

**TURN TO THE LIVING GOD:  
A CALL TO EVANGELISM IN JESUS CHRIST'S WAY**

**A Resolution  
Adopted by the 203rd General Assembly (1991)  
For Study and Implementation  
The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

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September 1991

To Pastors of Churches and Clerks of Sessions of Vacant Pulpits, and Stated Clerks and Executives of Presbyteries and Synods

Dear Friends,

The 203rd General Assembly (1991) gave evangelism continued high emphasis in the life of the church. One of the actions taken by the assembly was the adoption of the document "Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ's Way," which articulates our commitment to global evangelization.

As instructed by the assembly, I am distributing this copy of the document to the governing bodies and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for study and implementation.

Information on ordering additional copies of this report may be found on the copyright page of this publication.

Sincerely,

James E. Andrews  
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly



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## Turn To The Living God: A Call To Evangelism In Jesus Christ's Way

A Resolution Adopted By The 203<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly (1991)  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

### **How This Resolution Came To Be**

In their March 1989 meetings, the Global Mission Ministry Unit (GMU) and the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit (ECD) authorized the chairpersons of the two ministry unit committees to appoint a committee of five persons plus staff to work with the Joint Committee for International Church Development and Evangelism in revising, rewriting, or developing a new statement – as they deem most appropriate – utilizing the policy and strategy documents of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) dealing with mission and evangelism among people who are without the gospel...in order to provide appropriate, positive and timely direction to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as it engages in world evangelization, particularly among unreached people groups, in the decade of the 1990's. (ECD Action 6-89 and GMU 267-03-89)

The committee consisted of the following persons: Johnalee Nelson, Global Mission Ministry Unit Committee member, elder; Carol Weir, professor of Evangelism and Mission, San Francisco Theological Seminary; John R. Hendrick, professor of Mission and Evangelism, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary; Harold E. Kurtz, executive director, Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship; Virgil Cruz, professor of New Testament, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Ministry unit staff assigned to this committee included Syngman Rhee, associate director, GMU; Margaret O. Thomas, associate for Interfaith Relations, GMU; George Telford, director, Theology and Worship Unit; Jefferson Ritchie, missionary in residence, Office of International Church Development and Evangelism, ECD and GMU; Morton S. Taylor, associate for International Church Development and Evangelism, GMU and ECD.

The above ministry unit committee actions further mandated that the committee, through shared staff, maintain close coordination with those groups preparing study materials for evangelism in religiously plural situations and with partner churches and councils through appropriate consultation.

The attached paper and recommendations are the product of the Committee on Policy and Strategy Documents for World Evangelization working with the Joint Committee for International Church Development and Evangelism. In its sixth draft the paper was widely shared with congregations, presbyteries, synods, partner churches and councils of churches, other ministry units, and the staff and elected members of the Global Mission Ministry Unit and Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit.

### **SUMMARY**

“Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ’s Way” has been prepared in response to the churchwide priority goal of doing evangelism and developing congregations. It seeks to provide direction to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as it engages in global evangelism in the 1990’s, particularly among people groups not yet evangelized. The document, in the form of a resolution to the General Assembly, contains three major subdivisions: “Turn to the Living God,” “Evangelism in Jesus Christ’s Way,” and “The Wholeness of Evangelism.” Recommendations for implementation at all levels of the church follow the document.

The first section, “Turn to the Living God,” proclaims that evangelism has its source in the triune God. God’s intent is that there be a human community that enjoys God’s presence, reflects God’s image, demonstrates God’s love, shares God’s passion for justice, and cares for God’s earth. This divine intent has been marred by the fact of human sinfulness. But “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). Those who turn to Christ in repentance and faith are reconciled with God, and they, in turn, are sent into the world to continue Christ’s work. The Holy Spirit strengthens and renews the church in its mission of inviting people from “every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev. 7:9), to turn to the living God.

“Evangelism in Jesus Christ’s Way” identifies a number of characteristics of the method and style that Jesus proclaimed and lived the good news. He lived with the people among whom he evangelized. His offer was universal, inclusive. Jesus evangelized as a servant. His healing ministry went hand in hand with evangelism. Prayer undergirded his actions. A sense of urgency marked his life. And Jesus multiplied his evangelistic efforts through sharing the ministry with others.

The final section, “The Wholeness of Evangelism,” may be summarized by the phrase, “the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world.” From the individual Christian and local congregation, through the presbyteries and synods, to the General Assembly and beyond, the whole Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) remains committed to joining with God’s people everywhere in sharing the good news of God’s love and salvation among people of many cultures and religions who live in a great variety of contexts. The church has a special concern to share the good news among those peoples who are still without the gospel, who have no culturally indigenous church, for “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16).

## PROLOGUE

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in grateful response to the triune God, commits itself with other Christians to witness God’s grace and love in Jesus Christ. Together we will invite people of “every tribe, tongue, people, and nation” to join us in turning to the living God.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is claiming the evangelistic task afresh! The purpose of this document is to provide “appropriate, positive and timely direction to the church as it engages in evangelism, particularly among unreached people groups, in the

decade of the 1990s.” In doing so it incorporates insights from Scripture, the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, and recent denominational and ecumenical statements on mission and evangelism.

## TURN TO THE LIVING GOD

Evangelism has its source in the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Both the *Book of Order* and the recently adopted confessional document, “A Brief Statement of Faith,” provide a trinitarian basis for mission and evangelism.

We trust in God,

Whom Jesus called Abba, Father.

