



Principles for Public Advocacy

Pennsylvania Council of Churches



Developed by the Commission on Public Witness

Approved by the Board of Directors of the
Pennsylvania Council of Churches

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Developed in consultation with the Commission on Public Witness,
Pennsylvania Council of Churches.

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PRINCIPLES FOR PUBLIC ADVOCACY

Pennsylvania Council of Churches

PREAMBLE

Psalms 24:1 says, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” As Christians, we believe that all of creation is a gift from God, given to us to hold in sacred trust. We also believe that because God has created all things, all of creation possesses inherent value. Indeed, as God engaged in the very act of creation, God proclaimed this creation as good.

The early followers of God set about establishing the laws that governed their lives and their treatment of all creation. Even so, the story of human history is that while we acknowledge the wonder and the goodness of God’s creation, we don’t always treat it—the land, the air, the water, the plants and animals (including humans)—with the love, care, dignity, and respect it deserves.

When Jesus—teacher, prophet, God’s very image here on earth—entered the scene, he quickly went about the task of teaching his followers that the law was really quite simple—though not always easy to live out. When asked, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40).

In other words, the long list of laws concerning diet, cleanliness, observance of the Sabbath and many other things that had ruled the lives of the faithful for centuries all came down to these two very simple rules. Jesus’ life reflects these words, probably most clearly and forcefully in his healing acts performed on the Sabbath—to the consternation of many observant faithful in his society.

As Christians—followers of Christ—Jesus has interpreted what God desires from us. Loving God and loving neighbor are the principles that determine how we are to live our lives, and these principles are used set the direction for the advocacy efforts of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches.

For us, as Christian advocates, what does it mean to “love God” and “love our neighbors as ourselves”? We find many answers throughout both the Hebrew scriptures and our New Testament, including:

- Caring for creation
- Loving and working for justice for all of humankind, which includes:
 - Promoting respect for all persons
 - Protecting each person’s dignity
 - Showing compassion toward all
 - Ensuring that basic needs (food, clean water, secure housing and clothing) are met
- Engaging in acts of healing and promoting health for ourselves and our neighbors
- Working for peace and reconciliation wherever there is conflict
- Offering forgiveness when wrongs are committed, and working for the restoration of those who have committed wrongs, including ourselves
- Engaging in hospitality, welcoming all persons, including the “alien,” the “stranger”—that is, anyone who might be labeled as different.

We see God’s gracious love woven throughout both Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament, embodied in the concept of abundance. The manna story in Exodus reminds us that God provides abundantly if we trust in God, and that there are implications for hoarding more than our fair share. In Matthew 6, Jesus chides his followers for worrying more about earthly amenities than about striving for the realm of God—for it is in working for the realm

of God that they will receive all that they need. Put very simply, Jesus “came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

We believe that following the two great commandments to love God and love neighbor, with the understanding that God provides for us abundantly, will make it possible for us to shape a very different world.

What would life in this Commonwealth, shaped by these commandments and the principles they suggest, look like?

We believe it would look much different for most Pennsylvanians, shaped by an overarching commitment to facilitating the realm of God here on earth. All persons would receive respect, regardless of their place in society. No one would experience discrimination in any form. All would have what they need to live lives of dignity—living wage jobs, adequate access to health care, housing, food, and education. All who are unable to work or care for themselves for reasons of poor health, disability, economic climate, or other factors beyond their control—whether permanent or temporary—would have access to adequate care and support as it is needed. Those who have run afoul of societal rules would be treated with dignity, with an eye toward rehabilitation and restoration.

We believe individuals must accept their sacred responsibility to work toward a vision of this Commonwealth as expressed above, but individuals cannot do it alone. More collective action is needed. Governments, government institutions, businesses, and all other organizations and institutions would act on behalf of the common good—not just the bottom line—and follow through on promises. Government would protect civil liberties for all, and businesses, other organizations and institutions would treat employees fairly and contribute appropriately to society. To ensure that government and private entities work for the common good, all persons¹ would have a voice in government at all levels, and access would not be limited in any way. All must work cooperatively with the resources they have for the common good.

Completing the vision, however, requires one key component. All must work to protect and sustain our fragile resources—land, water, air, plants and animals—the entire web that connects and sustains all of God’s creation, or none of the elements described above will be possible.

PURPOSE

This document is intended to provide the basis for the Pennsylvania Council of Churches’ policy positions and priorities for public advocacy, and to inform policy-makers concerning the principles that guide the Council’s advocacy efforts. The Council’s principles reflect the principles and policy positions of its member bodies, where they are in agreement, and thus witness to their unity in Christ.

We hope that you will find this document useful, and that it will aid your understanding of how the Council determines the positions it takes in its efforts to be a faithful witness in the world.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

Please consider the following uses for this document:

- As a basis for adult classes.
- As a reference in the church or judicatory library.
- As a resource for workshops at meetings or annual conferences or in ecumenical activities.

¹While the landmark Supreme Court decision in the 2010 case of *Citizens United v Federal Election Commission*, 558 U.S. 50 (2010) recognizes corporations as persons and permits unlimited corporate funding of independent political broadcasts in candidate elections under the First Amendment, person in this instance refers to individuals. The Citizens United decision has the effect of limiting the voices of individuals and organizations that don’t have similar financial resources to make their voices heard.

- As a guide for advocacy efforts by individuals, congregations, member church bodies, and other groups of concerned persons.
- As a resource to prepare groups of citizen advocates for legislative visits through study and analysis of particular topics.
- As a guide to review particular policy positions related to legislation and analyze the implications for action.

