epidemic-wage-theft-costing-workers-hundreds/>

NOTES

WRAPUP: SESSION THREE

Ask three participants:

What do you remember from this session?

What could you tell someone at home about what you learned?

Ask everyone:

What was "the big word"?

How did Martin Luther define vocation?

What does it mean to be a mask of God?

How can we be involved in advocacy against stolen wages?



CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God, we give thanks for our labor, even as we pray for rest. We give thanks for our workdays, even as we long for weekends. In your gracious love, you have called us to be your "masks," to love and serve one another in our vocations. Yet, for many of us, economic realities stifle even our best efforts. Wages and profits fall, factories and offices close, and families and communities suffer every month. Be near us, O God, in times of growth and times of need. Keep our hearts and minds ever open to one another, keep our eyes focused on the dignity and worth of all your creatures, and guide our reason and wisdom that we may share in your work of building a world of justice, hope, freedom and dignity. In your name, we pray, amen.

Lined area for taking notes, consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

Session Four: A Just Economy

Dear leaders,

We are providing this background information to help you feel more informed when you teach the session. Please read this material beforehand as a preparation for teaching. You can refer to this additional information when participants raise questions or want more resources during the sessions.

WHAT IS A JUST ECONOMY?

In a just economy, every person's dignity is respected, and all have a fair opportunity to acquire the things necessary for life. The practice of charity and the pursuit of justice are part of the Lutheran church's identity.

Because it covers so many contexts, justice can be difficult to define. The ELCA's social statements offer some clues. Below are several selections on justice from the social statements.

From "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All: A Social Statement on Economic Life" (1999):

God who "executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry" (Psalm 146:7) is revealed in Jesus, whose mission was "to bring good news to the poor ... release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4: 18-19). The kingdom of God he proclaimed became real through concrete acts of justice: feeding people, freeing them from various forms of bondage, embracing those excluded by the systems of his day, and calling his followers to a life of faithfulness to God.

From "Faith, Sexism, and Justice: Conversations toward a Social Statement" (2016)⁴:

One fundamental reason for Christians [to talk about women and justice] is the belief that God as creator makes all people with dignity, and so our church (the ELCA) is committed to the full and equitable participation of all people in church and society. Yet, for example, women and girls as a group experience tragically high rates of physical and sexual abuse, as well as economic disparities in income and opportunities. ... Christians believe that God is at work in society to bring greater justice, and we are called to be God's hands in doing the same. That means society should strive to respect the needs, rights, and responsibilities of all people. These include equality of access in many matters, such as health care, personal safety, public and ecclesial leadership, education and financial well being.

From "A Social Statement on The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries" (2013):

In some contexts, justice emphasizes equity – the disinterested, even-handed application of rules to each person – and the determination of eligibility of benefits or imposition of penalties. In other contexts, justice demands attention to differences

⁴This "study" is a step toward a social statement on women and justice. The "study" provides an opportunity for readers to provide their feedback to the social statement task force prior to the writing of the social statement.

among people – for instance, the distribution of some goods according to particular circumstances of need or merit. A central theme, however, weaves together all the various dimensions of justice. Justice speaks about social relations and the need to create, exercise, or restore right relationship between and among individuals in community.

Justice takes many forms and encompasses many aspects of our lives. Economic justice, in particular, is a theme we see in several social statements because it impacts so many parts of life: at work, at home, at church, in government and in education.

In a just economy, every person's dignity is respected, and all have a fair opportunity to acquire the things necessary for life. Economic justice also means that burdens and benefits are shared equitably. No single group should reap all the benefits of an economy; nor should one single group bear all the burdens. When one group holds all or most of the wealth of a community, or when one group bears all or most of the burdens, injustice may be the culprit.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

In John 9, Jesus is confronted by a question about someone born blind: "Rabbi," the disciples ask, "who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). At the time, conditions like blindness, sickness and poverty were seen as curses from God on those who had sinned. Jesus' response reveals that God's desire is for all to participate in the uncovering of grace. As the story progresses, Jesus also makes clear that the problem here is not the man's sense of sight, but rather that the system of beliefs and laws had blinded the Pharisees to God's presence in their midst. When our prejudicial beliefs about other people – based on race, class, gender or level of ability – become enshrined in laws or traditions that exclude or marginalize them, we are denying the power of

God's grace to break forth in our midst, and "our sin remains" (John 9:41).

WHAT WERE MARTIN LUTHER'S VIEWS?

Economic justice was not far from the mind of Martin Luther, as we saw in the last three weeks. Price gouging and usury (the issuing of loans with very high interest rates) garnered particularly sharp criticism from Luther, in part because of their effect on people living in poverty. Luther didn't stop at criticism, though. He also pushed the church to respond positively:

"Every parish should have a common treasury for the poor." ("Martin Luther's Commentary on Matthew," Chapter 6).

THE CHURCH'S WEB OF POVERTY?