In sovereign love God created the world good  
and makes everyone equally in God’s image,  
male and female, of every race and people,  
to live as one community.

We trust in Jesus Christ,

fully human, fully God.

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:

preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives,  
teaching by word and deed and blessing the children,  
healing the sick and binding up the brokenhearted,  
eating with outcasts,  
forgiving sinners,  
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.

We trust in God the Holy Spirit,

everywhere the giver and renewer of life.

The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,

sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,  
and binds us together with all believers  
in the one body of Christ, the Church....

the Spirit gives us courage

to pray without ceasing,

to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,

to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,

to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,

and to work with others for justice, freedom and peace.

(“A Brief Statement of Faith,” lines  
27-32, 7-18, 52-57, 66-71)

God’s intent is that there be a human community that enjoys God’s presence, reflects God’s image, demonstrates God’s love, shares God’s passion for justice, and cares for God’s earth. The proclamation of the triune God’s loving purpose for the world is a

radical call for individuals and institutions to turn from idolatry, to acknowledge God's reign, and to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9).

## Turn and Be Reconciled

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.... We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:19a, 20b, New Revised Standard Version)

The central message of the Reformed confessions speaks of God's reconciling, sovereign love in Jesus Christ. The backdrop of this divine action is the fact of human sinfulness.

But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.  
Ignoring God's commandments,  
we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,  
accept lies as truth,  
exploit neighbor and nature,  
and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.  
We deserve God's condemnation.  
(“A Brief Statement of Faith,” Lines 33-39)

Nevertheless, God is merciful: those who repent and turn to Christ are reconciled with God. And God is gracious: those who are reconciled are entrusted with God's message of reconciliation.

The risen Christ is the savior for all.... Those joined to him by faith are set right with God and commissioned to serve as [God's] reconciling community. (*Book of Confessions*, Confession of 1967, 9.10)

The Holy Spirit enables those who are reconciled to bring the word of reconciliation to the human family for the restoration of the community of God's intent. The church is able to turn to God and work toward God's design because “the living God...has first turned to us in grace and love, and has done so supremely in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.”

## Turn and Be Renewed

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:2)

The God who reconciles is also the God who renews. This history of the church, like that of ancient Israel, has been a history of obedience and rebellion, of faithfulness and failure, of love and apathy. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is no different in this regard.

To the extent that we have lacked love and concern for other people, failed to pray for others, been selfish in assuming the right to live affluent lives in spite of the consequences to others, neglected the poor and [the] oppressed, participated in oppression, and failed to share the love of God in word and deed...we have need to repent.

Not only has our practice of the gospel been deficient, but our knowledge of it is incomplete and our commitment to it partial. As we seek to fulfill our vocation to call persons to turn to the living God, we must repent, turn to the living God ourselves, and seek from God that continuing transformation of mind by which new life is possible. How heartening it is to be reminded that

the Holy Spirit...renews the church as the community in which [we] are reconciled to God and to one another. [The Spirit] enables [us] to receive forgiveness as [we] forgive one another and to enjoy the peace of God as [we] make peace among [ourselves]. (Book of Confessions, Confession of 1967, 9.20)

By the Holy Spirit, the church as again and again been renewed and strengthened for God's mission. Evidences of the Holy Spirit and the grace of renewal at work in the church are many and diverse. From the growing awareness among many of the older churches that the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper," is the place for the renewal of the missionary conviction at the heart of every congregation"; from the corporate prayer, worship, and Bible reading that characterizes the new base community groups; from the piety and self-development activities of partner churches around the world; from the emphasis of the charismatics on gifts of the Spirit and their explosive growth; and from the innovative and multifaceted ministries of evangelism and compassion carried on by many congregations of "mainline" denominations – from all of these there emerge evidence of renewal taking place under the guidance and by the power of the Holy Spirit, in which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to participate wholeheartedly. May we be given new energy and courage for the fulfillment of our evangelistic calling.

### Turn And Be Sent

Peace be with you; as the Father has sent me, so I send you. When he had said this he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (John 20:21-22)

As God sent Jesus to announce the promised kingdom and to urge everyone to repent and believe the good news, so the church is sent into the world to continue Christ's work. As the body of Christ, the church is charged not only to make the deeds of Christ visible, but also to make the word of Christ audible. We are thus called to develop and evangelistic attitude that beckons us across boundaries and sends us in faith from one culture to another, from our own history to that of others with the glad news of God's salvation.

## EVANGELISM IN JESUS CHRIST'S WAY

Jesus was God's evangelist. From the beginning to the end of his ministry, Jesus joyfully shared the good news of God's reign. He challenged persons to turn from sin and to align their lives with the way of God.

There is general agreement that the way of Jesus Christ in evangelism should be our way also.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

The Confession of 1967 states, "The life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ [have] set the pattern for the church's mission" (*Book of Confessions*, 9.32). "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation" echoes this assertion: "Our obedience in mission should be patterned on the ministry and teaching of Jesus" ("Mission and Evangelism," paragraph 28).

What was Jesus Christ's way in evangelism? What does having the mind of Christ Jesus mean for the evangelistic program of the church? Much more study, reflection, and prayer will be necessary to understand fully how to do evangelism in Jesus' way. In what follows, a beginning effort

is made to suggest some of the radical transformations required to model our evangelistic work on that of Jesus Christ.

