

Biblical and Theological Rationale

During Jesus' earthly ministry, "great multitudes gathered to hear and to be healed of their infirmities." That ministry reached out to all kinds of people—to Jesus' own people, to the daughter of a Roman centurion, to a Syrophenician woman. Sometimes the healing of Jesus was closely associated with the forgiveness of sins. But when people assumed that blindness was a punishment for sin (in the familiar pattern of "blaming the victim"), Jesus said that the blindness was not a consequence of sin, but an opportunity to show the healing work of God. Jesus healed on the Sabbath, putting works of mercy above adherence to the ceremonial law. He healed those despised and condemned by the public, those whom the public feared because of the possibility of contagion.

When questioned about His credentials, Jesus said: "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me." He commissioned his disciples, both the twelve and the seventy, for ministries of healing.

Today the modern plague of AIDS, like past plagues of history, challenges the church in its ministry of healing. It calls for our best prayers and our most scientific knowledge. In our biblical heritage we find five guidelines for our action.

First, the ministry of healing is a compassionate ministry. Sometimes AIDS is the consequence of the patient's own behavior; sometimes (as in the case of infants born with the ailment) it has nothing at all to do with the patient's behavior. In either case, the church seeks ways to comfort and heal.

Second, the church seeks all possible information and medical skills for the prevention and healing of disease. It asks medical institutions, foundations, and government agencies to engage in research to overcome ignorance and superstition and to help those who suffer illness.

Third, as in all healing, the church seeks to involve the patients in their own prevention and overcoming of illness. Jesus frequently asked the sick to participate in their recovery. "Rise, take up your bed and go home. Your faith has made you well."

Fourth, the church commends those who, at cost and risk to themselves, engage in ministries of healing. Fortunately, the best scientific knowledge allays the fears and hysterias of those who thought AIDS was highly contagious. But the church admires those who, even before that knowledge was available, ministered to the sick without knowing the risk to themselves.

In the spirit of the Great Physician, the church endorsed the work of persons, hospitals, and hospices that now seek to help persons with AIDS. And it calls upon its own institutions and the institutions of society and government to make all possible efforts toward the prevention and healing of this ailment.

Fifth, toward the end of Jesus' life he commissioned his disciples to preach, to teach, and heal in his name. He told them that they were his hands and feet, the embodiment of God's love for the world. We who accept the call to embody God's love in our time, like Jesus, will walk and talk with the ill and their families; we will confront the narrow prejudices that have caused society to isolate and judge the ill and their families; and we will carry the vision of wholeness that we know through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we will carry the good news that in Christ, God has redeemed all creation.

A Statement of Christian Conviction

In light of the pandemic of AIDS that has struck 100,000 peo-

ple and is expected to spread to millions unless effective medical, educational, research and control programs are established, the Sixteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon the churches to embody God's love for the world and to announce the good news that in Christ, God has redeemed all creation. It also calls for a public response that makes the following affirmations.

1. Persons with AIDS and their families deserve sensitive pastoral care, comprehensive quality medical and social services, housing, and health care insurance.
2. Persons with AIDS need to be assured that their jobs are secure. In order to assure employment security, employers, including United Church of Christ related bodies, need to develop just employment policies and practices.
3. Medical personnel, in order to provide quality care may need to share medical information within the medical treatment community regarding sero-positive persons on a medical 'need to know' basis.
4. All persons need to be educated about the pandemic and about prevention of AIDS in ways that enable them to work through their fears and prejudices and convinces them to adopt effective preventive behavior.
5. Sex education beginning early in elementary school, as called for by the Surgeon General, is a major component of the effort to contain the AIDS pandemic. Curricula need to address the physical, social and ethical nature of human sexuality and teach skills for responsible personal decision-making.
6. Government funding of research, service, education, treatment and prevention must become a global priority.
7. State, federal and local governments must work to guarantee the protection of constitutional rights of people infected with HIV, with ARC and AIDS to insure personal privacy and access to public services and education.
8. Education to curb the use of illicit intravenous drugs, to teach AIDS prevention in the drug community and increased development of drug rehabilitation services should be a high priority for confronting the spread of AIDS.
9. Voluntary testing must be readily accessible to all people on the basis of informed consent and accompanied by counseling,—counseling to facilitate informed decision making about whether or not to be tested and post-testing counseling including attention to means of behavior change which will protect the individual from infection or protect others from infection. In order to assure the success of volunteer testing, confidentiality must be guaranteed, and there should be no disclosure of test results without consent. Test or test results should not be used as a condition of employment or insurability.
10. The church must teach responsible sexuality and faithfulness in relationships, bringing biblical and theological insights into a candid discussion of this crisis.