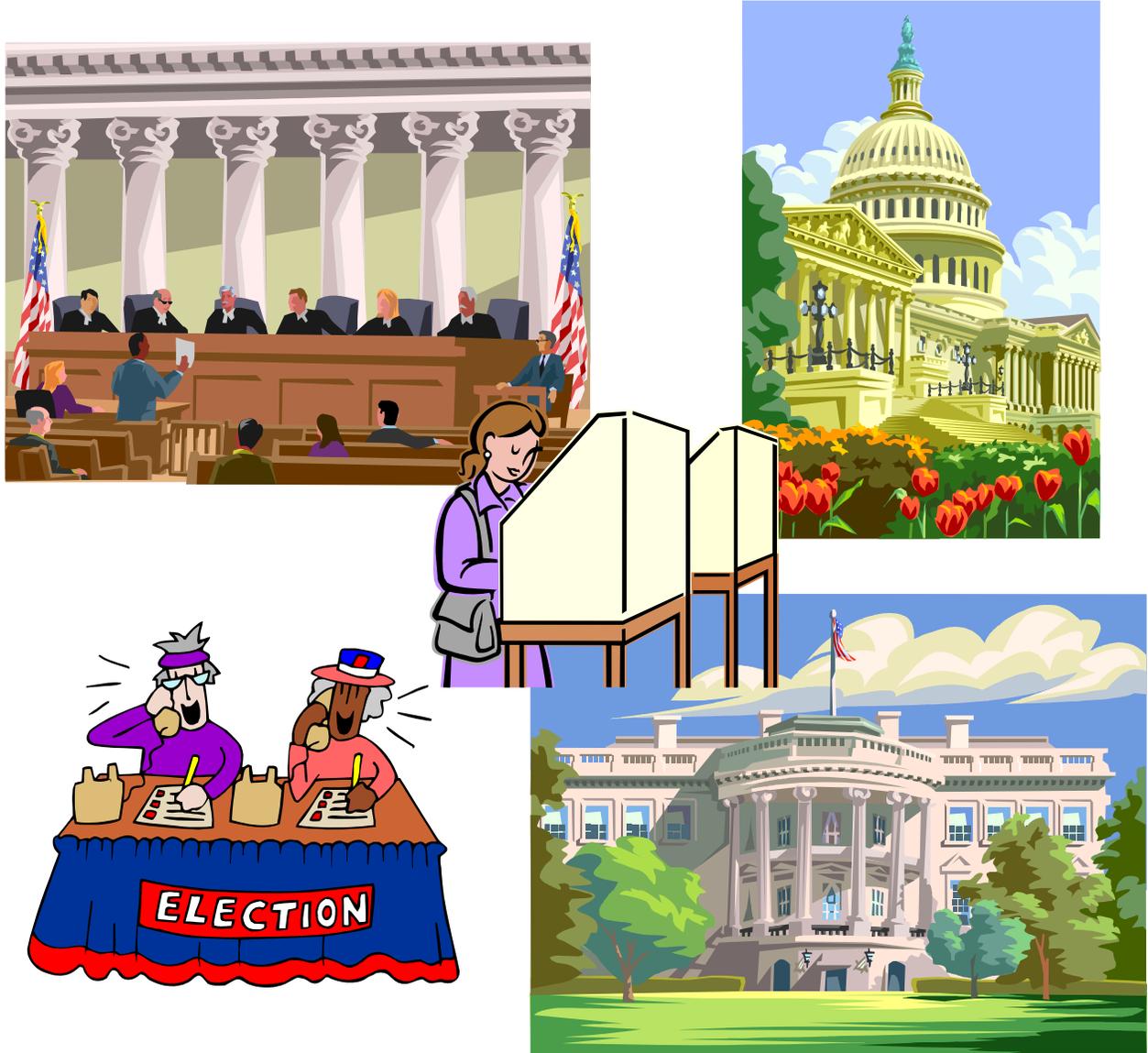
HOW THIS DOCUMENT IS ORGANIZED

Rather than providing dictionary definitions for each of the principles connected to loving God and loving neighbor as listed above, we decided that illustrating them via scriptural passages and relevant citations would be more illuminating for users. These passages will be highlighted in boxes throughout the document.

Specific areas of concern will be addressed separately. Within these sections, we will (1) state what we believe, (2) give an overview of what exists now and the challenges, (3) use the principles to lay out a vision for how things would be if we truly follow a path of loving God and loving neighbor, and (4) provide real world examples of the kind of advocacy efforts the Council has undertaken in working toward that vision. Throughout the document, we will cite supporting policies and statements from our member bodies. All of these references, with links for finding them where available, will be provided in their entirety in Part II: Selected Denominational References.

Please note that one statement concerning what we believe applies to every area of concern, and thus will not be repeated in the “What We Believe” sections for each of these areas: **We believe that every person is worthy of respect simply because we are all created in the image of God.**

An index is provided to help in finding specific information throughout the document.



Christian faith and scripture both speak to government. Scripture is teeming with stories of people of faith accepting the challenge of God's call to speak truth to power and step into the political world. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other Hebrew prophets confronted the power structures of their day to demand change in how the people were ruled. In the early church, Paul lectured on the duties of citizenship.

Church reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin took these scriptural imperatives to heart; in fact, according to Cynthia Moe-Lobeda in **Public Church: For the Life of the World** (p. 42), Luther

...wrote over one thousand letters to civil authorities, including letters regarding their public policies; fervently admonished preachers to preach against economic injustice and against economic practices and public policies that thwarted the well-being of the poor...and insisted that if civil authorities call Christians to actions that disobey God, then Christians must resist.

Jesus' life and, indeed, his death exemplified the cost of speaking truth to power.

Part I

Principles for Public Advocacy

Civic Engagement and Government Reform

What We Believe:

We believe that scripture is teeming with stories of people of faith accepting the challenge of God’s call to speak truth to power and step into the political world. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other Hebrew prophets confronted the power structures of their day to demand change in how the people were ruled. In the early church, Paul lectured on the duties of citizenship. Church reformers and leaders like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley took these scriptural imperatives to heart.

We believe that the government system that exists within the United States, where citizens have greater freedom than in many parts of the world, challenges us to bear witness. We are called by scripture to “Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9).

We believe that in a good society, those with political authority have a responsibility to provide justice for all. Elected officials are entrusted with managing the shared resources of the people and ensuring that decisions are made with justice and transparency. If government works as intended, its services, such as public safety and security, health, community and human services and public education, benefit the common good and address the needs of all citizens. We believe government has an especially significant role in protecting those who are weak and vulnerable—those who are unable to protect themselves.

Almighty God, ruler of all the peoples of the earth, forgive, we pray, our shortcomings as a nation; purify our hearts to see and love truth; give wisdom to our counselors and steadfastness to our people; and bring us at last to the fair city of peace, whose foundations are mercy, justice, and goodwill, and whose builder and maker you are; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

—Prayer for our nation by Woodrow Wilson

We believe that all persons should have a voice in government at all levels—including the right to vote—and that access not be limited because of situational factors such as economic disadvantages or distance, or demographic characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, disability, or sexual orientation. This includes convicted felons who have completed their jail sentences and have entered back into society.



Overview/Challenges:

The Council has long been aware of the distortions of power and the inordinate role of money within governing structures. Far too many of our elected leaders have violated the public trust by elevating themselves, enhancing their personal power, and becoming more responsive to moneyed interests than to the voices of common persons, moving agendas that do not benefit the common good or assure protection of the vulnerable. Often we find that reform efforts at all levels of government are mere window dressing. It seems that there is significant evidence that the power of ordinary citizens continues to remain secondary to that of special interests and, indeed, to those elected to serve us.

Without significant resources to engage in what has become known as a “pay to play” system, Christian advocates, whose voices for justice are strong and passionate, will not be heard on the traditional issues of the faith community, including poverty, health care, and the environment.

Given these challenges, we recognize that Christian citizen engagement in government must be as much about seeking transparency and integrity within the halls of power as it has been about seeking eco-

conomic and social justice. Without successfully changing the dynamics of power, we have no ability to realize any level of justice. Steadfast witness cannot succeed without systemic change.

Loving our Neighbor/Vision:

We envision a society where elected and appointed officials are entrusted with managing the shared resources of the people and ensuring that decisions are made with justice and transparency, where the people are fully engaged in the quest for mercy, justice and goodwill, and where there are no barriers to full participation in our government system.

Examples of Advocacy Efforts

Support for the following legislation and/or policies:

- Setting fair and reasonable campaign finance limits.
- Establishing lobbyist disclosure that provides transparency concerning the influence of lobbyists.
- Voting rules that expand access, rather than limit or erect barriers to voting.

