



LUTHERAN RESOURCES FOR WORKER JUSTICE

Urgent issues of economic justice demand attention and response from all Christians today. Lutherans are becoming aware of this faith-based responsibility to working people, the working poor, and the most destitute of our fellow citizens. Growing numbers of Lutheran pastors, laypersons, and community leaders are beginning to address issues of workplace justice in cooperation with representatives of other religious communities and unions.

The major Lutheran churches are the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Church. Members of each of these bodies are actively involved in the cause of worker justice, but only the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has adopted official positions in this area. Its basic position is stated in the 1991 Churchwide Assembly Resolution on Workers' Rights. The social statement adopted at the 1999 Churchwide Assembly, entitled "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All," expressed this commitment in greater detail in the section "Livelihood: vocation, work, and human dignity." Both statements are included in this collection of Lutheran resources relating to the struggle for worker justice. Lutheran theological and ethical insights, interviews with persons involved in workplace and economic justice activities, and worship suggestions are also included.

"Working people are near the edge economically. They are often just months of time payments away from poverty. Their lives are affected by global trends. They don't register in the media. They fly beneath the radar of most public policy and issues," said the Rev. Dr. Stephen Paul Bouman, bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Lutheran ideas of the dignity of vocation and of justification by grace have far reaching implications for how working people are regarded, he noted. Biblical texts – including Moses in Egypt welcoming his brothers who were economic migrants; the story of Ruth and Naomi; and the blue collar folks Jesus picked as his disciples – offer insight into the need for proper respect and treatment of workers, he said.



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Martin Luther and Worker Justice — Alexia Salvatierra

Economic justice was not one of Martin Luther's primary passions, nor has the Lutheran church been consistently at the forefront of the fight for economic justice. However, the core beliefs of Lutheran theology clearly support the struggle for fair wages and benefits in the workplace. At the core of Lutheran theology is the call to faith in a God whose love is unimaginably great, broad, deep and full. God's love embraces all aspects of our physical and emotional lives. God intends that we have "everything required to satisfy our bodily needs, such as food and clothing, house and home, fields and flocks, money and property." Martin Luther saw the process of obtaining what we need, our labor, as a holy act when performed in faith and gratitude; "picking up a piece of straw" could be equal in God's eyes to formal prayer and study (*Treatise on Good Works*).

While Luther emphasized the internal stance of the individual and the individual's existential relationship with God as primary concerns, he unquestionably expected faith in God's grace to result in righteous action. In his small and large catechisms, he painted a passionate picture of the kinds of behavior that would arise from faith – including the arena of labor relations. Luther's exegesis of the seventh commandment (Thou shalt not steal) includes the following passage:

"For to steal is nothing else than to get possession of another's property wrongfully, which briefly comprehends all kinds of advantage in all sorts of trade to the disadvantage of our neighbor. To steal is to signify not only to empty our neighbor's coffer and pockets, but to be grasping in the market ... wherever there is trading or taking and giving of money for merchandise or labor. Therefore they are also called swivel-chair robbers, land- and highway-robbers, not pick-locks and sneak-thieves who snatch away the ready cash, but who sit on the chair [at home] and are styled great noblemen, and honorable, pious citizens, and yet rob and steal under a good pretext.

No more shall all the rest prosper who change the open free market into a carrion-pit of extortion and a den of robbery, where the poor are daily overcharged, new burdens and high prices are imposed, and every one uses the market according to his caprice, and is even defiant and brags as though it were his fair privilege and right to sell his goods for as high a price as he please, and no one had a right to say a word against it."

Luther clearly sees from the perspective of an independent producer, a small businessman, whose experience of being robbed by the powerful is primarily connected to price gouging. However, the heart of his accusations would apply equally to the modern multinational corporations that seek profit at the expense of people not primarily by raising prices but rather by lowering wages. The core violation of "using the market according to his caprice as though it were his fair privilege and right" is as characteristic of

WalMart as it was of the noblemen of Luther's time.

Luther also believed that it was clearly the job of political decision-makers to protect the rights of their constituency. His doctrine of "two kingdoms" recognized that even human beings who have faith do not always live in accordance with their faith and that most people do not automatically treat one another with the love and respect called for by the Gospel. We all live in two worlds, the emerging world in which the law is written on the heart and people treat each other well out of love, and the old order in which it is necessary to intentionally ensure respect for human rights through civil authority. As Luther continues in the commentary on the seventh commandment:

"... to check such open wantonness there is need of the princes and government, who themselves would have eyes and the courage to establish and maintain order in all manner of trade and commerce, lest the poor be burdened and oppressed nor they themselves be loaded with other men's sins."

