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# SUNDAY CLOSING LAWS

**A STATEMENT  
COMMENDED  
BY THE CHURCH**

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**A statement commended by the Second General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, October 21-27, 1964, to members of The ALC "for their consideration in deciding their own positions on Sunday closing laws."**

## **SUNDAY CLOSING LAWS**

Sunday closing laws often become an issue which divides a community. Even religious people often are sharply divided on the question of whether or not to support Sunday closing laws.

Religious issues of course are involved in laws which restrict on Sundays those activities permitted on other days of the week. At stake are freedom of conscience and of justice. Laws which compel Sunday closing discriminate against those whose religion requires them to observe Saturday as their day of rest and worship. Just so, to be required to work on Sunday violates the conscience of many a devout Christian.

One thing is certain. Churches do not need Sunday closing laws in order to protect themselves. Such laws even may harm the churches by leaving the false impression that Christianity is a religion of rules and restrictions, that it opposes joy and happiness in this life, and that it is hypocritical in asking protection for its own holy day under the guise of "a community day of rest."

The Supreme Court of the United States, in accepting the legality of Sunday closing laws, stated the case for "a community day of rest" in these words:

"However, the State's purpose is not merely to provide a one-day-in-seven work stoppage. In addition to this, the State seeks to set one day apart from all others as a day of rest, repose, recreation and tranquility—a day which all members of the family and community have the opportunity to spend and enjoy together, a day in which there exists relative quiet and disassociation from the everyday intensity of commercial activities, a day in which people may visit friends and relatives who are not available during working days."

For Christians Sunday indeed is a day set apart. It is the day hallowed by the Lord's Resurrection. It is the day for assembling with fellow believers for study, worship, and praise. It is the "change of pace" day for setting aside all but the necessities in favor of those self-chosen activities that bring happiness, satisfaction, contentment, rest, and relaxation. Christians know that a community whose people neglect to hear the preaching of God's Word or to learn its message for their lives is scarcely likely to be one where "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:10).

As Lutherans following Luther's explanation of the Third Commandment, we emphasize attitudes toward God's Word above attitudes toward His Day. We view Sunday closing laws in terms of their effects upon the physical, mental, moral, and spiritual well-being of persons. Thus we remain faithful to our Lord's teaching, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). We practice St. Paul's counsel, "Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath" (Col. 2:16). We believe, nevertheless, that every community needs one day in seven for "rest, repose, recreation and tranquility" AS WELL AS for the opportunity it gives for associating with fellow-believers in study, worship, and praise of the Eternal God.

We would be naive if we did not recognize that Sunday closing laws involve not only religious but also economic elements. Typically underlying the agitation to ban Sunday sales of various lines of merchandise is economic competition, of discount houses with old-line stores, of suburban shopping centers with downtown merchants, of independents with the chains.

Both sides try to hide the economic issue behind moral arguments. One pleads to save Sundays for families or to keep one day free from normal week-day activities. The other stresses the case for freedom of personal choice, for families to shop together, and the impossibility of confining to six days the needs of a complex, mobile, interdependent society.

We urge that the issue be settled not primarily by law and the force of government but rather by voluntary agreement worked out in each community on the basis of its own needs and experience. We suggest that members of our own congregations buy only necessities on Sunday. They may prefer to patronize those stores which maintain the community pattern of informal, voluntary controls. Not wanting to impose our views on others, we ask that "every one be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5) and act accordingly.

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AND SOCIAL ACTION**

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