References:

AME econ.; AMEZ mission; ABC church & state; ABC power; ABC separation; NBCA home mission; Prog. civil rights; COB responsible citizenship; Friends civic engage; Friends policy; Friends declaration; G.O. Holy Spirit; ELCA policies & procedures; ELCA church in society; Mor. ch. & state; Presby. 1967; Presby. civic engage; UCC briefings; UCC separation; UM civic responsibility

Criminal Justice & the Death Penalty

What We Believe:

Jesus spoke against retributive justice when he said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” (Matthew 5:38-39). He also encouraged the eternally revolutionary mandate to “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

In that day the Lord of hosts will be...a spirit of justice to the one who sits in judgment.

—*Isaiah 28:5-6 (NRSV)*

Jesus spoke **against** hatred and **for** love at every turn. Putting someone to death, or imposing cruel/unusual punishment, whether as an individual or government, is not an act of love. The death penalty is an act of retribution, not justice.

We believe there is no room for vengeance and retribution in our criminal justice system. Because we believe every soul is redeemable, we believe that re-

habilitation and restoration should be the first priority for dealing with persons who have broken the law.

Overview/Challenges:

Crime—including violent crime—has been present for as long as human beings have walked on earth. We are reminded as Christians that even the first family knew the pain of violence when Cain slew Abel. While the crime cried out to God from the blood soaked ground (Genesis 4:10), God’s response to the first murder was not to put Cain to death. Just as God was pained, “The human community is saddened by violence, and angered by the injustice involved. We want to hold accountable those who violate life, who violate society. Our sadness and anger, however, make us vulnerable to feelings of revenge. Our frustration with the complex problems contributing to violence may make us long for simple solutions.”²



²ELCA Social Practice Social Statement, adopted 1991.

The U.S. criminal justice system is deeply in need of study and correction:

- The United States has by far the world's highest incarceration rate. With five percent of the world's population, our country now houses twenty-five percent of the world's reported prisoners.
- Our prison population has skyrocketed over the past two decades as we have incarcerated more people for non-violent crimes and acts driven by mental illness or drug dependence.
- The costs to our federal, state, and local governments of keeping repeat offenders in the criminal justice system continue to grow during a time of increasingly tight budgets.
- Existing practices too often incarcerate people who do not belong in prison and distract from locking up the more serious, violent offenders who are a threat to our communities.

I was in prison, and you visited me.

—Matthew 25:36b (NRSV)

- Mass incarceration of illegal drug users has not curtailed drug usage. The multi-billion dollar illegal drug industry remains intact, with more dangerous drugs continuing to reach our streets.
- Incarceration for drug crimes has had a disproportionate impact on minority communities, despite virtually identical levels of drug use across racial and ethnic lines.
- Post-incarceration re-entry programs are haphazard and often nonexistent, undermining public safety and making it extremely difficult for ex-offenders to become full, contributing members of society.³

However, no issue is more pressing than the questions surrounding the use of the death penalty. The death penalty is held up as a deterrent by some, while others feel it is the only fitting punishment for

Examples of Advocacy Efforts:

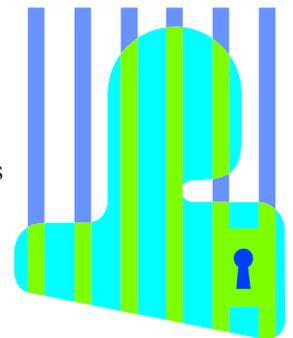
Support for the following legislation and/or policies:

- A moratorium on or abolition of the death penalty.
- Passage of the National Criminal Justice Commission Act to reform the criminal justice system.
- Voting rights for persons who have completed their sentences and returned to society.
- Reforms to the juvenile justice system.

the most violent and disturbing offenses. Politicians often use the death penalty to send a message that they are “tough” on crime. This toughness only continues the cycle of violence, ending the hope of redemption and positive contribution to society.

Loving our Neighbor/Vision:

We envision a society where persons accused of crimes are afforded fair trials, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status, and where opportunities for rehabilitation and redemption are considered in addition to punishment. Loving our neighbor means retribution should not be considered as a means of punishment. It also means that we ensure that punishment is proportionate to the crimes committed and equal or similar regardless of the person convicted for the crime, and that we must provide opportunities for offenders to make restitution and supports to help them be integrated back into society.



References:

ABC capital punishment; ABC criminal justice; ABC racial justice; ABC restorative justice; COB death row; Epis. death penalty; Friends crim. justice; ELCA death penalty; Mor. crim. justice & death penalty; Presby. cap. punishment; Presby. crim. justice; UCC cap. punishment; UCC racial justice; UCC restorative justice; UM crim. justice; UM death penalty

³United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society (http://www.umc-gbcs.org/c.frLJK2PKLqF/b.2794373/k.8BBF/Action_Center/siteapps/advocacy/ActionItem.aspx?c=frLJK2PKLqF&b=2794373&aid=13483).

Economic Justice/Worker Rights

What We Believe:

We believe that economic justice is rooted in the concept of abundance—visible in creation, and testified to by scripture. A presupposition of abundance frees us to live in a spirit of generosity, recognizing that there is enough for all. We believe that all deserve an opportunity to work, and that workers must be rewarded fairly for their labor, and must have the right to organize in order to protect their interests. However, we also believe that persons who are unable to work or who have completed their working careers must be afforded sufficient support to live with dignity.

Workers should also have some assurance that once their working life is done, they will have access to basic support that permits them to live out their lives with dignity.

Overview/Challenges:

In the richest country in the world, more than two million full-time, year round workers live below the poverty line, struggling to pay for necessities such as food, housing, healthcare, transportation, and child-care.

We learn the following from **A Just Minimum Wage**⁴:

Moses, the servant of God, was indeed a civil rights leader and an immigrants' rights leader, but he was also the Bible's first labor leader. Pharaoh placed slave-masters over the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly, "and they made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field" (Exodus 1:14). Even though Moses was raised in Pharaoh's court, he slew an Egyptian taskmaster who was whipping a Hebrew slave and took flight. In response to the cries for help by the Israelites groaning under their burdens, God told Moses to return to Egypt and lead the campaign for freedom.

—*Interfaith Worker Justice*, <http://www.iwj.org/resources/why-unions-matter-and-what-faith-has-to-do-with-it>



- The minimum wage has become a poverty wage instead of an anti-poverty wage. This has ripple effects through our workforce and society far beyond minimum wage workers and their families.
- The minimum wage sets the wage floor. As the wage floor has dropped below poverty levels, millions of workers find themselves with paychecks above the minimum, but not above the poverty line. Millions of workers are working hard, but can't make ends meet.
- As *Business Week* observed in a 2004 cover story on the growing ranks of the working poor, "More than 28 million people, about a quarter of the workforce between the ages of 18 and 64, earn less than \$9.04 an hour, which translates into a full-time salary of \$18,800 a year—the income that marks the federal poverty line for a family of four."
- We have gone so far backwards that one out of four workers makes the \$9-and-change-equivalent of the minimum wage of 1968. This includes nearly one out of three women workers, one out of three African American workers and more than one out of three Latino workers.
- Poverty rates are higher now than in the 1970s thanks in part to the falling minimum wage.
- Nearly one in three children living below the official poverty line lived in families where someone worked full time year round in 2003—an increase of 75 percent since 1991.

