

# **A STATEMENT ON YOUTH AND VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS**

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Adopted by the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the Lutheran Church in America  
Toronto, Ontario, June 28-July 5, 1984

## **RESOLUTIONS:**

**Resolved, That Lutheran Church in America - Canada Section request the Synods to commend to the youth in their congregations the opportunities for Christian social responsibility through volunteer programs sponsored by public agencies, voluntary agencies, and by the churches.**

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The 1965 Convention of Lutheran Church in America - Canada Section noted the interest of the Federal Government in youth, e.g., The Company of Young Canadians. The convention was encouraged to consider the involvement of Lutheran young people in such developments. In response to that concern this report expresses a viewpoint concerning youth and volunteer programs.

Ours is an acquisitive society. Youth are caught up in a success and achievement-oriented way of life. Their training and the emphasis on career skills are to fit them to serve the needs of our economic system. They become means to increase the Gross National Product. Generally speaking, society has not seen prolonged voluntary service by youth as a value.

While youth are maturing early, we have extended their dependence upon older adults because of the need for more and more education in a technological age. As a whole, society has not made provision for these young adults to participate in the larger community before they launch out into their careers.

Some young persons have decided to opt out. Clothing and hair styles become symbols of non-conformity. The behavior we see is more than a symptom of non-conformity. The behavior we see is more than a symptom of adolescent turmoil and of rebellious youth. There is a great deal of talk about the new morality. On one hand, it is seen superficially as the sexual revolution. On the other hand, it is more likely that we have misread the new morality. It is said that the new morality stems from political and social attitudes.

There is reason to believe that the generation now coming to maturity in Canada is unusually aware of social and economic inequalities. We are living in an age in which young people have to be considered as serious agents and proponents of social change. In high school and university the development of the social and behavioral sciences provide our youth with a deeper insight into the shortcomings of our society. They become aware of such things as power groups, social injustices, economic deprivation, human rights, and so on. Such insights make them more sensitive to duplicity. They note that our democratic values and our performance are not always the same. While some of the responses of youth may seem irresponsible, it should be noted that there are youth who have put their bodies where suffering and injustice exist. They can, out of their experience, speak to us of the realities of the world. They represent the first generation to know that man has the resources to eliminate poverty, illiteracy, and disease. They are aware that too many people are living in the basement of our affluent society. In a technological age this means permanent exclusion. We must admit, as Prime Minister Pearson put it, that "the door on the basement stairs is hard to open from the basement side."

The dominant goal of social change must be to help people to better themselves and their communities by development of their own potential, and by being enabled to utilize the resources available to them for changing their own situations. This means that people are helped to participate in the democratic process. This will always pose a threat to the status quo and will annoy people in influential positions. But a healthy democracy must be continually open to self-criticism.

The Gospel calls us to be sensitive to human need. To bring ambulance service to the casualties of our society, while necessary, is not enough. Sensitivity to human need must involve the church in developing a climate in which all people, including our youth, can constructively be agents of social change. "What makes the church literally an *ecclesia* is that its members have been called out of the world only to be oriented and sent back into the world, with a divinely authorized mission."<sup>1</sup> The world is God's creation. Christians respond to God's love by reaching out into "the whole community with a total concern."<sup>2</sup> Christians with inventive love "do all kinds of things, as the manifestation of the new life in Christ. They may do these things together through the organized church or through organizations outside the church, private (voluntary) or public (governmental)."<sup>3</sup>

Society cannot do without the constructive involvement of the majority generation. More than half the world's population is under 25 years of age. However, we must not utilize these youth in a paternalistic way. Rather we must engage them in a way that challenges their energies and capabilities and which appeals to toughness of character.

It is not enough to exhort individual effort without providing channels. "Our modern world easily frustrates even the most highly motivated Christian who sallies forth alone."<sup>4</sup> He needs the strength of a group. He needs some channels that will help him tie in with the larger social and redevelopment plans. He needs structure that will assure continuity of the efforts to which he has contributed.

Our church, therefore, should encourage its youth to exercise Christian social responsibility through various channels. It should support government and voluntary efforts which seek to involve all youth. There are channels such as the Company of Young Canadians, Canadian University Service Overseas, Summer Service Projects sponsored by the churches individually or jointly, Work Camps, overseas projects and other programs sponsored by the churches, projects sponsored by provinces such as the Alberta Service Corps, Frontier College, volunteer programs of community social agencies, and possibly others.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Church in Social Welfare, An Exploratory Study of the Role of the Lutheran Church in America in Social Welfare.* 1964, p. 11

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103