While Luther could not have envisioned a world in which every citizen had the right and duty to participate actively in political decision-making, we can see that in a modern democracy, we all have power and authority in the political realm and we all need the "eyes and the courage to establish and maintain" correct order in the economic sphere. When we campaign for living wage legislation or conditions on Big Box development, we seek to ensure an economic order that does not allow the poor to be burdened and oppressed. Unions are another modern structure through which workers can exercise legitimate power and authority in the public sphere to ensure protection of their rights.

These modern structures and the responsibilities that accompany them are recognized in a Resolution of the ELCA Church-wide Assembly in 1991 that reads, "The ELCA commits itself to advocacy with corporations, businesses, congregations, and church-related institutions to protect the rights of workers, support the collective bargaining process and protect the right to strike."

However, while Luther would have supported those with legitimate authority acting in the public realm to protect workers' rights, he would have seen clergy as having a different role. Luther saw the work of clergy as belonging to the second realm, the kingdom of God. The heart of that work, for Luther, was proclamation – the speaking of the truth that transforms. When religious leaders in interfaith worker justice committees utilize their moral authority to call business and political leaders to accountability to the scriptural vision of economic justice, they are fulfilling Luther's understanding of their calling to speak the Word of God.

Rev. Alexia Salvatierra, an ELCA pastor, is executive director of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) in Los Angeles.



Labor Day is a time to give thanks for and reflect upon our varied occupations. The workplace is where many of us spend the majority of our waking hours. If you are currently employed, how do you view your work? With joy, fulfillment, challenge, growth? Or do you find yourself dreading work? Perhaps it seems tedious, degrading, demanding.

Our places of employment have profound influence on our lives. It is important to recognize how our work environments shape us, but also to think about the ways we can influence the policies and practices and cultures of our workplace. Perhaps you can be a voice for personnel practices which are more just for all employees. Others of you may organize the work force for living wage compensation. You may be one who listens to the personal joys and struggles of coworkers, offering a word of encouragement and hope.

The challenges are great. How can there be a healthy balance of concern for personnel, products and profits – for the quality of the environment, the well-being of employees, the expectations of investors?

Whether in the trades or service sector or agriculture, whether in labor or management, raising children or volunteering, it is my hope that we will be able to pursue our work with zest and satisfaction, with competence and confidence. Wherever we work, may there be opportunities to live out our baptismal calling to lives of witness and service. Sometimes that may mean standing off to the side long enough to ask God to help us see what God may be up to in the workplace – to ask “How is God working through me and others?”

I hope that we will remember that our occupations are just one of God’s many callings in our lives. God calls us to proclaim Christ in word and deed, to make known God’s love and saving grace. That is the ministry of all the baptized. God calls us to live in and tend to relationships, to be stewards of friendships and family, to care for God’s creation, to active lives as citizens. God calls us to labor for justice and peace, for those who are unemployed and underemployed, whose energies go into finding food, shelter and safety.

May our congregations be communities of mutual support and accountability for God’s many callings in our lives. With this petition from the Prayer of the Church I conclude:

“Be with all who lay their hands to any useful task. Give them just rewards for their labor and the knowledge that their work is good in your sight. Hear us good Lord.”

Amen.

Mark Hanson is the ELCA presiding bishop.

‘I hope that we will remember that our occupations are just one of God’s many callings in our lives. God calls us to proclaim Christ in word and deed, to make known God’s love and saving grace.’

Wayne Stumme: Building understanding, church-labor alliances to benefit workers



Wayne Stumme

Wayne Stumme is a retired pastor and seminary professor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He has served congregations in England and Iowa, founded an ecumenical center, worked as assistant director of theological education in the national church, established a churchwide agency known as the Institute for Mission in the USA, and was professor of theology and mission at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. In his retirement Dr. Stumme lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

"My first extended exposure to the life experiences of American workers came during the Korean War. I was an infantry sergeant during that conflict and I came to have great respect for the 'ordinary' men who served so bravely, without complaint, and with very little recognition," Stumme recalls. His later pastoral ministry included more than nine years in blue-collar congregations. His English parish was in a new steel town where he gained first-hand knowledge of British unions and the Labour Party. Shortly after his return to the United States, Rev. Stumme was called to be pastor of a blue-collar congregation in a meat-processing and manufacturing city. Involved in the civil rights struggles of the late 1960s, he began to see more clearly the relationship between racial and economic injustice. Subsequent service in an ecumenical center and then in the national offices of his denomination allowed time to undergird these convictions with other experiences and with more extensive reading and reflection. A graduate thesis written during these years, entitled "The Gospel and the

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Our Challenge As Pastors

Wayne C. Stumme

The painful consequences of a recessionary economy include increasing numbers of men and women who have had wages reduced, benefits curtailed, and pensions threatened by executive cupidity, or excessive desire for wealth. Other workers – but especially the working poor – have suffered actual loss of livelihood through decisions made in the name of corporate profitability. The most powerless of workers – immigrants, migrants, women and, in some instances, children – exist today on the meager margins of a still affluent economy. At the same time, employer intimidation of employees seeking unionization has intensified in business and industry.