### **Jesus Identified with the People of His Time and Place**

Jesus lived among the people to whom he brought the good news of God's rule. He ate with them, walked their dusty roads, and made their concerns his own.

Evangelism in Christ's way today is a call to be with and for the people. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reaffirms that the church is sent into the world "to enter into the common life of men and women, sharing their aspirations and sufferings, striving against inhumanity, and healing the enmities which separate them from God and from each other."

### **Jesus Evangelized with Inclusive Love**

Jesus touched persons with leprosy. He ate with tax collectors. He respected women and blessed children. For Jesus, the gospel extended to Jewish revolutionaries, Samaritans, community leaders, Roman soldiers, and Syrophenicians. He made a special effort to include the poor; in his statement to the disciples of John he identified the inclusion of the poor in the community of faith as an indication that the rule of God was being established.

In parables Jesus likened the reign of God to a great banquet to which all kinds of persons are summoned (Luke 14:15-24; Matt. 22:1-14). He portrayed God as a shepherd who left ninety-nine sheep safely in the fold in order to seek on lost sheep and as a housekeeper who swept her house in search of a lost coin (Luke 15:1-10). In other words, Jesus made it clear that God is a seeking, inviting God whose kingdom is open to "whosoever will."

Today the church is called to practice evangelism that reflects open-hearted hospitality, eager seeking, and acceptance of all persons. God's love in Christ becomes visible as congregations and individual members of the Christian community intentionally extend "the fellowship of Christ to all persons" (*Book of Order*, G-5.0103).

### **Jesus Evangelized with Servant Love**

Jesus took the form of a servant who went about doing good. He fed hungry people and washed the disciples' feet. When the disciples argued about who would be the greatest in God's new order, Jesus rebuked them saying that he had not come to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). He thereby called his followers to a life in which self-serving attitudes and actions would be set aside.

In Jesus' own life, he was tempted by the possibilities for using spiritual power for self-serving, ambition – perhaps to manipulate the reactions of others to him by demonstrating his greatness before them (Luke 4:1-13). Only when he had prayerfully struggled against these temptations was he ready to identify himself with God's mission proclaimed through Scripture.

Christ's servant style led him, in obedience to God's will, to the cross. The church must be able to overcome its fears of loss and death found in temptations to false power in order to find resurrection life for authentic witness (see Phil. 2:5-8 above). The spiritual discipline that renounces the church's use of domination, arrogance, possessiveness, or manipulation – even in its evangelism – comes through struggle and vigilance.

#### Jesus Evangelized by Healing

On page after page of the gospels, one reads of the healing work of Jesus. Blind persons regained their sight. Lame people walked. Outcast lepers were cleansed. Those possessed by demons were made whole. Multitudes believed in Jesus because of these signs and mighty works.

Presbyterians have historically carried out Christ's healing ministry by blending modern medicine with prayer and compassionate service. As a result, many people all over the world have put their faith in Jesus, the Great Physician. Other Christians, especially in places where the church is growing rapidly today, give primary emphasis to the spiritual gift of healing. Both of these approaches to ministry of healing underscore the biblical understanding of salvation as wholeness, or shalom, encompassing the body, mind, and spirit.

#### Jesus Evangelized Through Prayer

Jesus preceded his major evangelistic initiatives by periods of intensive prayer (Luke 4:14; 6:12-13). As he looked around at the multitudes, his compassion moved Jesus to ask the disciples to pray that God would send laborers into the plentiful harvest (Matt. 9:38). The risen Christ commanded his followers to wait for the Holy Spirit before witnessing to the people of the world, a command that prompted them to pray together (Acts 1:4-8, 14).

Today all Christians are called to engage in evangelism through the vital work of prayer evangelism. Through prayer we maintain connection to the life of God the Holy Spirit who is ultimately the one who moves people to repent and put their faith in Christ. Sincere prayer builds bridges of love and concern. It leads to openness to others and provides a channel through which God may communicate both to the one who offers the prayer and to the one for whom the prayer is offered. Prayer is not bounded by language, space, time, national borders, or other barriers. It is a way for all members of the church, both young and old, and for the church corporately, to engage in evangelism and mission.

#### Jesus Evangelized with Urgency

Jesus had such compassion, such urgency of love for people, that he was moved to evangelism and ministry. This urgency is reflected in his life and through his teachings. Jesus pressed on to complete his work of the one who sent him (Mark 1:38; John 9:4). He responded to human crises large and small (e.g., Mark 6:30-43). He wept over Jerusalem in sorrow for its rejection of him and his message. In Jesus, God reached out to humanity even to the point of dying on the cross.

Today, energized by God's compassion, the church is called to reach out urgently to the multitudes of people who are living in their private daily hells, without the presence of Christ, without the power of the Holy Spirit, without the supporting fellowship of the church. God's desire that no one should perish, but that everyone should come to repentance; humanity's overwhelming anguish; and the wreckage of society all combine to motivate the church and Christians individually to overcome apathy and press on in evangelism and mission.

### **Jesus Evangelized Through Shared Ministry**

Jesus multiplied his ministry by choosing laborers whom he trained and authorized. On one occasion Jesus sent twelve to preach and heal (Mark 6), and on another occasion seventy went forth to bear witness to the reign of God (Luke 10). Following his resurrection, Christ entrusted the sharing of the good news to all the disciples. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, he continues with his disciples in the evangelistic task.

All Christians have the obligation to share their faith with others and to give a reason for hope that is within them (1 Pet. 3:15). The whole church has the responsibility to identify, train, and support those who possess special gifts for evangelism and for equipping others in evangelism (Eph. 4:11-12).