Indulgences, the practice of selling remission of sins, were, in fact, tied to these economic practices, though Luther may not have known just how closely the two were connected. One of the reasons Albrecht, the archbishop of Mainz, was so eager to sell indulgences was that Albrecht had borrowed a lot of money from the Fuggers, a wealthy banking family. To pay back the loan, Albrecht agreed to give half of the money from indulgences to repay the loan and to send the other half of the money to help rebuild St. Peter's basilica in Rome.⁵ Luther knew how the economy in Germany harmed people in poverty, especially through high interest loans, and he also saw a huge disparity between the wealth of the Catholic Church and the poverty of the German people. Again, from the "95 Theses:"

#86 - Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the riches of the richest, build just this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of poor believers?

⁵For more on this, see Samuel Torvend, *Luther and the Hungry Poor: Gathered Fragments* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 18-19.

The Fugger banking interest, along with the common practices of usury, price gouging and selling indulgences created a web that caught many people in poverty. Luther believed the church was called to change its practices and to respond in the broader economy. Luther critiqued sharply the practices that kept so many in poverty. He compared unjust economic practices to theft:

“And in the cities there are not only the people who break into a citizen’s house, but also the ones who cleverly and secretly suck out a city’s resources with their usury and their swindles in the market and wherever else they can” (“Martin Luther’s Commentary on Matthew,” Chapter 6).

THE COMMON CHEST

One method of responding to hunger and poverty in Germany in the 1500s was what came to be called the “common chest.” The first “common chest” was established in Wittenberg in 1520 or 1521. It was an actual chest to hold money and goods that could be used when someone in need came to the church. The chest had four locks, and four stewards each held a key to one of the locks, so that they had to decide together how to distribute the funds. Much of the money came from bequests and donations, but some also came from local taxes. This was a very early example of cooperation between the church and the government to help people in need.

Some of the ways the money was used might sound similar to relief given to people in need today, to help them purchase food, to support children who are orphaned, or to provide money to support a family in need. But the Wittenberg common chest was also a way for the church to pursue justice for people left behind by the economy. For example, monies from the chest were used to refinance high-interest loans, to provide vocational training to people who were unemployed, and to provide medical care for people

who could not afford it. In these ways, the common chest was an effort against economic injustice. Through it, the church could act within the economy in positive ways.

Luther saw the common chest as part of the basic “furniture” of the church. He believed that the church should not just help someone who was in poverty. It should also try to prevent someone from falling into poverty: “For so to help a man that he does not need to become a beggar is just as much of a good work and a virtue as to give alms to a man who has already become a beggar.” (“Martin Luther’s Commentary on Psalm 82”). Indeed, Luther saw serving the neighbor’s material needs as part of the calling of the church. Speaking of the sacrament of Holy Communion, he wrote, “But in times past this sacrament was so properly used, and the people were taught to understand this fellowship so well, that they even gathered food and material goods in the church, and these – as St. Paul writes in I Corinthians 11 – distributed among those in need” (“Luther’s Treatise on the Blessed Sacrament”).

WHAT ARE SOME MODERN LUTHERAN TEACHINGS?

Structural injustice

It may be easy to point out merchants who charge exorbitant prices to people who cannot afford them, or to identify business practices that exploit workers. But when the structure of an entire system is set up to lock people out of opportunities, it can be much more difficult to assess the situation. For these kinds of situations, the term “structural injustice” applies. “Structural injustice” includes the ways that opportunities are open or closed in different ways to different people. It is present when one group of people has more access to opportunities than another group.

The hard part of dealing with structural injustice is that there is not necessarily one individual or group to blame. Also, it can be deeply entrenched, making it difficult to see alternatives.

(The following is from "Faith, Sexism, Justice: Conversations toward a Social Statement," published by the ELCA in 2016. The resource can be downloaded for free at ELCA.org/womenandjustice. Your congregation is invited to participate in these conversations as our church works toward a social statement on women and justice. The resource offers ways for you to share your feedback with the task force responsible for the social statement process.):

While sin occurs in our relationship with God, it also arises in creation when we sin against one another. When we think that others are of less value than we are because of their sex or gender, or when we believe that others do not bear God's image in the same way because of their sex or gender, we sin. In addition, sexism and gender and sex discrimination are also social or structural sin. This occurs when the very structures, rules, and policies of companies, institutions and communities discriminate against groups of people and individuals.

Geri's story illustrates these points:

I am 52 years old, and I work 30 hours a week at a large retail store. I have a 10-year-old daughter. A year ago, my mother fell and sustained an injury that prevented her from caring for herself, so I cut my hours to part-time to help her. When I worked full-time, I was paid an hourly wage that covered our family expenses. I earned less than my male co-workers, but I did get health insurance for myself and my daughter. I lost our health insurance when I changed to part-time work.

My brother helps our mother, too. But he doesn't think cooking and cleaning are a man's work. So,

I spend more time caring for my mom than my brother does. I devote about 15 hours a week to helping my mom. If I could get compensated – even a little – for assisting my mother, it would help me feel like I wasn't so on the edge financially. And I could put some money away for my daughter's education.

