

Related articles:

That socially responsible thing
(page 16)

A flourishing life
(page 20)

The Lutheran,
April 2015

Contact us:

The Lutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, Ext. 2540
lutheran@thelutheran.org
www.thelutheran.org

The Lutheran is the
magazine of the
Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America.



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

Study guide:

\$2.00

That socially responsible thing

Some Lutherans find love of neighbor influences their buying, investing behavior

By Robert C. Blezard

A rising global population means more and more people must live on our earth and share its finite resources. It also means Christians have more and more neighbors whom we are commanded to love as ourselves. Socially responsible living presents principles that enable us to achieve both ends.

Exercise 1: My neighbor

Have you ever wondered exactly who is the neighbor that Jesus commands us to love as ourselves? In the parable of the good Samaritan a religious scholar (a lawyer) wonders the same thing. Read Luke 10:25-37 and discuss:

- Why do we ponder who our neighbor is? Why does the lawyer (verse 29)? How did Jesus answer his question?
- What is the “correct” answer for the lawyer?
- What is the correct answer for us?
- Are our neighbors only to be found in our community, county or country?
- Are we neighbors to people who belong to other faiths?
- Are we neighbors to the generations yet unborn who will inherit the world from us?
- What would Jesus say?

Exercise 2: Responsibility

Twin teachings can help guide a discussion of social responsibility: Jesus taught that to whom much is given much is required (Luke 12:48) and “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12).

- What does the first teaching mean for North Americans, who are among the wealthiest people who ever lived?
- If our income enables us to make informed choices about what we buy and where we invest, doesn’t “doing to others” invite us to put our money where it does the most good?
- Taking this seriously, how would you evaluate what to buy, where and how your savings are invested?

Exercise 3: Tithing

Many biblical stewards lift up tithing—offering back a 10th of what God first gives to us—as a faithful response to God’s generosity. But isn’t God concerned with how



Reprints:

Permission is granted for individuals, small groups and congregations to reproduce this study guide for local use.

Tell us:

Do you find this guide helpful? Send comments and suggestions to rcblezard@embarqmail.com

Contact us:

The Lutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, Ext. 2540
lutheran@thelutheran.org
www.thelutheran.org

The Lutheran is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



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

Study guide: **That socially responsible thing** *continued*

we spend the other 90 percent as well?

Divide your group and ask half to draft a list of uses for money that God would bless, and the other to come up with uses of which God would disapprove. When done, compare the lists and discuss the reasons for each choice. What would you add or take away from each list?

Discern an underlying philosophy or “rule” for the 90 percent left over from the tithe. (Oh, and you all tithe, right?)

Exercise 4: Prayer

An offering prayer on page 107 of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* provides a starting point for a discussion of wealth and its use: “Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts: our selves, our time and our possessions. Use us, and what we have gathered, in feeding the world with your love”

- Is everything you own and everything you are really a gift from God? Why or why not?
- Do you treat them as a gift from God?
- For what purpose did God give you your self? Your time? Your possessions?
- How do we go about feeding the world with God's love?
- Why is this a distinctly Christian imperative?
- How does this inform our efforts to practice social responsibility?

Exercise 5: Money log

As a study group, agree to keep a “money log” and see what it reveals about your spending. For a week or month, record every purchase—where and what—in a notebook or on a personal electronic device. When done, discuss:

- How many purchases were “needs” and how many were “wants”?
- Which could you have cut out without affecting your quality of life?
- Do the establishments you patronize most frequently pay their employees fairly and have fair benefits and policies? If you don't know, how could you find out?
- What does your spending pattern say about you?
- What does your spending say about your faith and values?
- For the future, what might you change?

Exercise 6: Money's purpose

The values of “the world” tell us that the primary purposes of money are to enable us to live well and to help us make more money.

- Is this a fair characterization?
- By contrast, what would values of the Christian faith tell us are the primary purposes of money? What Scripture can you cite?



About the study guide author:



Rob Blezard is an assistant to the bishop in the Lower Susquehanna Synod.

He holds

degrees from Boston University School of Theology and the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg.

