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2011
Reflections on a Divided Church

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Come Let Us Disagree Together

2016
A Confessional Approach to Discrimination
Homelessness as a Justice Issue

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A Question of Hermeneutics
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THE SANCTITY OF PERSONS

Introduction

This Commission has struggled long and hard with this issue. Referred to us by the 1990 General Assembly, we have sought to do what we interpreted the Assembly to be asking of us.

We sought divergent views on the subject. We sent requests to sixteen different people for their input on this matter. We do express appreciation to the following for their thoughtful input: Stan Garard, Jacqueline Warren, William Rustenhaven, Jr., Elinor Brown, Hubert Morrow, James R. Scobey, Mrs. Randall McGee, Mrs. Randy Hammer, Margaret McKee, Robert McClure, Deborah Peak, Maridell Templeton. The manner in which each of these addressed our questions, as well as the manner in which they put forth their own feelings, assisted us greatly in preparing this paper.

It should be pointed out that the topic before us here involves a wide range of issues which are not being addressed in this study.

Abortion

On the question of abortion, members of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church hold a variety of views. Some oppose abortion in almost every circumstance, except perhaps when the life of the mother is threatened. Others see abortion as regrettable but morally permissible if the fetus is diagnosed as seriously ill, or if the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. Still others see abortion as tragic but acceptable in wider circumstances.

In the public arena, the debate over abortion continues to rage. Unfortunately, this debate is often sharply polarized and unproductive. This public divisiveness poses a serious threat to the unity and peace of the church. Furthermore, the secular terms of the public debate—namely the right to life versus the right of the woman to control her own body—threaten to intrude on the integrity of the church's own reflection. Where the church should be listening to the teachings of the Bible and of its traditions, its search for guidance is often drowned out by the shrill divisiveness of the secular, public debate.

When we in the church look to scripture and the Christian tradition, we find they affirm a range of views. It is little wonder, then, that members of the church, each sincerely seeking the will of God, can come to differing conclusions. Among Cumberland Presbyterians, we find these views on abortion:

a. Some among us believe that abortion is always wrong, except perhaps to save the mother's life. They recognize that the Bible teaches that each human life is a gift from God. Children especially are to be received as a gift and nurtured in gratitude. Furthermore, the value of each human life is not intrinsic—that is, it does not depend on how good a person is, or how free of sickness or handicap, or how mature physically or mentally. God loves each human person fully and unconditionally, from the first moment of our existence. We are to treat every other person with a respect that is commensurate with the value that God's love gives them. This love of God confers an infinite value on each person. On this basis, we are to see each person as having a God-given sanctity. Every person, whether mentally handicapped, a convicted murderer, an enemy in war, or an unborn fetus, is given this sanctity by God and should be respected by us.

b. Others in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, equally sincere in their prayerful desire to be instructed by scripture, recognize that the mercy of God always meets us in the concrete circumstances of human brokenness. In a perfect world—without rape, incest, genetic abnormalities, unwed and teenage pregnancies, poverty, or illness—every pregnancy can be received as a gift. While agreeing that God's love for every human individual confers a sanctity upon the life of the individual, these others hold that this sanctity means that every child has a right to a life free of catastrophic genetic disease, abuse, neglect, and hunger.

In addition, they question the idea that a human person is brought into existence at the moment of conception. After all, they point out, conception itself is a process, not a moment. Furthermore, for about eight days after conception the embryo can divide into two identical twins, and it would not make sense to say that one person has divided into two. And, after the embryo divides into two, it can rejoin into one. Personhood, they believe, arrives much later when the fetus is fully formed and when the central nervous system and the neo-cortex (the human part of the brain) are present, around the twenty-second week of the pregnancy. In support of this view, they appeal not just to contemporary embryology but to many of the most prominent theologians of the Christian church until the middle ages, who taught that the human person did not exist until the embryo was formed.

Of course, long before the embryo is formed, it has the potential for human life, and this potential must be treated with great respect. But the potential for personhood is not the moral equivalent of actual personhood. And so if strong reasons are present (such as genetic deformity or, physical or psychological threat), an abortion is permissible.

Furthermore, since the mother (and, if married, her husband) is uniquely qualified to assess the full impact of any threat posed by the pregnancy, the mother, with the guidance and support of the church, is permitted to make her own decision as to the will of God for her pregnancy.

Conclusion:

In the public arena, some argue for the right to life. By contrast, we in the church affirm the God-given sanctity of every human life, seeking in prayer and repentance to create a world in which we respect more consistently the sanctity of all persons. In the public arena, others argue for the right of the mother to control her own body. By contrast, we in the church affirm the responsibility of mothers to guard their own health, their own calling as persons before God, and the health of their other children, even as they consider the will of God for a pregnancy that comes under less than perfect circumstances.
In the public arena, politicians use the abortion debate to attack their opponents and divide the electorate. We in the church pray for the unity and peace of the church even as we struggle to support individuals who are in distress over personal choices. In the public arena, some want to punish those who disagree with them. In the church, we recognize that we all stand in need of forgiveness and healing.

