

CONNECTING TO THE CREED:

A guide for understanding and applying the centennial Social Creed, adopted by ecumenical representatives of 35 Protestant and Orthodox church communions for 2008.



**"That all may have life and
have it abundantly"**
John 10:10

Biblical, Theological and
Historical Background

Current Challenges and
Choices

*For each affirmation and action
area of the new Social Creed*

National Council of Churches of Christ Member Communions and Denominations

African Methodist Episcopal Church
The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
Alliance of Baptists
American Baptist Churches in the USA
Diocese of the Armenian Church of America
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
Church of the Brethren
The Coptic Orthodox Church in North America
The Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Friends United Meeting
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Hungarian Reformed Church in America
International Council of Community Churches
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Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
Mar Thoma Church
Moravian Church in America Northern Province
and Southern Province
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Serbian Orthodox Church in the U.S.A. and Canada
The Swedenborgian Church
Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of America
United Church of Christ
The United Methodist Church

The member bodies of the National Council of Churches encompass a wide spectrum of American Christianity — representing traditions as varied as Protestant, Orthodox, Evangelical, Anglican, and African-American, historic peace churches and ethnic-language immigrant churches.

They include more than 100,000 local congregations and 45 million persons in the United States.

“A Social Creed for the 21st Century” was adopted by the NCCCCUSA General Assembly in November 2007. *

*For the 2008 centennial.



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Resources:

DVD: “Toward a New Social Awakening: The Social Creed 1908-2008”

Prayers for the New Social Awakening Edited by Christian Iosso & Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty (Westminster/John Knox, 2008)

To Do Justice, A Guide for Progressive Christians Edited by Rebecca Todd Peters & Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty (Westminster/John Knox, 2008)

Poster: “A Social Creed for the 21st Century”

Poster: “A Social Creed for the 21st Century, edited for youth discussion”

Other resources and bibliography at:

www.pcusa.org/acswp/socialcreed.htm

www.hudrivpres.org/socialcreed

www.nccusa.org

Scripture quotations from the New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible, unless otherwise noted.

The 1908 Social Creed

Statement by the Federal Council of Churches

We deem it the duty of all Christian people to concern themselves directly with certain practical industrial problems. To us it seems that the churches must stand—

- For equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.
- For the right of all men to the opportunity for self-maintenance, a right ever to be wisely and strongly safeguarded against encroachments of every kind.
- For the right of workers to some protection against the hardships often resulting from the swift crises of industrial change.
- For the principle of conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions.
- For the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational disease, injuries and mortality.
- For the abolition of child labor.
- For such regulation of the conditions of toil for women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community.
- For the suppression of the “sweating system.”
- For the gradual and reasonable reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest practicable point, and for that degree of leisure for all which is a condition of the highest human life.
- For a release from employment one day in seven.
- For a living wage as a minimum in every industry and for the highest wage that each industry can afford.
- For the most equitable division of the products of industry that can ultimately be devised.
- For suitable provision for the old age of the workers and for those incapacitated by injury.
- For the abatement of poverty.

To the toilers of America and to those who by organized effort are seeking to lift the crushing burdens of the poor, and to reduce the hardships and uphold the dignity of labor, this Council sends the greeting of human brotherhood and the pledge of sympathy and of help in a cause which belongs to all who follow Christ.



Preface and Invitation:

**A NEW SOCIAL CREED
FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

In our time of economic crisis, the churches have an answer, a constructive vision of the directions needed for a fairer society and a healthier world. This non-doctrinal Social Creed is a positive framework for needed new thinking and action by individuals, institutions and government itself, all of which are called to serve the common good. It embodies the prophetic heart for justice, which insists that all persons must be treated equally and that societies are judged by how they treat their weakest members.

Developed before the financial panic that began in fall 2008, the Social Creed adopted by the National Council of Churches and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was already clear that a new track was needed. It recognizes that our previous path has been unsustainable, for moral as well as financial reasons. It also recognizes that real change is hard, and that for Christians, change needs to be grounded in the redemptive hope and power of the Gospel.

Individuals, congregations, and communions are all invited to support this ecumenical Social Creed. This booklet explains the thinking behind each of the affirmations. It gives a brief history, showing that church commitment to a just social order goes way back, and includes the first “Social Creed” adopted in 1908. But the overall goal is to give people of faith a short, punchy statement of what we stand for in the world today. It is applied Christian social ethics, meant to help us practice what we preach.

The biblical message is not about infinite life, but about death and resurrection. It is this grounding that helps us stand for the abundant life that Jesus of Nazareth preached and lived. The kingdom or commonwealth of God that he embodied turned the values of the world upside down and created a new community of forgiveness, freedom and equality in the Spirit.

In light of Jesus’ courage and redemptive power, we are called to be the kind of persons who do not shrink from the challenges of social and ecological chaos. The era of unlimited consumption and accumulation is over, but a more cooperative society is far from present. The vision of the Church is not based on the logic of the market, with its short-term biases, the reduction of human motivation to self-interest, and its tolerance for enormous inequality. The Church’s vision here is more communitarian, reaffirming a mixed economy with heightened democratic accountability for government and private enterprises.

This booklet points to a politics of annunciation found in the opening and closing paragraphs of the Social Creed and its Trinitarian framework. Those three sections are pledges of personal, communal and global responsibility. In affirming them, we are led by the Spirit who is both “above partisanship and beyond neutrality,” to quote ethicist Edward Long. No political formulation is fully adequate to express the new responsibilities that we all must shoulder if our children, and all God’s children, are to inherit a better world.

We hope that more in-depth exploration will encourage each reader to find a personal call to action. In study groups, we hope that discussion will help everyone see the need both for shared action to challenge and change what we can, and for shared celebration of the reign of God already present in this world..

A Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century

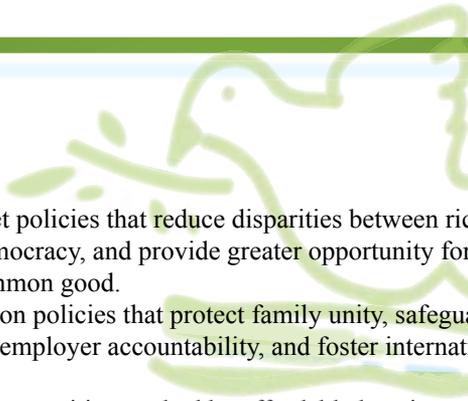
We Churches of the United States have a message of hope for a fearful time. Just as the churches responded to the harshness of early 20th Century industrialization with a prophetic “Social Creed” in 1908, so in our era of globalization we offer a vision of a society that shares more and consumes less, seeks compassion over suspicion and equality over domination, and finds security in joined hands rather than massed arms. Inspired by Isaiah’s vision of a “peaceable kingdom,” we honor the dignity of every person and the intrinsic value of every creature, and pray and work for the day when none “labor in vain or bear children for calamity” (Isaiah 65:23). We do so as disciples of the One who came “that all may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10), and stand in solidarity with Christians and all who strive for justice around the globe.

In faith, responding to our Creator, we celebrate the full humanity of each woman, man, and child, all created in the divine image as individuals of infinite worth, by working for:

- Full civil, political and economic rights for women and men of all races.
- Abolition of forced labor, human trafficking, and the exploitation of children.
- Employment for all, at a family-sustaining living wage, with equal pay for comparable work.
- The rights of workers to organize, and to share in workplace decisions and productivity growth.
- Protection from dangerous working conditions, with time and benefits to enable full family life.
- A system of criminal rehabilitation, based on restorative justice and an end to the death penalty.

In the love incarnate in Jesus, despite the world’s sufferings and evils, we honor the deep connections within our human family and seek to awaken a new spirit of community, by working for:

- Abatement of hunger and poverty, and enactment of policies benefiting the most vulnerable.
- High quality public education for all and universal, affordable and accessible healthcare.
- An effective program of social security during sickness, disability and old age.



- Tax and budget policies that reduce disparities between rich and poor, strengthen democracy, and provide greater opportunity for everyone within the common good.
- Just immigration policies that protect family unity, safeguard workers' rights, require employer accountability, and foster international cooperation.
- Sustainable communities marked by affordable housing, access to good jobs, and public safety.
- Public service as a high vocation, with real limits on the power of private interests in politics.

In hope sustained by the Holy Spirit, we pledge to be peacemakers in the world and stewards of God's good creation, by working for:

- Adoption of simpler lifestyles for those who have enough; grace over greed in economic life.
- Access for all to clean air and water and healthy food, through wise care of land and technology.
- Sustainable use of earth's resources, promoting alternative energy sources and public transportation with binding covenants to reduce global warming and protect populations most affected.
- Equitable global trade and aid that protects local economies, cultures and livelihoods.
- Peacemaking through multilateral diplomacy rather than unilateral force, the abolition of torture, and a strengthening of the United Nations and the rule of international law.
- Nuclear disarmament and redirection of military spending to more peaceful and productive uses.
- Cooperation and dialogue for peace and environmental justice among the world's religions.

We—individual Christians and churches—commit ourselves to a culture of peace and freedom that embraces non-violence, nurtures character, treasures the environment, and builds community, rooted in a spirituality of inner growth with outward action. We make this commitment together—as members of Christ's body, led by the one Spirit—trusting in the God who makes all things new.

Toward a New Social Awakening:
A Very Short History and Background
The Role for a 21st Century “Social Creed of the Churches”

The Social Creed of the Churches, endorsed in 1908 by the Federal Council of Churches, was their pledge to work together for a better, fairer, more faithful United States. One hundred years ago, the explosion of industry and its impact on U.S. society called for a new focus of the churches’ ministry. Those in the churches sensitive to the human costs of industrialization saw a challenge to the fullness of the Gospel, which is both personal and communal in dimension. The Social Gospel movement, evangelical at its heart, and inspired by Jesus’ preaching of “the kingdom of God,” was acutely aware of the brutalities of new working conditions, the social tensions of assimilating millions of immigrants and the loss of communal values in fast-growing cities.

More than 100 years ago, workers caught in the machinery of early industrialization were ground down by twelve-hour shifts and seven-day workweeks. Families were broken by absent or exhausted parents. Workers with disabilities were summarily dismissed and devalued. Retired workers were left without pensions. Children worked when they should have been at school or at play. At the same time, enormous wealth was generated. That wealth, however, was distributed to a relative few, primarily the owners of industry.

Responding to this changing situation, the churches saw the need to work across denominational lines in pursuit of social change. At the formation of the Federal Council of Churches in 1908, the denominational representatives put in place social principles to guide the Council’s work. The “social creed” was introduced by Methodist Frank Mason North, who had earlier written the great Social Gospel hymn, “Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life.” From North’s report on “The Church and Modern Industry” was lifted up a section of 14 principles and policies that were unanimously put into a short statement, the Social Creed, that was repeatedly affirmed, expanded and adopted by various denominations in future years. It was to be a concise and practical summary of what a “Christ-like God” willed for those seeking “to reduce the hardships and uphold the dignity of labor.”

Through the Social Creed, the churches declared that they would stand together and work toward addressing the needs of all workers. As a result of their commitment, they were able to influence our country in profoundly good ways. The churches’ pledge of support for “the toilers of America” helped to abolish child labor and bring about worker safety, retire-

ment security, healthcare, unemployment compensation, and more. In that prophetic witness, the churches' leaders anticipated Social Security, the social protections of the New Deal and more recent health and environmental protections. For these reasons, they deserve our thanks for their brave witness and our celebration of it by making a new commitment in the 21st century. It is also highly appropriate that the National Council of Churches, successor to the Federal Council, claim this heritage.

Similar economic problems persist today: injustice in the workplace, growing social inequities, and the intolerably high percentage of people living in poverty in the United States and in other nations. The majority of people around the world do not have access to adequate health care. Workers worldwide continue to earn low wages, fear occupational hazards and the loss of employment or other penalties when they need or use time to care for family members. These and many other problems call to the Christian conscience and to the moral imperative in every human heart.

However, in the 21st century we are also confronting complex new issues that reach beyond economics and call for unprecedented global cooperation and new governance structures. Some challenges seem greater, as the costs and consequences of war and the persistence of racism meet massive environmental degradation. Global warming threatens our very existence. We recognize more clearly divisions of wealth etched along lines of race and gender. The majority of people seem resigned to accept the present shape of our global market system and fail to see that any alternatives may exist. The responsibilities of both governments and citizens for the common good are often ignored or denied. Divisions between the rich and the poor grow wider by the day. In too many places, corruption in politics rises steadily and government competence declines. Based on enduring Christian principles, we seek to address these and other challenges in a coherent and hope-filled way.

We celebrate earlier efforts best by extending the ecumenical witness for justice in the workplace, promoting greater social equality, and reducing poverty. In hope that we too can effect change, we call upon concerned Christians to pledge their commitment to a new venture of cooperation through a Social Creed for the 21st Century. This Social Creed remains focused on economic issues but also addresses issues that fell outside the earlier reformers' line of vision. This is not a doctrinal creed; it is a shared affirmation that points to the heritage of redemptive energy and theological ethics in every faith tradition. Many elements recall the 1908 Social Creed: "the living wage," the "abolition" of child labor, "the abatement of poverty," the concern for public goods and laws, and the one-page framework that makes for maximum usability.

The ecumenical Social Creed for the 21st Century is strongly grounded in God's promises of life in abundance for us and the whole creation and inherently focused on the themes of globalization and sustainability. It is more explicitly theological than the 1908 statement, and it reflects the Church's learnings from Christian Realism and Liberation theologies, and from the strong resource of ecumenical social thought. It joins a public conversation with international ecumenical declarations, several U.S. "covenants," and the Earth Charter associated with the United Nations. It is also written in the face of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the danger of additional war elsewhere. It is written to build consensus in the United States and does not address every current issue.

