

## TUESDAY AFTERNOON

### DEPLORING VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE

WHEREAS, we are commanded to love God with hearts, minds, and souls, and to love our neighbors and ourselves (Mt. 22:37-39), to love one another, even as Jesus loved the disciples, and the quality of our love for one another is the identifying mark of faithful discipleship (Jn. 14:34-35);

WHEREAS, one expression of love is solidarity and support for those who are oppressed and who are the victims of violence;

WHEREAS, violent incidents against lesbian and gay people are markedly increasing, including 64 murders, as well as 835 documented physical assaults during 1987;

WHEREAS, the rise in the level of violence, as well as other discriminatory practices is partially attributed to increased homophobia related to the AIDS crisis;

WHEREAS, all oppressed communities including women, African Americans, Hispanics, Pacific and Asian-Americans, Native Americans, Jews, refugees, the poor, and the homeless are experiencing increased levels of both individual and systemic violence;

WHEREAS, society and all people benefit from individual and collective efforts aimed at reducing violence;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod of the United Church of Christ denounces violence against lesbian and gay people;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon the delegates of the 17th General Synod, Conferences, Associations, members of local churches and the Office for Church In Society to communicate and advocate support for the "Hate Crimes Statistics Bill (S419/USHR 1048) and support the inclusion of "sexual orientation" in the bill;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries to develop and distribute educational materials on the topic of violence against all oppressed and minority groups including lesbian and gay people;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon all local churches, Associations, Conferences, national agencies, Instrumentalities and other institutions to become aware of oppressive violence against lesbian and gay people within their jurisdictions and to develop ways to put it to an end.

Financial Implications: Subject to the availability of funds.

### 12. SUSPENSION OF RULES FOR AIDS MINISTRY FUNDING NEW BUSINESS

89-GS-105 VOTED: The 17th General Synod suspends rules to introduce new business.

89-GS-106 VOTED: The 17th General Synod calls upon the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries to maintain its current level of financial support or greater for AIDS ministry, both in staff and funding, through the next biennium.

A division of the house was called for, there was some confusion and a recount was also taken. By a vote of Yes - 321,

No - 312 the vote on the AIDS funding motion carried.

### 13. SPEAK OUT

During the Speak Out, an opportunity for brief statements of concern, delegates and other participants brought matters to the attention of the Synod.

### 14. RESOLUTION "SUPPORT FOR THE PEACE PROCESS IN CENTRAL AMERICA"

Assistant Moderator Alida Millham introduced the Rev. Richard Riddoch (RM), Chairperson of Committee 16, who presented the report of the Committee.

On behalf of the Committee Mr. Riddoch moved that the 17th General Synod adopt the Resolution "Support for the Peace Process in Central America."

89-GS-107 VOTED: The 17th General Synod adopts the Resolution "Support for the Peace Process in Central America."

### SUPPORT FOR THE PEACE PROCESS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

WHEREAS, the 15th General Synod of the United Church of Christ called for support of the peacemaking efforts of the CONTADORA countries to find a negotiated solution to the Central America crisis;

WHEREAS, on August 7, 1987, the five Central America presidents signed a peace accord, "Esquipulas II" which initiated a peace process for the region and provided a feasible alternative to end the war;

WHEREAS, the United States Government, in continuing to grant aid to the Contras, specifically violates the terms of the peace process;

WHEREAS, the Latin America Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches (at the Governing Board meeting in November, 1987) called upon all Christians in the United States to express support for the Central America peace process;

WHEREAS, the UCBWM church partners and ecumenical agencies in Central America are supporting actively the peace process - e.g. the appointment of Dr. Gustavo Parajon, CEPAD, to the National Reconciliation Commission and local church participation in regional reconciliation commissions in Nicaragua;

WHEREAS, 100 church leaders in Central America wrote a theological statement on this Kairos moment in Central America and asked for U.S. church support;

WHEREAS, the Roman Catholic churches in El Salvador initiated a national debate in July, 1988 to encourage dialogue on the peace process and the churches have asked for our support of that discussion;

WHEREAS, the UCBWM at its 179th Annual Meeting voted a resolution on support for the peace process in Central America;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon all UCC members to send letters of support for the Central America peace accords

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to UCC church partners in Central America and the Central America presidents;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon the President of the United States and Congress to respect the Central America peace accord and to actively support the various procedures such as the cease-fire, and cessation of aid to irregular forces, i.e. the Contras, non-use of territory to attack other states and financial support for refugees and displaced persons when the peace accord conditions are met, and to grant to the CONTADORA countries the right to self-determination, reconstruction, and their own destiny;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon the Office for Church in Society and United Church Board for World Ministries to provide educational and advocacy resources on the peace process, and upon United Church of Christ congregations to support actively the Central America peace accord process.