Since Cumberland Presbyterians affirm a variety of views on abortion, it is not appropriate for the General Assembly to define either view as the view of the church. Instead, on the issue of abortion, the General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church affirms this range of views as equally valid interpretations of the Christian faith, equally faithful to scripture and equally open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Recognizing that members of our church will act on their convictions in the public arena and in the church, we affirm their prerogative to act in Christian conscience.

Furthermore, the General Assembly calls upon all Cumberland Presbyterians to pray for the peace of the church, to repent of allowing this debate to divide us, to hear the pain of Christian sisters and brothers struggling with this issue, and to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit speaking through those who hold opposing points of view.

Social Ills

The Commission is aware of the social ills that surround the circumstance of unwanted pregnancies. For example, there is rape (both within and outside of marriage); physical and psychological threats and abuse; lack of knowledge regarding birth control; promiscuous behavior; economic hardships; the health of mother and/or child. Regrettably, the church has often resisted sex education of young people, thus allowing the standards of media and advertising to become the prevailing value structure.

Therefore, a statement on the sanctity of persons must include an acknowledgment that the church has fallen short in speaking out regarding the sacredness of sexual activity within a mutually caring, monogamous relationship, i.e., marriage. The reality of the rising statistics of teenage pregnancies as well as the spread of AIDS gives impetus to our concern.

It is clear that a woman does not become pregnant in a vacuum. Additional responsibility for prevention and care must be that of the man, and the community. Therefore, the Commission calls on the church to repent of its failure and to take active steps toward addressing this issue by:

1) Providing continuing education of a biblically based understanding of human sexuality within the church family.
2) Supporting public policy which helps to establish and educate healthy human sexual behavior.
3) Providing low cost child care.
4) Becoming the extended family for mothers who are without a familial support system.
5) Making sensitive responses to the needs of low income families.

Respectfully submitted: Commission on Theology and Social Concerns, R. David Lancaster, Chair; J. David Hester, Secretary.
The Theology of Evangelism

"Most evangelists are not very interested in theology" writes Michael Green, "and most theologians are not very interested in evangelism." The testimony, alas, is true. Theology and evangelism go their separate ways, and the result is great loss to both of them.

Henry Cook wrote: "There is a story told of the great scholar, Jerome, who did so much for the Church of God by his translation of the Scriptures. Grammarians, Latinists, Hebraists, philosophers, like all true students he loved his books and often burned the midnight oil. In his sleep one night, he tells us, he saw himself standing before the Judgment Seat. 'Who art thou?' said the Lord on His throne. 'Jerome, a Christian,' he replied. 'Thou art no Christian, but a Ciceronian, for where your treasure is there will your heart be also.' And Jerome woke with a start to pray that God would forgive him for becoming so deeply in love with his books that he forgot the men and women for whom Christ died."

And this is the peril that befalls us all—especially those who are so engrossed in studies. We become so involved in our studies and other activities that we forget the needs of those people who do not know Jesus as the Christ. Substitute for books other interests—sports, material things, family, church activities—on and on the list can go. There are so many "things" that we cannot find time to take the good news to other people.

So it is that we need once again to address the age-old theme. Evangelism is not new; it was talked about even in Old Testament times (see Jonah). It was refined in the New Testament as Jesus showed the way and gave the command to carry the gospel to all people.

Douglas John Hall, writing in Thinking the Faith, said "Theology lives between the stories—God's story of the world, and humanity's ever changing account of itself and all things. Theology is what happens when the two stories meet."2

The theology of evangelism attempts to approach the theme of evangelism from a somewhat different perspective. "Theology is the church's conversation with itself; evangelism is the church's conversation with the world." So writes Richard Stoll Armstrong. Between these conversations with ourselves and with the world, we, as believing Christians, are obligated to spread the Good News of the Gospel.

Evangelism is a very definite part of the Cumberland Presbyterian tradition. Our church was born over nineteen decades ago out of revival—a method of evangelism. During the early decades of our history, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church stood for evangelism. This set us apart from other bodies of Christian believers who did not put as much emphasis on evangelism.

But somewhere in our history we have put less and less emphasis on evangelism and more and more emphasis on other segments of the Christian faith and practice. It is time for us to return to the roots of our heritage and rekindle the fires of evangelism.
Cumberland Presbyterians were leaders of evangelism during the 1800’s. Dare we dream of fulfilling that role in the last decade of the 1900’s?

