



# AN ECONOMY OF LIFE: RE-IMAGINING HUMAN PROGRESS FOR A FLOURISHING WORLD

TWELFTH ASSEMBLY, UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

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## STATEMENT

### Preamble

The point is not to find the solution (for there is no one), but to foster all the ways that every human enterprise, including theology, can help us imagine and live a different abundant life, one that will make the earth healthier and people happier. This is the great work of the twenty-first century. Never before have we had to think of everyone and everything all together.<sup>1</sup>

Since the beginning of history, humans have pursued wealth and the power it affords, but it is only relatively recently that, as John Cobb writes, the world itself has become 'organized around the service of "Mammon", that is, wealth'.<sup>2</sup> The pursuit of ever-increasing wealth has driven the development of the systems and structures which now define the way our world works. These systems and structures are financial, geared to the making of profit, and they are global. They assume that eventually everyone will get a share of the wealth: as long as the systems of production and consumption are not limited, eventually the money will 'trickle down' and those who are now poor will one day be rich too.

In this context, human wellbeing is measured in terms of continually increasing material prosperity, 'progress' is economic growth and when economic growth slows or stops, human progress is said to be halted. Ecological wellbeing is not a factor other than that the earth's resources, extracted, excised, processed and refined, are essential for economic growth.

Over the last decade of the 20th century and the

<sup>1</sup> Sallie McFague (2001) *Life Abundant: Rethinking theology and economy for a planet in peril*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, p. xiv  
<sup>2</sup> 'Liberation Theology and the Global Economy' in Joerg Rieger (ed) (1988) *Liberating the Future: God, mammon and theology*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, p. 29

first decade of the 21st century, we have had to come to terms with the knowledge that this current global economic agenda, what is often referred to as neoliberal/neo-classical or (radical) free-market economics is failing to achieve prosperity for all, is causing violence and destruction to people and the planet and is entirely unsustainable in its current form.

It is true to say that neoliberal economics has brought massive benefits, including political security to many millions of people around the world, especially to most of us living in Australia. It is also true, however, that it is a system biased to the already powerful and prosperous. While the rich in our world are increasing their wealth, those who are poor remain staggering in number and are caught in devastating intergenerational poverty traps. We are witness to the ecological destruction of animal species, forests, rivers, oceans and our atmosphere. The financial security our economic system promised to deliver disappeared almost overnight with the global economic crisis which began in July 2007 with the collapse of the housing bubble in the United States and the financial devastation caused by exposure to complex financial instruments such as collateralised debt obligations based on sub-prime (high risk) mortgages. These crises are a global wake-up call. We must find a new way to live together in peace with each other and the planet.

It is time to ask ourselves what we can do differently. We must consider the values and the principles we need to guide us to more equitable, peaceful and sustainable ways of living. We must try to imagine this alternative life – what might it look like? How will we know if we are making the 'right' kind of 'progress'?

As a Church it is incumbent upon us to explore what might be alternative Christian understandings of the meaning of 'progress' and 'wellbeing' and how these understandings might shape the way we live as people in community connected with the planet.



How could the dominant cultural values of acquisitiveness and greed, materialism, competition, consumerism and individualism be challenged by Christian values such as justice, peace, compassion, community, hospitality, generosity, truth and grace? This statement offers a Christian perspective on human and ecological wellbeing. It offers some principles for an alternative economic vision to help us transform the world: principles which arise from an economy of life grounded in the love of God for the good creation and the vision and hope we have for the flourishing and reconciliation of all creation with the Creator and source of life.

## The Christian vision of love and wholeness

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.<sup>3</sup>

The Christian faith understands that God's goal for life is wholeness. The biblical stories, sacred witnesses to the history of our relationship with God, articulate a vision for human wholeness and wellbeing grounded in the values of the reign of God: love (of God and each other, even our enemy and especially those most vulnerable), justice, peace, grace, mercy and forgiveness, hospitality, inclusion, connectedness and compassion.