The unequal pay that Geri experienced is very real. A recent study found that "in 2009 ... women one year out of college who were working full time were paid, on average, just 82 percent of what their male peers were paid."⁶ When gender inequality intersects with racial inequality, the disparities can be even starker. A recent report shows that – compared to what a white, male worker earns – Hispanic women earn 54 percent, African American women earn 64 percent, American Indian women earn 59 percent and Asian American women earn 90 percent.⁷

The disparities in wages aren't limited to secular companies, though: Nationwide, women clergy earn 76 cents for each dollar earned by male clergy.⁸ Within the ELCA, women clergy on average earn 86 cents for each dollar earned by male clergy.⁹

⁶"Graduating to a Pay Gap: The Earnings of Women and Men One Year After College Graduation Executive Summary and Recommendations," American Association of University Women, published March 2013, <http://www.aauw.org/files/2013/02/graduating-to-a-pay-gap-the-earnings-of-women-and-men-one-year-after-college-graduation.pdf>.

⁷The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap," American Association of University Women, published February 2016, <http://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>.

⁸Tobin Grant, "Gender pay gap among clergy worse than national average-A first look at the national data," National Religion News Service, published Jan. 12, 2016, <http://religionnews.com/2016/01/12/gender-pay-gap-among-clergy-worse-than-national-average-a-first-look-at-the-new-national-data/>.

⁹"45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Rostered Leader Survey" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, forthcoming).

HOW CAN WE SUMMARIZE SESSION FOUR?

- As Christians, we are called to respond to our neighbors in need. However, we are also called to recognize and name the economic injustices that create need in our communities.
- Often, hunger is a result of structural injustice which in turn influences both larger and personal economies.
- Justice is a complex idea that declares the need for equity and fairness on a large scale.
- The church has been dealing with problems of economic injustice since early times. Luther criticized the Catholic Church for not addressing the economic disparity of its members, and he helped establish ways to help the vulnerable members of the church.
- In our world today, we still deal with economic injustice including the gender pay gap. How can we as Lutherans respond to this injustice and help those who hunger for just participation in the economy?

JUSTICE:

Selections from ELCA Social Statements

From "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All: A Social Statement on Economic Life" (1999):

God who "executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry" (Psalm 146:7) is revealed in Jesus, whose mission was "to bring good news to the poor ... release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4: 18-19). The kingdom of God he proclaimed became real through concrete acts of justice: feeding people, freeing them from various forms of bondage, embracing those excluded by the systems of his day, and calling his followers to a life of faithfulness to God.

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One fundamental reason for Christians [to talk about women and justice] is the belief that God as creator makes all people with dignity, and so our church (the ELCA) is committed to the full and equitable participation of all people in church and society. Yet, for example, women and girls as a group experience tragically high rates of physical and sexual abuse, as well as economic disparities in income and opportunities. ... Christians believe that God is at work in society to bring greater justice, and we are called to be God's hands in doing the same. That means society should strive to respect the needs, rights, and responsibilities of all people. These include equality of access in many matters, such as health care, personal safety, public and ecclesial leadership, education and financial well being.

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In some contexts, justice emphasizes equity – the disinterested, even-handed application of rules to each person – and the determination of eligibility of benefits or imposition of penalties. In other contexts, justice demands attention to differences among people – for instance, the distribution of some goods according to particular circumstances of need or merit. A central theme, however, weaves together all the various dimensions of justice. Justice speaks about social relations and the need to create, exercise, or restore right relationship between and among individuals in community.

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Session Four: A Just Economy



OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, you invite us to reflect on our need for your grace. As you walk with us, grant us sight to see the brokenness of our communities and our economy; grant us courage to work together for a just world in which all are fed, and grant us hope in your promises for today and for the world to come. In the name of Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Savior, amen.

REVIEW

1. In Session One of our study, we learned that one way to understand the economy is as a "household." We also learned that our faith calls us to see the economy through the lens of God's abundant gifts to God's creation and how this is different from a view of the economy based on scarcity.
2. In Session Two, we looked more closely at the difference between an economy of grace and an economy of merit and learned that grace helps us understand the importance of creating space for everyone to participate in the economy.
3. In Session Three, we learned how we serve God and our neighbors through our vocations.

THE BIG WORD FOR SESSION FOUR: JUSTICE

Because it covers so many contexts, justice can be difficult to define. The ELCA's social statements offer some clues. Divide the participants into groups. Give each group a quote from a social statement (see

leader background materials) and ask them to discuss these questions:

What does the selection say about justice?

What practices, policies or behaviors does justice demand, according to the selection?

Justice takes many forms and encompasses many aspects of our lives. Economic justice, in particular, is a theme we see in several social statements because it impacts so many parts of life: at work, at home, at church, in government and in education.

In a just economy, every person's dignity is respected, and all have a fair opportunity to acquire the things necessary for life. Economic justice also means that burdens and benefits are shared equitably. No single group should reap all the benefits of an economy; nor should one single group bear all the burdens. When one group holds all or most of the wealth of a community, or when one group bears all or most of the burdens, injustice may be the culprit.