The 1984 *Confession of Faith* of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church reaffirmed our church’s stance on spreading the good news. That *Confession of Faith* states (p. 15):

5.28—"The church, being nurtured and sustained by worship, by proclamation and study of the word, and by the celebration of the sacraments, is commissioned to witness to all persons who have not received Christ as Lord and Savior.

5.29 —"Growth is natural to the church’s life. The church is called into being and exists to reach out to those who have not experienced God’s grace in Christ, and to nourish them with all the means of grace.

5.30—"In carrying out the apostolic commission, the covenant community has encountered and continues to encounter people who belong to religions which do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. While respecting persons who adhere to other religions, Christians are responsible to share with them the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.'

Definition of Evangelism

What do we mean by the word "evangelism"? Everyone has an answer. And most of them will have threads of truth in them.

The verb "to evangelize" (euaggelizo) appears 55 times in the New Testament (sometimes as "proclaim," "preach").

The noun "good news," "gospel" (euaggelion) appears 77 times in the New Testament (56 times in Paul’s writings).

The noun "evangelist" (euaggelistes) appears only three times in the New Testament ( II Timothy 4:5, Ephesians 4:11, Acts 21:8).

The word "evangelism" does not appear in the Bible. It came into existence in the English language only 200 or so years ago.

So, what is evangelism? Delos Miles gives several Biblical clues as to the meaning of evangelism. Evangelism is...

1. The proclamation of the gospel (Mark 1:14-15)
2. Making disciples (Matthew 28:19-20)
3. Bearing witness to Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8)
4. Being fishers of persons (Mark 1:17)
5. Being the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13a)
6. Being the light of the world (Matthew 5:14 and John 15:16)
7. Bearing fruit that remains (John 15:8 and John 15:16)
8. Being the aroma of Christ ( II Corinthians 2:15)
9. The ministry of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:17-21)
10. Advertising the deeds of God (I Peter 2:9-10)

Michael Green gives a long list of things evangelism is *not*. It is *not*: the same as mission; individualistic; a system; an optional extra for those who like that sort of
thing; shallow; the task of ordained ministers alone; finding pew fodder; manmade propaganda; neither Christian proclamation alone or Christian presence alone.\textsuperscript{6}

During the days of the Cuban missile crisis people would go to the supermarket and buy two baskets full of canned goods. They anticipated war. This also happened recently in areas of the country when people anticipated an imminent earthquake. "What and how we do things in our daily lives are to a great extent determined by what we expect to happen in the future." And, this is true of our evangelism. Tell me what you expect of the future, and I will tell you what you think evangelism is and how one should go about it. "If we confine the Christian hope to the soul, our evangelism will be spiritualistic and thus consist of efforts to save souls from their bodies or the material world."\textsuperscript{8}

If we narrow the Christian hope to personal lives, as we do when we say, "I hope that when I die, my soul will go to heaven," our evangelism will be individualistic. And, in that case, we have not grasped the corporate and cosmic scope of salvation as it is presented in the New Testament.\textsuperscript{9}

What is evangelism? The answer is contained in the word itself. Evangelism means to confront people with the evangel, the "Good News" of the Christian gospel, in order that they may share in the fulness of life which it bestows. The meaning of evangelism cannot be stated more pointedly than by the author of the Fourth Gospel: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31). It is that business of making disciples which our Lord made the one commission of the church when He said, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Thus D.T. Niles of Ceylon, in his excellent book, \textit{That They May Have Life}, defines evangelism simply as "following Christ." Later, Niles was to define evangelism as "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."

A very simple—yet profound—definition comes from Michael Green: "Evangelism is proclaiming the good news of salvation to men and women with a view to their conversion to Christ and incorporation into his church."\textsuperscript{10}

How we define evangelism will dictate how we do evangelism.

\textbf{The Biblical Bases of Evangelism}

The Bible is filled with evidence showing that God expected God's people to communicate the Gospel wherever they found themselves. Carl Kromminga did us a great service by showing us six lines of evidence which are plainly discernable in the New Testament.\textsuperscript{11}

1. Evidences in Acts and Paul's Epistles

The earliest clear reference to lay communication of the Gospel after Pentecost occurs in Acts 8:4; "now those who were scattered went about preaching the word." The fact that the gospel was communicated not only by the apostles and others of some official standing in the church but also by lay people in their daily contacts with their neighbors is further suggested in numerous passages in Acts in which the "multiplication of believers" is referred to. These are: Acts 6:7; 9:31; 11:24; 16:5. It
is also evident in passages which state that the word of God "grew" ("increased", etc.): Acts 6:7; 12:24; 13:49; 19:20.

