



BUDGET AND TAXATION

Adopted: 10/19/2004

Position Statement

Just and equitable taxation is one means by which all members of society share the right and responsibility to contribute to the common good. Through these contributions we share the blessings God has given us so they can be used for the good of all. The personal responsibility of private citizens and charities, including the Church, cannot substitute for what the public sector can do to provide a safety net for poor families and vulnerable people. The distribution of tax resources must first address the basic material needs of all people, especially society's poor and most vulnerable.

The State should therefore seek revenues sufficient to meet the basic needs of all, especially the poor and most vulnerable, and collect those revenues in a manner which reflect principles of

- FAIRNESS in accounting for the respective ability of each person, corporation or business to contribute taxes according to her, his or its ability;
- COMPREHENSIVENESS in providing not only a broad base of taxpayers, but also a broad basis for taxation of wealth, income or consumption;
- NEUTRALITY or evenhandedness in treating similarly-situated taxpayers alike;

- SIMPLICITY in the manner in which tax revenues are paid, collected and administered; and
- ACCOUNTABILITY in providing adequate information in the public forum for taxpayers to understand (1) how taxation issues are decided; (2) how the tax system works; and (3) how taxation decisions will affect each taxpayer.

Supporting Statement

The Montana Association of Churches recognizes that government has an important place in the ordering of human life. God has created a world of sufficiency for all, providing us daily and abundantly with all the necessities of life. Justice calls for an equitable collection and distribution of income, wealth and resources.ⁱ In the interest of justice, revenues necessary for the government to meet its legitimate responsibilities should be apportioned and distributed with the utmost fairness.

A political democracy cannot thrive amidst great economic disparity and inequity. In recent years the tax policies have tended to contribute to the widening gap between the rich and the poor.ⁱⁱ Thousands in Montana live in poverty; many work part- or full-time but have incomes that cannot lift them out of poverty. Others are physically or mentally unable to work. The poor are disproportionately women with their children.ⁱⁱⁱ Spending by the state should meet basic needs of citizens before other appropriations are made.^{iv}

All members of society have a responsibility to contribute to the common good. Works of charity will always be a personal responsibility for Christians. But private charities cannot substitute for what the public sector can do through the just collection and distribution of tax monies. Through

contributions collected by taxes, we share the blessings that God has given us so that these resources can be used for the good of all.^v

ⁱ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, Department for Studies of the Division for Church in Society, 1999, p. 10.

ⁱⁱ United States Federal Reserve as cited in the *Guardian/UK*, January 24, 2003, "American Dream Tarnished by Widening Wealth Gap" by Gary Younge. "The difference in median net wealth between the top 10% income group and the bottom 20% leapt 70% between 1998 and 2001, the Fed announced in its consumer finances report."

ⁱⁱⁱ Montana census data.

^{iv} Archbishop Jerome Hanus, Dubuque, Iowa ; Bishop Joseph Charron, Des Moines, Iowa; Bishop William Franklin, Davenport, Iowa; and Bishop Daniel DiNardo, Sioux City, Iowa as members of the Iowa Catholic Conference, *Taxation Issues in Catholic Social Thought*, Origins, Vol. 33: No. 26, December 4, 2003, p. 441, 443.

^v Ibid.

Montana Association of Churches

American Baptist Churches of the Northwest * Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) in Montana
 Episcopal Church Diocese of Montana * Evangelical Lutheran Church in America-Montana Synod
 Presbyterian Church (USA)-Glacier Presbytery * Presbyterian Church (USA)-Yellowstone Presbytery
 Roman Catholic Diocese of Great Falls-Billings * Roman Catholic Diocese of Helena
 United Church of Christ of Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference * United Methodist Church Yellowstone Conference