



A Social Statement on:

Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All

Adopted by a more than two-thirds majority vote by the sixth Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, meeting in Denver, Colorado, August 16-22, 1999.

Economic life pervades our lives—the work we do, the income we receive, how much we consume and save, what we value, and how we view one another. An economy (*oikonomia* or “management of the household”) is meant to meet people’s material needs. The current market-based economy does that to an amazing degree; many are prospering as never before. At the same time, others continue to lack what they need for basic subsistence. Out of deep concern for those affected adversely, we of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America here assess economic life today in light of the moral imperative to seek *sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all*.

To an unprecedented degree, today’s market economy has become global in scope, intensity, and impact. Common brand names appear throughout the world. Many companies based in the United States generate most of their revenues and profits abroad. Daily foreign exchange trading has increased a hundredfold over the past quarter century. Billions of dollars of capital can flow out of one country and into another with a few computer keystrokes. This economic globalization has brought new kinds of businesses, opportunities, and a better life for many. It also has resulted in increasing misery for others. Intensive global competition can force a company to relocate if it is to survive—generating jobs elsewhere, while leaving behind many workers who lose their jobs. Sudden shifts in globalized capital and financial markets can dramatically affect the economic wellbeing of millions of people, for good or for ill.

Human beings are responsible and accountable for economic life, but people often feel powerless in the face of what occurs. Market-based thought and practices dominate our world today in ways that seem to eclipse other economic, social, political, and religious perspectives. To many people, the global market economy feels like a free-running system that is reordering the world with few external checks or little accountability to values other than profit. Economic mandates often demand sacrifices from those least able to afford them. When any economic system and its effects are accepted without

question—when it becomes a “god-like” power reigning over people, communities, and creation—then we face a central issue of faith.

The Church confesses

If the economic arena becomes a reigning power for us, the question arises: in what or whom shall we place our trust and hope? The First Commandment is clear: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Or as Jesus said, “You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matthew 6:24c, Luke 16:13). To place our trust in something other than God is the essence of sin. It disrupts our relationships with God, one another, and the rest of creation, resulting in injustices and exploitation: “For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain” (Jeremiah 6:13).

As a church we confess that we are in bondage to sin and submit too readily to the idols and injustices of economic life. We often rely on wealth and material goods more than God and close ourselves off from the needs of others. Too uncritically we accept assumptions, policies, and practices that do not serve the good of all.

Our primary and lasting identity, trust, and hope are rooted in the God we know in Jesus Christ. Baptized into Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, we receive a new identity and freedom, rather than being defined and held captive by economic success or failure. In the gathered community of Christ’s Body, the Church, we hear the Word and partake of the Supper, a foretaste of the fullness of life promised by Jesus, “the bread of life” (John 6:35). Through the cross of Christ, God forgives our sin and frees us from bondage to false gods. Faith in Christ fulfills the First Commandment. We are called to love the neighbor and be stewards in economic life, which, distorted by sin, is still God’s good creation.

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.

God’s reign is not a new system, a set of prescriptive laws, or a plan of action that depends on what we do. Nor is it a spiritual realm removed from this world. In Jesus Christ, God’s reign intersects earthly life, transforming us and how we view the systems of this world. Our faith in God provides a vantage point for critiquing any and every system of this world, all of which fall short of what God intends. Human impoverishment, excessive accumulation and consumerism driven by greed, gross economic

disparities, and the degradation of nature are incompatible with this reign of God.

Through human decisions and actions, God is at work in economic life. Economic life is intended to be a means through which God's purposes for humankind and creation are to be served. When this does not occur, as a church we cannot remain silent because of who and whose we are.

Our obligation and ongoing tensions

Based on this vantage point of faith, "*sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all*" is a benchmark for affirming, opposing, and seeking changes in economic life. Because of sin we fall short of these obligations in this world, but we live in light of God's promised future that ultimately there will be no hunger and injustice. This promise makes us restless with less than what God intends for the world. In economic matters, this draws attention to:

- the scope of God's concern "**for all**,"
- the means by which life is sustained "**livelihood**,"
- what is needed "**sufficiency**," and
- a long-term perspective "**sustainability**."