The factual type of evidence which can be traced in Acts can also be traced in the letters of Paul. In Romans 1:8, Paul thanks God because the faith of the Roman Christians is "proclaimed in all the world." The Corinthian Church is enriched in Christ Jesus "with all speech and all knowledge" (I Cor. 1:5). Paul thanks God for the partnership of the Philippian Church in the gospel "from the first day until now" (Phil. 1:5). In I Thess. 1:8, there is clear indication that whole congregations engaged in spreading the gospel. Paul says that the word of the Lord has "sounded forth" from the Thessalonian Christians.

2. Love for the Neighbor

The second major line of evidence that Christians have the duty to communicate the gospel to those around them is implicit in the repeated admonitions in the New Testament to love one's neighbors and to do good to that neighbor. The most radical application of this appears in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus speaks of the love which citizens of the kingdom owe to their enemies (Matthew 5:43-47).

Love for the neighbor is plainly commanded in the Old Testament. Israel was not to restrict its love to Israelites (Leviticus 19:18, 33, 34).

In Luke 6:27 Jesus commands those who hear, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." I Cor. 13:5, 6 reminds us that love "keeps no score of wrongs" (NEB) and "does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth" (ASV).

In Romans 12, Paul deals extensively with the demands of love as they relate not only to fellow believers but also to those outside the church. In response to the lawyer's question, Jesus emphasizes the importance of the law of love, Luke 10:25-28.

Paul's labors for the conversion of Jew and Gentile were performed in absolute obedience to his charge from Christ, Romans 114; II Corinthians 5:11; I Timothy 1:12.

3. The Absolute Requirement Of Confessing Christ

There is a third line in the New Testament which underscores the fact that Christians are to communicate the gospel to those around them. The followers of Jesus are under an absolute obligation to confess Christ openly. This is the clear teaching of Matthew 10:32, 33 and Luke 12:8,9. That the confession of Christ in public is absolutely required is further made plain in the negative instance in Matthew 10:33 and Luke 12:9.

The absolute character of the requirement of public, oral confession of Christ is further clarified in Romans 10:9,10. It is true that Paul's main purpose in this section (Romans 10:1-15) is to show that salvation is not to be gained by works of the law but by faith in Christ. But in doing this Paul brings out the absolute necessity of confession for salvation.

In the epistles of John the Christian confession is formulated over against specific details of the doctrine concerning Christ. He who denies that Jesus is the Christ is a liar (see I John 2:22, 23, 4:2, 3; 4:15, II John 7).
4. The Imitation Of Christ And The Apostles

The fourth line of evidence that believers are required to communicate the Gospel to those outside the church is found in some passages which speak of the imitation of Christ and the Apostles. In I Cor. 10:23-11:1 Paul deals in detail with the question of eating things offered to idols. The Christian has the freedom to eat flesh offered to idols (10:23; 25-27). But this freedom is not self-centered. Freedom must not be used in any way which gives an occasion for his own advantage "but that of the many, that they may be saved," vs. 33. And he adds immediately, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (11:1).

Peter writes: "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (I Peter 3:15).

5. Concern for the Erring

A fifth line of evidence that the New Testament requires all believers to engage in the oral transmission of the gospel is found in those passages in which believers are commanded to show concern for the erring or for those who are in danger of falling into sin. This is forcefully taught in passages which deal with the relationship of the "strong" and the "weak." The believing community has the urgent task of holding within its fellowship those recently converted to the faith and those whose consciences are tender.

It is apparent from Romans 14 and 15: 1-7, along with I Cor. 8:9-13, that the helping and holding of the weak are primarily effected through inoffensive conduct on the part of the strong. They are to make certain that they do not exercise their rights as the strong in the eating of meat, the drinking of wine, and the partaking of flesh offered to idols in a way which offends the weak.

Paul speaks of this theme again in I Thessalonians 5:14 and in II Corinthians 2:7. In James 5:19, 20 the communication of admonition and exhortation to the brother who errs from the truth is commanded. Yet another command to show concern for the erring is given in II Thess. 3:14, 15.

6. Direct Injunctions To Communicate The Gospel

The most direct line of evidence that the New Testament requires believers to communicate the gospel to others is afforded by those passages which directly command all believers to express the faith orally to those with whom they come in contact.

A general admonition to proper speaking on the part of believers is given in Ephesians 4:29. Christians are to speak "only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear." (NRSV)

In Paul's description of the armor of God in Ephesians 6:13-18, he exhorts the Ephesians "as shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace." (NRSV)

Phil. 1:27 tells the Philippian Christians to "only live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

In I Peter 3:15 there is a direct command to believers to be ready always to make a defense to everyone who calls them to account for the hope that is in them.
The most direct injunction to communicate the Gospel, and the very foundational verse of evangelism is found in Jesus' words at his ascension in Matthew 23:19-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (NRSV)

The specific promise of Jesus at His ascension (recorded in Acts 1:8) also places heavy emphasis on communicating the gospel to others: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." There is no question of whether the gospel is to be spread or not: "You shall be my witnesses..."