This vision of wholeness is not about perfection – physical or spiritual – or freedom from disaster or suffering. It is not confined to 'the world to come' but is offered as a reality for the life of this world. It is a vision of flourishing, abundant life, of peace and reconciliation, justice and transformation, love and inclusion for all creation. Its antitheses are also described in the biblical stories: the worship of idols, of which mammon (wealth, gain or possessions<sup>4</sup>) is prominent; and separation and exclusion from community, often wrought by violent and oppressive social, political and religious systems.

The images of Sabbath and Jubilee, for example, offer a counter to a society whose economic and social systems were based on values antithetical to those of the reign of God. They speak powerfully of the need for rest, for humans and the land, and of the importance of equity in society. The Law in ancient Israel, which included prescriptions for caring for widows and orphans (the most

vulnerable in terms of isolation from the care of community), for regularly writing off the personal debt of the poor, and resting the land so it might recover from continued use and restoring it to its original caretakers, provided some redress for the excesses which affected people's wellbeing and the sustainability of the earth.

Hebrew prophets such as Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah, responding to the political and economic hardships of their time in ancient Israel, called the people to account before God, for failing to remember their history as the people of God, worshipping idols, and allowing injustice and oppression to affect the most vulnerable in their society.

The Christian story is the story of God in Jesus Christ: Jesus, the incarnation of the God whose very nature is love<sup>5</sup> who came to announce good news for the poor in the tradition of the ancient Hebrew prophets and in fulfilment of the Jubilee.

Jesus declared that God's promise of good news for the poor was fulfilled in his ministry.<sup>6</sup> He was the embodiment of the promise and the promise was both an agenda for his life (the micro-change he brought to people's personal wellbeing) and a promise about the coming reign of God (the macro-change necessary for the rule of justice and peace). The good news was that God was incarnated in Christ and God's being was expressed in him, in reaching out to all people, the disadvantaged, marginalised, and destitute (the poor), the exploiters, powerful and greedy and the spiritually desolate and impoverished. In his world of Galilee, a complex system of patronage and financial exploitation, an arena of complex systems of religious and social exclusion and of the Roman Empire's tentacles of control, Jesus engaged people with uncompromising goodness and compassion to bring hope and change, building networks of support and care.

Behind the many stories of individual healing and hope in the gospels is a theology which looked beyond these to major structural change, expressed as the coming of God's reign which would override all unjust structures which oppressed and exploited people and all of creation. Jesus embraced the image of a great international banquet of peace among all peoples and with God as a powerful expression of this good news. It gave special meaning to shared meals in Jesus' ministry and became the basis of the shared meal of the

<sup>3</sup> John 10:10

<sup>4</sup> John Macquarrie and James Childress (eds) (1986) *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, London: SCM Press, p. 364

<sup>5</sup> 1 John

<sup>6</sup> Luke 4



Eucharist among his followers which celebrates his hope and his broken and poured out life.

Far beyond Galilee and its environs, Paul gave expression to this hope as the good news of God's saving love or righteousness, which through the Spirit of the risen Christ sets people right with God and with one another and builds supportive communities of hope, both for humanity and all of creation. Such good news is rooted in the ancient stories of Israel's liberation from Egypt and restoration from deportation, and so in the belief that to have faith in God always means hope for the future and engagement with God's life and love in the present. It changed Zacchaeus' approach to wealth, lifted Mary Magdalene to dignity, restored a leper to community, affirmed the worth of little children, canonised a Samaritan, transformed a fanatical Paul, and rehabilitated a failed Peter. Beyond breaching the barriers of racism, sexism, ageism, and religious hate, it invited people to be good news and to embody God's life into the known and unknown future, to our own time.

The Church's role in the mission of God in the world requires us to be constantly asking how we might be good news in our own world. We are challenged to do this in a way that acknowledges both the huge problem of economic poverty within its complex causal context (historical, economic, social and environmental) and the impoverishment of all peoples, through the tyranny of greed, abuse, violence and obsession, disconnecting us from each other and the natural world. We are called to live out the vision of Jesus for human wholeness, an alternative understanding of what constitutes human progress – the love of God, made manifest for people in the experiences of dignity and respect, meaning and purpose in life, connection with the earth and all its creatures, health and security of person and inclusion in communities of care and participation in society.<sup>7</sup>

## Experiences of love and wholeness denied

In contrast to the vision for human wholeness offered to us through Christian faith, scriptures and tradition, the majority of people are denied experiences of wholeness and our planet is groaning under our weight.