Language chosen for the Social Creed may be seen as optimistic by some, but is intended to express the Gospel conviction that real freedom and power in life consist in sharing, rather than in an abundance of things. The Gospel stories witness to Jesus' prophetic challenge to the established social and economic order. Jesus of Nazareth came not to be served, but to give his life for others: his life and example still challenge us to confront injustice and preach the Good News. By supporting the Social Creed for the 21st Century, the endorsing church bodies and individual Christians affirmed that the moral vision and tradition of action identified with the Social Creed of 1908 can help guide our ministries in the decades ahead.

This "very short history" comes from the Presbyterian study team that helped develop the new Social Creed. The Social Creed for the 21st Century was also developed by a task force of the National Council of Churches' Justice & Advocacy commission that included members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Coptic Orthodox, Presbyterian, Progressive National Baptist, Roman Catholic, United Church of Christ and United Methodist churches. The United Methodist Church also had a study team working on the Social Creed centennial celebration. Their focus was liturgical and their creation is the "Companion Litany" to the Social Creed adopted by the United Methodist 2008 General Conference (included at the end of this booklet).

In the following pages, each of the new Social Creed's
“Affirmations” is highlighted with:

Biblical, Theological and Historical Background, and

Current Challenges and Choices

...to foster conversation, discussion and action ...
in faith, in love, and in hope for the 21st century.

IN FAITH,

responding to our Creator, we celebrate the full humanity of each woman, man and child, all created in the divine image as individuals of infinite worth, by working for....



- Full civil, political and economic rights for women and men of all races.
- Abolition of forced labor, human trafficking, and the exploitation of children.
- Employment for all, at a family-sustaining living wage, with equal pay for comparable work.
- The rights of workers to organize, and to share in workplace decisions and productivity growth.
- Protection of workers from dangerous working conditions, with time and benefits to enable full family life.
- A system of criminal rehabilitation, based on restorative justice and an end to the death penalty.

... Full civil, political and economic rights
for women and men of all races.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

The concept of human rights is a powerful theological witness to our belief in God as Creator and, consequently, to the equality of humans, each created in God's image. Together we constitute one human family. In order to live with dignity and to develop our God-given potential, all humans require certain conditions of life. "Civil, political and economic rights" define those conditions to which all humans are morally entitled. Because these rights are not created by society but are bestowed by God, they place moral duties upon individuals, institutions, and governments to establish and defend them.

The United States declared its independence from the British Empire with these words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness ... That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted" Still, a constitution was written that denied equal civil and political rights to all women, to all men of color, and even to white men who were not property owners. The Bill of Rights and additional amendments have been added to rectify these omissions, often through long struggles and sacrifices to change public opinion. In addition to much support for the Civil Rights movement, church leadership was important in the establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Current Choices and Challenges

Today we wrestle with such civil rights issues as the rights of immigrants, and the use of torture, extra-ordinary rendition, and discrimination in the application of criminal justice. We need new safeguards against internet and phone surveillance and abuse of personal information by private companies, sometimes in government employ. To be an effective democracy, we must always wrestle with such political rights issues as free speech, freedom of worship, personal privacy, corruption in government, and racial disparities in access to voting. However, as Martin Luther King, Jr. often noted, civil and political rights become almost meaningless if people do not have access to the material necessities of life.

In 1986 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops raised the challenge of economic rights: "... We suggest that the time has come for a 'New American Experiment' — to implement economic rights, to broaden the sharing of economic power, and to make economic decisions more accountable to the common good."¹ The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) stated in 1996: "Basic needs for all have precedence over luxuries for some in a just society" and "The satisfaction of basic needs is indispensable for human development."² Article 21 of the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family ..."

This concept of economic rights places a responsibility on government, on the economy and on all other institutions of society to reshape our way of living together so that meeting these basic needs becomes possible for all.

This responsibility cannot stop at our national borders. All human beings have a right to those material conditions upon which life with dignity depends: physical security, mental and cultural development, the formation of a family, participation in shaping one's society, and fair and equal treatment. Christians living in the United States have a responsibility to ensure these rights within our borders and to engage the world in such a way as to support the struggles of all people for full civil, political and economic rights.

By acknowledging economic rights, the Social Creed affirms more than a procedural or individualistic approach, while acknowledging that each person has a fair claim on society by virtue of our common humanity. The 1908 Social Creed also began with a call for "equal rights." The precise balance of rights and responsibilities can only be worked out within a working justice system to which all have access and in which no one is denied basic human rights, even in times of war or fear of terrorism. This affirmation urges us to end abuses, such as Guantanamo Bay and the indefinite detention and arbitrary deportation of undocumented immigrants. Throughout the Social Creed, the principle of equal rights is also intended to increase possibilities for human fulfillment, as in universal healthcare and the provision of clean air, water, and security for all.

¹ Economic Justice for All, #21.

² "Hope for a Global Future," PC(USA), pp.96,79.

... Abolition of forced labor, human trafficking and the exploitation of children.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

The Bible knows what happens when people are dragged into captivity. The Psalms and prophetic writings express the horror of violation and the despair of servitude. Deliverance from exile (as in Isaiah 40ff) provides a vivid model for redemption echoed by Jesus in his proclamation of release to the captive (Lk 4). Throughout history, forced labor has taken many forms, denying humanity and freedom to some for the satisfaction of others. The promise of the Gospel and Jesus' eye for children inspire us to continue to struggle to end all forms of forced labor and victimization of the vulnerable. We see in them our own faces, the faces of our children, and the face of God's Christ, who took "the form of a servant" to end all forms of domination, especially those most personal and cruel.

In 1912, Lewis W. Hine produced a photographic essay of "Child Labor in America: 1908 - 1912." It became a landmark witness to the employment of children in coal mines, textile mills and factories. His photos of the coal-encrusted faces of breaker boys or the lone figure of a small girl in front of a textile machine were forever burned into the conscience of America. The awareness of this exploitation of children was a key motivation to those who passed the original Social Creed in 1908.

Unfortunately, the awakening of society to the ill effects of child labor on the children themselves — especially on their health and the loss of educational opportunity — was not immediate. In fact, at that time, many considered child labor a necessary part of the U.S. economy in the new, industrialized age. Thus, it took some time before those groups that recognized its dangers were heard, and serious steps to repair the situation were taken.¹ In 1937, a second attempt to pass a constitutional amendment against child labor failed. However, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 set maximum hours and minimum wages for child workers, as well as listing "hazardous occupations" in which children could not work under any circumstances.

Current Challenges and Choices

The international problem of child labor was confronted directly by the Child Labor Deterrence Act of 1995, which sought to restrict U.S. importation of goods produced abroad with child labor.² Immediate focus was on the rug industry in India, Pakistan and Nepal. In response, the rug-importing countries created the Rugmark Foundation to certify rugs

from overseas producers that do not use child labor. The Foundation also provides for the education of child laborers, an example of progress in one industry. Worldwide, the greatest number of child laborers is in agriculture; they are among the billion and a half persons living under subsistence conditions. Food security, population stabilization, and public education for both girls and boys are part of the larger solution.

With the proliferation of regional conflicts and the ensuing economic disruption, this century has already seen mass movements of people, including children, into the immigrant stream. Human trafficking continues to be an end product, with an estimated 800,000 to one million people caught in a web of rootlessness, servitude and prostitution across borders each year. In countries with a surplus of workers or economic depression, overseas labor recruiters begin with promises of a good job and an opportunity to provide income for the family left behind. The actuality is often a nightmare of forced labor, brutal treatment and destitution.³ Estimates of women and children trafficked into the U.S. range between 15,000 and 50,000; trafficking rings have been identified in 14 major cities.⁴

In response to global human trafficking, the U.S. Congress passed the “Trafficking Victims Protection Act” in 2000, creating an Interagency Task Force to monitor and combat trafficking. It focuses primarily on the “sex tourism” industry and works toward trafficking prevention, as well as assisting and protecting the victims. In December 2000, over 80 countries signed the “Protocol to Suppress, Prevent and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children” (The Trafficking Protocol) in Palermo, Italy.⁵

Recent movements in some countries suggest that the definition of “human trafficking” will be expanded to include body parts and babies for adoption, so that these issues will receive heightened awareness in the future.⁶ In a world of broken promises, the global mission of the Church must be as an intervener in the human suffering and as a witness to God’s promise of human redemption.

¹ The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. went on record against child labor in 1908, 1909, 1910, 1920. In 1924, at the time of the first (failed) attempt to pass a U.S. constitutional amendment requiring federal regulation of child labor, the General Assembly echoed its support with these words: “This Assembly expresses its sympathy with and hearty approval of all wise measures to prevent the exploitation of children in industry, and to this end instructs its Department of Moral Welfare to give all reasonable support to such measures.” *Minutes of the General Assembly*, PCUSA of 1924, p. 183

² Pharis Harvey, “Where Children Work: Child Servitude in the Global Economy” *Christian Century*, April 5, 1995, p. 362 f.

³ Jamie Etheridge, “Gulf Region’s Newest Pipeline: Human Trafficking” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 19, 2005, p. 13

⁴ Yvonne C. Zimmerman, “Situating the Ninety-Nine: A Critique of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act,” *Journal of Religion & Abuse*, Binghamton, 2005: 7:3; pg. 37.

⁵ Mary Ellen Dougherty, *America*, New York: Jan.30,2006: 184:3; pg.18.

⁶ Ina Friedman, *The Jerusalem Report*, Jerusalem: Dec.26,2005, p.6.

... Employment for all, at a family-sustaining, living wage, with equal pay for comparable work.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

Underlying the actions of those who affirmed the Social Creed of the Churches in 1908 was the awareness of the prophetic message embodied in the Old and New Testament. Those who made up the related “social gospel” movement drew heavily upon the words of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus. They took seriously the words of Jeremiah: “Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages” (Jer 22:13).

The conditions of labor at the turn of the 20th century were harsh and placed heavy burdens upon families of the immigrant people, who made up the majority of the industrial workforce. A working father’s income was often not enough to provide for the family, so his young children were sent onto the streets and into the mines and mills to work. Charles Stelzle, a Presbyterian minister associated with the formation of the Social Creed, went to work at eight years of age stripping tobacco leaves in the basement of a New York East Side tenement.¹ The 1908 Social Creed focused on the conditions under which working families lived, and spoke for “a living wage as a minimum in every industry” and “a reduction in the hours of labor to the lowest practicable point” so as to afford “that degree of leisure for all which is the condition of the highest human life.”

Current Challenges and Choices

We have come far from the harsh industrial conditions of 1908, but gross inequities still exist in our labor force and world economy. A significant economic downturn, with massive unemployment and thousands of foreclosures and bankruptcies, was unleashed amid the credit crisis that began in September 2008.

Back in 2004, jobs increased, but the number of Americans living in poverty rose by 1.1 million people (from 12.5% to 12.7%). In 2005, the Census Bureau reported that, for the first time on record, household incomes had failed to increase for five straight years.² This trend has only worsened, with the almost 40 million people who fall below the poverty line, often working at jobs that provide no healthcare or pension coverage. Behind the figures of receding family incomes are the stories of those living on the margins of the economy. Barbara Ehrenreich, a middle class writer, dedicated herself to learning the trials of those in the low wage

service economy by taking jobs as a waitress, a hotel maid, a nursing home aide, a house cleaner and a retail clerk. She learned that people who work at “entry level jobs” earn far less than they need to live on. She concluded, “no one ever said that you could work hard, harder than you ever thought possible — and still find yourself sinking ever deeper into poverty and debt.”³

The federal minimum wage remained fixed at the 1995 level (\$5.15) for nearly a decade, leaving many full-time minimum-wage workers in poverty. Thanks in part to the example set by six states who voted to raise their minimum wages to be “living wages” in 2006, the new Congress increased the federal minimum wage. The raise to \$7.25 put the minimum wage earner \$2,000 over the poverty line and affected more than 14.9 million Americans.⁴ True, the new wage level is not indexed to changes in the cost of living, and the poverty line itself (originally set in 1962) is very much in need of re-calculation, but the churches deserve significant credit for coordinating those initiatives, part of the *Let Justice Roll* campaign for a living wage.

As we look to the decades ahead, our efforts are aimed at providing a family-sustaining living wage. The living wage campaign was an effective joint effort supported and led by the National Council of Churches USA to continue the traditions of the Social Creed in this day. In the words of one organizer, a just minimum wage will keep people out of poverty rather than keep people in it.⁵

As important as a living wage is, full employment is another goal of economic policy in developed nations. In the U.S., full employment remains a formal goal, as enunciated in the *Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act*, but in practice it has been subordinated to measures like the Dow Industrial Average. Along with full employment, there is a need to pay fairly within comparable job categories; this is the goal of “comparable worth” legislation. While there have been advances in income for college-educated women, wages for women overall remain at approximately 78% of men’s. Calculating “comparable worth” means including factors of expertise and experience and avoiding stereotyping of people and positions.

The goal of full employment is still important enough, in the view of Social Creed originators, to justify public works and strategic government investment on a large scale, with strong accountability safeguards.

¹ *Workingman and Social Problems*, Charles Stelzle (NY:Revell, 1903), p.13

² “U.S. Poverty Rate Was Up Last Year,” David Leonhardt, *NY Times*, Aug. 31, 2005.

³ “*Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*”, Barbara Ehrenreich (NY: Metropolitan, 2001) , p. 220.

⁴ Economic Policy Institute, January 2006.

⁵ “A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business and Our Future,” Holly Sklar and the Rev. Dr. Paul H. Sherry, NY; National Council of Churches, USA and the American Friends Service Committee, 2005.