8. PROPOSAL FOR ACTION "HEALTH AND WHOLENESS IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC"

The Moderator recognized Rev. Avery Post who spoke on health and human services ministries, wishing to celebrate the growth on issues of health and human services within the United Church of Christ.

Ms. Hoffman recommended the following proposed additions to the printed material:

1. In the section titled "To the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries" in the fourth paragraph, after the phrase, "to control the spread of AIDS" add: "including the distribution of the Surgeon General's report on Ac-

quired Immune Deficiency Syndrome to the churches and support for his strategies for AIDS prevention."

2. In the section titled "To The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries" in the last paragraph, after the word "procedures," add the phrase: "within the Center for Disease Control guidelines."

Ms. Hoffman moved that the Sixteenth General Synod adopt the Proposal for Action on "Health and Wholeness In The Midst of Pandemic" with additions shown above.

Following discussion it was voted to close debate.

87-GS-102 Voted: The Sixteenth General Synod adopts the Proposal for Action "Health and Wholeness In The Midst of A Pandemic" as amended.

Proposal For Action Health and Wholeness in the Midst of A Pandemic

Summary

This Proposal for Action designates the responsibilities of the members, congregations, conferences, agencies, and instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ to address the physical, spiritual, social, legal and public policy issues related to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

Background

The Pronouncement, "Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a Pandemic," adopted by the Sixteenth General Synod, presents the theological understanding that God intends the community of faith to hold the vision of wholeness as God's intention for the world. Wherever God's children suffer illness or oppression, the community of faith is called to embody God's redemptive love.

AIDS is a devastating disease spreading rapidly across the United States and around the world. This Proposal for Action is a call to the United Church of Christ to respond to the pandemic of AIDS in the world.

Directional Statements and Goals

WHEREAS, the Sixteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ has adopted the Pronouncement, "Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a Pandemic," and

WHEREAS, this Pronouncement raised important concerns and issues to be addressed by the church;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Sixteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon:

Members and congregations of the United Church of Christ, in consultation with UCC members and constituencies with experience in AIDS-related ministry, to become knowledgeable about AIDS and become leaders in the mobilization of compassionate ministries, effective public policy, and preventive education in their communities, in the nation, and in the global community.

Our church families to engage in open and prayerful dialogue to foster the development of faithful Christian attitudes and expressions of our human sexuality.

Congregations, conferences, and instrumentalities to review personnel policies and benefits to insure that persons with AIDS and those otherwise directly or indirectly affected by AIDS are not discriminated against in employment, or in eligibility for and access to full benefits.

Conferences in the UCC to provide resources to their congregations to assist them in playing a leadership role in the community;

Provide personnel and necessary resources to citizens' groups working to control the pandemic and provide support systems for persons with AIDS, AIDS-related conditions, their families, friends and caregivers;

Provide opportunities for reconciliation between person with AIDS and AIDS-related conditions with their families and the larger community;

Work to eradicate fears surrounding AIDS by exposing the misunderstandings which create those fears;

Create specialized ministries to persons with AIDS and AIDS-related conditions and their families and friends;

Work to establish state and local policies which protect the constitutional rights of persons affected by AIDS.

The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries to establish an AIDS Ministries Clearinghouse to provide information, media resources, technical assistance to churches and religiously affiliated groups and institutions;

Initiate local religious responses to AIDS by informing religious people, providing guidance for church effort in communities, offering training for clergy, and facilitating local ministries of care and support;

Continue to develop and promote youth and adult resources to aid in teaching responsible sexuality and relational faithfulness, and which identify those elements in our culture which encourage superficial and casual relationships;

Initiate community-based citizen committees to stop AIDS, stimulate action to support efforts to maintain civil liberties of persons with AIDS, and expand public education to control the spread of AIDS, including the distribution of the Surgeon General's report on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome to the churches and support for his strategies on AIDS prevention;

Initiate innovative community-based preventative education models;

Assist in increasing awareness, knowledge and services available to persons with AIDS through United Church of Christ-affiliated health and human service providers;

Encourage United Church of Christ-related colleges and seminaries to study AIDS and AIDS-related issues, particularly as they are manifest in the academic environment, to promote preventative AIDS education and develop just and equitable personnel policies;

Provide advocacy in consultation with the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries beyond the UCC for the support of health care workers, encourage their employers to initiate education policies and procedures, within the Centers for Disease Control guidelines, that enhance the safety, security and well-being of those who provide care to those infected with HIV;

The United Church Board for World Ministries to provide information to local churches, associations and conferences on how the UCC is responding to the AIDS crisis on a worldwide basis and how these groups may further assist this response;

Coordinate the gathering and dissemination of global research data on AIDS throughout the United Church of Christ;

Encourage Church World Service to provide services which address the needs of persons with AIDS and AIDS-related conditions, their families and friends;

Work with partner churches in the development of strategies to address the AIDS crisis.