Even Adam Smith, the father of modern capitalism, said in his book **The Wealth of Nations**: "It is but equity... that they who feed, clothe and lodge the

⁴*A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business and Our Future* (American Friends Service Committee, the National Council of Churches and Holly Sklar, 2005), p. 5.



whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labor as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed and lodged.”⁵ For many, it requires two or more jobs to do this. Maintaining such a work schedule may “keep the

wolf from the door,” but it does little for an individual’s or family’s quality of life.

Low wages are not the only problem. According to Interfaith Worker Justice, “Wage Theft is the illegal underpayment or non-payment of workers’ wages. It affects millions of workers each year, often forcing them to choose between paying the rent or putting food on the table. Wage Theft is all around us. It robs from the government’s tax coffers, resulting in cutbacks of vital services. Wage Theft puts ethical employers at a competitive disadvantage.”⁶ It includes violations of minimum wage laws; not paying time and a half overtime pay; forcing workers to work off the clock; workers not receiving their final paychecks; misclassifying employees as independent contractors to avoid paying minimum wage and overtime (as well as employers’ share of FICA tax); and not paying workers at all.

Another problem is that more than half of American workers in the private sector do not have access to paid sick leave, and therefore cannot take a paid sick day, either for themselves or family members. They end up going to work sick, risk losing a day’s pay or even their jobs.

A more recent problem relates to unprecedented high levels of unemployment, and also chronic unemployment that exists among some populations. Insufficient levels of unemployment compensation, as well as the length of unemployment (where benefits end after the required period) mean that workers and families risk bankruptcy, foreclosure, and all the other problems that follow.

Finally, most workers have paid into the social insurance system called Social Security throughout their working lives, and many have paid into company, institutional, or government pension programs. These programs represent a social contract with workers. As government budgets have fallen short, and businesses and institutions have run into financial troubles, these programs are being threatened, and in some cases, discontinued. Retirees can no longer count on these social contracts being honored.

Loving our Neighbor/Vision:

We envision a society where “A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it.”⁷ Loving our neighbor means that we ensure that workers receive a fair, living wage for their work, so that they can live with dignity and provide for their most basic needs. It means that they get paid for every hour of the work they do, that they have sufficient time for breaks during the work day, and that they be afforded appropriate compensation so that a worker’s or a family member’s illness does not put them at

Examples of Advocacy Efforts:

Support for the following legislation and/or policies:

- A fair minimum wage—living wage—that is sufficient to provide for basic needs.
- Paid sick leave for workers in all places of employment.
- Legislation and policies that prevent wage theft.
- Protecting Social Security, unemployment compensation, and other mechanisms that make it possible for workers to live lives of dignity.
- Preventing the expansion of gambling with its negative effects on families and communities.
- Fair and progressive taxation.
- Equal pay for equal work.

⁵Ibid., p. 1.

⁶Interfaith Worker Justice, <http://www.iwj.org/index.cfm/wage-theft>.

⁷A Just Minimum Wage, p. 1.

risk for their job. It also means that workers are protected from financial devastation when they are unemployed for reasons beyond their control. It means

that the social contracts meant to protect the financial condition/quality of life for seniors must be honored.

References:

AME beliefs; AME econ.; AMEZ mission; ABC affirmative action; ABC civil rights; ABC economic justice; ABC employment; ABC gambling; ABC gambling & state revenue; ABC human rights; ABC labor; ABC power; ABC racial justice; ABC tax policy; NBCA home mission; Prog. civil rights; COB minimum wage; Epis. living wage; Epis. unions; Friends econ justice; Friends policy; G.O. econ injustice; G.O. human dignity; ELCA economic; ELCA race; Mor. gambling; Mor. globalization; Mor. racism; Presby. gambling; Presby. labor; UCC civil liberties; UCC econ. justice; UCC minimum wage; UCC econ. justice; UCC racial justice; UM gambling; UM labor; Interfaith Worker Justice also provides explicit documentation on denominational positions at <http://www.inj.org/resources/protestantism>.

Environment

What We Believe:

We believe that all creation is a gift from God, and that we are called to be faithful stewards of creation on God's behalf. We understand stewardship—care for creation—to mean that we must honor the integrity of creation, acknowledging that all of creation is a web. A web is very strong, but that strength is contingent upon protecting the web as a whole. When we do harm to one portion of the web, all other parts of the web will experience harm in ways we cannot predict. We understand that loving our neighbor means recognizing that we are all dependent on this fragile and intricate web of creation, and that our neighbors may suffer when we violate the integrity of creation.

As human beings, we have to respect [God's] order if we are to live on earth. When the limits set by God are transgressed, the fragile balance can easily be broken... Humans are creatures whose life flourishes only as they respect their connection with the whole. Eating and even breathing remind us of our dependence on the cycles of nature... With our unique freedom, however, we tend to forget or deny our continuing dependence on the rest of creation. The patterns of behavior and industry that we establish for ourselves are often at odds with the ecological cycles into which they need to fit.

—“*Human Creatures as Part of the Whole of Creation*,” *Sign of Peril, Test of Faith: Accelerated Climate Change*, World Council of Churches, 1993, p. 32.

Stewardship dictates that we use sustainability—the capacity to endure—as a measure. How will our actions affect the sustainability of our natural resources of water, air, and land, or other finite resources that help to support our lives? How will our actions affect all other living things?



Overview/Challenges:

Humans have failed to care for creation in keeping with God's call to “till and keep” the garden (Genesis 2:15)—the magnificent creation we have been given. While there are those who disagree, the preponderance of scientific evidence indicates that our failure to curb the ever-increasing emissions of global warming gases into the air has resulted in a sharp increase in global temperatures over the past century.

Over the last decade we have witnessed more extreme weather patterns, and the hottest annual temperatures on record,⁸ creating a wide range of problems within our environment, and Pennsylvania is not immune. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists in a 2008 report, “Pennsylvania is pro-

⁸http://www.noaa.gov/stories2010/20100728_stateoftheclimate.html NOAA: Past Decade Warmest on Record According to Scientists in 48 Countries: Earth has been growing warmer for more than fifty years, July 28, 2010, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

jected to experience dramatic increases in the number of extremely hot days over the coming century...The greatest warming will be in the southwest and southeast regions, where daytime temperatures by late century (2070–2099) could hover over 90°F for nearly the entire summer.”⁹ The heat will have particularly negative health effects on vulnerable persons, agriculture, native trees, birds, and recreation, and has already made possible the overwintering of the West Nile virus and Lyme disease ticks. Effects on other parts of the country and around the world will differ, but the news is not good for people and the environment in which we live.

The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.

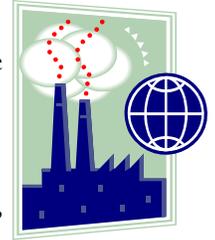
—*Psalms 24* (NRSV)

In pouring a variety of toxic materials into our air and water, we have tipped the delicate balance of nature. High levels of toxic chemicals, nutrients and sediments have caused severe damage to thousands of miles of waterways and groundwater—affecting aquatic life, water dependent industries and drinking water. Pollutants released into the air have also affected plant and animal life, and have had the most negative impacts on persons with asthma and other health problems. Toxic materials in the environment are the cause of many human and animal diseases—most notably various forms of cancer, but there are many others—as well as environmental degradation and devastation.

