

G. God's Work in Our Hands: Employment, Community, and Christian Vocation

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The following paper has been developed by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP)

425

following extensive consultation with Presbyterians at all levels of the church, including commissioners of the 206th General Assembly (1994), which referred the paper back to ACSWP for refinement and revision.

This policy statement is a theological exposition concerning the vocation of every Christian. The understanding of vocation is based on insights from our biblical heritage, the Reformed tradition, our own American Presbyterian heritage as seen in the statements of previous General Assemblies, and an analysis of contemporary economic and societal realities.

Sections of the paper include an introduction to the issues, a theology of vocation, a theology of work, past General Assembly actions, principles, plans for implementation, a final theological statement, and a glossary.

This paper affirms that work, paid and unpaid, is an integral part-of-the believer's response to God's call, the call to vocation in God's world. Good work should reflect the principles of justice on which the church's witness is based, and is described as full, fair, participatory, and sustaining.

The heart of the policy statement is its "Principles of Vocation and Work," through which theology is brought to life in concrete ways. The principles, time-bound and contextual, are followed by a theological vision of the future, the way in which God's people are called to live together as the biblical understanding of God's realm is realized.

Outline

Precis

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1. Recommendations

2. Background

God's Work in Our Hands:
Employment, Community, and Christian Vocation

I. Introduction

- A. Mandate: The General Assembly Assignment
- B. Process Statement: The Task Force Describes Its Work

II. The Challenge

- A. A Challenge Worth Facing
- B. God's Call: Theology of Vocation
- C. God's Work and Ours: Theology of Work
 - 1. On the "Covenant of Work"
 - 2. Full Employment: Work Is a Gift of God to Every Human Being
 - 3. Fair Employment: Human Work Is Meant to Serve God's Just Ordering of Creation
 - 4. Sustaining Employment: Work Sustains Life and Creation
 - 5. Participatory Employment: Work Is a Sharing in Common Life

III. Previous General Assembly Policy Statements

IV. Implementation: Action Plans

V. A Vision for the Future: God's Call for Work and Community

VI. Glossary

VII. Endnotes

1. Recommendations

[For assembly action see p. [56](#).]

34.504

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy recommends that the 207th General Assembly (1995)

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a. Approve "God's Work in Our Hands: Employment, Community, and Christian Vocation" as policy, to be used as a basis for decision in the development of guidelines, policies, programs, and procedures for the entities of the General Assembly and for advocacy by appropriate entities with all levels of government.

[For assembly action see p. [58](#).]

34.506

b. Commend "God's Work in Our Hands: Employment, Community, and Christian Vocation" to middle governing bodies, sessions, and congregations, urging its use by personnel committees and as the basis for study and action concerning issues of vocation and employment by all governing bodies and for advocacy by appropriate entities with all levels of government.

[For assembly action see p. [58](#).]

34.507

c. Direct the General Assembly Council and its entities to report to the 208th General Assembly (1996), the 209th General Assembly (1997), the 210th General Assembly (1998), and the 211th General Assembly (1999) with plans and progress in implementation, with a final report to the 212th General Assembly (2000), which reports on churchwide implementation of the policies and actions as a result of this policy statement.

[For assembly action see p. [58](#).]

34.508

d. Direct the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to print and distribute [*within three months*] to the clerk of each session and each middle governing body "God's Work in Our Hands: Employment, Community, and Christian Vocation," together with a study guide designed for congregational use [*in a format determined in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy*].

[For assembly action see p. [59](#).]

34.509

e. Direct the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to have the "Principles of Vocation and Work" translated into Spanish and Korean and distributed with the policy statement to Spanish- and Korean - language congregations [*within three months*].

[For assembly action see p. [59](#).]

34.510

f. Urge that all governing bodies provide for annual services of commissioning for those engaged in paid or unpaid work in church and society, held most appropriately on Labor Day Sunday, honoring the belief that work, paid and unpaid, is an integral part of the believer's response to God's call[, *and that Labor Day Sunday be noted as an appropriate day in the denominational calendar beginning in 1997*].

[For assembly action see p. [59](#).]

34.511

g. Call upon the Task Force on Sustainable Development, Reformed Faith, and U.S. International Economic Policy to make recommendations concerning measures to address the global employment crisis, especially concerning ways in which the world's most

426

privileged groups and nations must make sacrifices as an inescapable aspect of faithfulness in adjusting to global realities; as well as recommendations that encourage equity in international economic decisions, making clear the General Assembly's concern for all employees, both in the United States and other nations.

[For assembly action see p. [59](#).]

34.512

h. Approve the following, "Principles of Vocation and Work," as policy for the General Assembly and its entities and commend it to all governing bodies and their members:

PRINCIPLES OF VOCATION AND WORK

34.513

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy proposes the following principles on vocation and work as the policy basis for the recommendations and implementation and action plans of this paper. These principles have evolved from the statements of previous General Assemblies, from current theological reflection by the wider church in light of contemporary economic realities, and from the theological perspectives of this paper.

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1. Vocation is a lifelong response to God in all aspects of one's life. Work, paid and unpaid, is an integral part of the believer's response to God's call. One's vocation may include multiple careers, volunteer opportunities, and should involve continual spiritual growth in every step of the life-journey to which God calls us.

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2. The social policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should seek to change work from a burden to a glad and collaborative response to Jesus' [*transformative life and*] work of redemption. Such good work contributes to the creation as well as to the economy, by providing not only the means for subsistence, but also a way to honor human dignity and participate in community life.

34.516

3. The church must seek to become a model employer by providing workers with adequate compensation, meaningful opportunities for participation in decision making, leisure time in which to participate in family and community life, and by developing a ". . . reasonable relationship between the highest and the lowest salaries paid to all church employees." 1

34.517

4. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should provide educational materials so that its members can become informed voters and advocates for economic policies that will serve to alleviate poverty, empower marginalized groups, and generate environmentally sustainable economic growth around the world.

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5. All sectors of society—including labor, management, and government—must be engaged in the task of economic renewal of our life together. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should play a significant role as a catalyst for conversation among these sectors.

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6. The social safety net that supports individuals, families, and communities suffering from economic dislocation must link both private voluntary agencies and the public sector. The church alone cannot provide an adequate safety net.

34.520

7. The foundation upon which all just employment policies are built is access to employment at a level of compensation that allows people to live in dignity and security. In a market economy, the private sector provides the majority of jobs, supported by local, state, and federal government policies designed to ensure that there is sufficient employment for all willing and able to be in paid employment. The cost of such policies must always be weighed against the cost to society of allowing high levels of unemployment or underemployment.

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8. ~~[Inequalities in compensation and working conditions demand the strictest scrutiny. A political, economic, and social system that translates unalterable human differences—race, ethnicity, gender, age, and physical ability—into occasion for oppression, exploitation, and hopelessness, is incompatible with the Reformed tradition. As our workforce becomes increasingly diverse, these concerns become even more urgent.]~~
[Inequalities in compensation and working conditions demand the strictest scrutiny. As our workforce becomes increasingly diverse, these concerns become even more urgent. Employment for persons who have suffered the injustices of prejudice and bias is the object of laws requiring affirmative action. A political, economic, and social system that translates unalterable human differences—race, ethnicity, gender, age, and physical ability—into occasion for oppression, exploitation, and hopelessness, is incompatible with Reformed theology. Restorative justice is the paradigm for affirmative action. It was God's way of restoring the Hebrews. We have been restored in Christ. Through Christ we are called to engage in a ministry of reconciling and restoring the inherent freedom of all of God's children.]

34.522

9. All conditions of paid employment, including compensation and working conditions, should sustain and nurture the dignity of individuals, the well-being of households and families, the social cohesiveness of communities, and the integrity of the global environment.

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10. Justice demands that social institutions guarantee all persons the opportunity to participate actively in economic decision making that affects them. All workers—including undocumented, migrant, and farm workers—have the right to choose to ~~[be represented by a labor organization]~~ *[organize]* for the purposes of collective bargaining.

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11. Domestic economic policies should be judged in the light of their effect on the most vulnerable groups

of people in the society, including racial ethnic and national minorities, women, older and younger people, and persons with disabilities.

34.525

12. International economic policies should be judged in the light of their ability to raise the standard of living of the world's most vulnerable groups, the human rights of workers, as well as of their effects on the global environment.

2. Background

God's Work In Our Hands:
Employment, Community, And
Christian Vocation

I. Introduction

A. Mandate: The General Assembly Assignment

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Inflation was coming down and interest rates were dropping when the 200th General Assembly (1988) gathered in Saint Louis, Missouri. At the same time, members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) nervously observed employment statistics, producer and consumer price indexes, industrial production data, plant closings, trade figures, the decline of the dollar, and the economic restructuring in the United States and many other nations.

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The 200th General Assembly (1988) adopted three items that were later to define the work of the Task Force on Vocation and Work.