Why is this happening? Whatever other causes may be cited, what many workers are experiencing is more than a cyclic occurrence that will pass in time. Behind the self-justifying rhetoric advanced by those whose actions benefit a few at the expense of the many is the grim reality of the continuing exploitation of working people. This is nothing new, of course. We would rather deny its existence in this country of opportunity and promise. Some even go so far as to blame the poor and the near poor themselves for their desperate plight.

It has been done before, and today new voices join that macabre chorus.

Is all of this of concern to the Church of Jesus Christ? More specifically, does any of this impact the understanding of the pastoral vocation? What does it mean for those who exercise the ministry of Word and Sacraments in our congregations? For some, the answer is "Nothing" or "Very little." It is not part of the tradition of being a Lutheran pastor as they have come to understand it.

Then that tradition is lacking something of essential importance. For the Bible does speak of an option for the poor, the just decision of God on behalf of those who consistently are denied both economic and political justice. There is an unmistakable scriptural polemic against those who exploit the weak and needy.

There is a biblical warning against greed, cruelty, hard-heartedness, and injustice. And there is the compelling vision of a human society in which all persons – without regard to class or wealth, position or power – are equally valued and where genuine community can take root. To affirm these truths, and certainly this is part of the calling of the Christian preacher, requires taking up of practical tasks that the God of all righteousness has laid upon us.

Yes, the pastor as pastor, the pastor as leader of the people of God in the local congregation, has responsibility for speaking and acting on behalf of the victims of economic injustice. What will that include?

- Without question, the task of better informing both self and members with respect to the expectations of Scripture and the cruel deformations of economic practice.
- It will mean the recapturing of the profound biblical compassion for working people and the poor.
- It will mean courageous advocacy wherever and whenever human beings are robbed of their dignity, denied what they have earned, and deprived of their rights.
- It will mean – as it has meant in many cities throughout this land – new forms of cooperation with the representatives of organized labor in situations where our shared commitment to justice due working people, the working poor, and the poor is threatened or denied.
- And it means – as a gift and encouragement – that our limited and often inadequate efforts may help to open our eyes to that final gift of grace, the Kingdom in which humanity finds both its true home and righteous and lasting community.

The time is late. Let us begin.

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Labor Liturgy

Invocation

Gracious Lord, creator of all that is and sovereign over all that ever will be, You have given us life and kept us by Your mercy through all the days of our journeys. We praise You for your unfailing love for all Your human children; we trust You for that justice no human deceit can ever corrupt. Let Your generous blessing rest upon all workers and their families, in this place and everywhere. Unite us with one another as together we seek workplaces of greater fairness; strengthen us for the struggles that lie ahead; keep us faithful to the vision of a world in which no one is hungry, no one is exploited, no one is despised, and no one has lost hope. This we ask, knowing that You have heard us before we speak and that You have turned to us even before we turned to You. All thanks to you, O God of all compassion, now and forever. Amen.

Opening Hymn

O God of Every Nation • 416 – Lutheran Book of Worship

The Prayer of the Day

Gracious heavenly Father, as the United States pauses to contemplate the freedom to work and the employment opportunities that are available to us, may we never lose sight of the fact that it is only because of Your grace and favor that we are able to work. Thank You, Lord, for the blessings of employment and work that I have had in the past and at present. May all that I do at work give glory to You and Your precious name. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, whom I love and serve. Amen.

—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

First Lesson

Leviticus 26:13

Psalm 1

Second Lesson

James 2:14-17

Gospel

Luke 14:25-33

Sermon

Hymn of the Day

Let Justice Flow like Streams • 48 - This Far by Faith

Closing Prayer

God most holy, God most near: hear the prayers of all who call upon You for food and clothing and shelter, for health and family and the opportunity to work, for recognition of their human dignity and their right to fair treatment on the job; hear our prayers this Labor Day as we celebrate what the movement of working people has accomplished and as we seek Your guidance in the continuing struggle for workplace justice.

God, before You the ages rise and pass away, and yet none of Your human creation is forgotten by You: We remember those no longer with us, brothers and sister who struggled and suffered and sometimes died in the fight to win a greater measure of fairness in wage, safer working conditions, a secure livelihood for their families, and the dignity and respect due all of those whom You created in Your image. Let us never forget their sacrifices, nor let us dishonor their memories by our own words and actions.