Contact us:

The Lutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, Ext. 2540
lutheran@thelutheran.org
www.thelutheran.org

The Lutheran is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



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

Study guide: **That socially responsible thing** *continued*

- Which values generally prevail in how you use what's in your wallet or purse? How can you do better?

Exercise 7: Living wage

Workers in fast-food and retail industries are making headlines by protesting for better wages. Should every adult worker who puts in an honest 40-hour week be paid enough to cover basic food, shelter and clothes? Why or why not?

At the minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, a 40 hour week would earn someone \$290 weekly, or \$15,080 a year. Is that a living wage for your community? The total is \$850 below the federal poverty level for two people. Would you be willing to pay more for a burger, groceries or clothing if you knew the restaurant or retailer was paying employees enough to live on?

Exercise 8: Energy use

Most of the world's scientists agree that burning fossil fuel is the major factor in climate change, which is evidenced in melting glaciers, extreme weather, rising sea levels and other problems that imperil the lives of our future neighbors.

- Why is it important that we reduce fossil fuel use in our lives, our congregations, institutions and nation?
- What are things you (and your congregation) can do to cut down on fossil fuel use immediately? Next month? Next year?
- Ask members to research the issue and report in one month. Compile a paper with your findings and give it to your council or pastor for implementation.

Exercise 9: Go green

Form or support a congregational "Green Team" to help raise awareness of environmentally sound practices in your church and home. Begin by banning plastic foam plates and disposable cutlery in favor of reusable items at coffee hour. Plan for upgrades to energy-efficient lighting and insulation. Lots of resources are available at the website of Lutherans Restoring Creation (www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org).

That socially responsible thing

Some Lutherans find love of neighbor influences buying, investing behavior

By Ann Hafften

Socially responsible shopping or investing—it's an awkward term for an idea as old as Earth Day. Many Lutherans practice it consciously while others ask, "Is that a thing?"

In your personal or congregational life do you:

- Buy fairly traded coffee, chocolate or olive oil?
- Bring reusable bags to the grocery store?
- Request that your pension be invested in "social purpose" funds?
- Avoid buying clothing made in sweatshops?

If yes, then you are doing it—that socially responsible thing.

'A dollar spent is a vote cast.'



"I try to really think about whether or not I need that new article of clothing or that new piece of technology," said Elly McHan, a campus pastor at Concordia College, Moorhead, Minn. "There's privilege involved in that I have the financial ability and time to think about where I shop; to pay attention to packaging and how far the food has traveled; and whether a less-packaged,

more local option might suffice."

To Lura Groen, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, Houston, "it's about how we can 'love our neighbors as ourselves' with the things we buy. Is my neighbor helped or harmed by what I buy? And then I take into account the neighbors who make the product, the neighbors around where the product is made, all my neighbors on the earth, and the way I'll be a better or worse person to my neighbors when I use this product."

Vanessa Young is director of youth and family ministry at St. Paul Lutheran, Wheaton, Ill., where the earth ministry team encourages members to "bring a bowl" for soup suppers and use the church's cloth napkins to avoid buying disposable products. The youth also use reusable bowls and cups for their weekly activities.

Young also suggests shopping options for her sisters and friends. "They know I have a list in my head of stores and companies that treat their employees well, that recycle, use resources wisely and exhibit ethical

"I have a list in my head of stores and companies that treat their employees well, that recycle, use resources wisely and exhibit ethical practices," says Vanessa Young of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Wheaton, Ill. She checks labels using www.responsibleshopper.org, www.buypartisan.org and www.hrc.org/apps/buyersguide.

Young believes people want to know how to be responsible consumers.



KATHRYN BREWER

'We believe it is important to support our brothers and sisters in developing countries.'



practices," she said, adding, "A dollar spent is a vote cast" for the earth and the human family.

Young believes people want to know how to be responsible consumers. "They will go out of their way if you make it very easy for them," she said, noting that word about corporate practices spreads fast on social media.

Fair trade products are often a starting point for ELCA congregations. These products assure that small-scale farmers are given a fair and dependable price for their goods (coffee, chocolate, olive oil and others) on the world market.