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1. The resolution "Closing the Household Income Gap," urged ". . . the President and Congress of the United States of America to raise the minimum wage to its historical level of 50 percent of the average nonsupervisory, nonagricultural wage and provide for regular increases that will keep the minimum wage at an adequate level to lift people out of poverty" 2 In addition, the General Assembly instructed the Committee on Social Witness Policy to ". . . explore policies that might reverse the trend of increasing income disparity through the study on 'Issues of Vocation and Problems of Work in the U.S.'" 3

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"God's Work in Our Hands: Employment, Community, and Christian Vocation" supports the call of the 200th General Assembly (1988) for increasing the minimum wage because of pressing human needs and as a sign of the nation's commitment to an adequate income for all its people.

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2. The Presbytery of Trinity sent an overture, adopted by the 200th General Assembly (1988), which asked the Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit and the Committee on Social Witness Policy to work together to provide an ". . . emphasis on the doctrine of Christian vocation. . . ." ⁴The materials, including any social witness policies under development, were to ". . . place appropriate emphasis on the call of every believer to serve Christ in whatever occupation or station of life one may be. . . ." ⁵

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"God's Work in Our Hands" renews the commitment of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to a faithful doctrine of Christian vocation. It calls upon believers to serve Christ by seeking justice in places of employment or through volunteer labor.

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3. *Commissioners' Resolution 15-88. On Study of Business and Industry Practices*, adopted by the 200th General Assembly (1988), described the problems of work in tough terms:

Whereas, business and industry sometimes make decisions that seem to be solely for the economic benefit of the few or corporate stockholders without compassionate or economic concerns for the individual employee and their families; and

Whereas, such decisions often result in dismissal, forced early retirement, sometimes with loss of financial benefits, or in many instances uproots families without regard to their sociological and emotional well-being; and

Whereas, such decisions of business and industry tend to dehumanize and reduce the role of men and women to expendable objects for economic gain . . . ⁶

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The 200th General Assembly (1988) condemned ". . . business practices that disregard the sociological and emotional well-being of employees." ⁷ Further, it authorized the publication of a study document on practices of work that disregard the sociological and emotional well-being of employees. Finally, the assembly called for the development of a policy statement that urges ". . . both moral and material assistance to people who find themselves economically disenfranchised." ⁸

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In 1990, in response to the General Assembly's mandate, the Task Force on Vocation and Work published a study document, *Vocation and Work: Challenges in the Workplace* with a study guide, and invited the church to enter into dialogue on the issues addressed in *Commissioners' Resolution 15-88*. "God's Work in Our Hands" calls for actions that will provide moral and material assistance to those who are economically disenfranchised.

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Four years later, the 204th General Assembly (1992) added an assignment to "lift up clearly the impact of international economic realities on the creation of jobs in the United States. . . ." ⁹"God's Work in Our Hands" comments on selected aspects of United States employment in light of international developments. However, a full response to this referral, specifically its interest in international economic realities, must await the report of the Task Force on Sustainable Development, Reformed Faith, and U.S. International Economic Policy, scheduled for the 208th General Assembly (1996).

B. Process Statement: The Task Force Describes Its Work

1. Work Site Visits

34.536

During 1988 and 1989, the task force met in locations that highlighted differing issues of vocation and problems

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of work. Group members talked with workers, managers, consultants, university professors, community organizers, business owners, trade unionists, church leaders, and others concerned with issues of vocation and work.

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In July 1988, the task force visited Livermore, California, a San Francisco suburb described as a "self-contained city of the future" designed to provide inhabitants places of work and residence in close proximity. Company planners spoke proudly of their facility, child-care provisions, and worker transportation plans. Asian women testified to concerns about reduced access for poor workers to this community and others in the Bay Area.

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In November 1988, the task force met in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where two pastors, a director of a state council of churches, a community developer, a business professor, a seminary professor, and members of the presbytery staff spoke about the demise of the steel industry and the restructuring of the economy in that city. They were especially concerned about the prevalence of low-paying jobs and high unemployment in the city.

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The task force then toured Pittsburgh's Monongahela Valley. The tour guides were ex-steel workers and members of the Unemployment Committee of the valley. The group discovered that many were struggling to find work that could support a family, while many young people had moved away from the region. They had no choice; there was no work.

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In February 1989, the task force met in the El Paso-Juarez area of the U.S.-Mexico border, where they interviewed the mayor of El Paso, a former mayor and small business person, a professor in the local community college who was developing worker-retraining materials, two university professors who were specialists on border industries, and a business person who owned eleven "maquiladoras" in the area, and representatives of women's garment workers and small businesses. They also visited joint ministries of churches in the United States and Mexico.

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In July 1989, the task force spent a week at Ghost Ranch Conference Center in New Mexico, developing study materials. Several people made presentations: a specialist in industrial relations, the president and vice-president of the National Council of Presbyterian Men, and a person engaged in doctoral theological studies related to issues of vocation and problems of work. The task force also visited a small family farm, a craft cooperative, and a small weaving company owned by a Mexican American woman.

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These on-site experiences heightened the task force's awareness of the urgency, complexity, and depth of the issues assigned to it. The task force was disturbed by some of the living and working conditions in both the United States and Mexico. They saw well-planned, but sterile, isolated communities in California. The members said they would not forget the sprawling steel mills—miles of rusted, silent skeletons, like the remains of once mighty dinosaurs—in the Monongahela Valley. However, members also saw energy and hope: in the women working in Mexico who banded together in determined dignity; in intrepid farmers and gifted crafts workers in New Mexico; in compassionate church groups called into community, resilient and imaginative, supportive of their own and their neighbors' needs. All these experiences and more strengthened the task force's resolve as it addressed these issues.

2. Educational Material Development

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During the Ghost Ranch meeting, the task force completed the workbook, *Vocation and Work: Exploring the Changing Nature of Work and Policies for Good Work*. This study encouraged wide participation and a formal response from sessions and other churchwide groups.

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An in-depth background book, *Vocation and Work: Challenges in the Workplace*, was written and refined during the remainder of 1989 and 1990. Following a letter of announcement sent to all congregations in the denomination, the book was distributed, quickly sold out, and was reprinted. It has been used in the educational programs of congregations, governing bodies, and other groups related to the church.

3. Regional Dialogues

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The task force initiated several regional dialogues on the issues of vocation and problems of work. During the October 1988 "Partners in Social Witness" event, more than 150 representatives of middle governing bodies met with task force members to discuss concerns surrounding vocation and work and the policy formation process.

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In the spring of 1991, task force members met with twenty-three church members and leaders from the Seattle, Washington, area "who were concerned about issues of vocation and problems of work. In June 1991, task force members traveled to Knoxville, Tennessee, for a similar gathering. A third regional dialogue was held in Chicago, Illinois, in the fall of 1991. These conversations were guided by the educational materials and the response form published by the task force.

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Some of the task force's most significant conversations with business and corporate executives took place at these dialogues. These, along with a discussion in New York City with several major corporate personnel officers, revealed the deep concern of many executives with the human dimensions of the complex decisions they must make in today's uncertain economy where profit considerations are paramount.

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Participants in these groups proposed recommendations that became part of the information received and studied by the task force as it completed its final report.

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4. *Policy Feedback*

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Educational materials developed by the task force provided opportunities for sessions, middle governing bodies, and groups related to the church to respond with information, concerns, and opinions prior to the completion of a final report. Opportunity for feedback also included the study, *All the Live Long Day: Women and Work*, which was distributed to the Church by the actions of the 200th General Assembly (1988).

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More than two hundred individuals participated in the study process, representing the insights of fifteen congregations and other groups. Although most of the responses came from the eastern region of the nation, others were received from Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan, Arkansas, and Arizona.

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When the task force completed draft policy recommendations in early 1992, each group that had responded previously was invited to comment again. Further comments were received from these groups and comments were also received from an additional fifty people and twelve congregations and organizations. The task force studied these comments during their meeting in September 1992, and, where appropriate, incorporated them into the draft of the policy statement.

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God's Work in Our Hands: Employment, Community, and Christian Vocation was presented to the 206th General Assembly (1994) and assigned to the Social Witness and Issues Committee. Though some members of the committee found the paper difficult and offered several amendments, the majority of the committee members recommended the policy statement to the plenary session. (Votes to recommend various sections ranged from unanimous—for example, 56 for, none voting against or abstaining—to 44-6-4 for one section.) The assembly referred the paper back to the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy for "further study, comment, and revision based on the need for (1) additional input of viewpoints representing a broader socioeconomic perspective, characteristic of our Presbyterian congregations; (2) more time for the 207th General Assembly (1995) to review the revised paper adequately and fairly and to report back to the 207th General Assembly (1995)." ¹⁰ Also, the assembly asked that two additional persons be appointed to the task force to represent this broader opinion, and urged that the assembly committee to which this report is referred be given an extra committee working day, prior to the assembly, in which to study the document.