These criteria often are in tension with one another. What benefits people in one area, sector, or country may harm those elsewhere. What is sufficient in one context is not in another. What is economically sufficient is not necessarily sustainable. There are difficult and complex trade-offs and ambiguities in the dynamic processes of economic life. As believers, we are both impelled by God's promises and confronted with the practical realities of economic life. We often must choose among competing claims, conscious of our incomplete knowledge, of the sin that clouds all human judgments and actions, *and* of the grace and forgiveness given by Christ.

Economic assumptions can conflict with what we as a church confess. Who we are in Christ places us in tension with priorities given to money, consumption, competition, and profit in our economic system.

- While autonomy and self-sufficiency are highly valued in our society, as people of faith we confess that we depend on God and are interdependent with one another. Through these relationships we are nurtured, sustained, and held accountable.
- While succeeding or making something of themselves is what matters to many in economic life, we confess that in Christ we are freely justified by grace through faith rather than by what we do.

- While a market economy emphasizes what individuals want and are willing and able to buy, as people of faith we realize that what human beings *want* is not necessarily what they *need* for the sake of life.
- While a market economy assumes people will act to maximize their own interests, we acknowledge that what is in our interest must be placed in the context of what is good for the neighbor.
- While competitiveness is key to economic success, we recognize that intense competitiveness can destroy relationships and work against the reconciliation and cooperation God desires among people.
- While economic reasoning assumes that resources are scarce relative to people's wants, we affirm that God promises a world where there is enough for everyone, if only we would learn how to use and share what God has given for the sake of all.
- While economic growth often is considered an unconditional good, we insist that such growth must be evaluated by its direct, indirect, short-term, and long-term effects on the wellbeing of all creation and people, especially those who are poor.

When we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "*Give us this day our daily bread,*" we place ourselves in tension with economic assumptions of our society. Rather than being self-sufficient, we need and depend on what God *gives* or provides through people, practices, and systems. "*Daily bread*" is not earned by efforts of individuals alone, but is made possible through a variety of relationships and institutions.¹ God gives in ways that expand our notions of who "*us*" includes, from people close at hand to those around the globe. In stark contrast to those who seek unchecked accumulation and profit, our attention is drawn to those who are desperate for what will sustain their lives for just *this day*.

For all: especially those living in poverty

"For all" refers to the whole household of God—all people and creation throughout the world. We should assess economic activities in terms of how they affect "all," especially people living in poverty.

We tend to view economic life by how it affects us personally. The cross of Christ challenges Christians to view this arena through the experience of those of us who are impoverished, suffering, broken, betrayed, left out, without hope. Through those who are "despised" and "held of no account" (Isaiah 53:3) we see the crucified Christ (Matthew 25:31-46), through whom God's righteousness and justice are revealed. The

power of God's suffering, self-giving love transforms and challenges the Church to stand with all who are overlooked for the sake of economic progress or greed. Confession of faith ought to flow into acts of justice for the sake of the most vulnerable.

Outrage over the plight of people living in poverty is a theme throughout the Bible. The poor are those who live precariously between subsistence and utter deprivation. It is not poor people themselves who are the problem, but their lack of access to the basic necessities of life. Without such, they cannot maintain their human dignity. Strong themes in Scripture indicate that people are poor because of circumstances that have afflicted them (such as "aliens, orphans, widows"), or because of the greed and unjust practices of those who "trample on the poor" (Amos 5:11). The basic contrast is between the weak and the greedy. The psalmist decries that "the wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy" (Psalm 37:14). The prophet rails against those "who write oppressive statutes to turn aside the needy from justice" (Isaiah 10:1-2). Their moral problem is that they have followed greed rather than God. As a result, the poor lose their basic productive resource (their land), and fall into cycles of indebtedness. Poverty is a problem of the whole human community, not only of those who are poor or vulnerable.

In relation to those who are poor, Martin Luther's insights into the meaning of the commandments against killing, stealing, and coveting are sobering. We violate "you shall not kill" when we do not help and support others to meet their basic needs. As Luther explained, "If you see anyone suffer hunger and do not feed [them], you have let [them] starve."² "To steal" can include "taking advantage of our neighbor in any sort of dealing that results in loss to him [or her] . . . wherever business is transacted and money is exchanged for goods or labor."³ "You shall not covet" means "God does not wish you to deprive your neighbor of anything that is [theirs], letting [them] suffer loss while you gratify your greed."⁴ Related Hebraic laws called for leaving produce in the fields for the poor (Deuteronomy 24:21), a periodic cancellation of debts (Deuteronomy 15:1), and a jubilee year in which property was to be redistributed or restored to those who had lost it, so that they might again have a means of livelihood (Leviticus 25).

