

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;

the role of the family farm in providing food and fiber for this nation and the world;

the need for rural/urban cooperation in changing the policies and institutions that have helped engender the current crisis in rural America; and

the need to break down stereotypes and perceptions that culturally divide rural and urban people.

2. That local churches, associations, conferences and national instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ provide increased leadership and support for:

organizations and coalitions that are committed to the preservation and vitality of the family farm and which share the social values and policy goals of the Church;

local, state and national ecumenical programs and projects designed to minister to farm families in crisis; and

programs, projects and organizations seeking to stop the loss of Black-owned land in the U.S. and enhance opportunities for Black farmers to make a living from agriculture.

3. That denominational and ecumenical public policy efforts on farm and rural community issues be focused and strengthened to:

ensure that adequate church resources are made available to support the Church's policy objectives in relation to family farm agriculture;

ensure that the Church's membership across the nation is informed and mobilized to support state and national policy objectives aimed at the survival and vitality of the family farm; and

ensure that the voices of family farmers and other rural people are heard and heeded in the development of public policy by legislators at both the state and national levels.

4. That the Congress of the United States be encouraged to enact legislation which will:

reform Federal tax laws in a manner which removes all elements that encourage unfair competition and the entry of tax-shelter motivated capital into family farm agriculture. Reform should include the elimination or restrictions of existing investment tax credit, accelerated depreciation, capital gains and other tax shelter mechanisms that unfairly penalize family farm operations;

target benefits of federal farm income support and credit programs toward small and moderate-sized farms;

increase income support levels to reflect cost of production, plus a fair profit, coupled with production goals which are met by mandatory and equitable management programs subject to a vote by the farmers;

maintain the Farmer's Home Administration's traditional emphasis on direct loan activity, resisting attempts to reduce the level of direct loans in favor of loan guarantees, and increasing the Limited Resources (LR) Loan Program for those farmers for whom the program is intended from 20 to 25 percent;

lower the existing cap of \$50,000 of Federal Farm payments with strict enforcement on any farmer or farm op-

erator who participates in a government program currently in existence or enacted in the future;

encourage farmers to remove highly erodible land from production and reduce incentives to plow highly erodible land by cutting off farm support payments to farmers to do so;

provide for commodity reserves, isolated from the market, to be established at a level adequate to protect consumers and to meet domestic and global humanitarian food aid requirements;

establish debt relief and restructuring programs which are geared to family farm units only, and which are developed and implemented for the benefit of the owner-operator and not for the sole benefit of the lender;

ensure that all federally-supported programs of research and education in agriculture be required to focus on small and medium-sized family farm operations, and that such programs be especially targeted to minority farmers and land-owners in those areas where they constitute a significant portion of the population;

create comprehensive public policies that will assure the retention of Black-owned land in the U.S., and provide access to land ownership by all minority peoples; and

require that major new research initiatives and programs be undertaken by the federal government to ensure the development of long-term, sustainable agriculture in the U.S.

FURTHER, the Fifteenth General Synod requests the Secretary of the church to communicate this resolution and its recommendations to every local church of the United Church of Christ; the President, the Secretary of Agriculture and the Congress of the United States; and to the Governor and Secretary of Agriculture of every state in the Union, drawing attention to the crisis of the family farm and the need for immediate action at all levels of our society.

15. REPORT OF COMMITTEE #1 ON PRIORITIES

The Moderator called on Rev. Jean Curtis to speak to the Report of Committee #1. She moved that the Fifteenth General Synod adopt the Proposed Goal Statement, the Proposed Designation of Implementors and a National Body as Coordinator for Family Life: A Proposed Priority, it was

16. FAMILY LIFE PROPOSED PRIORITY

85-GS-30 VOTED: The Fifteenth General Synod adopts the Proposed Goal Statement, the Proposed Designation of Implementors and a National Body as Coordinator for Family Life.

GOAL STATEMENT

To enlist all parts of the United Church of Christ in study and action to the end that ministry to families is integrated into the total life of the church, by:

providing for on-going Biblical and theological reflection for members of the UCC on family life and its issues; providing materials for the encouragement of family worship and devotions;

identifying and sharing a variety of resources which will enable all families to be ministered to creatively and all persons, regardless of their family patterns, to be affirmed and supported in the life of the Church, manifesting our unity as a family in Christ;