



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)
MEMORANDUM

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL WITNESS POLICY

TO: General Assembly Council

DATE: March 7, 2007

RE: **REPORT TO THE COUNCIL: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL CREED**

Dear Friends:

This memo is intended to give you a brief overview of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) work, and then to introduce attachments related to a joint project of the National Council of Churches and ourselves, the “Social Creed for the 21st Century.”

Recent Policy Statements Available: Print and CD

We are also making available to the Council copies of all five policy statements developed by the Advisory Committee and adopted by the 2006 General Assembly. The Office of the General Assembly also produces a CD with containing all five that may also be available (see display tables). In addition to those reports and recommendations, ACSWP prepared four “Monitoring Reports” and a communication on Taiwan and China that were received by the Assembly and an Interim Report on the Social Creed that was also received (after unanimous approval in Committee). The 2006 statements are:

Just Globalization: Justice, Ownership, and Accountability

Study Guide in preparation

Living Into the Body of Christ: Toward Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities

With Study Guide

A Reformed Understanding of Usury for the 21st Century

Economic Security for Older Adults

Resolution Against Torture (adaptation of Human Rights Update)

Current Resolution Study Approaches:

Based on General Assembly authorization, ACSWP is currently managing a number of study processes. Typically these involve 6-12 volunteers and a consultant writer, with staff assistance from ACSWP and sometimes other offices of the GAC. One or two ACSWP members generally sit on the resolution teams to maintain strong connection with the Advisory Committee as a whole. Depending on the topic, a report can stress educational, public advocacy, direct service, or church program responses.

GAC members may note that studies analyzing current developments (such as Energy or bioethics—*The Nature and Value of Human Life*) may focus on public policy and models for the Church while others will emphasize congregational ministries of direct service and inclusion (*Living into the Body of Christ*, and the current studies of Serious Mental Illness and Homelessness, as examples). The Advisory Committee is also aided particularly by faculty of Presbyterian seminaries and colleges who are often willing to offer their expertise and writing skill with our other volunteers.

ACSWP Study Teams:

Nature and Value of Human Life: Updating a 1981 PCUS study that covered topics from bioethics to war that involved limitations and possibilities of human life.

Energy: An initial study of Personal Responsibility and Carbon Neutrality is on the web. A study team's work is being supplemented for presentation to the 2008 General Assembly, building on previous statements about climate change and sustainability overall.

Serious Mental Illness: This task force has developed a strong resource for ministry with persons with serious mental illness, recognizing from Presbyterian Panel survey data and other studies that better standards and patterns of interaction are desirable and achievable.

Homelessness: This resolution team is addressing an aspect of severe poverty estimated to affect more than 1 million US citizens and involving many forms of congregational outreach, some now lasting since the early 1980's when homeless families began to appear.

Pay Equity: The proportion of women's to men's pay has moved from 65% to 75%, but the structural causes of this inequity run deep, affecting some families over generations. Coordinating with the Advocacy Committee on Women's Concerns, the team will link practical impacts and theological concerns of vocation, stewardship, etc.

Voting Rights & Electoral Reform: Building on the renewal of the Voting Rights Act first signed into law in 1965, and the substantial statement on Reformed Faith & Politics of 1983, this team will propose an updating of the strong Presbyterian commitment to democracy served by the widest possible franchise.

In addition to these study teams, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy is considering cooperating with the Advocacy Committee on Racial-Ethnic Concerns in a report on the human and environmental challenges of the post-Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf coast, where so many Presbyterians and other Christians have volunteered. On-going monitoring of the Middle East situation occurs with other GAC staff, and input from the UN Office and peacemaking conferences is considered in relation to the fighting in Afghanistan, Iraq, Darfur and other countries.

The General Assembly also referred three relatively smaller concerns to ACSWP:

1. an overture of concern for working conditions at the Smithfield pork processing plant in Tar Heel, NC; the Committee is to consult with two presbyteries and encourage progress.
2. a request to update a packet on Faith-based Initiatives to consider church-related educational institutions that may be able to receive public funds.
3. re-configuration of the long-time Human Rights Update to include developments in Colombia specifically and to focus in part on specific church-related issues.

The Social Creed Resolution Team: Working in cooperation with a task force of the National Council of Churches and in coordination with a United Methodist team, our study team has helped develop a set of concerns shared by most member communions of the NCC. This effort is to express a consensus, and hence leaves out explicit treatment of certain issues. The General Assembly of the National Council has received the attached proposed "Social Creed for the 21st Century" (marking also the anniversary of the 1908 original) with 2 page backgrounder, and the Governing Board will be asking member communions to study it for approval this November.