

# A Declaration of Resistance to INEQUALITY

The God of all creation calls people of faith to work for the *common* good and, in order to achieve it, to participate actively in a democratic process that recognizes the value of *every* person.

**As an act of devotion to the God of love and justice, people of faith in this American democracy are called:**

- **to resist** any public policy or action that increases inequality or fails to benefit the poor
- **to judge** candidates in the 2004 elections by their specific plans to dismantle structures fostering economic inequity
- **to support** vigorously candidates who are committed to a renewed pursuit of the common good.

**T**oday the common good in America is seriously threatened. Despite hard-fought gains in the struggle for greater racial, gender, and social equality, we are becoming a divided nation because of a rapidly widening gap between the very wealthy—the recipients of privilege and special treatment—and the rest

of society. We are losing the vision of a commonwealth in which the abundance of America's resources supports the flourishing of all, so that their achievements may contribute to each other. That is the social and political meaning of our divine calling to live for one another. Instead, our plenty accumulates to the few at the expense of the many and a deficit to the common good.

The income of the highest 1% of households over the last thirty years has increased 157% in dollars

adjusted for inflation, compared to a 10% increase for middle income families, while the income of the poorest 20% of Americans actually declined.

In 1980 the average CEO of major American firms received 42 times the average non-supervisory worker in income; that has now increased to 458 times.

Such vast differences between the very wealthy and those of ordinary or meager means erode the cohesive fabric required of a united, democratic people. As Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis cautioned: "We can have a democracy or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of the few. We cannot have both."

The chasm between the rich and all others has decisive consequences for virtually every dimension of public life.

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## PROTESTANTS FOR THE COMMON GOOD

*"People of faith advancing justice in public life"*

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*This statement is addressed to all Americans in this election year. Developed by Protestant Christians committed to social justice, it is meant to be shared and used by all who work for the common good. The statement may be reprinted and distributed with or without attribution.*

— Board of Directors, Protestants for the Common Good, March 2004



### Economic Inequality and the Impact on Political Life

God invests every citizen with equal worth. But political equality in America is corrupted by the power of wealth in the election process, at all levels of government. In 1999-2002, the wealthiest Americans contributed \$1.8 billion to political campaigns and received \$1.35 trillion in tax cuts over ten years, 57% of which going to the top 10% of income earners.

### Economic Inequality and the Impact on Public Education

God shares the divine love and wisdom with all. Equal access to quality education is universally recognized as the single most important factor for children and young people to escape or avoid poverty and achieve productive participation in society during their lifetimes. But major gaps in educational achievement continue, and dropout rates remain appalling for low-income students and racial and ethnic minorities across the nation. Children in wealthy school districts attend exceptional schools, while schools for most students from poor families and communities are inadequately funded and lack support services important to learning.

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Poverty in the United States is more pervasive than in any other industrialized nation

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### Economic Inequality and the Impact on Affordable Housing

God is concerned for the basic needs of all. But over fourteen million households in the United States suffer a severe housing crisis, paying more than half their income for housing, while the wealthy build extravagant homes across the country. Despite the growing need for affordable housing, the federal government has frozen—and is proposing to reduce—the number who can receive assistance.

### Economic Inequality and the Impact on Health and Health Care

God seeks healing for the afflicted. Yet there are 43.6 million people in the nation without health insurance,

two-thirds of whom come from low income families and 80% from working families. Rising health care costs (8-14% annually) and continuing high rates of unemployment aggravate the problem for a growing portion of the population. Many households, including seniors, must choose between health care and providing other necessities. Only the wealthy are truly exempt.

God consistently shows special concern for the poor. Shamefully, poverty in the United States is more pervasive than in any other industrialized nation. While the rich grow richer—with the assistance of government benefits and tax cuts—the poor grow poorer: in the 1970s approximately 30% of those living in poverty were *below one-half* of the official poverty line (itself unrealistically low); by the late 1990s nearly 40% had dropped to this level. Now 35 million Americans—10% of the population—live below the poverty line, with 1.3 million more added in 2002.

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The massive and growing inequality in America is a violation of democratic justice and an offense to the God who abundantly loves and values all. It endangers the mutuality that is our high calling as a nation. Only we the people, exercising our political sovereignty, can reverse this social evil and transform our national life.

As an act of devotion to the God of love and justice, people of faith in this American democracy are called:

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- to judge candidates in the 2004 elections by their specific plans to dismantle structures fostering economic inequity
- to support vigorously candidates who are committed to a renewed pursuit of the common good.

*“Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him.”*

(Proverbs 14:31)



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