Loving our Neighbor/Vision:

Loving our fellow human beings means supporting legislation and policies that ensure that people everywhere—not just in our backyard—are able to live in an environment where they are able to thrive, with

access to clean air, clean water, and other resources that they need to live abundant lives. It means that when legislation and policies threaten to create an environment that is detrimental to any part of God’s creation, we seek to prevent them. Where previous actions have already caused environmental damage, it means that we must move quickly to work toward restoring the environment in a way that ensures the integrity of every portion of the web.



We recognize that great damage has already been done, and that restoring our environment to a place where all of creation is able to survive and thrive is a goal that may never be achieved. We know that this work will take long term commitment. It will require significant education within our congregations and church bodies, and sustained challenges to our elected officials and government policymakers to make personal and political decisions today that honor tomorrow.

Examples of Advocacy Efforts:

Support for the following legislation and/or policies:

- Protecting public health and the environment in the development of Marcellus Shale natural gas resources.
- Climate change legislation that drastically reduces global warming emissions and assists those most affected by climate change.
- Clean water legislation that protects the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- Strengthening the Toxic Substances Control Act.
- Ending mountaintop removal mining.

References:

ABC ecology; ABC energy; ABC environmental concerns; ABC global warming; NBCA home mission; Disc. ecology; COB creation; COB global warming; Epis. global warming; Epis. sustain; Epis. water; Friends eco-justice; G.O. creation; G.O. Easter; G.O. ecology; G.O. environmental intro; G.O. environmental examples; G.O. nature; ELCA creation; Mor. environment; Presby. energy; Presby. environment; UCC climate change; UM environment

⁹http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/global_warming/Exec-Summary_Climate-Change-in-Pennsylvania.pdf, Climate Change Impacts and Solutions for Pennsylvania: How Today’s Actions Shape the State’s Future, Executive Summary, Union of Concerned Sciences, 2008.

Health Care

What We Believe:

Jesus, the “great physician,” said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). His words and healing acts extended beyond his immediate family and community to some of the most hated and marginalized persons in his society. As persons created in the image of God, we understand that we have a responsibility to do the same; we are to care for the well-being of all, extending that care to our own bodies. By tending to the well-being of all, we not only respect their humanity and dignity—we help them to live abundantly—to their full-potential.

We are also called to care for those who are most vulnerable among us. We see and understand the

As people of faith, we envision a society where each person is afforded health, wholeness, and human dignity. That vision embraces a system of health care that is inclusive... accessible... affordable... and accountable.

—“*A Faith-Inspired Vision of Health Care,*”
Faithful Reform in Health Care
(<http://www.faithfulreform.org/>)

vulnerability of persons who are disabled, ill, or who have ongoing health challenges. But we must recognize that those who are uninsured and without financial resources to pay for health care are vulnerable as well—and we believe they should not be forced to choose between caring for their health and other necessary goods and services.

Overview/Challenges:

For centuries we have failed to care for the health and welfare of all of our fellow human beings. We know from the gospels that 2000 years ago lepers,

mentally ill and physically disabled persons were either abandoned or sent to live separate from the rest of society. Even in the earlier years in our own country, mentally ill persons were routinely sent to “insane asylums” where they received poor or even abusive treatment.



For the most part, we no longer physically separate persons from society for reasons of health or disability. But instead, we find millions of Americans left without access to proper health care for lack of insurance and/or lack of money.

Shrinking budgets have also led us to reduce assistance to address health concerns in other parts of the world. However, in an ever more connected world, the problems in other countries or continents sometimes tend to become problems throughout the entire world, including the United States.

Loving our Neighbor/Vision:

Loving our neighbor means supporting a comprehensive health care system that is available to ALL persons. This comprehensive system would cover all persons, and would provide for continuous coverage through moves, jobs changes, or other life events. It would be affordable for individuals and families, and would ensure that money is not a bar to receiving health care if and when it is needed. It would be affordable and sustainable for society, and would enhance health and well-being by promoting access to high-quality care that is effective, efficient, safe, timely, patient-centered, and equitable.¹⁰



¹⁰From *Insuring America's Health: Principles and Recommendations*, Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, January 2004 (www.iom.edu).

Examples of Advocacy Efforts:

Support for the following legislation and/or policies:

- Comprehensive health care reform at the federal level.
- A single-payer health care system that is publicly financed and privately delivered at the state level.
- The Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).
- Affordable health care for low income persons at the state level.



References:

ABC health care; COB health care; Friends health care; Epis. health care; Epis. Medicare; G.O. health; ELCA health; OCA affirmations; Presby. health; UCC health care; Faithful Reform in Health Care also provides a number of links to theological statements concerning health care at http://www.faithfulreform.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=category§ionid=9&id=74&Itemid=68.

Human Needs/Poverty

What We Believe:

We believe that every person—especially those who are most vulnerable due to age, lack of wealth, gender, race, ethnicity, or disabilities—should have access to all that is necessary to “live life abundantly.” We also believe that a just society has a responsibility to protect all who are marginalized or disenfranchised in any way—which includes persons who lack financial and material resources.

And from the Council’s “A Statement Concerning Poverty”¹¹:

“It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?: says the Lord God of hosts.

—*Isaiah 3:14b-15 (NRSV)*

place our service to the poor and vulnerable and our work for justice at the center of Christian life and witness.

The Council believes that we are called by God to urge our churches and nation to strengthen and expand efforts to address the scandal of widespread poverty in the United States and around the world. The Gospel and our ethical principles

We believe the fundamental question for Christians is, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus addresses this question in Matthew 25, when he says, “Just as you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me.” Jesus’ words strike at the very core of God’s call to us as Christians—to love God, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Presumably, loving our neighbors as ourselves means treating them as we would like to be treated—with dignity and respect. This simple “Golden Rule” guides us to work to ensure that all persons have what they need to live lives of dignity, safely and with access to adequate food, shelter, health care, education, and living wage employment.

Treating others with dignity and respect includes having an acute awareness that all members of society do not have the same privileges or opportunities due to circumstances beyond their control, including, but not limited to, race, gender, and position. Once we understand that all do not have the same privileges, we have a responsibility



¹¹http://www.pachurchesadvocacy.org/index_files/web_attachments/Statement_on_Poverty.pdf

to lessen or end the consolidation of power in the hands of those with privilege.

Overview/Challenges:

The Council's Commission on Public Witness has defined poverty as a continual, chronic condition of want for (1) basic necessities, resources, and opportunities, (2) connection to the larger society, and (3) power to affect positive change, which is often exacerbated by social stigmas, isolation, and caste status. Despite many efforts over the years, by most measures the number of persons living in poverty or at the low end of the income scale is growing, and the gap between the richest and poorest continues to widen.



We witness a reluctance to accept individual or societal responsibility for any part of this problem. We also understand that greed leads us to hoard more than our “share” of resources, driven by the fear that there isn't enough to go around.¹² Often we even place blame on persons living

in poverty in the belief that our capitalist system will always work to lift persons out of poverty if they work hard enough. We acknowledge that this system can and does lift some out of poverty, but we also stress that this isn't always the case. A free market system does, in fact, require rules to avoid producing extreme winners and losers. Such rules can serve to “level the playing field” for those who start out with poor conditions and without the “equipment” they need to be in the game.

