

continued

No. 8539

RESOLUTION CONCERNING THE PRESERVATION OF THE FAMILY FARM FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD!

ADOPTED by the General Assembly

WHEREAS, the family farm is an agricultural production unit in which the management, economic risk, and principal labor are provided by a given family and from which that family receives the bulk of its earnings; and

WHEREAS, the family farm represents one of the basic values of our American culture; and

WHEREAS, the family farm has provided food, not only for us, but for the whole world, and is needed to fight against the hunger our world is facing; and

WHEREAS, a study of the Bible shows that our use of the land requires that we never forget it is (1) a gift in covenant, (2) of God's creation, and not ours, and (3) a corporate gift for the welfare of the whole community, today and always; and

WHEREAS, during the decade of the 70's when the rate of inflation was high, farmers were encouraged (and sometimes required) by lenders to accept larger loans for purchase of more land and bigger equipment than they were requesting; and

WHEREAS, the successful fight against inflation with its high interest rates has produced a sudden deflation of land values (down more than half in many cases), has left the farm borrower with high indebtedness, and insufficient collateral causing loans to be unsecured and lenders to be calling in these loans, often with little notice, so that even well-established, master farmers find themselves in deep trouble — coupled with prices below the cost of production; and

WHEREAS, the farm crisis has caused suffering among farm people, with many losing their homes and livelihood resulting in unemployment, little food, and despair, causing some to turn to violence and suicide, with many others crying for moral, spiritual, emotional, and financial help; and

WHEREAS, the farm crisis not only affects farmers, but also small businesses, banks, schools, churches, and the whole fabric of life in communities of our nation's heartland; and

WHEREAS, the average age of farmers is late 50's and early 60's with very few young persons financially able to enter farming; and

WHEREAS, many government programs to help the farmer have been cut; and

WHEREAS, if current trends continue, it is estimated that the family farm, as we now know it, could disappear by the end of this century,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, August 2-7, 1985, affirm those values and support those policies that will

- strengthen our historic pattern of diversified land ownership and preserve and build an agricultural system based on owner-operated family farms,
- enable young and beginning farmers to get started and stay in farming,
- enable farmers to make a just living and to avoid the necessity of forced farm sales, including foreclosures and forced bankruptcies,
- promote and expand soil conservation and protect and preserve prime agricultural land as an individual, community, and government priority,
- strengthen the social, cultural, and economic fabric of our rural communities and rural life,
- implement a comprehensive farm program that will provide farmers with a profitable price structure that will result in a reasonable return on the farmer's investment in both capital and labor, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we call on our congregations, regions, and general units to work together

- to educate clergy and parishioners in land stewardship values and practices, beginning in our seminaries and continuing with opportunities for local pastors and laity,
- to promote public policies and individual and corporate actions that encourage the preservation of the family farm,
- to contact members of the U.S. Congress concerning their opinions on farm policy legislation including the Farm Policy Reform Act of 1985,
- to seriously consider moving invested funds to small town banks where they can be of help to farmers,
- to find ways to give immediate help to persons and families who are caught in the farm crisis,

- to overcome the sense of powerlessness that often immobilizes us, and to take action and confront those issues, policies, and institutions that debase and destroy our land, farms, and rural communities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we challenge

- the churches* to work together to serve and support an agricultural system based on family farms,
- the churches to make wise use of their own land and to be sure that their farmland is operated by or conveyed upon sale to family farmers,
- the churches and their leaders to be a reconciling force among our farm organizations,
- the churches and the clergy to be active with their farm members in constructive meetings, marches, rallies, and daily deliberations affecting farm operations and farm policies,
- the church to take an active and vocal role in farm issues; to fulfill its role as prophet and witness,
- the clergy to speak from the pulpit on those farm and rural life issues and policies that today threaten the very fabric of life in the heartland,
- local, state, and national officials and agencies to enact policies and laws that will assure diversified land ownership; protect the land, soil, and water; and enable farm families to earn just and equitable incomes, and enhance the vitality of all community life in rural America.