At First Lutheran Church, Little Falls, Minn., the hospitality crew serves fair trade coffee and tea to about 250 worshipers each week. Susan Gustner, office manager and lay visitation coordinator, said, "We also have the products available for purchase at cost. We believe it is important to support our brothers and sisters in developing countries in this way."

Is being "socially responsible" a thing? "Absolutely!" Gustner said. "Anything a person does will have an impact. ... If we don't believe that our world will suffer for it. Our neighbors aren't just the people in the next house over but [people] on the other side of the world. God calls us to care for one another and for creation."

When serving only fair trade coffee was suggested, there was no real resistance. Some members even contribute to a fund for buying fair trade products.

"Our members are supportive of giving a hand to people around the globe. Some have gone on mission trips and see buying fair trade as something they can do on a daily basis," Gustner said. "We all buy coffee anyway—why not be helping

"I don't think I'll ever eat chocolate that doesn't have the fair trade label on it again," says ELCA pastor David Lose, president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

a small farmer while we do it?"

"We spend a little more, but it is something we think is worth doing as a mission."

The women of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Aberdeen, Md., have their own kiosk on wheels. Made by two men of the congregation, the kiosk goes wherever fair trade items can be

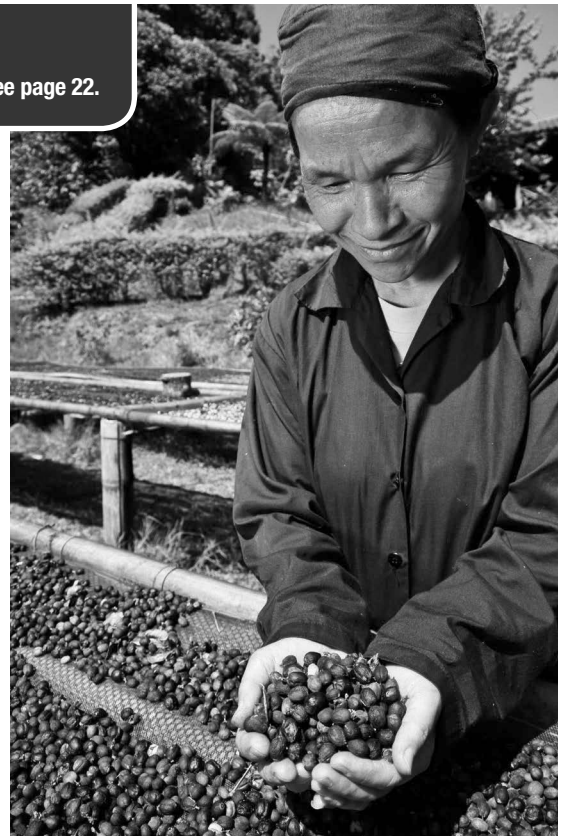
displayed—in the narthex on a Sunday morning or in the fellowship hall for a special event.

Lutheran World Relief is an important ELCA partner in making fair trade products available to congregations. The organization cites Martin Luther's explanation to the Seventh Commandment: "We should fear and love God that we may ... help [our neighbor] to improve and protect his property and business."

During a trip to Honduras, David Lose, president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, wrote in a blog: "Knowing a little more about where chocolate comes from and the farmers who work so hard to produce it, as well as seeing firsthand the difference it makes to buy fair trade, I don't think I'll ever eat chocolate that doesn't have the fair trade label on it again."