Poverty is not a life-style choice. We believe that most people, given favorable circumstances and the

right resources, would choose the path that leads to a comfortable existence and respect within our society.

Despite evidence that poverty is growing in the United States, legislators and decision makers at every level continue to reduce taxes while making further cuts to budgets for

programs that support the country's most vulnerable citizens—budgets that are already insufficient to meet the growing needs of these persons.

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

—Matthew 6:26 (NRSV)

Loving our Neighbor/Vision:

We envision a society where everyone respects the dignity of their fellow human beings, regardless of any demographic characteristics that might apply. It means making sure all the mechanisms are in place to ensure that all have their basic needs met—food, clean water, safe and secure housing, clothing, health care, etc.

Examples of Advocacy Efforts:

Support for the following legislation and/or policies:

- Protecting the needs of poor and low income persons in both state and federal budgets.
- Strengthening the SNAP/Food Stamp program to address food insecurity.
- Providing healthy and adequate food for children in schools and at home.
- Assisting citizens in danger of losing their homes with home foreclosure relief and tools.

References:

AME beliefs; AME econ.; AMEZ mission; ABC economic justice; ABC housing; ABC hunger; ABC power; ABC welfare; NBCA home mission; Prog. civil rights; Epis. dom poverty; Epis. housing; Friends econ justice; Friends policy; G.O. Cyprian “Works & Alms”; G.O. econ injustice; G.O. Holy Spirit; G.O. human dignity; G.O. sanctity of life; ELCA policies & procedures; ELCA economic; Mor. poverty; Mor. world poverty; OCA affirmations; Presby. fed econ priorities; Presby. housing; Presby. hunger; Presby. poverty; UCC econ. justice; UM poverty

¹²This speaks to the notion of “poverty of spirit,” and it is this type of poverty that we believe contributes to poverty as defined above.

Immigration and Refugees

What We Believe:

We believe that God calls upon us to welcome the “stranger,” the “alien,” and all who may be considered “different” or “foreign” in our midst. In the time of the patriarchs/matriarchs we know through the Jewish scriptures that such a practice quite literally meant the difference between life and death for those made welcome during travel or other migration. In Hebrews, we are reminded to show hospitality to strangers because we never know when we might be entertaining angels (Hebrews 13:2). In fact, we never know when we might find ourselves in circumstances where we might need such hospitality.

Overview/Challenges:

Throughout history we have witnessed a climate of fear and resistance to migration of new and different populations, including to our own country. Even though millions originally came to North America to escape religious persecution in their native countries,



history shows that these religious refugees themselves became oppressors, seeking to limit or even prevent those from other traditions from establishing a home in this country.

We have witnessed resistance to entry of persons from other countries and of other ethnicities. Initially it was

mostly Europeans from countries/ethnicities not already represented, like Ireland, Italy, and eastern Europe. Later, the resistance became more focused on those who look different from our European ancestors—primarily Africans and Asians. More recently, opposition has shifted mostly to Latino and Arab populations seeking to live and work in the United States.

Our restrictive immigration laws have made it nearly impossible for even refugees to follow a clear, reasonable, and timely path to legal status. For years we have encouraged the entry of workers willing to take on the jobs that most Americans are not willing to

do for wages far below a fair level. Now we find that these same workers are accused of “stealing” jobs that should rightfully belong to Americans. We also find that immigrants of all backgrounds—but mostly the most hated and/or feared (primarily Latino and Arab)—are accused unfairly of engaging in crime and violence that is destroying our communities, and robbing Americans of millions in education, health care, and social welfare program dollars.



Failure to act at the federal level is resulting in states and towns taking actions that may be harmful to immigrants, and that may differ from state to state, making enforcement difficult. One concerning possibility is the increasing use of racial/ethnic profiling in the effort to seek out undocumented persons.

Loving our Neighbor/Vision:

We envision a society where we welcome the stranger—regardless of race, ethnicity, or country of origin—with love and compassion rather than suspicion, and where all are able to live openly as contributing members of society. Loving our neighbor means that we seek to create immigration policies:

- (1) that provide opportunities for hard-working undocumented persons who are already contributing to this country to pursue lawful permanent residency;
- (2) that are “family-friendly,” seeking to expedite bringing and keeping families together rather than separating them;
- (3) that create reasonable avenues for those who wish to enter

You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

—Deuteronomy 10:19 (NRSV)

the United States to work and live with their rights fully protected—whether as permanent residents or as migrants; and (4) that protect our borders in the most humane way possible, respecting the lives and dignities of individuals.

Examples of Advocacy Efforts:

Support for the following legislation and/or policies:

- Comprehensive immigration reform that establishes a safe and humane immigration system.
- Passing the DREAM Act to create a path to legal status for persons brought to the U.S. as children.

References:

ABC immigration; Epis. immigration; Friends immigration; ELCA immigration; Mor. immigration; Presby. immigration; UCC immigration

Peacemaking/Preventing Violence

What We Believe:

We believe that scripture gives a vision of a world at peace in numerous places, and that brokenness and sinfulness are not the final words for humankind. God is constantly at work healing the brokenness that exists in individual lives, in families, communities, congregations, political processes and systems and in the environment around us.

We believe that peacemaking is the appropriate human response to the divine gift of peace, wholeness and reconciliation. God calls us to reconciliation: between individuals, within families and communities, and among nations. When faced with conflict and brokenness, our first response is to seek a peaceful solution that ensures the health and safety of all involved.

We witness God's gift of peace most profoundly in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We believe that

He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

—Isaiah 2:4 (NRSV)

Christ calls all who profess faith in him to share the gospel message of peace to a broken and insecure world. We believe that there will never be peace on earth as long as there is injustice. As the Body of Christ, we are called to stand with all humankind in the search for justice. Christians are called, then, to embrace the security

that God has given and to pursue the security that God intends for creation on a local, national, and global level. We are called to treat others fairly and justly and to care about the safety of others.



We are called to feed the hungry, find shelter for the homeless, create jobs for the unemployed, and work for the day when poverty ends. We are called to turn our swords into plowshares, to love our enemies, to take those actions with other nations that will prevent future acts of terrorism, to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction that threaten to undo God's creation, and to invest in productive lives rather than violent deaths.

Seeking reconciliation and peace is not an optional activity. It is an absolute imperative in a time when we threaten to destroy our society and our world if we do not begin the hard work of finding peaceful solutions to the conflicts and the problems that we face.

Overview/Challenges:

At the Global Level:

During most of the previous century, Americans felt safe and insulated from the dangers of war as conflicts raged in other parts of the world. We could watch as tensions erupted into violence, believing we had the luxury of staying on the sidelines for many years, acting only when we felt it served our inter-

ests. Then things began to change toward the end of the 20th Century. U.S. citizens and military personnel came under attack in other parts of the world as individuals, residence buildings, embassies, and other American installations and symbols became the targets of violence and bloodshed. The threat, for the most part, still seemed distant until September 11, 2001.