On the whole, in the New Testament, there is a relative scarcity of direct injunctions to communicate the gospel to others. Why? "It must be observed that believers were actively engaged in sharing their faith at the times the New Testament was written. Believers were simply conforming to the law of the church's life."2

As Harry R. Boer says: "The obedience of the church to the law of her being was a natural obedience, unreflective, spontaneous."

It should not surprise us then that the New Testament often simply takes note of witnessing activity already being performed and seldom urges this activity on believers. When these injunctions do occur, they are given either to encourage believers to testify in the face of opposition or to urge them to seize the opportunity for testimony and to do it effectively.

It is our contention that the Bible teaches a theology of harvest, that "it is God's intention that His lost children be found."14 The Bible does not lead one astray. One doesn't make the Bible relevant—it is relevant. So, evangelism is justifiable, biblically. It is also imperative, biblically.

The Need for Balance

One of the criticisms leveled against evangelism today is that it does not address the needs of people in this world. It is strictly "other-worldly." True evangelism will minister to people's physical needs as well as their spiritual needs.

Myron Augsburger told a 1985 meeting of six Anabaptist denominations: "If you think you can be New Testament in peace and social concerns without being evangelistic, then you are mistaken."3

Delos Miles gives the flip side to that statement: "If you think you can be New Testament in your evangelism without being concerned with peace and social concerns, then you are mistaken."6

Walter Rauschenbush laid it out for us when he said: "The adjustment of the Christian message to the regeneration of the social order is plainly one of the most difficult tasks ever laid on the intellect of religious leaders."7

"Example evangelism" may be a term we should coin. In such usage we are showing by example what Christ has done for us. I give to other's needs because Christ gave for my needs. I minister to the needs of others because I have been the
recipient of ministry. I share the good news of the gospel because someone shared it with me. And good news cannot be kept—it must be shared! There must be a balance between seeking salvation for a person's soul and providing food for their table. True evangelism will minister, not only to spiritual needs, but to physical needs as well.

**Evangelism and the Laity**

"There is no more important theological theme for evangelism than that of the role and responsibility of the laity." This is not a new idea. But very few churches seem to have grasped the truth that clergy alone cannot evangelize the world! If laity does not assume its rightful role in spreading the good news of Jesus, the vast majority of people will not be reached! "We have had almost two thousand years to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the professional clergy cannot win the world. If there is any real hope of winning the world, it lies in the implementation of the doctrine of the priesthood of the believers."

Stated another way, "...preachers do not bear unique responsibility for evangelism. Like theology, that is a task too big for only a few. It is a task that belongs as much to the pew as it does to the pulpit. And it is a task that is fulfilled, if at all, not in the safety of the sanctuary but in the risky world of work and play, of home and community."

"A most misleading term which we still employ in the church is that of 'full-time ministry' for the minister of the Word and the Sacraments. It suggests that only the clergy can serve God all the time while the person who has a secular occupation is forced to serve God in his spare moments."

One of the teachings of the Bible which has been neglected in many churches is the teaching about Spiritual Gifts. Several passages clearly indicate that every believer is gifted (I Cor. 12:7, 11; Ephesians 4:7; I Peter 4:10; Romans 12:5, 6). There are no exceptions. Some Christians have only one gift; others are multi-gifted. Biblical lists of such gifts are found in I Cor. 12: 8-10, 28-30; Romans 12: 3-8; Ephesians 4:11, 12.

One of those gifts listed is "evangelist" (Ephesians 4:11). While only a small percentage of believers would have this gift (some say about 10% of all believers), all believers have been given the good news to share. All should be witnesses to what Jesus has done for them.

So it is that on Sunday morning when the clergyperson stands to preach, the gospel is being proclaimed by one. On Monday, that congregation of 200 is scattered and they should become 200 "sharers." They are the church gathered on Sunday; they are the church scattered on Monday.

Church-growth people define evangelism as "3-P evangelism": Presence, Proclamation and Persuasion. Your church building in a community is a presence. The pastor preaching from the pulpit proclaims the word. But it is the persuasion of the lived lives of Christian laity that will spread the gospel most. Christ's good news will never be carried to the world unless it is intentionally carried by the laity as well as the clergy.
Conclusion

So it is that we have said about the Theology of Evangelism:

1) The Cumberland Presbyterian church was born in evangelism and has long since championed the cause of evangelism.

