

No. 8546

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

ADOPTED by the General Assembly

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

The General Assembly designates such priorities at any given time based on the awareness that: (a) the central mission of the church is the proclamation of the Gospel; that is, the promise of God that all persons are forgiven by and reconciled with God and one another by grace through faith in Jesus Christ; (b) the church is the community of persons united in Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit to be sons and daughters of God, the community in and through which Christians express their love for, confidence in, and reliance upon God through worship, evangelism, education, social action, mission and service; and (c) the church is also the people of God called and sent to minister in God's world.

The 1981 Anaheim General Assembly declared that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) would strive in special ways during the 1982-1985 quadrennium to:

Pursue peace with justice

The Biblical imperative of peace, along with the justice that makes it possible, is at the heart of the Christian gospel. Making peace and therefore being among the blessed is a teaching of Jesus that applies in the congregation, in the region, in the nation, in the world. It is inextricably interwoven with hunger and human rights and is linked to a congregation's life and witness. It means dealing with questions of control of nuclear power, armaments, peace-keeping mechanisms based on the equality and oneness of nations under God, crime, injustice, systemic violence, revolution, freedom, racism, discrimination, and economic inequality. World peace is a prerequisite for any improvement in the living conditions of the world's people and new redemptive ministries in pursuit of peace is a priority for the church.

In implementing this priority, the General Assembly recommended 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.

The Peace with Justice priority has been important for Disciples. The present-day tumultuous, conflict-ridden global situation cries out for the church's concern. Indeed there has been wide affirmation that the pursuit of peace with justice is a biblically and theologically mandated task of paramount importance for the church. When the numbers of starving people are rising, national antagonisms remain at the tinder-point, and global militarization is increasing, the temptation often is to give in to a sense of helplessness and apathy about the world, to turn inward and care only for oneself.

Peace with Justice has served a sign of hope in a troubled world — a recognition of God's promise. It has enabled many Christians to refocus and rediscover the mission of the church. In this regard, while greater impact is always hoped for, Disciples responses have been noteworthy.

The priority has also served Disciples in another way. The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) calls upon the three manifestations of the church to work together in complementary and mutually supportive relationships. For Peace with Justice to be truly a priority of the church, it is not enough for it to be adopted by the General Assembly and proclaimed as a priority concern. The priority comes alive when there is a visible, energetic response throughout the church in all its manifestations.

Peace with Justice has provided an opportunity for general administrative units to begin to be effective in encouraging, resourcing and supporting the regional and congregational response. The ultimate test for the priority is the response in congregations. The Shalom Congregation Program developed by the Division of Homeland Ministries has been a major response to this understanding. More than 125 congregations have now enrolled as Shalom congregations.

The 1981 General Assembly called for a Peace Sunday to be designated in order that the whole church might have an opportunity to join in the shared witness of worship, preaching, and study on that day to affirm and express more fully the biblical vision of peace. The second Sunday of Advent has been designated as Peace Sunday. Resource packets developed by the Division of Homeland Ministries, were prepared in 1983 and 1984. The 1985 Peace Sunday packet will be ready for sale at the Des Moines General Assembly.

In 1983, the General Minister and President, believing that the church has a responsibility to provide guidance in ethical thinking for its members, appointed a Panel on Christian Ethics in a Nuclear Age. The Panel, made up of respected scholars and leaders in the church, was directed to reflect upon issues raised by the nuclear age and to share the results of that reflection with the membership of the Church. Their report, "Seeking God's Peace in a Nuclear Age — A Call to Disciples of Christ," has been completed and congregations have been sent complimentary copies of their work. Additional copies will be available for purchase at the Des Moines General Assembly.

Responses from regions and congregations indicate widespread involvement in the implementation of the priority in the church's life.

But peace with justice has not come. So Peace with Justice must remain a priority for all who claim to be followers of the Prince of Peace.

The 1981 Anaheim General Assembly also declared that it would continue to:

Reach out globally to alleviate hunger and extend human rights

Week of Compassion has continued to promote relief of world hunger, both emergency relief and longer-term preventive measures as a year round program. For the first time, in 1984, the regular offering to Week of Compassion amounted to more than \$2,000,000. Designated offerings — for Ethiopia, Africa and other related purposes have provided another half-million dollars for hunger concerns.

Reconciliation continues to respond to problems of poverty and race and Disciples give approximately a half-million dollars for those causes.

But hunger continues rampant in all parts of the world. So alleviation of world hunger and the extension of human rights remains a priority for those who call themselves Disciples of Christ.

The 1981 Anaheim General Assembly also declared that it would continue to:

Renew congregational life and witness

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has sought renewed vitality with a rebirth of faith and spirit, rooted in the Biblical tradition. This has been sought through education, effective leadership, ecumenical endeavors, social involvement, personal witness and evangelism, and establishment of new congregations.

The Department of Evangelism of the Division of Homeland Ministries, supported by the efforts of the National Evangelistic Association, has sought spiritual and numerical growth through word and deed. Through "Church Advance Now," a goal was set to establish 100 new congregations during the 1980s. To date a total of 74 new congregations, 11 of which are ethnic/minority congregations, have been started or are in formation. Additional pastor/developers are expected to be called to areas needing new congregations in 1985.

Preparations are underway for significant advances in the financial support of Basic Mission Finance to enable renewal and extension of the life and witness of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The call is going out for new energy, new levels of commitment and intensified power for:

A Growing Church

- through existing congregations,
- through establishing new congregations,
- through growth of the church around the world;

Spiritual Enrichment

- through education,
- through personal growth,
- through growth in understanding of the Lord's Supper and Baptism,
- through growth in giving;

Growth in Christian Service

- with the poor,
- with minorities,
- with strangers and sojourners in our midst.

So renewal of congregational life and witness remains a priority concern of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

The General Minister and President, who retires from that office at the close of the 1985 Des Moines General Assembly, has proposed that these priorities be continued for the 1986-1987 biennium in order that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) may continue unabated to pursue peace with justice, alleviate world hunger and extend human rights, and renew congregational life and witness;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, August 2-7, 1985, declare that the following three concerns are of vital importance for the whole church, meriting first attention, and should be proclaimed by its leadership and addressed by its general administrative units, regions and congregations as priorities during the 1986-1987 biennium.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will continue to strive in special ways during the 1986-1987 biennium to:

Pursue peace with justice;

Alleviate world hunger and extend human rights;

Renew congregational life and witness.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, 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 priorities for the church during the 1988-1991 quadrennium.