



**EQUALITY of OPPORTUNITY--**  
**A CIVIL RIGHT**

**A STATEMENT  
COMMENDED  
BY THE CHURCH**

A statement adopted by the Third General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, October 19-25, 1966, *Resolved*, That The American Lutheran Church endorse the following statements as an expression of its conviction and as a stimulus to the thinking and a guide to the actions of its pastors, congregations, and individual members:

## **EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

1. The American Lutheran Church believes firmly that equal opportunity for all is a basic civil right which any government must safeguard. To deny equality of opportunity to any person is to deny the revelation of Scripture, the counsel of reason, and the laws of our nation.

2. The American Lutheran Church therefore reaffirms the convictions it expressed at its 1964 convention, based upon earlier affirmations adopted by it in 1961, and by its predecessor bodies in 1958, principles which are incorporated in its Constitution. "The unique task of the churches," said the 1964 convention, "is to seek to bring the power of the Word, the Sacraments, and the corporate fellowship to bear upon individuals, thereby changing their hearts and lives." It added a conviction we now reaffirm:

Nevertheless, churches, their members, and their leaders need also to exercise Christian social responsibility. They have the duty to protest against and to act responsibly, beginning in their own communities, to correct those cruelties and injustices which deny basic human freedoms. Christians, both personally and corporately, have the duty to press for and to support measures which insure that all persons, regardless of color, economic position, national origin, or ethnic grouping, have fair and equal access to education, housing, employment, voting, and public accommodations.

3. Both reason and law support these imperatives. By its Constitution the United States

. . . guarantees that "the citizens of each state shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several states";

. . . assures all persons within its jurisdiction the freedoms and protections of the first ten amendments known as the Bill of Rights;

. . . confers federal and state citizenship upon all persons born or naturalized in the United States; and

. . . declares that no state has a right to "abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States," nor shall any state "deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

The American Lutheran Church rejoices that in the providence of God men were moved to write into the law of the land such powerful protec-

tions for human freedom and dignity. Our generation must make these civil liberties a living reality experienced equally by each person within the jurisdiction of the United States.

4. As a church concerned for the total well-being of every person, we deplore and condemn the racial hostility and antagonism symbolized in the terms "black power" and "white backlash." Separation, alienation, and rejection along racial lines can become the means by which demonic and alien forces may destroy our nation. We desire a land in which Negro and white, Indian and Oriental, Puerto Rican, Latin American, or person of any other ancestry, may cultivate his abilities, develop his strengths, display his creativity, take pride in his heritage, and win appreciation for his contributions to the common good.

5. We call upon members of The American Lutheran Church to examine honestly and openly before God our attitudes and actions toward our fellowmen of another race. We ask that we examine ourselves as to what we are thinking, saying, and doing to establish the point that all persons are entitled to equal opportunity in the social order. In so far as we as congregations or individual members may be remiss in this obligation, we should seek the Lord's forgiveness.

6. Pastors and congregations need to take vigorous, skillful, and patient measures to build bridges of communication and understanding between alienated segments of our society. We need to heed and act upon cries of distress, evidences of exploitation, discouragement of initiative, and denials of opportunities. Rather than limit our involvement to condemning the demonstrations which bring injustices to public attention we need to ask ourselves why we have been so inattentive to and so tolerant of injustices needing correction. Participating with and within the several power structures of our communities, our pastors, congregations, and members need, in their quest for civic righteousness, to work for a social order in which each person has equality of opportunity to develop his potential and to participate constructively in society.

7. We may differ in our judgments as to which measures or which laws can best guarantee equality of opportunity. Some may argue that conformity cannot be coerced, that it can only be effected by the inner compulsion of the heart. This gives the church two opportunities: (1) through the power of the Holy Spirit to change men's hearts so they will desire to do what is good in the eyes of God, and (2) to win support and respect for laws and ordinances which seek to curb stubborn men as well as others who unthinkingly do what is evil. In these times of domestic stress and strain over civil rights, The American Lutheran Church has no unique wisdom to prescribe the form and content of legislation which may be needed. This remains the task of civil legislators. The church insists, however, that each person is entitled to his birthright of equality of opportunity and equality of protection under the law. No member of The American Lutheran Church, faithful in his commitment to Jesus Christ, can be of an easy conscience before God unless he is actively working to give full effect to this revelation of Scripture, this counsel of reason and these laws of the nation.

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## **OPEN HOUSING**

*Resolved,* That The American Lutheran Church in convention assembled places itself on record as favoring "open housing," the right of each individual to live where his economic means makes it possible for him to live, without any restriction as to race, creed, color, or national origin.

The achievement of this goal is best accomplished when men of good will voluntarily agree to sell or rent their property to any financially qualified purchaser or tenant.

Where voluntary cooperation is resisted, we believe it lies within the province and responsibility of government—municipal, state, and federal—to adopt such legislation as will discourage prejudicial practices and insure "open housing."

### **COMMISSION ON RESEARCH AND SOCIAL ACTION**

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