

TUESDAY MORNING

racial, democratic South Africa and the abolition of apartheid, especially the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa and the South African Council of Churches;

- d. Pray earnestly for our sisters and brothers in Southern Africa, especially that their suffering may soon end and peace with justice may reign in all Southern Africa;
- e. Call upon the United Church Board for World Ministries to report back at General Synod 18.

Financial Implications: Subject to the availability of funds.

23. RESOLUTION "MINISTRY TO PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE"

Ms. Wong pointed out some changes to be made in the text, then she moved the adoption of the Resolution "Ministry to Prisoners of Conscience." After some discussion it was

89-GS-89 VOTED: The 17th General Synod adopts the Resolution "Ministry to Prisoners of Conscience."

MINISTRY TO PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Background

Scripture informs us that our Creator has a concern and an interest for those who are afflicted and in captivity. This concern reflected in Isaiah 58:6-9 focuses our attention on the care of others and commits us to action and faithful witness as God's people: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free . . . to share bread . . . to bring in the homeless poor . . . to cover the naked."

Hebrews 13:3 calls us to "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body." Scripture in so stating clarifies that this is not a mere mechanical act but one of true empathy for others.

In John 10:9-10 we are informed that abundant life is only possible when Christ is made known to us, in our lives, "I am the door . . . I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Jesus teaches us that he is continually revealing himself in human history and making himself known to us through our brothers and sisters who need our care. "When did we see you, Lord? . . . When I was in prison you came to see me. If you do it to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me."

As Jesus clearly manifests his personal concern for the incarcerated people, he being himself a prisoner, and teaches us that the relationship with those in prison is part of our Christian responsibility; the Ministry to Prisoners of Conscience, in an attempt to respond faithfully to Christ's call, brings to your attention the cry for justice and mercy for prisoners who are subjected to discriminatory treatment from prison officials and our responsibility to improve the prison conditions of prisoners.

Text of the Resolution

WHEREAS, a Prisoner of Conscience is a person imprisoned - awaiting trial, serving a sentence, or incarcerated without a trial (such as on grand jury contempt charges) - for reasons of

acts, associations or beliefs based on a fundamental concern for social justice and human rights (some of these concerns for self-determination of oppressed peoples and nations are considered by authorities as in opposition to prevailing United States foreign, domestic and military policies); well over 100 prisoners of conscience have been identified by The Ministry to Prisoners of Conscience and other human rights organizations;

WHEREAS, the 15th General Synod committed itself to creating a Ministry to Prisoners of Conscience which would monitor the treatment of prisoners within the U.S. prison system, provide pastoral care and advocate on their behalf;

WHEREAS, the General Synod found it important that educational materials be developed on the plight of these prisoners and that public lobbying be carried out for the effecting of changes in present prison policies which perpetuate injustices to prisoners; the Ministry to Prisoners of Conscience has joined the efforts of the United Nations Human Rights Campaign which will study the case of each prisoner of conscience and contact with Amnesty International has been made;

WHEREAS, the inclusive nature of the United Church of Christ required that this ministry be a shared ecumenical network of pastoral care, many denominations (Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal and Disciples of Christ) have adopted similar resolutions and have joined us in this ministry;

WHEREAS, United Church of Christ Instrumentalities (UCBHM, OCIS, CRJ, CCW), Conferences and the Chicago Metropolitan Association have shared in the commitment of making this ministry a reality through their time and financial support, the ministry today has created such a network of pastoral care, monitoring and advocacy which counts with national volunteers who visit prisoners representative of various social movements; a director; a central office in Evanston, Ill.; and an ecumenical board composed of the Midwest Regional National Council of Churches Racial Justice Working Group representatives, Illinois Conference staff, attorneys as well as lay and community persons;

WHEREAS, behavior modification units also known as control units, have been constructed (such as those in Marion, Illinois and Mariana, Florida) to carry out both physical and psychological torture of prisoners, in order that they may be made broken people and ineffective in their lives of struggle for justice, for example, Alejandrina Torres (now in San Diego, CA prison), confined in various prisons since 1984 and charged with seditious conspiracy because she and her husband, United Church of Christ Pastor Jose Torres, have been active in the Puerto Rican independence movement, during which time this mother of five and grandmother has been sexually assaulted by male guards and abused in many other ways, and

WHEREAS, the Ministry to Prisoners of Conscience needs the help of the United Church of Christ in order to further implement the work of this ministry to prisoners.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod of the United Church of Christ:

Affirms the efforts of this new ministry;

Encourages local congregations through Conferences and Associations to reach out to prisoners of conscience in local area prisons, to their families, and volunteers as they effect visits;