Today, well over a billion people in the world are deprived of what they need to meet their basic needs. Far more lack clean water, adequate sanitation, housing, or health services. They use whatever limited options are available to them in their daily struggle to survive. Thousands die daily. Millions pursue economic activities that are part of the underground or informal economy, and are not counted in economic statistics. Children often have no option but to labor under unjust conditions to provide for themselves and their families. Political struggles, militarism, and warfare add to this travesty, displacing masses of people from their homes.⁵ In many of the poorest countries, incomes continue to decline, and people subsist on less and less. Although most of the impoverished live in developing countries, where their numbers continue to grow at alarming rates, many millions are in the industrialized countries. Millions of poor people live in communities

in the United States and the Caribbean where the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is present.

Developing countries that have opened their economies to global markets have generally reduced poverty over time more than those that have not, but the terms of trade often work to the disadvantage of developing countries. Seeking more just exchanges “for all” through investment and trade is a significant challenge. The danger is that less developed parts of the world, or less powerful groups within a country, will be exploited or excluded from participation in global markets.

When a developing country becomes heavily indebted, the poorest are usually the most adversely affected. A huge share of a country’s income must be used to pay off debt, which may have been incurred unjustly or under corrupt rulers. Structural adjustment programs to pay off debt typically divert funds from much needed educational, health, and environmental efforts, and from infrastructures for economic development.

God stands in judgment of those in authority who fall short of their responsibility, and is moved with compassion to deliver the impoverished from all that oppresses them: “Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute” (Psalm 82:3). The rich are expected to use wealth to benefit their neighbors who live in poverty here and throughout the world.

In light of these realities, *we commit ourselves* as a church ⁶ and urge members to:

- address creatively and courageously the complex causes of poverty;
- provide opportunities for dialogue, learning, and strategizing among people of different economic situations and from different regions who are harmed by global economic changes;
- give more to relieve conditions of poverty, and invest more in initiatives to reduce poverty.

We call for:

- scrutiny of how specific policies and practices affect people and nations that are the poorest, and changes to make policies of economic growth, trade, and investment more beneficial to those who are poor;
- efforts to increase the participation of low-income people in political and civic life, and citizen vigilance and action that challenges governments and other sectors when they become captive to narrow economic interests that do not represent the good of all;
- shifts throughout the world from military expenditures to purposes that serve the needs of low-income people;

- support for family planning and enhanced opportunities for women so that population pressures might be eased;⁷
- reduction of overwhelming international debt burdens in ways that do not impose further deprivations on the poor, and cancellation of some or all debt where severe indebtedness immobilizes a country's economy;
- investments, loan funds, hiring practices, skill training, and funding of micro-enterprises and other community development projects that can empower low-income people economically.

Livelihood: vocation, work, and human dignity

Vocation: Our calling from God begins in the waters of Baptism and is lived out in a wide array of settings and relationships. Freed through the Gospel, we are to serve others through arenas of responsibility such as family, work, and community life. Although we continue to be ensnared in the ambiguities and sin of this world, our vocation is to seek what is good for people and the rest of creation in ways that glorify God and anticipate God's promised future.

"Livelihood" designates our means of subsistence or how we are supported economically. This occurs through paid jobs, self-employment, business ownership, and accumulated wealth, as well as through support of family, community networks, and government assistance.

Strong families, neighborhoods, and schools should support and help prepare persons for livelihood. Churches, businesses, financial institutions, government, and civil society also play key roles. Through these relationships people can be enabled and obligated to pursue their livelihoods as they are able. When these infrastructures for livelihood are absent, weak, or threatened (as they are for many today), people are more likely to be impoverished materially, emotionally, or spiritually.

Through these relationships and structures, individuals can learn important virtues, such as:

- trust, accountability, and fidelity in relationships;
- discipline, honesty, diligence, and responsibility in work;
- frugality, prudence, and temperance in the use of resources;
- compassion and justice toward other people and the rest of creation.

These virtues, along with perspectives and skills acquired through education and training, make it more likely that individuals will be able to flourish in their livelihood.

We commit ourselves as a church and urge members to:

- develop God-given capacities and provide stable, holistic, loving development of children and youth through families, neighborhoods, congregations, and other institutions;
- support and encourage one another as we live out our vocation in ways that serve the neighbor and contribute to family and community vitality;
- pray and act to provide livelihood for ourselves and others through the institutions of our day, trusting in God's providential care for all.