Since 9/11, tensions have continued to rise globally. According to the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition:

Threats to U.S. safety and security are no longer limited to conflicts between nations. Fueled by extremism and instability, today's challenges include terrorism, global pandemics, famine, and the complex challenges of fragile states. Responding to these types of threats requires strong development and diplomacy capabilities in addition to our military strength...Investments in development and diplomacy reduce the burdens on our men and women in uniform and diminish the likelihood of costly military involvement.¹³

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

—Matthew 5:9 (NRSV)

Many live in fear of terrorist attacks. Meanwhile, traditional conflicts throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East have continued as well. Often, those in conflict fail to seek peaceful solutions, electing instead to engage in war as a means of settling disputes. The result has been increased fear, death, suffering, hunger and deprivation among those who are directly involved in areas of conflict. Most Americans still do not witness these conflicts directly, but are affected indirectly when they live in fear for their safety and when national spending to support war and other conflicts takes away from funding that



otherwise might support some of the most vulnerable citizens.

At the Domestic/Local Level:

While violence continues to escalate at the global level, we also see violence manifesting itself within our own society. Gang warfare has turned some neighborhoods and regions into places of fear. A constant barrage of violent images on television, in movies, in music, and on our streets seems to have desensitized some members of our society, and as a result, women, children, and even whole families live under the threat of violence and abuse.



A rising tide of handgun violence affects all corners of our country and our Commonwealth. Pennsylvania's existing gun laws make multiple handgun purchases easy and cheap, and encourage illegal trade in handguns and the cruel and vicious violence that results. Too many families of both victims and perpetrators are thrown into grief by handgun vio-

Examples of Advocacy Efforts:

Support for the following legislation and/or policies:

- Ending economic disparities and political oppression that are often the root causes of terrorism, genocide, war, and other violence.
- Investing energy and funds into productive activities that will address the problems that lead to conflict—feeding the hungry, providing adequate shelter, fostering good educational systems, and creating jobs that build up society and training people to fill those positions.
- Stopping the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and reducing existing stockpiles of weapons.
- Stopping the spread of illegal weapons within our communities.
- Protecting families and individuals from violence and abuse.

¹³Smart Power Fact Sheet, http://www.usglc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/USGLC_National%20Security_one_pager.pdf.

lence. Too many congregations—urban, suburban, and rural—have buried children and sought to bring the comfort of God’s peace to families wracked by this epidemic of violence and death.

The Council acknowledges the problem is primarily one of handgun distribution, abuse, and violence, not gun ownership. While the vast majority of handgun owners take their responsibility for the safe use of guns seriously, existing laws need to strengthen

responsible ownership for all gun owners, and to prevent illegal sale and distribution of firearms.

Loving our Neighbor/Vision:

We envision a society where justice reigns, and all feel called to work within the world to build a culture of peace and understanding as a means of protecting all who are created in the image of God and preserving the creation that God called good.

References:

ABC peace; ABC peacekeeping; COB nonviolence; COB peacemaking; Epis. foreign non-violence; Epis. guns; Friends peace; G.O. peace; G.O. violence; ELCA peace; Mor. peace and justice; Presby. dom. violence; Presby. gun violence; Presby. peace; UM peace

Public Education

What We Believe:

“As Christians we believe that God desires for children the life abundant which comes from the fullest development of their gifts — physical, intellectual, social and spiritual.”¹⁴

We believe “The health and strength of our nation depends on the ability of its citizens to understand issues and to treat each other with respect.”¹⁵ This is made possible by the availability of comprehensive, fair, and effective education. A just education system prepares persons for gainful employment that enables them to support themselves and their families, and provides them with an adequate understanding of their responsibilities as members of communities and our society as a whole.

Overview/Challenges:

Injustices in our public education system continue to exist despite many attempts to reform the system over the years. We have identified poverty and racism as the main causes of these injustices. Many public school systems—including Pennsylvania’s schools—rely to a large extent on local funding, which varies widely from district to district. Good

Schools Pennsylvania has noted that “...some communities are taxing themselves at four times the rate of other communities, yet still unable because of low community wealth to raise adequate funds to support their schools. Consequently, in Pennsylvania, some students are supported by as much as \$17,000 per year, and some in other districts by as little as \$6,000 per year.”¹⁶ Declines in state funding combined with an inequitable allocation system have served to exacerbate injustices.



Pennsylvania adopted a new school funding formula in 2007, but state budget challenges continue to affect the state’s ability to provide adequate funding to fully address the inequities, insufficiencies, and disparate needs that exist among the state’s school districts.

Also, a shifting focus to rewarding “successful” teachers, programs, and districts **seems** logical, but in fact threatens to shift even more funding from

¹⁴1991, United Church of Christ General Synod XVIII Pronouncement, "Support of Quality, Integrated Education for All Children in Public Schools"

¹⁵Laura Sadler Olin, Executive Director of the Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment.

¹⁶Good Schools Pennsylvania, “Core Messages, Education Finance Reform Campaign.”

challenged districts (those with significant poverty and populations of color) to districts with the resources to produce more “successful” outcomes. With revenues declining at all levels of government, schools are fortunate if education funding remains level—often, schools are competing in a zero-sum game for pieces of a shrinking pie.

Loving our Neighbor/Vision:

We envision a society that provides comprehensive, fair, adequate and cost effective public education opportunities for all children and youth.

Loving our neighbor means that we will work for our society to address injustices in our public education system, rooting out patterns of discrimination that impact the ability of specific populations to receive fair and adequate quality education. It means that we will work to enact fair, progressive tax struc-

tures that provide for fair and adequate funding for all students and schools. Finally, it means that we must urge policymakers, in cooperation with education professionals, to work toward set ambitious but reachable standards for students and schools, and to provide resources and tools to help in meeting the standards.

Examples of Advocacy Efforts:

Support for the following legislation and/or policies:

- Comprehensive public education reform at the federal level.
- A school funding formula that levels the playing field for all of Pennsylvania’s students.
- Fair funding to address the needs of special education students.

References:

AME beliefs; ABC public education; NBCA home mission; Prog. civil rights; Epis. pub schools; Friends education; G.O. paideai; ELCA education; Mor. pub. ed.; Presby. education; UCC pub. schools; UM education

Social Justice/Civil Rights

What We Believe:

We believe that God values all people without regard to any identifying characteristics. In Genesis, we learn that God created all humans in God’s image, and called it good. We believe God values all persons in their rich diversity; thus we support full civil rights for all persons. Actions that discriminate against people on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, class, age, disability or sexual orientation are sins and a rejection of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king’s son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.

—*Psalm 72:1-2 (NRSV)*

We believe programs of education, credit, housing, employment and income, health care and banking—

among others—should address historic and current injustices and wrongs.

Overview/Challenges:

Discrimination based on numerous factors is as old as humanity itself. We see discrimination throughout the history of our own country.

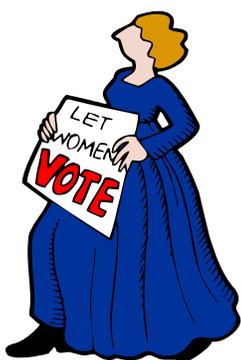
The “Three-Fifths Compromise” reached during the Constitutional Convention of 1787 determined that three-fifths of the number of slaves would be counted in determining representation in Congress—though these same slaves did not have the right to vote.¹⁷ In fact, only white, male, adult landowners had the right to vote at the founding of our country.¹⁸ It was only after a civil war and passage of



¹⁷Exploring Constitutional Conflicts, “The 13th Amendment: The Abolition of Slavery,” <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/thirteenthamendment.html>.