5. Group Membership

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Twenty people served as task force members, of whom fourteen members continued through the transforming pilgrimage of learning over the full four-year life of the task force. Those who served on the task force included: Theodore Adams, local pastor; Teresa Amott, professor of economics; Stewart Bridgeman, local pastor; Gilbert Brown, economist; Sydney Thomson Brown, community-based activist; Janet Henley, librarian, resource center and women's advocate; Nancy Duff, theologian and ethicist; Jennifer Henderson, community-based activist; Harry Kim, government professional; Dora Lodwick, professor of sociology; John Moeser, professor of urban planning; Irvin S. Moxley, synod staff; Kent Organ, local pastor; Dick Poethig (consultant), local pastor and urban mission; Peggy Shriver, religious researcher and ecumenical leader; Donald Shriver, theologian, ethicist, and educator; Katherine Tarbell, labor relations professional; and John R. Yost, business owner and manager. The task force was ecumenical and had several racial ethnic members. Staff members Ruth Duba, Kenneth Grant, Dieter Hessel, Walter Owensby, Michael Purinton, and Peter Sulyok assisted the task force at different times during the process.

34.554

The Moderator of the 206th General Assembly (1994), Robert Bohl, appointed Fane Downs, a local pastor from Dallas, Texas, and Robert Doxey, an entrepreneur and small business owner

from Chagrin Falls, Ohio, to work with the committee as they considered and revised the paper. Catherine Borchert gave additional staff assistance during this time.

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The task force became aware in the course of its work that the pain and promises of the whole society were mirrored not only in their individual lives, but were also expressed in the give and take of task force life. From its members and related households there were job losses, unemployment, career changes, college graduates unable to find jobs, and persons forced to move long distances away from families—even spouses—to obtain work. One member experienced the loss of health insurance and benefits when moving from full-time to part-time work. Another suffered through a plant closing. Members of a congregation pastored by a task force member participated in a long and unsuccessful strike at a meat-packing plant.

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Finally, several of the members found that their task force work affected their expectations about their personal work and vocation. One said,

[While I expected relatively easy work, I found the task] demanded an in-depth analysis of the interaction between theology and reality, international economy and domestic unemployment, church employment practices against successful secular operations. Ultimately, [we have had to focus] . . . on socioeconomic justice to build God's Kingdom on Earth.

34.557

Another member said,

My work for the last twenty years put me in regular contact with those at the bottom of the workforce. When this task force began its work, I was gently reminded that those on the bottom, or at the edge, were not Presbyterian. Now, in late 1992, many, many more of those on the edge are Presbyterians, uneasy, anxious, searching for ways to live out their "callings" through their work life; . . .

I have found that the traditional individual call to vocation is not enough for Christians in these times. I have learned that we must also find our calling as communities whose vocation it is to bring health, healing, and wholeness for all, not just those at the top. I have learned that Presbyterians are not separate from the rest of God's people: that what happens to all also happens to Presbyterians.

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II. The Challenge

A. A Challenge Worth Facing

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Change does not surprise us. We expect it. We are a church that welcomes change as we celebrate the Reformed tradition, opening ourselves to reform, the new leading of God. The world in which we live often seems invigorating, exciting, shrinking as we move in the direction of a global human community that may come to express God's desire "that they may all be one"

(John 17:21, NRSV). (All Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.)

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But somehow change is coming more swiftly than we anticipate. Some of us were born into a world without jets or even a family automobile; a world where we lived in one community and worked at one job for our entire career. New technologies, new products, new ways of life, new roles explode upon us more swiftly than we are able to assimilate.

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[~~We do not understand the~~] International interdependence [~~that~~] makes the workings of our economic life unprecedented, unpredictable, even uncontrollable. Confusing economic concepts are spoken of daily in magazines, newspapers, on television. Job markets, the value of money, deficits, free trade or trade unbalance, and the global economy bring complexities that elude most of us. Cars are designed in one country, assembled in another from parts from several other areas of the world, and distributed in this and other countries, giving jobs to many and profits to a parent company elsewhere. [~~How can we understand the~~] Complex dynamics and interrelationships [~~that~~] lie behind what seems to be a tradeoff between U.S. jobs and jobs overseas?

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Domestically and globally, We are faced with overwhelming economic problems. [~~Good work is scarce throughout the world.~~]

"According to the ILO [International Labour Organization], an average of over 43 million people are being added to the worldwide labor force annually. Most of these people live in developing countries. . . . In 1994, the International Labour Organization estimated the world's labor force, i.e. those people either currently working or looking for work, to be 2.7 billion. Of that number, an estimated 30 percent—820 million people—unemployed or underemployed. At least 120 million workers are officially unemployed, while many others have simply stopped looking for work. Another 700 million workers the ILO calls 'underemployed'—unable to earn enough to support a minimum living standard." [11](#)

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Global Dilemmas: American Christians [~~who~~] [*should*] seek justice in global terms [~~want to rejoice~~] [*rejoicing*] in new job opportunities for the poor in other countries, but [~~not~~] at the expense of the American worker. [~~American Christians~~] [*Americans*] want to live a decent life, yet [~~we~~] understand that [~~our~~] [*the American*] lifestyle consumes more of the world's resources than that of other nations. American Christians [~~are~~] [*should be*] concerned about stewardship of God's creation, in a world interrelated, finite, fragile, and irreplaceable.

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The realities of the world globally are felt locally. Technological change and marketing patterns have produced a domestic economy that is moving from manufacturing products to providing services. The rate of unemployment is stable, but many are unemployed or underemployed. Many have lost jobs as the result of downsizing and restructuring of companies.

Good work is hard to find. Virtually no worker is immune, from those on assembly lines or behind tellers' windows, from those in thick-carpeted law offices or in gleaming hospital corridors. Even the church has felt the pressures of downsizing and restructuring.

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Dilemmas: We are experiencing changes in technology, productivity, and demographics that are redefining work. What happens when fewer people produce more goods for all of us? What is the impact of the information society? For all who are able and wish to work, is meaningful, productive work an impossible vision? What will be the effect if the federal government shifts to the states much of its current responsibilities for provisions of basic rights for all workers?

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Work normally occurs in community and expresses our social being. Therefore, work must be sustaining of the fabric of social life: sustaining of the individual, of the family, of the community. Yet the community, and the shape of the families that comprise that community, is changing also. Rather than the traditional nuclear family, there are many blended families; single-parent families; families headed by grandparents, nonrelated persons, or female-heads-of-household. These changes mean that a greater economic burden falls upon women.

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Traditional support systems are overburdened or can no longer be assumed. Many households are scaling down expectations or struggling to survive by dedicating more members to the labor force. Two, three, and more individuals per household work in multiple jobs, or add hours of overtime to a primary job. This may lead to the anomaly of one person working seventy or eighty hours per week, while another cannot find any job at all.

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A few statistics may highlight the challenges we face.

In 1969, a typical middle income, middle American family with two children and a husband-wife couple, would have been working an equivalent of 5,420 hours. . . . Twenty years later that family is putting in an extra [1,068] hours of work for a total of 6,488 hours. That comes from a number of things, the most important of which is, of course, the fact that the typical family now contains two wage earners and the full-time homemaker is now an even more full-time . . . working mother. [12](#)

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In 1993, unemployment in the United States hovered at 6.2 percent. Black and Hispanic male teens in city poverty areas were experiencing 44.2 and 32.3 percent unemployment. [13](#) Concerns are being expressed over new immigrants, legal or illegal, taking jobs away from American workers.

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The purchasing power of wages has been shrinking in the United States over the past 20 years. Average weekly wages declined from \$275 in 1980 to \$255 by 1992, after adjusting for inflation." [14](#)

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As wages have fallen, an increasing share of U.S. workers cannot lift themselves and their families out of poverty. Nearly 18 percent of U.S. workers earn poverty-level wages. As part-time and temporary employment (the contingent workforce) grow, fewer workers are eligible for basic benefits, such as health insurance, sick and vacation pay, and pensions. For example, fewer than one-quarter of full-year, part-time workers receive health insurance on the job. [15](#)

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Transformation in the meaning, compensation, and organization of work affects everyone. No other issue plays such a crucial role in either personal or social life. The economy and the nature of work are changing, but so are the relationships between work and community, work that we define as service to God.

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All of these things have become a crisis in the meaning of the word, "vocation." In a work environment where people lose jobs or cannot find them, where they can expect to change jobs six to seven times during their work life, vocation can no longer be equated with a single lifetime job in one setting.

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What, then, is vocation? Vocation is a response to the initiative of God's call. This call is to work, work that implements the purpose and acts of God. Vocation lasts a lifetime, which may encompass many jobs, times of being unemployed, study preparing for future work, and volunteer assignments.

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A great deal of work is done in the home, church, and community without remuneration. Society would soon collapse without such unpaid work. Many people are able to fulfill their sense of vocation, their response to God's call, in this way. Therefore, in an economic system in which everything is related, policies aimed at seeking justice for workers cannot be limited to the area of paid employment. In this paper, however, "work" usually refers to paid employment, as do most of the proposals for implementation and action.

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For seventy years, Presbyterian General Assemblies have spoken eloquently, courageously, compassionately, and firmly about issues affecting the ability of people to earn their daily bread. The General Assembly social witness policies pertaining to economics have had a coherence of Christian concern for which we can be proud. This policy statement stands firmly in that tradition.

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We seek to find our voice once again in a time of economic change and dislocation, a voice that maintains continuity with and authority from the past, while addressing circumstances that require us to understand afresh what God may be challenging us to do and say.