We call for:

- policies that promote stable families, strong schools, and safe neighborhoods;
- addressing the barriers individuals face in preparing for and sustaining a livelihood (such as lack of education, transportation, child care, and health care).

Work: In Genesis, work is to be a means through which basic needs might be met, as human beings “till and keep” the garden in which God has placed them (Genesis 2:15). Work is seen not as an end in itself, but as a means for sustaining humans and the rest of creation. Due to sin, the work God gives to humans also becomes toil and anguish (Genesis 3:17,19). Injustice often deprives people of the fruits of their work (Proverbs 13:23), which benefits others instead.

God calls people to use their freedom and responsibility, their capacities and know-how to participate productively in God's world. As stewards of what God has entrusted to us, we should use available resources to generate jobs for the livelihood of more people, as well as to create capital for the growth needed to meet basic needs. Wealth should serve or benefit others so that they also might live productively.

What matters in many jobs today, rather than a sense of vocation, is the satisfaction of wants or desires that the pay from work makes possible. Work becomes a means toward increased consumerism. Many also feel a constant sense of being judged, having to measure up according to an unrelenting bottom line of productivity or profit. We are freed from such economic captivity by the forgiveness, new life, and dignity that is ours in Christ.

Competitive economic forces, as well as changing technologies and consumer demands, significantly affect the kinds of jobs available and the nature of work. Increased productivity and technological innovation continue to make some jobs obsolete, while creating others. A growing proportion of jobs are part-time, temporary, or contractual, without the longevity and security assumed in the past. Workers in the United States increasingly produce services rather than tangible goods. Many people choose to be self-

employed. A large number lose their jobs when companies merge, downsize, or move to areas with lower labor costs.

Job transitions can be enriching, but also painful. Feeling invested in one's job as a calling or being able to count on a future livelihood can be difficult when work is continually in flux. Many workers feel treated as if they are dispensable. Amid these changes, our faith reminds us that our security and livelihood rest ultimately on God. Our hope is grounded in God's promise—that people “shall long enjoy the work of their hands” (Isaiah 65:21). This gives us courage to ask why changes are occurring, to challenge forces of greed and injustice when they deny some people what they need to live, and, when necessary, to seek new possibilities for livelihood.

Therefore, *we commit ourselves* as a church and urge members to:

- deliberate together about the challenges people face in their work;
- counsel and support those who are unemployed, underemployed, and under going job transitions;
- provide skill and language enhancement training that will enable the most vulnerable (including new immigrants) to become better prepared for jobs.

We call for:

- public and private sector partnerships to create jobs and job retention programs;
- national economic policies that support and advance the goal of low unemployment.

Human dignity: Human beings are created “in God's image” (Genesis 1:27) as social beings whose dignity, worth, and value are conferred by God. Although our identity does not depend on what we do, through our work we should be able to express this God-given dignity as persons of integrity, worth, and meaning. Yet work does not constitute the whole of our life. When we are viewed and treated only as workers, we tend to be exploited.

Employers have a responsibility to treat employees with dignity and respect. This should be reflected in employees' remuneration, benefits, work conditions, job security, and ongoing job training. Employees have a responsibility to work to the best of their potential in a reliable and responsible manner. This includes work habits, attitudes toward employers and co-workers, and a willingness to adapt and prepare for new work situations. No one should be coerced to work under conditions that violate their dignity or freedom, jeopardize their health or safety, result in neglect of their family's wellbeing, or provide unjust compensation for their labor.

Our God-given dignity in community means that we are to participate actively in decisions that impact our lives, rather than only passively accept decisions others make for us. People should be involved in decision making that directly affects their work. They should also be free to determine their lives independent of particular jobs. Public policy can provide economic and other conditions that protect human freedom and dignity in relation to work.

Power disparities and competing interests are present in most employment situations. Employers need competent, committed workers, but this does not necessarily presume respect for the personal lives and needs of individual workers. Individual workers depend on the organization for employment as their means of livelihood, but this does not necessarily presume respect for the organization's interest and goals. Management and employees move toward justice as they seek cooperative ways of negotiating these interests when they conflict. Because employees often are vulnerable and lack power in such negotiations, they may need to organize in their quest for human dignity and justice. When this occurs, accurate information and fair tactics are expected of all parties involved.