*'Gracious Lord, creator of
all that is and sovereign over
all that ever will be...'*



LUTHERAN SEMINARIES AND WORKER JUSTICE

There have always been sizeable numbers of wage earners, union members, and the working poor within Lutheran congregations in the United States. Too often their presence has not been noted nor their concerns recognized, but today a growing number of pastors are beginning to respond to issues impacting the lives of these workers and their families.

As part of their preparation for the pastoral ministry, all students in Lutheran seminaries in the United States take courses in Christian ethics. Few seminaries or professors, unfortunately, deal directly with urgent issues of economic justice for American workers. From the 1930's through the 1950's a professor at Augustana Lutheran Seminary in Rock Island, Ill., A.D. Mattson, attempted to raise Lutheran awareness of the need for workplace justice. The socialist mayor of Milwaukee, Frank Zeidler, was another Lutheran advocate for worker justice during the middle years of the twentieth century. Neither their examples nor the contemporary struggles of working people, however, brought about significant changes in what was taught in American Lutheran seminaries.

There are more hopeful signs today. Some professors have begun to incorporate worker justice issues in classroom sessions and urban encounters. Among these are Dr. Wayne Stumme, retired professor of theology and mission at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio; Dr. Charles Amjad-Ali, who is the Martin Luther King Jr. Professor for Justice and Christian Community at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.; and Dr. Richard Perry, professor of church and society and urban ministry at Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. From 1990 until his retirement in 1997, Stumme taught a course entitled

"The Church and the Struggle for Economic Justice." Professor Amjad-Ali, during his six years at Luther Seminary, has drawn on his extensive knowledge of both global and domestic working people movements. Beginning in January 2005, Perry will be co-teaching a course called "Faith, Work, and Economic Life." Perry has previously incorporated economic justice into his ethics and urban ministry courses.

It should be noted as well that courses in Third World liberation theologies and European political theologies have contributed to a growing interest in worker justice issues.

The recent commitment and activity of Lutheran seminarians is particularly encouraging. Seminarians from four Lutheran seminaries – the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, Luther Seminary, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, and the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia – have participated in the 10-week Seminary Summer program sponsored by the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and the AFL-CIO. The summer internship allows students to take part in worker justice campaigns.

In 2002, Seminarians for Worker Justice was formed in Chicago Lutheran, United Methodist, and United Church of Christ seminarians. The group educates, mobilizes, and organizes students to put their faith into action. These seminarians have walked picket lines, raised money, donated food for striking workers and talked with both workers and employers in efforts to just resolve labor-management conflicts. In 2004 students at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago joined other area seminaries in organizing a forum on Spirit and Solidarity that focused on religion and labor.

Rev. Alexia Salvatierra: Leading Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice

Some 200 clergy, lay leaders and workers participated in a 450-mile pilgrimage to the home of Steve Burd, the CEO of Safeway corporation on January 27, 2004. Their goal was to appeal to Burd as a Christian to settle a strike and lockout affecting 70,000 Southern California grocery store workers. Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) organized the pilgrimage that ultimately played a definite catalytic role in settling the strike. CLUE engages over 400 clergy and lay leaders from a wide variety of religious traditions throughout Los Angeles county in the struggle of low-wage workers for a living wage, health benefits and a voice in employers' decisions that impact workers. The executive director of CLUE, Rev. Alexia Salvatierra, is an ELCA pastor, with a Synod Council

agencies serving the homeless, farm workers and inner city youth as well as serving congregations and working as a Mission Developer. She has also served on the ELCA Strategic Commission for Hispanic Ministry. She has a 10-year-old daughter, Alina.

During Rev. Salvatierra's tenure, CLUE has expanded its ministry in ways connected to a distinctively Lutheran vision of economic justice. For example, CLUE has a volunteer chaplaincy program with religious leaders inspiring workers to sustain involvement in justice efforts in the face of company retaliation. This program is based on the recognition of the importance of faith in sustaining righteous action. In October of 2003, workers at the Radisson hotel at Los Angeles Airport won a two and half-year



Rev. Alexia Salvatierra leads pilgrimage to home of CEO on behalf of grocery workers.

battle to regain jobs. The entire workforce had been fired in order to break a union. The support of CLUE chaplains was an essential element in the workers' ability to stay united and fight such a lengthy battle.

Joy Heine: Charity isn't enough

"I had taught children and advocated for families trying to make a better life for themselves, but who struggled to make ends meet and obtain food, shelter and healthcare. I began to realize something was drastically wrong," said Joy Heine, sharing her experience before joining NICWJ. She saw parents on welfare who wanted to work, but had a hard time doing so. Once a meager amount of money was earned, parents no longer received welfare benefits or healthcare services for their families.