### **Jesus Evangelized Through Proclamation**

Jesus began his ministry with the proclamation, "the kingdom of God is near; repent, and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). On many occasions he sent his disciples out to tell the same message (Luk 4:18, 19; Mark 10:17).

The church is still sent to proclaim by word as well as deed the good news of God's reign and the need to repent and believe.

### **Jesus Evangelized by Living and Calling People to a Holy Life**

Jesus evangelized by living a holy life. His character was the embodiment of his own teachings (Matt. 5:7) and drew people to him. As Jesus attracted people by who he was, so the church today is challenged to demonstrate a quality of living as revealed in Scripture that is attractive to people and is itself a means of evangelism.

As stated at the beginning of this section, the above is only a beginning effort to understand evangelism in Jesus Christ's way. As the church follows its Lord in joyfully sharing the good news, it will discover further ways in which Jesus is its model for evangelism.

## **THE WHOLENESS OF EVANGELISM**

Evangelism in these past decades has come to be seen as the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world. This terminology, derived from two ecumenical streams, provides a useful set of categories under which to explore some of the more specific aspects of global evangelism.

## The Whole World

All persons are created in the image of God and share in a single, interrelated humanity. The tragedy of earth is the distortion of this image and the brokenness of the human family. In the work of evangelism the church reflects the seeking heart of the Eternal that longs to unite people with God and with one another.

The modern world is a vast mosaic of religions and ideologies, cultures and peoples, cities and villages, poor and rich. How we understand these realities will shape in part the way our resources for evangelism are utilized at this particular moment in history.

## People of Many Cultures

Over five billion persons inhabit the earth. People in this world normally identify themselves as members of particular groups: cultures, languages, ethnic groups, nationalities, vocations, classes, or religions, to name a few. These "people groups" number tens of thousands and are in constant flux as societies and world conditions change.

Some of the larger people groups and many smaller subcultures still have no indigenous church, one that expresses their unique culture. While they may be found in isolated parts of the world, unevangelized people groups are increasingly likely to be found in the teeming cities of the world. "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," calls for the establishment of congregations in every human community and culture:

This task of sowing the seed needs to be continued until there is, in every human community, a cell of the kingdom, a church confessing Jesus Christ and in his name serving people. ("Mission and Evangelism," an ecumenical document of the World Council of Churches, paragraph 25)

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is committed to this task. In fulfilling this calling we will be sensitive toward the cultures of people groups among whom we engage in mission. At the same time we will work cooperatively with other churches and Christian groups seeking to relate to particular people groups.

## People of Many Religions

With other Christians we are called to make joyous witness to persons of other faiths in a spirit of respect, openness, and honesty. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms with ecumenical partners that

the proclamation of the gospel includes an invitation to recognize and accept in personal decision the saving lordship of Christ...Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and every people. ("Mission and Evangelism," and ecumenical document of the World Council of Churches, paragraphs 10, 41)

In calling people to faith in Christ we are not only offering personal salvation but also calling them to follow Jesus in the service of God's reign. ("Message" of San Antonio, World Council of Churches, Section I.26)

As our Christian affirmation meets the faith of others, we are not called to respond in judgment but in awareness of the limitless, saving presence, power, and grace of God. The spirit that is to inform our witness among people of other faiths

...presupposes our presence with them, sensitivity to their deepest faith commitments and experiences, willingness to be their servants for Christ's sake, affirmation of what God has done and is doing among them and love for them. ("Message" of San Antonio, World Council of Churches, Section I.25)

As Christians our faith demands that we seek to build loving relationships with persons of other faiths. Where possible we will work in solidarity with them in struggles for justice, freedom, peace, and human dignity.

### People Who Are Uprooted and Displaced

Millions of people are made refugees through war, poverty, oppression, and changing social conditions. They become displaced from familiar surroundings to live in new lands among strangers, often destitute and marginalized.

Waves of immigration have swept such people to our shores, as well as to many others. The world has literally come to our doorstep. As Presbyterians we have a responsibility to increase efforts to reach out in love to these newcomers in the spirit of Christ's vision of the kingdom: an open house, a festive table, a royal banquet made ready for all who will come. Since this situation is acute in many parts of the world, we stand in solidarity with partner churches and other agencies as they seek to minister with immigrants and refugees in their own context.

### People of Secular Persuasion

Historically, the United States of America was settled by many who sought freedom from monolithic religion that would disallow free spiritual response or discourage strong individual responsibility for one's faith. Today, many Christian minorities around the globe seek the freedom to exercise their faith in the midst of forces that would require conformity. The movement toward releasing society from the bonds of religion, known as "secularization," has been a positive force often related to Christian faith.

Nevertheless, secularization has frequently spawned an ideology of "secularism," that is, an attitude toward the world in which there is no reference to God. This attitude, in turn, may become dominant in a society, even capturing the minds of people of faith, so that they view large segments of their lives as having no relationship to God.

Secularism, that is, a world view without God, causes many people to be caught up in the selfishness of personal ambition, the pleasure-seeking of consumerism, or the greed of power. Likewise, people who have lived in such an environment lacking personal or corporate acknowledgement of God may yearn for meaning in their lives. Their emptiness may be filled through acceptance of unauthentic distortions of religious institutions, new religions, or controlling

ideologies. Idolatries of race, nation, or philosophy may become demonic forces. Even important work such as the search for justice may be no justice at all when it is done without God.

