

No. 0115

(Sense-of-the-Assembly)

CONCERNING REPARATIONS FOR SLAVERY

ADOPTED by the General Assembly

Background Information

Members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ began conversations on the issue of reparations for slavery following the Disciples Justice Action Network sponsored Justice Jubilee 2000 gathering in Tulsa, OK in September 2000. It was noted that awareness and discussion of this issue occurs almost exclusively among African American clergy and those churches they serve, but is also a justice issue long overdue for the serious attention of Christian citizens motivated by faith and tradition.

Summary

This resolution calls upon the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) General Assembly, individual churches, regions and other manifestations to be educated about the historic evils of the slave trade and its legacy; and the pernicious and self perpetuating distrust and fear that continues to feed the sin of racism and its fruits of inequality and injustice. It calls upon local congregations to make this a searching public discussion as well as a congregational one. It calls upon Homeland Ministries to cooperate with the Justice Ministries Unit of the United Church of Christ to provide an education piece that will help the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ members dialogue with each other and with members of their congregations and communities.

WHEREAS, the institution of Slavery is internationally recognized as a crime for which there is no statute of limitations; and

WHEREAS, uncompensated labor under cruel circumstances was demanded from enslaved Africans and their descendants for more than two centuries on U.S. soil; and

WHEREAS, the principle that reparations is the appropriate remedy whenever a government unjustly abrogates the rights of a domestic group or foreign people whose rights such government is obligated to protect or uphold has been internationally recognized, including:

German reparations to the State of Israel for the Holocaust,

United States reparations to Japanese Americans for illegal internment,

Reparations by the people of New Zealand through their government to the Maori people of New Zealand; and

WHEREAS, this violation of the human rights of Africans has left a long legacy of subordination, segregation, and discrimination against descendants of slaves; and

WHEREAS, in January 2000 a bill was presented in the U.S. House of Representatives: THE COMMISSION TO STUDY REPARATIONS PROPOSALS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS ACT (H.R. 40) by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.);

"To acknowledge the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery in the United States and in 13 American colonies between 1619 and 1865 and to establish a commission to examine the institution of slavery, subsequently de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African-Americans, and the impact of those forces on living African-Americans, to make recommendations to the Congress on appropriate remedies and other purposes;" and

WHEREAS, in the century and a half since the abolition of slavery the United States government has never acknowledged or taken responsibility for its role in the enslavement of Africans and the promotion of White Supremacy; and

WHEREAS, the experience and legacy of enslavement, segregation, and discrimination continues to limit the life chances and opportunities of African Americans; and

WHEREAS, Christians must not only continue to call for the release of the captives (Leviticus 25:52), but also to proclaim liberty, bring good tidings to the afflicted, and build up the ancient ruins; (Isaiah 61) and

WHEREAS, several attempts have been made by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to address issues arising from racism and poverty {including Resolution No. 62 Concerning the Crisis in the Nation and a Call to Action approved by the 1967 Assembly of the International Convention of Christian Churches, Resolution No. 19 A Message from the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in response to the Black Manifesto approved by the May 27, 1969 meeting of the General Board, and Resolution No. 6919 Recommendation for Action by the Christian Church approved by the 1969 General Assembly of the Christian Church} (Disciples of Christ), these attempts have been limited and ineffectual and have not directly addressed the issue of the evil of slavery and have not dealt with the horror of our church's official silence in the days of the abolitionist movements.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in Kansas City July 13-17, 2001, calls upon congregations, regions, agencies, and general units of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to join in active study and education on issues dealing with reparations for slavery; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Homeland Ministries and Reconciliation Mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) cooperate with the Justice Ministries Unit of the United Church of Christ and other appropriate partners in making available study resources with scriptural basis to equip churches and individual Christians so that they might acknowledge our nation's role in slavery, and the compliance of many of our ancestors with slavery; that they might assist local schools in resourcing curricula that tell the truth about the practice of slavery; that they might help Christian citizens make informed communications to elected government representatives, giving faith based reasons for support of a formal apology for slavery, and that they might prompt the creation of a Congressional Commission for the study of reparations issues; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly of 2001 calls upon the United States government to issue a national apology for participating in and supporting the kidnaping, exporting and enslaving people of African descent. This apology needs to be made on behalf of the people of the United States to people of African descent by the President of the United States and Congressional leaders from both political parties; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly of 2001 calls upon its President and General Minister, Richard Hamm, and other Disciple leaders to be in dialogue with leaders of other Christian denominations, other faith groups, and leaders and activists in the secular community to raise this issue at every opportunity.