"Many of the families I worked with just didn't work. They couldn't afford to lose benefits. The alternative was working poor, just barely surviving, without a safety net. What is being done to address this systemic injustice?" Heine began to wonder.

During her second year at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, Dr. Richard Perry, a professor of Urban Ministry, took her class on an urban immersion outing. The trip included a visit to the offices of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice (NICWJ).

"I was amazed at what NICWJ was doing. The underlying premise was if workers had high enough wages, they could support

Wayne Stumme

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Poor," helped him establish the biblical and theological foundations for his developing interest in economic justice.

His most intensive efforts on behalf of worker justice occurred after he was called to Trinity Lutheran Seminary as professor of theology and mission and as the founding director of the Institute for Mission in the USA. Professor Stumme taught a course in "The Church and the Struggle for Economic Justice," and encouraged seminarians to incorporate this concern in their future ministries. He saw that the achievement of any measure of worker justice in the United States required that religious and labor communities would have to form new alliances. As part of his responsibilities as Institute director, he began to establish relationships between his church and the American labor movement. He was a member of an ecumenical team investigating the unfair treatment of coal miners in southwest Virginia; he cooperated with the AFL-CIO in planning for and holding two national religion and labor conferences; he attempted to counter the anti-union efforts of managers of Lutheran church-related institutions in a dozen states; he agitated for a stronger and clearer commitment of the national Lutheran Church to worker justice; and in 1993 he established a Church and Labor Network within the ELCA and published an occasional newsletter on issues of economic justice for working people, the working poor, and the destitute in this country. In 1996, Executive Director Kim Bobo asked Dr. Stumme to become a founding board member of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice. Dr. Stumme continues to be active in church and labor cooperation during his retirement, and helped to establish the Twin Cities Religion and Labor Network. As necessary, he writes, speaks, argues, and demonstrates on behalf of worker justice.

In a recent essay, Wayne Stumme wrote, "And what of our present time? It is unfortunately true that the prosperity currently enjoyed by many of our citizens does not extend to vast numbers of workers, the working poor, and the poor. Consider, for example, the situation of these people: immigrants and migrants, workers in the poultry industry and meat processing plants, food service and hotel workers, janitors and custodians, nursing home and hospital workers, and many agricultural

themselves without going to someone else for food, having to go to homeless shelters or receive Medicaid. They could become self-sufficient. I was awed by the idea of working to empower women and men through mobilization of the religious community to support organizing efforts," Heine said.

Her excitement led to an application for the 10-week Seminary Summer program in 2001. She learned what workers face each day in trying to better their lives, and how employers and managers often try to sacrifice worker power, confidence and hope to increase company profits.

"My eyes were opened to injustices low-wage workers face each day and how low-wage workers supported my daily life through service work, like cleaning the seminary, waiting tables at restaurants, cleaning office buildings, and busing tables. Our society is full of people without whose hard working hands, many people would be lost, but even with their hard working hands, they are invisible. I had to get involved," she said.

Joy Heine, a Lutheran Consecrated Diaconal Minister, is Religious Studies and Internship Director for the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice.

laborers. Few of these receive even a minimal living wage for full-time work. The abominations of sweatshops and child labor still exist in this country. Gender and racial discrimination negatively affect employment possibilities for too many people. So many Americans, including children, lack adequate health care and basic nutrition. Dangerous working conditions and mistreatment of workers on the job are far more prevalent than most middle-class Americans want to believe. Far too many employers engage in aggressive and sometimes illegal actions to discourage workers in their efforts to represent themselves through unions, and the laws intended to prevent these abuses are weak and unevenly enforced.

"For millions of our fellow citizens, life is a day-by-day struggle to keep going while at the same time – in the church as well as the broader society – the more well-off are largely indifferent to their plight."

If this is true, what follows? Stumme warns that "Christians dare not adopt the deterministic outlook that claims nothing can be done to alter in any fundamental way the working of a system that creates so many victims and is so insensitive to the misery of those it leaves behind. Once more the ancient temptation to idolatry threatens as the ideology of global market capitalism wins new converts daily. Yet the God we worship and serve as Christians is just and compassionate to all of human creation, totally unlike the popular Mammon of greed, self-interest, and callous indifference. We hold, therefore, that our economic institutions and practices and attitudes are not beyond informed criticism and necessary reform, that they – including those who benefit from their present operation – also are accountable to God and subject to the divine intention that justice be done for all."

What does that mean for the Church?" "The God who mercifully justifies sinners summons his people to respond to that grace by seeking justice for the weakest and most threatened of their neighbors. Could it be that a renewed commitment by the Church to the struggle for greater economic justice for all our brothers and sisters will constitute the necessary obedience of Christians in the 21st century?" For that commitment and in anticipation of that obedience, Wayne Stumme works and prays.