B. *God's Call: Theology of Vocation***34.577**

Our biblical and theological traditions shape our response to these urgent, complex, and deep issues. Our Christian vocation embraces the whole of our lives, including the communities of which we are a part and the work, both paid and volunteer, that we do. While we generally think of our vocation as our occupation, profession, or job, the biblical meaning is much broader, encompassing God's calling the people of God to be in union with their Creator.

34.578

The glory of God shines in God's own first work of creation before it shines in any work of our hands. It can shine in every fragment of faithful human work done in response to the One in whose image we are created. As the Creator God continues to create, we can participate through our work. By working with integrity and responsibility toward all our neighbors and all of creation; by treating other workers [*and ourselves*] with respect, compassion, and gratitude; and by seeking forgiveness from God for the imperfections in our work; we bring ourselves and our work to God as an offering. This we understand to be good work, pleasing to God.

34.579

The God revealed to us in Jesus Christ is the one who called the creation into being. That same God called a man and a woman to become a nation, and to be part of a covenant. God called an enslaved nation to freedom in a land of promise, and called them again and again to repent of their unfaithfulness to the covenant. It is this same God who in Jesus of Nazareth summons all humanity to abundant, new life in the Holy Spirit.

34.580

To be a follower of Jesus is to respond to his call. Like some of the earliest disciples, summoned from occupations like fishing and farming, we know that the high calling of God in Jesus Christ our Lord may move us to change our immediate occupations. Like the part-time work of the Apostle Paul as a tentmaker, our Occupations continue to be a realm in which we can serve our God, whether or not that service is paid. Our occupations, employed or volunteer, can still serve our vocations.

34.581

The Bible does not apply the term "vocation" directly to trades or occupations. Narrowly, it refers to a person sent on a special mission by God. Broadly, it is the total, inclusive purpose of a person's life, that destiny for which and to which one is summoned.

34.582

Hence, our vocation includes the ways we participate in the life of church and community. "A 'calling' thus [has] two aspects. First [is] the call to respond to the grace of God offered in the gospel of Jesus Christ by joining in the life of the covenant[al] community. Second [is] the call to express one's response in doing one's daily work, whatever it [is], in terms of covenant life." [16](#)

34.583

From these themes of God's initiatives and our response, we find assurance that work [~~can~~] [*has begun to*] be changed from a burden to a glad response to Jesus'

432

work of salvation. [We acknowledge that human effort alone is insufficient to fully redeem work. Final transformation awaits the culmination of God's action.]

34.584

Our Reformation forebears set human work in a new, liberating context. As our Creator and Redeemer, God is our sovereign, granting us life as a gift, saving us from sin, death, and every other barrier to our security in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God's work is the foundation of our own:

For it is by his grace you are saved, through trusting him; it is not your own doing. It is God's gift, not a reward for work done. There is nothing for anyone to boast of. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to devote ourselves to the good deeds for which God has designed us. (Eph. 2:8-10, NEB)

34.585

In the freedom of this faith, Christians earn their daily bread unencumbered by the illusion that humans "live by bread alone" (Luke 4:4) or attain status in the eyes of the Creator through any career achievements. Precisely because we have been freed from the compulsion to make a reputation for ourselves, to amass wealth as a sign that we "count," or to be "successful" in some other worldly sense, we can devote our energies wholeheartedly to our calling. First; we are to be the children of God, then to use our personal gifts in grateful service to God the Giver, and, finally, to serve our neighbors, going to the limit of our resources.

34.586

Hard work has marked Calvinist Christians from long ago. At their spiritual best, Calvinists have been energized to work by this security of a faith-filled ethic: "We love because [God] first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

34.587

Unfortunately, however, Calvinist Christians have sometimes yielded to the very economic-spiritual anxiety against which Jesus warned his disciples (Matt. 6:25-34). Even today among

Christians, work can become not an exercise of freedom but a submission again "to [the] yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). Work becomes enslavement every time one determines that the chief purpose of life is to "make it" in the eyes of either God or our neighbors. In short, one has not yet been grasped by the call of Jesus into discipleship in the Realm of God if one hears that call as offering anything less than "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21, KJV). "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your [God's] good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

34.588

Freed by that faith, a Christian has the greatest of all reasons to pursue his or her earthly calling with energy and enthusiasm. In this paper, we assume that we lose our God-given freedom to work if we mortgage our selfhood and sense of worth to our success in getting a particular job, gaining a promotion, avoiding unemployment, or "staying off welfare." No matter what the economic circumstance, none of these conditions should obscure for Christians their calling to serve God and neighbors in the freedom of the Good News. Nothing, precisely nothing, "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39): neither low wages nor the "disgrace" of poverty, neither early retirement nor long months of unemployment, neither citizenship in a rich country nor citizenship in a poor one. To treat any of these as a sign of our worth to God or to our neighbors, is to worship an idol.

34.589

Many are the idols of the marketplace in societies, ancient and modern; and this paper calls upon Presbyterians to shun these idols, especially as they sometimes appear in the modern American marketplace. Like our Reformation forbears, we should reject indolence, because work is a way of serving God and our neighbor and because good work expresses our dignity as fellow servants in the household of God. This dignity, which in faith we claim for ourselves, we owe equally to our neighbors. We cannot ignore those conditions, abundant in our current national and world economies, that hinder employment opportunity and frustrate the exercise of God-given gifts by people high and low in the social order.

34.590

As faithful disciples, we Christians know that we are not saved by our energetic work. But, once thrown out of work by economic circumstances beyond one's control, a human being may not only starve to death but may in fact become a "nobody" in the eyes of neighbors. We know from the gospel that, in the eyes of God, nobody is a nobody. We cannot witness to the gospel, however, if we treat our own or a neighbor's unemployment as mere bad luck about which others can do nothing. We misread and misinterpret the Good News if we use it to minimize the damages inflicted on humans when they are poor, unemployed, and treated as useless in a fast-changing economic system.

34.591

It is important here that we consider two of Jesus' parables: the talents and the vineyard laborers. The first (Matt. 25:14-30) teaches us that God expects every human to make the most productive possible use of every gift entrusted to our hands. Therefore, energetic, good work is

to be expected from every human being according to her or his capacity. The other (Matthew 20:1-16) teaches us that God rewards laborers with gracious generosity, not with careful calculations of so-much-reward for so-much-work. In the Realm of God, we do not get merely what we deserve. From God we have already received more than we deserve. In our economic exchanges, both the justice and the love in these teachings must be at the center of a Christian ethic of work.

34.592

With our Calvinist forbears, we celebrate

- the capacity of any good work to glorify God;
- the obligation of a human community to find good work for all of its members and to care for those who cannot work; [17](#)
- the like obligation of all to render good service beyond the letter of human contracts to their neighbors—neighbors who may be their employers, colleagues, or customers;
- the understanding that vocation is directly related to the concept of the covenantal community, because through work persons contribute to the well-being of the entire community as well as to themselves;

433

- the virtue of frugal living in order that savings and other resources may be available for future generations; and
- the social duties to ". . . endeavor by all just and lawful means to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own." [18](#)

34.593

Unfortunately, in the centuries following the Reformation, many of its followers twisted this biblically based theology and ethic of work into caricatures and contradictions. Among the caricatures have been the

- denial of human dependence upon the grace of God by the substitution of salvation through economic achievement;
- prejudice that wealth is a sign of God's favor and poverty a sign of God's judgment;
- belief that human economic systems are laws unto themselves and should be free of religious and moral constraints[, *denying the sovereignty of God*];
- belief that the free market economic system has been ordained by God;
- captivity of business organizations to efficiency and profit as the only relevant measures of success;

- unfounded optimism that assumes in this complex economy anyone who wants a job can find one;
- loss of a sense of reciprocal responsibilities between and among employers, employees, and the community; and
- elevation of individualism that rejects human interdependence and the obligation to care for one's neighbors and for the earth.

34.594

Our Reformed teachings call us to be just and responsible in every economic relationship, and invite us to be free from the tyranny of market forces, greed, and possessions.

C. God's Work and Ours: Theology of Work

1. On the "Covenant of Work"

34.595

The spirit of mutual responsibility and mutual service should infuse a Christian view of work. "We love" because "God first loved us," and to live by this faith is to express it, not only in gratitude to God but in loving service to one's neighbors. In the modern complex workplace, this truth of faith must not become an irrelevant truism. Christians must repeatedly ask what it means to work in a spirit of mutual service, in a covenant of work that assumes mutual responsibility between employers and employees, producers and consumers. In a modern world economy, we must search for new answers to questions like the following:

- What is the responsibility of employers to employees; employees to employers; workers to fellow workers; all of the aforementioned to the people of a world market who use their goods and services?
- As consumers, how can we understand and balance needs and wants—my need and your want, your need and my want?

34.596

There are no easy translations of the old rule, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work." We hear frequently about fair wages, fair stockholder returns on investment, fair trade, fair bargains, and fair labor practice. What is fairness, or justice, in the relations of all these interest groups to one another? Much economic history comes down to a struggle among them, each with its own self-interested definition of justice. There is no simple list of Christian contributions to this struggle, but it is clear that Christians are called to observe the discipline of following certain ethical standards that protect against personal economic aggrandizement as the only purpose of work. We Christians must hold fast to standards like the following:

- The purpose of work is not only "to make a living," but to love God and neighbor in one's work.

