

21. CONTINUATION OF ACTION ON RESOLUTION "ACKNOWLEDGING THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LANDING OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS AND A UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST RESPONSE"

The Moderator reintroduced Mr. Tubbs, Chairperson of Committee Eight. Following clarification of the position of the discussion, general discussion of this resolution continued. The Eighteenth General Synod terminated debate on this Resolution.

91-GS-93 VOTED: The Eighteenth General Synod adopts the Resolution "Acknowledging the 500th Anniversary of the Landing of Christopher Columbus and a United Church of Christ Response."

ACKNOWLEDGING THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LANDING OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS AND A UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST RESPONSE

Preamble

The General Synod is aware that justice is a primary expression of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many actions for racial justice dot the landscape of General Synod Minutes. The Sixteenth General Synod enacted a pronouncement and proposal for action confirming the commitment to the Council for American Indian Ministry, and that Council's mission. This resolution continues in that tradition.

The Eighteenth General Synod receives with appreciation the resolution of the Council on American Indian Ministries, the Board for World Ministries, the Ohio Conference, the Northern California Conference, the Connecticut Conference, the Pennsylvania West Conference and the Minnesota Conference. Components of these resolutions are incorporated in what follows:

Theological and Biblical Basis

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) commands that the church make disciples within each nation on earth. Those who came to the American continent following the Columbus journey sought to do just that. Now, 500 years later, we are in a position to review the history of dealings with the people of this land, and all that has been a part of the growth and development of nations and cultures in the Americas, and the Pacific Islands.

While the dominant people are likely to celebrate and claim great achievement in government, commerce, and culture; it is not appropriate to mark this anniversary without a solemn awareness that some peoples in America have nothing to celebrate. Indeed, this observance is the occasion for strong judgment on the past 500 years.

The legacy of these 500 years is profoundly ambiguous. Native Americans are at the bottom of most lists of social indices. Treaties made solemnly have been broken whenever it suited the purposes of the dominant culture, and they continue to be discounted, discarded, or proposed to be broken.

As Christians, we are called to love all others as ourselves, and to love the Spirit which lives in each being with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We are blessed as peacemak-

ers, called to lighten the load of the oppressed, and to see their yoke as our own. We are called by Scripture continually to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with the God of all relations, assured that our interconnectedness is written on our hearts, and warned of the consequences of acts of separation.

The mission of the United Church of Christ includes, and goes beyond, the Great Commission to include justice and judgment. The United Church of Christ is called to speak a word of Truth and Justice about the observance, and to give support to the Council for American Indian Ministry and join with them in a call for a new commitment to the development of justice for those who have known oppression and genocide resulting from the European colonization.

Brief Rationale for Synod Action

The General Synod as the body best able to speak on behalf of the whole United Church of Christ has an opportunity to say a prophetic and healing word to the church and the world. Our membership includes those whose ancestors were the evangelizers as well as survivors of the genocide. It is an act of faithfulness to examine the whole history of these 500 years, to confess our complicity in the genocide, and to avoid denial of the truth through nationalistic and patriotic celebrations. We are called to a truthful telling of this history and to a new commitment to a just peace in the Americas.

Background Discussion

1992 is the 500th Anniversary of the first voyage of Christopher Columbus to this continent. Many groups in the United States, including the federal government, have planned large celebrations. Others, however, are painfully aware of the event that led to the devastation of Native Peoples in the Americas. When Columbus and other European explorers first came to these shores, the people native to this land welcomed them and shared with them the fruits of the earth and the hospitality of their hearts. This welcome was spurned, and the native peoples were mistreated, killed and driven from their land. The fruits of the earth which they had long treasured were plundered to exhaustion.

The Native American population in the U.S. was reduced by 90 percent (from 10 million in 1492 to 240,000 by 1900), their culture and spirituality were destroyed, and the people and land were exploited for the profit of the Euro-Americans.

Christians have begun to grow aware of the Church's complicity in these destructive events. While the Church must never apologize for proclaiming the Gospel, the manner in which the Gospel was proclaimed must be studied. The Christianity which was frequently forced on Native American people was a triumphalistic one, confusing the triumph of western culture with that of Christ. The Church today has much to learn from an accurate history of the mission.