We commit ourselves as a church to:

- hire without discriminating on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, disabilities, sexual orientation, or genetic factors;
- compensate all people we call or employ at an amount sufficient for them to live in dignity;
- provide adequate pension and health benefits, safe and healthy work conditions, sufficient periods of rest, vacation, and sabbatical, and family-friendly work schedules;
- cultivate participatory workplaces, support the right of employees to organize for the sake of better working conditions and to engage in collective bargaining, and refrain from intentionally undercutting union organizing activities, or from permanently replacing striking workers.

We call for:

- other employers to engage in similar practices;
- government enforcement of regulations against discrimination, exploitative work conditions and labor practices (including child labor), and for the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively;
- public policies that ensure adequate social security, unemployment insurance, and health care coverage;
- a minimum wage level that balances employees' need for sufficient income with what would be significant negative effects on overall employment;
- tax credits and other means of supplementing the insufficient income of low-

paid workers in order to move them out of poverty.

Sufficiency: enough, but not too much

“Sufficiency” means adequate access to income and other resources that enable people to meet their basic needs, including nutrition, clothing, housing, health care, personal development, and participation in community with dignity. God has created a world of sufficiency for all, providing us daily and abundantly with all the necessities of life.⁸ In many countries, the problem is not the lack of resources, but how they are shared, distributed, and made accessible within society. Justice seeks fairness in how goods, services, income, and wealth are allocated among people so that they can acquire what they need to live.

Human need and the right to ownership often are in tension with each other. The biblical understanding of stewardship is that what we have does not ultimately belong to us. We are called to be stewards of what God has given for the sake of all. This stewardship includes holding economic, political, and social processes and institutions responsible for producing and distributing what is needed for sufficiency for all. Private property is affirmed insofar as it serves as a useful, yet imperfect means to meet the basic needs of individuals, households, and communities.

Government is intended to serve God’s purposes by limiting or countering narrow economic interests and promoting the common good. Paying taxes to enable government to carry out these and other purposes is an appropriate expression of our stewardship in society, rather than something to be avoided. Government often falls short of these responsibilities. Its policies can harm the common good and especially the most vulnerable in society. Governing leaders are to be held accountable to God’s purposes: “May [they] judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. . . . May [they] defend the cause of the poor of the people” (Psalm 72:2).

The lack of material sufficiency for some within the human community is itself a spiritual problem. “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help?” (1 John. 3:17). Sin disrupts our bonds with and our sense of responsibility for one another. We live separated from others on the basis of income and wealth, and resent what others have. Huge disparities in income and wealth, such as those we face in this country, threaten the integrity of the human community.

Those who are rich and those who are poor are called into relationships of generosity from which each can benefit. Within the Church, those in need and those with abundance are brought together in Christ. On this basis and in the face of disparities in the church of his day, Paul calls for “a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need.” In so doing, “the one who

had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.” (2 Corinthians 8:9, 13-15).

God’s mandate is clear. “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice . . . and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?” (Isaiah 58:6-7). God’s lavish, justifying grace frees us from self-serving preoccupations and calls us to a life of mutual generosity as we relate to all who are our neighbors. Faith becomes active through personal relationships, direct assistance, and wider policy changes in society.

Not enough: In the United States, tens of millions of people live in poverty, although many refuse to think of themselves as “poor.” Some make daily choices as to which necessities they will have to live without. Many work part- or full-time, but on that basis, are still unable to lift their families out of poverty. Others are physically or mentally unable to work. Many lack the family, educational, and community support important for making good choices in their lives. Although those living in poverty are particularly visible in cities, their more hidden reality in suburban, small town, and rural areas can be just as painful. A greater proportion of people of color live in conditions of poverty. The poor are disproportionately women with their children.⁹ Systemic racism and sexism continue to be evident in the incidence of poverty.

In light of these realities, ***we commit ourselves*** as a church and urge members to:

- provide counsel, food, clothing, shelter, and money for people in need, in ways that respect their dignity;
- develop mutual, face-to-face, empowering relationships between people who have enough and people living in poverty, especially through congregational and synodical partnerships;
- advocate for public and private policies that effectively address the causes of poverty;
- generously support organizations and community-based efforts that enable low-income people to obtain more sufficient, sustainable livelihoods;
- continue working to eradicate racism and sexism.