THE FAITH CONNECTION

Invite several people to read sections of John 9. Write the following points on the board.

- Conditions like blindness, sickness and poverty were seen as curses from God on those who had sinned.
- Jesus saw the problem as the system of beliefs and laws that blinded the Pharisees to God's presence in their midst.
- When we exclude or marginalize others, we deny the power of God's grace to break forth in our midst, and "our sin remains" (9:41).



THE MARTIN LUTHER CONNECTION

The economy in Germany harmed people in poverty, especially through high-interest loans. There was a huge disparity between the wealth of the Catholic Church and the poverty of the German people. Again, from the "95 Theses":

#86 - Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the riches of the richest, build just this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of poor believers?

ACTIVITY: THE COMMON CHEST

(10-15 minutes)

One method of responding to hunger and poverty in Germany in the 1500s was what came to be called the "common chest." The first "common chest" was established in Wittenberg in 1520 or 1521. It was an actual chest to hold money and goods that could be used when someone in need came to the church. Luther saw the common chest as part of the basic "furniture" of the church. He believed that the church should not just help someone who was in poverty. It should also try to prevent someone from falling into poverty.

Distribute empty shoeboxes to small groups. Invite them to decorate the boxes with pictures of things your church could collect (or already does) that would make a difference in the community. Encourage groups to think of several age groups who could help. For example, younger children could collect baby socks, older youth could gather notebooks and backpacks, and adult members could do a soap drive.

ACTIVITY: ROPE KNOTS

(10-15 minutes)

Use this rope knots activity to demonstrate how difficult it is for people to escape from complicated systems.

To begin the activity, count the people participating. Then tie one overhand knot per person (up to 8-10 people) in a long climbing rope. The knots should be about two feet apart. (At this point the rope is lying on the floor.) Ask participants to pick a knot on the rope and stand next to it on either side of the rope. They then grab the rope on either side of the knot with one hand and pick up the rope. After everyone is standing and holding onto the rope with one hand next to a knot, the challenge begins. Participants are to untie all the knots without letting go of the rope. They can't move their hand that is on the rope. They can only use their free hands, and help each other, to untie the knots. After the activity, debrief with the group about the analogies to getting free from tangled economic situations in society. You can use the following questions to get started:

- In what ways can our current economy make people feel "trapped"?
- What are some ways that problems in one area of the economy can create problems in other areas for the economy, particular for families and individuals who are economically vulnerable?
- How can the complex "tangle" of economic issues make solving poverty seem impossible?
- How is the church called to respond to this "impossibility"?

THE HUNGER CONNECTION

Explore the connections between economic injustice and hunger by dividing up into pairs to read and discuss this short story.

I am 52 years old, and I work 30 hours a week at a large retail store. I have a 10-year-old daughter. A year ago, my mother fell and sustained an injury that prevented her from caring for herself, so I cut my hours to part-time to help her. When I worked full-time, I was paid an hourly wage that covered our family expenses. I earned less than my male co-workers, but I did get health insurance for myself and my daughter. I lost our health insurance when I changed to part-time work.

My brother helps our mother, too. But he doesn't think cooking and cleaning are a man's work. So I spend more time caring for my mom than my brother does. I devote about 15 hours a week to helping my mom. If I could get compensated – even a little – for assisting my mother, it would help me feel like I wasn't so on the edge financially. And I could put some money away for my daughter's education.

The unequal pay that Geri experienced is very real. A recent study found that “in 2009 ... women one year out of college who were working full time were paid, on average, just 82 percent of what their male peers were paid.” When gender inequality intersects with racial inequality, the disparities can be even starker. A recent report shows that – compared to what a white, male worker earns – Hispanic women earn 54 percent, African American women earn 64 percent, American Indian women earn 59 percent and Asian American women earn 90 percent.¹¹

The disparities in wages aren't limited to secular companies, though:

Nationwide, women clergy earn 76 cents for each dollar earned by male clergy.¹² Within the ELCA, women clergy on average earn 86 cents for each dollar earned by male clergy.¹³

Ask participants to talk about the following questions:

- What assumptions about men, women and work do you hear in Geri's story? How might assumptions like this affect Geri's job prospects if she were to seek new employment?
- What is your reaction to her brother's belief that some duties are “women's work,” and that women are better caregivers than men?
- Earlier, we said that justice includes respecting each person's dignity. In what ways did Geri experience this side of justice or injustice?
- In our world today, we still deal with economic injustice including the gender pay gap. How can we as Lutherans respond to this injustice and help those who hunger for just participation in the economy?

WRAPUP: SESSION FOUR

Ask three participants:

What do you remember from this session?

What could you tell someone at home about what you learned?

Ask everyone:

What was “the big word”?

In what ways does our current economy act like a web in which people are trapped?

How does our church work against this kind of injustice?

¹¹The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap,” American Association of University Women, published February 2016, <http://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>.