2) Evangelism may be defined in many ways. A simple definition says "evangelism is proclaiming the good news of salvation to men and women with a view to their conversion to Christ and incorporation into His church."

3) There are strong biblical bases for evangelism.

4) There is a need to balance our view of evangelism so as to look at the physical as well as the spiritual needs of people.

5) Evangelism will never be done in today's world until the laity join the clergy in spreading the good news.

"A paradigm of our present situation is provided by the trial scene in the ninth chapter of John's gospel. Jesus has restored the sight of a man born blind. Because this occurred on the sabbath the man is led before the Pharisees to give an account of this breach of the Law. They interrogate him. They call his parents to testify that their son was indeed born blind. They mount an ad hominem attack upon Jesus and characterize him as a sinner. When they turn again to the man formerly blind and demand of him an explanation, he gives his testimony: 'Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see' (9:25). The issue of evangelism today is precisely whether or not we who profess faith in Jesus Christ can, like that man, testify to the difference Jesus Christ has made in our lives. The challenge of evangelism today is whether or not we will bear that public witness."

It was reported that Dwight L. Moody was approached one day by a young minister who exclaimed how much he desired to see people saved, but that no matter how hard he preached, he did not have much results. "You don't mean you expect to have conversions at every service?" queried Moody. "No, I guess not," was the timid reply. "That's your problem," was Moody's curt response.

At another time, Moody was criticized for his methods in reaching people. "I prefer my methods of reaching people to your method of not reaching people," Moody replied.

Decades ago George McLeod expressed the essence of evangelism this way: "I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap, at the kind of place where cynics talk smut and thieves curse and soldiers gamble. Because that is where he died, And that is what he died about, And that is where churchmen should be and what churchmanship should be about."

There are many methods of evangelism. Examples include preaching, revivals, visitation, crusades, literature (tracts). On and on the list goes. But method is not our concern in the Theology of Evangelism. Our concern is that we once again address the premise that evangelism is a way of life for every believer. We must stop worrying about methods—new or old. Instead we must turn to the way of sharing what we possess—the good news of Jesus.
END NOTES

8. Ibid., p. 6.
9. Ibid., p. 6-7.
12. Ibid., p. 42.
15. Quoted in “Historic Peace Churches Seek a New Evangelistic Emphasis,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 29, no. 8, May 7, 1985, p. 44.
19. Ibid.
   Lovell, *op. cit.*, p. 126. C.
1991

THE THEOLOGY OF THE SACRAMENTS AND ORDINATION

The 1988 General Assembly (Minutes p. 225) assigned this Commission to be a consultant relating to the question of whether licentiates should administer the sacraments in certain situations. We petitioned various persons both within the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and from other persons who are closely associated with the work of the church. Those responding to questions put by the Commission were: Roy E. Blakeburn, Robert L. Brawley, Paul B. Brown, Ronald Cole-Turner, Dan Freeman, Hubert Morrow, Robert E. Shelton, and Robert M. Shelton. The Commission expresses its thanks for the time and thoughtful preparation given by these respondents.

A paper on this issue was prepared and presented to the General Assembly Committee on Judiciary. They accepted the paper as from our consultant role and assured us that they would prepare necessary amendments to the Constitution for the 1992 General Assembly in response to this concern.
The Committee on Theology and Social Concerns, in reviewing the paper which we submitted in 1991 on "The Biblical and Theological Basis for Evangelism," made the following recommendation which was passed by the General Assembly:

"That the Commission on Theology and Social Concerns in conjunction with the Division of Church Growth and Evangelism review the statement and prepare a joint statement on the Biblical and Theological Basis for Evangelism and Church Growth for adoption by the 1992 General Assembly." (p. 269, 1991 Minutes).

After more than two years in writing, and having been assigned the task by the General Assembly, the Commission presented its paper on the Theology of Evangelism to the 1991 General Assembly. This paper was referred back to the Commission with the above instructions. Efforts to meet with Rev. Jack Barker, head of the Department of Church Growth and Evangelism, during this past year were unsuccessful. However, he did write a paper of his own which did not arrive in the hands of members of the Commission until well after the scheduled January meeting of the Commission. The Commission thanks Rev. Barker for his input.

We ask the Assembly to delay until 1993 the request for the joint statement as this Commission and the department of Church Growth and Evangelism work together to produce a final draft regarding the theology that undergirds both church and evangelism.
THE SANCTITY OF PERSONS

The report of this Commission on this topic to the 1991 General Assembly was reviewed and the following action was taken: "That the study be referred back to the Commission to deal with as instructed by the 1990 General Assembly, to list Biblical references for support of both positions stated in the study paper on Abortion, and that they deal with the Sanctity of Life from "'beginning to end.'" (p. 270, 1991 General Assembly Minutes).