... The rights of workers to organize and to share in workplace decisions and productivity growth.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

The original Social Creed speaks of “the principle of conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions,” along with several aspects of workers’ rights. Later versions of the Social Creed were more explicit about the method of “collective bargaining.” The issue, then and now, was how to equalize power between the individual worker and the business or corporation. The Bible’s condemnations of forced labor make no mention of “industrial democracy” or “cooperation” as a remedy, but the same texts used to defend democracy and freedom of association have been used to support labor unions. Employers have often made claims for a sanctity of private property that would extend to the whole of very complex enterprises; workers, in turn, have contended that they are more important than commodities or property and are deserving of fair remuneration (“worthy of their hire”). Most non-literalist Christians have looked at the practical need of workers for countervailing power against the inevitable human tendency of those in control to exceed their bounds. Strikes, boycotts and other nonviolent means have been accepted as legitimate tools in the struggle for fair wages and benefits, without idealizing either businesses or unions.

Books and publications from the early 20th century were filled with surveys and statistical information detailing the wide gulf existing between industrial workers and those who profited from the industries in which those workers were employed. In the general steel strike of 1919, the Federal Council of Churches was partner in an investigative report, *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike*, which remains one of the most thorough documents on an inquiry into a specific strike. The report focused attention on the use of labor spies and the two-shift/twelve-hour day at the U.S. Steel mills. In 1923, U.S. Steel finally announced it was moving to a three-shift/eight-hour day. Later actions and testimony by church leaders, with particular leadership from the Catholic Church, lent further support—with regional variations—to the growth of unions.

During the 1970s, through the work of Cesar Chavez and the La Raza movement in California, the issue of migrant worker organizing came into focus. Despite some progress in California and several other places, most migrant workers remain excluded from labor law coverage and protection by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Lack of legal status adds to the migrants’ sense of their labor being treated as a cheap commodity in danger of exploitation.

The last three decades have seen the diminishing strength of organized labor and the loss of the industrial middle class. Industrial democracy, which had been a bedrock of the U.S. middle class, has been challenged by the rolling back of the guarantees of the labor laws of the 1930s and the weakening of the NLRB as a defender of workers punished or fired for union activity. The loss of union protection has seen the scaling back of pension and healthcare provisions in union contracts. The decline in union membership has been correlated with the nationwide stagnation in hourly wages.¹ All of this was happening against the growing disparity between management salaries and workers' wages. In 2004, the top 10 percent of executives earned at least 350 times the average worker's pay; this was up from 122 times in 1990, and 74 times in 1950.² It is estimated by Nobel economist Paul Krugman that most of the enormous internet productivity gains of the 1990s went to the top .5 percentile of owners and investors. A fairer sharing of profits would mean a healthier and more stable economy.

These trends would argue for expanding the participation of workers in workplace decisions that affect their lives in order to improve both production and the distribution of incentives. In 1995, the Presbyterian General Assembly affirmed this right when it said: "Justice demands that social institutions guarantee all persons the opportunity to participate actively in the economic decision-making that affects them."³ The clearest current way to support this right, and to raise wages, is to support the "employee free choice act," which strengthens protections for unionization votes. Opposed by corporations that have effectively suppressed many "secret ballot" election efforts over the past 30 years, this law would also increase penalties for unjust firing and wage theft.

In the current economic crisis, as in the successful Chrysler bailout in 1985, it is appropriate for strict expectations to accompany infusion of public capital into private firms. Among these expectations would be: performance goals (e.g., for banks to lend money rather than buy other banks, for cars to be greener); acceptance of collective bargaining by workers, full voting of taxpayer-owned shares by public trustees on corporate boards, and an end to grossly disproportionate pay packages for executives and lavish board perks.

¹ Causes of overall wage stagnation since the 1970s are reviewed in *The Big Squeeze* by Steven Greenhouse (NY: Random House, 2008). In "Inequality and Institutions in 20th Century America," Frank Levy and Peter Temin document the impact of decreasing percentages of union membership (*MIT Working Papers*, 2007).

² "Off to the Races Again, Leaving Many Behind," Sunday Business, *N.Y. Times*, April 9, 2006, p. 1

³ *Minutes of the General Assembly PC(USA) of 1995*, p. 426

... Protection from dangerous working conditions,
with time and benefits to enable full family life.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

In 1910, the chair of the Presbyterian Assembly committee which passed the first Social Creed was the Rev. John McDowell. Years before, McDowell, a Scots immigrant, had gone to work in the Pennsylvania anthracite mines at the age of eight. At twelve, he lost his arm in a mine accident as a coal driver boy. On the day of his accident, company records showed the death of a mule; no mention was made of his having lost an arm. John McDowell went on to fight for the rights of labor and became Moderator of the 145th Presbyterian General Assembly in 1933.

In the early 20th century, crippling accidents, occupational diseases and premature death were high on the list of the conditions that working people faced. Annually reported industrial injuries totaled half a million, 30,000 of which were fatalities.¹ The effects of damaging workplace accidents on families was not lost on those who wrote and supported the 1908 Social Creed. Here they drew on the biblical concern for “the lame and the maimed” (Mt 15:30-31).

The Social Security Act of 1935 included authorization of state-run industrial health clinics, and some worker protection legislation existed in northern industrial states. In 1970, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) was created to enforce occupational safety and health standards. This assertion of public oversight is a delayed reflection of the biblical tradition that links the well-being of the human community with the work that supports that community: “Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands...” (Ps 90:17).

The 1908 Social Creed was also concerned with twelve-hour days and lack of Sabbath for workers to worship and be with their families. Today there is widespread agreement that the well-being of families is central to the social development of individuals, the quality of neighborhoods, and the character of a nation. Conversely, “the pitting of family against work is unjust A just political economy affirms the values of the family with the basic functions that it serves, the traditions it carries forward, and the loyalties that it develops in its children.”² The National Conference of Catholic Bishops put it this way: “Economic and social policies as well as the organization of the work world should be continually evaluated in light of their impact on the strength and stability of family life.”³

Current Challenges and Choices

The hazards of work-related disease and illnesses are still with us. In 2006, forty-seven coal miners lost their lives in U.S. coal mines, including the twelve who died in the Sago, West Virginia mine disaster. Lax or unenforced safety regulations and cutbacks in OSHA workplace inspec-

tions continue to threaten the lives of working people.⁴ Ergonomic standards adopted during the Clinton Administration were set aside during the Bush years. Technology, with all its marvels, has brought a new range of life-endangering circumstances. Chemically-related industries often leave behind toxic waste, which threatens whole communities, a problem made infamous by Love Canal and many other “Superfund” sites.

To protect employee and public health today requires new measures, such as: more testing of chemicals used in consumer products and manufacturing processes, with high standards also for imported goods; the use of the “precautionary principle” to put the burden of doubt on new biochemical and genetically engineered products and therapies; proper enforcement and protection of “whistle-blowers” on workplace hazards.

U.S. workers work, on average, more hours per year than workers in other rich, industrialized economies. Since 1979, middle-income married couples with children have added more than five months of full-time paid work to their time spent in the paid labor force. Since fathers in this group tend to work more than full-time, full-year work (2080 hours), the additional time in paid labor is due to mothers’ employment. For most U.S. families, falling or stagnant male wages made the earned income of mothers an essential contribution to the family’s income.

Other practices pit work against family: mandatory overtime, an intense pace of work, job insecurity, and reductions in benefits. Most U.S. workers, especially low-income workers, cannot take time to care for a sick child without losing pay, losing vacation time, or being evaluated as a less dedicated employee. *The Family and Medical Leave Act* (1993) offers leave (unpaid) to only 55% of the U.S. labor force for certain narrowly defined situations.

These conditions are experienced more severely in many developing countries. Companies in Export-Processing Zones pay women workers 50%-75% of male wages, denying adequate support to families and creating higher unemployment for the men of those families.⁵ The higher migration of men to find work is a major cause in the rise of single-mother families in many developing countries.⁶ Structural adjustment policies forced on developing nations have severely reduced social support to poor families.⁷ Raising standards may begin at home, but they should be reflected in trade agreements as well.

¹ *American Social and Religious Conditions*, Charles Stelzle, (N.Y.: Revell, 1912) p. 17f.

² “Challenges in the Workplace” PC(USA) Resource Paper, 1990, p. 92.

³ “Economic Justice for All”, #93 d, The National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

⁴ “U.S. Rarely Seeks Charges for Death in Workplace,” D. Barstow, *NY Times*, Dec. 22, 2003

⁵ “The Economic Effects of Free Trade and Globalization,” ACSWP-PC(USA), p. 14

⁶ “Women and the World Economic Crisis,” 24-25, *Vickers*, 1994.

⁷ “The Employment Effects of Free Trade and Globalization,” ACSWP-PC(USA), p. 6

... A system of criminal rehabilitation, based on restorative justice and an end to the death penalty.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

“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; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” (Mt 5:38-42)

Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount may well refer to a proactive “third way” (Walter Wink) between violent fight and fearful flight, an approach that reveals and builds on a shared humanity. However interpreted, these words point to an alternative to retribution that can be called “restorative justice.”

The scriptures also show that the possibility of repentance is always present, whether to Moses (fleeing after killing a harsh overseer) or to Paul, complicit as Saul in the stoning death of Stephen. Standards for fair judicial process and treatment of prisoners have improved greatly in most countries since that time. The death penalty, highly debatable as to its deterrent effect, is opposed in principle as it ends the possibility of repentance. For some Christians, it also usurps God’s role as judge and Lord of Life.

Restorative justice addresses the humanity of both victim and perpetrator. It also seeks to restore the social fabric by acknowledging the full costs of a given crime and offering possibilities for transformation, through serious community service, fines, public repentance, restitution and forgiveness as well as incarceration or probation. Naturally, the Church seeks to reduce, if not eliminate, all forms of crime, but we resist demonizing even violent individuals when rates and patterns of criminal behavior can be predicted—and thus are partly preventable.

Current Challenges and Choices

The U.S. imprisons a higher percentage of its citizens than any other society on earth. Of the more than 2 million in prison at any given time, more than half are persons of color. States vary in their incarceration rates, from more than 1 in 100 to less than 1 in 500, but in all cases prisoners are disproportionately poor and poorly educated, from divided families,

mentally ill and homeless. Rural communities, poor themselves, vie to attract prisons and count prisoners as part of their communities to increase their share of state and federal benefits, while prisoners are deprived of voting and other civil rights, often effectively for life. A large number of prisoners are imprisoned under mandatory sentences, sometimes under grossly inequitable provisions of the “war on drugs.” Most prisons themselves do not offer drug rehabilitation, educational or training programs, feeding a high recidivism rate based in part on lack of opportunity and discrimination on the “outside.”

In terms of violence, prisons themselves intensify the brutality and hopelessness of harsh neighborhoods: prison rape and AIDS rates are high, gangs and corruption become ways of coping with overcrowding and enormous social tensions. All know the cliché that prisons are training grounds for crime rather than places for rehabilitation or repentance. Some call the system “racialized” for its disproportionate involvement of black and Hispanic young men (more than 25% of whom have been in prison or on probation). Despite all this, prison ministries and volunteer visitors do vital work within a broken system.

The following policies follow from a restorative justice commitment:

1. Restitution and other alternatives to incarceration.
2. Review of “life terms” for long-serving prisoners.
3. Prison reform to end overcrowding, rape, other violence, and drug availability.
4. Rehabilitation, education, and addiction treatment programs to cut recidivism.
5. Programs to help maintain family connections.
6. End to for-profit prisons as improper commercialization of the justice system.
7. Decriminalization of low-level marijuana offenses, as in Massachusetts.

The fairness of the criminal justice system itself is the linchpin of its legitimacy. Hence the guarantees of due process must be backed by the decent support of public defenders. Preventive, community-based policing is key for a proactive society that seeks to reduce both crime and the enormous size of the “prison-industrial complex.” Further, the easy availability of guns contributes to the level of violence in the U.S.

Lastly, from an economic viewpoint, the costs of security are always a drag on the efficiency of markets and public services. A more humane and Christian criminal justice system will be less coded to race and class and of far lower cost than the current system.



IN THE LOVE

incarnate in Jesus, despite the world's sufferings and evils, we honor the deep connections within our human family and seek to awaken a new spirit of community, by working for:

- Abatement of hunger and poverty, and enactment of policies benefiting the most vulnerable.
- High quality public education for all and universal, affordable and accessible healthcare.
- An effective program of social security during sickness, disability and old age.
- Tax and budget policies that reduce disparities between rich and poor, strengthen democracy, and provide greater opportunity for everyone within the common good.
- Just immigration policies that protect family unity, safeguard workers' rights, require employer accountability, and foster international cooperation.
- Sustainable communities marked by affordable housing, access to good jobs, and public safety.
- Public service as a high vocation, with real limits on the power of private interests in politics.

... Abatement of hunger and poverty, and enactment of policies benefiting the most vulnerable.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

In the Social Creed of 1908, the statements on the “abatement of poverty” and on distributive justice were closely linked. Those who affirmed the Social Creed were moved by the Old Testament prophet’s image of those who “sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes” (Amos 2:6). They saw the abyss that existed between the tenement dwellers of First Avenue and the residents of the Fifth Avenue mansions. Their question was: “How does one bring justice to the land and diminish the economic distance between these people?” The Social Creed set forth the conditions of livelihood that had to be changed in order to make the industrial society of that time more equitable.

The Bible’s witness that we must “feed the hungry” (Isa. 58), goes back to the Ten Commandments. Deuteronomy and Leviticus contain the distinctive set of laws for the social order that included the idea of the jubilee, when debts would be forgiven and landless laborers given new opportunity. A society is judged on how it treats the most vulnerable. The New Testament continues this witness vividly in the stories of Lazarus with Abraham and the rich man in hell (Lk 17) and the last judgment on nations (the sheep and goats of Mt 25). A foretaste of the messianic banquet is also presented in the feeding miracles (Mt 14, Mk 6, Lk 9, Jn 6); Acts 2 and 4 show the basic Christian commitment to sharing for the common good.

