

No. 8730

RESOLUTION CONCERNING THE PRIORITY FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)

ADOPTED by the General Assembly

The Process

The Anaheim General Assembly adopted Business Item 8145 Resolution Concerning the Year 2000 declaring that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) should take a leading role in preparing for the year 2000 and that the General Minister and President explore the appropriate role of the church in the year 2000.

The Des Moines General Assembly took action mandating "that the General Minister and President during the next biennium follow the regular procedure for the establishment of priorities and present to the General Board recommendations for the church's priority during the 1988-1991 quadrennium."

With guidance from our planning documents, the General Minister and President has taken these steps:

- Listened to laity and ministers in 20 regional conferences;
- Conducted futuring sessions with General Board members;
- Studied the Division of Homeland Ministries research;
- Engaged in dialogue with the Council of Ministers;
- Shared with and received counsel from the Administrative Committee;
- Presented the recommended priority to the General Board for its response.

The Priority Statement

The process has led to the decision to propose that for the next twelve years, bringing us to the year 2000, the priority of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will be:

To develop vital congregations as dynamic faith communities in prophetic, redemptive and reconciling ministries to the whole world.

Biblical Images

Our pursuit of this priority will be founded on such Biblical images of the dynamic church as:

• A confessing community, confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior

"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God." (Philippians 2:9-10 RSV)

The Samaritan woman at the well brought the people to hear Jesus. They said, "We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:42 RSV)

• A teaching community

According to Acts, after the day of Pentecost, "... they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching..." (Acts 2:42 RSV)

• A community of loving fellowship, of Koinonia

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship... And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts," ... (Acts 2:42, 46 RSV)

• A worshiping, praying, proclaiming community celebrating the Lord's Supper

Luke described the early Christians as those who "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42 RSV)

The letter to the Colossians says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thanksgiving in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16 RSV)

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- **A giving, sharing, serving community**

In Jerusalem, "All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all as any had need." (Acts 2:44 RSV)

- **An evangelistic, converting community**

In confessing, teaching, loving, worshipping, praying, proclaiming, celebrating the Lord's Supper, caring and serving, they engaged the culture with the claims of the saving power of Jesus Christ, that persons might become reconciled with God, in Christ, and identified with the body of Christ, the church. "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47 RSV)

- **A healing community**

The description of the dynamic new church following Pentecost is set in sequence with Peter and John healing the lame man and other stories of the healing community. (Acts 3:1-16 RSV)

- **One church, with diverse faith communities, whose visible unity is a sign and foretaste of the unity of the human family.**

The earliest church found its identity and witness given in the prayer of Jesus Christ, "...that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (John 17:21 RSV)

At the Jerusalem conference on the question of the Jerusalem church being composed of those who were Jews, and the Antioch church being Gentiles, the voice of Peter settled the question of diversity.

"... you know that in the early days God made choices among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as was done to us; and God made no distinction

between us and them, but cleansed their heart by faith ... But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." (Acts 15:7-11 RSV)

- **"A community in mission, sending and receiving apostles as ambassadors of reconciliation, bearing witness to God in Christ, strengthening the church in all lands, even to the ends of the earth."**

"... God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5:19-20 RSV)

- **A community dedicated to peace with justice**

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19 RSV)

Claiming the Biblical Images

Evidence of our claim of these Biblical images will be:

- **Confessing congregations,**

whose members "confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world." (Preamble to THE DESIGN FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST))

- **Teaching congregations,**

which grow in faith through Biblical study and theological reflection. A developing faith will lead to a ministry of reconciliation.

- **Congregations of loving, caring persons,**

who reach out as servants to one another and to the world with the reconciling reality of God's grace and mercy.

- **Worshiping congregations,**

which commit themselves in ever deeper ways to the reconciling will of God, through prayer, proclamation, the sacraments and confession.

- **Sharing congregations,**

which grow in the faithful stewardship of money and all other life resources, because we are created as persons who need to give to be whole, and because we are partners with God in a ministry of reconciliation.

- **Evangelistic and converting congregations,**

which witness to persons and engage the world with the saving power of God's reconciling love in Jesus Christ. To be "in Christ" is to be in His Body, the church. The witnessing church must be involved in membership recruitment and new congregation establishment.

- **Congregations concerned about the wholeness and health of our people,**

which work for a world of mercy and justice in which the reconciling wholeness of God's shalom is a reality for all people.

- **Congregations claiming the Disciples ecumenical heritage,**

which are committed to the unity of all Christians. Because the church is the one body of Christ, diverse and global, we will participate in local, national and worldwide ecumenism.

- **Congregations in mission,**

which carry out a ministry of reconciliation in their local communities and, in covenantal partnership, share in such ministry beyond those communities.

- **Peacemaking congregations,**

which witness to peace with justice in ways which affirm God's special concern for the poor and the oppressed.

The Implementation

We call upon the official bodies of all congregations, regions and the general program units of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to affirm the priority and to commit themselves to an implementation process which will move the church through the 1990's prepared to be partners with God in a ministry of reconciliation. Shared decision-making will be key to every step of the process which in twelve years will result in the realization of the priority.

The General Minister and President will launch the priority by calling upon all manifestations of the church to be in a time of prayer and reconsecration as each moves to claim the priority as its own. On Pentecost Sunday 1988, all persons in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are encouraged to recommit themselves to God through Jesus Christ, to the renewal of congregational life, and to the whole mission of the church.

Resource materials will be developed to interpret the priority.

Regional teams using available materials will meet with clusters of congregations to interpret and discuss implications of the priority.

A broadly representative team appointed by the General Minister and President will design a Churchwide Planning Conference in 1988 which will bring together congregational, regional and general unit leadership (1) to examine current programs and resources in terms of congregational life, (2) to explore the needs of congregations, and (3) to project future programs along with the leadership and resources which will be needed.

Participants in the Planning Conference will be divided into working groups focused on the Biblical marks of a dynamic church.

The Churchwide Planning Conference held on a conveniently located college or seminary campus will be open to all Disciples who wish to register, attend and participate in one of the working groups.

Based on the information generated at the Churchwide Planning Conference, programmatic resources and materials will be developed and produced for use by congregations as they implement the priority.

Regional events will be planned to introduce resources which can be used to support the development of vital congregations throughout the denomination.

Each biennium the various manifestations of the church will evaluate their progress, reordering, rethinking and renewing their commitment to the priority.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the priority for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for the next twelve years (1988-1999) shall be:

To develop vital congregations as dynamic faith communities in prophetic, redemptive, and reconciling ministries to the whole world.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the implementation process move forward through the affirmation of the priority in the three manifestations of the church, the Churchwide Planning Conference in 1988 and the subsequent implementation of program and resources through the twelve year period.