This comprehensive referral made by the 1991 General Assembly far exceeds the capacity of this Commission as presently constituted and funded.

In 1990 the Commission solicited sixteen people to respond to questions addressing the sanctity of life. Twelve people responded (p. 152, 1991 GA Minutes). One of the responses was given by Dr. Hubert Morrow of Russellville, Arkansas.

We submit the following condensation of his paper as a resource for theological reflection on the Sanctity of Persons.

THEOREOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURE AND SACREDNESS OF PERSONS

Hubert W. Morrow

Preface

The term human life is an abstraction. No such entity exists. Persons do exist, therefore it is appropriate to reflect theologically on the nature and sacredness of persons. To reflect theologically on the nature and sacredness of persons is to consider them in relationship to God. The sacredness of persons derives from this relationship which was established by God in the act of their creation. This relationship was broken by persons in their rebellion against God, and is restored by God in their redemption through Jesus the Messiah. In reflecting on the sacredness of persons, they must be considered as they were created to be, as they exist in rebellion against God, and as they are as new creations in Christ by the Holy Spirit.
The Sacredness of Persons in Creation

According to Genesis 2:27-28, persons are created in the image of God. To speak of the image of God in persons is to talk about their relationship to God as they were created to be. This is a relationship of love, trust, acknowledged dependence, and worship and service. When this relationship is as it was created to be, persons reflect an image or likeness of God.

The relationship of persons to God as established in their creation is the source of their sacredness. Therefore, the sacredness of persons is a corollary to the divine image in which they are created. That persons are sacred means that they are created and set apart by God for a purpose in the world.

However the original creation of persons occurred, God's continuing creation of persons is by a process that is known to us. When sexual intercourse between a man and a woman occurs, and this results in the fertilization of an egg by a sperm, the process of creating a person has begun. Understood theologically, God is acting in this process to create a person for some divine purpose in the world. It is clear from Scripture, that God intended that this creative act occur within the relationship of a man and woman in marriage.

Sin and the Sacredness of Persons

In the rebellion of persons against God, the image of God reflected in them, and the sacredness that derives from that image, are perverted, corrupted and violated. Instead of seeing themselves in relationship to God, and cherishing their sacredness, persons create their own worlds and develop purposes for their existence in terms of self interest. Indeed, sin corrupts the very process by which persons are created by God. God's gift of sexual intercourse to a man and woman in the relationship of marriage is degraded to the level simply of selfish lust between men and women.

The further corruption and violation of the sacredness of persons take many forms of cruelty of persons toward other persons. The ultimate form is the killing of persons by other persons, the prototype of which is found in the story of Cain and Abel. This ultimate form of violence of persons toward other persons is understood in Scripture as a most serious offense against God, since persons are created in the image of God. (See Gen. 9:6). The utter seriousness with which God views this ultimate violation of the sacredness of persons is seen in the unconditional prohibition against the killing of persons by other persons in Exodus 20:13. (See also Dent. 5:17 and Mt. 5:21-22.)
The Law and the Sacredness of Persons

According to the Apostle Paul, the Law is God's gift to a fallen world, to restrain rebellious and self-centered persons (Gal. 3:19). This is illustrated in the five unequivocal prohibitions in the Decalogue which apply to human relationships (Ex. 20:13–17). However, even the restraining power of unequivocal prohibitions has been weakened and qualified to make room for the self-interests of sinful persons. This is illustrated by Jesus in his response to questions about the nature of marriage and its termination by divorce. He said that marriage was a union created by God and should not be broken by divorce. The Pharisees protested saying, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and divorce (his wife)." Jesus replied, "Because of the hardness of your heard (Moses) wrote this commandment for you" (Mk. 10:4–9).

In a similar fashion, and for the same reason, Moses qualified the sixth commandment in the Decalogue, which prohibits the killing of persons by other persons. The most important qualification provided for a further killing, for blood revenge (Ex. 21:14). This was then expanded into a general principle of retaliation. "Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Ex. 21:23–25). As the concept of Law was developed in the Old Testament, it became a system of laws (qualifications of the Law) designed to restrain rebellious, self-centered persons by appealing to their self-interest. The sanctions of laws included rewards for their obedience and punishments for their disobedience.