In the years since the Social Gospel movement, Christians have understood hunger and poverty to be a scandal. During the Great Depression, the churches were more forthright in assessing the inequities of the economic order. The Presbyterian General Assembly of 1937, for example, saw “the inequitable distribution of the fruits of industry with a large portion of the families receiving an income insufficient to maintain a family in health and comfort, the concentration of control and power in the hands of a few and the temptation of this group to exploit the many for profit (as) incompatible with the Christian ideal of the Kingdom of God.”¹

After WWII, economic growth was coupled with unionization and other policies that increased the middle class and decreased poverty. In the 1960s, Great Society programs and a “war on poverty” tried to help those at the bottom. Social tensions erupted, devastating cities. The 1970s saw the origins of denominational “hunger programs,” ecumenical ventures such as Bread for the World, and efforts like Evangelicals for Social Action. Social Security and parts of the social safety net (“welfare”) became more contested in the 1980s. Churches opened shelters to increasing numbers of homeless persons while religious and other advocates fought to maintain Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare and other social protections for the most vulnerable. Those established programs helped lessen the proportion of older Americans in poverty, but wage stagnation, unemployment and changes in “welfare” have kept a high proportion of children (18%) in poverty.

Even before the credit crisis in fall 2008, the economic inequality of the 1930s had been reproduced: household savings in 2005 were negative for the first time since 1933, a Depression year.² In 2008 the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) actually shrank. Many families spent more than they earned and borrowed just to keep their heads above water. The 1996 change from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) conditioned assistance on either job training or employment; childcare costs often canceled out gains at low-income jobs. Available jobs have been inaccessible from many inner city and rural areas; means tests for Medicaid and food stamps kept poor families from owning cars and building up other assets. Food stamps are received by 25 million citizens, approximately half of whom are children.³

Official numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau show that (despite slight growth in the U.S. GDP through 2006), the number of Americans living in poverty has increased to 37 million—with 12.5% of the population and 18% of children in poverty. Since 2001, the number of Americans in poverty has grown by 5 million, and the number lacking health insurance now totals at least 47 million. “Far too many American families who work hard and play by the rules still wind up living in poverty. Nearly one in five American children live in poverty. Nearly one in four African Americans live in poverty, while more than one in five Hispanic Americans do.”⁴ Studies going back to 1975 show that our “poor” have indeed become “poorer,” with 2005 showing the highest percentage increase of families going below the poverty line from one year to the next.⁵

The Church’s task today is to speak, with the same passion for justice and practical focus as it did in 1908, to abate poverty and help the most vulnerable. Here are several basic measures:

1. Provide non-punitive work supports for the working poor, building on the Earned Income Tax Credit, and including subsidized childcare/Head Start programs.
2. Encourage “asset development” to move the poor toward financial security. As described by Bread for the World, raising or removing means caps would allow greater asset accumulation by the poor.⁶
3. Make accurate the actual calculation of poverty, along the lines of the “Self-Sufficiency Standard” as recommended by many experts, and then index payments to actual cost of living changes.
4. Institute “Child Savings Accounts” or “SEED” investment accounts at birth for those born in poverty to allow for a small “nest egg” to accumulate until age 18 for education or other career opportunities.
5. Maintain the dignity and “social inclusion” of those justly receiving assistance on a long-term basis.

¹ *Minutes of the General Assembly, PCUSA of 1937*, p. 218ff

² “The Future is Now”, William Greider, *The Nation*, June 26, 2006, p. 23-26

³ “Working Harder for Working Families.” Bread for the World, 2008, p. 62.

⁴ U.S. Fed News Service, Including U.S. State News. Washington, D.C.: Aug 29, 2006. pg. n/a (Rep. George Miller)

⁵ *America*. New York: Oct 2, 2006. 195:9 pg. 4, 1 pgs

⁶ For this and recommendations 4 and 5, “Working Harder for Working Families,” op.cit., pp. 50, 60, 98-101.

... High quality public education for all ...

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

Public education within many Christian traditions was directly inspired by the reading of scripture and the desire to open God's Word to all people. Luther's German Bible, textual work from Origen and Jerome to Erasmus and the modern Revised Standard Version, the early public schools of Calvin and Knox ... all testify to the high value on education for faith. And within scripture itself, how important it is to see a Moses or Samuel or Nehemiah or Jesus take up a scroll and read to the people!

Putting Education and Healthcare in the same line of the Social Creed was not an accident. What this affirmation proposes is that healthcare should be made as universally available as education, as a *right* for all citizens, as it is in most developed nations. The analogy is imperfect, in that education is only provided until one is 18, while public support for healthcare through Medicare is provided *only* on the other end of life. Universal healthcare, however, would strengthen public thinking about health and the value of government as a provider. (See next page for the treatment of healthcare.)

Public education in America began as a largely Protestant enterprise and became a chief agency of the "melting pot," until it came to the processes of desegregation and resegregation, which have impaired the funding and quality of public education in many areas. The inventive power of the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries can be attributed, in large part, to its educational strength. Public education has also been a linchpin of democracy. History shows the linkages between better education and better chances in life and, conversely, the linkages between poor education and underdevelopment. Even one more year of education can make the difference between living at the poverty level and earning enough to support a family. Education is also linked to better child nutrition, health and safety.

Seeking to eliminate disparities in public education carries an admittedly utopian element, based in the claim that every child represents God's promise to the whole human community, and that every member of God's family deserves a fair share—even a generous helping—of the common good. Education alone does not save, but neither does the Gospel come without some cultural resources prepared by God's providential hand. Thus a Christian vision of education is partly about stewarding and passing on the riches of a tradition infused by faith and guided by justice. No educational system can replace either the family or the church

but, without crossing the church/state boundary, good education can be a strong support to both and vice versa.

Current Challenges and Choices

Particular legislation mandating higher educational standards, such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), cannot realistically be separated from the contexts of unequal funding and de facto resegregation. Home schooling, with its self-selecting networks for curriculum provision and socialization, presents new challenges to public school systems. Charter schools have proven not to be a silver bullet, and magnet schools sometimes bring subtle forms of segregation through the “tracking” of students. Improving the conditions, pay, and quality of teachers remains the most dependable way of improving public education, but even the best K-12 schooling cannot overcome the disadvantaging effects of poverty.¹

“Voluntary desegregation” plans by major urban school districts have recently been critically limited by court decisions that appear to tilt the legal balance toward the choices of individual parents, regardless of long-standing patterns of racially- and economically-segregated housing. By denying the relevance of these patterns and limiting the use of percentage guidelines (demonized as quotas), the rights of all children to a multi-cultural society may be ignored. While these decisions may be based in overly-individualistic views of Constitutional protections, they point to the need for a social will to legislate for the equal educational opportunities necessary to participate in the larger society.

School reform proposals, working in tandem with early childhood intervention programs in poorer areas, generally modify the test-based model enshrined in the *No Child Left Behind Act* to reflect local conditions and prevent its reporting provisions from reinforcing failure. Formal accountability without funding has also skewed educational curricula and led to a blame cycle directed at teachers and administrators. Teachers need both decent salaries and good administrative support, legitimate goals for teachers’ unions. National standards have a place, as do new ways of allocating tax monies for education. All this said, much creative and technological innovation is going on that may reshape both learning and school administration. Christian education may itself learn from these new approaches.

¹ This summary draws on and combines two approaches to school reform reported on in “Legacy-Minded Bush Loyalist Fights to Save ‘No Child’ Law” and “Democrats Offer Plans to Revamp Schools Law,” both in *The New York Times*, June 12, 2008, pp. 1, 18, 21.

... And universal, affordable, and accessible healthcare.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

Propelled by the biblical concept of shalom, the Social Creed recognizes that God's will for human persons and their communities is abundance of life. The health that undergirds such abundance "... is the condition of wellness and integrated 'wholeness in body, mind, and spirit.'" ¹ A society committed to health must address "... a safe environment; adequate food, shelter, clothing, and employment or income; and convenient access to quality, affordable, preventive and curative health services." ² A ministry of health, healing and restoration of wholeness is central to Christian witness.

Because health is God's intention for all of God's people, many communions affirm that healthcare is a right of all persons. The U.S. Catholic Bishops' Resolution on Health Care Reform states: "Every person has the right to adequate health care." This right flows from the essential dignity of each person grounded in their creation in God's own image. When quality healthcare is acknowledged as a human right, a just society, including its government, other institutions and its members, responds to assure that this right is real in the lives of all its members. ³ Healthcare is thus not a usual commodity or product, but a "right" and a shared responsibility.

During the 20th century, particularly in the post WW II period, health benefits were linked to private employment arrangements, often negotiated as part of union contracts. The federal government provided some insurance for those whose pension plans were jeopardized by bankruptcy or corporate malfeasance, and in recent years individuals were encouraged to join health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and otherwise rely on the market for coverage. The number of medically-uninsured Americans has steadily risen, as have healthcare and insurance costs. In early 2008, U.S. polls showed majority support for government intervention to provide universal health insurance, possibly through a "single payer" or "medicare-for-all" system.

A "single payer" system is privately-delivered, publicly-financed, and arguably a very efficient system. Proponents of this approach underline the efficiency of the Social Security and Medicare systems, which have much less overhead than private insurance. The percentage of healthcare expenditure in the United States is almost twice that of other developed nations, virtually all of which have single payer systems, while the market "rations out" 47 million uninsured and as many as 50 million under-insured citizens. Opponents believe that "socialized medicine" interposes the government between doctor and patient, restricts the choices provided by the market, and penalizes those who refuse to participate. Politically, various ways have been proposed to have government as a provider, short of single payer, adding

real competition with a broad-based “public option,” and using combinations of taxes and cost savings to pay for universal coverage.

Current Challenges and Choices

Despite spending more on healthcare per capita than any other industrialized nation, the United States is 42nd in life expectancy. Forty nations have lower infant mortality rates.⁴ These data mask race and gender disparities. The black infant mortality rate is about 2.5 times greater than that of white infants; and black Medicare patients are less likely to receive adequate testing or drug therapies than white patients.⁵ “One-third of all members of lower-income families are uninsured. African Americans are twice as likely, and Hispanics three times as likely, as whites to be uninsured. . . . More men than women are uninsured. . . .”⁶ A decreasing number of workers, today only 55.9%, are covered by employer-sponsored health insurance⁷, and the auto industry, among others, complains that its medical insurance burden makes it uncompetitive. Many congregations, of course, also find it hard to pay medical benefits for pastors and other staff.

Outside the developed nations, the global picture is much worse. In 1998 the U.N. Development Program estimated that an additional \$13 billion would provide basic health and nutrition for all. Affluent nations spend more on pet food! Yet the World Health Report 2005 states “. . . This year almost 11 million children under five years of age will die from causes that are largely preventable. Among them are 4 million babies. . . . At the same time, more than half a million women will die in pregnancy, childbirth or soon after.”⁸

Achieving a basic level of universal healthcare is not unaffordable in the U.S., as has been shown by other developed countries. Nor is it unaffordable for the world’s people. It must not be seen as unimaginable in the 21st century, despite the proven power of several industry lobbies to block legislation.⁹ Most of the legislators working on health legislation, for example, are recipients of insurance and pharmaceutical industry “support.” Healthcare reform is a matter of political will and remains one of the most pressing needs in the United States.

¹ *Minutes of the General Assembly*, PC(USA) 1999, p.341

² “Life Abundant” PC(USA),1998

³ In 1983 the PC(USA) urged “. . . that access to a basic, minimum level of health care be available to all persons regardless of race, gender, age or economic standing” *Minutes*, PC(USA) 1983, p.366. In 1999 this position was strengthened to include “. . . the right of every person to have access to quality health care that is adequate, affordable, and accountable.” *Minutes*, PC(USA) 1999, pp.341-2

⁴ Stephen Ohlemacher, “US Slipping in Life Expectancy Rankings,” *Washington Post*, August 12, 2007.

⁵ Smedley, ed. *Unequal Treatment*, p.423

⁶ “An Affirmation on Advocacy,” PC(USA) 2002

⁷ Mishel, et al. “The State of Working America 2006/2007,” p. 131f,335f

⁸ www.who.int/whr/2005/en/index.html

⁹ www.healthcareforAmericaNow.org (HCAN) is a coalition organizing support for universal healthcare legislation based on a set of principles; www.cato.org (the Cato Institute) is a non-profit public policy research foundation.

... An effective program of social security during sickness, disability and old age.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

The Social Creed of 1908 called “for suitable provision for the old age of the workers and for those incapacitated by injury.” That is, the prophetic voice of the churches called for a comprehensive system of social insurance 27 years before President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed and succeeded in enacting the Social Security Act of 1935. While the Social Security program is now widely accepted as a basic communal responsibility, and theological support is virtually automatic, earlier thinking often held care of the elderly to be a family’s responsibility. The Bible’s frequent call to take care of “widows and orphans” however suggests communal responsibility. Also, the Book of Acts describes the work of the first deacons, appointed in response to a concern that widows were being neglected.

The Social Security Act, in essence, created an intergenerational covenant among workers, their elders and the United States government. It is a pay-as-you-go system through which current workers provide the social insurance that protects those who can no longer work, including workers who cannot work due to disability and those who survive a deceased worker. It is an earned benefit, not an entitlement. All workers benefit from the social insurance provided by Social Security, which has occasionally been updated since 1935 to expand its coverage and increase its longevity. This social covenant is based on the principle of building God’s community and striving for the common good that binds all people together as children of God.

Psalm 71:9 declares, “Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent.” Indeed, without Social Security, millions of American workers in despair would echo the cry of the psalmist. But God does not forsake those who are vulnerable and calls on us to care for the poor, the elderly, the orphan and the widow (Deut 10:18). As the Church, we are called to live into God’s abundant care and radical hospitality for those in need by advocating in solidarity with them and by supporting public programs that serve the common good of all, not just the few.

