

A Pastoral Letter from the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Almighty God, . . . teach us how to govern the ways of business to the harm of none and for the sake of the common good; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 78

Grace and peace to you.

As bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we are deeply concerned about the current financial crisis, which is affecting not only our nation but the entire global economy. This crisis is causing fear and loss in our country as thousands of families face unemployment, foreclosure, and uncertainty about savings and pensions. Meanwhile, they struggle to put food on the table and gas into their cars. The future is uncertain for all of us, but it is especially frightening for those who are already vulnerable and struggling to survive. We offer our prayers for those whose lives are being affected and for our national leaders as they seek to address this complex matter.

We call on all people in our own communities of faith and those from every segment of our society who seek the health of our nation to join in conversation and prayer about our collective economic life, our financial behaviors, and the interconnectedness of all life and creation that cries out to be reclaimed.

This church has addressed the issues surrounding economic life in its social statement, “Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All,” (www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Economic-Life.aspx), and we encourage the use of this statement as a way to understand more fully how the following theological and biblical principles are central as we respond to this situation.



Concern for People in Poverty

The constitution of the ELCA calls this church to serve by “standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs.” (ELCA 4.02.c.). We are grateful for the pastors and leaders in our congregations who already have stepped forward to care for those who are suffering, and we encourage them to continue this response and to provide leadership in the task of turning our attention to the causes and effects of this crisis. We are called to work toward an economic system that truly serves the common good and especially the needs of the poor. We look for partnership with all those who seek to address this financial crisis in a way that also recognizes the humanitarian issues involved.



Personal and Corporate Responsibility

The ELCA social statement on economic life calls for individuals to live responsibly and within their means and to beware of the dangers of over-consumption and unnecessary accumulation, which draw us beyond authentic need into excess and destructive indebtedness. We call on businesses and corporations of all sizes to consider the social implications of company policies and to practice good stewardship of creation (Genesis 1:26).



The Need for Good Government

We hold and teach that government has an instrumental and constructive role to play in our shared life. This role includes “limiting or countering narrow economic interests and promoting the common good” (“Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All,” p. 11). We call on government to hold corporations and other powerful economic actors accountable for the effects of their practices on workers, communities, and the environment.



The Benefits and Limits of Free Markets

For many people, the current market-based economy has proven to be effective as a system to meet material need, generate wealth, and create opportunity. However, we hold and teach that any economic system should be measured by the degree to which it serves God’s purposes for humankind and creation. Those who have been blessed by the fruits of our economy are called to be generous in giving to those who have lost much and to advocate for accountability and appropriate regulation in this system.

As people of the God who calls us out of fear into hope and community, we welcome all people into widespread and respectful discussion about this current crisis. In this way we can create partnerships that will help those whose lives are being shattered and encourage responsibility and integrity in our national economic life.

As people of faith we pray:

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ dignified our labor by sharing our toil. Guide us with your justice in the workplace, so that we may never value things above people, or surrender honor to love of gain or lust for power. Prosper all efforts to put an end to work that brings no joy, and teach us how to govern the ways of business to the harm of none and for the sake of the common good; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**The Conference of Bishops
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