

gifted instrumentality executives of the church, gifted staff colleagues throughout the church, and, as we have seen at this Synod, many, many gifted young people.

"My best gift to the church over the next four years may be the introduction and support of new leadership.

"Occasionally there may be a call for whatever gifts I have for teaching and preaching, and I hope and pray that these gifts will be expressed without protection and without pride.

"I have no doubt that there will be calls for courage in the pursuit of a just peace. I pray that I may not flinch and that I will seek God's strength for the public leadership that is part of the responsibility of the Office of the President.

"In your presence I give the same advice to myself as I gave on Sunday afternoon to Scott Libbey: take good care; let there be wise pace; build in fun and leisure and time with a wonderful family.

"Above all I ask for your prayers."

6. ANNOUNCEMENT CONCERNING RELEASE OF HOSTAGES

President Post then read an announcement which had just been received that the hostages had moved to Damascus and were at the airport awaiting flight to Frankfurt.

7. NOMINATING AND SECONDING SPEECHES FOR EXECUTIVE COUNCIL NOMINEES, CLASS OF 1991

The following speeches were given for nominees for Executive Council, Class of 1991: Mr. Jeff Murakami gave the nominating speech for Mr. Antoine Crenshaw; Rev. Hector Lopez gave the nominating speech for Mr. Larry Garvin; Rev. Robert Fiske gave the nominating speech for Mr. Douglas Hatfield; and Mr. Douglas Albert gave the nominating speech for Mr. Donald Haward.

8. MOTION TO ELECT THE PRESIDENT BY BALLOT.

There was a motion by Rev. Keith VonderOhe (MICH) to elect the President by ballot vote, and when put to a vote it was defeated.

9. RECOGNITION OF MINISTRY OF CHARLES E. COBB

The Moderator, called upon President Post who introduced a moment of recognition for Rev. Charles E. Cobb, who is retiring as Executive Director of the Commission for Racial Justice at the end of 1985. There was a brief audio/visual about Mr. Cobb after which Rev. Edwin K. Edmonds, pastor of Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church in New Haven, Connecticut introduced Mr. Cobb, who gave a speech including thanks to many people who had helped him and influenced him during his life along with his wife, Martha.

10. INTRODUCTION OF THE REV. JOHN M. NAKAJIMA

The Moderator, Rev. John Krueger, called on President Post to introduce and present Rev. John Nakajima, General Secretary of the United Church of Christ in Japan. Rev. Post presented Mr. Nakajima with a chalice.

11. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

The Moderator called on Rev. Gary D. Bryant, Chairperson of the Executive Council, who introduced Rev. Milton Gockley of the Stewardship Council who introduced Rev. Robert Burt of the United Church Board for Homeland Min-

istries. A slide presentation on New Initiatives in Church Development was viewed. President Post ended the presentation with theological reflections on New Initiatives in Church Development.

12. AGENDA REVISION TO POSTPONE PRIORITIES

Because the agenda was behind schedule the delegates were asked to choose between two agendas—the Report of the Committee on Proposed Priorities or the Crisis of the People and the Land. There was a consensus to change the agenda and postpone the Proposed Priorities until evening.

13. PRONOUNCEMENT ON THE CRISIS OF PEOPLE AND THE LAND

The Moderator called on Rev. David Stephens, chairperson of Committee #2, to present the recommended action of Committee #2 which was to adopt the Pronouncement on the Crisis of the People and the Land, and it was

85-GS-28 VOTED: The Fifteenth General Synod adopts the Pronouncement on the Crisis of the People and the Land.

PRONOUNCEMENT ON THE CRISIS OF PEOPLE AND THE LAND

SUMMARY

The fabric of rural life is being affected by the changes taking place in the relationship between people and the land, and between farm families and the rest of U.S. society. Events threaten to end forever the vision our society has had of widespread ownership of agricultural land by productive, working farm families. The proposed pronouncement affirms the Christian commitment to social justice in rural and agricultural life, and calls for a public response to the crisis of people and the land.

BACKGROUND STATEMENT

The relationship between people and the land from which they gain their sustenance is among the most important relationships in our society. Many of our forebearers left their homes in distant places to seek a new world that offered an opportunity for people who worked the land to enjoy the rights and responsibilities of owning it. They formed covenants among themselves, securing the privileges of private property, and adopted policies designed to provide the opportunity of ownership to as many as possible. Out of their experience emerged a social and economic institution—the family farm—in which was vested both economic rights of enterprise, opportunity, and property, and the social responsibilities of stewardship, productivity, and sharing. Current conditions experienced by North American farm families reflect a collapse of this relationship.

It is no irony that the fragile shape of the family farm exists despite a splendid record of productivity in agriculture. An exaggerated emphasis on production without concern for the social use of the product or the welfare of those who produce is now punishing the North American farmer.