- None of us works [~~alone, especially in the modern-day—workplace~~] [*independently*] .Employees, employers, and customers need each other, depend upon each other, and owe each other help beyond the letter of law.

- Our partners in work, even when we cannot see them or know them personally, deserve our respect and our attention to their needs. How well we do our work affects them.

34.597

The imagination of Christians, as we do our daily work, must be ample enough to include the purchaser of the car we help to manufacture, the consumer of the bread we bake, and the reader of news we write. Diverse, invisible millions of neighbors now participate in each other's work: workers in mines, factories, governments, schools, labor unions, business schools, and production facilities on six continents. They all may contribute to our material well-being, or they may not if competition becomes too fierce. It is always right to ask if our work contributes to the sum total of good or evil in the world.

34.598

To hold all of these mutual obligations in one's mind and heart is not easy. Work in so wide a network of responsibility is a high calling indeed. Ours is a global covenant-partnership of work. When we work in conscious fidelity to our far-flung work partners, we live up to our calling. No neighbor on earth is irrelevant to that calling.

34.599

Our responsibility as a community of faith is to call the church and the world to the high vision of vocation and work contained in the Bible. Drawing upon this theological vision, [~~four~~] [*several major*] themes emerge: [*among them,*] full employment, fair employment, sustaining employment, and participatory employment.

2. *Full Employment: Work Is a Gift of God to Every Human Being*

34.600

God worked in Creation and Called all of it very good. As liberator of Israel, God called a slave people away from their oppressive work in Egypt to the promised land in which justice, mercy, and service to God would be the law of their daily life together. Jesus of Nazareth, born a

434

member of this covenanted people, worked with his hands, as did the men and women who were his first disciples. The apostle Paul supported his ministry with his own hand labor, and the businesswoman, Lydia, furnished material support for the young church in her house in Philippi. Their work provided part of the earthen vessel that carried the gospel treasure to the world.

34.601

The Bible assumes that we satisfy our material needs chiefly through collaborative work and that our capacity to work comes to us from the creative hand of God. A major purpose of that work is to satisfy our material needs and those of the community to which we belong. Not to accept [~~the~~] good [~~the~~] work as God's gift, when we are able to do so, is to turn aside from one of the fulfillments of human destiny. To deny or neglect opportunities for our neighbors to find [*good*] work is to hinder their fulfillment and increase human suffering. Such suffering contradicts the intention of the Creator for the Creation.

34.602

This contradiction entered human life long ago. As the Genesis narrative portrays vividly, the task of tilling and keeping the Creation was given to humankind before sin entered the world afflicting work with drudgery, anxiety, and pain. The economic evils of human history have been a powerful taproot in our readiness to exalt ourselves against God and our neighbors. We [~~use~~] [*often misuse*] the gifts of Creation for the exploitation of other people, constructing economic systems based on slavery, subordination, and contempt for life, taking and withholding from our neighbors what belongs to them. ¹⁹This evil is further perpetuated by the barriers we erect through the institutions of racism, sexism, ageism, and the many other biases that work adversely to God's Creation. Because of this fact, Work for many is not a good gift.

34.603

In God's mercy, however, work and economic responsibility remain gifts that God bestows on us for the maintenance of our life and that of other creatures. In the Good News of Jesus and in the power of the Spirit, we experience [~~the beginning of~~] God's great deliverance of the world from the power of sin, including in economic systems and workplaces of the world. Our workplaces are filled with the struggle between God's intentions and human corruptions. We are called, as followers of Jesus, to join in this struggle, to seek justice in the midst of injustice, to overcome sin in which we too are complicit [~~, to "Work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in us, enabling [us] both to will and to work for [God's] good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13, NRSV)~~].

34.604

The Reformed tradition supports the view that humans should be fully engaged in service to God and to each other. Today a policy of full employment, work opportunity for all who want and are able to work, can reflect God's intentions for us all.

34.605

We recognize, however, that in the short term a job for our neighbor may mean no paid work is available to us. At a time when paid employment is not available, the challenge is to continue to claim one's vocation in service to the community. The challenge of job loss calls us to use all we have been given by God: our energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. It is important to realize at such a time that one still has the capacity to give to neighbor and to self through volunteer labors. In this way, one continues to share in the common life of the community.

3. Fair Employment: Human Work Is Meant to Serve God's Just Ordering of Creation

34.606

Full employment is not enough. Slavery can be full employment. There is something dramatically wrong with employment and compensation systems that allow some persons to earn millions while others work full-time, year-round, and are still in poverty. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard makes the point that an acceptable compensation system may reach beyond a just wage, but it should never fall short.

34.607

~~[The Bible portrays Creation as order replacing chaos—first physical order itself and then spiritual and social order within human history and beyond. Unfair, arbitrary conditions of work demonstrate a kind of chaos in society. One name for the order, which God is still dealing in the world, is Justice.]~~ Justice includes fair employment, work that is appropriately rewarded ~~[for effort expended]~~. Further, fair employment takes into account other factors such as safety of working conditions and opportunities for retraining, and opportunity for employment of persons from groups who have long suffered[, and continue to suffer] [,-] from the injustices of bias and prejudice. ~~[Employment for these persons is the object of laws requiring affirmative action, which is another name for restorative justice.]~~ [*In reading the Scriptures we are reminded that equality and liberty are rooted in creation. When race, gender, national origin, disability, or any other basis for discrimination becomes detrimental to equality and liberty the imperative of creation is denied. Sin leads to suffering and death. Justice demands affirmative action—the act of reclaiming for others and ourselves all that God created us to be.*]

34.607A

Restorative justice is the paradigm for affirmative action. It was God's way of restoring the Hebrews. We have been restored in Christ. Through Christ we are called to engage in a ministry of reconciling and restoring the inherent freedom of all of God's children. Employment for persons who have suffered the injustices of prejudice and bias is the object of laws requiring affirmative action.]

34.608

This is why we seek public policies that serve justice and fair employment conditions for all workers. Insofar as a human society restores work to the realm of justice, it helps to rescue work from the curse of the Fall, from the burden of work done for human self-exaltation rather than God's glory. Work becomes part of the realm of redemption when it expresses the divine determination to reclaim the whole of Creation for right relationships, peace, and plenty.

435

4. Sustaining Employment: Work Sustains Life and Creation

34.609

Genesis 2 records that God placed humankind in the garden to till it, that is, to cultivate it for immediate use and gratification. But humankind is also instructed to keep it, to preserve and guard it. Our responsibility is not merely to use the earth's resources and productive capacity for the benefit of self, family, class, nation, or present generation, in whatever we do, we are called to mix our labor and thought with God's other gifts so that all Creation may be sustained—the soil, water, and air of the garden, as well as other creatures. No matter how productive and profitable our work is, we have not worked faithfully and well unless the garden of earth is preserved for all Creation and each future generation.

34.610

The American lifestyle consumes a disproportionate amount of the world's resources; neither the global nor the domestic economy can support this way of living indefinitely. Indeed, we see now that unlike previous generations who expected that the lifestyles of their children and grandchildren would be improve over theirs, our children and grandchildren may be faced with less.

34.611

As Christians, we know that our work of sustaining life cannot be accomplished only through jobs that are compensated. Important as paid work is for almost every human, we know that we do not live by bread—or money—alone. The health of both church and society depends upon the willingness of men and women to serve their neighbors' needs whether or not they receive a financial reward. As part of the divine calling, work transcends paid employment. If meaningful volunteer work disappears from either the church or society, the causes of justice and compassion will suffer.

5. *Participatory Employment: Work Is a Sharing in Common Life*

34.612

Work is a reminder that "it is not good that the (human being) should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). ²⁰By God's intention, we live not in isolation but in community. Our work reminds us that we need one another. That without participation in each other's lives, we would not be human. Freedom, much cherished in American culture, is too often understood as freedom from each other. We need to recapture the biblical view that God frees us for each other. Individual self-interest must be balanced with community good and vice versa.

34.613

The products of our work frequently benefit or harm other people unknown to us. Work, production, and trade in global economic systems can illustrate God's intention that all people are invited to participate in a commonwealth of work. In such a commonwealth, our work would be a service to our neighbors and their work a service to us.

34.614

Participatory employment also involves the active participation of persons in decisions that affect them. Justice [~~demands~~] [*requires*] that social institutions offer all persons the capacity

to participate actively in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. The level of participation may be greater for some than for others, but there is a basic level of access to decision-making that should be available to all. The very structure of our church and its Presbyterian polity denotes the high value that we place on participation in decision making, from majority decision in governing bodies rather than singular decisions imposed by individuals, to the insistence that only by including representation of the diversity of our bodies can we find wholeness in Christ's Body.

III. Previous General Assembly Policy Statements

34.615

The church has spoken clearly, forcefully, and for a long time on these issues of vocation and work. Lest we think we are blazing new trails, a summary of past General Assembly policy is enlightening and sobering.

34.616

"God's Work in Our Hands" is the most recent statement on employment issues. The four themes of full, fair, sustaining, and participatory employment are derived from our theology. Together with past General Assembly policy, they underpin the recommendations and implementation and action plans that follow.

