



ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Position Statement

Adopted 10/21/1998

The Montana Association of Churches supports policies and efforts to advance economic justice in Montana, consistent with the following principles:

- All people are made in God's image.
- All people have a responsibility toward family, the broader society, and creation. All people have a right to secure the basic necessities of life.
- All people have the right to economic opportunities, meaningful and useful work, and just wages and benefits.
- Ethical values shape economic justice.
- A fundamental measure of any economy is how the poor and economically vulnerable are faring.
- Policies and decisions on investment, trade and development should protect human life, promote human rights, and ensure a sustainable future for the planet.

Supporting Statement

In Matthew 22:38-39, Jesus says,

"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.'"

Human life is fulfilled as we come to know and love the living God in communion with others. Followers of Jesus Christ are called to work for

greater economic justice in the face of persistent poverty, growing income gaps, and increasing global economic trade. Jesus Christ calls humanity away from greed and materialism. Humans are created by God for wholeness, peace (shalom), and interdependence. Our well-being is dependent upon the well-being of all creation.

Jesus reminds us in Luke 16:13b that we have economic choices:

"You cannot serve God and wealth."

Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they serve the common good, support the family, and protect the life and dignity of the individual. The marketplace does not exist in a vacuum. Ultimately, we who shape it and are shaped by it are accountable to God. Society has a moral obligation, including governmental action where necessary, to meet basic human needs, pursue justice in economic life, and assure opportunity for all.

Christ reveals God's suffering passion for the poor. A just economy gives all persons access to the basic material necessities of life. When some people are excluded from the abundance of life which God intends for all persons, justice is denied. Two signs of injustice in our world are large numbers of people in need, and great gaps between the rich and poor. In Luke 14:12b-14a, Jesus reminds us that God's gifts are for everyone.

"When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed. . ."

Jesus taught us to pray,

"Give us this day our daily bread..."

in Matthew 6:11. All people have a right to basic needs (e.g. food, clothing, shelter, education, health

care, safe environment, economic security.) A just economy strives to eliminate poverty. A just economy assures equality of opportunity. A just economy distributes resources so that all individuals are empowered to participate fully in the economic system. A just economy seeks continually to redress imbalances in wealth and power so that all, even the poor and weak can control their lives and shape their own future.

In a just economy, the division of labor reflects our mutual interdependence and underscores the importance of the participation of all human beings in the community. In a just economy, no one is unfairly disadvantaged or excluded from productive activity. Human dignity involves the recognition of each person as a decision-maker in the community, so that no one is deprived of an active voice. Human productivity and a sense of vocation benefit all society and provides a sense of accomplishment to individuals.

"Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness . . . then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. . . . The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.'" (Genesis 1:26a, 2:7, 2:15).

Work sets humans apart from the rest of creation. All people, to the extent they are able, have a responsibility to provide for the needs of their families, and an obligation to contribute to the broader society.

The global economy has moral dimensions and human consequences. Workers, owners, managers, stockholders, and consumers are moral agents in economic life. By our choices, initiative, creativity, and investment, we enhance or diminish economic opportunity, community life, and social justice.

"And he said to them, 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.'" (Luke 12: 15).

Supporting Data

Revised 4/21/2008

After fluctuating over the past 6 years, the nation's poverty rate rose from 11.3 percent in 2000 to 12.3 percent in 2006. Median household income increased 0.7 percent in real terms from its 2005 level to \$48,201 in 2006.ⁱ

However, disparity continues to exist between racial groups, communities, and regions. Additionally rising inflation threatens to undue any gains. The consumer price index, used by the Bureau of Labor Statistic to track the costs of goods, has increased 3.1 percent in the first quarter of 2008, compared to 4.1 percent for all of 2007. Food and energy may be especially problematic, with the cost of food increasing 5.3 percent and energy increasing 17.4 percent in the first quarter of 2008.ⁱⁱ

In a report of the U.S. Census Bureau, it was reported that 14.6 percent of Montana's population was living in poverty in 2005, compared to 13.7 percent in 2001. Additionally 19.9 percent of children in Montana were found to be living in poverty.ⁱⁱⁱ Nationally 12.8 million or 17.4 percent of children live in poverty; that is 35 percent of all those living in poverty.^{iv}

According to a 2008 study by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, there is no state in the U.S. where a low-income worker can reasonably afford a modest one-or-two-bedroom rental unit. In Montana, a full time worker must earn \$12.05 per hour in order to afford a two-bedroom unit for fair

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

market rent. This is 193% of the \$6.25 per hour minimum wage in Montana.^v

A minimum wage earner can afford a monthly rent of no more than \$325 per month. An SSI (Social Security) recipient that receives \$637 a month can afford monthly rent of no more than \$191 per month. A minimum wage earner must work 77 hours per week to be able to afford a two-bedroom rental unit.^{vi}

ⁱ United States Census Bureau. United States Department of Commerce. *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2006*. www.census.gov. Accessed on 4/21/2006.

ⁱⁱ United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. www.bls.gov. Accessed 4/21/08

ⁱⁱⁱ United States Census Bureau. Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates. www.census.gov. Accessed on 4/21/2006.

^{iv} United States Census Bureau. United States Department of Commerce. *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2006*. www.census.gov. Accessed on 4/21/2006.

^v The fair market rent information was provided by The National Low Income Housing Coalition. “Out of Reach, 2007-2008.” www.nlihc.org. Accessed on 4/21/2008.

^{vi} The fair market rent information was provided by The National Low Income Housing Coalition. “Out of Reach, 2007-2008.” www.nlihc.org. Accessed on 4/21/2008.