

Introduction

“The United Methodist Church, as a covenant community committed to God’s justice, must work toward a just global economy.”

—General Conference Resolution 206.
“Economic Justice for a New Millennium,” *The Book of Resolutions, 2004*

“It is time that we manifest gospel values in the economic order. It is after all, our calling.”

—General Conference Resolution 208.
“Pathways to Economic Justice,” *The Book of Resolutions, 2004*

Continuing a Tradition

Throughout the course of the history of Schools of Christian Missions, The United Methodist Church has turned its attention to issues of the economy. In 1966, we considered issues of *Affluence and Poverty: The Dilemma for Christians*. In 1974, we tried to understand *The Welfare Maze*. In 1988 we explored *The Faces of Poverty in Our Midst*; in the early 1990s we considered *Living Values—Changing Times*, and in 1993, *Global Economics*.

These studies remind us of the long history of public witness by The United Methodist Church in matters of economic justice. In this time of changing realities about wealth and poverty, abundance and scarcity, it is appropriate that we again turn our attention to issues of the global economy.

Goals of the Study

The goal of this study is to explore the places where globalization touches the lives of ordinary people.

The goal of this study is to explore the places where globalization touches the lives of ordinary people. If we are to “manifest the gospel values in the economic order,” as a General Conference resolution suggests, we need to understand better where contemporary issues of economic justice touch our lives and where we are faced with decisions about how to act responsibly on behalf of economic justice.

We will examine the impact of economic globalization, including free trade policies, on our lives. We will look at the processes known as outsourcing and offshoring, that is, the expansion of business and corporate operations into many countries throughout the world. We will think about how global media and communications technologies are drastically altering both economic and human relationships.

By looking at these phenomena we hope to understand more fully the impact of globalization on human rights and the social, economic, and political development of various cultures and nations. We will seek to understand the difference between globalization as economic exploitation and the potential for globalization

as the development of a global community, one that fosters more intimate contact between cultures and nations. We will try to understand how economically and politically powerful people from different countries often work together for the exploitation of their own people. We will look for spaces of hope: alternatives where people are acting together to build justice, working in concert with others to affirm the vision of global community for each of us individually. We will explore what we as people of faith can do to seek to build a global community based upon justice and solidarity.

In simplest terms, we will place ourselves into the globalization picture. We will look at potential opportunities presented by globalization. We will analyze the changes globalization is making in our lives that may be frightening. To open the door to an understanding of a larger reality, the study will present several specific real-life examples of places where globalization touches our lives.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

1. **What is happening** in each local situation? Who are the players? What do they have at stake in the outcome? How are we involved?
2. What is the larger problem? Why does it exist? **What is the connection** between the problem in our community and the problem in communities in other parts of the world? What is the role of global actors in the problem?
3. **What can be done and who will do it?** What actions are already being taken to address this problem? What alternative possibilities can we imagine?

Images of Globalization

It is not easy to separate the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of our lives. The workings of the global economy touch our lives in many everyday places; for example, when we:

- shop at Wal-Mart and notice that almost everything we choose to buy is made in China;
- try to make a long distance call and find that the person assisting us is speaking from India;
- notice that the textile workers at the factory in our town all seem to be immigrant women;
- discover that a transnational corporation has been given a concession to bottle the water that comes from the streams that have always flowed freely near our home;
- find that our friend's job as a medical researcher has been cut by the company because they can pay a researcher much less in the third world and get the same quality of work;
- use the Internet to get directions to drive door-to-door from our house to a job interview with a company two towns away.

The Corporate Globalization box on p. 13 portrays these relationships.

Overview of the Book

In order to focus our attention on seeking globalization through the eyes of ordinary people, each specific discussion will begin and end with stories taken from real life experiences in real communities. We have called these stories **Globalization Times**.

Chapter One, the starting point for the study, is a broad overview of some of the present concerns about globalization through the lens of one specific example from daily life.