Evangelism among people of secular persuasion is an important, if neglected, role of the church in the United States and in other parts of the world where secularism is common. While Christians may find points of common ground with secular people in the mutual search for human well-being, they can witness through joining the church's resistance to God-denying secularism. Education and evangelism are often linked as the church witnesses to what we believe.

Evangelism is also required where the Christian faith has not been passed on to succeeding generations. The church must pay special attention to youth and young adults who live in an overwhelmingly secular milieu.

### People Who Are Poor and Powerless

In a world where the majority of those who do not know Jesus are the poor of the earth, those to whom he promised the kingdom of God, *how essential it is to share with them the Good News of that kingdom!* ("Mission and Evangelism," World Council of Churches, Preface)

There is a new awareness of the number of people who are destitute, hungry, and materially forsaken as the gap between wealth and poverty grows in our own and other nations. The "poor" are also those who suffer persecution, oppression, and social marginalization. Unjust economic orders, unequal distribution of political power, racism, gender discrimination, and the fragmentation of family and community all increase the number of people who find themselves homeless, isolated, imprisoned, disenfranchised, and feeling abandoned and voiceless without a sense of being in control of their own destiny.

God is active in the world working among the poor of the earth, seeking to reconcile them in Christ and blessing them in their longing for justice and liberation. As the poor become bearers of the whole gospel, they have much to teach others. The lively hope of poor people in Central America, for example, has surprised and moved more affluent visitors from North America.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) must continue to rethink its priorities and lifestyles as it expands its efforts to bear witness to the gospel in word and deed to all peoples, with special concern for those on life's periphery economically and socially and for those multitudes – most of whom are "poor" in one or more senses of the word – who, increasingly, are flocking to the cities of the world. A guiding principle for Presbyterian life and mission comes from the "Message" of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism held in San Antonio, Texas, in 1989:

The proclamation of the gospel among the poor is...a priority by which to judge the validity of our missionary engagement today.... A proclamation which does not hold forth the promises of the justice of the kingdom to the poor of the earth is a caricature of the gospel. A Christian participation

in the struggles for justice which does not also point to God's gracious offer of reconciliation and salvation to the poor is likewise a caricature. ("Message" of San Antonio, World Council of Churches, Section I.32, 34)

## The Whole Church

The church of Jesus Christ is present today in almost every country of the world. It exists in an amazing variety of forms. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is one part of this emerging global Christian community. With all God's people everywhere we join in making disciples among all the nations and people of the world.

## Members, Sessions, and Congregations

Global evangelism has no reality until it becomes local evangelism. When each congregation and each Christian assume responsibility for evangelism at the particular place where they live, they are engaging in the evangelization of the world.

Members of the church are called to evangelize as they are dispersed in the world (Westminster Confession of Faith, 7.200). By their witness at home, in the neighborhood, where they work, and in society at large, Christians become a major part of the church's mission to the world.

When members are gathered for worship, the gospel is proclaimed in Word and Sacrament (*Book of Confessions*, Confession of 1967, 9:36). In congregations, God's people demonstrate the reality of God by the mutual love and support they offer each other. In addition, every church is to cultivate the grace of openness in extending the fellowship of Christ to all persons of every race, ethnic origin, or worldly condition (*Book of Order*, G-5.0103).

Presbyterian sessions are to call their congregations and members to assume special responsibility for evangelism where they are. They are also to call on them to be partners in evangelism with the other governing bodies of the church in state, nation, and world. It is expected that all Presbyterians will "contribute by their prayers, gifts, and personal efforts to the extension of the Kingdom of Christ throughout the whole earth" (*Book of Confessions*, Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.058).

## Other Governing Bodies

The General Assembly, through the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit and the Global Mission Ministry Unit, provides programs designed to encourage and carry out evangelism in the United States and in many other nations. These ministry units challenge particular churches, presbyteries, and synods in the United States to educate their constituencies in regard to global realities and opportunities to participate in and to support mission and evangelism at home and overseas. They seek to build personal relationships between these governing

bodies, mission coworkers, and Christians from other lands who come here to share their witness.

Through the Global Mission Ministry Unit, which is charged with coordinating work overseas, presbyteries now have the opportunity to relate directly with ecumenical and church partners overseas. Presbyterian members, sessions, congregations, presbyteries, and synods are encouraged to use these and other ways to strengthen their relation to and underwriting of the global mission program of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit has established a plan for evangelism entitled "Presbyterian Evangelism: Looking to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Its aim is to inspire, equip, mobilize, and resource the whole church for evangelism. Church revitalization, church redevelopment, and new church development are some of the particular emphases of this plan.

Presbyteries are discovering the value of encouraging congregations to look for groups without the gospel in their ministry area. Particular emphasis is being placed upon identifying people among emerging immigrant groups, traditional racial ethnic groups, new youth cultures, and other self-identifying subcultures of the general population. Presbyteries in coordination with synods are encouraged to explore this and other ways of harnessing the energy and resources of Presbyterians for evangelistic outreach.

Special attention must be given to Christians who have come to the United States from other lands. Some of them have been members of Christian communities with which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in global partnership. Culturally sensitive congregational development projects will make it possible for these newcomers to be part of a worshiping, nurturing, and evangelizing church in this land.

There are groups within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who have organized themselves around one or more specific concerns for mission and evangelism. Some of these have entered into covenant relationship with the General Assembly through the appropriate ministry unit. This spirit of collegiality with like-minded Presbyterians is affirmed and should be fostered appropriately by all governing bodies of the church.