Lars Negstad: A passion for justice and human dignity

Lars Negstad is a research analyst for the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) union in Chicago. The grandson, great-grandson and nephew of Lutheran pastors, Lars inherited a passion for justice and human dignity. He also lived in Cambodia where he worked on a campaign to ban landmines, and began to understand the need for collective action to fight injustice. His values and experience led him to work in the labor movement.

What role does your faith play in any decisions you make at HERE? Can people of faith also be good union members?

Without faith, I would not be able to sustain the work that I do. Even secular colleagues of mine within the labor movement, whether they are union leaders or rank-and-file members, must have a kind of faith. I believe strongly in the power of redemption, and without that belief, I would have burned out long ago. We are all children of a fallen humanity, yet we are all God's children too. Understanding this helps us maintain our spirit so that we can keep struggling against injustice in this world. Without faith, I think injustice would appear intractable and we would succumb to the temptation of despair and cynicism.

What should Lutherans understand about what working people face today?

Working people are under attack, and it's not just low-wage workers. Healthcare costs are skyrocketing, and now over 40 million people are uninsured. Pensions are disappearing, and we are being asked to assume all the risk of our own retirement security. We face anxiety about jobs being sent overseas. Overtime compensation is being reduced, and people are being forced to work longer hours. Health and safety standards are being rolled back. Gender and racial discrimination is still rampant.

The industries I work in – hotels, laundries and foodservice companies – are abusing workers. Manufacturing jobs have all been sent overseas to sweatshops, while sweatshop conditions are becoming the norm in low-wage workplaces right here. Hotel workers face a greater rate of injury than mineworkers. Housekeeping jobs are literally killing people. Can you imagine cleaning 16, 17, 18 rooms a day? Making all those beds, scrubbing those toilets and tubs, at a pace so fast that you have to skip your lunch break, and feel



Lars Negstad

compelled to work off the clock?

This is immoral. I think we all have a responsibility to inform ourselves, and understand that the solution is not just to help individual workers who are being especially exploited, but that we must address the underlying structures of oppression. The imbalance of power between workers and multi-billion dollar corporations must be righted. Workers need the ability to join together and have a voice on the job. Unity can make employers hear workers who cry, "Stop! You're killing us! We need more respect, and some economic security!"

What would you like to see happen in the future between Lutherans and organized labor? How can the two work together?

First of all, it's not like you can say there are two groups of people, "Lutherans" and "working people." Most Lutherans also work for a living. We all have multiple identities: we are workers, people of faith, members of a family, residents of a neighborhood, citizens of a country or newcomers to a country seeking to become citizens. I think it is crucial to understand that our identities are legion, and they do not easily switch on or off, but we carry them with us at all times.

That being said, I think we ALL face great challenges and great temptations, and we ALL face oppression from values that are destructive to us as human beings. As Lutherans we are called to live in the world but not be of it, which means that we have a special calling, a mission. Our mission is to listen for the voice of God, to recognize our common humanity, to stand for justice in the face of oppression, and to resist the cacophony of signals that would send us in the wrong direction. There's no question that this is difficult. We wonder if we can do it. But as long as we join together, as we say in the labor movement, "Si se puede!" (Yes, it can be done!)

ELCA Statements

Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All

Below are selected portions of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) social statements pertaining to workers' rights and economic justice. As amended and adopted by a more than two-thirds-majority vote as a social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by the sixth biennial Churchwide Assembly on August 20, 1999, at Denver, Colorado.

Livelihood: vocation, work, and human dignity

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 well-being, 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.

A Social Statement on Economic Life (August 20, 1999)

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 workplaces of participatory decision making;
- honor the right of employees to organize for the sake of better working conditions and for workers to make free and informed decisions; encourage those who engage in collective bargaining to commit themselves to negotiated settlements, especially when participatory attempts at just working conditions fail; and discourage the permanent replacement of 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.

(Compiled by Dr. Wayne C. Stumme, Coordinator, Church and Labor Concerns Institute for Mission in the USA.)

Workers' rights and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Below are selected portions of a 1991 Churchwide Assembly Resolution on Workers' Rights adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at the 1991 Churchwide Assembly resolution.

Whereas, our faith makes us particularly sensitive to those who are adversely affected by economic dislocation and powerlessness; and

Whereas, the collective-bargaining process is fundamental for the attainment of justice in American society; and ...