Current Challenges and Choices

The safety net created by Social Security ensures that 96% of those who have reached retirement age in the United States have an income after they leave the work force. As of July 2005, this program provided security to 48 million people, 33 million of whom are retired workers and their dependents, 8 million of whom are unable to continue working due to

a disability, and 7 million of whom are the survivors of deceased workers. Without the Social Security benefit, 48.6% of persons age 65 or older would be living in poverty, but because of Social Security, only 8.7% of older adults have incomes below the poverty line. Social Security, therefore, lifts 13 million older adults out of poverty annually. Furthermore, Social Security ensures that one million children live above the federal poverty line.

Efforts to privatize Social Security, or shift contributions into individual accounts in the securities markets, may now, since 2008, seem unwise, but for a brief period after the 2004 election there were claims that such a privatization strategy would in some way protect the retiring waves of Baby Boomers and others, who would otherwise imbalance the system.

Social Security indeed faces a long-term deficit that must be addressed, but proposals to privatize social security, or to somehow reduce the universal nature of this social insurance program, would further endanger the ability of the program to provide the safety net for which it was designed. Currently, the system will be able to pay out a full benefit until 2041, according to Social Security actuaries, or 2052, according to the Congressional Budget Office. After these dates, analysts estimate that Social Security will continue to be able to pay 70% of current benefits without any change to the program. “A balanced set of reforms needs to be enacted to ensure that Americans can continue to count on this vital program ... But it is crucial not to undermine the essential features of Social Security in the name of saving it. Private accounts that divert revenue from Social Security and replace part or all of Social Security would jeopardize, directly or indirectly, many of Social Security’s most important accomplishments.”¹

As he signed the bill that created Social Security in the midst of the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt said,

“This law, too, represents a cornerstone in a structure which is being built but is by no means complete. It is a structure intended to lessen the force of possible future depressions. It will act as a protection to future Administrations against the necessity of going deeply into debt to furnish relief to the needy... It is, in short, a law that will take care of human needs and at the same time provide the United States an economic structure of vastly greater soundness.”

As true now as they were then, President Roosevelt’s words reflect the spirit of this program: to promote general welfare, or common good, in a way that provides dignity and security to a population that would be otherwise unprotected from vulnerability to devastating poverty.

¹ Jason Furman, “Top Ten Facts of Social Security’s 70th Anniversary,” Published by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, <http://www.cbpp.org/8-11-05socsec.htm>, accessed on Jan. 26. 2007.

... Tax and budget policies that reduce disparities between rich and poor, strengthen democracy, and provide greater opportunity for everyone within the common good.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

“Budgets are moral documents,” wrote 34 church leaders to President George W. Bush in 2003. Knowing Jesus’ contention that “... as you did it *not* to one of the least of these, you did it *not* to me” (Mt 25:45), religious leaders felt compelled to witness: “We believe the budget your administration has put forward fails to protect and promote the well-being of our poorest and most vulnerable citizens. The tax cut ... provides virtually no help for those at the bottom of the economic ladder, while those at the top reap windfalls. The resulting spending cuts ... in the critical areas of health care, education, and social services, will fall heaviest on the poor.”¹

How a government chooses to raise and spend money affects the lives of each member of society. It reveals the nation’s values and commitments. No part of life is exempt from God’s call to governments to serve the common good. Attention to budgets reflects the conviction that federal tax policies are subject to evaluation by “the great themes of the Bible—covenant responsibility, the Kingdom of God, faith, love, justice, mercy, righteousness...”² The progressive income tax instituted under President Theodore Roosevelt perhaps marked the end of the “Gilded Age.” It recognized that “of them that have much, much will be required” (Lk 12:48) and, in a practical sense, that the wealthiest profited most from an orderly and developed society.

Harking back 100 years, we affirm that Christians have always been concerned about the poor. Proposals to end poverty are numerous and complex.³ Generally, however, they recognize that poor and rich both have rights and obligations, and that democracy functions on some measure of “equal citizenship,” usually based on work. Everyone is both self-interested *and* motivated by love, respect, and honor; the new Social Creed envisions “a society that shares more... seeks compassion over suspicion and equality over domination.” Positive incentives and creative—not always monetary—opportunities are preferred to punitive approaches. Over-privilege poses as many moral challenges to the common good as under-privilege.

Current Challenges and Choices

That poverty and inequality mark the U.S. economy can be documented in a range of ways. While the U.S. enjoys a high average level of per capita income compared to other modern nations, this average masks large divergences of well-being for various populations within the U.S. Among modern, industrialized nations, the U.S. has the highest rates of poverty, particularly child poverty, even after accounting for all transfer payments.

The income gap has grown steadily over the past three decades despite some gains in the mid- to late-1990s. The 20% of families with the highest incomes received almost 48% of all family income in 2000, while the 20% of families with the lowest incomes received only 4.3%. In 1973 these percentages were, respectively, 41% and 5%.⁴ Disparities in income and wealth between races continue to persist and in some cases worsen. In 2004, the median income of black and Hispanic families was 62% that of white families. In 1973 the ratio was 58% for black families and 69% for Hispanic families.⁵ International measurements show that the U.S. experiences a very high level of income inequality among households when compared to other developed nations.⁶

The economic crisis of 2008 has renewed questions as to the essential health of the economy, given large levels of private and public debt, massive trade deficits, two wars, and projections of higher energy costs. The shrinkage of the manufacturing sector in relation to finance and real estate sectors—both now deflating—is seen by some to confirm real weakness and threaten recent gains in the technology sector.⁷

Several direct principles regarding tax, budget and welfare policy need to work together, particularly at a time when government rescue and stabilization need to be accompanied by substantial stimulus and redirection investments:

1. Progressive taxation needs to be re-emphasized in the income tax, with investment income taxed at a higher rate than earned income, tax shelters and tax havens made less attractive and more regulated, and capital gains and inheritance taxes must continue to temper the intergenerational magnification of inequality.
2. Welfare measures, in addition to the Earned Income Tax Credit, need to make provisions for childcare, education and skills training, and job programs that bring together unemployed middle class and poorer citizens.

Ultimately social divisions threaten democracy itself. When inequality of social power privileges some, while burdening and silencing others, the pattern is passed down to new generations, resulting in increased social tensions. Budgets—that deny government the funding needed to promote economic opportunity, favor the richest at the expense of the least, and ignore the crumbling of social resources benefiting everyone—contradict the promise of democracy: a government of, by, and for the people, *all* the people.

¹ <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuemet/hh-030612.pdf> This echoes the 1995 Presbyterian General Assembly urging to Congress “to defeat any proposals that base budget or deficit reductions primarily on the services provided to children, families, the needy, and the homeless” and to recommit to these programs. *Minutes of the General Assembly, PC(USA), 1995*, p. 718

² “Federal Tax Reform,” General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church, 1977, p. 8

³ This section is indebted to Warren Copeland’s *And the Poor Get Welfare* (1994).

⁴ Mishel, *State of Working America 2006/2007*, p.57

⁵ Mishel, p. 49

⁶ Mishel, pp.328-33

⁷ This is one of the contentions in Kevin Phillips’ *Bad Money* (2008); another of his books, *Wealth and Democracy* (2002), addresses the dangers of a “second Gilded Age.”

... Just immigration policies that protect family unity, safeguard workers' rights, require employer accountability, and foster international cooperation.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

On a fence along Highway 59 in Victoria, Texas, there is an altar marking the site where 19 immigrants suffocated to death in the container of an 18-wheeler in May 2003. It was one of the worst immigrant tragedies in U.S. history. In the several years since, undocumented immigrants have been subjected to increasing pressure by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), but public debate often ignores morality and forgets words like those of Emma Lazarus in 1883: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

The Old Testament describes the processes of migration from the time of Abraham, "a wandering Aramean," to the time of exile. The text urges that we care for the sojourner in our midst. We remember immigrant Ruth, who is included in the genealogy of Jesus. "In the New Testament, Jesus identifies with the stranger and emphasizes hospitality as one of the indispensable acts of discipleship."¹ The book of Hebrews suggests that we all are "... strangers and exiles on the face of the earth" (11:13*KJV*) and that through hospitality, we may "entertain angels unawares" (13:2*KJV*).

The principles in the Social Creed recognize that most immigrants, legal and illegal, come to work, are often separated from their families, and are vulnerable to exploitation from employers who are unscrupulous or desperate themselves. The "workers' rights" referred to include the rights of U.S. workers who are to some degree threatened by the presence of immigrants, especially those who are undocumented and less likely to protest ill-treatment. The overall effect of immigration on economic opportunity for native-born U.S. citizens, especially the poor, is much debated. At what point do communal social obligations apply when, in a given case, the exploitation of an immigrant group helps undercut prevailing wage levels and weakens unionization efforts? Similar questions hold for "guest worker" programs.

Historically, immigration laws have varied in how many immigrants to admit and from what countries. U.S. and international law has distinguished between those seeking asylum based on fear of persecution and those who are economically driven. Both groups need fair and humane adjudication of their cases and respect for basic human rights. The U.S. has a somewhat symbiotic history with Mexico in the use and frequent abuse of agricultural laborers; the "bracero" program formalized this at one time, by withholding some wages for final payment back in Mexico to encourage Mexican laborers to return home. The broad picture of economically-driven immigration can also be seen in the European Union; trade and aid policies can make for less desperation in developing countries, where social safety nets are very limited. Climate change is expected to increase migration worldwide as some areas become too arid to farm or simply too close to rising sea levels.

Since undocumented workers are not counted, it is difficult to know how many are in the United States. Estimates range between 9 and 15 million. The tragic deaths on Texas Highway 59 are reflective of the great risks taken by those who come here out of desperation. Their contributions to the United States are in the form of labor, payment of taxes, commitment to their families, children who go to school and often excel, the creation of new businesses, and support of local economies. Despite their violation of immigration law, generally with the complicity of their employers, it is highly unlikely that these millions of undocumented immigrants could be deported.

Present immigration laws have caused a backlog of persons who wish to immigrate in one of the three legal ways—through petitions filed by family members or U.S. employers who wish to fill positions, or through application for asylum by refugees fleeing prosecution from their own countries.

Enforcement efforts by the U.S. government absorb significant resources in the area of border control and investigation of employers, particularly those in tough, low-wage industries such as meatpacking. Fear of, and disrespect for, police authority contributes to crime and underground economic activity. Border fencing, though undeniably effective in some areas, is a sign of failure and creates environmental havoc. Thus it is more than time to update immigration laws in a humane way:

1. Reform the immigrant detention and deportation processes so that people are not imprisoned indefinitely, treated punitively or deported summarily, often leaving young children, born in the U.S. and thus without passports, separated from their parents and put in foster care.
2. Payment of a “living wage” would bring more native-born workers into the job market and make employers literally value their labor more. Enforcing real sanctions on employers would decrease the exploitation of immigrants and, on a larger scale, decrease the “pull” of the U.S. job market.
3. Establish a workable “path to citizenship” with a fair weighting of time spent seeking legal status, contributing to the U.S. economy and obeying its laws, and paying fines where appropriate, possibly out of lost payroll taxes.
4. End gross discrimination in country quotas, such as that between Cuban and Haitian immigrants, and increase cooperation with all “sending” countries.
5. Increase asylum for families endangered by wars or occupations for which the U.S. bears responsibility, such as Iraqis unable to return to home areas or regions.

A prayer for “the souls of the ones who died in that truck” is attached to the altar/fence in Victoria, Texas. We join in prayer so that we may recognize that “indeed God may be present in the guise of a stranger bringing news that we can hear only by receiving her or him.”²²

¹ PC(USA) 2004 General Assembly Resolution on Immigration.

² The text of that prayer can be found in *Prayers for the New Social Awakening*, Iosco and Hinson-Hasty, eds. (2008), p. 86.

... Sustainable communities marked by affordable housing, access to good jobs, and public safety.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

Between the images of the chaos of Babel in Genesis and the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven in Revelation, there is a powerful yet simple image in Micah of a peaceful Zion where “they shall sit every one under their own vine or fig tree, and none shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:4). Here is seen much of the biblical promise of right living: that a person not build and another inhabit; that communities not be isolated from meaningful work; that one should be able to fulfill a calling without exhausting travel; and, that homes and communities should be free of violence and fear.

This holistic goal of the Social Creed brings together the interdependent components needed for communities to survive: housing, jobs, and security, all in a healthy environment. Effective public transportation is addressed elsewhere as part of “access to good jobs.” “Good jobs” means jobs with at least adequate benefits and decent working conditions, if not opportunities to grow in one’s vocation and create worthy products or services that build up human life. “Public safety” means good policing, low levels of crime, appropriate control of guns and other weapons, and freedom from fear. Historically, housing is considered “affordable” when households spend no more than 30% of their income on housing costs.

A “housing wage” is the amount a full-time worker must earn to afford the fair market rent and utilities on a unit without paying more than 30% of one’s income. Nationally, the hourly housing wage in 2005 for a two-bedroom unit was \$15.78. Yet 90% of renter households live in counties where the average hourly wage was \$12.22, insufficient to afford such a unit.¹

In Detroit, for example, a household needed a yearly income of \$32,279 to afford the fair market rent and utilities for a basic two-bedroom apartment. Yet, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that one-third of Detroit residents earned less than \$19,157, the official poverty level for a family of four; 47.8% of the city’s children lived below the poverty level. Nationally, 600,000 families and 1.35 million children endure homelessness each year.

Until 2007, housing costs rose faster than wages. Harvard’s Joint Center on Housing Studies estimates that, as a result, one-third of U.S. households were spending more than 30% of income on housing; more than 12% spend over 50% of income on housing; and 2.5 million households live in severely inadequate housing. Millions of U.S. households were already cutting down on food and medical expenses to meet housing costs.²

Current Challenges and Choices

It is important to put in context the 2008 credit crisis, which is particularly blamed on “subprime” mortgage lending, before addressing the possibilities for strengthening hurt communities.

