



Guidelines for Decisions about Proper Use of Money and Doing Good Business for God

Investing Money in Banks and Other Companies to Earn Interest

Monies owned by the Northern Synod that are available for investment, with the aim of earning or receiving interest, are being looked after by the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, and their UCA Funds Management department and other Uniting Church Synods, including the Northern Synod. Past investment decisions of the Northern Synod have been made in agreement with the Ethical Investment Policy of Victoria-Tasmania Synod. The Northern Synod have looked carefully at this policy and are confident that it is a good pathway to follow and to use in helping to develop our own investment policy. If the Northern Synod has concerns or doubts about any particular investment decision that has been made, it has the power to request changes to the way that money from the Northern Synod or Synod agency is invested.

Decisions about Property Use or Other Purchases

God is the giver of all good things and God requires us to look after everything under our care, including the money we have and to recognise the special place of First Peoples. This is talked about in the Preamble mentioned earlier. God also requires the Northern Synod to understand its responsibility to exercise 'good financial stewardship' for all money under its care. When church leaders in the Northern Synod make decisions about buying, selling and leasing property God requires them to have a good understanding about what helps the Synod, and also what helps other people. Also we should be careful not to waste or lose our money by being careless with it. In the same way, when church leaders in the Northern Synod make decisions about what things to buy, there is lots of information to discover about the companies that make or sell the things we want to buy. This information will help us to make good decisions.

A good way to find out information about other companies is by asking questions. There are positive questions we can ask like: Does this company have a history of employing First Peoples? Does this company have a history of caring for God's world and the natural environment? Does this company help Australia to be a good place for all people to live together in peace?

There are also negative questions to ask like: Does this company hurt or damage the natural environment? Does this company do business in a way that causes suffering, or causes poor people to lose their jobs or have workplace accidents? Does this company help rich people get richer and cause poor people to feel helpless and disempowered?

Sometimes it is hard to find out all the background story about companies because they also work overseas, not just in Australia. The Northern Synod will work together with the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania to help with this work of asking questions and finding the truth about

the way companies do business in Australia and overseas. There is a special Justice and International Mission Unit in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, that knows how to do this work for both Synods. When we test companies in this way, it helps us to make good finance decisions about how to use our money wisely and do what God wants.

Positive Test

The Synod wants to do business with companies and businesses that have good ethics and care about others. That is, companies that have a good name and history of doing business with helping First Peoples or helping to build good relationships in Australia, and also with other countries. It means that those companies do their work and do business contracts in a way that helps poor people have better health and self-respect, or improved services like roads and housing. Other examples are companies that have a good name and provide employment for First Peoples and companies that produce things or services that help care for and protect the natural environment.

Negative Test

The Synod will avoid doing business with companies whose products or services cause injustice or human suffering, and avoid businesses with a bad name or those involved in crime or corrupt activities. The Synod will also avoid doing business with companies whose way of doing business lessens human rights, especially the rights of First Peoples. We will also avoid investing in businesses that cause lots of damage to the environment like uranium mining, or that add to global warming by mining of coal, oil and natural gas. Also, companies involved in producing alcohol, or helping people to smoke tobacco or gamble or become addicted to pornography, are not helping to build a better or more caring society.

A good way to avoid these companies is to find out which companies have a bad record of causing suffering to poor people in countries overseas. This includes not doing business with companies who trade with or support bad governments. Also, we will not do business with companies who have a bad record for causing damage to the environment, and also those companies that do not care for their employees health and safety, or pay their workers very low wages.

Sometimes companies with a good business record may do something that breaks the Synod's rules or guidelines for ethical business activity. When this happens unintentionally or it is a minor or small breaking of the rules, it may still be okay to continue to invest in or do business with that company. When there are many negative factors or major breaking of rules, or when there is no effort to fix up the wrong things done, then the Synod will stop doing business with that company.

Sometimes it is hard to make good business decisions about investment and doing business because the company may be involved in many positive business activities but also in some negative business activities. When there are a few bad stories or negative things, it will be very hard to know what is the right thing to do and maybe to stop doing business with that company.

Neutral Stories, not Good or Bad

Most of the companies that the Northern Synod wants to do business with have a business record that is not good or bad. This means that they do not have a good or bad record of working with or employing First Peoples or with hurting or helping poor people. It also means that when we check to see if they have a good or bad record in relation to improving or damaging the natural environment there is no story for us to find. So the Synod is free to choose which of these companies will help the Northern Synod or its agencies to make the most money from investments and other business activities. Good stewardship and wise use of money is also doing what God wants.

Good Decisions about Property

Northern Synod rules (By-Laws) require the Synod Finance and Property Committee to consult with NRCC Executive about all decisions regarding property owned by NRCC. This will always happen when making big or major decisions.

The ideas and thinking of traditional owners or First Peoples will always be listened to and considered before any decisions are made about Indigenous land or about land with strong connections or history to First Peoples.

The Synod will work hard to make sure that the ethical rules of the Synod are included in all contract agreements for lease of Synod property. When the Synod enters into lease or partnership agreements about the use of church or Synod land, the contract will include agreement for the Synod to end the contract if major things happen that do not agree with the Synod's guidelines about proper use of money. When this happens the Synod will try hard to make sure it does not receive a financial penalty.

Good Decisions when Purchasing Goods or Services

To assist in making ethical decisions about buying things, the Synod will identify companies that conduct their business in ways consistent with the above ethical guidelines written in this paper. These companies will be the first choice or preferred suppliers for the Synod to buy from.

Some companies group together with other companies to form an alliance to try and look after the environment. Other business alliances try to help poor people in other countries get paid proper wages for their work. The Synod will look to do business with companies who belong to alliances like these who are trying to look after God's world.

The Synod will work hard to make sure that the ethical values of the Synod are included in all purchasing contracts. When the Synod enters into purchasing agreements, the contract will include agreement for the Synod to end the contract if major things happen that do not agree with the Synod's guidelines about proper use of money. When this happens it will, as far as it can, be without receiving a financial penalty.

*Approved by consensus at the Annual Synod Meeting
held on 25-28 June 2017*

Plain English translation by Howard Amery, from original Zirsnak/Schild transcript - 'Northern Synod Ethical Guidelines for Commercial Decision Making'.