Throughout the course of human history we

<sup>7</sup> this section includes the words and ideas of Reverend Professor William Loader, Murdoch University Western Australia, generously offered, 4 December 2008.

have seen the development and maintenance of systems and structures which demean the value of life and reward the thirst for money and power. Human wellbeing is violated through individual and communal experiences of violence, persecution and oppression, dispossession and disconnection. Ecological destruction is being wrought upon the atmosphere, the planet's biodiversity, its forests, oceans and rivers. In recent times we have come to understand that we are facing a number of potentially catastrophic global crises, all connected to each other as both cause and consequence, and all cause and consequence of wholeness denied. These crises are expressions of the ongoing violations of human and ecological wellbeing that have been entrenched in our social, political and economic systems and which diminish the capacity for human and ecological flourishing.

These global crises include:

- human-induced climate change, a most serious threat to the lives of hundreds of millions of people and many eco-systems;
- the persistence of violent conflict and global militarism, the most dangerous outcome of which is the stockpile of nuclear weapons;
- the energy crisis, a grave threat to human wellbeing and to peace as the supply of fossil fuels reaches nearer its finite end without viable alternatives in place;
- the food crisis, already leading to food riots around the world as higher food prices push millions of citizens in developing countries further into hunger and poverty; and
- the Global Financial Crisis (or GFC).

Our experiences of wholeness denied include the following sufferings of humankind and the planet.

- Billions of people around the world live in conditions of dire poverty as a small minority of the world's people continue to consume the majority of the earth's resources and hold a large majority of the world's wealth. The wealth of the world's three richest people combined is greater than the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the world's poorest 48 nations<sup>8</sup>.
- More than one third of the growing urban population in developing country cities live in slum conditions.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ignacio Ramonet (November 1998), 'The politics of hunger', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, <http://mondediplo.com/1998/11/01/leader>  
<sup>9</sup> UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2008, United Nations, New York, 2008, p. 4



- Human-induced climate change has already produced rising temperatures which are melting the ice caps, upsetting ecosystems, damaging the planet's biodiversity, raising sea levels and risking the future of low lying coastal and island nations and populations around the world, increasing the frequency and ferocity of storms and other natural disasters, and threatening the security of all life.
- Almost half of the world's pristine forests (compared to 8000 years ago) have been lost to logging, most during the 20th century.<sup>10</sup>
- World military spending during 2007 was more than 12 times the amount spent on overseas aid.<sup>11</sup>
- Civil wars around the world are being fought (allegedly along racial, tribal and religious lines but more accurately over resources) with a complete disregard of the value of human life – children are recruited as soldiers and trained to kill without care, women are brutally raped as acts of war and genocide, and people are suffering brutal assaults intended to maim and disable.
- Trillions of dollars have been poured into saving financial institutions in the global financial crisis while a small fraction of that cannot be found to meet the Millennium Development Goals or address the costs of mitigation of and adaptation

to climate change.<sup>12</sup>

- Transnational corporations, many with production valued at more than the national income of medium-sized countries, continue to amass massive profits and political power with no more than token regard for the wellbeing of human society and the health of the planet.
- Wealthy free market economies are counting the increasing costs of such illnesses as depression, diabetes, obesity, drug dependence, loneliness (what two commentators have labelled 'influenza' and 'the maladies of affluence')<sup>13</sup>.
- Human dignity is threatened by the continual commodification of life, including the exploitation of human labour, the trafficking of people, the privatisation of water and the recasting of education solely as a tool for improving an individual's productivity.

## The limits of economic growth in a globalised world

Globalisation has connected people all over the world. Borders mean little in the world of information technology and global economics and for those of us with access to the technology and other resources necessary for participation, this global system can be of great benefit. Globalisation has enabled some positive progress to be made in terms of human wellbeing. As nations become increasingly economically intertwined, it becomes important for them to support stability and wellbeing in other countries. The development and spread of communications technology, has for example, enabled people to see conflict and disasters as they happen almost anywhere in the world making it more difficult for the perpetrators of violence to escape notice.