The Office for Church in Society to address AIDS-related legislative issues at state and national levels to sustain the civil rights of persons with AIDS, increase funding for research, expand preventive education, and expand support services to persons with AIDS;

Provide advocacy within and beyond the United Church of Christ for services, public policies, and legislation which address the needs of persons with AIDS and AIDS-related conditions, their families and friends;

Collaborate with the United Church Board for World Ministries to provide the United Church of Christ with a global connection to AIDS data and research through the United Nations and the World Health Organization;

Call upon the government of the United States to contribute to the World Health Organization campaign against AIDS;

Monitor and advocate for administrative and legislative efforts to support the World Health Organization campaign against AIDS and with the United Church Board for World Ministries, through their Non-Governmental Organization representatives to the United Nations, to monitor the campaign and to keep national bodies and United Church of Christ members informed of the progress of the World Health Organization campaign.

The Office For Church Life and Leadership to provide liturgical and pastoral resources for clergy and churches pertaining to a reconciling and healing ministry related to AIDS within the local congregation and the local interfaith community;

Collaborate with the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries to provide clergy and chaplains with resources to expand their pastoral care and counseling ministries with persons with AIDS and AIDS-related conditions, their families and friends, as well as to others with AIDS-related concerns.

The Commission for Racial Justice to advocate for fair and equitable treatment for all population groups with respect to AIDS screening, treatment and provision of services;

Provide leadership among ethnic and minority churches to deal compassionately with AIDS-related issues at the local church level.

The Coordinating Center for Women in Church and Society to provide information and consciousness-raising to the church on AIDS and AIDS-related conditions and issues particularly as they affect women;

Provide advocacy for the development of resources, services, and public policies which address the needs of persons with AIDS and AIDS-related conditions, their families and friends, particularly women.

The Stewardship Council to collaborate with the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries in providing resources for use in local churches which focus on AIDS ministries.

The Office of Communication to provide media resources which relate to the mission of the church in relationship to AIDS;

Advocate for media to provide public service announcements for preventive education and resource referral.

The Council for Health and Human Service Ministries to acknowledge the selfless commitment of persons engaged in ministries of healing with persons with AIDS and encourage all UCC members to prayerfully support these caregivers;

Acknowledge the potential fear and anxiety of caregivers for persons with AIDS and encourage CHHSM member institutions to hold appropriate educational forums for the discussion of these anxieties;

Provide information on AIDS from the medical community and encourage CHHSM members to make themselves available as resources throughout the UCC.

Fiscal Implications

To facilitate existing programs, some of the costs are already provided in the operating budgets of local churches, conferences and national agencies and instrumentalities. Implementation is subject to availability of funds.

At this time, a moment of prayer was offered from the floor.

9. RESOLUTION "U.S. PEACE TAX FUND ACT"

The Moderator introduced Ms. Dollie Burwell, Chairperson of Committee 30.

Ms. Burwell moved that the Sixteenth General Synod adopt the Resolution "U.S. Peace Tax Fund Act." Following discussion it was

87-GS-103 Voted: The Sixteenth General Synod adopts the Resolution "U.S. Peace Tax Fund Act."

United States Peace Tax Fund Act

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) have supported their members and others who conscientiously are opposed to participation in war; and

WHEREAS, the UCC Office for Church in Society and the Disciples of Christ Peace Fellowship support a "Peace Tax Fund;" and

WHEREAS, those who are conscientiously opposed to participation in military action should be provided an opportunity to indicate their opposition by directing their tax payments toward non-military expenditures; and

WHEREAS, General Synod XV called upon the denomination to become a Just Peace Church; and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) adopted peace with justice as a priority at its 1981 General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, Peace Tax Fund bills have been introduced in the House (HR 3032) and the Senate (S 1468); and

WHEREAS, these bills are to amend the current Internal Revenue Code in order to provide that a taxpayer conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form may elect to have such taxpayer's income, estate or gift tax payments spent only for non-military purposes, and to create the United States Peace Tax Fund to receive such tax payments to be administered by a United States Peace Tax Fund Board of Trustees; and

WHEREAS, the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ has voted to support the Peace Tax Fund Bills (HR 3032 and S 1468);

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Sixteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ goes on record in support of a "Peace Tax Fund;" and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, the Sixteenth General Synod encourages National Offices and Instrumentalities, Conferences, Associations, local churches and members to support the Peace Tax Fund and communicate their support to elected representatives.