

## US LUTHERANS VOTE TO DISCONTINUE FOSSIL-FUEL INVESTMENTS, TO WORK TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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**New Orleans** – On August 13 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) voted to work towards the goal of discontinuing any investment by the church in fossil fuel companies, and to commit to investing in corporations that are taking positive steps toward a sustainable environment.

The resolution was approved by majority of the 900 voting members at the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, the main decision-making body of the ELCA. Full text is below.

With this action, the ELCA heeds the 2015 call of the Lutheran World Federation Council to its member churches *“not to invest in fossil fuels and to support energy efficiency and renewable energy companies, and to encourage their institutions and individual members to do likewise.”*<sup>1</sup>

The decision strengthens actions the ELCA had already taken to limit new investment and encourage sustainability practices. It builds on divestment resolutions already passed by eight different ELCA synods (regional bodies) and aligns the ELCA with the global Lutheran church.

“This bold action situates us squarely in the tradition of Martin Luther and the reformers who loved God’s creation,” said the Rev. Barbara Rossing, professor at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and a leader in the grassroots organization Lutherans Restoring Creation which supported the resolution. “Lutheran ethics calls us to care for the most vulnerable, and for future generations,” she said.

The church’s action was the culmination of efforts by a coalition of members, spearheaded by Gerry Falco from the Metro New York Synod. “We joined forces with activists from five synods that had pending resolutions like ours,” Falco said.

The assembly theme of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation galvanized voters.

“For many of us, this decision became a ‘here we stand’ kind of moment in our concern for justice for future generations,” said Kim Winchell, echoing Martin Luther’s famous statement. Winchell is an ELCA deacon from Freeland, Michigan in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, and served as point person for the resolution on the Assembly floor.

**The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)** is the seventh-largest religious body in the United States, with over 9,300 congregations and 3.7 million baptized members (2015). In 2015 the church had \$7.5 billion in assets under management. The amount of the church’s current investment in fossil fuel companies was not immediately available.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.lutheranworld.org/news/lwf-announces-decision-not-invest-fossil-fuels](http://www.lutheranworld.org/news/lwf-announces-decision-not-invest-fossil-fuels). Remarks by LWF General Secretary Martin Junge at the Churchwide Assembly: <http://livestream.com/elca/events/5829763/videos/132472410>.

## **Toward a Responsible Energy Future (adopted by the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly)**

To receive with gratitude the memorials of the Saint Paul Area, Metropolitan New York, Northeastern Pennsylvania, Upper Susquehanna and Northwestern Pennsylvania synods related to climate change and fossil fuels;

To urge all ELCA members, congregations and synods to inform and educate themselves about the effects of climate change through the lens of the “Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice” social statement, and to advocate for policies that reduce energy use and our dependence on fossil fuels and encourage development of renewable energy sources as an expression of our commitment to address climate change and caring for God’s creation;

To affirm the action of the 2013 Churchwide Assembly and subsequent action of the Church Council in 2014 related to the development of revised or additional investment screens on fossil fuels, and to support and commend ELCA members, congregations, synods, the churchwide organization, and related institutions and agencies such as ELCA Endowment Fund and Portico Benefit Services for their leadership efforts to invest in companies that are taking steps toward a sustainable environment;

To affirm Portico’s balanced approach to supporting this church’s principles and directives as stated in the social statements — including the commitment to help transition to an economy less dependent on fossil fuels. The approach has included:

1. shareholder advocacy (filing and supporting resolutions on environmental issues, including 150 resolutions in 2015),
2. focused investment screening, which has identified 113 companies screened for environmental reasons, and
3. ramping up positive social investments, such as investments in companies that develop solar, wind and water power generation systems, repurposing waste products and reducing toxic emissions; and now

To call upon Portico to evaluate the viability of an optional fossil -free fund for retirement plan participants; and

To call upon the ELCA to heed the call of the Lutheran World Federation Council in 2015 to member churches “not to invest in fossil fuels and to support energy efficiency and renewable energy companies, and to encourage their institutions and individual members to do likewise”; and

As part of this church’s response to the Lutheran World Federation’s call, to request that the ELCA churchwide organization review the ELCA’s applicable social teachings and Corporate Social Responsibility policies and procedures, with the goal of not investing in, and removing the largest fossil fuel companies as identified by Carbon Tracker, and investing in corporations which are taking positive steps toward a sustainable environment; and

To support the ELCA network of affiliated social ministry organizations with programs to address unemployment caused by changing patterns of fossil fuel use, to advocate for retraining workers – especially for renewable energy jobs, to advocate for programs that will support those in transition, and to encourage congregations and ministries to address the resulting unemployment and poverty; and

To urge ELCA members, congregations and synods to set measurable goals to reduce their consumption of fossil fuels and improve their stewardship of energy resources, transition to renewable energy sources and promote care for God’s creation.