



## PEACE, JUSTICE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

*(A statement of the Sixth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church adopted October 6, 1972, by action GC72.6.38, as a statement of comment and counsel addressed to the members of the congregations of The American Lutheran Church to aid them in their decisions and actions.)*

1. Peace, justice, and human rights matter to the Christian. They matter because together they express that civic righteousness which God wills for his human family. Again and again the Scriptures, especially the Psalms, yoke righteousness with peace, with justice, and with the recognition of the rights, freedoms, and responsibilities of persons. Righteousness is vital to the health and wholeness of persons and of the human community. Peace, justice, and human rights advance that health and wholeness.

2. War, injustice, and the denial of human rights profane God's creation. They deny the worth, the dignity, and the integrity of each human being. They weaken or break the bonds of kinship among the peoples of the earth. They undercut the effectiveness of social institutions, social structures, and customs and folkways which guide and give meaning to life in the human community. They damage or destroy the ability of nations individually and of nations collectively to foster whatever is good and to curb whatever is evil for human beings. War, injustice, and the denial of human rights negate righteousness.

3. The peoples of this earth are striving to bring wars under control. Increasingly they see that war is a brutal, destructive, foolish, inhuman, ugly, wasteful way of settling disputes. The peoples of this earth are striving to correct injustices. Increasingly they see that the oppressor and the oppressed, the exploiter and the exploited, the violator and the victim, the powerful and the weak, the person and the community suffer when injustice rules. The peoples of this earth are striving to end the denial of human rights. Increasingly they see that the denial of human rights stunts the growth of persons, warps their image of themselves, limits them in their relations with others, and deprives the community of contributions they might have made. Christians, who share such a vision, need to join with their neighbors in striving toward these goals. To bring war under control, to prevent injustice, and to end the denial of human rights is to strive for righteousness.

4. This striving recognizes the kinship and unity within the human family. The human race is one in creation, in sin, and in God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. We who are human are conceived, born, live our individual

lives, and die. No matter what our color, language, religion, nationality, or social standing, we all as human beings:

- a. Need food, shelter, and clothing as the basics for existence.
- b. Hunger for love and for the opportunity to express love.
- c. Crave recognition as persons unique in our own right.
- d. Look for a change of pace and new experiences to add zest to life.
- e. Want answers to the meaning, purpose, and ends of life.
- f. Know some form of marriage and family life which structures and controls relations between the sexes, provides for the oncoming generation, and cares for the dependent and handicapped.
- g. Exchange the goods and services which grow out of the ways we invest our time and energies in managing the resources of this earth.
- h. Live under some type of authority, rules and regulations, and governing power which binds us in our respective groups, community, clan, or nation.
- i. Relate ourselves, knowingly or unknowingly, to some force greater than ourselves, to which we give our highest loyalty and from which we gain an understanding of what is expected of us.

5. Thus human beings strive for recognition and acceptance of rights such as those named in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Declaration, and other human rights initiatives taken by the United Nations, incorporate (1) respect for the essential dignity and integrity of each person, (2) guarantees of freedom of expression and responsible decision making, (3) assurance of opportunity for each person to develop freely and fully that person's unique potentialities, (4) provisions for participation in the institutions and relationships of one's society, and (5) protections against arbitrary and despotic uses of power. The American Lutheran Church, following the lead of the Lutheran World Federation, commends the thrust and intent of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the covenants based on this Declaration. It urges its members to give these careful study, and to act as their study points them.

6. Little progress is likely to be made in assuring human rights unless economic strength and political viability can be achieved. Economic, political, and social development become crucial for peace, justice, and human rights. The younger nations, usually the less developed countries, need help in developing their own foundations for economic strength, political viability, and effective social systems. We rejoice over the progress made through the cooperative efforts of governments and of voluntary agencies in developing sound economic, political, and social structures for peace, justice, and human rights. We rejoice the more when these efforts respect the integrity, the traditions, the values, and the cultural expectations of the developing nations. Increasingly such efforts to aid nations in their own development must be genuinely international in character. There no longer is room for a strong nation to impose its economic, political, or social systems upon another. Nations, as persons, seek their own integrity.

7. Bringing war under control is an urgent priority in human affairs. We reaffirm the 1966 General Convention action urging:

- . . . committed Christians to take part in the arguments seeking the strengths and the pitfalls of such measures for cutting the risk of war as:
- a. Cooperation in responsible efforts, both governmental and voluntary, to alleviate material and psychological deprivations suffered by human

beings all over the world, which create in them a seedbed for suspicion, hate, and war.

- b. Multilateral reduction of armaments to the types and levels necessary to maintain domestic tranquility and order, with effective, verified, reliable checks and controls to insure adherence to arms reduction agreements.
- c. An orderly transition whereby excess manpower and materials devoted to armaments can be turned to goods and services yielding a higher quality of personal and community life.
- d. International cooperation and control to insure the peaceful uses of outer space.
- e. Technical assistance to younger nations in developing their own resources and traditions so that they can take a strong, cooperative, responsible, viable place in the community of nations.
- f. Development of a sense of regional and world community through voluntary associations of free nations united by history, values, and goals, and evidenced by mutual cooperation and adherence to covenants which protect the freedoms and liberties of responsible men.
- g. Establishment, strengthening, and support of agencies of international conciliation, arbitration, and justice, which seek under law to resolve in honor, equity, and impartiality any major disputes which arise between nations and which possess legitimate power and delegated authority to enforce their decisions.
- h. Increased intergovernmental cooperation in cultural, educational, economic, and social spheres to achieve goals of human welfare beyond the capacity of any one nation.

8. These observations apply also to the cooling off of current hot spots of international tension. Preventing, controlling, or ending a particular war becomes an international obligation. Whether it be Vietnam, Indochina, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent, Africa, or Latin America, the interests of peace, justice, and human rights require means other than war to settle the dispute.

9. We know how difficult it will be to act wisely. Wars, injustice, and the denial of human rights are a consequence of a world estranged from God. Such sinful human traits as pride, arrogance, greed, lust for power, divisiveness, hate, bigotry, self-centeredness, self-righteousness, and idolatry are at work. Values become twisted, persons become things, means become ends. The overwhelming mass and complexity of problems drive many persons to despair of any solution. Research is inconclusive, facts appear contradictory, values clash with other values, science and education offer no clear-cut clues to solving the problems. In their despair and hopelessness many persons isolate themselves by retreating to their own private concerns. They reject any responsibility for the social situation, seeking escape rather than involvement.

10. Action for peace, justice, and human rights also encounters the opposition of entrenched institutional forces. Realism requires recognition that we are struggling "against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness" (Eph. 6:12). Forces of evil continue at work in this world. Various organized forces thrive on aggression, conquest, intimidat-

tion, exploitation, disorder, preferential position, or the denial of justice and human rights. Economic, political, and social systems in their operations, both at home and abroad, often intensify the difficulties of achieving peace, justice, and human rights.

11. Christians are realistic. We are neither utopian dreamers nor hopeless pessimists. We recognize the hard realities of the human situation. We know that we will never achieve utopia on this earth. Yet, we have a vision of the world as God sees it. We affirm the lordship of Jesus Christ and his triumph over all the forces of evil. We believe that to the extent that all persons have opportunity to hear about Jesus Christ, accept him as their Lord and Savior, and live in total commitment to his way, to that extent do prospects for peace, justice, and human rights brighten. We believe, therefore, that freedom for religious witness and the free exercise of religion are essential to peace, justice, and human rights. As Christians we share in the human vision of a better world. We join our neighbors in the struggle for that better world where peace, justice, and human rights are central in its civic righteousness.

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