

MONDAY AFTERNOON

Through a violent death, Jesus confirmed God as the ultimate peacemaker, “for while we were enemies, we were reconciled through the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10). This reconciliation is part of who we are as children of God — proclaimed at our baptism when we were welcomed into the family of God. When a child is baptized or dedicated, a congregation promises to nurture and care for the child and to bring the child into faith. How can we help but be concerned about those media that have so much impact on a child’s life?

We, therefore, deplore the competing stories of violence from the media that continue to shape our society. Even in doing so, however, we know that sin still infects and affects us all. Too often we ignore our personal and corporate complicity in violence, blaming others. Too often we are weak and uncertain about our part of the solution.

After all, we Christians:

- support the media industries as consumers, thereby helping to form their financial backbone. We are, indeed, part of the audience that media violence attracts;
- permit and sometimes encourage our children’s exposure to media with violent content;
- participate in the media industries through our investments and through our vocations as producers and writers. We do not always use our power to work for better programming; and
- shirk our duty as citizens to be vigilant in the pursuit of a common good.

IV. STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN CONVICTION

We take the critical issue of media violence very seriously because it is in contradiction to our basic beliefs. Jesus calls us to peace and compassion as his followers. Developments in the public debate on media violence cause us to lift our voices in witness to the words of Jesus when he said: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evil doer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.” (Matthew 5:38,39) The media’s portrayal of violence as an appropriate response to hatred and fear must be resisted. We bear witness to a God who calls us to new life, and who promises liberty, community and care for those held captive by violence.

In the public debate on the causes and effects of media violence, the United Church of Christ reaffirms its adherence to the principles of an open forum of ideas and the guarantees of the First Amendment to free speech, press and religion. As objectionable as we find media

violence, we do not believe government censorship is a viable or appropriate solution.

Free speech and a free press have their places within a context of social responsibility and a concern for the common good. We hold media industries accountable for what they produce and distribute, and challenge them to act as good citizens in society. Electronic media and films reach most of the citizens of our country including children, many of whom spend more hours watching television than attending school. Such media have an enormous influence especially on children and an enormous opportunity for good.

The Twentieth General Synod, in order to be supportive of churches and families and in our dealings with government and industry, calls for media that clearly:

- create community, value and develop cultures;
- respect human dignity and seek to involve people in participatory communication processes that enhance human dignity; and
- help people in society break the cycle of violence that we understand to have been broken definitively by the cross of Christ.

Further, The Twentieth General Synod calls for a nationwide approach to media literacy involving three interrelated components:

- critical viewing, that is, learning to discern the meanings and values communicated and critical analysis of the cultural, social, political and economic influences that cause these messages to be produced;
- use of creative production skills to produce films and programs that create community, value cultures and respect human dignity; and
- encouragement and preparation of individuals for engagement with government and industry where the best interest of the public is at stake.

In summary, we understand media violence to be the moral equivalent of a harmful substance. Therefore we call upon the church in all of its settings to challenge and support families in their aspirations and strategies for more appropriate media choices. Such strategies will include appropriate actions with government and industry at local, state and federal levels.

7. PROPOSAL FOR ACTION ON VIOLENCE IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND FILM

Assistant Moderator Taylor asked Mr. Perez to continue the report of Committee Two. Mr. Perez moved that the

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Twentieth General Synod adopt the "Proposal for Action on Violence in Electronic Media and Film." There was no discussion and the vote was taken.

95-GS-43 VOTED: The Twentieth General Synod adopts the "Proposal for Action on Violence in Electronic Media and Film."

PROPOSAL FOR ACTION ON VIOLENCE IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND FILM

I. SUMMARY

This Proposal for Action outlines the implementation of the Pronouncement on Violence in Electronic Media and Film. All settings of the United Church of Christ are called to participate affirmatively and actively in the strategies suggested in order that violence in electronic media and film may be reduced and our society's tolerance for violence abated.

II. BACKGROUND: AN ISSUE OF URGENCY

The United Church of Christ last spoke out on this issue in 1977. Other churches occasionally have lifted their voices in concern over media violence. Statements have come from a number of communions, among them: Church of the Brethren (1962, 1978, 1985); the American Lutheran Church (1969); the Reformed Church in America (1971); the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (1973, 1976); the United Methodist Church (1976); The National Council of the Churches of Christ addressed this issue (1985).

Churches have not been alone in calling for curbs on media violence. Other concerned organizations also have taken a stand, including The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (1969), the Surgeon General (1972), the National Institute of Mental Health (1982), the Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence (1984), the National Parents Teachers Association (1987), and the American Psychological Association (1992), National Commission on Children (1991), H.F. Guggenheim Foundation Study (1993), and a Citizens' Task Force on TV Violence (1993).

III. DIRECTIONAL STATEMENT

WHEREAS the Twentieth General Synod has adopted the Pronouncement on Curbing Violence in Electronic Media and Film;

WHEREAS movie rentals and cable television have made explicit violence more available, CD-ROM technology promises to make violence interactive. Network television and the film industry, over the years, have supplied a steady diet of violence:

70 percent of prime-time programs use violence, with an average of 16 violent acts (including two murders) in each evening's prime-time programming;

WHEREAS:

■more parents of young children see television as a teacher of behavior and attitudes which are often negative;

■more citizens view what the Surgeon General has described as a "public health crisis" with alarm, recognizing that it needs to be addressed through regulatory standards in several arenas;

■more grass roots organizations challenge the presence of violence in the media, occasionally falling into extremist reaction; and

■cultural warfare breaks out over our institutions--government, universities, schools, churches, media--pressing the question as to what we want our society to be, and who we want our children to become.

The Twentieth General Synod

1. Calls upon families, as the primary social unit of our culture to:
 - 1.1 monitor family viewing habits of television, film and video games;
 - 1.2 discuss programs, films and media experiences in relationship to their faith;
 - 1.3 participate directly in the media world through conversations with the church, government and media industries, as it is helpful to let these groups know what is valued and what needs to be changed among the media options;
 - 1.4 protect children from seeing films expressly intended for adults;
 - 1.5 urge the film industry rating board of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) to revise the present rating system to use more descriptive language and thus assist in halting the trend toward the increasingly violent images that now appear in films rated suitable for children;
 - 1.6 urge the film industry that creates cartoons, watched especially by children, to feature situations of positive values, e.g. empathy, good humor, cooperation, conflict mediation, non-violent ways of coping with anger, tolerance of diversity etc.;