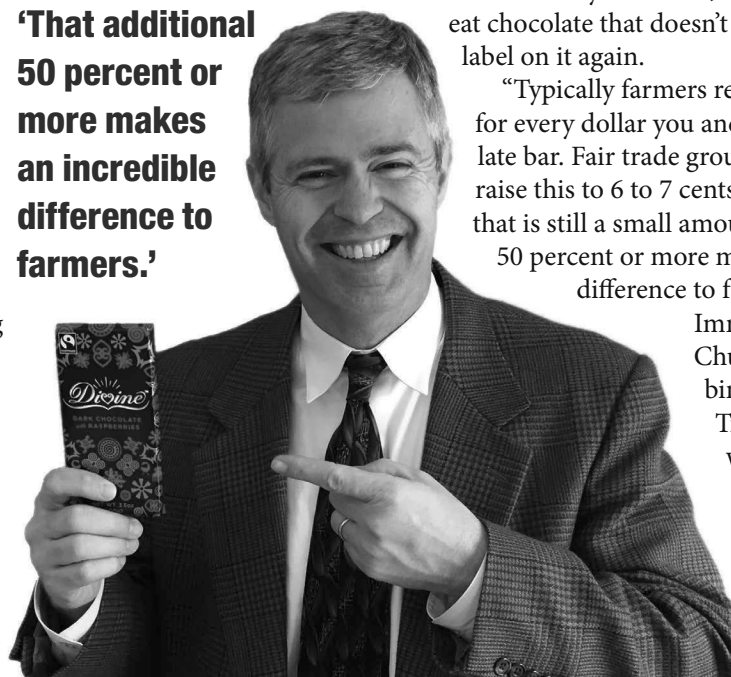
"Typically farmers receive about 4 cents for every dollar you and I pay for a chocolate bar. Fair trade groups ... are able to raise this to 6 to 7 cents on the dollar. While that is still a small amount, that additional 50 percent or more makes an incredible difference to farmers."

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Seattle, combines a monthly "Fair Trade Marketplace" with an "Advocacy Day," said member Stacy Kitahata. In addition to fair



©ISTOCK/RANPLETT

'That additional 50 percent or more makes an incredible difference to farmers.'



Before you buy

Before making a purchase, ask: Why do I want to make the purchase? Do I need the item? Does this purchase reflect the values I hold and the life I want to live? Does it support the well-being of others?

Consider purchasing items secondhand. Garage sales and thrift stores conserve resources, support local communities and prevent usable items from ending up in landfills.

When you buy new items, purchase them from companies with positive labor and environmental practices. (Learn more at www.buypartisan.com and www.responsibleshopper.org.)

Purchase fair trade products from small farmers across the globe. (Visit www.lwrcoffee.com for ideas.)

Choose alternative gifts: the gift of your skill, a donation in someone's honor or a membership to a local museum. (See www.elca.org/goodgifts and www.buynothingchristmas.org/alternatives.)

trade chocolate and Palestinian olive oil and soap, the market sells art cards made by a member to benefit the church's community services.

"Immanuel Fair Trade Marketplace demonstrates our congregation's commitment to economies that invest

Stacy Kitahata appreciates that her congregation, Immanuel Lutheran, Seattle, combines advocacy efforts with a monthly "Fair Trade Marketplace" that includes Palestinian olive oil and soap, as well as original art cards that benefit community services.



in local people and communities," Kitahata said. The proceeds support Immanuel's Community Services hygiene center, recovery program and food ministries.

Nativity Lutheran Church in Reading, Pa., serves fair trade coffee for social occasions, and its women's group sells fairly traded Divine Chocolate at cost, said Eileen Smith LeVan, its pastor.

LeVan, who encourages members to give ELCA Good Gifts, was delighted when "at Christmas our members 'gifted' me [with] a microloan for women in developing countries and support for a program for pregnant teens."

Part of her role as a pastor, she said, is to encourage parishioners to consider the impact of their spending. She doesn't stop there. LeVan's entire ELCA pension is invested in social purpose funds through Portico Benefit Services, which manages the church's retirement program. Twenty-nine percent of all ELCA retirement dollars are in these funds.

"I know [the funds] have been scrutinized to include companies that are environmentally responsible and don't exploit workers," she said. "I know my money will be invested in ways compatible with my values."

Investing with purpose

The eight social purpose funds strive to invest in ways consistent with the values of the ELCA. Portico screens thousands of potential companies and typically finds about 10 percent to be unsuitable based on screening out alcohol, environmental issues, gambling, military

'Where my pension funds were invested was a faith issue and not simply a financial question.'



Eileen Smith LeVan, pastor of Nativity Lutheran, Reading, Pa., enjoys her congregation's fair trade coffee and invests her entire ELCA retirement account in social purpose funds through Portico Benefit Services. "I know my money will be invested in ways compatible with my values," she says.

weapons, pornography and tobacco. In 2014 the ELCA Church Council approved a new screen for privately owned prisons.

