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**REPORT ON THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)  
RESPONSE TO ITS PRIORITY PURSUE PEACE WITH JUSTICE**

**RECEIVED by the General Assembly with special attention to be given by the Administrative Committee and the Task Force on Renewal and Structural Reform to the three recommendations in the report.**

A "priority" for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) can be defined as a concern of vital importance for the whole church which merits first attention, should be proclaimed by its leadership and addressed by its general administrative units, regions and congregations.

Resolution No. 7774 "Concerning Priorities  
for the Christian Church (Disciples of  
Christ)"

In 1981, the General Assembly named the pursuit of Peace With Justice as a priority. Resolution 8148, "Concerning Priorities for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 1982-1985" stated,

In implementing this priority, the General Assembly recommends that the pursuit of peace with justice be at the center of the mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)... and that the church in all its manifestations... join in efforts of witness and advocacy on issues of peace-making and international justice with special attention to the concerns of those who struggle for freedom, human rights and social justice.

In 1985, the General Assembly extended the priority for two years.

The Joint Staff Working Group on International Concerns was "designated as an inter-unit task force, assigned to Section II, to assist the Administrative Committee in its work of implementing the priority of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to pursue peace with justice as stated by the General Assembly ..." (AC-82-0848). A report on responses to the priority was presented to the Administrative Committee and General Board in 1983 and 1985.

In January 1987, a letter and brief questionnaire requesting information about implementation of the priority was sent to the presidents of general units, regional ministers, Shalom Congregation contact persons and persons identified by regions to receive regular mailings related to the priority. This report is based on responses received from seven (7) general units, 20 regions, 20 Shalom Congregations and 25 regional contact persons.

**GENERAL UNITS**

All units report some activity in response to the priority. Those units with programmatic assignments report the greatest impact upon their work, as would be expected. Implementation of the priority has been achieved, in the main, by adding responsibilities to existing staff portfolios or by changing those portfolios in some manner. Staff assignments adjusted in response to the priority range from 0 - 10. One new staff position has been created. Frequently mentioned as new and significant program during the priority are the Shalom Congregation Program, Peace Sunday celebration, visits to and dialogue with the church in the Soviet Union and publication of "Seeking God's Peace in a Nuclear Age" written by the Panel on Christian Ethics in a Nuclear Age.

Units reported \$278,500 in expenditures and budget in priority programming during 1986-87 with an additional \$250,000 reported as expended over the life of the priority. It would appear from these reports that close to \$1,000,000 has been expended by general units on peace with justice concerns since the naming of the priority. It is difficult to determine and is thus unclear how much of this expenditure and the programming it represents can be said to be caused by the naming of the priority and how much of it represents normal implementation and growth of established program. It is clear that the larger percentage does not represent new program.

Units reported activities such as the following:

- Publication and promotion of study and action materials
- Advocacy and legislative organizing on Peace With Justice related issues
- Workshops
- Network creation
- Educational events
- United Nations Seminars
- Grants to related groups for Peace With Justice activities.

When asked to identify the most exciting response, units identified a number of specific programs and an increased level of awareness of the issues involved in peace with justice. The biggest disappointment reported tends to be related to the excitement. It is the perception of a number of the responders that the priority has had a significant amount of program response across the church but that it has not become a priority for many persons and congregations.

### REGIONS

Reports of program response by regions varied widely. Some regions reported long lists of program initiatives including activities at assemblies, study and action workshops, promotion of the Shalom Congregation Program, new ecumenical arrangements for implementation of work on peace with justice, denominational and ecumenical statements on peace, declaration of nuclear free zones, formation of Disciples Peace Fellowship chapters and development and distribution of materials. Others reported little activity based on a lack of response from members of the church in the region.

Virtually all responders expressed disappointment, sometimes bordering on frustration, that the priority which most perceived as of great importance for the church and world had not received greater positive response from many members and congregations. Some perceive the priority to be programmatically vague with few or no handles for implementation.

Some regions reported portfolio shifts in response to the priority. Others reported that staff does what can be done. In either case, assignment for implementation of the priority was added to existing portfolios with several other responsibilities.

Five regions reported funding allocations for priority implementation. These ranged from \$300 - \$3500. Others indicated that funding was being included in on-going program budgets or sought "as needed."

When asked "What program emphases on peace with justice should be continued?" responses ranged from "materials to hand out" to specific programs such as Shalom Congregation Program and observance of Peace Sunday to "all of it." It appears to be a consensus of regional responders that programmatic work on peace with justice should continue.

### INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES

Individual responders reported much of the same material and reactions reported by regions. Since many of these persons are members of regional committees planning regional program, that similarity is not surprising. One additional value of the priority was reported by several individuals however. The priority has legitimized work on peace with justice issues. As one responder wrote, "It provides us a legitimate base from which to work."

Responders from Shalom Congregations reported a wide and varied number of study, worship and action activities. Most expressed a clear excitement about what they are doing.

The disappointment reported by individuals echoed that of general unit and regional responders; there are not enough persons who had decided to become part of the response and not enough resources to do what needs to be done.

### STAFF TASK FORCE

Members of the staff task force join many other responders in believing that the priority has had significant value for Disciples. In a conflict dominated world, this priority (and similarly named priorities adopted by other denominations and church bodies) has been affirmed as a sign of hope - a recognition of God's promise, and a discovery of mission. The task force believes that the priority has helped to develop a common focus for the mission of the church. A great deal of valuable work has been done. There are, however, weaknesses as well as strengths which have become evident.

That an increasing number of persons are aware of the issues involved in the pursuit of peace with justice is a clear strength. Naming of a priority appears to grant a legitimacy to raising related issues within the church that was not as widely recognized before. This appears to increase the possibility for study, worship and action participation by members of the church.

The task force also considers it a strength that the naming of a priority reinforces the call for the three manifestations of the church to work together in complementary and mutually supportive relationships. While the priority has not been universally accepted, the task force believes that it has enabled a common language and focus for work that has led to increasingly effective working relationships.

The naming of Pursue Peace With Justice or similarly worded priorities by a number of denominations and church bodies has led to the creation of new ecumenical configurations in several places. The task force considers this a strength of priority setting when done in concert with others.

Perceived weaknesses are related to perceived strengths.

It is difficult to tell what changes occur because of the naming of a priority. This is particularly true when there are a number of existing programs and staff assignments in the arena of work suggested by the priority.

The growth of supportive program relationships between manifestations of the church appears to have been inhibited by the lack of a clearly defined church-wide process for program planning, development and coordination. While this is not a weakness in the priority itself, it does appear to the task force that it has had a detrimental effect on implementation of named priorities.

General units and regions report that a relatively small percentage of staff time and financial resources have been available for reassignment to priority implementation. With relatively small annual increases in allocation to general units and regions being the current norm and the absence of an additional funding pattern for priority implementation, reports suggest that funding is not sufficient to permit an adequate response to priority setting. In spite of this weakness, response to Pursue Peace With Justice has been remarkable. Reports from all manifestations of the church suggest the frustration of not being able to do more.

The task force wishes to make several recommendations which it believes are pertinent to the priority setting and implementation process.

1. The task force recommends that the Administrative Committee consider possible structures and processes for churchwide priority program planning, development and coordination. A step might be to request the Council of Ministers, regional boards, Regional Ministers and Moderators, and general unit boards of directors regularly to discuss progress on priority implementation and to report those discussions.
2. The task force recommends that the Administrative Committee convene a meeting of appropriate representatives within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to discuss the funding of the church's priorities. The task force believes that options which might be considered include the following:
  - a. The Commission on Finance establish a priority implementation fund including guidelines for allocation.
  - b. Agreement that priority implementation would have first call on new monies received by the Church Finance Council.
  - c. Develop a special offering for priority implementation with a formula dividing the funds among the manifestations of the church.
3. The task force recommends that the Administrative Committee formulate more specific guidelines for a staff task force (when in cases such as Pursue Peace With Justice, a staff task force is designated or created to assist the Administrative Committee in its work) including a regular reporting process to the Administrative Committee.

### CONCLUSION

In the six years since Pursue Peace With Justice was named as a priority, a great deal has been done. Those persons who have become involved in responding to the priority are deeply committed to it as an important part of the Christian life and of deep significance for the world. Sixteen of the responders stated a wish for the priority to continue and all but two have specific program responses they wish continued.

The sense of vagueness and lack of "handles" which several reported should be instructive to those developing priority statements and program responses in the future.

The priority has helped to develop understanding and excitement but has also developed frustration at the lack of broader participation. "We have just begun," is a common theme in the responses.

Peace with Justice is not a reality in 1987. In the words of one responder, "The witness for Peace is central to the witness of the church. Under the priority, we made some progress, we have only just begun. There is still a long way to go."