Whereas, for many years, it was generally recognized that employees who engaged in a legal work stoppage as part of the collective-bargaining process would not be penalized by the permanent loss of their jobs; and in more recent time a growing number of employers have responded to these legal work stoppages by hiring persons to replace permanently the striking workers, and unfortunately, this practice is allowed under existing labor laws, but until recent years was not widely used by employers; and

Whereas, this practice is a direct threat to the collective bargaining process as it has developed in this country since the mid-1930s, causing hardship in families and entire communities where employees have, in effect, been fired from their jobs for engaging in collective bargaining, and a weakened collective-bargaining process deprives American workers of the right to participate effectively in decisions that impact their lives and future ... now, therefore, be it

Resolved, that the 1991 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

1. offer its support and prayers for labor and management who engage in collective bargaining to reach acceptable agreements in their working relationship;
2. urge employers, corporations, and workers to commit themselves to negotiated settlements;
3. express concern for workers and their families who endure hardship and job insecurity due to the breakdown of the traditional collective bargaining practices;
4. call for an end to recriminations against workers who participate in strikes;
5. call upon the appropriate churchwide units, synods, congregations, and members to support legislation that would strengthen the viability of negotiated settlements and prevent the permanent replacement of striking workers;
6. call upon the Division for Church in Society to have available information to assist the members of this church to understand these issues; and
7. commit itself to public policy advocacy and advocacy with corporations, businesses, congregations, this church, and church related institutions to protect the rights of workers, support the collective bargaining process, and protect the right to strike.

Dave Kemnitz: 'Faith gives me strength'

Dave Kemnitz was elected president of the North Dakota AFL-CIO in 1983, and has served since that time. Kemnitz is a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 714. Previously he was executive director of the North Dakota Building and Construction Trades Council, and president of the Bismarck-Mandan Central Labor Council AFL-CIO. He is married to wife Paula and has three children, Jennifer, David and Karisa. Kemnitz is an active member of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Raised by parents with strong faiths – a Catholic mother and Lutheran Church of American father – he participated in the Catholic Church growing up, and learned about the Lutheran Church as well. Kemnitz converted to the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod when he married 29 years ago.

Faith didn't drive Dave Kemnitz to fight for workers. Kemnitz went to trade school, spent some years in military service, and started working as an electrician. Often negative realities he and others faced on the job motivated him to get deeply involved in the labor movement. He learned the hard way that his father's admonition, "You don't always need a union, but you need the skill," was not entirely correct. "I learned you are always taken advantage by someone who can do so. Without a union, healthcare was a questionable thing, and workers were often paid less," he says. Without unions, workers face a much more difficult time and respect, honest wages, pensions, education and professional

certification would be at risk, he says.

As he deals with real world problems faced by workers, Kemnitz says his faith in the gospel helps to keep him grounded. "Faith gives me the strength and allows me to carry on, with authority and conviction," says Kemnitz. His beliefs strong religious convictions help him manage high stress that comes with making tough decisions and allows for making well-thought out, fair choices. The values of justice and fairness are found in the gospel can be reflected in how workers are treated and respected, he says.



Dave Kemnitz

Kemnitz sees a need for increased education within the Lutheran Church to promote a greater understanding of organized labor. "The Lutheran church, I think should probably engage in labor management exercises on a more ongoing in-depth way, being at the table, so Lutheran churches better understand agreements between labor and business," says Kemnitz. Having church representatives, pastors or synod members, sit in on city or state advisory councils that deal with unemployment, tax rates, and services to the unemployed, could increase understanding of what workers face, he adds. Usually there is representation from labor, business and public, perhaps one of the three public representatives could be from the church. "The Lutheran leader would learn more about problems and solutions and incorporate this information into church bulletins and sermons to educate church members," he says.

Jennifer Barger: Shining light in the darkness

Jennifer Barger came to the Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues as a Lutheran Volunteer Corp intern several years ago. Her activism has grown into a vocation as an organizer for the Chicago Interfaith Committee. But the seed of putting personal faith into action was sown long ago, she recalled. "I spent dozens of evenings during my formative junior high school years sitting on thrift-store couches in the attic of St. John's Lutheran Church in Grinnell, Iowa, studying the Small Catechism and the Word of God with my pastor and my fellow confirmation classmates," said Barger. "Two of Luther's teachings made a particular impact on me. One is that our freely-given salvation should manifest itself in our good works. The second is Luther's call to 'sin boldly,' that in the face of doubt, fear, or risk we must not stand idly

by, but instead we must act faithfully, trusting in God's forgiveness for an honest mistake. Like the flame that burned into my eyes as we gathered around a single candle for prayer each evening, the call to take bold action for justice was burned into my heart."



Jennifer Barger

The struggle of low-wage workers to cast aside doubt, fear and accept great risks reminds Barger of how workers on the front lines battle for respect and dignity. "Picket lines and protests are not easy places for workers to be, nor are they comfortable places for pastors, seminary students, and congregation members. But when we are present together, and when together we win living wages, affordable health care, and safe working conditions it becomes clear that our work is good and just," said Barger.

