

ELCA Social Statements

Found at elca.org

- 1991 Abortion
- 1991 Church in Society
- 1991 The Death Penalty
- 1993 Race, Ethnicity and Culture
- 1993 Caring for Creation
- 1995 Peace
- 1999 Economic Life
- 2003 Health and Health Care
- 2007 Education
- 2009 Human Sexuality
- 2011 Genetics
- 2013 The Church and Criminal Justice

Coming Soon...Women and Justice

FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL STATEMENTS

- God as our creator, we are made in the image of God, one with the whole creation
- Through Jesus, we are justified by grace through faith and freed to care for all of God's creation, seeking justice and peace for all
- The Holy Spirit is always at work inspiring us in new ways to live in this world and in relationship with one another
- God's intention for all of humanity is abundant life for all. But because of sin, this is not happening.

PROCESS OF FORMING SOCIAL STATEMENTS

- Synods propose the need for a social statement on an issue
- Task force is formed made up of people with specialized knowledge of the issue, those directly affected by the issue, pastors and/or theologians
- The task force puts together a draft of the social statement. These go out to congregations and synods for study and feedback.
- The feedback is taken into consideration by the task force as they put together the final draft of the social statement.
- The final draft has to be adopted by a vote at the churchwide assembly

Sufficiency: enough, but not too much (from *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*)

“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 Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All 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 nonprofit organizations provide for the common good of all;
- scrutiny to ensure that new ways of providing low-income people with A Social Statement on Economic Life 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

Questions for Small Group Time:

1. Which social statement do you think you'd be most interested in reading? Why?

2. Are there any issues facing society now for which you think we need a new social statement?

2. How do you see your church working to improve the lives of others? Are there issues in society that you would like to see churches be more involved in? What are some suggestions of ways your church could help with those issues?