Requests that the appropriate division of the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice in cooperation with the National Council of Churches Racial Justice Working Group and the Ministry to Prisoners of Conscience actively develop and disseminate information on the plight of Prisoners of Conscience which can fight discrimination towards these prisoners;

Calls upon the United Church of Christ Office for Church in Society in cooperation with the Ministry to Prisoners of Conscience and United Church of Christ United Nations observers to actively participate in the lobbying efforts of the United Nations Human Rights Campaign which through its attention to prisoners of conscience can bring about change in their present discriminatory treatment, and

Calls upon the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries to coordinate the efforts of the Commission for Racial Justice, Coordinating Center for Women, Office for Church in Society and the appropriate divisions of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries as advocates for this ministry to prisoners of conscience and to report annually to the Executive Council on the progress and needs of this ministry. This is to be financed through existing available resources in the budgets of the above named instrumentalities.

24. RESOLUTION "THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS FOR REFUGEES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA"

Ms. Wong moved the adoption of the Resolution "Protection of Human Rights for Refugees in Southeast Asia." A friendly amendment was made to add to the last paragraph "... but that the United States Government will not provide covert military aid to any of these Southeast Asia countries." This amendment was accepted and it was

89-GS-90 VOTED: The 17th General Synod adopts the Resolution "Protection of Human Rights for Refugees in Southeast Asia," as amended.

PROTECTION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF REFUGEES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

WHEREAS, refugees from Cambodia/Kampuchea, Vietnam and Laos continue to flee deprivation, human rights abuses, civil war, violence and famine, and are crowded in refugee camps particularly on the Thai border and in Hong Kong;

WHEREAS, as of May 31, 1989 there were 83,296 Vietnamese boat people in camps and centers in East and Southeast Asia, the highest number since 1979. In addition, 75,100 Laotian refugees remained in camps in northern Thailand, as well as an estimated 350,000 Cambodians/Kampuchean;

WHEREAS, in the last two years countries of first asylum in Southeast Asia have become increasingly intolerant of new arrivals; resettlement countries outside the region, including the United States, have diminished in their commitment to resettle refugees; and as a result refugees have increasingly suffered abuses of their human rights as evidenced by the increased savage attacks on boat people by pirates, a weakening of efforts by governments to protect them and the push-backs of refugees from coming ashore which have resulted in the deaths of refugee men, women and children;

WHEREAS, thousands of Cambodian Kampuchean refugees are held in camps along the Thai-Cambodian border to which

the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has no access to extend a protection mandate, camps where refugees suffer harassment, abuse, malnutrition and mental illness;

WHEREAS, 700 Cambodian Kampuchean refugees recently escaped during a shelling from a Khmer Rouge camp and were threatened by the Thai government with being returned to the same camp; the refugees asked for the right of freedom of association, in effect, the right to disassociate themselves with the Khmer Rouge;

WHEREAS, the exodus of the boat people from Vietnam is increasing, host countries are increasingly encouraging the use of forced repatriation, and western countries have failed to resettle them, and the principle of first asylum in Southeast Asia is threatened;

WHEREAS, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and all who dwell therein; and that Jesus Christ proclaimed, I came that all might have life and have it abundantly; and that by welcoming the stranger we also welcome him;

WHEREAS, we seek to listen and support the concerns of our partner churches overseas;

WHEREAS, we seek to hold to the international conventions to which the United States is signatory, that our nation too must be held accountable for upholding;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod affirms:

1. The right of a person to leave and to return to one's homeland and to seek asylum elsewhere be affirmed as a universal principle of refugee protection which must be vigorously defended, based on the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articles 13 and 14;
2. The screening procedures for determining the refugee status of individuals should be fair, just and expedient; those who are determined to be refugees should be resettled and not left waiting indefinitely in refugee camps; those screened out should have access to an appeals process and legal counsel; governmental officials with the authority to determine status be separate from any enforcement agency;
3. Increased resettlement opportunities for Southeast Asian refugees should be ensured by Western countries, and the United States especially should contribute to a comprehensive solution for the humanitarian problems in Southeast Asia; our commitment should be generous, and of unlimited duration;
4. Internationally accepted safeguards should be established to protect the human rights of those returning to their homeland; and the voluntary nature of repatriation be affirmed;
5. The Orderly Departure Program agreed upon between the United States government and Vietnam should be strengthened and expanded to minimize the need for clandestine and dangerous departures by boat from Vietnam;
6. Camps located in places where lives are threatened should be transferred to locations of peace and security; camps with inadequate shelter, clothing, sanitation, or food should be improved and social services be provided to elderly, unaccompanied minors, mothers, single parents and disabled;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the 17th General Synod affirms that those Refugees in camps along the Thai/Cambodian Border should have the right to freedom of political association.