¹²Tobin Grant, “Gender pay gap among clergy worse than national average-A first look at the national data,” National Religion News Service, published Jan. 12, 2016, <http://religionnews.com/2016/01/12/gender-pay-gap-among-clergy-worse-than-national-average-a-first-look-at-the-new-national-data/>.

¹³“45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Rostered Leader Survey” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, forthcoming).



CLOSING PRAYER

Just and merciful Lord, in baptism, you claimed us as your own and commissioned us to “strive for justice and peace in all the earth.” Forgive us for the injustices we have created and for the injustices we have tolerated. Be our courage and our strength as we work toward a just world, where all are welcome and where every dignity is respected. Bless our church, that it may be a wellspring of justice in our community and our world. In your holy name, amen.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY, DEPENDING ON TIME

ACTIVITY: STEWARDS OF THE CHEST (10-15 minutes)

Divide the group into small groups of four to five. Give each group a piece of paper or, if available, play money from a board game. Tell each group that they are the “stewards” of a modern common chest. Their chest has \$500 in it. They must decide how to use this money. On the board, write the following terms:

- health care
- loan refinancing
- immediate relief from hunger
- job re-training
- education for children

Each of these categories represents things that the original common chest in Wittenberg was used to support. Ask each group to determine how they will divide their funds. After each group finishes, discuss the following questions:

How did you divide the funds? Why?

How would your decisions change if you could count on the same money every year?

What if you only had one year of funding?

How does our church act as a “common chest” for our community and world?

BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

Session Five: A Sustainable Economy

Dear leaders,

We are providing this background information to help you feel more informed when you teach the session. Please read this material beforehand as a preparation for teaching. You can refer to this additional information when participants raise questions or want more resources during the sessions.

WHAT IS A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY?

- Economic growth must be measured by the opportunities it creates for humans and by its effects on all of creation.
- Humans are called to be wise stewards of creation.
- Economic activity and care for creation are closely tied together.

In the first week of our study, we learned that one way to understand the economy is as a “household.” We also learned that our faith calls us to see the economy through the lens of God’s abundant gifts to God’s creation and how this is different from a view of the economy based on scarcity. In the second week, we looked more closely at the difference between an economy of grace and an economy of merit and learned that grace helps us understand the importance of creating space for everyone to participate in the economy. In the third week, we learned how we serve God and our neighbors through our vocations, and last week, we learned about justice and injustice. This week, we will be looking at sustainability.

SUSTAINABILITY

A just economy provides sufficient access to the goods we need to live today, but it also remains mindful of the goods future generations will need to live tomorrow and beyond. “Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All,” the ELCA’s social statement on economic life, defines sustainability as “the capacity of natural and social systems to survive and thrive together over the long term.” This is an important piece to consider when evaluating our economic practices and policies.

Growth can have many great effects – more jobs, more affordable goods and more improved technologies. But it can also have startling negative consequences when the good of the whole of creation is not taken into account.

This can be true for both the natural environment and for human communities, and sometimes the two are tied together, as we will see.

CARING FOR CREATION

As Christians, we believe that God created humans within a complex and interrelated world. We also believe that God continues to sustain the earth: “When you send forth your spirit ... you renew the face of the ground” (Psalm 104:30). As stewards of God’s

creation, “we are called to care for the earth as God cares for the earth” (ELCA, “Caring for Creation: Vision Hope and Justice,” 1993). The biblical call to have “dominion” over creation (Genesis 1:28) must be read in light of how God exercises dominion over creation, “as a shepherd king who takes the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7), wearing a crown of thorns” (“Caring for Creation,” 1993).

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

In a valley of dry bones, the prophet Ezekiel bears witness to the power of God to bring new life in desolate places (Ezekiel 37:1-14). In the Gospel of John, Jesus reveals the power of God to overcome death in the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-45). Scripture testifies to God who calls God’s people and the entire world to new life, a life of renewal, restoration and reconciliation. Our faith in the promise of God to bring new life invites us to seek the renewal, restoration and reconciliation even in our most desolate places, such as those where drought, disaster and degradation threaten humans and non-human nature alike.

The story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness is told in Matthew 4:1-11. Jesus faces three temptations: turning stones into bread, throwing himself from a high pinnacle, and the temptation to power over all the kingdoms of the world.

Two of these temptations are of particular interest for us this week. First, Jesus is tempted to transform nature to suit his own needs by turning stones into bread. This may seem like a trivial act in the story, but how often are we, as stewards of God’s creation, tempted to use our power to turn nature to our own ends, without concern for the good of creation? Harmful environmental practices can convert creation into things useful to humans, but when done without thought to the good of nature or the sustainability of our own action, these practices

can have long-lasting consequences. Unsustainable farming practices, for example, can create food in the short-term but can also deplete vital nutrients from the soil, leaving the land infertile.

