

RESOLUTION ON THE HOMELESS IN AMERICA **A Resolution Approved by General Synod XIV (1983)**

Summary:

The Fourteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ is asked to urge member churches and individual members to become actively involved in ministries to homeless persons and to support efforts to lobby for Federal, state and local action in regards to homelessness.

The Fourteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ is further asked to declare that the United Church of Christ, as a national body, has a collective concern for the plight of homeless persons and concern over the issues which cause them to be homeless.

Background:

It is impossible to know exactly how many persons are homeless in the United States. The homeless remain un-numbered until such as they come in from the outside to receive some form of service. Only then are they counted or even countable. What is known is that, for example, in one metropolitan area, over 11,000 persons were served by shelter agencies in the past year.

Traditionally, the media, both print and visual, have handed us a picture of older, alcoholic males and disoriented “bag ladies” as being the homeless. A recent study, however, indicates that the 18 to 29 year old group accounts for a far greater percentage of the homeless than ever before believed.

Recent Federal legislation providing emergency funds for shelter and food was enacted only as a stop-gap measure and only after considerable pressure from many groups, particularly religious, all over the country. The funds provided, while a big help, are still woefully inadequate for the great need which exists.

Even if the economy were to take an immediate and dramatic upswing, joblessness, lack of low-cost housing, and homelessness would not disappear. The issue would still have to be spoken to and the homeless persons must be cared for.

Biblical and Theological Rationale:

Both the Jewish and Christian faiths place strong emphasis on hospitality and compassion. The directive of the Lord in Deuteronomy 10:19 – “Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (KJV) is clear enough. The New Testament story of the Good Samaritan provides us an example. Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:31-46 again provide us with an example and a clear directive for action: “I was a stranger and ye took me in.” (Matthew 25:35) (KJV) is the basic issue at hand. The call for Christian social action cannot be denied.

The Text of the Resolution

WHEREAS, the number of homeless persons in our communities, both urban and rural, is dramatically increasing, due, at least in part, to: (1) the shortage of low-rent housing; (2) the economic pressures of our time as inflation combines with decreasing assistance to the poor; (3) the high percentage of unemployment, especially among minority youth; (4) the lack of jobs,

counseling, follow-up care, and community residence facilities for deinstitutionalized persons;
and

WHEREAS, the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ calls us to be Christ's servants in the service of the whole human family; and

WHEREAS, the problem of homelessness and the factors causing homelessness directly relate to the family and to family life, a Priority decided upon in the Thirteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ;

THEREFORE, the Fourteenth General Synod encourages the United Church of Christ, all of its churches and their members to:

1. support local organizations addressing the problems of the homeless;
2. devote volunteer resources, skills, time, worship services, and chaplaincy services to nearby shelters;
3. offer space for and support the establishment of emergency shelters and day-time shelters;
4. encourage local businesses to provide jobs for homeless persons who are able to work;
5. volunteer resources, skills, time, and other material support to organizations such as soup kitchens, relief centers, etc., which minister to the needs of the homeless; and
6. urge national, state, and local lawmakers to enact legislation on this issue as a result of the Urban Oversight Hearings which have revealed homelessness as a national problem.