

A SOCIAL STATEMENT ON POVERTY

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Justice for the impoverished and dispossessed has been the concern of the people of God under both the Old and New Covenants. Under the divine imperative of prophetic faith, Christians today continue to seek justice for all whose lives are subject to abject poverty. Under the abundant mercy of the Father of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, Christians are constrained to minister compassionately to the needs of all their neighbors. Motivated by the love of God in Christ, the church has this double commission; to serve human need and to testify prophetically for justice in the ordering of society and the use of its resources.

Poverty is an age-old affliction of the human race. Concern for the poor, both through the economic arrangements of society and through the expression of personal responsibility, is a continuing theme throughout the Old and New Testaments. Today we find ourselves confronted by a radically new and potentially explosive situation in human society. On the one hand, the population explosion and modern technological developments threaten to create a class of human beings who are economically superfluous, and who find themselves increasingly sealed off from participation in the economic benefits of society.

On the other hand, the revolution in technology holds out, for the first time in history, the possibility of the virtual elimination of hunger and basic economic deprivation both at home and throughout the world. The contrast between plenty and poverty, on the domestic and on the world scene, becomes doubly scandalous in the light of this new possibility.

The possibilities for good inherent in God's new gifts to humanity in technology will not be realized without changes in some attitudes and in some economic arrangements. Today's situation presents vastly new dimensions of justice and confronts serving love with opportunities hitherto undreamed of. Realizing that no conclusive word can yet be spoken about new forms of social and economic order, or even of proper attitudes underlying them, the Lutheran Church in America sets forth the following ethical judgments in the conviction that they are in continuity with biblical concern for the poor, and are obedient administration of its understanding of God's grace and the abundance of nature.

1. We rejoice in the applied achievements of science and technology which make it possible, currently in industrially developed countries and potentially throughout the whole world, to provide basically adequate levels of living for all.
2. We approve of declarations of public policy in our own countries (U.S.A. and Canada) which seek to eliminate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty and further seek to open to everyone opportunities for education and training, for work, and for living in decency and dignity.
3. We believe that in nations where conditions of abundance exist, it should be the goal of the national economy to provide every able-bodied adult with the opportunity for meaningful employment sufficiently remunerative to secure, at the very least, the minimal necessities required in our society for living in decency and dignity. Further, where a full employment economy is not possible or not desirable, or where individual inadequacies exist, we believe our countries have the responsibility to move as readily as possible to assure income adequate to secure the minimal standard of living.
4. We believe that although the establishment of social justice is primarily a responsibility of governing authority, it is appropriate that innovative programs designed to counteract the causes of economic deprivation be enacted by any agencies having such responsibility.

5. We recognize that, in a time of population explosion, the problems of hunger and poverty cannot be solved without substantial attention to population planning. We affirm the responsibility of governmental and nongovernmental agencies to make available to the deprived the same knowledge and means of conception control already available to others.
6. We are reminded by the "revolution of rising expectations" of the universal dimensions of the present challenge to eradicate poverty. Any commitment to the elimination of domestic poverty must be accompanied by a commitment to seek justice in the reduction of the disparity between rich and poor nations by programs designed to assist the developing nations to raise their standard of living.
7. We encourage the congregations, the synods and the agencies of the church to be open to the kind of cooperation with public and voluntary agencies which as part of the church's witness to God's love in Jesus Christ will enable them to participate in the struggle against poverty in measures fully consistent with the resources God has given us and our responsibility for the use of those resources.

The Lutheran Church in America commits itself to the struggle against poverty in full continuity with the biblical testimony about concern for the poor. While it recognizes that the forms of this struggle are subject to human judgment and are open to differences of opinion among fully committed Christian persons, it does not believe that commitment to the struggle is an open question for Christians.