We call for:

- government to provide adequate income assistance and related services for citizens, documented immigrants, and refugees who are unable to provide for their livelihood through employment;
- adequate, consistent public funding for the various low-income services non-profit organizations provide for the common good of all;
- scrutiny to ensure that new ways of providing low-income people with

assistance and services (such as through the private sector) do not sacrifice the most vulnerable for the sake of economic efficiency and profit;

- correction of regressive tax systems, so that people are taxed progressively in relation to their ability to pay;
- opposition to lotteries and other state-sponsored gambling because of how these regressive means of raising state revenues adversely affect those who are poor.¹⁰

Too much: Because most of us in the United States have far more than we need, we can easily fall into bondage to what we have. We then become like the young man Jesus encountered, whose bondage to his possessions kept him from following Jesus (Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-25).

We consume goods and use services to meet our needs. To increase consumption and expand sales, businesses stimulate ever new *wants*. Rather than human need shaping consumption, advertising and media promotion both shape and expand *wants*. Our very being becomes expressed through what we have or desire to possess. When consuming to meet basic needs turns into consumerism as an end in itself, we face a serious crisis of faith.

Endless accumulation of possessions and pursuit of wealth can become our god as we yearn for a life without limits. “Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you” (Isaiah 5:8). Many look to material possessions and money as the means for participating in the “fullness of life,” and thus become ever more dependent on economic transactions. But Jesus asks, “What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?” (Luke 9:25).

In the United States, people’s worth and value tend to be measured by the size of their income and wealth. If judged by their multimillion dollar compensations, top corporate officers and sports superstars would seem to be the most highly valued in our society. Enormous disparities between their compensations and the average wages of workers are scandalous.

The economic power of large transnational corporations continues to grow, making some of them larger than many national economies. Along with this financial strength comes an inordinate potential to influence political decisions, local and regional economies, and democratic processes in society. The power they wield, enhanced through mergers and buyouts, can have positive effects, but it can also hold others captive to transnational corporate interests. The global community must continue to seek effective ways to hold these and other powerful economic actors more accountable for the sake of sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all.

In light of these realities, ***we commit ourselves*** as a church and urge members to:

- examine how we are in bondage to our possessions and can be freed to be faithful stewards of them;
- serious and ongoing consideration in our families and congregations of how to resist the allure of consumerism and live lives less oriented toward the accumulation of goods and financial assets;
- educate one another, beginning with the young, on how to deal responsibly with money, credit, and spending within one's means;
- give generously of our wealth (for example, through tithing and planned giving), especially for purposes that serve the needs of others.

We call for:

- corporate policies that lessen the disparities between compensations of top corporate executives and that of the workers throughout an organization;
- corporate governance that is accountable for the effects of a company's practices on workers, communities, and the environment here and throughout the world;
- scrutiny of the tax breaks, subsidies, and incentives many companies receive, to assure that they serve the common good;
- enforcement of laws to prevent the exercise of inordinate market power by large corporations;
- appropriate government regulatory reform so that governments can monitor private sector practices more effectively and efficiently in an ever-changing global economy.

Sustainability: of the environment, agriculture, and low-income communities

“Sustainability” is the capacity of natural and social systems to survive and thrive together over the long term. What is sufficient in providing for people's wants often is in tension with what can be sustained over time. Sustainability has implications for how we evaluate economic activity in terms of its ongoing effects on the wellbeing of both nature and human communities. Economic life should help sustain humans and the rest of creation—now and in the future.

Efforts to provide a sufficient livelihood must be sustainable economically. Individuals and families should not borrow more than they are able to pay back and still meet their future needs. Governments should not finance their spending by excessive borrowing or money creation that reduces national income and production, and threatens the liveli-

hood of future generations. Tax rates and government regulations must not be so burdensome as to stifle the production of the very goods and services people need to live.

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” (Psalm 24:1). As God created, so God also sustains: “When you send forth your spirit . . . you renew the face of the ground” (Psalm 104:30). God makes a covenant with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature that they will not be destroyed (Genesis 9:8-17). In God’s promise of “new heavens and a new earth . . . they shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit” (Isaiah 65:17, 21). The vantage point of the kingdom of God motivates us to focus on more than short-term gains. Humans, called to be stewards of God’s creation, are to respect the integrity and limits of the earth and its resources.