10 Gary T. Gardner (2006), *Inspiring Progress: Religions' Contributions to Sustainable Development*, Worldwatch Institute, New York: W.W. Norton

11 In 2007 world military expenditure is estimated to have been US\$1337 billion. This corresponds to 2.5 percent of world GDP and \$202 for each person on earth (the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute SIPRI Yearbook 2008: Armaments, Disarmaments and International Security, <http://yearbook2008.sipri.org/files/SIPRIYB08summary.pdf>). Compare this with the total overseas aid provided in 2007 of \$104 billion (announced by the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD), [http://www.oxfam.org/en/news/2008/pr080404\\_aid\\_figures\\_drop\\_for\\_second\\_year](http://www.oxfam.org/en/news/2008/pr080404_aid_figures_drop_for_second_year). The additional foreign aid required to reach the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 is between \$40-60 billion a year (<http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/mdgassessment.pdf>).

12 World Council of Churches, 'The Time for Justice is Now', Statement on the Doha Outcome Document, 29/11/08, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace-poverty-wealth-and-ecology/finance-speculation-debt/29-11-08-statement-on-the-doha-outcome-document.html>. Estimates of the level of funding required to assist developing countries in managing the impacts of climate change vary widely. The 2007/2008 UN Human Development Report estimates that additional adaptation finance will need to be US\$86 billion annually by 2015 (p. 26). It represents about 0.2 percent of developed country GDP (less than one-tenth of what is currently allocated to military expenditure, see footnote 11 above). Oxfam estimates the figure to be US\$50 billion per year. The UNFCCC estimates the cost to be US\$28-67 billion by 2030. Barack Obama's 2009 stimulus package for the ailing US economy totalled \$838 billion.

13 Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss (2005), *Affluenza*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, and Clive Hamilton (2008), *The Paradox of Freedom: Towards a post-secular ethics*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, p. 3



Yet industrialisation, technological development and economic globalisation have also damaged much of what is precious and necessary for humanity's wellbeing and future.

As it connects, globalisation also disconnects. Workers in many nations become vulnerable to the fortunes of industries in countries on the other side of the world. The local economies of communities in developing countries disappear in the wake of an open and unfettered international market and people who can least afford it lose their jobs and their livelihoods. People without technological resources (those in developing and developed countries) are further marginalised in an information rich, technologically driven world – in education, employment and even access to social services and healthcare. Local and indigenous cultures strain to maintain their traditions and identities under the pressure of global (American) popular culture.

The argument in favour of the neoliberal global economic system has been that the great wealth that has been generated will eventually 'trickle-down' to those who are currently poor. It was based on the belief that 'the market', driven by self-interest and allowed to run free of government constraint, was the best tool for developing the world's wealth.

The evidence, however, suggests this system perpetrates exploitation, instability, injustice and violence on people and the planet and will continue to do so because of the values and assumptions inherent to it: materialism, individualism, greed for money and power, competition and unlimited growth. These are the values upheld by the neoliberal (or neo-classical) economic agenda, a global agenda which has come to determine so much of how we live together and how we understand human progress.

In neoliberal economics, social policy, politics and the organisation and operation of the systems and structures of society are directed towards serving and maintaining the system itself. Progress in the system is measured in terms of profit, size and above all economic growth and the achievement of continual economic growth is the goal of human activity. Human wellbeing, therefore, is at best regarded a secondary and derivative goal measured only in financial terms: if economic growth slows, halts or reverses, human wellbeing is threatened because the capacity of individuals to consume is threatened.

It is also important to recognise that in this economic model consideration of ecological wellbeing is

entirely absent. Unrestrained consumerism, a necessary plank in this form of economy, is encouraged without consideration for the damage being inflicted upon the biosphere. The single-minded pursuit of corporations to deliver profit to their shareholders has resulted in the destruction of rivers and forests around the world and the devastation of Indigenous communities and cultures.