¹⁸U.S. Voting Rights, <http://www.infoplease.com/timelines/voting.html>.

the 15th Amendment to the Constitution that African Americans were given franchise, and even then, the battle continued over voting by these now free persons. It took the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to work toward removing many of the barriers to voting, barriers which included poll taxes, literacy tests, harassment, intimidation, and more. Though it was not the original intention, this legislation has been extended repeatedly because of ongoing evidence that attempts to disenfranchise racial and ethnic minority voters that still exist in many places.

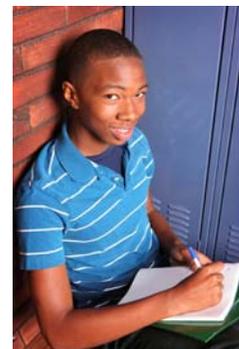


Women were denied the right to vote until passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1919-20. A National Archives article states, “Achieving this milestone required a lengthy and difficult struggle; victory took decades of agitation and protest.”¹⁹ Women started organizing in the early 1800s—they wrote, lectured, marched, practiced civil disobedience; many were heckled, abused, and jailed, and some even died for the cause.

Newer tactics designed to disenfranchise “undesirable” voters have emerged with the advent of voter identification legislation—in particular, requirement of difficult-to-obtain photo identification in some states—and attempts to purge voter rolls that have resulted in removal of many legally registered voters, mostly naturalized citizens and minorities. For example, the Miami Herald found that 87 percent of the persons on a purge list in Florida were minorities, and 58 percent were Hispanic.²⁰

Jim Crow laws, where “African Americans were relegated to the status of second class citizens,”²¹ permitted all kinds of state-sanctioned discrimination.

They permitted “separate but equal” accommodations (which proved to be anything but equal) in many areas, but most notably in education. It took *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 to begin the process of providing equal public education to Black students.²²



Race and ethnicity, as well as sexual orientation/gender identity, are often used to discriminate when it comes to housing and employment. While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 “forbade discrimination on the basis of sex as well as race in hiring, promoting, and firing,”²³ discrimination continues to be practiced in the workplace. Various forms of immigration legislation from the state down to the local level make it a crime to rent housing or offer any services to undocumented persons—which has the effect of creating discrimination against entire ethnic populations for fear of violating the law. (NOTE: We also believe that laws that violate the human dignity of immigrants, regardless of status, are wrong.)

Also, realtors and banks have practiced “redlining”—steering of racial and ethnic minorities to segregated housing, denial of credit, or imposing higher rates for mortgage borrowing. The practice is illegal, though stories of its use continue to surface throughout the country.

Loving our Neighbor/Vision:

Loving our neighbor means supporting full civil rights for all persons, without exception. It means supporting policies and legislation that enable government to root out patterns of discrimination in employment, housing, credit, health, education, and banking.

¹⁹ National Archives, “19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Women’s Right to Vote,” <http://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/document.html?doc=13&title.raw=19th%20Amendment%20to%20the%20U.S.%20Constitution:%20Women's%20Right%20to%20Vote>.

²⁰ Washington Post, “Florida’s Voter Purge Explained,” http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/floridas-voter-purge-explained/2012/06/18/gJQAhvcNIV_blog.html.

²¹ Jim Crow Museum, “What Was Jim Crow?” <http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/what.htm>.

²² National Center for Public Policy Research, “Brown v. Board of Education,” <http://www.nationalcenter.org/brown.html>.

²³ National Archives, “Teaching With Documents: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission,” <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/civil-rights-act/>.

Examples of Advocacy Efforts:

Support for the following legislation and/or policies:

- Reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act until there is no evidence of voter disenfranchisement or intimidation based on race or ethnicity.
- Prevention of voter disenfranchisement through arbitrary voter identification laws and poorly regulated voter purges.
- Prevention of discrimination in hiring based on factors not dictated by the position (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.).
- Prevention of discrimination in housing.
- Preventing redlining in mortgage or other lending.

References:

AME beliefs; AMEZ mission; ABC affirmative action; ABC civil rights; ABC employment; ABC human rights; ABC power; ABC racial justice; NBCA mission; Prog. civil rights; Friends civil rights; G.O. truth & tolerance; ELCA race; Mor. racism; Presby. race; UCC civil liberties; UCC race & econ. justice; UCC racial justice; UM civil rights

Torture/Genocide

What We Believe:

We believe that torture or the systematic killing of persons who have been identified as our enemies is reprehensible and wrong, and is against the teachings of a loving Jesus. Torture “violates the basic dignity of the human person that all religions, in their highest ideals, hold dear.”²⁴ We are called by Christ to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. While the “Golden Rule” dictates that we should never authorize or use any methods of interrogation or punishment that we would not find

Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.

—*Hebrews 13:3 (NRSV)*

acceptable if used against Americans, be they civilians or soldiers, we believe that we must never engage in such cruel and inhuman behavior.

We believe that torture “degrades every-

one involved -- policy-makers, perpetrators and vic-

tims. It contradicts our nation's most cherished ide-

als. Any policies that permit torture and inhumane treatment are shocking and morally intolerable.”²⁵

Overview/Challenges:

Torture is widely practiced by governments across the globe—including the United States—despite prohibitions found in international and national laws. We also see a number of instances of genocide—mass murders of minorities or those not in political power—but we often fail to act for a variety of reasons, and sometimes even support (intentionally and unintentionally) those who engage in genocide for our economic interests or to protect “national security” interests.

In recent years we have learned that our government has opened and operated secret prisons, kidnapped and tortured detainees and turned over detainees to foreign governments known to use torture. We have



²⁴Torture is a Moral Issue Statement of Conscience, National Religious Campaign Against Torture, http://www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=42.

²⁵Ibid.

become aware that government agencies have destroyed evidence of the use of “harsh” interrogation techniques against prisoners—possibly out of concern that agency officials might be incriminated.

While many Americans have been outraged by the discovery of abuses by our own government, a 2009 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life poll indi-

cated that over 50 percent of some Christian populations believe that torture is often or sometimes justified.²⁶



Loving our Neighbor/Vision:

We envision a society where no government or anyone acting in an official capacity engages in emotional or physical intimidation or coercion that inflicts pain and suffering on another person for any reason.

Loving our neighbor means that we abide by the “Golden Rule,” and that we demand that our government do the same in its dealings with persons imprisoned in the United States or abroad. It means that we ensure that U.S. government officials or its proxies will be held accountable for the use of torture in any form—physical or emotional. It means that we will abide by international law and hold fellow nations accountable as well.

Examples of Advocacy Efforts:

Support for the following legislation and/or policies:

- International Committee of the Red Cross access to all U.S. detainees.
- A Commission of Inquiry or similar to investigate past use of torture with an eye to preventing its future use.
- Ending domestic torture in the U.S. criminal justice system (e.g. use of extended periods of solitary confinement).

References:

ABC human rights; Friends torture; Presby. human rights; UM torture

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