The current crisis is the result of both private and public actions. For a brief period in the 1970's, world-wide shortages of food and economic conditions at home and in the rapidly developing world, encouraged the notion that there would be strong demand for export crops, especially grain, from the United States. Declining prices, rising costs, heavy debts and the exceptional strength of the U.S. dollar overseas combined, however, cause acute financial stress for many farm families. This stress has caused severe emotional upheaval as families whose lives and homes are indivisible

from their farm's struggle to survive. As the family farm disappears, land ownership concentrates. Farmers' inability to meet their financial obligations threatens their neighbors who run businesses to which the farmers are indebted. The fabric of rural community life is torn by the conflict that marks the troubled relationship between debtors and creditors. They are often friends and neighbors. They are sometimes members of the same rural congregations.

The tearing of the social fabric of North American rural life is accompanied by threats to the land itself, as erosion eats away at the earth and the environment is endangered by the introduction of pesticides and chemicals intended to enhance production. Meantime, fewer and fewer citizens remain close enough to the day-to-day experience of farming to understand these issues or to appreciate their importance to the larger society.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the Biblical account of creation, God intends harmony between human beings and the rest of nature; a harmony expressed in and blessed by the productivity of the earth. However, as a result of sin, that harmony has been destroyed. This estrangement from nature has resulted in willful misuse of the land.

Still, land is seen as central to God's covenant with people; central to shaping of human community; central to relationships of justice among all peoples who dwell on the earth. Caring for and living in harmony with the land, therefore, have been important visions for the people of God; promises of God which have been fulfilled in Christ, the New Creation, in whom the unity of all creation lies.

Because Christ is the bearer of the New Creation, He is the mandate for the people of God to take with divine seriousness the care of the land. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the people of God, with a committed sense of stewardship, to stand with and assist those who work the land. The Biblical demand for justice and the rightful payment of just reward impels us to speak and to act.

STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN CONVICTION

In light of the crisis visiting the people and the land, the Fifteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls for a public response which affirms the following principles believed basic to the concept of the family farm:

The culture of the land expressed in the practices of farming constitutes a community of values that transcend economic objectives. The relationship of persons to all creation, the care of the land, and the ways of family life and human culture in rural areas should be nurtured and sustained.

Ownership of agricultural land should be widespread among farm families to assure a democratic character to rural communities as well as a vigorous use of agricultural resources.

Farming should provide a meaningful opportunity to earn a decent living, and acquiring farmland for speculative purposes only should be discouraged.

Stewardship of natural resources is both a legitimate public policy objective and a responsibility of land ownership; farmers therefore, should practice soil conservation and the public should support their efforts to do so.

In commitment to these principles, the Fifteenth General

Synod recommends the following goals for farm policy:

Undertaking measures immediately to address the imminent bankruptcy of farm families, exercising as much care as possible to offer people a second chance at productive farming without validating those economic choices that have deepened their problems and made them critical;

Developing policies designed to stabilize agricultural prices and farm income in order to promote a fair return to those who farm the land;

Encouraging farm programs that are long-term in nature and discouraging the dangerous "boom-bust sequence" of recent years;

Advocating strong measures of federal, state, and when appropriate, local governments, to remove from production highly erodible land.

Supporting public and private actions now to encourage and affirm the entry of new farm families on the land;

Eliminating tax and other policies that make attractive the exploitation of human and natural resources, or which favor investments in farm land by high income individuals and those who do not depend on farming for their living.

The purpose of these recommendations, when taken together, is to redefine the social covenant between people and the land and between farm families and the rest of society. The purpose is to affirm the Biblical vision of the just use and care of the land. It is to express concern for the crises exploding around the family farm. It is to stand with those who seek to inform themselves about the problems faced by agriculture in the United States, who engage in public dialogue in an effort to find solutions, who minister with compassionate understanding to the people of the land wherever possible, and who take those actions appropriate and necessary to the achievement of these goals, ever faithful to the church's vocation on earth as witness to the Shalom of God.

14. RESOLUTION "THE FAMILY FARM"

The Moderator called on Rev. David Stephens to present the recommended action of Committee #2 to adopt the Resolution on the Family Farm. Mr. Stephens also spoke to this resolution.

85-GS-29 VOTED: The Fifteenth General Synod adopts the Resolution "The Family Farm."

THE FAMILY FARM

In recognition of the farm crisis and in solidarity with all who suffer because of it,

THEREFORE, the Fifteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ recommends the following actions:

1. That educational resource materials and programs on the rural crisis be developed by the appropriate national instrumentalities for use in rural, urban and suburban churches of the UCC, with emphasis on:

the biblical understanding of land and justice, and the relationship of those understandings to the current crisis and control of land;

the economic relationship between rural and metropolitan people, and the importance of the agricultural economy for the rest of the nation;