This model also measures people's value to society in terms of their productiveness, quantified in financial terms, and their individual success defined by how well they perform as consumers and measured by the personal and conspicuous consumption of material goods. Education policy is now increasingly focussed on producing productive human beings rather than curious and creative life-long learners engaged with the world around them. Consumerism is entrenched in many societies, including Australia, and internalised within our self-understanding as it has come to answer to our deep and genuine needs for belonging, connection and security.

An economic system, however, is just that—a system. The word 'economics' comes from the Greek *oikos* meaning 'house' and *nomos* meaning 'to manage'. The economy is, therefore, literally about how the household is managed. It is a construct developed to serve the needs of people in the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services and inherently value-laden as its design will depend on the choices made about the priorities and management of those human needs.

The threat of devastating climate change and the global financial crisis are two powerful demonstrations that this current global economic system and the values it represents is failing us and is ultimately unsustainable. It is perpetrating violence on people and the planet as it prioritises wealth, materialism and profit—measured by national GDP, company profit, shareholder dividends, corporate expansion, and 'brand awareness'—over wellbeing and wholeness—measured by such things as equity, health (physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual), individual participation in society (meaningful work, vibrant democracy, strong civil society) security (food, water, financial and physical), freedom from violence and persecution, and environmental sustainability.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has said,

Motivated, at core, by greed – that is: a thirst for maximum private returns in the shortest possible time – the neo-liberal model has



pushed our world closer to the brink of financial and ecological breakdown. The WCC is particularly concerned about the crises' unfolding impacts on the lives and livelihoods of the economically weak and vulnerable. While they had little or no part in the creation of these crises, poor countries and people in poverty – already struggling to make daily ends meet – are paying the highest price for reckless economic liberalisation and deregulation.<sup>14</sup>

The Lutheran World Federation, well before the Global Financial Crisis, was equally strong in its condemnation of neoliberal economics:

As a communion, we must engage the false ideology of neoliberal economic globalization by confronting, converting and changing this reality and its effects. This false ideology is grounded in the assumption that the market, built on private property, unrestrained competition and the centrality of contracts, is the absolute law governing human life, society and the natural environment. This is idolatry and leads to the systematic exclusion of those who own no property, the destruction of cultural diversity, the dismantling of fragile democracies and the destruction of the earth.<sup>15</sup>

It is a matter of survival that we must declare limits to 'growth'. Growth as it is measured by ever-increasing wealth and profits is actually not human progress in a sense that reflects the creative flourishing of human beings, but simply 'greed'. It is time to reconsider growth if we are to ensure the planet's survival for future generations. We must reconsider growth also as we recognise and accommodate the inherently cyclical nature of economies. Above all we must re-imagine and redefine our success, our progress, as societies and nations according to how well we support what is necessary for the flourishing of all people, including:

- financial security for a reasonable standard of living
- decent and meaningful work
- education
- healthcare
- secure housing
- appropriate social services

<sup>14</sup> World Council of Churches, 'The Time for Justice is Now', op. cit.  
<sup>15</sup> Message from the Lutheran World Federation Tenth Assembly (2003) Winnipeg, Canada, pp 17-18, [http://www.lwf-assembly.org/PDFs/LWF\\_Assembly\\_Message-EN.pdf](http://www.lwf-assembly.org/PDFs/LWF_Assembly_Message-EN.pdf)

- "opportunities for cultural, technological... social and spiritual development"<sup>16</sup>,
- the right to "participate in decision-making in the community"<sup>17</sup> and
- vibrant, safe and inclusive communities.

## Naming the interests, confronting power

The Uniting Church in Australia believes it is called to take a prophetic stand in this world, standing with those who are marginalised and confronting the interests and the powers that perpetrate violence, injustice and oppression. As Jesus challenged the empire of Rome by exposing those who benefited from an unjust system and calling them to a different way of being in the world, so too must we understand who has a stake in maintaining the systems of injustice and violence in our world and how we ourselves might be complicit.

Throughout its history, Christian churches have all too often failed those they should have been serving. Rather than confronting abusive power they have wielded that power. Rather than standing with those who are marginalised and poor they claimed a place in the centre of social, political and economic power. Christian churches have directly and indirectly committed acts of violence and destruction upon people and the planet.