### Church-to-Church Relationships in Evangelism

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) engages in world evangelism with churches in over eighty countries. Partners in evangelism may be churches that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) played a role in establishing. Today these churches have their own programs of evangelism and global mission. In obedience to Christ they are involved in evangelism around the world.

Our denomination will continue to cooperate with these and other churches in the task of world evangelization. They will assist us in evangelizing in the United States; we will join hands with them in their own countries; and together we will reach out to yet other countries.

### Ecumenical Cooperation in Evangelism

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been in the forefront of ecumenical approaches to mission and evangelism. Presbyterians have been a vital part of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Council of Churches, and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Presbyterian Christians are also to be found in mission organizations independent of official ecclesiastical structures and in Christian movements that have arisen for the purpose of achieving a greater unity in evangelism.

As one part of Christ's body, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) understands that the fullness of the body can be demonstrated only as Christians unite in mission and evangelism. For the church at this point in our history, ecumenical cooperation implies at least the following:

1. acknowledging the authenticity and integrity of varying forms of the Christian movement, as long as the essentials of the faith are affirmed;
2. respecting the presence of other Christians and their church structures and recognizing that our efforts in areas where they exist inevitably affect them and their relations to their surrounding society; and
3. engaging in consultations with established churches and parachurch groups and, wherever possible, undertaking joint efforts in mission in evangelism

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) pledges itself to continue working and praying for the visible unity of the church: that the world may believe (John 17:20-24). Christians around the world hope for that time when the church will exhibit the wholeness for which we all long, when the church will be established in every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, and when with one unified voice we will all give glory to God.

### The Whole Gospel

The whole gospel is the good news of God's love and salvation as revealed in Jesus Christ, as set forth in Scripture, and as demonstrated in the life of God's people. It is good news for people in all realms of life and in all human circumstances.

1. For those suffering from the guilt of sin, the good news is forgiveness, restoration, and new life through Jesus Christ, the Savior, and loving acceptance extended by God's people.

2. For those controlled by sin, slaves of dehumanizing forces, or addicts of destructive substances and their human networks, the good news is God's liberation from the sovereignty of evil through the power of Christ's resurrection and the presence of the Holy Spirit.
1. For those facing death, the good news is that in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, death is swallowed up in victory; that he goes with us through the valley of the shadow of death; and that beyond the grave he welcomes us into the church triumphant.
2. For those enduring physical suffering or mental anguish, the good news tells of one who endured the depths of human pain, who is present with us in our brokenness, and who, through brothers and sisters in faith, participates with us in our times of suffering and healing.
3. For those who feel deserted or left alone in life, the homeless and the orphaned, the good news is of a friend who never leaves or forsakes us, who comforts us with the Holy Spirit and befriends us in God's family.
4. For those investing their lives in materialism and pleasure, those caught in affluence built on the exploitation of others, the oppressors of the world, the good news is both a call to repentance and a word of mercy that with Jesus' servanthood brings wholeness in life, simplicity brings freedom, and life lived in harmony with God's reign brings meaning and purpose.
5. For those who are mired in apathy or exhaustion, or who have lost confidence amidst the overpowering, seemingly fruitless struggle against the negative forces in human existence, the good news is that by the Holy Spirit our gloom is infused with light, our existence with new life, and our despair with hope.
6. For those whose lives are threatened, exploited, shattered, or oppressed, the good news is that God and God's people stand with us defending life in all its fullness and advocating justice with dignity for all persons and groups.
7. For those who have lost land, possessions, and family through natural or humanly-caused disasters, the good news is that the compassionate Savior comes to each of us through the Holy Spirit and the generous love and care of brothers and sisters in Christ.
8. For the smallest child, the least powerful and poorest persons, the forsaken and downtrodden groups who are relegated by others to less than human status, the voiceless and the untouchable, the good news is that God created us and deeply loves all of us, that Christ died for us and sends the Holy Spirit to fill us with life, courage, dignity, and peace.

- 9 For those of other faiths and ideologies, the good news is that in Jesus of Nazareth, God has revealed the fullness of divine love and extends through the church an invitation for all to share in the banquet of God's reign.
- 10 For those struggling against injustice or war, for hostages and prisoners held by inhuman systems or persons, the good news is that God in Christ is an advocate for justice and peace and has called the community of faith into partnership for the transformation of evil institutions, structures, and persons.
- 11 For the elderly who face the latter years of their lives with a mixture of anxiety and hope, and the good news is of the continuing love of God in Christ for each person and of the continuing call of God to join in faithful worship, prayer, stewardship, and work in the church and in the world for the glory of God and the good of all.
- 12 For all people everywhere, the good news is that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

## CONCLUDING AFFIRMATION

- Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) commits itself
- 1 To announce the good news that in Christ Jesus the world is reconciled to God;
  - 2 To tell all nations and peoples of Christ's call to repentance, faith, and obedience;
  - 3 To proclaim in deed and word that Jesus gave himself to set people free;
  - 4 To offer in Christ's name fullness of life now and forever;
  - 5 To call people everywhere to believe in and follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;  
and
  - 6 To invite them into the community of faith to worship and serve the triune God.

