



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Lutheran Principles for Foreign Aid Reform

Lutherans have a long history of serving those most in need throughout the world and advocating for U.S. policies that promote sustainable development and the well-being of all of God's people. Today, many people enjoy tremendous wealth while extreme poverty, disease and conflict threaten the lives of billions of people in developing countries. The needs of the most vulnerable in the world are great and growing in the midst of an unprecedented global economic crisis. When these needs go unmet, the humanitarian consequences are grave and international security is compromised.

For decades the U.S. government has demonstrated leadership in addressing these challenges through Official Development Assistance (ODA). However, the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, which established the U.S. Agency for International Development and separated military from non-military aid, is outdated and in need of revision. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Lutheran World Relief (LWR) bring decades of implementing experience, relationships with global church partners and Lutheran teachings to the debate about foreign aid reform, and are uniquely placed to contribute to a new vision of the Foreign Assistance Act.

Like U.S. development assistance, formal Lutheran relief and development efforts began in response to the aftermath of World War II. The U.S.-based agency Lutheran World Relief (LWR) and International agency Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service were created at this time. While the needs of devastated European communities prompted these efforts in 1945, the work of Lutheran development agencies continues today in more than 40 of the world's poorest countries.

LWF and LWR share the vision of a world where all people are empowered to realize their basic human rights and thus able to live with dignity in peace. LWF and LWR and their partners are currently implementing U.S. aid programs in Africa, Asia, Central and Latin America. The ELCA and LWR bring the lessons learned through this **implementing experience** to the foreign aid reform debate.

The ELCA also brings the asset of **relationships with Church partners** to the foreign aid reform debate. The ELCA, a member of the Lutheran World Federation, maintains institutional relationships with more than 75 Lutheran church bodies throughout the world. Church-based health, educational, and service institutions and programs, some of which pre-date World War II, provide the foundation for these churches' continuing development work in many poor communities throughout the world. The ELCA's financial and personnel support for these efforts is complemented by transformative Lutheran-to-Lutheran relationships at the congregational and regional level between U.S. Lutherans and Lutherans from around the world.

Finally, the ELCA and LWR also bring important **Lutheran teachings and theological concepts** that guide our international relationships and development work to the foreign aid reform debate. These include:

- **Human Dignity:** "All human beings are made in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27) and have equal value, worth and dignity. Individuals' human dignity flourishes when they are able to actively participate in the pursuit of their basic human rights.¹
- **Accompaniment:** This philosophical approach to development is grounded in the concept of human dignity and results in a practical framework for implementation which teaches that empowerment and justice are achieved by 'standing with' rather than 'doing for' others in need.²

¹ *Sufficient, Sustainable, Livelihood for All*, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1999. pg. 9

² www.lwr.org

- **Sufficiency:** God has created a world of sufficiency for all, and yet many lack access to basic necessities of life because established human systems of distribution have failed. Government must play a central role in helping to fairly distribute resources within and between nations.³
- **Sustainability:** “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” (Psalm 24:1). We are called to consider the long-term consequences of our actions in the world and to be good stewards of the earth.
- **Peace:** Individuals, communities and national governments are called to be active in creating just peace in the world. While we understand that in some circumstances our country will respond to modern-day threats with force, we recognize that marginalization and desperation, often perpetuated by poverty and hunger, are at the root of most conflicts. We believe that sustainable peace is inextricably linked to the well-being and human dignity of all persons, which cannot be realized or affirmed through military means.

“ ***Uphold the rights of the poor and oppressed.***

-Psalm 82:3”

In light of our implementing experience, global church partnerships and church teachings, we urge Congress to consider the following principles as they begin rewriting the Foreign Assistance Act:

- Make the promotion of **human dignity**, and the realization of basic human rights, through human development and poverty alleviation programs the fundamental purpose of U.S. foreign aid.
- **Prioritize development** as a key pillar of U.S. foreign policy alongside diplomacy and defense.
- Clearly communicate the purpose, goals and objectives of U.S. foreign assistance in a **global development strategy**.
 - o Such a strategy should seek to help eliminate duplication and increase coordination and coherence among U.S. government agencies responsible for emergency humanitarian aid, long-term development aid, debt relief, trade, climate change initiatives and agriculture policy and human rights.
- USAID country specific strategies should be **developed in cooperation** with and in alignment to recipient country government’s national poverty reduction plans. USAID should help ensure that civil society in the recipient country is able to actively engage in the process.
- Long-term development projects should be designed and implemented in cooperation with the targeted population to **ensure ownership, empowerment and sustainability**.
 - o Implementers of USAID program funds should be required to meet a **universal standard of local population participation** in long-term development projects.
 - o Mechanisms for multi-year funding, in addition to the Millennium Challenge Corporation, should be created. It is difficult for recipient country governments and populations to plan or prioritize when funding fluctuates with donor countries’ annual appropriation cycles.
- **Poverty-focused development assistance should be doubled by 2012** and such funds should be dedicated to those most in need based on long-term development goals, not short-term security or political concerns.

3 *Sufficient, Sustainable, Livelihood for All*, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1999. p. 10

- Integrate **gender analysis** throughout all humanitarian and development programs. The unique and diverse roles that men and women play in societies throughout the world must be taken into account in order to fashion effective and sustainable programs.
- U.S. foreign aid should promote and help achieve **environmental sustainability**.
- U.S. foreign aid should promote **agricultural sovereignty and sustainability** in all developing nations.
- U.S. foreign aid should respond to human need in **conflict countries**, support peacekeeping forces and address the gap between emergency response and long-term development efforts.
- U.S. foreign aid should be **coordinated with other donors** to reduce duplication and reduce the reporting burden on recipient countries.

LWF is a global communion of 140 churches in 79 countries representing over 68 million Christians. LWF headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland.

LWR is a joint ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and works with partners in 35 countries to help people grow food, improve health, strengthen communities, end conflict, build livelihoods and recover from disasters. It is headquartered in Baltimore, MD.

The ELCA is the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States, representing 4.8 million Lutherans in 65 Synods.