Sustaining the environment: The growth of economic activity during the twentieth century, and the industrialization and consumerism that fueled it, radically changed the relationship between humans and the earth. Too often the earth has been treated as a waste receptacle and a limitless storehouse of raw materials to be used up for the sake of economic growth, rather than as a finite, fragile ecological system upon which human and all other life depends.

Instead of being stewards who care for the long-term wellbeing of creation, we confess that we have depleted non-renewable resources, eroded topsoil, and polluted the air, ground, and water. Without appropriate environmental care, economic growth cannot be sustained. Caring for creation means that economic processes should respect environmental limits. “When we act interdependently and in solidarity with creation, we *do* justice. We serve and keep the earth, trusting its bounty can be sufficient for all, and sustainable.”¹¹

We commit ourselves as a church and urge members to:

- use less, re-use, recycle, and restore natural resources;
- plan for careful land use of church property, and receive and manage gifts of land and real estate in sustainable ways.

We call for:

- appropriate policies and regulations that help reverse environmental destruction;
- planning that accounts for the impact of regional growth on communities and ecosystems;
- ending subsidies for economic activities that use up non-renewable natural resources;

- companies to pay more fully for the wider social and environmental costs of what they produce; the development and use of more energy-efficient technologies.

Sustaining agriculture: Agriculture is basic to the survival and security of people throughout the world. Through the calling of agriculture, farmers produce the grain for our daily bread and the rest of our food supply. Without a bountiful and low-cost food supply, most Americans would not enjoy the livelihood they do. Farmers face the challenge of producing this food in ways that contribute to the regeneration of the land and the vitality of rural communities. At the same time, society as a whole must address the high levels of risk farmers face and the low prices they often receive. Changing agricultural policies and the growing power of large agribusiness corporations make this even more challenging.

We commit ourselves as a church and urge members to:

- pray for and support those who farm the land;
- pursue new ways for consumers to partner with small farmers in sharing the risks and yields of farming.

We call for:

- changes to assure that farmers will receive a greater proportion of the retail food dollar;
- adequate prices for agricultural products so that farmers can be compensated fairly for their labor and production costs;
- sustainable agricultural practices that protect and restore the regenerative capacities of the land, rather than practices that deplete the land (for example, by measuring productivity only by short-term agricultural yields);
- more just work conditions for farm workers, especially immigrants, and opportunities for them to acquire their own land.

Sustainable development of low-income communities: In many low-income communities, disinvestment and neglect have taken their toll. In contrast to this are examples of sustainable community economic development that take into account the overall health and welfare of people, the environment, and the local economy. Such an approach creates jobs, prepares people for work, generates income that is re-circulated several times in the community, and sustains and renews environmental resources, all for the sake of a community's long-term viability.

Instead of a top-down approach focused on a community's deprivation and its lack of economic growth, effective community development draws upon its assets and empha-

sizes quality and diverse production. Effective policies build and enhance a community's social relationships, values, and institutions, which together can further economic development. Local residents determine the future of their community by initiating, supporting, and sustaining new projects. Their capacities, skills, and assets help shape the vision and plan for the community.

Through broad-based community organizing people can be mobilized to address economic and other issues that directly affect them. Government and the private sector also must invest in health, education, and infrastructures necessary for sustainable development. When people and resources are connected in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness, this will help bring about productive results and meaningful participation in community and economic life.

Therefore, *we commit ourselves* as a church and urge members to:

- learn about, participate in, and provide financial support for community economic development and organizing strategies that enhance the current and future wellbeing of communities and the environment;
- support community development corporations and locally-owned or producer-owned cooperatives;
- integrate social values into our investment decisions, and invest more in socially responsible companies and funds that sustain businesses as well as workers, consumers, the environment, and low-income communities.

We call for:

- support of the above strategies by governments, financial institutions, and the wider society;
- alternatives to gambling as a means of community economic development;
- grants and low-interest loans that enable small companies and farms to get started, develop, and expand in order to provide livelihood for more people in low-income communities.

In conclusion, a vision renewed

Pursuing policies and practices that will lead to “sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all” is such a formidable challenge that to many it seems unrealistic or not worth the effort. The Church as an employer, property owner, consumer, investor, and community of believers can be as caught up in the reigning economic assumptions as the rest of society. But despite the Church's failings, through the Word and the sacraments, we are forgiven, renewed, and nourished. At the Table, we together receive the same bread and drink of the same cup. What we receive is sufficient; it does sustain us. We are strength-

ened to persist in the struggle for justice as we look forward to the coming of God's kingdom in all its fullness.

