

DECLARING THE NCNC/UCC TO BE A JUBILEE CONFERENCE

POSITION STATEMENT

Purpose

In response to the crushing global debt experienced by developing countries around the world, and in solidarity with international efforts to eliminate the debt, the Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ adds its voice to this call for justice.

Position to be Voted

The 2004 Annual Meeting of the Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ declares itself to be a Jubilee Conference, and encourages all local churches of the Conference to consider becoming Jubilee Congregations.

Background

Jubilee USA Network began as Jubilee 2000/USA in 1997 when a diverse gathering of people and organizations came together in response to the international call for Jubilee debt cancellation. The Jubilee 2000 campaign resulted in the cancellation of one hundred billion dollars, approximately one-third of the total debt.

Now over 60 organizations including labor, churches, religious communities and institutions, AIDS activists, trade campaigners and over 9,000 individuals are active members of the Jubilee USA Network. Together they comprise a strong, diverse and growing network dedicated to working for a world free of debt for billions of people.

Jubilee means debt cancellation for poor nations. In the Jubilee Year as quoted in Leviticus, those enslaved because of debts are freed, lands lost because of debt are returned, and community torn by inequality is restored. Today international debt has become a new form of slavery. Debt slavery means poor people working harder and harder in a vain effort to keep up with the interest payments on debts owed to rich countries including the US and international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Jubilee USA Network brings together people to turn this reality around by active solidarity with partners worldwide, targeted and timely advocacy strategies and educational outreach.

Why eliminate the debt?

- **Debt costs lives.** In the world's most impoverished nations, the majority of the populations do not have access to clean water, adequate housing or basic health care. These countries are paying debt service to wealthy nations and institutions at the expense of providing these basic services to their citizens. The lives of 19,000 children could be saved every day if the debt of these countries was cancelled and savings put to good use.
- **Debt sucks the natural resources out of a country,** forcing countries to become dependent on international creditors for more aid and new loans.

- **The conditions that come with new loans and debt relief hurt the poor.** Debt relief under the current program takes essential human services, like primary health and education and access to safe water, out of reach of the impoverished majority.
- **They've already paid.** These nations have already paid back their debts time and again. The debt crisis set in when interest rates skyrocketed and compound interest made repayment impossible.
FACT: Nigeria borrowed \$5 billion, paid \$16 billion to date and still owes \$32 billion.
- **Debt cancellation is adding by subtracting.** Debt cancellation allows countries to access their own resources for poverty reduction. Savings from debt service can now be allocated for health care, education, fighting HIV/AIDS and more.
FACT: Experts estimate it would take an annual commitment of \$10-15 billion a year to turn around the AIDS crisis in Africa that claims 7,000 lives a day. Sub-Saharan Africa pays almost \$15 billion in debt service to the wealthy nations and institutions every year. Just do the math.
- **Makes our foreign aid work better.** Currently our foreign aid frees up money for countries to pay back their debts to other wealthy nations and international banks. Debt cancellation would help ensure that new funds can be used effectively for poverty reduction, ultimately lessening countries dependence on aid.
FACT: In the "boom" years of 1990-1997 developing countries paid more in debt service than they received in new assistance.
- **Debt cancellation gets results.** The small amount of debt relief given so far has achieved startling results, including more than doubling school enrollment in Uganda, vaccinating five hundred thousand children in Mozambique and adding three more years of schooling for Honduran children.
FACT: After debt relief and the elimination of school fees, 1.5 million children returned to school in Tanzania almost overnight.
- **We have the power.** Ordinary Americans, working with partners around the world, can generate the political will needed to drop the debt. The United States has the most influence of any nation over creditors and international banks. Our Congress could leverage full debt cancellation for impoverished countries. However, they won't act unless they think we care.

Becoming a Jubilee Congregation requires four simple commitments:

1. Pray for a Jubilee for the world's poorest countries.
2. Appoint a Jubilee contact person who will serve as a liaison between the congregation and Jubilee USA.
3. Contribute one dollar per member per year to Jubilee USA Network (or whatever they can afford).
4. Send one letter per member per year to a member of Congress or the administration calling on them to "drop the debt."