34.617

On full employment, previous General Assemblies have called for

- appropriate structures of government, to offer the opportunity for socially useful work to all persons with government being the employer of last resort (1968);
- federal programs of employment for counties where unemployment exceeded 10 percent (1971);
- the federal government to supply funds wherever public programs and the private sector fail to provide enough jobs for public employment to produce goods and services in the public interest (1972);
- legislation directed toward job opportunities for every American (1976);
- the adoption, as a major moral issue, of the guarantee of the right of all legal resident Americans, able, willing, and seeking work; and the opportunity for useful and paid employment (1976);
- a national commitment to guarantee a job or job training for each person willing and able to work (1977);
- recognition that every society has the obligation to provide for all people the opportunity for meaningful work (1978);

- federal and state policies that affirm job creation, full employment, and advance notification of plant closings (1983); and

- a focus on job creation (1987).

34.618

On fair employment, previous General Assemblies have urged

- that racial, religious, age, and sex barriers to employment be removed (1971);

436

- the implementation of nondiscriminatory employment practices (1976);

- support for economic justice for women and equal pay for jobs of comparable worth (1983, 1984, 1985);

- the 200th General Assembly (1988) approved churchwide compensation policy guidelines that recommend the salary range for the highest level position within each governing body should be no more than approximately four times the salary range of the lowest level position; and

- the protection of affirmative action programs that ensure equal rights in the workplace (1989).

34.619

On sustaining employment, previous General Assemblies have

- advocated for the right to [a] wage[s] adequate to maintain [~~the~~] worker[s] and [~~his family~~] [*their families*] in health and honor (1920);

- called for reasonable wages and reasonable hours of work (1938);

- recommended to industrial management the study and experimentation of a plan for an annual wage, and for pensions beyond the scope of social security (1948);

- called for a guaranteed minimum income establishing minimum wage levels in all areas (1971);

- recommended increasing the minimum wage (1988); and

- called for a national health-care plan to be equally available to all (1991).

34.620

On participatory employment, previous General Assemblies have called for

- the right of wage earners to organize and to negotiate through their chosen representatives with the management of the industries in which they work (1920);
 - greater emphasis upon free collective bargaining (1952);
 - confidence in collective bargaining as the most responsible and democratic way (1959);
 - social justice, self-determination, and a chance to develop materially (1970);
 - a share in formulating and responsibly implementing economic policies for workers (1978);
- and
- being disturbed that powerless people have been left out in the cold economically, that they never have a voice in that decision to close a plant (1985).

IV. Implementation: Action Plans

34.621

Policy guides the church in making a coherent and cohesive Christian response as it considers difficult issues. Policy statements have value and come to life when they lead to action, implementation, and advocacy.

34.622

Most of us, for much of our lives, will be involved in concerns about work and our vocation. We believe that the theology and the principles of work and vocation presented through this policy statement can be used as the basis for study and decision making at all levels as we respond to God's call to faithfulness advocating justice for all members of society.

34.623

However, we understand that particular circumstances mean that faithful responses may vary. In this section of the report, a variety of plans for action and implementation are provided. It is the expectation that individuals and governing bodies will use the principles of vocation and work for guidance as they endeavor to discern the will of Christ for their lives individually and in community, and will choose between these and other forms of action in living out that discernment.

The material, in this section is divided under the headings study, dialogue, advocacy, or action.

A. To the Church, Individuals, and Governing Bodies

1. To the Whole Church

a. For Study

34.624

(1) Examine [*the many facets of*] the unfolding history of the Protestant work ethic, discern the enduring strengths of this tradition, acknowledge the distortions it has sometimes suffered, and recognize those features of modern society that invite us to retain and modify this theology of work.

34.625

(2) Use the task force's documents, *Vocation and Work: Exploring the Changing Nature of Work and Policies for Good Work*, and the study book, *Vocation and Work: Challenges in the Workplace* and previous General Assembly policies identified in section III, such as that of 1976 that upholds the right of every American to be employed in a job that pays a living wage.

34.626

(3) Consider and provide opportunities to discuss this statement: Within society, the role of the church and its members is to be informed, to advocate for policies supported by our scriptural and theological call to support vulnerable and marginalized groups of workers, and to take appropriate action supporting the policies of the General Assembly.

b. *For Dialogue*

34.627

Act on the call of the 202nd General Assembly (1990) for a dialogue on economic conversion, addressing business, labor, all levels of government, and communities as they face the challenge of restructuring our economy from military to civilian production and to also address the issue of a just ratio in compensation between the highest and the lowest paid employees in all sectors of Society among other appropriate topics.

437

c. *For Advocacy*

34.628

(1) Advocate and support strengthened and expanded programs and policies to support individuals, families, and communities suffering from economic dislocation and personal and employment crises by participation in networks and coalitions with appropriate volunteer agencies and through counseling, support groups, family-care networks, career guidance, referrals to social welfare programs, and prayer.

34.629

(2) Advocate for passage of legislation at all levels of government guaranteeing universal access to health care as defined by the resolution, "Christian Responsibility and a

National Medical Plan," approved by the 203rd General Assembly (1991) and continue and expand their advocacy for affordable, accessible, and quality care of dependents (both, children and adults) including advocating increased funding by all levels of industry and government for dependent care.

34.630

(3) Call for employment practices that are sustaining of the community, interpreted here to mean the environmental integrity of the Creation, and affirm the recommendations of the 202nd General Assembly (1990) in "Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice."

34.631

(4) Advocate in both public and private sectors for policies that would promote equality of opportunity, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, or creed, except where faith-based work required the latter.

34.632

(5) Advocate in church, business, labor, and government settings for flexible work schedules that will allow workers more time for family responsibilities.

34.633

(6) In their role as employers and managers of businesses and other institutions in society, call upon Presbyterians to provide for employer-employee dialogue to encourage a collaborative work environment.

d. Advocacy and Action

34.634

Continue and expand their support of affordable, accessible, and quality care of dependents (both children and adults), including advocating for increased funding by all levels of industry and government for dependent care; exploring ways that church bodies can contribute to the supply of facilities in their communities; and serving as model employers for those who work as caregivers.

e. For Action

34.635

(1) Challenge, in both public debate and private conversations, demeaning stereotypes of any vulnerable or marginalized group.

34.636

(2) Use funds available for investment, including pension funds where appropriate and prudent, to support community-based economic development projects.

34.637

(3) Practice and promote fairness in restructuring or downsizing by urging all governing bodies to model procedures in handling their own restructuring or downsizing that reflect care for the faith community. Procedures for downsizing should include asking those most able to bear the greatest share of the financial costs out of concern for the most vulnerable; and in addition, maintaining gains made by racial ethnic persons and women. This would mean that such decisions would not be implemented strictly on the basis of economic considerations, but would reflect other principles of justice on which the church's witness is based.

34.638

(4) Provide a level of compensation adequate to sustain its employees in dignity and security.

34.639

(a) Increase minimum compensation requirements to guarantee an annual income above the poverty level, as currently defined by the Federal Government for a full-time worker supporting a family of four. (In 1993, that would imply a minimum wage of \$7,00 per hour).

34.640

(b) Provide the same oversight on wages and other benefits to their other employees as currently afforded ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

34.641

(5) Become model participatory employers, seeking out opportunities to hear the voices of their workers and to engage them in an employee-employer dialogue that they may have collaborative workplaces and that the church may reap the benefits of this partnership.

34.642

(6) Be aware of and commend sessions and other governing bodies who have engaged in just personnel practices that promote full, fair, participatory, and sustaining employment. Also commend these and other managers whose just actions result in creating new employment opportunities, especially in economically depressed communities, encouraging others to explore models that create good work, i.e., jobs that provide full, fair, sustaining, and participatory employment.

34.643

(7) Lobby local, state, and federal governments to legislate just labor policies for [*Native Americans*] immigrant and migrant workers, poultry workers, garment industry workers, and others Who have historically been victimized and subjected to unjust labor practices.

34.644

(8) Support efforts between its members and in society at large to encourage the establishment of and to support entrepreneurial efforts to establish new businesses and the establishment of employee-owned and employee-managed firms[, *and to empower members of marginalized groups to own and manage their own firms*].

438

2. To the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and All U.S. Churches and Faith Communities

34.645

For Action: Reach out to faith communities in other countries so that together we may restrain exploitation, secure just working conditions, protect the environment, serve the economic interest of vulnerable people in our own and other countries, and press governments and industries to adopt and enforce worldwide work standards, such as those contained in declarations by the International Labor Organization (ILO) or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations.

3. To Sessions and Ministers of the Word and Sacrament

For Action

34.646

(1) Provide worship, program, and outreach opportunities that address the issues of vocation outlined in this policy statement:

34.647

(2) Honor voluntary individual and group acts of community service and compassion as ways of living out a Christian vocation.

34.648

(3) Address the stresses experienced by church volunteers, who often juggle paid and volunteer obligations along with family life, being alert to occasions when volunteer work might appropriately become paid work.

