

General Synod 20 Resolutions United Church of Christ

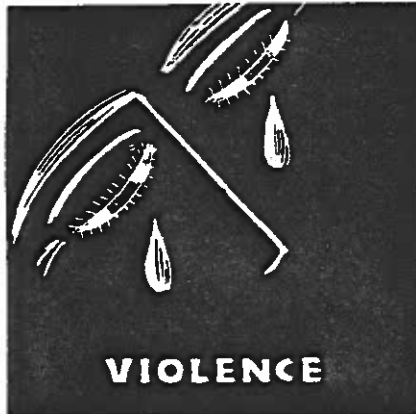
Violence in our Society and World

Summary

Violence touches all of us. Its roots are deep and entangled around issues related to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and economics, among others. Violence pervades our past, shapes our present reality and threatens our future. Violence is not far removed from our lives. It is very close to home, indeed, it is often in our homes. Children see murders on the street, witness domestic violence in their homes and are assaulted with a constant stream of violence on the movie screen, on the television and on the radio. Children not only observe violence on a daily basis, they are often its victims. Adults have often responded to violence through isolation, building higher walls and fences, buying more sophisticated burglar alarms, purchasing guns for protection and abandoning life in the public sphere. Meanwhile the government's response is too often to build more prisons, eliminate opportunities for rehabilitation and cut prevention programs which would offer young people an alternative to violent streets and homes.

All of us suffer from the increase in violence in our society. We are, understandably, fearful and even at times paralyzed by the magnitude of the problem. Indeed, a lack of hope is often at the root of violence and it is all the more essential for us, as people of faith, to identify and lift up the source of hope and healing along with the possibilities for faithful action which we can bring to the epidemic of violence. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral,

begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it...Returning violence for violence multiplies violence...Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." As a church let us assess the toll that violence levies against us all. Then may we proceed to invert the descending spiral of violence into an uprising of hope.



Biblical / Theological / Ethical Rationale

"Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise." Isaiah 60: 18.

Violence is an exertion of force so as to injure or abuse. Violence encompasses violations of trust and infringements upon the integrity, wholeness, or health of another or of oneself. To indulge in violence is to deny the full humanity of the person violated and to treat that person as an object to be used and/or discarded.

Ultimately violence breaks faith with the belief that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God [Genesis 1: 26-27] and thus worthy of respect.

The climate of violence is the climate of despair. Despair characterizes those who are violent, threatens those who are violated and marks those who regret violence but are resigned to its inevitability.

Violence is commonly conceived in individual terms with a single perpetrator and a single victim. The reality, however, is far more complex. Violence is a part of the very structures that define the way we relate to each other socially, politically, economically and spiritually. None of us is solely victim, perpetrator or bystander. Violence manifests itself in our language, in our social structures and in our public policy as it lingers in our land. Recent immigrants to the United States and gay and lesbian people are current targets of increased hate crime violence, as other groups have been in the past.

Text of Resolution

WHEREAS the American Missionary Association, the Commission for Racial Justice, the Coordinating Center for Women in Church and Society, the Office for Church in Society, and the Twentieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ seek to have the whole church begin to address the pandemic of violence in our society;

WHEREAS our Christian convictions call us to be peacemakers in a world in need of peace;