Internal migration within the U.S. tells us where sustainable communities are perceived to be. For more than a century, economic growth has been led by well-placed or well-planned cities encouraging development and drawing effectively upon surrounding regions. As transportation and communication costs decreased, a smaller number of cities came to overshadow most others, leaving parts of the country depressed and depopulating as other areas prospered. Rural areas have generally declined in population, even where subsidies and favored crops or resources have allowed some to prosper. In most cities, de-industrialization and lack of good jobs have left substantial “inner cities” impoverished, even as there has been some job growth in still-sprawling suburbs. The inner city lack of revenue means poor schools and, with lack of access to good jobs and housing segregation, effective abandonment for poorer residents. Increased homelessness, drug trade and other crimes are symptoms of communities *in extremis*; but the larger crime can be called “structural racism,” a color-coded pattern of severe poverty.

It is in this context that a disproportionate number, about 30%, of subprime home mortgages were made to African Americans, when up to half may have qualified for regular mortgages if they lived in other neighborhoods. Subsequent attention has focused on the ways subprime (actually higher interest and higher risk) mortgages were re-packaged into complex securities and then further mixed into highly leveraged “bets” by eager investment bankers. The process started in the 1970s when usury laws—against exploiting the poor with ruinous interest rates—were dismantled. (Other growth in the mega-banks is built on high interest credit card debt.) Accountability begins with the Federal Reserve and a mindset that downplayed the failures of Enron, Long Term Capital and lessons from Japanese and broader Asian bank crises. Those who took the biggest profits bear the greatest responsibility.

Here are some policies to help local communities and governments:

1. Court-supervised renegotiation of all subprime mortgages, whether in foreclosure or not. This is one way to redress predatory lending, particularly in the black community. Re-legislate interest maximums for all lending to prevent usury.
2. New housing subsidies targeted to affordable housing construction on previously used land near public transport—no further subsidies for sprawl.
3. Assistance to state and local governments contingent on plans and programs for green energy, public transportation, new businesses, and use of abandoned land.
4. Economic planning boards for all cities and states, tied to accountability for taxpayer funds and earmarks, and including voting public representatives on the governing boards of banks, utilities, and companies receiving public money.
5. A financial product safety commission to protect citizens from consumer credit exploitation.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, see: www.census.gov

² The Harvard Joint Center on Housing study, see: jchs.harvard.edu

... Public service as a high vocation,
with real limits on the power of private interests in politics.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

God calls both individual public servants and the whole Christian community to political responsibility on behalf of the common good. The Bible describes the characteristics of wise and foolish rulers, tyrants and weaklings, and many in-between. The distinction between rulers and prophets is clearly defined as well. The prophetic responsibility to stand apart from those in power forms the root of our much later concept of the division between church and state. It is clearly not a division between faith and politics, as faith has always motivated political activity. Similarly, it is hard not to legislate morality, since members of our communions are inevitably motivated by Christian conscience, even when other interests are at work. Respect for individual conscience, informed by Spirit and scripture, underlies the commitment to “one person, one vote.” Virtue in both leaders and citizens is to keep the broadest possible interest in view, and to resist corruption by particular interests. The task is not to deny that interest group politics exists, but to create structures of transparency and incentives for broader visions of national purpose and democracy itself.

Politics is considered a “high vocation” because of the broad impact that public decisions have on a wider community. It is as “high” as it is most democratic and most in service to the common good. Politics necessarily involves personalities and differing positions, but as a form of communal decision making it benefits from orderly and fair procedures and laws. One of Jesus’ great reversals was his demonstration that “whoever wishes to be great among you must become as a servant” (Mk 10:43). This understanding stands near the beginning of the movement toward democracy over the last two thousand years, and acknowledges that all forms of democracy are still imperfect.

Some historical difficulties of the U.S. have to do with limits on the franchise: The original Constitution did not envision direct election of senators, voting by women, men without property, or African Americans. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 marks the assertion of federal authority to defend people of color from discrimination in voting, but vote “suppression” methods, restrictions on voting times and places, and felon disenfranchisement, still exclude African Americans disproportionately. Voting is largely the province of states; there is no affirmative right to vote on a national basis. Another holdover from earlier times, the Electoral College, is intentionally undemocratic, inflating the influence of the smallest states, creating a focus on “swing states” to the neglect of “spectator states,” and sometimes overruling the popular vote entirely. Fortunately, early and absentee voting lessen lines on election days. Despite concerns over machine undercounts and computer glitches, there has been no repeat of the Florida 2000 debacle.

Current Challenges and Choices

In campaigning and governance, the challenges of U.S. politics relate generally to the inverse proportion between money and participation. The more money is involved—most basically in being able to run for office—the fewer persons can enter the process. The more monied interests can shape the debate on a given issue, the fewer options will be considered by the voters—and by their elected representatives. When the political system is able to resist what may be termed “the power of market leaders,” a greater measure of fairness can result.

For politics to be a high vocation, power must be exercised with accountability and transparency about potential conflicts of interest. Whistle-blowers should not be retaliated against; rules for preserving documents should be followed. The public deserves the benefit of the doubt. When there are significant government failures, non-partisan investigations should be automatic. The Justice Department and intelligence services should be kept free of cronyism and corruption due to abuses such as selective prosecution and unwarranted investigation, cyber-tapping and the like.

The decision of the Obama campaign in 2008 to forgo public financing and raise approximately \$700 million dollars poses new questions about campaign duration and dependence on donors (funds from lobbyists were declined by Obama but allowed by the Democratic Party). The usual Republican Party financial advantage was thus offset, but the cost of the 21 month election cycle totaled almost \$2 billion, much of it spent on television advertising. Perhaps the long primary process, seen by some to give too much influence to atypical early states, functioned not only to test and “vet” the final candidates, but to help a black candidate become accepted. There are proposals that would start the process later, rotate the early primaries more fairly, and provide public airtime for major party representatives to introduce themselves and their plans. The internet provided many video clips, but the acceptance of public TV airtime could enable systematic questioning on key issues.

Specific policies to honor the “one person, one vote” principle and increase voting levels include:

Making election day a legal holiday or weekend; restricting all contributions to political advertising or parties by government contractors as well as lobbyists; professionalizing the oversight of elections and re-districting by non-partisan, civil-service-governed-commissions not headed by elected or appointed officials; improving the reliability and audit-ability of voting machinery through paper trails; an interstate compact to vote all electoral votes for the winner of the popular vote (or removing the Electoral College outright); measures to make registration easier or more universal, including automatic return of voting rights to felons who have paid their debts to society; completing the enfranchisement of District of Columbia residents. Some forms of voting may improve representation for minority views: ranked choice, instant run-off voting and proportional representation for multi-seat councils.

For politics to be a high calling for everyone, however, it is not enough to improve structures. Civic virtues like honor and concern for the common good are crucial to the legitimacy of the process.

IN HOPE

sustained by the Holy Spirit, we pledge to be peacemakers in the world and stewards of God's good creation, by working for:



- Adoption of simpler lifestyles for those who have enough; grace over greed in economic life.
- Access for all to clean air and water and healthy food, through wise care of land and technology.
- Sustainable use of earth's resources, promoting alternative energy sources and public transportation with binding covenants to reduce global warming and protect populations most affected.
- Equitable global trade and aid that protects local economies, cultures and livelihoods.
- Peacemaking through multilateral diplomacy rather than unilateral force, the abolition of torture, and a strengthening of the United Nations and the rule of international law.
- Nuclear disarmament and redirection of military spending to more peaceful and productive uses.
- Cooperation and dialogue for peace and environmental justice among the world's religions.

... Adoption of simpler lifestyles for those who have enough; grace over greed in economic life.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

God's first gift to us is our life in an interdependent Creation. God's declaration to humans was, and is, that this Creation is "good." Its interdependence was immediately suggested in the consequences of the Fall story: hard labor is required, pain and enmity arise, human behavior affects the natural order. For most of human history, subsistence level agriculture has been the primary way of life. Frugality and family solidarity are virtues cultivated in such an environment; sufficiency and global solidarity are the challenges now before us.

Over the past 200 years, however, human industry, creativity, suffering for some and good fortune for others have all contributed to a vastly different form of abundance in developed nations, an abundance that is actually wasteful and detrimental to future generations. In the Exodus account of Israel's escape from servitude in Egypt, manna is a great gift in the wilderness, but it cannot be stored. In a sense, we have learned how to "manufacture" manna and have mounded it up rather than distributing it and using only what we needed. By analogy, in our much different context, the ethos of a limitless "more" now poisons the whole, imbalancing the natural order, confusing needs and wants, insulating even the relatively comfortable from the aching poor.

Granted, there are geographic and cultural differences that underlie this disparity among peoples of the world. Those who live in an arid desert are not apt to enjoy the same abundance of late-summer corn that U.S. Northeasterners take for granted. But the fact remains that the world is the one and only Creation, and it must serve us all, as it serves us differently. The best contribution of simpler lifestyles is to slow down the depletion of resources, allow the natural environment to regain some of its own regenerative and "carrying" capacities, and allow other human beings—now and in the future—more chance to grow: "Live simply that others may simply live."

The new Social Creed invites us to make many changes in the way we live our lives. Changes on a large scale are best coordinated through laws and regulations adopted by governments or intergovernmental agencies. But it is not enough to lay out a set of expectations addressed to other people. Therefore the Creed's guidance is addressed first to Christians and their churches. It calls for commitment and action, not merely words. And behind that outward action, in its closing section, the Social Creed calls for the kind of character that "treasures the environment, and builds community, rooted in a spirituality of inner growth..." Simpler lifestyle is a form of personal stewardship that shows awareness of, and care for, how our choices affect God's world.

Greed is an old false-friend of the human race, an exaggerated form of self-interest, and perhaps a less popular sin in light of the grandiosity that led to the current economic crisis. The juxtaposition of grace with greed says at least three things: that greed is still a sin, opposite the virtue of sharing; that there is a form of graciousness in our self-limitation to “enough”; and that there can be cooperation as well as competition in economic exchange.

Current Challenges and Choices

Perhaps the first choice is attitudinal. We can resent being asked to cut back, we can sabotage the idealists, deny scientific findings, and resist shared sacrifices. Or we can embrace the possibility of contributing to a better future, preserve species, and exercise our creativity in reducing our consumption and disposal of resources. In traditional spiritual terms, we can let the new disciplines of environmental asceticism make less room for things and more for Spirit, less gobbling up of experiences and more growing of friendships, less consumption and more community, more hand-made and less strip mall.

To reduce consumption, we can “steward” our use of plastic and minimize the amount of non-biodegradable garbage we contribute to Earth’s limited space. The average American produces five pounds of garbage a day, with the United States producing more garbage as a country than China (four times its size). We can “repair” and “recycle” rather than throw away and replace ... cars, appliances, furniture. We can support community-based agriculture, with fresh, less-processed foods, grown without pesticides and with care for maintaining healthy, fertile soil. It is healthier for consumers, for the soil, for local economies—and consumes less energy en route to market.

At a second level, we may begin to detach from “conspicuous consumption” and “positional” goods, scaling down the footprint of our homes or the carbon footprint of our cars. Repositioning one’s imagination and reference groups may be a lot harder than saving shower water for the plants, but more grace may come.

Congregations often begin with small but significant steps, such as using ceramic rather than plastic coffee cups, recycling their paper, and buying fair trade coffee. In the process they learn more about issues, solutions, and difficulties. It is an important educational experience, showing that some things are easier to do than we had imagined, others need to be done differently, and new possibilities as well as new challenges are likely to emerge. Each congregation is also a significant reference group for those outside the church. If the church lets some of its lawn go back to nature or does minimal mowing, or if it installs solar collectors on the parish house, or puts up a bicycle rack ... these are acts of witness and evangelism.

The longer-term, interdependent impact of each step we take to simplify leaves a little more of this one Creation for someone else who needs the “good” of it, and carries a little more of God’s promise that “the earth may yet be fair” (Sir Francis Bacon).

... Access for all to clean air and water and healthy food,
through wise care of land and technology.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

One of the basic human rights is the right to have access to clean water, the foundation of life. The biblical images of the Red Sea parting and baptism, of wells being dug and water drawn, of justice running down like a rushing stream and the river running through the new Jerusalem for the healing of the nations ... these are not polluted waters. Nor is the smoke of ancient sacrifices the kind of air pollution that sacrifices people when toxic, creates asthma on a large scale, and darkens the skies of the future. The biblical world presumes a natural goodness we must preserve, though we may now see God's providential hand in the work of agricultural science and the green revolution. The "wise care" spoken of here is not simply use and greater extraction. A new, more organic and wilderness-preserving green revolution is needed to provide the basics around the world.

In the U.S., this line of the Social Creed may suggest the *Pure Food and Drug Act*, the work of the Environmental Protection Agency, the state officials protecting reservoirs and monitoring run-off from factory farms, the blessings of catalytic converters, and now hybrid and all-electric vehicles. Yet, worldwide, 1.1 billion people do not have ready access to clean, potable water; this contributes to the preventable deaths of 1.8 million children each year. Unsanitary conditions spread disease, contaminate food, and link to extreme poverty and high mortality rates. We are reminded of the obligation in ancient Israel to leave portions of a field or a vineyard available for the poor and the sojourner (Lev 23:22; Deut 24:21).

To provide for the basics, and to ensure the appropriate technology for long-term or sustainable development, United Nations agronomists, economists and others put together *Millennium Development Goals* (MDG). They speak to the interrelatedness of the factors for social progress. The eight MDG breakdown to 21 quantifiable goals measured by 60 indicators. Among them: all industrialized nations increasing their development aid and aiming to break the scourge of poverty by 2015.

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

It could be done. The simpler language of the Social Creed on this point is no less ambitious.

The basic choices before all nations have to do with the role of government, not simply as protector, but as provider, especially in the case of water. Clean water, as a popular James Bond movie dramatizes, may become as contested a good as oil. Many cities and communities have pre-1908 water and sanitation systems that are now challenged by increasing population, unpredictable weather, and faster consumption by new industries that threaten supplies. In severest form, lack of water means desertification. Nobel prize winner Wangari Maathai's Greenbelt Movement in Kenya plants trees around farms precisely to push the Sahara back. But water availability is also a matter of political climate.