34.649

(4) Utilize the reaffirmation of baptismal covenant liturgy found in the *Book of Common Worship* as an appropriate public acknowledgment for members who are experiencing a deepening of vocational commitment or a transition in employed or volunteer circumstances.

4. To General Assembly Council

a. For Advocacy and Action

34.650

Urge the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment of the National Ministries Division, in conjunction with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, to continue introducing shareholder resolutions addressing corporate ratios of compensation with a particular focus on the salaries of top-level corporate executives and to work for greater participation by shareholders in the review and determination of employment policies and practices of corporations, including greater utilization of proxy strategies by the interreligious community.

b. *For Action*

34.651

(1) In adopting any new personnel policies, include and implement the 1988 churchwide compensation policy guidelines that call for establishing salary ranges and ratios between highest-paid and lowest-paid church employees, both salaried and non-salaried.

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(2) Urge the Congregational Ministries Division to develop and distribute liturgical materials that will assist sessions in preparation for Labor Day Sunday commissioning services, supporting vocational commitments either in paid or in unpaid work.

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(3) Urge the Congregational Ministries Division to develop educational and advocacy materials in consultation with the National Ministries Division that will assist churches and their members in understanding economic issues and these policies so as to become informed advocates for appropriate local, state, and federal government legislation.

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(4) Urge the Board of Pensions to continue its efforts to seek to ameliorate the difference in pension benefits between those who have ministered in church-related institutions paying lower salaries and those who have received larger salaries throughout their ministries and thus receive larger pensions.

B. *The Church Speaks to the World*

34.655

In addition to its tasks of praising God and offering worship and service in God's name, the church carries the responsibility to "speak and act in the world's affairs as may be appropriate to the needs of the time" (*Book of Confessions*, 9.36). In this spirit, this section for implementation and action speaks directly to all levels of the government—local, state, and federal—understanding that the advocacy for these policies will be carried by appropriate persons and entities at all levels of the church.

1. *To Businesses of All Sizes*

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a. Work in partnership with church, labor, and government leaders to explore attributes and consequences of a national policy for a reduced work week, elimination of overtime, and increased days of paid vacation.

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b. Work in partnership with industry and schools to improve the vocational education system by developing apprenticeship programs and other creative strategies to facilitate the transition from school to work.

34.658

c. Work in partnership with industry, unions, and schools to assure retraining and employment opportunities for workers displaced by such factors as plant relocations, plant closings, and changes in technology, and to provide on-the-job training and literacy programs for their employees so they may upgrade their skills, keeping abreast of changing technology.

34.659

d. Have locations abroad to voluntarily adopt and enforce International Labor Organization (ILO) or similar, work standards.

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2. To All Levels of Government

34.660

Call upon local, state, and federal governments to develop innovative policies that will generate jobs that meet human needs and address national priorities, even if these initiatives require increased revenue raised through taxes, such as the following:

a. Rebuild and strengthen the nation's physical infrastructure, particularly in the areas of transportation, housing, water and sewage, communications, and environmental cleanup.

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b. Rebuild the social infrastructure by creating jobs in human services, particularly in areas such as education and preventive health care, where investment today can lower social costs in the future.

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c. Target employment creation for communities suffering high rates of unemployment and underemployment.

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d. Increase their support of community development initiatives that stimulate entrepreneurs, the development of small businesses, worker-owned enterprises, microenterprises, and other types of community-based employment.

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e. Eliminate tax incentives that promote relocation abroad.

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f. Make education a national priority, with appropriate funding, to ensure access to quality education for all children, particularly those in inner-city or rural areas, through policies to equalize funding across school districts.

3. To the President, Administration, and Congress

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Ask that these individuals and groups work to:

a. Pass legislation that will support and facilitate the process of economic conversion. Such legislation should provide funding for retraining workers and management to function in the new competitive environment of the civilian sector, for the development of new products and new markets (both domestic and abroad) for exploring the possibilities of employee ownership in the new industries that will emerge, and for transferring the resources now freed from military use into meeting the social needs of our nation and others.

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b. Enact legislation that strengthens the safety net for individuals, families, and communities suffering from economic dislocation; expands unemployment insurance coverage; provides protection for worker pension and health benefits; and creates development programs that direct federal and state revenues to communities in economic dislocation.

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c. Allow increased participation in self-directed, tax-deferred retirement accounts that encourage additional employer participation, especially for lower and middle income employees.

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d. Strengthen enforcement of federal equal opportunity and affirmative action legislation and support such laws at state and local levels as the most effective way of assuring continued gains for women and racial ethnic persons.

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e. Adopt and enforce laws that will ensure equal pay for jobs of comparable effort, skill, and responsibility in both the private and public sectors.

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f. Increase funding for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, or for similar laws at local and state levels, to ensure that laws and regulations protect the health and safety of workers, especially in the light of new technologies and increasing pressures for efficiency on the job.

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g. Enact legislation requiring employers to provide prorated fringe benefits to contingent and part-time workers.

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h. Increase the minimum wage so as to guarantee a basic level of human dignity for workers and their families, in order to lift them above the poverty line. Special consideration needs to be given for minimum compensation levels for part-time employment by minors who are also students.

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i. Enact generous family- and medical-leave policies.

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j. Urge the vigorous enforcement of federal laws that protect workers in the exercise of their rights to be represented by a labor organization of their own choosing.

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k. Explore labor law reforms that would address the new realities of contingent employment and increasing mobility of capital and that would guarantee meaningful opportunities for worker participation in decision making.

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l. Explore the attributes and consequences of legislation that would prohibit the hiring of permanent striker replacements during labor disputes and guarantee the full return to employment of strikers after a settlement has been reached.

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m. Adopt trade policies that serve to promote those aspects of trade between nations that increase global employment, raise the standard of living of the world's most vulnerable groups, and promote global environmental protection, and to reject any trade agreement that does not include standards on working conditions, wages, environmental protection, and the right of workers to be

represented for the purposes of collective bargaining by a labor organization of their own choosing.

34.679

n. Support the adoption and enforcement of worldwide work standards, such as those contained in the widely ratified conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO) or in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The declaration includes prohibitions against child labor, and a minimum wage that supports an adequate standard of living, a safe and healthy workplace, protection of the environment, and the unrestricted right of workers to organize and bargain collectively.

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o. Call for new mechanisms of industrial policy to assist industries, workers, and communities facing global competitive pressures in planning to meet new e

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(1) Approve legislation for a coordinated industrial policy that would make available federal resources for research and development of emerging technologies and assist companies in seeking new markets and developing new products, with particular consideration to emerging technologies, products, and markets aimed at addressing the environmental crisis and to policies that would retain and renew U.S. manufacturing.

34.682

(2) Ensure that such legislation provides a participatory role for communities and workers in the process of industrial policy-making. This role could include an inventory of community needs and resources; development of worker-owned, nonprofit, and other alternative forms of enterprises; and coordination of education and training institutions with emerging community needs and industries.

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p. Coordinate economic policies concerning government spending and taxation to promote full employment and to seek opportunities, working with other governments, to accomplish the same goals.

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q. Consult with the Federal Reserve Bank system concerning the development of monetary policy that coordinates with the administration's fiscal policy in order to achieve the most just outcome for individuals and for the common good.

**V. A Vision for the Future:
God's Call for Work and Community**

34.685

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18, KJV). We live in a time, a place, as particular people. Our context [often] informs how we understand ourselves, what we can do, how we are to live our lives. Yet in the late twentieth century, the familiar has become strange, the far become near, the exotic become everyday. Through modern communication technology, we live intimately with [those] [*people everywhere*] on the other side of the earth, and not even on the earth. What happens in one community or area may affect people miles away, physically through the environment, or economically as a consumer market is provided or taken away. We are bound together in a world economy whether we wish to be or not.

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The history of our living together has been punctuated with interactions with others in the form of wars, both hot and cold; communities taking advantage of others, knowingly and unknowingly; of the strong conquering, enslaving, or abusing the weak. Yet this is not the vision God has given us in the Bible. We know we are not able to achieve the vision alone, and probably not in the lifetime of any of us now on this earth. Yet if we have a sense of the vision, then each small and incremental step can be weighed and considered in light of whether it furthers the realm of God.

34.687

As Christians, we understand that God has called us, called us to a specific way of living together. This way is not exclusively how we treat each other in our separate church bodies, but in the whole of our lives. Responding to a question concerning which commandment in the law is the greatest, Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:36-39).

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Called to love our neighbor as if we were considering our own best interest, we may think that we can escape by being alone or solitary. Not so, says Paul. "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves" (Rom. 14:7). In acknowledging that we live in a community, Paul speaks of the law, saying that the one who "loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8, RSV).

34.689

How shall we fulfill that law? Paul again states, "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4). The Scots Confession speaks of works that honor God and others

to the profit of our neighbor. . . . [The works that profit our neighbor include] to save the lives of the innocent, to repress tyranny, to defend the oppressed . . . to deal justly with all . . . in word and deed, and finally, to repress any desire to harm our neighbor . . . and these are most pleasing and acceptable to God. . . . Acts to the contrary are sins. (*Book of Confessions*, 3.14)

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The response of the earliest Christian community to the gift of God in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is heard in Acts 4:32-35:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them. . . .