The Uniting Church confesses our sin. We have privileged power over prayer and money over service. We have lived arrogantly and abandoned humility. We acknowledge that we still fail to live up to our calling and every day fall short of Jesus' call to us to participate in God's mission of justice, reconciliation and peace. We call on God's grace to transform our hearts and commit ourselves to act with careful authority and humility in the world, sure of our calling to bring the love of God to all people and offer hope wherever there is none.

It is in understanding our own complicity in these systems and our responsibility to act for change that we believe it is of critical importance that, committed to the prophetic heritage of our faith, we name those who benefit from the current global economic system and those whose power is deeply entwined with its continuation.

Foundational to neoliberal economics is the image

<sup>16</sup> McFague, op. cit. p. 107

<sup>17</sup> *Statement to the Nation* (1977), Inaugural National Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia



of the 'machine'<sup>18</sup>. The most powerful interests at work to maintain this system (and the myth that there is no viable alternative) are often described as 'machines' and include:

- the military machine (violent conflict pays), also known as the 'military-industrial complex'
- the financial machine (including the deals with virtual money that no-one can see)
- the corporate machine (big companies with products and resources to sell and dividends to deliver)
- the consumer machine (personal success as defined by conspicuous consumption and individuals, consciously or not, 'buying-in' to the system)

The military machine would collapse if violent conflict ended. The financial machine succumbed to its own excesses and demanded rescue by government. This machine has so insinuated itself into our society that the collapse of just one part (the US financial sector), threatened disaster for people all over the world. The corporate machine thrives on the permission given to a small number of people to earn as much profit as they can without regard for equity and, in the process, devastate forests, mountains and rivers, paying scant regard for the resource needs of future generations and little attention to the environmental consequences of such plunder. The consumer machine is more insidious, eating away at our spirits. It leads us to a sense of failure and dissatisfaction with our lives if we cannot afford to continue buying 'stuff'.

There are two sides to our relationship with this mechanistic system. First, we may or may not understand ourselves as part of these machines, but most of us have interests, conscious or otherwise, which are intertwined with and dependent on the maintenance of the status quo. We must, therefore, be aware of how our own identity and values lead us to feel satisfied and supportive of the current system.

The other side is that this mechanistic model for

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18 Julie A. Nelson (2006) *Economics for Humans*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp 1-4. Nelson writes of the origins of the image of 'economic machine' and its relationship to ethics. She writes about an earlier definition of economics that was about "the way we manage our time and money so we can obtain groceries and shelter and thus 'keep body and soul together'" and describes how over time discussions of economics moved away from considerations of 'body and soul' and towards a focus on "money, profits, markets and corporations" as "parts of an 'economic machine.' This machines operates in an automatic fashion, following inexorable and amoral 'laws'. While the machine organizes provisioning for our bodies, it is itself soulless and inhuman..." (p. 1)

organising society is inherently counter to the gospel image of life as a sacred gift and the guiding Christian metaphor of relationship. Even when we do feel uneasy, dissatisfied or angry at how the world is working, this mechanistic model by its very nature leaves us feeling disempowered about our capacity to stop the machines and bring about change. It is vitally important, therefore, that we remind ourselves and others that having designed it in the first place we do have the power to change the system.

Christians have a particularly important role to play in breaking open the alternative possibilities for the future. Central to our faith we have a vision of life that calls us to a different way of being in the world.

### Living a different story

Understanding that economies are vital, living, human-made, and shaped by our ethical choices can help to improve our decisions—both individually and as a society.<sup>19</sup>

Christians, believing that God is love, that it was out of love that God gave birth to the world, that all that is necessary for life to flourish is provided by the Creator and that God's will is for the flourishing and reconciliation of all creation, live life out of genuine hope, believing that transformation is possible. This is not a wild or shallow optimism that is satisfied to rest on the idea that all will be OK in the end, but a commitment to engage as active participants in the reconciliation of the world with God.