In addition to screened funds, Portico works with expert partners to invest in community development, affordable housing, sustainable forestry, clean energy options, and women- and minority-owned businesses.

“As one called to preach the gospel, including justice, concern for the neighbor and caring for the common good, where my pension funds were invested was a faith issue and not simply a financial question,” said Luther Wayne Kendrick, a retired ELCA pastor in Comstock, Wis.

“I gladly invested my funds in those socially responsible options. I saw it as faithfulness and common sense. The returns of these socially responsible funds were nearly identical to the unscreened funds in the plan [and sometimes higher], so there was no financial downside.”

The New Jersey Synod’s investment committee decided to adopt the ELCA’s social screens. “Our financial managers investigate funds or companies that fit within these restrictions,” said Tom Kull, a former synod treasurer. Some managers have turned down the synod’s business, saying it would be too much work, he added.

Care for the environment is often a strong motivator for socially responsible consumption—though sometimes the convenience of prepackaged snacks like applesauce or yogurt in a plastic tube just makes life easier for parents.

“Yes, socially responsible consumerism is relevant in my life,” said Kathleen Bronstad, a member of Messiah Lutheran Church, Weatherford, Texas. She faces the tensions of other young parents when it comes to green living. “I buy in bulk and send the kids to school with reusable containers that I wash each night,” she said. “I’m not sure it’s actually worth it as the containers probably use more plastic than a bunch of baggies.

“I think about this a lot. Am I really helping the environment with my actions? We recycle everything we can in this household and we have a compost pile. I use a drip hose watering system.”

Human rights issues and the “huge, negative impact on the environment” were among the reasons Bronstad avoided buying products from China for a long time.

McHan from Concordia echoes that concern: “With

‘I buy in bulk and send the kids to school with reusable containers.’



Kathleen Bronstad, a member of Messiah Lutheran Church in Weatherford, Texas, buys green products, recycles and composts with her kids.

my deep connection to Palestine, I try very hard to know what is coming from [Israeli] illegal settlements, and not to purchase products related to them.”

Congregational purchases too

When First English Lutheran, Columbus, Ohio, replaced the church’s 50-year-old heating system, it went high-efficiency with help from an ELCA Mission Investment Fund grant. The congregation’s Green Team, headed by Sara Ward, is committed to tracking and reducing the church’s energy and gas usage and carbon footprint.

“As people of faith, we know we



Author bio:

Hafften is a writer and editor in Weatherford, Texas, where she is a member of Messiah Lutheran Church.

are called to do justice for all, which includes that we be intentional in our care of our natural world,” Ward said. “How we use these gifts not only matters to our local ministry but also to countless others around the globe struggling to survive in an ever-more-hostile climate. It is incumbent upon us to do our part to reduce this burden in every way possible and hopefully lead others to do likewise.”

Jim Martin-Schramm, a religion professor at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, and others are organizing to present a resolution related to fossil fuels at ELCA synod assemblies. The resolution will ask ELCA congregations and institutions to make a public commitment to transition away from investments in fossil fuels and move to investments in clean, renewable energy sources. Martin-Schramm believes Christians are called to

A flourishing life

Living intentionally

By Jeremy Rehwaldt

Is your life as fulfilling and meaningful as you'd like it to be? Every year when I ask students at Midland University in Fremont, Neb., what makes for a contented and meaningful life, I hear the same responses: strong family relationships, close friends, meaningful work, faith in God, a sense that they are contributing to the world.

Yet often the way we spend our time and money doesn't support those goals.

Why is that? I think it has to do with sin. We are all sinners in need of redemption. Martin Luther affirmed that, and our lives show it. But what does sin have to do with living a meaningful life?

Most of us know our personal sins, our individual failings, pretty well. We recognize our impatience with our children, a harsh word said to our partner, a grudge held against a friend. We pay attention to these and struggle to do better: to be kinder, more patient and more forgiving.

Paying attention

We're not as good at seeing social sins—sins connected to our participation as members of a society. We often think we have a handle on our moral failures.

