

An Issue Paper on Global Concerns and World Needs General Synod XI (1977)

Summary

There is growing readiness within the United Church of Christ to see our life and our priorities as a denomination in global perspective and with sensitivity to world needs. A many-faceted program will be required to provide this readiness with practical and productive channels of expression. Theological and factual understanding, study and reflection, communication and interpretation, first-hand experiences, action on a wide range of issues and programs, world-wide linkages of persons and resources, some budgetary reassessments, all will be a necessary part.

Background

Previous General Synods have considered the calling of the United Church of Christ to an authentic world perspective. They have said that a sense of universal Christian and human belonging will give depth and range to members' understanding of mission and enrich their expressions of stewardship. The Executive Council has acknowledged the special importance of a world perspective during our time of widespread economic crisis, hunger and political upheaval, and has recommended that all programs be developed and implemented with such a vision.

Global concern was specially lifted up in the priority given by the Tenth General Synod to a hunger action program related to the world food crisis. Every sector of the church has been engaged in this priority, with national instrumentalities and conferences collaborating through a World Hunger Working Group linked with wider ecumenical efforts. Most of the other priorities of the 1975 General Synod have also been tackled with some measure of global concern, including Women in Church and Society, Christian Education, Evangelism and Christian Life Style and Ecology. In connection with Racial and Economic Justice, concerns for the international economic order, and particularly the social impact of transnational business, have been stressed. In the efforts for Criminal Justice and Penal Reform the implementation of human rights internationally has been of high concern.

Beyond the official Priority programs there are instances of global engagement by many sectors of the United Church of Christ. The Commission for Racial Justice has taken up concerns for Africa, and the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries the many issues of world peace and U.S. power. The Office for Church in Society has worked vigorously on a series of international issues, and several state conferences have developed overseas-focused programs in cooperation with United Church Board for World Ministries.

Yet in the life and action of our churches overall the recognition of world needs and global concerns has been far from adequate. In the decade from 1965 to 1975 the total expenditures of our denomination on all levels increased nearly 35%, and total mission giving by about the same percentage. But because of the claims of new domestic mission programs, expenditures for ministries outside the United States rose only at one-fifth that rate, about 7%. Even that modest gain was achieved through designations for One Great Hour of Sharing and other international causes, while basic support for mission beyond the United States declined very substantially. Surveys have documented a pervasive tendency in U.S. society toward localism and self-

concern, whether in news coverage, emphasis on community rather than national concerns or in popular forms of piety.

Experience indicates that people respond best to global concerns and world needs when they are presented in concrete terms and specific instances, when there are fairly direct channels for making response and where action that makes a practical difference is proposed. Such characteristics are built into the proposals which follow.

Implications of a Serious Response to Global Concerns and World Needs

Without attempting to spell out all the ways in which the United Church of Christ might move toward an increasingly adequate global perspective and program, the following are important starting points.

1. Overseas Personnel. The drastic attrition in our presence overseas (from 598 missionaries in 1964 to 187 in 1976) needs to be reversed. These personal links with the global society are essential, not only for what they do overseas but for their ministries among U.S. churches upon their return or during furloughs.
2. Missioners to America. More Christians from partner churches and indigenous mission programs around the world are needed among us. They personalize the reality of global community, fertilize our thinking and feeling with surprising insights, and reveal to us the impact of U.S. power and life-style on the rest of the world.
3. First-hand Experience of World Needs and Issues. United Church of Christ lay people and youth, ministers and other leaders, need encouragement and assistance in developing arrangements for overseas travel, residence, study or work as they explore for themselves the meaning of Christian discipleship in an interdependent planetary society. Pastors should consider one or more terms of service in ministry to an English-language congregation overseas as part of their career plan. Sabbaticals can profitably be invested in experiences overseas.
4. Education. The many media and means by which our people are educated in the meaning of discipleship can and should be rich in global concern and information on global needs. Church school curricula and worship, programs for youth and the elderly, Sunday bulletins and A.D. Magazine, parish and conference newsletters, preaching, new forms of liturgy - these are among the principal elements of the educational complex which shapes our people's conception of their role as Christians in the world. For all these deliberately to draw on the resources provided by world ministries and the ecumenical movement could bring new relevance and authenticity to our Christian existence.
5. Faith Understandings. In theological explorations beginning in our seminaries and extending to every local parish through such activities as the Faith Explorations of the Office for Church Life and Leadership we must find a broadening frame of reference. In dialogues with Marxism, other living faiths, the ecological consciousness and the liberation movements of our time, relevant theological pioneering by the specialists and understandings by all Christians will be enriched.

6. Evangelism/Church Extension Among Immigrants. Millions of new persons are being added to the ethnic communities of the U.S. These Hispanic, Korean, Filipino, Samoan, Chinese and other populations are a great opportunity and challenge for homeland mission and provide significant linkage with overseas mission. We should give high priority to church extension and helping ministries with these persons, and also take full advantage of the special gifts they bring to U.S. society and church and to our understanding of issues in their homelands.

Recommendations

1. Resources needed. The first need is to recognize the importance of a global perspective and to apply it in all the work of congregations, educational institutions, conferences and instrumentalities. Significant budgetary recognition is needed to maintain United Church of Christ presence overseas and for the strengthening of mission to America from sister churches. Enlarging evangelism among new ethnic communities likewise requires additional funding.

2. Responsibility. All sectors of the church will have to have a vision of global concerns and world needs if effective response is to be made our communication organs bear heavy responsibility for this, as does the Stewardship Council. Within a collaborative style the United Church Board for World Ministries may provide essential data, experience and channels for expression for this concern. The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries should lead in evangelism among immigrant communities. Other instrumentalities will continue to relate in significant ways to these concerns.

"RESOLVED, That the Eleventh General Synod:

- affirms the global concerns of the United Church of Christ ;
- rejoices in the continuing impact of our overseas ministries upon a changing world;
- recognizes the basic programs of the UCBWM as the foundation for United Church world outreach; and
- strongly supports our overseas program as an essential part of our mission for Jesus Christ.

RESOLVED, That the General Synod:

- affirms the issue paper on Global Concerns and World Needs and,
- commends this global perspective to all members and sectors of the United Church of Christ and requests all appropriate organs of the Church:

1. to maintain and increase the international exchange of persons in mission, with proper budget support;
2. to encourage and assist first-hand experience of world needs and concerns by all our people;
3. to increase the global dimensions in all educational and communications work, and in theological and faith exploration;
4. to increase efforts in evangelism and church extension among immigrant communities;
5. to foster better stewardship in support of all these efforts."