## NOTES

1. The citation is from the actions taken by the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit and the Global Mission Ministry Unit as recorded in the background material for this resolution. For the purposes of this resolution, the meaning of "evangelism" is that adopted by the 201<sup>st</sup> General Assembly (1989): "Evangelism is joyfully sharing the good news of the sovereign love of God and calling all people to repentance, to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, to active membership in the church, and to obedient service in the world" (*Minutes*, 1989, Part I, p. 359).

Also included in the action of the two ministry units was the phrase "unreached people group." This term and phrases related to it such as "unevangelized peoples," "people not yet evangelized," "people without the gospel," and the like, are technical terms that designate groups of people who have not known God's love and salvation in Jesus Christ.

2 *Minutes*, 1990, Part I, p. 68.

- 3 Excerpts on the biblical basis for evangelism from the *Book of Order* will be cited throughout the document.
- 4 All citations from Scripture are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
- 5 References to specific confessions of the church may be found in the *Book of Confessions* (Louisville, Ky.: Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)).
- 6 "Message: Authorized Version," Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches, San Antonio, Texas, 22 May-1 June, 1989, Section I, 1.2.
- 7 "Affirm the Good News: Strategies That Will Enable the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. to Fulfill Its Responsibilities for Reaching People Who Are Without the Gospel," (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1977, Part I, p. 545).
- 8 "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," paragraph 21. "Mission and Evangelism" is an ecumenical document of the World Council of Churches that has been approved by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) "as a faithful expression of the basic commitment of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America to mission and evangelism..." (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1983, Part I, p.436).
- 9 Adapted from *Charter and By-Laws of the Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, as revised and adopted by the commission, November 18, 1969 (Louisville, Ky.: Office of the General Assembly, p.5).
- 10 Matthew 11:2-6; Luke 7:18-23. The word "poor" is the subject of much discussion in the light of Liberation Theology. According to the Bible, "the poor" are, on the one hand, "the humble and pious who seek God and tremble at God's word" (see Isa. 66:2, 5). On the other hand, "the poor" are also "unfortunate, neglected people who are suffering and weeping because of their social inferiority; the feeble, weak members of society, who feel and who are really defenseless, helpless, and unprotected; those who have neither a voice nor an opportunity in society" (Barreiro, Alvro. *Basic Ecclesial Communities: The Evangelization of the Poor*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982, p. 15).
- 11 The *Book of Order*, together with the *Book of Confessions*, from the constitutional documents of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Like the *Book of Confessions*, the *Book of Order* is available from the Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- 12 In Christian ecumenical medical circles, attempts are being made to understand the nature of the healing community, the relationship of scientific and traditional medicine, and the gift of healing, as well as the way that disease is related to injustice and poverty, on the one hand, and how it is self-inflicted by lifestyle decisions, both individual and collective, on the other.
- 13 Jesus' parables indicated this kind of urgency also, e.g., Luke 14:15-23.
- 14 See also Mark 5:1-2; John 11:1-44.
- 15 See also the *Book of Confessions*, Confession of 1967, 9:37.
- 16 See also the *Book of Confessions*, Westminster Confession of Faith, 7.200.

- 17 For specific programs in the plan for evangelism, contact Andrea E. Pfaff, director, Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); 100 Witherspoon St.; Louisville, Ky. 40202-1396.
- 18 Groups that have entered into a covenant relationship with the General Assembly include the Outreach Foundation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Medical Benevolence Foundation, and the Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship. They are called Validated Mission Support Groups.
- 19 The Lausanne Committee on World Evangelism is one such organization with heavy Presbyterian involvement.
- 20 With regard to parachurch groups, see recommendation C.(13) that calls for guidelines for relations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels to Presbyterians engaged in global mission non-Presbyterian mission organizations.
- 21 *Book of Order*, W-7.2001, G-1.0200, G-3.0300; *Book of Confessions*, Confession of 1967, 9:31.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to “Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ’s Way,” which is an affirmation of the continuing direction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in evangelism, both local and global, with particular focus on mission among those not yet evangelized, and a challenge to the whole church to renew its engagement in evangelism and to provide the resources needed to fulfill its calling as “Christ’s faithful evangelist,” the 203<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly (1991)

- A adopts the document, “Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ’s Way”;
- B instructs the Office of the General Assembly to distribute the document, “Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ’s Way,” to the governing bodies and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for study and appropriate implementation;
- C instructs the Global Mission Ministry Unit, the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit, and other appropriate entities to implement the following:
  - (1) prepare and make available at cost a study guide to be used with the document, “Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ’s Way,” incorporating suggestions for exploration and action by congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, and others;
  - (2) reaffirm the commitment of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to respond to the initiatives of governing bodies, related churches, councils of churches, and other groups in a common effort to communicate the gospel among all people by word and action, with priority concern for those still unevangelized;
  - (3) reaffirm the continuing commitment of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to initiate efforts to share the gospel with specific groups of people who are not yet evangelized, doing this wherever possible in cooperation with governing bodies, partner churches, councils of churches, and other appropriate Christian groups (see recommendation C. (13) below);