Corporate Globalization =



A 16 year old working 18 hours a day for \$0.22/hr in Indonesia using toxic glues to make \$150 shoes sold by a recently laid-off, non-unionized, part-time worker without health benefits in the shopping malls of America, bought by a teenager using his minimum wage mother's credit card.

Adapted from Polaris Institute, www.polarisinstitute.org

Chapter Two explores the question: How will the natural resources of the earth and from the earth be shared in a way that will provide maximum benefits for individuals, families, communities, and nations? Will we accept the premise that water, oil, natural gas, and other forms of energy are the private possessions of states and corporations and therefore can be exploited for their benefit alone? What is our

responsibility to protect and cherish these resources? What rights do people have to access these resources? What of the foods and natural medicines, farmers and traditional healers?

Chapter Three examines a combination of the essential elements of our lives often spoken of with the single word—livelihood. It explores the following question: How will each

individual, family, and community have maximum opportunity to build the life that they value; to have decent and safe work with wages sufficient for their lives; to have good health care and other social services; to live in safe communities; and to be able to participate in decisions about their lives in community?

Chapter Four looks at how advances in communications technologies have combined with the values of economic globalization (such as deregulation, privatization, and consolidation of corporate control) and to jeopardize information as a public resource. It addresses questions such as the following: Who has access to new technologies and who does not? What value messages are the owners of these technologies bringing to us? In the midst of a global media culture that emphasizes competition and celebrates greed, how shall we have space to affirm cultural and religious values that emphasize cooperation, equality, justice, and just mutual sharing and caring?

Chapter Five summarizes the issues and challenges us to consider what response we might make as Christians.

Drawing on Biblical/Theological/United Methodist and Ecumenical Resources

Each chapter will draw on the richness of our theological and biblical tradition as United Methodists as well as that of the ecumenical Christian family. We have as the compass for this journey the biblical witness of the meaning of God's justice and the statements of The United Methodist Church General Conference on globalization and economic justice.

In particular, the study will focus on the story of the Good Samaritan. This story offers

important practical advice about how to live a life of faithfulness. It contains much wisdom about how to deal with the dangers of life, giving instruction in just how far we are expected to go to fulfill the demands of justice. It is also useful as a way to begin to think about building global community since it is the stranger in the story who exemplifies what it means to be faithful. As we seek to answer some of the factual questions about how globalization manifests itself, we will do so in light of these biblical and theological understandings.

A Note on Perspectives

Any time we set out to study complex and conflicting social and economic realities, we bring the sum total of our experiences and our identities to bear on that study. All of us come as people of faith trying to discern and to be faithful to God's action in history. But we also bring to the task our national, racial, ethnic, gender, and class identities. Where those identities are a barrier to our understanding, we will need to try to put our preconceptions aside, at least temporarily, in order to hear different points of view. It is hard to hear our nation or our way of life criticized, but we may need to listen to such criticisms during this study. We may also need to be bold in critiquing ourselves. This is not an economist's study of globalization, it is an inquiry by a person of faith with some experience in working on issues of economic justice and globalization. It is designed for persons of faith who are living in the midst of globalization's many realities.

Alternatives Considered

Throughout our explorations we will always keep in mind our faith responsibility, as well as

our opportunity to be involved in building global community. We will ask ourselves what the essential elements of that global community are. What are the things that we as members of a global community need to hold in common? We will explore the idea of a global set

of ‘common goods’—resources, services, and ways of life that are important to protect for all of us, if any of us are to enjoy them. We will look at some examples of the work already taking place to build and protect the global commons and a global community.

Journaling: Thinking About Our Own Connections

Please take a moment to make a list of some of the things you would like to learn from this study. Make a note of any aspects about globalization that seem to you particularly good—things that affect your own life and the life of your community. You might also want to write down some things that seem very worrying about globalization, things that seem to be threatening to you, your community, and the nation. As we proceed we will continue to relate information about globalization to our own lives and to the major questions that we have about it. Your own reflections will be important to how much you can benefit from the study.