

TITLE: MAKING MISSION AND MINISTRY OUR FIRST PRIORITY

SUBMITTED BY: The Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ

DATE OF SUBMISSION: June 8, 2009 (Adopted by the Annual Meeting of the Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ at Minot, North Dakota, Sunday, June 7, 2009).

SUMMARY:

The United Church of Christ brings unique gifts to mission and ministry in this world. Mission and ministry must be the central focus of discussion for the General Synod as it considers its future operations and governance, and as the United Church of Christ in all of its settings moves forward to meet the many challenges of this millennium.

BACKGROUND:

As we close the first decade of the new millennium, our society and our world are beset by enormous challenges on a wide variety of fronts. We are facing social, economic, financial, environmental and political crises that challenge the very nature of human endeavors and our existence on this earth.

At the center of these crises are moral and ethical issues that require the faith community to respond with full vitality and clarity in discerning the will of God and in serving as the transformational instrument for the mission and ministry to which God is calling us.

The United Church of Christ through its heritage, covenantal polity, and theological, cultural and racial diversity is uniquely positioned in this kairos moment to be a leader and a partner in mission and ministry to help give birth to this new world in which God's will is truly done on earth as it is in heaven. Believing that God is about to do a new thing, and that all of creation is groaning with birth pangs, we are anxiously preparing for the opportunities that challenge today's world. (Isaiah 43:19 & Romans 8:22)

As a church which proudly declares, "God is Still Speaking" we must not only hear what God is calling us to do, but we must also be "doers of the word" (James 1:22). We must build upon the great success of the increased denominational identity of the United Church of Christ, and use it as a launching pad for the bold discipleship that is essential today to address the enormous challenges facing humanity in these perilous and difficult times.

Therefore, the Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ calls upon the United Church of Christ, in all of its settings, including local churches, associations, conferences, and its covenanted and affiliated ministries, to focus our attention and resources onto the mission and ministry to which we are being called.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE:

We are reminded that "The Church exists in Mission as fire exists in burning, if there is no fire there is no burning, if there is no mission there is no church." (attributed to Emil Brunner)

Our Statement of Faith is clear that we are in covenant for mission and ministry:

"You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races. You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory."

This is further emphasized by the Statement of Mission affirmed by General Synod XVI:

*"Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called and commit ourselves:
To praise God, confess our sin, and joyfully accept God's forgiveness;*

*To proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our suffering world;
To embody God's Love for all people;
To hear and give voice to creation's cry for justice and peace;
To name and confront the powers of evil within and among us;
To repent our silence and complicity with the forces of chaos and death;
To preach and teach with the power of the living Word;
To join oppressed and troubled people in the struggle for liberation;
To work for justice, healing, and wholeness of life;
To embrace the unity of Christ's church;
To discern and celebrate the present and coming reign of God.*

During a prior restructuring process, a "think tank" held March 3, 1997 at the request of the Transition Coordinating Committee concluded:

"The Church exists for mission. Structures of the Church exist to serve God's mission; structures do not exist to serve the church. There is one mission, and it belongs to God. Faithful structures are marked by covenantal life."

CONCLUSION

Therefore, we call upon the General Synod as it elects new leadership, considers the urgency of its mission and ministry in this world, and considers how to most effectively organize our denominational efforts and structures, to place its primary focus upon the mission and ministry that we are to accomplish as a united and uniting church of Jesus Christ.

As a church that is based in covenantal relationships, we recognize that we will move forward only through continuous development of mutual trust and confidence in one another. What binds us together is our mission and ministry. Restructuring must facilitate both mission and ministry, and not become a source of fracture or faction.

Our theological, cultural, and racial diversity is a source of strength, and should not become wedges that divide us. Instead, they are avenues for building greater understanding, respect, and the hope that demonstrate the possibilities of how a multi-racial, multicultural, theologically rich community of faith can work together for the salvation of this world.

As a small membership, large geographic conference, we are acutely aware of the importance of being heard and represented within the various settings of the larger body of Christ. We call upon the United Church of Christ to hear and value the many voices of its diverse constituencies and our many partners in mission and ministry in ecumenical settings. As we listen to the still-speaking God, we are reminded that God may speak through a shepherd of Tekoa.

While we highly value and vehemently uphold the democracy of the United Church of Christ, we also recognize and affirm that the purpose of our gatherings in our various settings is to discern the will of God and God's desires for us, and not to simply determine the will of a majority who have gathered. That is why we are united in Jesus Christ as the head of the church.

Lastly, we recognize that governance and structure are products of human endeavor and therefore must not become ends onto themselves, but instruments by which we as the United Church of Christ seek more faithful and effective ministry and mission together.

FUNDING:

Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Executive Council and the Boards of the Covenanted Ministries are requested to implement this resolution.