Financial Implications: Subject to the availability of funds.

### 15. RESOLUTION "AN APPEAL FOR ASSISTANCE TO TROUBLED ARMENIA"

On behalf of the Committee Mr. Riddoch moved that the 17th General Synod adopt the Resolution "An Appeal For Assistance To Troubled Armenia."

89-GS-108 VOTED: The 17th General Synod adopts the Resolution "An Appeal For Assistance To Troubled Armenia."

### AN APPEAL FOR ASSISTANCE TO TROUBLED ARMENIA

#### Summary

Recognizing that Armenia had a devastating earthquake which caused enormous loss of life and destroyed large numbers of apartments and dwellings; recognizing that more than 500,000 persons are now homeless as a result, a figure equivalent to 15% of the total population of Armenia; recognizing further, the persecution of Armenians of mountainous Karabagh (historic ancestral region known as Artzakh) suffered at the hands of Muslim Azerbaijanis (Azeris) in consequence of the peaceful request made to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia (USSR) for the annexation of Karabagh to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia; and recognizing further the fact that over 50,000, and according to other figures, 200,000 Armenians ended up as refugees: this resolution calls for two actions, namely, (1) to rally our UCC churches to raise generous funds to assist in the rebuilding of Armenian lives and their habitations; and (2) to call upon the World Council of Churches, our President and the U.S. Government and its departments to request of Mikhail Gorbachev to correct an injustice done under Stalin when Armenian Karabagh with an 80% Armenian population was made part of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan.

#### Background

In February, 1987 peaceful demonstrations were held in the capital city of Armenia, Yerevan, asking the USSR Central Committee to transfer Karabagh from the Azerbaijan Republic to the Armenian Republic. The request was made on the grounds that Karabagh (Artzakh for Armenians) was the ancestral home of Armenians and that Stalin had unjustly and discriminatorily assigned the region to the Azerbaijan Republic. The Armenians wanted Mikhail Gorbachev to rectify the

injustice done in the past chiefly to pacify Turkey as Azerbaijanis (Azeris) are Moslem. Thousands of Azeris took to the streets in Sumgait, a seaport city on the Caspian Sea with a substantial Armenian population, and murdered hundreds of Armenians. Official Soviet communiques put the killings at 31. Protests have continued in Sumgait and Baku, another city on the Caspian with an Armenian population of 300,000. Similar protests are being made in other towns in Azerbaijan. Some towns have been totally emptied of their Armenian inhabitants. There have been rapes, homes have been attacked with some having been set on fire, and a good many children are missing. The terrorist activities have forced deportations as a result of fear and the number of deportees have been estimated from 50,000 to 200,000.

As if the ethnic strife and the hurts were not sufficient troubles, a devastating earthquake shook the cities and towns of northeastern Armenia bordering Turkey on Wednesday, December 7, 1988 precisely at 11:41 on a work day morning. An entire town, Spitak, ceased to exist, thousands of school children were buried alive, and the cities of Leninakan and Kirovakan and cities and towns all across northwestern Armenia were flattened with cries of many survivors, "Somewhere here is my brother." The grief is terrible, the agony of Armenia deep.

The estimated loss of life is placed at approximately 35,000 persons. Rebuilding will run into a score of billions. With the consumer and construction good shortages, the agony will be of long duration.

The population of Armenia is put at 3.4 million, occupying 11,500 square miles. An ancient people dating to 1000 B.C., their country was invaded by many warrior people and it became an important buffer state between the Romans and the Persians. In the 16th century most of the country was occupied by the Muslim Ottoman Empire. Following the Turkish defeat in World War I, Armenia achieved independence but in 1920 the Soviet Union absorbed much of its territory and Armenia became a Socialist Soviet Republic.

Armenia became the first State to adopt Christianity as a national religion. It held its Christian faithfulness under great tribulation withstanding Zoroastrian and Muslim pressures unto the shedding of blood. Always open to Christian truths, many Armenians embraced the preaching and teaching of missionaries during the great worldwide missionary movements of the 19th century. The missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (now the United Church Board for World Ministries) were received well and a mini reformation, the Armenian Evangelical Movement, took hold strongly in Turkey only to be felled as a result of the Turkish atrocities of 1915-1918 against the Armenians. The Armenian Evangelical Movement has prayed for an open door in Godless Soviet Armenia so it can do its mission and energize and inspire, once again, the Christian spirit of the nation.

#### The Theological Background

The prophets of the Old Testament throughout have called for social justice, freedom of conscience and righteousness. These are the fundamental challenges and the most important needs of humanity. We are called to be obedient to the call. "What doth the Lord require of thee?" Micah inquires, "but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8) Amos, rejected solemn assemblies, burnt offerings and songs as a way to God and calls for "judgment to run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."