One of the economic/political mantras of our time is "privatization," even for the goods and services that are indispensable to human life. Arguing that private ownership is more efficient, powerful voices urge that water and other public services be transferred from governmental to private ownership. In other cases, seen in the widespread use of anti-environmental plastic water bottles, even ordinary water is marketed effectively, in part by implicitly discrediting public water.

To choose privatization is actually to look backwards. During the 19th century many of these services were provided by private corporations, chartered or licensed by governments. Yet service was sporadic or inadequate and many areas were left unserved since profits took precedence over human need. Postal services were among the first offered by governments; then municipalities decided to provide gas, water, and electricity. Even when these necessary services remained in private hands, they were regulated by governments through franchises and review of the rates that were charged. During the 1930s, the federal government created the TVA to provide electric power to a large region and encouraged rural electrical cooperatives that extended benefits to unserved areas. In our time, in Latin America, making water a commodity has made it inaccessible to many families and neighborhoods. Public protests have then led to the cancellation of privatization programs.

But again, not all backward choices are wrong. As the U.S. government redevelops major public works programs, some directed at infrastructure and some at new green industries, wise care for land and technology comes to the fore. If equitable land stewardship involves land reform in many parts of the world, as well as legal redress for those whose property rights are infringed, these same issues may face the United States. Where the benefits of new technologies may go to large landowners in developing nations, in developed nations private corporations and contractors may profit disproportionately from public initiatives and subsidies. The whole social ecology must be considered in such situations, and the MDG goals should guide: with ready and free access to air and water, and the availability of good food from wise land use and distribution, the lives of many can be renewed.

... Sustainable use of earth's resources, promoting alternative energy sources and public transportation, with binding covenants to reduce global warming and protect populations most affected.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

Our call to action by God begins in Genesis 2:15, as humankind is placed in God's good and wonderful Creation and charged with the freedom and responsibility to "till it and keep it." Implicit in this charge is the mutual dynamic of our right and "just" relation to the earth and its creatures. Yes, the earth is there for us to "till" and to use as a resource for our food, fiber and necessary material goods. BUT in return, we must "keep it," giving back as good as we get, instead of depleting it without heed to the long-term consequences to the earth "that is the Lord's, and everything in it."

The awareness of eco-justice, defined as the well-being of all humankind on a thriving earth, was not part of the 1908 Social Creed, written in the early days of the Industrial Revolution. For the new Social Creed, after one hundred years of industry and "tilling without keeping," the Creation is at a crisis point.

Current Challenges and Choices

A Lutheran ethicist writing for the Presbyterian Church distills the scientific consensus: "*If the world takes a business-as-usual approach and continues a fossil fuel-intensive energy path during the twenty-first century, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects current concentrations of greenhouse gases could more than quadruple by the year 2100. At this rate, the IPCC projects the global-average surface temperature will increase 4.0° Celsius (7.2° Fahrenheit) by the end of the twenty-first century.*

This rapid rate of global warming will raise sea levels, endangering millions living in low-lying areas, despoil freshwater resources, widen the range of infectious diseases like malaria, reduce agricultural production, and increase the risk of extinction for 25-30 percent of all surveyed species. A subsequent report released by the U.S. Climate Change Science Program claims '[we] are very likely to experience a faster rate of climate change in the next 100 years than has been seen over the past 10,000 years.'

Those of us living in the United States have a unique moral responsibility to change our energy consumption practices in the face of global climate change. According to the World Resources Institute, our nation is responsible for nearly 30 percent of the carbon dioxide emissions produced by the combustion of fossil fuels from 1850-2002, and we still lead the world, accounting for 23 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions today. There is no question that as a nation, and as individuals, the United States must accept its moral responsibility to deal with the negative consequences associated with fossil fuel consumption and global warming.

There are three important truths... First, the potential supply of renewable and alternative energy sources far exceeds the current and projected demand. God has truly furnished creation with energy in abundance. Nevertheless, the second truth is that our nation still relies heavily on fossil fuels and nuclear power to provide 93 percent of the energy we currently consume. We are not living sustainably in relationship with God's creation. This leads to the third, sad truth: Our reliance on these traditional energy sources poses grave dangers to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. We find ourselves at a pivotal moment in history with regard to global climate change. Scientists warn that global greenhouse gas emissions need to be reduced 80 percent below 1990 levels by the year 2050 in order to avert catastrophic consequences associated with global warming.”¹

Policy Directions:

The World Council of Churches refers to the moral responsibility for past industrial contributions to global warming as “ecological debt,” and observes that its costs will hit many countries of the global “South”—which did not create it—particularly hard. All countries, however, will need to join in binding covenants that build on the Kyoto Protocols, even if countries bear different dimensions of the burden of change. The U.S. will need mandatory and aggressive legislation to reduce carbon emissions from all sources. And the churches may need to insist that we are morally bound to take in refugees driven by already irreversible climate changes elsewhere in the world, even if our habits do change.

The Social Creed specifically names “alternative energy sources and public transportation” as areas for major change in our society’s energy footprint. With the abject failure of the U.S. automakers to anticipate rising oil costs, if not ecological needs, and the windfall profits going to Exxon and other oil companies from the nation’s “addiction,” it is clearly time for serious public planning and policy changes, including:

1. Internalize all social and environmental costs related to greenhouse gas emissions into the prices of fossil fuels;
2. Redirect subsidies and incentives to renewable energy and energy efficiencies and away from fossil fuel, nuclear power, and unjustifiable agro-fuels;
3. Adopt new efficiency standards for buildings, appliances, and vehicles, adapting the energy grid to encourage decentralized and distributed power generation;
4. For sustainable communities, shift to rail-based public transportation and urban planning that emphasizes mass transit;
5. Suspend all new coal-fired and nuclear plant construction until emissions scrubbing and radioactive waste problems have been significantly addressed;
6. Revise U.S. national security policies that seek to control overseas oil supplies;
7. Encourage individuals and churches to lead society in facing these challenges.²

Through the grace of God, humans have been placed in this wonderful Creation, with the freedom to share in its beauty and its abundance to meet our basic needs. However, God also reminds us to save Noah’s animals, and to “keep” the earth when we “till” it . . . that it may continually and fairly provide for many generations after this one.

¹ and ² are both taken from *The Power to Change: U.S. Energy Policy and Global Warming*, Executive Summary of General Assembly policy, prepared by James Martin-Schramm, PC(USA), 2008, posted online with full footnotes at www.pcusa.org/acswp.

... Equitable global trade and aid that protects local economies, cultures and livelihoods.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

“Almost everyone is familiar with the power of the world market system; yet the Christian tradition speaks of the whole earth as God’s household—‘oikoumene’—from the same NT Greek word from which we get economics, ecology, and ecumenical. Along with the many wonders of the microchip and instant communication, globalization also brings intensifying economic, technological, educational and political division among and within countries ... The biblical vision begins with ...one God creating one humanity, and includes God’s redeeming work in Christ reconciling across divisions ... Martin Luther King Jr.’s image of a ‘world house’ was his version of the Bible’s vision of a world made new and at peace. We believe that the vision and values of the ‘world house’ are more encompassing than those of the ‘world market,’ and we also remember Jesus’ warning that ‘no city or house divided against itself will stand’ (Mt 12:25).”¹

Within this framework, the market’s key characteristics are its short-term bias and its need for serious regulation on both the national and international levels. With regard to the first, economic opportunities and jobs created short-term can significantly improve local economies. But the chief consideration of corporations is to decrease costs and increase profits, which is not always in the best interest of local economies in the longer term. In the name of breaking down barriers to trade and investment, the World Trade Organization and international agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), have limited the power of governments to regulate their own economies. Under these agreements, corporations have challenged many laws enacted by governments to protect their people, their resources and environments, and the health of their economies. The results have included harder working conditions, exposure to harmful substances, absorption of family farms by agribusiness and “factory farming,” destruction of local economies by global marketing, patenting of indigenous crop strains, increased dependency on genetically-modified seeds and agricultural chemicals, and undocumented migrations of displaced people looking for work.

With regard to the second market characteristic noted above, political scientists often call attention to an ironic fact: the same people who object to any treaty or agreement that gives new powers to the United Nations, international courts, and other such bodies have often been eager to compromise the power of local, state, and national governments to regulate economic matters. Without accountability, international trade agreements can constitute a massive transfer of sovereignty to corporations and to semi-secret partnerships established by the World Trade Organization. In opposition to this trend, other voices insist on the right of sovereign countries to regulate agriculture, industry, and trade for the benefit of their own people in matters of food sufficiency, public services, employment, government purchasing, investment policies, intellectual property, and dispute resolution. This is especially crucial in dealing with indigenous peoples, whose traditional wisdom deserves respect and who have the right to adapt to new situations in their own ways, not at the direction of global forces.

Current Challenges and Choices

The General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches issued a far-reaching statement, “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth,” in Accra, Ghana in 2004.² It criticized the ideology of “neoliberalism,” which encourages unrestrained competition and consumerism, private ownership without social obligations, and accumulation of wealth without regard to consequences, and sees government’s role to be the protection of markets, not regulation of markets or promotion of economic justice. In this document and the World Council of Churches’ work on “Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology,” Christians around the world are asked to respond to the pleas of people long-silenced, taken for granted, or exploited for others’ gain.

Christian mission co-workers, as they proclaim God’s love and invite all people into fellowship, often find themselves promoting local economic development as a tangible sign of what they are preaching. Their work is sometimes assisted by “microcredit,” offering small loans to local farmers and traders; the church-related international development cooperative, Oikocredit, has become a worldwide support to such activities.

Churches in more affluent countries can also offer support by purchasing fair trade coffee, which guarantees a living price to producers, and “sweat-free” goods, which independent monitors have shown not to be produced in sweatshops. Churches and Roman Catholic religious orders also join with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility to engage in dialogue and witness with corporations about their practices and, if they are unresponsive, to divest church funds.

In addition to those actions by Christians and churches, here are several recommended policy directions:

1. To help build capital and reduce debt in developing nations, institute a small tax on international capital transactions (the “Tobin” tax) to discourage currency speculation and stabilize global financial systems;
2. Make designated U.S. courts a venue for the enforcement of international law and human rights cases involving corporations;
3. Include in the governance of the World Bank and other international finance institutions a greater representation of less-developed nations;
4. Strengthen international labor, public health and environmental standards, including the implementation of the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
5. Provide greater tariff assistance and debt relief to poor nations seeking a more even “playing field,” without requiring wholesale privatization of public goods.³

As we work with our brothers and sisters around the globe, let us heed the call to protect their livelihoods and cultures, as if they were our own. For in this new age of mutuality and global-connectedness ... they are, and we shall celebrate and value our differences as well as our commonality together in God’s created world.

¹ Just Globalization: Justice, Ownership, and Accountability, PC(USA), 2006, p. 6.

² Accra Confession: www.warc.ch/documents/ACCA_Pamphlet.pdf. See www.oikoumene.org for World Council resources.

³ Just Globalization, *ibid*.

... Peacemaking through multilateral diplomacy rather than unilateral force, the abolition of torture, and a strengthening of the United Nations and the rule of international law.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

“Blessed are the peacemakers,” Jesus says in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:9). Peace is pervasive in the blessing of well-being, or shalom, that is repeatedly pronounced by Jesus and the disciples. Acts 10:36 sums up the whole story of Jesus as “the good news of peace.” In the Old Testament, peace often comes after a violent struggle related to idolatry. Idolatry, the worship of false gods, is linked to greed and injustice, thus the establishment of peace also restores justice.¹ Jesus’ own “making peace by his cross” shows the deep cost of peace, as his life shows a deep coherence between his means and ends of love and reconciliation.

Thus peacemaking has been a Christian obligation from the beginning. Some respond by being pacifists; others see a need for military force, though under clear rules of justice. In our time the notion of “just war” has been completed by advocacy of “just peace,” for peace is not a mere absence of war or a precarious balance of power, and peace cannot endure for long without justice. A basic link between the peace of Christ and acts of repentance, restoration, and reconciliation can be seen in the way the announcement of the reign or kingdom of God comes with Jesus’ healing power. That healing and release from oppression is the opposite of the violence on which every “domination system” depends.²

Multilateral diplomacy, ending the very personal terror that is torture, building up the community of nations, and basing it all on international law: these methods show a clear coherence with the goal of peace. What is also significant for the church’s role today is how the biblical language of truth-telling, witness, confession, and forgiveness are being given practical application among and within nations, as in the Truth and Reconciliation commissions that are—still with suffering—asserting powers stronger than war.

Following the end of the Cold War, the churches initially hoped for a “peace dividend,” but despite a decrease in its rate of growth under President Clinton, the U.S. continued to expand its military expenditure and use its “superpower” status to see a “unipolar” world. This misjudgment prefigured the missed opportunity to build on the world’s sympathy and solidarity with the United States after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Instead, U.S. leaders embraced the action of “empire” declaring a “global war on terror.”³

In the current context of wars begun in Afghanistan and Iraq in the wake of the destruction of the World Trade Center, almost all leaders of member communions in the National Council of Churches, and the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church, opposed the Iraq war and have sought a responsible end to the U.S. occupation of that country. The joint work of NATO in Afghanistan was more accepted, though the support given a dictator in Pakistan to assist in that struggle may now be seen as counterproductive.

Overreliance on military force has dominated recent U.S. foreign relations, with threats of force issued against Iran for its purportedly civilian nuclear program and tolerance of use of force by ally Israel in the maintenance of its occupation of Palestine. In contrast, multi-lateral diplomacy has created treaties and reduced tensions in Northern Ireland, the Balkans, and along countless disputed borders.