Such an engaged Christianity seeks not to impose its way of life or its beliefs on others, but rather to work with all people, out of the values and hopes that we share across religious traditions, race, culture and nationality, for a better world. This would be a world where all people have access to what is necessary for their flourishing and where people contribute to the continued flourishing of the planet. Just as we draw on the stories of others as offered to us, we offer our story of these universal values in the hope that it may help to light the way.

God's economy is an economy of life and love which flows out of the very life of the Triune God. Life and all its riches are both an expression of God's very being as creative love and a gift of God. As sacred gift, the riches of life must be approached with humility, regarded with reverence and respect, and valued as precious, never being taken for granted.

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19 Julie A. Nelson, op. cit., p. 4



An economy of life is marked by regard for the common good. Individualism, competition and greed deny human flourishing because the fullness of our humanity is not found in wealth but in relationship with each other and the world around us. We need community for our wellbeing. Systems and structures which breed individualism and competition deny the nature of our humanity and lead to isolation and despair. In God's household people are safe, secure, cared for and valued. The household shares all it has with concern for those most in need. This is a system of cooperation, justice and equity which is characterised by love and marked by generosity.

As we seek to address the failings of the current global economic system, the values of an economy of life would find their expression in an economic system which places the needs of people and the planet before profit. It would be characterised by such principles as:

- the abundance of the earth's resources, food and water, managed in a just, participatory and sustainable manner, for the benefit of current and future generations;
- human and financial resources directed away from the military-industrial complex and towards the processes and practices that build peace;
- global poverty addressed as a priority over and above the continued growth of the already wealthy;
- reduction of the world's greenhouse gas emissions as an immediate high priority for international cooperation, national, local and individual action;
- local economies encouraged (on an eco-regional basis and within ecological limits) and supported by the global economy;
- recognition of the intrinsic value of cultural heritage (including sites, language and customs) as an expression of the wholeness of humanity and commitment to ensuring the conservation of this heritage for generations to come;
- recognition of the value of knowledge and the importance of education for its own sake, not to be relegated to functional approaches of human 'productivity' – the human capacity to wonder about the world, to seek to understand our history and explore how the world works and what our place in it might be are defining characteristics of our humanity;
- workplace policies and practices which support vulnerable people in our society—including working people on low incomes, people who are unemployed, and people who are dependent on the incomes of others—to maintain a decent standard of living;
- taxation regarded not as a burden, but as how people contribute, according to their means, to the well-being of the whole community through redistribution and the provision of goods and services;
- social welfare regarded, not merely as a 'safety net' for the few deserving who slip through the system, but as an expression of our responsibility to each other and the common good, and essential for equity and fairness in society;
- the provision of universally accessible and affordable essential services such as water and electricity;
- 'the market' regulated and held accountable for unjust and exploitative practices, environmental damage, excesses of greed, monopolies and other forms of exploitative collusion, the fostering of rampant and damaging consumerism and dangerous speculation within financial markets;
- 'the commons' (wilderness, forests, deserts, rivers, oceans and shared public space, including parks, community centres, galleries and performance spaces) valued more than the profits derived from the private development of such spaces;
- urban planning marked by the consideration for people's wellbeing: the need to easily access workplaces, public transport, schools, healthcare and social services, and by an understanding of people's inherent need of spaces and places of beauty and quiet; and
- our 'progress' measured not in monetary terms but as human and ecological wellbeing<sup>20</sup>, including how well we achieve the building of just, peaceful and sustainable societies where individuals are secure in their lives, free from fear, violence and persecution, and able to participate in a meaningful way in their community and society.

<sup>20</sup> In Australia and throughout the world, systems of measuring human and ecological wellbeing are being developed, trialled and used. Examples include the work of the New Economics Foundation (UK) on their Measure of Domestic Progress (MDP) which adjusts national accounts for a variety of social, economic and environmental factors not included in the standard GDP measure and the development of Genuine Progress Indicators (GPI) in countries such as the United States.