34.691

Perhaps this response does not seem either possible or wise for us as American Presbyterians of the late twentieth century. Yet our vision may include having "not a needy person" among us, It may include having no one who is hungry, who is wet from the rain or freezing from the cold or burning from the sun. It may include having health care

441

for all, so that all are cared for in sickness and nurtured in wellness. It will include, therefore, access to basic services and the provision of basic needs for all.

34.692

The vision will affirm the worth of each person; that all who are [*willing and*] able, have good work; and, that some are not rich at the expense of [~~the poor~~] [*others*] . It will see that all are enabled to use the talents given by God, for personal betterment and for the betterment of the neighbor. The vision is one of justice, which "roll[s] down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream" (Amos 5:24). That justice calls Presbyterians to work in the power of the Holy Spirit to share "with Christ in establishing [God's] just, peaceable, and loving rule in the world" (*Book of Order*, G-3.0300).

The biblical vision of doing justice calls for

- a. dealing honestly in personal and public business,
- b. exercising power for the common good,
- c. supporting people who seek the dignity, freedom, and respect that they have been denied,
- d. working for fair laws and just administration of the law . . .
- f. seeking to overcome the disparity between rich and poor,
- g. bearing witness against political repression and exploitation,
- h. redressing wrongs against individuals, groups, and peoples in the church, in this nation, and in the whole world. (*Book of Order*, W-7.4002)

34.693

Our vision as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is not a small one. It certainly is not one that can be realized alone. It is a vision given to us by God. It is one that must inform our actions as a church and as a people in order that the angel may truly say, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord . . ." (Rev. 11:15). In the meantime, each activity that we undertake and the way that we live our lives as individuals and as a church must be lived in the light of this vision of the achievement of the purposes of God on the earth.

VI. Glossary

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Capital Flight—Relocation by a business to another site. Can be motivated by a search for lower labor costs or lower taxation, by a desire to be closer to an emerging market or to a more qualified labor force, or by an attempt, to evade government environmental or other regulation. Results in plant or office closure in one location and job growth in another.

Collective Bargaining—A framework established by federal law for negotiation between management and a labor union over wages and other conditions of employment. The law requires that workers choose to be represented by a union in a federally supervised election and that both the union and management adhere to certain ground rules for arriving at a contract. The framework is enforced by the National Labor Relations Board, which hears grievances from both labor and management. Coverage under collective bargaining agreements has declined since the 1960s to less than 20 percent of the workforce but is growing in some sectors of the economy, particularly the public sector and service employment.

Community Economic Development—A strategy to promote employment and income opportunities from the grass roots by building on the resources and skills of people in neighborhoods. These policies typically involve assistance such as low-interest loans, technical assistance, and other forms of support to small businesses, micro-enterprises (see below), and worker-owned companies. These policies stand in contrast to policies whereby localities bid against one another to lure businesses.

Contingent Workers—Workers who do not have stable, secure, and full-time jobs. Includes part-time, temporary, and contract workers. By some estimates, as many as 25 percent of the U.S. workforce now falls into this category. Such workers typically do not receive benefits such as health insurance, sick and vacation pay, and pensions.

[Distributive Justice—Takes into consideration the whole in relation to its parts and deals with such matters as the fair distribution of honors, wealth, power, and taxation among individuals and groups. This is more commonly understood as social justice, which views society from the perspective of the common good in relation to its parts and expands the considerations to include social behavior and the rights of individuals and groups.]

Downsizing or Restructuring—Reductions in a company's workforce that are designed to lower labor costs and achieve maximum efficiency.

Economic Conversion—The process of lessening reliance on military production and increasing civilian production. At a company level, this involves the search for new civilian products and markets and a reorientation toward the competitive realities of civilian markets. At a community level, this involves an attempt to diversify the community's sources of employment. At a government policy level, this involves assistance to companies, communities, and individual workers making the transition to civilian work .

Economic Dislocation—The process of job loss as a result of capital flight, automation, and restructuring that produces job loss for individuals and such problems as fiscal strains on communities.

Employment Act of 1945—Legislation establishing a framework for national macroeconomic policy, creating the President's Council of Economic Advisers and a Joint Economic Committee of Congress. Committed the federal government to a program of spending to ensure maximum employment, production, and purchasing power.

Full Employment—Generally, a condition in which all who wish to be employed at the going wage rate can find jobs. Even at full employment, the rate of unemployment will not be zero as workers seek better jobs and employers can increase or decrease the number of employees.

Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act of 1978—Amended the Employment Act of 1945 to ensure that the federal governments seek full employment in its macroeconomic policies.

Industrial Policy—A national, consistent strategy to coordinate public and private policies with the objective of enhanced competitiveness in a global economy. The components of an industrial policy can include areas such as credit, investment, infrastructure, education and training,

442

and trade policy. Practiced by many industrialized and industrializing nations such as Japan, Germany, South Korea, and others.

Infrastructure—The basic requirements for a productive economy, including a transportation and communications network. Some economists also speak of a social infrastructure that includes activities such as child care, education, and health care.

Maquiladora—Processing facilities operated in Mexico, along the U.S. border, by multinational enterprises, which utilize large numbers of semiskilled or unskilled machine operations or their manual equivalents.

Microenterprise—A small business with extremely low capital requirements, such as handicraft production. The most widely known model to promote microenterprise is the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which makes very small loans (anywhere from \$10 to \$100) to entrepreneurs to start up small businesses.

Progressive Tax—A tax that takes a larger share of a wealthy person's income than a poor person's income, such as the federal income tax, where the tax rates rise as income rises; in contrast, regressive taxes take a larger proportion of poor people's earnings, such as the social security payroll tax.

Public Service Employment—Employment in a federal, state, or local government agency that is aimed at providing a public service, such as teachers' aides, park workers, or public transit workers.

Replacement Workers—Workers *hired* by an employer to replace, whether permanently or temporarily, those workers engaged in an organized work stoppage.

[*Restorative Justice—When individuals or groups who have been discriminated against are restored to their rightful state of existence. For example, Christians believe that all humans are created equal to live as free people in communities and societies. When circumstances remove people from this intended state of existence, restorative justice seeks to reinstate them. The requirements necessary to overcome barriers and disadvantages are taken into consideration. This also involves repentance for wrong doers and forgiveness for victims.]*

Tax-Deferred Retirement Accounts—Investment vehicles that have no income tax due on the growth of the investment until they are used for retirement purposes.

Underemployment—A condition in which a worker has less employment than he or she desires. For instance, a worker who desires full-time or year-round work, but can only find part-time or temporary work, or a condition in which the wages earned are too low to support the worker and his or her family above the poverty level.

Unemployment—According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a condition in which a person is actively seeking employment but has not found work. Workers who have abandoned the search are not officially treated as unemployed, and instead are called "discouraged workers."

Worker Ownership—A type of firm in which the workers are the company's owners and divide up the profits of the firm among themselves. Includes employee stock ownership programs that provide for the purchase of stock by employees over time and worker cooperatives, in which each worker has one vote in the running of the firm.

VII. Endnotes

34.695

- 1 . [*Minutes* , 1988, Part I, p. 796 .](#)
- 2 . [*Minutes* , 1988, Part I, p. 364 .](#)
- 3 . [*Minutes* , 1988, Part I, p. 365 .](#)
- 4 . [*Minutes* , 1988, Part I, p. 1019 .](#)
- 5 . [*Minutes* , 1988, Part I, p. 1019 .](#)
- 6 . [*Minutes* , 1988, Part I, p. 1066 .](#)
- 7 . [*Minutes* , 1988, Part I, p. 1066 .](#)
- 8 . [*Minutes* , 1988, Part I, p. 1066 .](#)
- 9 . [*Minutes*, 1992, casebound, Part I, p. 427 .](#)
- 10 . [*Minutes* , 1994, Part I, p. 104 .](#)
- 11 . "The Demographic Face of Employment," Population Reference Bureau, Washington, DC, presented to the World Summit on Social Development, Copenhagen, Denmark, 6-12 March 1995.
- 12 . Juliet Schor, "Labor and Leisure: A Changing World," Unpublished.
- 13 . U.S. Bureau of Statistics, *Employment and Earnings Table 64*, January 1994, p. 256.

- 14 . U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract 93*, Table 667, p. 424; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Monthly Labor Review*, February 1994, Table 16, p. 73.
- 15 . U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Consumer Income, Series P-60, No. 178, *Workers with Low Earnings 1964-1990*.
- 16 . *Vocation and Work: Challenges in the Workplace*, (Louisville: Committee on Social Witness Policy, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1990), p. 49.
- 17 . The church is called to affirm the dignity and value of persons who, due to various disabilities, cannot work at an occupation, raising up their vocation and witness as a ministry of presence and prayer that uplifts the whole church.
- 18 . The quotations imbedded in this list are from the Larger Catechism, Q. 141, *Book of Confessions*, 7.251.
- 19 . The Larger Catechism, Q. 142, *Book of Confessions*, 7.252.
- 20 . Genesis 2:18, *An Inclusive-Language Lectionary: Readings for Year B*, revised edition, (New York: Division of Education and Ministry, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1987).