



# Social Statements

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

## THE CHURCH AND SOCIAL WELFARE

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### INTRODUCTION

"Social welfare" is a system of laws, programs and services which provide for the meeting of social needs in order to promote the well-being of people and the humane functioning of society.

Social welfare in the United States and Canada has developed under the auspices of governments, of churches and of voluntary associations. They provide a wide variety of health and welfare services and other related programs responding to human need. Each makes its contribution to the total social welfare system.

Neither churches nor voluntary agencies have the capability of dealing with massive, pervasive social problems arising in a highly mobile, rapidly changing society. Therefore, governments have rightly assumed increasing responsibility for meeting social need and dealing with its causes.

While the degree and kind of involvement of the churches and voluntary associations have changed, the significance of these nongovernmental activities in social welfare is not diminished.

The governments of both countries encourage the involvement of nongovernmental social welfare agencies and institutions, and solicit counsel based on their experience.

The changing scene requires that the Lutheran Church in America redefine its social welfare concerns in relationship to the present day within the context of its own self-understanding of its mission.

### BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

1. Justice requires that the state promote the general welfare, further the well-being of every citizen, and secure equal opportunity for full development of all its citizens. This requires that the state provide means for self-fulfillment to those who cannot because of circumstance provide them for themselves.

2. The unique task of the church is to bear witness to God's Word. Such witness must always be in both word and deed, if the life of the church is to be consistent with its message. The imperative to serve leads the church into the broad range of activities identified with social welfare. The church rightly engages in social welfare because the gospel it proclaims impels Christians both individually and corporately to show concern for persons and to serve them at their point of need and should be properly recognized.
3. In fulfillment of its role, government engages today in many social welfare programs which historically developed under the auspices of the church. Thus churches and governments often find themselves engaged in parallel social welfare activities.
4. The social statement of the Lutheran Church in America on "Church and State, A Lutheran Perspective" (1966) affirms the functional interaction between the two as desirable and right. Functional interaction between church and state contributes to the enrichment of all social welfare, and to the common good.
5. Since the services of governments are established by law, they may not be readily adaptable to new situations in times of crisis and rapid change. The churches, not being so limited, ought to adapt their services more flexibly to new situations. The church can react to social need also by seeking to influence the political and administrative processes which control the welfare services of government. Regardless of how pervasive and thorough public social welfare service may become, meeting social needs in a democratic society requires the resources of the whole community, including those of the church.
6. The church should explore new forms of service in its diaconic task since no particular form of service is scripturally or theologically determined.
7. As the church engages in social welfare services it is better able to acquire understanding of social problems which will assist it in influencing public policy to bring about social change and to further sound public social welfare services and programs.
8. Social welfare in the church is not limited to providing professionally conducted services, or to corporate efforts in social education and action. To be truly effective the church must encourage services which can be provided by congregations and their members in their outreach to their communities. Corporate instruments for social welfare may represent the church, but they do not absolve individual Christians from responsible services of love, either in their occupation or in their voluntary service.

9. This church affirms the sacredness of all services which further the common good in the helping, healing professions and in the political, economic and educational processes of society.

### AFFIRMATIONS

1. This church reaffirms its belief that social welfare services carried on through the church either in its individual or corporate expression are a joyous and self-less response of love growing out of faith in Christ.
2. This church in order to fulfill its service role should carry on continual study, research and experimentation in the field of social welfare.
3. This church should be flexible in its social policies and practices. The diversity and complexity of modern society are such that a variety of responses to any problem may be appropriate.
4. This church should be alert to the manner in which social need is met, whether by government, voluntary, church, or proprietary agency. Wherever practice or policy threaten the rights and dignity of those who require aid, the church should strive to bring about correction.
5. This church's concern may be expressed by the development of agencies and institutions when community need calls for them. They are not to be ends in themselves, but are to be seen as part of the total engagement of the church.
6. When this church establishes social welfare programs it may properly enter into agreements with federal, state and local government to receive payment for services rendered or to accept, on a nonpreferential basis, grants or long-term loans.
7. This church through its various jurisdictions should support social welfare services by providing opportunity for financial participation by its congregations and their individual members through both general benevolence and direct personal giving, in keeping with the established policies of the appropriate synod(s).
8. The social welfare services of this church should comply with the service standards set by government, professional agencies and the church.
9. This church should serve all people in its related social service programs.
10. This church in its social welfare activities should, so far as it is possible, involve those for whom service is intended in determining the services and the manner in which they are administered.

## CONCLUSION

In contemporary society the church has tasks of service to perform in obedience to Jesus Christ, its servant Lord. It is he who placed upon his people the indelible mark of servanthood and gave them the mission to identify with all who are disadvantaged and suffer hurt. They bear this mark not to serve themselves but to give witness to Christ.

The foremost task of the church in social welfare is to proclaim the Word of God in such ways that it makes all of its members alert and responsive to human need at home and abroad and to the many faces of injustice. It should abhor and oppose all that erodes and destroys human dignity and deprives people of their God-given rights.

The Lutheran Church in America calls upon its congregations, synods, boards, commissions and agencies to re-examine their roles in the light of current social needs and to bring the redeeming and healing power of the gospel to bear upon those needs. It calls upon all of its people to give ungrudgingly of their time, talents and substance in support of those works of mercy and of service which witness to the truth they profess.

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