The Assembly resolved:

to adopt the Statement, “An Economy of Life: Re-imagining human progress for a flourishing world”;

- a) to commit itself and call on members, councils and agencies of the Uniting Church to
- (i) examine their lives as Christian disciples and communities that they may first of all serve God in the world through the love, compassion and generosity extended to all our neighbours
  - (ii) examine their lives in order to identify where and when they behave in ways that deny human and ecological wholeness
  - (iii) examine their lives in order to identify where and when monetary interests are placed ahead of human and ecological wellbeing
  - (iv) identify, develop and implement alternative systems, structures and processes within the church that promote the practice of the economy of God and model a way of being in the world which promotes human wholeness, equity and ecological sustainability
  - (v) challenge rampant consumerism and materialism as antithetical to what is necessary for a healthy and sustainable world and engage in public conversation about notions of sufficiency, abundance and the fullness of life
  - (vi) challenge the commodification of people, the exercise of the profit-motive when it denies people without wealth access to essential services such as water and electricity, decent healthcare, education and other essential social services, and the recasting of education as merely a tool for producing productive human beings
  - (vii) advocate social and economic policies which
  - (viii) are based on relational rather than mechanistic models
  - (ix) support the growth of vibrant, safe and inclusive communities
  - (x) overcome poverty and injustice, addressing, as first priority, the needs of people who are most vulnerable
  - (xi) dramatically and urgently reduce greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption
  - (xii) support the research, development and implementation of clean and renewable energy, and
  - (xiii) prioritise peacemaking and seek to end militarism;
- b) to call on Australian governments to develop economic systems and structures which recognise that human and ecological flourishing require much more than the creation of wealth by ensuring that public policy seeks to address first and foremost the wellbeing of all people, especially those most vulnerable, and the environment, including
- (i) regulatory reform of financial markets including systems of greater accountability the reduction of military spending and redirection of human and financial resources towards peacemaking
  - (ii) the reform of the Australian tax and transfer system to make it a progressive tool for the equitable distribution of wealth, including taxing the most wealthy at an appropriate level and providing adequate income support for those people who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged
  - (iii) the provision of universally accessible and affordable essential services such as water and electricity
  - (iv) workplace relations policies which ensure just working conditions – fair and sustainable wages



- and conditions, with adequate protections especially for low-skilled low-paid workers, job security and predictability of hours
- (v) the recognition of the importance of shared (community) leisure time, reasonably priced and readily available childcare, and paid parental leave
  - (vi) the increase and prioritisation of support for renewable energy over support for climate polluting industries
  - (vii) urban planning which is marked by a commitment to enhancing and protecting ‘the commons’ (public space including parks, art galleries, performance spaces and community centres), ensuring that people have access to workplaces close to home, public transport, schools, healthcare and social services, and an understanding of people’s inherent need of spaces and places of beauty and quiet;
- c) to call on the Australian Government to work with other national governments and multilateral institutions to redevelop a global economic system that is regulated, transparent and accountable, for the wellbeing of people and the planet, and includes action that
- (i) renews and strengthens global action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals;
  - (ii) immediately and dramatically reduces greenhouse gas emissions through the development and use of renewable sources of energy, the reduction of our dependence on fossil fuels, and the saving of the world’s oceans and forests
  - (iii) commits to ending the stranglehold of the military-industrial complex on the global economic system
  - (iv) develops a practice of ethics and social justice that can guide financial markets in the world
  - (v) regulates ‘the market’ and holds it accountable for unjust and exploitative practices, environmental damage, excesses of greed, the fostering of rampant and damaging consumerism
  - (vi) creates a new international financial architecture developed under the aegis of the United Nations where broad participation of all countries and civil society can take place and which creates a process for the democratisation of all global finance and trade institutions
  - (vii) encourages the development and sustainability of local economies through localised and sustainable systems of food production and consumption, fair trade, microfinance and incentives for investment in rural, regional and Indigenous communities
  - (viii) recognises the intrinsic value of cultural heritage (including sites, language and customs) as an expression of the wholeness of humanity and ensures its conservation; and
- d) to call on the Australian Government to shift its rhetoric from the focus on continual and unlimited growth and redefine how Australia measures its progress as a nation in terms of wellbeing rather than monetary indices such as GDP, doing so in such a way that these measures eventually become primary and directive.