The third temptation, to power, is especially pernicious. Jesus is no stranger to power. He grants the disciples authority over “unclean spirits” (Matthew 10:1), claims for himself power over life and death (John 5:21), and claims to have “conquered the world” (John 16:33). Yet, the power Jesus exercises, and the power the devil offers, are too very different things. Jesus’ power and authority are ultimately for the good of the world, to save it and not to condemn it (John 3:17). This is the power of a servant-king. The power the devil offers is “power-over,” the oppressive authority of a lord who believes those under dominion are mere objects to be traded at will. This power is the type of dominion that Jesus rejects and that the ELCA’s social statement on caring for creation warns against. When we exercise our dominion over creation without respect for the good of creation, we are falling victim to the temptation Jesus rejected.

Caring for creation means, first, respecting both human dignity and the inherent value of God’s creation. It is not “ours” to do with as we will; it is God’s, and we have been entrusted to use and care for it as wise, responsible stewards. Second, caring for creation means respecting the many ways in which we are dependent on the environment around us. When creation suffers – when water is polluted, when land is infertile and when creatures become extinct – we all suffer.

WHAT WERE MARTIN LUTHER'S VIEWS?

Sin disrupts our relationship with God, our relationships with one another and our relationship with God's creation. Martin Luther believed that before humanity's first sin, our relationship with creation was very different: "I have no doubt that before sin the air was purer and more healthful, and the water more prolific; yes, even the sun's light was more beautiful and clearer. Now the entire creation in all its parts reminds us of the curse that was inflicted because of sin Now the earth is not only barren in many places; but even the fertile areas are defaced by darnel, weeds, thorns, and thistles. This is a great misfortune" (Commentary on Genesis).

In Scripture, too, creation is caught up in the consequences of sin: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:22-23).

WHAT ARE SOME MODERN LUTHERAN TEACHINGS?**Creation and human economy**

The consequences of our unsustainable use of the environment are evident in the many ways the climate is changing. In Alaska, warmer winters threaten the very existence of our neighbors in areas like Shishmaref, home to an Inupiaq community and Shishmaref Lutheran Church (ELCA). In this island village, large ice packs used to protect the coast from erosion from fierce winter storms. Now, the warmer climate means less ice, which means much greater erosion. According to some estimates, the island is losing nearly a foot of land per year to the sea. With less than three square miles of land on the island as a whole, the situation is dire.

The effects of climate change represent the deep connections between care for creation and care for human communities. While many of the profits of large-scale, unsustainable environmental practices that drive climate change are enjoyed by a handful of corporations, countries and individuals, the effects of climate change are often faced by those least able to weather it. Communities around the world with very high rates of hunger, where nearly 1 in 4 is undernourished, are in some of the regions most vulnerable to climate change. These include coastal communities like Shishmaref, where flooding, erosion, and powerful storms can threaten the community's existence.

Seeking grace in creation

News headlines and reports are important reminders of how far humans have to go in caring for God's creation. Polluted waterways, eroded coastlines, droughts, and human-caused environmental disasters are the wages of our failure to act as good stewards of the environment. A degraded and threatened environment is a powerful reminder of sin.

Yet, still the grace of God is revealed in our relationship with creation in profound ways. Care for creation is about more than the "hot-button" issues we see in news feeds today. It is about more than the bare facts of droughts or floods. It is about more than fossil fuels and water management. At its root, our vocation as stewards of creation is a collaborative partnership in which we come to see the presence of God in, through, around and with us – enriching our labors and shaping the world. As Luther wrote, "God is entirely present, personally and essentially, in Christ on earth in his mother's womb, in the crib, in the temple, in the wilderness, in cities, in houses, in the garden, and in the field." The call to care for creation is the call to draw near to the presence of God in the world around us, in the restored relationships between our neighbors, and us and in the life-giving relationship between humans and the land.

FLINT, WATER AND JUSTICE

The story of the water crisis in Flint, Mich., is a story of how care for creation was undermined by a lack of concern for the dignity of human beings. It is a story of dominion exercised in harmful ways, for people and the environment.

It took nearly two years for the state government in Michigan to admit what most of us now know, that the water in Flint was unsafe to use. For 18 months, residents complained of rashes and illness from the water in their homes and workplaces, but despite warnings from researchers that levels of lead in the water were dangerously high, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the regional office of the Environmental Protection Agency insisted the water was safe. By the time they told the truth, it was too late. Adults and children throughout the city of 99,000 people had tested positive for lead in their bodies.

Lead poisoning can have serious, long-term health effects. In children, it can delay brain development. It can affect organs like the liver and kidneys. While the effects of lead poisoning can be lessened with a diet high in nutrient-rich foods, there is no "cure."

This lead-poisoned water was no environmental accident. It was the result of choices made by people in power in Michigan, few of whom actually lived in Flint and had to depend on the water. In 2014, an emergency financial manager appointed by Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder made the ill-advised choice to switch the water source for Flint to the toxic Flint River, despite warnings against this. The water was filled with bacteria, leading to three advisories in just one summer for residents to boil their water. To treat the bacteria, chemicals were poured into the water at dangerously high rates, corroding the pipes and leaching lead into the water that would eventually flow into homes, schools, businesses and churches. This was water that people gave to their children,

that churches used to baptize infants, and that adults and children alike used to bathe. Because of the dishonesty and lack of concern of people in power, residents had no idea how dangerous it was.