- (4) facilitate, guide, and coordinate the participation of congregations, presbyteries, and synods in the Commitment to Share Good News, as a way to relate to people groups not yet evangelized;
- (5) increase, as resources are provided by the whole church, the recruitment and deployment of varieties of mission personnel-those who have the joyful urgency to share the good news in Jesus Christ's way;
- (6) give strong emphasis-in cooperation with others-to holistic gospel ministries among the poor, the disinherited, the uprooted, and the oppressed;
- (7) explore appropriate alternative methods of evangelism among people living in countries that are officially opposed to the presence of a witnessing church or mission group, while taking precautions to avoid practices that may compromise the witness of the church or bring harm to the existing churches to those areas;
- (8) give special emphasis, in cooperation with others, to mission and evangelism among the inhabitants of the rapidly growing cities of the world;
- (9) provide resources to help congregations learn about other major faith traditions, non-Christian ideologies, and new religions, and offer counsel on ways for Christians to engage in dialogue and witness to Jesus Christ among persons of other major faith traditions;
- (10) continue to implement the "Looking to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" plan for evangelism and church development in order that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) may increase its effectiveness in "doing evangelism and developing congregations," particularly among those who are not yet evangelized;
- (11) continue to work with and encourage support from the Validated Mission Support Groups, in order to enhance the work of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its partner churches and councils in mission and evangelism, with special focus on those still not evangelized;
- (12) continue to plan with existing ecumenical institutions (World Council of Churches, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and regional council of churches) for greater programmatic cooperation in evangelism to demonstrate the connection between unity and evangelism; and
- (13) develop and publish a set of guidelines for relations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels to Presbyterians engaged in global mission through non-Presbyterian mission organizations.

D. urges sessions, in view of their responsibility "to lead the congregation in the participation in mission of the whole Church in the world, in accordance with G-3.000" (*Book of Order*, G-10.0102b), to

- (1) join in an intentional commitment to become more involved in evangelism and mission in order to enable the congregation and its members to be "Christ's faithful evangelist";
- (2) adopt and implement one or more of the evangelism approaches offered through the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit, giving particular attention to training members for the work of evangelism and noting the wide variety of materials available through the New Day Dawning Evangelism Emphasis and other General Assembly materials;

- (3) ensure that corporate worship of the church offers people the opportunity to “turn to the living God” in repentance and faith;
- (4) enhance the experience of mutual love and support within the church, demonstrating the gospel so that people see in action the good news proclaimed by the church;
- (5) cultivate the grace of hospitality and demonstrate an inviting spirit by extending the fellowship of Christ to all persons;
- (6) identify, recruit, train, deploy, and support those members who manifest special gifts for evangelism, such as: compassion and empathy; cross-cultural communication skills (listening, learning other languages, relating to people of other cultures); knowledge of human systems for spiritual, social, and psychological discernment; and a desire to share the good news of Christ with others;
- (7) explore developing relations with unevangelized people groups in their local community and outside the United States, following the approach and guidelines of the Commitment to Share Good News; and
- (8) employ available resources from their presbytery, synod, and the General Assembly ministry units, especially the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit, to identify and begin ministries with the unchurched people in their areas.

E. urges presbyteries and/or synods, in view of their constitutional responsibilities for mission initiation, strategy, and coordination within their bounds (G-11.0103 and G-120.102), to

- (1) reach out to unchurched people in their areas through new church development, church redevelopment, and church revitalization, utilizing the resources of the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit;
- (2) develop or assist congregations to develop gospel ministries, fellowships, or congregations among unevangelized people groups in their bounds, following the approach and guidelines of the Commitment to Share Good News, and to work with the Office of International Church Development and Evangelism regarding unevangelized people groups in other countries;
- (3) work with appropriate offices in the Global Mission Ministry Unit (Presbytery Partnerships) to develop programs of mutual assistance in evangelism and church growth with partner churches and councils of churches in other lands;
- (4) assist churches in the process of identifying, recruiting, training, deploying, and supporting members who manifest gifts for evangelism; and
- (5) work with theological institutions to provide for alternate styles of pastoral leadership development (such as, commissioned lay preachers or Christian educators) for the new churches among recently evangelized peoples and for church development or redevelopment and church revitalization situations where the traditional pattern of a full-time pastor with a master of divinity degree is not appropriate or possible.

## ABBREVIATED STUDY GUIDE FOR "TURN TO THE LIVING GOD: A CALL TO EVANGELISM IN JESUS CHRIST'S WAY"

### Part I, "*Turn to the Living God*," and Part III, "*The Whole Gospel*"

- 1 What is the good news according to Section I, Introduction and "*Turn and Be Reconciled*"?
- 2 How has the gospel become good news for you personally? Can you think of other paragraphs to add to Section III, "*The Whole Gospel*" that tell another way the gospel is good news?

### Part I, "*Turn and Be Renewed*" and "*Turn and Be Sent*"

- 1 What factors have hindered you and your church from "joyfully witnessing" to the love of God in Jesus Christ?

### Part II, "*Evangelism in Jesus Christ's Way*"

- 2 Do you agree with the assumption made in this paper, that Jesus is to be our model for evangelism?
- 3 Which aspects of the evangelistic style and strategy of Jesus impress you? Which challenge you?
- 4 As you read the gospels, do you see other ways Jesus did evangelism that are not mentioned in this section?

### Part III, "*The Whole World*"

- 1 Which of the "realities" of the modern world presented in this section are ones you have considered as you think about sharing Christ with others? How do they affect our doing evangelism in Jesus Christ's way?
- 2 Which of the "realities" presented have you not thought much about before?
- 3 Are there other factors in the "vast mosaic" of this world which also significantly affect our strategy and practice of evangelism?

### Part III, "*The Whole Church*"

- Where does your church do a good job of bearing witness to Jesus Christ?
  - Who in your church seem to have the gifts of evangelism and hospitality?
  - Where could you improve?
- How is your church involved in church development and evangelism at the presbytery and synod level? At the General Assembly level?