For Mestizos and indigenous peoples of the Caribbean islands, Central America, South America, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippines, North America and Asia, the European invasion resulted in slavery, genocide, land and economic exploitation, and systemic racism. For the peoples of Africa and Asia brought to work on the land, the result was labor camp relocation, discrimination and victimization via systemic racism. For the descendants of European conquerors the subsequent legacy has been the perpetuation of paternalism and racism into our cultures and times.

TUESDAY EVENING

We now recognize that what represented newness of freedom, hope and opportunity for some was the occasion for oppression, degradation and genocide for others. For the Church this is not a time for celebration, but a time for a committed plan of action insuring that this anniversary observation not disguise the painful realities of American history.

Policy Statement

The Eighteenth General Synod recognizes that the whole story about the native peoples of the Americas, and those brought here against their will, has not been told. Nor, is the tragic nature of the story and its continuing implications known by many. Particularly, the General Synod calls upon us to acknowledge our need to understand and take action.

- A. The General Synod calls upon instrumentalities and other national bodies, conferences and associations to provide to local churches materials for education and consciousness raising experiences relative to this issue. These should include background and historical data, to be used prior to Columbus Day 1992, which recognize both the evil and the good that arose and continues to be a part of our culture out of Columbus' journey in 1492.
- B. The General Synod calls upon instrumentalities and other national bodies, conferences and associations to provide local churches encouragement and sample materials for writing letters to appropriate state and national leaders and to appropriate policy teams in all media urging a balanced and truthful observance of the 1492 events.
- C. The General Synod encourages local church people to listen to Native Americans (and other indigenous persons) in our churches and in the wider community and to work together to promote understanding, justice and healing in the year 1992 and beyond.
- D. The General Synod directs its ecumenical officer to invite and encourage all our ecumenical partners to adopt similar resolutions and encourage all conferences, associations and local churches, working through their ecumenical structures, to encourage such study and action at each level of the church.
- E. The Eighteenth General Synod calls upon conferences, associations and churches with leadership provided by the Council for American Indian Ministry and the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries to plan, in partnership with Native Americans, activities for young and old - including educational materials, sermon helps, symposia and retreats, public statements, story telling and dramatics, artwork and musical celebrations, and special interfaith worship events which will move us toward respect for and reconciliation with the Native Americans of this land.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, the Eighteenth General Synod urges instrumentalities and other national bodies, conferences, associations and local churches to study the fullness of this history, participate in developing a knowledgeable observance, recommit ourselves to the mission and support for Native American people and others directly victimized through these 500 years, and become advocates in their churches and various governments for a just expression of the Gospel.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Eighteenth General Synod declares 1992 as a year for the United Church of Christ to

reflect, confess, repent, forgive and convert from our sins.

The Eighteenth General Synod commits itself to the development of liturgies of repentance, just resolve, and hope for reconciliation. As one such liturgy, the General Synod commends the following apology, offered by the United Church of Canada to its native sisters and brothers:

Long before my people journeyed to this land, your people were here, and you received from your elders an understanding of creation, and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured.

We did not hear you when you shared your vision.

In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ, we were closed to the value of your spirituality.

We confused western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ.

We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the Gospel.

We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were.

As a result, you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred and we are not what we are meant by God to be.

We ask you to forgive us and we ask you to walk with us in the spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Eighteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ moves to design new systems, structures, and communities of men and women who are committed to the integrity of creation, justice, and peace; to establish a more fair, just, and equitable society in the United States; and to seek a more compassionate, reasonable, and ethical dimension of relationships with our neighbors throughout this hemisphere.

Subject to the availability of funds.

22. CLOSING REFLECTIONS BY OUR PRESIDENT PAUL H. SHERRY

President Paul H. Sherry offered some brief remarks on the United Church of Christ continuing forward to meet the challenge to make the world fit for God's children. God built the world for all God's children, all generations. We are a people sustained by our God. President Sherry challenged his listeners to be a faithful people. He declared the United Church of Christ is a great church, a servant church, and it rests on the arms of a loving God. President Sherry commended his listeners to go forward in joy and love, with God's blessing.

23. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Bernice Powell made several announcements including that Ms. Sharon Jefferson, Office of Communication, was hospitalized and in intensive care. Ms. Powell asked the delegates to hold Ms. Jefferson in their prayers.