

## No. 8358

### REPORT ON REFERRED RESOLUTIONS CONCERNING A WASHINGTON OFFICE

#### RECEIVED by the General Assembly. Recommendations ADOPTED

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Two resolutions concerning a Washington office for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) were presented for consideration by the 1981 Anaheim General Assembly. A substitute resolution combining the two was prepared by the General Board and submitted to the General Assembly. Following debate, the substitute resolution No. 8140 was defeated by a vote of 1,073 to 831 with 24 absentions. In keeping with a new procedural rule adopted by the Assembly (No. 8150) which states: "If a substitute resolution fails, the original resolution is automatically committed to the Committee on Reference and Counsel for an appropriate recommendation. The original resolution then returns to the floor," the two original resolutions were thus committed. The Committee on Reference and Counsel recommended that the two original resolutions be referred to the Office of General Minister and President with a request that a feasibility report be made to the General Board and a further report to the 1983 General Assembly.

The assessment of the negative vote by the General Assembly in 1981 is that opposition was of two kinds: the first being those who were opposed to the principle that the Disciples should have a Washington-based office for the purpose of communicating concerns to government officials and informing church members about issues before the Congress and national administration; and the second being those who believed that any such office should be ecumenically related.

At the present time the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) participates in the funding of the Washington Office of the National Council of Churches through a minimal financial support of \$1,500 per year from the budget of the Office of General Minister and President. The Department of Church in Society of the Division of Homeland Ministries also has a variety of contacts with ecumenical organizations operating in Washington.

The General Minister and President has gathered financial data from the various denominations that have Washington-based offices. The budgets for those offices range from approximately \$60,000 to \$150,000 per year. From these figures, it has been estimated that a minimal full-time operation would require a budget of from \$60,000 to \$75,000 a year. The cost of "purchasing services" from an already existing office cannot be estimated. It would depend on the specific services contracted for, whether additional staff is required, pro rata costs for various programs, etc.

At the time of the Anaheim General Assembly, the comment of the Commission on Budget Evaluation regarding the resolutions was: "Unless there are significant increases in basic mission finance offerings with a corresponding increase available for the Washington office, the Commission would find it difficult to provide the required allocation."

The General Minister and President has been participating in interdenominational consultations on organizing for effective public policy advocacy with representatives of the 32 member communions of the National Council of Churches. Those consultations have affirmed certain principles which undergird their common life together in the National Council. These include:

- **Shared Commitments.** The 32 member communions have covenanted together to be a community of Christian churches. As a national Christian community they symbolize wholeness in the midst of a broken and fragmented world; share and consult on one another's life; share resources for the common good; affirm one another's uniqueness; and engage in all things together, except those things they cannot because of conscience.
- **Shared Policy.** Through its unit committees, executive committee and Governing Board, the NCCC provides its 32 member communions with forums which for over 30 years have produced a broadly representative and recognized policy base for public policy.
- **Shared Network.** A related network of regional and local ecumenical organizations provide a structure for the development of coordinated information/action networks across the nation, which is a vital part of effective public policy.
- **Shared Witness.** Practical experience demonstrates that the effectiveness of public policy witness is enhanced by speaking with a single voice and engaging in common action.

Based upon these principles, the member communions continue to explore ways by which the various churches may enhance their public policy witness. These suggest the following possibilities:

1. Establish a Committee on Public Policy composed of representatives of member communions, program units of the National Council and regional ecumenical organizations to

coordinate, oversee, review and evaluate the resources required for effective public policy witness. Such a committee would be responsible to the Executive Committee of the National Council of Churches Governing Board.

2. Strengthen the NCCC's Washington office through consolidation of the various council activities in Washington into one office and provide a fulltime director with such additional core staff as resources permit. This would mean member communions might second or support staff for the work together.
3. If a Committee on Public Policy were to be established, it could delegate certain on-going responsibilities to a Washington "operations committee" composed of those with Washington offices. This committee could provide the necessary staff coordination and special assignments.
4. A Committee on Public Policy could be the forum within which the various communions would determine what their relationships would be to the interreligious community and other organizations with similar purposes and goals.

The planning committee which has developed the consultations on coordination has been designated to continue the development of ways and means for the churches to enhance their working together in Washington.

**Recommendations:**

1. That the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) continue to participate in ecumenical conversations that look toward effective cooperative organization for public policy witness and interpretation of public policy to the churches, with such participation to include, as appropriate, representatives of the office of General Minister and President, the department of church in society of the Division of Homeland Ministries, the Capital Area region, and National City Christian Church Corporation.
2. That the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) continue to maintain its presence in public policy witness and interpretation through the Washington Office of the National Council of Churches.
3. That further consideration of the establishment of a Washington office for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) be postponed until such time as the continuing ecumenical conversations may indicate the appropriateness for such an office to be established.