Canceling the debt enjoys bi-partisan support in the US Congress... more needed here. In May, 2003, for example, the US Senate passed a global AIDS legislation package which included an amendment calling for deeper debt relief for impoverished nations, especially those burdened by high levels of HIV/AIDS. The amendment was championed by Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Rick Santorum (R-PA). It will nearly

double current debt relief for the world's poorest nations by cutting an additional \$1 billion in both bilateral and multilateral debt service annually.

Most recently, as of the writing of this resolution, former Secretary of State James Baker has been visiting with world leaders to convince them to forgive Iraq's international debt, most of which was incurred during the reign of Sadaam Hussein.

For more information contact the Jubilee USA Network website at www.jubileeusa.org.

The UCC has been a part of Jubilee USA since its inception. In October 2000, the UCC's Office for Public Life and Social Policy in Washington, DC, joined millions of Christians and churches around the globe encouraging the US Congress to pursue debt relief for some of the world's most impoverished nations. In addition, our denomination works with non-governmental organizations to reform global financial institutions and with local churches to keep the pressure on for debt relief that helps, not hurts, indebted countries. For more information about the UCC's involvement, check the Justice & Witness section of the UCC website www.ucc.org. For an easy way to communicate with your elected officials about debt cancellation, check www.ucctakeaction.org.

In 2002, the Overview Board for Justice & Witness Ministries convened a Conference-wide symposium on global debt reduction. Marie Clarke, Executive Director of Jubilee USA and Rev. Ron Stief, Minister and Team Leader of the UCC's Public Life and Social Policy Ministry were key-note speakers.

In 2003, at its annual meeting, the California-Nevada Conference of the United Methodist Church voted to become a Jubilee USA Network Conference. The Pacific Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is considering a similar action at its 2004 annual meeting.

Biblical/Theological Rationale

"Proclaim liberty throughout the lands and to all the inhabitants thereof, it shall be a jubilee for you." Leviticus 25:10. God and right community relationships occupy the center of economic and social life in the Bible. Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15 call for debt cancellation and the righting of relationships every 7 years with a super Jubilee every 50th year. They announce the periodic release of those enslaved because of debt, rest for the land and the people, redistribution of the land, and the restoration of right-relationships.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). In the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus read this Jubilee passage from the Book of Isaiah. Throughout his ministry, Jesus embodied this Jubilee principle. In an article in *Sojourners*, biblical scholar Ched Meyers points out that "there is no theme more common to Jesus' storytelling than Sabbath economics. He promises poor sharecroppers abundance (Mark 4:3-8, 26-32), but threatens absentee landowners (Mark 12:1-12) and rich householders (Luke 16:19-31) with judgment. In order to teach the incompatibility of the economy of grace with the dictates of "Mammon," Jesus spins a parable that portrays a hapless middleman caught in the brutal logic of the debt system who decides to "trade" instead in Jubilee-style debt release (Luke 16:1-13). When faced with a dispute over inheritance rights, Jesus counters with a parable about the folly of storing up wealth (remember the manna!), and then exhorts us to learn the lessons of

grace and subsistence from the "great economy" of nature (Luke 12:13-34; see James 5:1-6)" (*Sojourners*, July-August, 1998).

Recommendations for Implementation

The Bay Area Jubilee Debt Cancellation Coalition, the local chapter of Jubilee USA stands ready to assist local churches in their quest for more information about global debt cancellation as well as how to become a Jubilee Congregation. Contact person is Rev. Bill Leshner (ajlesher@aol.com). In addition, the Overview Board for Justice & Witness Ministries is available to work with interested Conference churches.

Announcements of this decision will be sent to all Northern California Nevada US Senators and Congresspersons, encouraging their support of Jubilee debt cancellation.

Cost Estimate

Minimal. Expenses connected with printing and circulating this action both to churches within our Conference, as well as to individuals and groups outside the Conference.

Contact Persons

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