



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

September 3, 2020

Our calling from God begins in the waters of Baptism and is lived out in a wide array of settings and relationships. Freed through the Gospel, we are to serve others through arenas of responsibility such as family, work, and community life. Although we continue to be ensnared in the ambiguities and sin of this world, our vocation is to seek what is good for people and the rest of creation in ways that glorify God and anticipate God's promised future.

—ELCA social statement *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, page 7.

The origins of Labor Day, established as a federal holiday in 1894, lie in the labor movement's persistent organizing for the rights and recognition of American workers. This year's impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the heroics and faithfulness of the many we now know to be essential workers.

While all workers are essential, especially during this pandemic, we give special thanks on this Labor Day for those workers who, despite challenges and dangers to their health, plant and harvest and deliver our food, keep store shelves stocked with essentials, nurture and teach our children, and care for the sick. In honor of their contributions to our country's well-being, they deserve our support and accompaniment so they can do their jobs safely with dignity and respect.

Our church's social teaching reminds us that work is a way we serve God and our neighbor. The ELCA social statement *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* states: "In Genesis, work is to be a means through which basic needs might be met, as human beings 'till and keep' the garden in which God has placed them (Genesis 2:15). Work is seen not as an end in itself, but as a means for sustaining humans and the rest of creation" (page 8).

Labor Day, like many holidays, marks the passage of time, the change of weather, the return to school, the end of the growing season. It also marks our eighth month of collectively facing the challenges of this time together. Dear church, we need to also acknowledge the extra labors these last months have required in what is turning out to be a marathon with a long way to go. The multiple hardships of this year have touched every one of us.

We know this crisis has been disruptive and destructive — as it has been elsewhere in the world — with so many suffering and facing uncertainty through a staggering loss of millions of jobs and no end in sight. The coronavirus also has exposed the inadequacy of an economic system for workers who live paycheck to paycheck, many of whom are disproportionately people of color. It has pulled back the veil of long-held racial disparities in income and opportunity and within the health care system. Communities of color have borne the brunt of death and illness in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Racial and economic injustices deprive people of the fruits of their work (Proverbs 13:23), which benefits our economy more than the workers' sustainable livelihoods.

Furthermore, gender discrimination has placed women of color in low wage, front-line positions at heightened risk. Many vulnerable women of color work as personal care aides, nursing assistants, cashiers and retail salespeople. In addition to their vulnerability, these front-line workers are disproportionately underpaid for their work. The average woman earns 82 cents for every dollar earned by men. Black women, Native American women and Latinas earn 62 cents, 57 cents and 54 cents, respectively, for every dollar earned by white men, according to the [National Women's Law Center](#).

These systemic issues continuously challenge and obstruct the well-being of many and deny God's desire for us to execute justice for the oppressed (Psalm 146:7). As church together, God calls us to accompany our neighbors who have lost livelihoods or income, supporting our siblings through prayer, service and advocacy. Our nation's leaders must not forget that responding to the needs of those who have lost jobs or income is now critical. Our accompaniment also must take shape as we prayerfully heed God's call to build economies that enable life in all its fullness; dismantle disparities in health, income, racial equality and privilege that trouble human community; and act together toward a more just society where all can live out their vocations and sustain their families with dignity.

This Labor Day remember that God is at work in our economic life, which "is intended to be a means through which God's purposes for humankind and creation are to be served" (*Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, page 3). Throughout this pandemic, we have risen to many challenges. We have reimagined almost everything in our lives and churches, including worship, workplace, education, child care, vacations, communication, service, advocacy, faith formation and much more. God's sustaining love for all of us is even more abundant than our imaginations and is providing us with the creativity and grit to try, try again so that Christ is proclaimed and our communities are served. Together, we can solve what seems unsolvable. Together, we can strive for each person's dignity to be recognized and treasured, remove disparities in health care, achieve racial equity, defeat poverty and work together with all people to overcome this virus.

As you take time to observe this year's Labor Day, may you find time to rest and renew yourselves for the work ahead. As is stated in this church's economic life social statement: "Our vocation is to seek what is good for people and the rest of creation in ways that glorify God and anticipate God's promised future" (page 7). Below you will find information and resources to advocate for our neighbors and communities to build a just economy for all:

- ELCA social statement [Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All](#)
- [Hungering for Justice](#), a study guide on Martin Luther and the economy
- [Action Alert](#) on COVID-19 response
- [Interfaith Worker Justice](#), an ELCA partner organization

A prayer from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*:

God of justice, we remember before you those who suffer want and anxiety from lack of work. Guide the people of this land so to use our wealth and resources that all people may find suitable and fulfilling employment and receive just payment for their labor; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In peace,



The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
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