Current Challenges and Choices

“National security” is a justifiable concern, but it is best achieved through collective security forged in regional alliances and in the United Nations. NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, has been stretched beyond the bounds of Europe, but it may yet provide a model for other regional alliances to deal with failed states, humanitarian disasters, and regional conflicts. The United Nations, while not the only means of achieving security through just peace, is the most comprehensive. Its Security Council has the authority to adjudicate conflicts, while its General Assembly and various agencies have negotiated numerous international conventions, delegated peacekeepers and observers, developed targeted sanctions, and provided much development aid and emergency relief, despite the sometimes-repressive governments in the U.N. membership.

Overall, the value of the United Nations resides in its capacity to focus attention and some resources on troubled areas and, through painstaking diplomatic efforts, to build consensus and raise standards of behavior. Compared to the costs of wars such as Iraq (over \$3 trillion when all is included), it pays to pay the U.N. dues and to support its specific peacekeeping and peace-building missions.⁴

The U.N.’s founding in 1948 was linked to the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the foundation of many other human rights instruments. Its creation was strongly influenced by ecumenical church leadership. The Social Creed’s goals of ending torture and strengthening international law would help restore U.S. leadership for human rights generally and support the International Criminal Court in particular. The proposed closing of the Guantanamo Bay prison camp and other secret detention centers are good steps in this direction.

Respect for international law prevents unilateral interventions and treats terrorism as a crime rather than an act of war. This approach encourages international cooperation and diplomacy, institution-building, cultural exchange and economic development in the often weak countries where terrorists take refuge. Better governance and peace-building within particular states can then connect with the positive goals named earlier in the Social Creed.

¹ This section draws on “To Repent, To Restore, To Re-build, and To Reconcile,” a study paper of the Presbyterian Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, 2008.

² This conception is drawn partly from the biblical analysis of Walter Wink.

³ Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (NY: Routledge, 2004) documents the repeated public use of “empire” concepts by the initiators of the Iraq invasion.

⁴ Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes calculated the total war costs initially at \$2 trillion and then revised it upward: *The Three Trillion Dollar War* (NY: Norton, 2008)

... Nuclear disarmament and redirection of military spending to more peaceful and productive uses.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

The Bible chronicles the rise and fall of empires far larger than Israel, empires that overextended their reach in conquest and occupation. Joshua, Samson and David figure in stories of irregular and guerrilla warfare. When the prophet Samuel warns the people about the consequences of choosing a king, he warns them of the costs they will bear: “He will take your sons... to be his horsemen ... to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and equipment for his chariots” (1 Sam 8:11-12). Jesus, much later, refers to kings needing to “count the cost” required to do battle and urges them to sue for peace if the price of battle is too high.

Every war has led to massive expenditures, not only of money (including long-lasting debt), but of human lives, through death, mutilation, emotional trauma, and disruption of social institutions. This is true for the victors and the losers, military personnel and civilian populations. In the face of such destruction, it is grotesque to consider war a useful investment on the part of any nation. This is particularly true of nuclear war.

Even when preparation for war is regarded as necessary for security, wisdom suggests that money also be directed toward more constructive activities that can make the country more secure, with fewer negative consequences. An arms race diverts educational, technological, and productive energies away from pressing human needs. It creates vested interests that use economic and political power to continue to develop weapons. And it encourages nationalistic or religious ideologies that demonize other nations or groups and intensify the fierceness of government policies.

Nuclear weapons systems are the top of the weapons pyramid and, in the United States, include costs in the Department of Energy and so-called “black” budgetary items—amounts kept secret for national security reasons. It should be noted that more of the federal budget for military systems has been going “black,” joining the only-estimated costs of surveillance and intelligence operations. Some nuclear-weapon-related programs, like the technologically uncertain missile defense system or partially disclosed space militarization research and development, threaten to make obsolete all current treaties.

The total military expenditure of the United States is only slightly less than that of all other nations combined and a large part of this is for weapons systems generally. Another large cost sector is support for over 750 military bases around the world, designed to allow “force projection” anywhere in the world. While attention has focused on the construction of 14 “permanent” bases in Iraq, there is a constant flow of maintenance and support for personnel to bases of all sizes in over 100 countries: airbases, seaports, refueling stations, ordnance depots, testing sites.

Current Challenges and Choices

“Economic Conversion” is the term given to retooling the industrial

basis of military production, and it faces strong resistance. Because of the massive scale of military contracting, public spending in this area is often called “military Keynesianism.” Powerful interests protect local bases, regardless of military objective and stated opposition to government spending. Similarly, individual contractors have an enormous vested interest in major weapons programs being sustained by the government, prompting some countries simply to nationalize their primary military manufacturers to ensure transparency and control cost overruns. At the same time, the U.S. government also supports the export of weapons systems: U.S.-based companies export the largest amount of weapons in the world, often as part of our foreign aid packages, requiring purchase of U.S.-made material.

President Eisenhower’s name for this whole system was “the military industrial complex,” and it is clearer than ever that reducing this entity will not only save billions of dollars for countless productive uses (often employing more people), but contribute to the world’s safety and security. Thus while policy considerations particularly include returning to treaties banning the testing and manufacture of nuclear weapons, it is most important to muster the will to change how our nation relates to the world. Let us hear more from General Eisenhower, in prophetic mode, as he left the Presidency on January 17, 1961:

Down the long lane of the history yet to be written America knows that this world of ours, ever growing smaller, must avoid becoming a community of dreadful fear and hate, and be, instead, a proud confederation of mutual trust and respect.

Such a confederation must be one of equals. The weakest must come to the conference table with the same confidence as do we ... That table, though scarred by many past frustrations, cannot be abandoned for the certain agony of the battlefield.

Disarmament, with mutual honor and confidence, is a continuing imperative. Together we must learn how to compose difference, not with arms, but with intellect and decent purpose. Because this need is so sharp and apparent I confess that I lay down my official responsibilities in this field with a definite sense of disappointment. As one who has witnessed the horror and the lingering sadness of war—as one who knows that another war could utterly destroy this civilization which has been so slowly and painfully built over thousands of years—I wish I could say tonight that a lasting peace is in sight. ...

...To all the peoples of the world, I once more give expression to America’s prayerful and continuing aspiration:

We pray that peoples of all faiths, all races, all nations, may have their great human needs satisfied; that those now denied opportunity shall come to enjoy it to the full; that all who yearn for freedom may experience its spiritual blessings; that those who have freedom will understand, also, its heavy responsibilities; that all who are insensitive to the needs of others will learn charity; that the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance will be made to disappear from the earth, and that, in the goodness of time, all peoples will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love.¹

¹ <http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/farewell.htm>

... Cooperation and dialogue for peace and environmental justice among the world's religions.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background

Christian history contains many examples of conflict among Christians and between Christians and adherents of other faiths. Even when conflicts do not lead to physical violence, the violence of fanaticism may be under the surface. Yet Christ resisted the spirit of violence even at his arrest. The Gospel of John affirms that God provided a presence, a witness, after Jesus' death. Many understand that witness to be the Spirit who touches every heart or conscience. Christian churches, recognizing that faith is a free internal response to God, have pervasively come to reject compulsion, with churches in the United States being particularly clear about church/state separation.

The U.S. has always been pluralistic, and its religious diversity is constantly increasing. Other societies, even those with a tradition of religious uniformity, are experiencing religious diversity to a new degree, and in some cases, as a major element of contention. To nations that claim a state religion and deny religious liberty or civil freedoms to adherents of other faiths, the U.S. tradition of cooperation among faiths can provide an example of tolerance and joint moral progress, as in the Civil Rights movement. Churches and synagogues that have held interfaith services on Thanksgiving and Martin Luther King Day are now inviting participation from the mosque, Hindu and Buddhist temples, etc. Not all U.S. citizens welcome such newcomers, which is one reason that signs of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect are important, but on a personal level, the vast majority of persons of different faiths find themselves working together peaceably.

Current Challenges and Choices

Mutual understanding is not only for reducing tensions and preventing violence. It also highlights the strengths that religious commitment and cooperation bring to the challenges detailed in the Social Creed. On a global level, tensions and differences among Christians, Muslims, and Jews are very real. Justice and peace cannot be achieved without understanding each other's faith traditions. Religious minorities all over the world deserve freedom of faith: persecution does not honor God. The Social Creed is clearly an ecumenical Christian document. Yet it ends on an appeal for greater cooperation for the sake of our shared humanity and our shared planet, precisely out of gratitude to God and our sense of being called to reverse global warming and create a just, sustainable and peaceful future. No single faith can accomplish this.

Within the Christian family, we celebrate the unity of the communions in the councils and conferences of churches around the world. We are encouraged by growing areas of agreement. While the new Social Creed speaks directly from and to U.S. Christians and churches, it is an invitation to work together for the sake of God's *oikoumene*. As Christ was "a man for others," so the churches offer their witness and service for the world God continues to love.

In this spirit we lift up a “companion litany” of the United Methodist Church, done also to mark the centennial of the first Social Creed, to be shared in the joint work of our churches together.

**2008 UNITED METHODIST COMPANION LITANY
TO THE SOCIAL CREED***

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace

**to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.**

Today is the day
God cares for the integrity of creation,
wills the healing and wholeness of all life,
weeps at the plunder of earth’s goodness.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God embraces all hues of humanity,
delights in diversity and difference,
favors solidarity transforming strangers into friends.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God cries with the masses of starving people,
despises growing disparity between rich and poor,
demands justice for workers in the marketplace.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God deplors violence in our homes and streets,
rebukes the world’s warring madness,
humbles the powerful and lifts up the lowly.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God calls for nations and peoples to live in peace,
celebrates where justice and mercy embrace,
exults when the wolf grazes with the lamb.

And so shall we.

*Today is the day
God brings good news to the poor,
proclaims release to the captives,
gives sight to the blind, and
sets the oppressed free.*

And so shall we.

(*Approved by the 2008 General Conference of the United Methodist Church, May 1, 2008.)

Questions for Study and Discussion

In teaching the Social Creed, some have first asked classes to identify key issues of faith and ethics, or outline how they would define “life in abundance” (from both a personal and communal perspective). Others have concealed the church origin and theological bases of the affirmations, sometimes surprising those who think the church has been silent on these matters. The point of these questions is to help us find shared values and our personal ways to connect to the core of each affirmation, and to feel a call to action. A “social” creed is meant to foster change-creating conversation about what needs to happen next in our society, our culture, and our world.

1. Is there a value in having a short summary of Christian social teaching? Do people considering the truth of Christianity care about its commitment to justice? Is the public witness of the church part of evangelism?
2. What makes a document “prophetic”? Does it need to carry judgment and even denunciation of wrongdoers, liars and oppressors? (See Luke 17 and Mt 23.) Does it also need “pathos” or a feeling for the fate of those judged responsible for the suffering of others? Especially in its opening and closing paragraphs, does the Social Creed contain too much positive “annunciation” of a better future? Were the prophets more realistic about social conflict over power and the inevitability of tragedy?
3. Does the Social Creed’s concern with individual rights in the first set of affirmations conflict with the emphasis on communities later in the document? Are some rights and concerns left out? (Which ones — and are some implied, if not stated?)
4. Some of the Social Creed affirmations are principles, others are policy directions. They are designed to help apply Christian ethics to enduring and emerging problems. Are some too detailed or specific? Too time-bound? Too practical?
5. In the second set of affirmations (*In Love, community needs and action*), the communal theme begins with human family and includes the framework of the common good. If the first section (*In Faith, what individuals need to care for themselves*), spoke more of rights and human dignity, this one speaks more of responsibilities—but not just individual responsibilities. How much is the role of government essential throughout? Are these affirmations too insistent on government’s role?

6. The third set of affirmations (*In Hope, working together to take care of the world*) would strengthen the rule of law in international relations. Given the number of weak or “failed” states with high rates of poverty, violence and corruption, is this section too hopeful? Can there be economic development without regulations against exploitation?
7. The Social Creed emphasizes creative alternatives to military force, though it is not a necessarily pacifist statement. What combinations of “hard” or “soft” or “smart” power do you favor? Given the strength of special interests including those involved in defense industries, how would your part of the country start “economic conversion”?
8. The closing section speaks to the virtues or strengths of character necessary for the transformation of both church and society. What are the sources of these spiritual gifts? How do we cultivate “communities of character”? Do material basics need to be met for most people to see the benefits of shared action?
9. The Social Creed refers to the Accra Confession of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Poverty, Wealth, Ecology program of the World Council of Churches. These documents see economic inequality and toleration of poverty dividing the church, and doctrinaire “free market” ideology justifying these divisions. Is it important for us to look at consensus statements by Christians from other countries?
10. The Social Creed points to many large changes but is designed to be practical and concrete. Is it more radical or reformist? Does this distinction matter? Is it more important to be incarnational?
11. What roles do you think the churches should play in advocating in response to the Social Creed? Letters to legislators or testimony before legislative bodies? Changes in investments? Changes in pastoral training? Community organizing?
12. How might the current economic crisis impact personal connection, or commitment, to the affirmations on the Social Creed? Are there specific points that may achieve new awareness or understanding because of it?

Does your church have a bike rack? Did your youth group build it? Do you have a garden for the local food pantry? The following page will direct you to additional resources and study materials (also listed on page 4) that you may find useful in creating awareness, and encouraging action, in line with the affirmations of the Social Creed. As individual study groups and congregations explore and discuss this historic document, we expect these web-based platforms to evolve, and to grow. We welcome your thoughts, suggestions and sharing of “incredible” stories as you reach out to the world ...

in faith, in love and in hope.

View this 28-minute DVD,
and find resource materials for
further study and discussion of
the Social Creed at:

[www.pcusa/acswp/
socialcreed.htm](http://www.pcusa/acswp/socialcreed.htm)

www.hudrivpres.org

www.nccusa.org



Bulletin inserts, posters, related books, translations, and more ...



Details on page 4

America's Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox faith groups joining hands and voices to express their unity in Christ