"If today's political, social, and economic trends do not change, the future looks dim for low-wage workers, immigrant workers, un- and underemployed workers and their families. But if we boldly act to support our sisters and brothers in struggles for justice, then a light truly shines in the darkness. The darkness has not overcome it."

Rev. Doug Mork: "People's Pastor"

Rev. Doug Mork, lead organizer for the Twin Cities Religion and Labor Network in Minneapolis, Minn., has always been intrigued by stories – whether from the Bible, extraordinary books, or brought to life by powerful preachers, teachers and writers. Most of all, he has been struck by the “living stories of the remarkable people engaged in their dance with God and God’s world.” His parents provided a sense of the importance of commitment to faith and other teachers and adults inspired him to consider how to best use his gifts.

In college, science, music, and public policy appealed to him. College also led to more grappling with the relationship between faith and public life. Mork increasingly became engaged in community organizing, the peace movement and decided to work in the broad arena of faith, justice and community organizing. Paul Wellstone, the late senator from Minnesota, was a mentor, friend and called Mork a “people’s pastor.” During his senior year, Mork’s passion for organizing, stories and the faith community came together. Following a phone call from Wellstone, Mork interviewed for a position in Knoxville, Tenn., and went to work with a fledgling faith and labor community organization. Next he also spent six years working as a union organizer in the Deep South.



“Standing beside workers struggling to build better lives for their families and communities against enormous economic and social forces changed me forever. Though my own call into this work remained powerful, I increasingly felt that some of my own gifts were called for in the church. It became a matter of stewardship, and a deep sense that this gospel-proclaiming work needed to be more integrated with the life of the church, specifically of my own Lutheran church,” Mork recalled. “Too often I had seen our Lutheran theological focus on justification become an opportunity to ignore justice. Instead our theological heritage is a great gift that enables us to cry and work for justice without turning it into a means of grace.”

That theological heritage is reflected in Mork’s continued organizing activity at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, six years of serving a congregation in a diverse St. Paul neighborhood and helping to lead it into consolidation with a Spanish-speaking congregation. In addition, the past six years included helping to launch the Twin Cities Religion and Labor Network and recent acceptance of a part-time position as an organizer.

Rev. Mork also serves as associate pastor for outreach and social justice ministry at the Episcopal Church of the Nativity in Burnsville, Minn.

Sign-up for worker justice updates via the National Interfaith Committee “Faith Works” newsletter and e-mail bulletin. Mail, fax or e-mail your addresses:

Name: _____

Organization/Congregational Affiliation: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail address: _____

Mail:
NICWJ
1020 West Bryn Mawr
Chicago, IL 60660

Fax:
(773) 728-8409

E-mail:
bridget@nicwj.org

What You Can Do to Help Workers

1. Pray for low-wage workers, unemployed workers and their families. Pray for employers and elected leaders who set policies and make decisions that affect low-wage workers.
2. Contact your Congressional Representatives and Senators, and urge them to co-sponsor the Employee Free Choice Act to help protect the right of workers to organize.
 - Visit www.nicwj.org to send a letter directly to your members of Congress. To see if your member of Congress has co-sponsored the Employee Free Choice Act (S. 1925 & H.R. 3619), please go to THOMAS: U.S. Congress on the Internet (a free service provided by the Library of Congress) at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/>
 - For more information on the Employee Free Choice Act, please go to the AFL-CIO's website at: <http://www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/voiceatwork/ns111332003.cfm>
3. See if your congregation, health care facility, business, or organization uses Cintas for its mats, uniforms, or first aid kits. Cintas is a huge industrial laundry that can treat its workers more fairly and raise standards for industry workers. In many communities, Cintas workers are organizing to improve conditions on the job. You can encourage Cintas consumers to urge Cintas to become a model employer and sign on the Cintas petition. Visit www.nicwj.org for more information or contact Tiffany Heath, NICWJ Issues and Action director, at 773-728-8400, x 42, or e-mail: theath@nicwj.org.
4. Invite a labor leader or worker to talk to your congregation during Labor Day. NICWJ and AFL-CIO sponsored "Labor in the Pulpits" offers an opportunity for congregations to hear directly from workers and labor leaders about the challenges and injustices many people face in their workplaces. You can also use worship materials found in this book during the service. Other Labor In the Pulpits materials can be downloaded from www.nicwj.org. Call the National Interfaith Committee (773) 728-8400, or contact your local AFL-CIO office to learn more. Contacts for AFL-CIO state federations and central labor councils can be found at www.aflcio.org or call (202) 637-5000.
5. Sign-up for worker justice updates via the National Interfaith Committee "Faith Works" newsletter and e-mail bulletin. See page 11 for information form.



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