James Keenan, a Roman Catholic ethicist, writes in *Moral Wisdom* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005): “Our sin is usually where you and I are comfortable, where we do not feel the need to bother.”

If we want to promote others' well-being, are we paying attention to the right things? Where are we not looking?

What decisions are worthy of moral reflection? Controversial issues such as whether to sentence

someone to death, certainly. Decisions about whether to cheat on your taxes, of course. But decisions about what to wear, what to eat, whether to purchase a new car and so on? Those are the kinds of decisions where we often aren't paying attention.

Earlier this year I purchased a new pair of shoes. The people who make most of the shoes and clothing sold in the U.S. work under hazardous conditions for low pay. The 2013 factory collapse in Bangladesh that killed 1,000 garment workers is a dramatic example. In an area where \$105 a month is needed for a minimum quality of life, workers recently received a pay raise to \$68 per month. My everyday purchases do affect the well-being of others, in this case by supporting—even if passively—a system that doesn't promote the flourishing of life for those who work in it.

Why do such issues escape our attention? Even if I know about sweatshops, how do I still buy goods without reflecting on the practices of the companies that make them?

Keenan notes: “We live in societies that do not want us to be disturbed.” We follow “paths of least resistance,” doing what those around us do, and we see moral problems as those around us see them. As people living in a consumer society, we don't see how our purchasing habits can support suffering because it's not where we are looking.

So where does that leave us? As my students often tell me: We can't pay attention to everything. It's over-

My everyday purchases do affect the well-being of others, in this case by supporting—even if passively—a system that doesn't promote the flourishing of life for those who work in it.

socially responsible living based on his understanding of a Christian's one vocation as "the care and redemption of all that God has made."

That "applies to every aspect of life: how I am at work, with my family, in my marriage, as a member of my church," he said. "How I steward resources, how I function as a citizen all are grounded in this one

vocation. We are stewards of the gifts given to us, with lots of room for novelty and creativity."

Socially responsible indeed. □

'As people of faith, we know we are called to do justice for all, which includes that we be intentional in our care of our natural world.'



whelming just to think about.

We must go back to Luther, who points us to God's gift of grace. He encourages us—mired in sin and unable to rescue ourselves—to depend on God's grace.

God's grace doesn't suddenly make us perfect. Rather, God's grace justifies us in the midst of our sin and gives us courage to keep striving to do better. Luther helps us understand that we need not be paralyzed by our failures. God gives us grace that moves us to respond to our neighbor in love.

Let me give you a personal example

After graduating from college I served with Lutheran Volunteer Corps, which helps participants "explore their spirituality while working for social justice, living

While others thought our living 'simply' with fewer material goods was a sacrifice, we discovered it was an opportunity for reflection and a way to experience God's grace.

in intentional community with other volunteers, and practicing sustainability in all aspects of their lives." I lived with five other volunteers in inner-city Minneapolis. Each of us served a different nonprofit that was working to address the needs of others. Our modest

stipends reinforced our commitment to carefully consider what to buy as well as the effects of our purchases.

While others thought our living "simply" with

fewer material goods was a sacrifice, we discovered it was an opportunity for reflection and a

way to experience God's grace. That's right:

Living with fewer things is an opportunity for those living in a land of abundance.

"Fewer things" is still much more than enough.

Those things my students said make for a meaningful life? Strong family relationships, close friends, meaningful work, faith in God, a sense that they are contributing to the world? None of these require an abundance of material possessions.

Choosing to live life intentionally, purchasing fewer things and then buying from companies with ethical practices whose workers have the opportunity to live life fully, spending time with family and friends rather than working to pay off our most recent purchase (which may already have found its way to the back of the garage or closet)—all of these are ways to build a more meaningful life.

Sometimes we need to be reminded of what is really important and then dare to live out our core values. Sin is not only unkindness to those around us but also unrecognized harm to those whom we may never meet. Despite our sin and failures, we can choose to live differently—and more meaningfully. God's grace really does give us the opportunity to do just that. □

'Fewer things' is still much more than enough.



Author bio:

Rehwaldt is a professor of religion at Midland University, Fremont, Neb.