



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

*A brief summary of*  
***Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All***  
**An ELCA social statement (adopted 1999)**

*The statement and other supplemental materials can be downloaded at*  
[www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements)

**In a nutshell**

Through this statement the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) addresses economic life in light of the moral imperative to *seek sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all*. The statement affirms the biblical understanding that the economy (“oikonomia,” Greek for “management of the household”) is meant to meet all people’s material needs. It recognizes that the contemporary global economy has brought a better life for many, but also has increased misery for many. Humans are responsible and accountable for economic life. Accepting any economic system without question gives it god-like power.

In Jesus Christ, God’s reign intersects earthly life, transforming us and allowing us to see the ways in which the world falls short of God’s intentions and enabling us to speak out. The ELCA confesses that it sins whenever we put our trust in wealth or fail to question practices that do not serve the good of all. Baptism gives us a new identity and freedom that leads us to love the neighbor and be good stewards in economic life, which is God’s good creation.

**The statement makes the following key points:**

- This statement applies four criteria to affirm, oppose or seek changes in economic life:
  - the scope of God’s concern, which is “for all,” but has special concern for people who are poor;
  - the means by which life is sustained – “livelihood”;
  - what is needed – “sufficiency”; and
  - a long-term perspective of “sustainability.”
- Economic assumptions can place us in tension with our Christian identity. The phrase of the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread,” assumes both interdependence and need as part of human identity. The teachings of Scripture commit Christians to concern “for all.”
- The power of Christ’s suffering on the cross challenges us to pay special attention to those who suffer. Outrage over the plight of people living in poverty is a central biblical concern. Martin Luther’s insights into the commandments show us that neglecting the needs of the neighbor is breaking God’s commandments. Poverty is a global problem. The ELCA commits to addressing the causes of poverty and calls for particular scrutiny of policies that affect the poorest people with the aim of investing to improve their lives.

- Christian vocation is our freedom, through the gospel, to serve others through our earthly responsibilities such as family, work and community life. “Livelihood” refers to our economic support system. The relationships and structures that support livelihood teach important virtues. As a church the ELCA commits to and urges its members to support and encourage the living out of daily callings in order to serve the neighbor (including the wider society) while trusting in God’s providential care.
- Daily work is a means to sustain humans and creation, but (due to sin) it is also toil. The dignity that is ours in Christ frees us to see work as a calling, not merely a means to consumerism. Believing in God’s promises challenges the forces of injustice.
- Human beings are created “in God’s image” as social beings whose dignity is conferred by God. We are more than workers. Employers are responsible for treating employees with dignity and respect, and employees have a responsibility to work to the best of their potential. People should be involved in decision-making that directly affects their work. Employees may need to organize in their quest for human dignity and justice, in which case accurate information and fair tactics are expected of all parties. The ELCA calls for just hiring and employment practices.
- “Sufficiency” means being able to meet basic needs. God created a world that has enough for all, but it needs to be shared and distributed justly in order to be enough for all. Huge disparities in wealth threaten the integrity of the human community. Property does not ultimately belong to us under a biblical understanding of stewardship. The ELCA commits to providing for people in need and calls for the government to provide for people in need or who are unable to provide for their livelihood through employment.
- Government is to serve God’s purposes by promoting the common good, and we are to hold leaders accountable.
- Consumerism causes us to confuse what we want with what we need. Possessions and wealth can become our gods. The gulf between the pay of top corporate officers and average workers is scandalous. Transnational corporations, wielding great economic power, should be held accountable for the sake of all.
- “Sustainability” is the capacity of natural and social systems to survive and thrive together over the long term. We are moved by Scripture to focus on the long term and respect the integrity and limits of creation. Humans have treated the earth as something to be used rather than the finite, fragile ecological system upon which life depends. We confess our mistreatment of the environment, and believe that economic processes should respect environmental limits.
- Producing food in sustainable ways is worthy of attention. The ELCA calls for fair compensation for farmers, just conditions for farm laborers, and sustainable agriculture.
- The ELCA supports sustainable development of low-income communities. People need to be connected with resources for results and meaningful participation in community and economic life.

*Summary provided by the Theological Discernment Team of the Office of the Presiding Bishop, ELCA. Only official statements of the ELCA should be forwarded or represented to third parties as the position of the ELCA.*