We are sent forth into the world to bear witness to God's promised reign. The world is the whole household of God that economic life is intended to serve. The Spirit of God expands our vision and transforms our priorities. We realize that we do not eat alone; everyone needs to eat. The multitudes present around God's global table become our neighbors rather than competitors or strangers. Empowered by God, we continue to act, pray, and hope that through economic life there truly will be sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all.

Implementing Resolutions

To recommend that the 1999 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America adopt the following resolutions:

1. To adopt "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All" as a social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in accordance with "Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns" (1997);
2. To call upon members of this church to pray, work, and advocate that all might have a sufficient, sustainable livelihood, and to draw upon this statement in forming their own judgments and actions in their ministries in daily life;
3. To call upon our bishops, pastors, and other rostered leaders to give renewed attention to how Scripture, liturgy, preaching, hymnody, and prayers may express God's will for economic life and empower a faith active for justice, and to provide leadership in seeking economic justice in their communities;
4. To challenge all congregations, synods, and churchwide units to carry out the substance and spirit of this statement and intensify their work with various ecumenical, interfaith, and secular groups in pursuit of its commitments;
5. To encourage the education, service, and outreach ministries of this church in their work for economic justice;
6. To urge churchwide units and affiliated organizations (social ministry organizations, schools, colleges/ universities, and seminaries) to review and adjust their programs and practices in light of this social statement;
7. To direct the Division for Church in Society, in cooperation with other churchwide units, to provide leadership, consultation, and educational and worship resources on the basis of this statement, particularly through the development of resources that interpret

this statement and develop its implications for different arenas of responsibility;

8. To direct the Division for Church in Society to expand its work in advocating for corporate social responsibility, in assisting with community economic development, and in public policy advocacy that furthers the various commitments made in this statement;

9. To call upon the members of this church to give generously to the World Hunger Appeal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, so that the Lutheran World Federation, Lutheran World Relief, domestic hunger grants, and our partner ecumenical agencies might do more in helping to alleviate the causes and consequences of hunger, poverty, and injustice; and to call upon the members of this church to participate actively in supporting these and similar ministries; and

10. To call upon the educational institutions of this church schools, colleges, universities, seminaries, continuing education centers, camps, and retreat centers to develop programs and educational resources in light of this statement so people can be better prepared to respond to the challenges of economic life.

Notes

All Scriptural references are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (1989).

1. See Martin Luther's discussion of this in "The Large Catechism," The Book of Concord, Theodore G. Tappert, transl. and ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 430-431.
2. The Fifth Commandment as discussed in "The Large Catechism," BC, 391.
3. The Seventh Commandment as discussed in "The Large Catechism," BC, 395.
4. The Ninth and Tenth commandments, "The Large Catechism," BC, 406.
5. See the ELCA Message, "Immigration" (1998) and the ELCA Social Statement, "For Peace in God's World" (1995), available from the Division for Church in Society (Call 800-638-3522, extension 2712, for this and other ELCA statements and studies).
6. In this and subsequent "we commit" sections, "church" includes congregations, synods, the churchwide organization, and where relevant, this calls upon affiliated organizations such as seminaries, schools, colleges and universities, and social ministry organizations to adjust their policies and practices accordingly.
7. "Global population growth, for example, relates to the lack of access by women to family planning and health care, quality education, fulfilling employment, and equal rights." ELCA Social Statement, "Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice" (1993), 3-4.
8. See how Luther explains the First Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism.
9. See the Women and Children Living in Poverty Strategy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (800-638-3522, extension 2863).
10. See "Gambling: A Study for Congregations" (Division for Church in Society, 1998), 20-22.
11. "Caring for Creation . . ." (1993).

Copyright © September 1999 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Produced by the Department for Studies of the Division for Church in Society.

Permission is granted to reproduce this document as needed providing each copy displays the copyright as printed above.

Ordering Information

Copies of this message are available in packets of 10 at a cost of \$1.00 per packet (plus shipping and handling) from: ELCA Distribution Service (800-328-4648, 426 South Fifth Street, Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN, 55440). Single, complimentary copies may be obtained by calling 800-638-3522 ext. 2718. Spanish translations of this statement are available using the same information.

 Printed on Recycled Paper
with Soy-Based Ink

69-XXXX
ISBN X1-2345-6789-X