Flint's story does not begin with water but with economic collapse. What was once a booming industrial city with good jobs for many residents became one of the poorest cities in the region when major manufacturing companies like General Motors moved their facilities to countries where they could pay their workers much lower wages. The results were nearly immediate: high unemployment, a deflated real estate market that devalued homeowners' largest assets, and a community without the financial or political power to determine its own future.

This laid the groundwork for Michigan to appoint an unelected emergency financial manager with near-absolute power over the finances of the city, including power over its public services. What had been an economic crisis became an environmental crisis and a public health crisis. Its roots were in a lack of opportunities for residents to participate in the economy and thus in leadership of their community. An unsustainable economy led to an unsustainable ecology.

Fortunately, many people have stepped in to accompany the community. Salem Lutheran Church (ELCA) has been one of the largest sites for water distribution in the city, providing fresh water to neighbors. With the support of ELCA World Hunger, Salem's food pantry also has been able to provide the nutrient-rich foods needed to counteract the effects of lead. And ELCA Advocacy, again supported in part by ELCA World Hunger, has been an important voice on a national level for funding to help the city deal with the crisis. The work goes on, but Flint remains an important reminder of how closely the economy and the environment are connected.

Session Five: A Sustainable Economy



OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, you invite us to reflect on our need for your grace. As you walk with us, grant us sight to see the brokenness of our communities and our economy; grant us courage to work together for a just world in which all are fed, and grant us hope in your promises for today and for the world to come. In the name of Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Savior, amen.

REVIEW

1. In Session One of our study, we learned that one way to understand the economy is as a "household." We also learned that our faith calls us to see the economy through the lens of God's abundant gifts to God's creation, and how this is different from a view of the economy based on scarcity.
2. In Session Two, we looked more closely at the difference between an economy of grace and an economy of merit and learned that grace helps us understand the importance of creating space for everyone to participate in the economy.
3. In Session Three, we learned how we serve God and our neighbors through our vocations.
4. In Session Four, we learned about justice and injustice.

THE BIG WORD FOR SESSION FOUR: SUSTAINABLE

Write this definition on the board:

A sustainable economy remains mindful of the goods future generations will need to live tomorrow and beyond.

SHARE WITH PARTICIPANTS

"Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All", the ELCA's social statement on economic life, defines sustainability as "the capacity of natural and social systems to survive and thrive together over the long term."

Write "sustainable" on one side of the board, and "unsustainable" on the other side. Invite participants to call out words they associate with these two categories. Write the words on the board.

ACTIVITY: VOTE WITH YOUR BODIES

(10-15 minutes)

Post a sign that says sustainable on one side of the room and unsustainable on the opposite side of the room. Instruct participants to listen to the list below and then stand under one of the signs that best expresses their opinion. The purpose of the activity is not to "get it right" but to spark conversation.

- indiscriminately using fossil fuels
- growing crops that require a lot of water in dry regions
- alternative energies, such as wind and solar
- increasing crop yields (This could be either one. You may note here that one of the ways ELCA World Hunger cares for creation is by

supporting projects that teach small farmers to use sustainable agricultural practices, such as growing crops suited for the environment or using efficient irrigation methods that require less water.)

- fresh-water supplies.
- small farms
- churches not speaking out about care for creation.
- God's grace

Talk about it

Was it easy to decide where to stand?

How can Luther inspire us to advocate boldly for sustainable practices?



THE FAITH CONNECTION

Invite two people to read the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness in Matthew 4:1-11.

Focus on particular temptations:

1. Jesus is tempted to transform nature to suit his own needs, to turn stones into bread. Discuss this question in pairs: How often are we, as stewards of God's creation, tempted to use our power to turn nature to our own ends, without concern for the good of creation? What are some examples, such as unsustainable farming practices?
2. The power Jesus exercises, and the power the devil offers, are two very different things. Invite half of the group to name three characteristics of the devil's power. Ask the other half of the group to name three characteristics of Jesus' power. Ask everyone, what do these very different uses of power mean for sustainability and caring for creation?

Share these points from the background materials:

1. Caring for creation means respecting both human dignity and the inherent value of God's creation. It is not "ours" to do with as we will; it is God's, and we have been entrusted to use and care for it as wise, responsible stewards.
2. Caring for creation means respecting the many ways in which we are dependent on the environment around us. When creation suffers – when water is polluted, when land is infertile, and when creatures become extinct – we all suffer.



THE MARTIN LUTHER CONNECTION

Martin Luther believed that before humanity's first sin, our relationship with creation was very different: "I have no doubt that before sin the air was purer and more healthful, and the water more prolific; yes, even the sun's light was more beautiful and clearer. Now the entire creation in all its parts reminds us of the curse that was inflicted because of sin. ... Now the earth is not only barren in many places; but even the fertile areas are defaced by darnel, weeds, thorns, and thistles. This is a great misfortune" ("Commentary on Genesis," LW 1:204-205).

THE HUNGER CONNECTION

The story of the water crisis in Flint, Mich., is a story of how care for creation was undermined by a lack of concern for the dignity of human beings. It is a story of dominion exercised in harmful ways, for people and the environment.

ACTIVITY: FLINT, WATER AND JUSTICE

(10-15 minutes)

Read the following story together:

It took nearly two years for the state government in Michigan to admit what most of us now know, that the water in Flint was unsafe to use. For 18 months, residents complained of rashes and illness from the water in their homes and workplaces, but despite warnings from researchers that levels of lead in the water were dangerously high, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the regional office of the Environmental Protection Agency insisted the water was safe. By the time they told the truth, it was too late. Adults and children throughout the city of 99,000 people had tested positive for lead in their bodies.

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This lead-poisoned water was no environmental accident. It was the result of choices made by people in power in Michigan, few of whom actually lived in Flint and had to depend on the water. In 2014, an emergency financial manager appointed by Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder made the ill-advised choice to switch the water source for Flint to the

toxic Flint River, despite warnings against this. The water was filled with bacteria, leading to three advisories in just one summer for residents to boil their water. To treat the bacteria, chemicals were poured into the water at dangerously high rates, corroding the pipes and leaching lead into the water that would eventually flow into homes, schools, businesses and churches. This was water that people gave to their children, that churches used to baptize infants, and that adults and children alike used to bathe. Because of the dishonesty and lack of concern of people in power, residents had no idea how dangerous it was.

Flint's story does not begin with water but with economic collapse. What was once a booming industrial city with good jobs for many residents became one of the poorest cities in the region when major manufacturing companies like General Motors moved their facilities to countries where they could pay their workers much lower wages. The results were nearly immediate: high unemployment, a deflated real estate market that devalued homeowners' largest assets, and a community without the financial or political power to determine its own future.

This laid the groundwork for the Michigan to appoint an unelected emergency financial manager with near-absolute power over the finances of the city, including power over its public services. What had been an economic crisis became an environmental crisis and a public health crisis. Its roots were in a lack of opportunities for residents to participate in the economy and thus in leadership of their community. An unsustainable economy led to an unsustainable ecology.

Fortunately, many people have stepped in to accompany the community. Salem Lutheran Church (ELCA) has been one of the largest sites for water distribution in the city, providing fresh water to neighbors. With the support of ELCA World Hunger, Salem's food pantry also has been able to provide the nutrient-rich foods needed to counteract the effects of lead. And ELCA Advocacy, again supported in part by ELCA World Hunger, has been an important voice on a national level for funding to help the city deal with the crisis. The works goes on, but Flint remains an important reminder of how closely the economy and the environment are connected.

Write the following questions on the board for small groups to discuss:

How is the Flint water crisis both an economic justice and hunger issue?

What might faith leaders have to say about the Flint situation?

ACTIVITY: SEEKING GRACE IN CREATION

(10-15 minutes)

Remind participants that the call to care for creation is the call to draw near to the presence of God in the world around us, in the restored relationships between our neighbors, and us and in the life-giving relationship between humans and the land.

Invite children to this portion of the sessions and partner groups of kids and adults to plant seeds that the kids can take home and care for. Adults can teach kids simple lessons they've learned about sustainability and creation while they plant the seeds together. Plant bean seeds in paper cups with a little potting soil and water.

ACTIVITY: CREATION AND THE HUMAN ECONOMY

(10-15 minutes)

The consequences of our unsustainable use of the environment are evident in the many ways the climate is changing. In Alaska, warmer winters threaten the very existence of our neighbors in areas like Shishmaref, home to an Inupiaq community and Shishmaref Lutheran Church (ELCA). In this island village, large ice packs used to protect the coast from erosion from fierce winter storms. Now, the warmer climate means less ice, which means much greater erosion. According to some estimates, the island is losing nearly a foot of land per year to the sea. With less than three square miles of land on the island as a whole, the situation is dire. You can explore more about Shishmaref by reading this article together: livinglutheran.org/2017/03/shishmaref-called-care/.

Invite the group to consider ways people in your community are caring for God's creation – or failing to care for it.

WRAPUP: SESSION FIVE

Ask three participants:

What do you remember from this session?

What could you tell someone at home about what you learned?

Ask everyone:

What was “the big word”?

How are we called to provide for a sustainable future?

How can we use our privileged position of power in the world to work for lasting justice?

When have we been called to help our neighbors and work for greater sustainability?

How is our vocation as stewards of creation a collaborative partnership with God?



CLOSING PRAYER

Creator God, you have blessed us with a bountiful world filled with your goodness and called us to share with you in stewarding our resources. Forgive us for the ways we have fallen short in caring for one another and in caring for all of creation. Open our eyes, ears and hearts that we may be attentive to the cries for justice in our world. Open our mouths that our voices may be lifted up to advocate for justice for our neighbors and your world. In your gracious name we pray, amen.



ELCA World Hunger
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.