The process of qualifying the sixth commandment did not stop within the time frame of biblical history. The ambiguities of human existence under the conditions of sin continue to call for further qualifications. New circumstances arise and cultures change, making some of the qualifications in Scripture no longer applicable and calling for new qualifications. For example, a qualification in Ex. 21:10–21 provided that the killing of a slave should be treated as the loss of property rather than the killing of a person. On the other hand, society today is grappling with how to formulate a qualification that is appropriate for the killing of a person by a drunken driver of an automobile. Some of the most troublesome circumstances today have been created by medical science. Society is being forced to deal with abortions, "mercy" killings, "pulling the plug," and decisions in certain instances not to employ life prolonging procedures. Society is now grappling with the formulation of laws, qualifications of the sixth commandment, that will regulate these forms of "killing."
In a different context, society continues to struggle with how to regulate killings by persons serving in military forces in wars, and by law officers in the preservation of order. These killings in "line of duty" are initiated by governments rather than individuals. It is not altogether clear what qualifications of the sixth commandment are appropriate in these cases.

There are other circumstances in which the death of persons occur as the result of certain actions or failure to act, which generally are not regarded as killings. The use of certain products such as tobacco and alcoholic drinks are known to cause deaths, both of the people who use them and others. There are further questions about the responsibilities of the companies which continue to make and sell these products. Though not now generally regarded as killings, these deaths are nevertheless violations of the sacredness of persons. Society is grappling with the issue of what laws are appropriate qualifications of the sixth commandment in these circumstances.

Still another category of deaths may be said to be killings by omission. Many infants die from lack of pre/post natal care because their parents are poor and unable to provide such care. Other children die of malnutrition or unnecessarily from diseases because their parents are poor and cannot provide them adequate food and medical care. Debates about responsibilities of parents and society for these deaths do not change the fact that laws could be enacted that would prevent many of these killings by omission.

By their nature, all laws are expedient. As the Apostle Paul noted, they can never make people righteous. The best that can be expected of laws and their sanctions, is that they will provide some restraints on the rebellious, self-centered disposition of persons in a world that is in bondage to sin and death. This is not to despair altogether of this gift of God to the human family. Rather, it is to recognize both the functions and limits of the Law, and to encourage all efforts to fashion and administer laws in ways that maximize the protection of the sacredness of persons.

Christians and their churches are responsible to work for the formation and administration of laws that will be most effective in restraining all forms of the violation of the sacredness of persons. The task will involve compromises, not only because Christians their selves do not always agree, but because a significant portion of the population will not necessarily share a Christian perspective.

These conclusions are drawn from the above reflections on the qualifications of the 6th commandment in the formulation and application of laws to protect the sacredness of persons. (1) The killing of persons by other
persons will continue in a variety of ways, until the kingdoms of this world become
the kingdom of the Lord, Jesus the Messiah. (2) The ambiguities of the
circumstances in which killings occur will not go away, but will increase,
presenting new challenges in the formulation and administration of laws designed
to restrain persons from killing other persons. (3) Christians and their churches are
responsible to participate in the effort to obtain justice and equity in the
formulation and administration of laws designed to protect the sacredness of
persons; but at the same time are themselves called to go beyond the Law to
interpret and uphold the sacredness of persons in accordance with Grace.

Grace and the Sacredness of Persons

In the beginning of the human family, God was confronted by an ultimate
violation of the sacredness of persons—Cain's killing of his brother Abel.
Fearing for his life, in accordance with the law of blood revenge (life for life),
Cain cried out to God for protection. According to the account, God dealt with
Cain according to Grace rather than Law. God put a sign of Cain which read, "Do
not kill Cain." This suggests that God had determined to deal with rebellious,
self-centered persons in a fallen world, not simply by restraining them with the
Law, but by redeeming them through Grace.

In the supreme manifestation of Grace, God in Christ refused to take up
the sword in establishing the kingdom of God. He was condemned under the
Law, and willingly suffered death at the hands of rebellious and self-centered
persons. What the Law could not do was accomplished in the miracle of Grace.
Death was overcome by Life, in the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

Persons who are redeemed from bondage to sin and death through the death
and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah are made citizens of the Kingdom of God.
They are in the world, and live under the laws of governments of the world, but
their first loyalty is to Jesus the Messiah who rules over them. As citizens of the
Kingdom of God, they are called to deal with other people even as God has dealt
with them, according to Grace not Law.

The beginning point of Grace in dealing with the sacredness of persons is the
affirmation that they are created by God in the divine image, and have a place
and purpose in God's world. This is the reason that the first issue for Christians in
the abortion controversy must be the issue of creation. Christians are responsible
to reflect on the theological meaning of sexual intercourse between a man and a
woman, and to teach the spiritual meaning of human sexuality. Through their
witness, Christians and their churches should seek the redemption of the act of
sexual intercourse from the level of self-getting lust (eros), to the level of self-giving love (agape).

To live according to Grace is to celebrate the mystery of God's creation of persons in the divine image. It is to give thanks for other persons, and to help them realize God's purposes in their lives. The motive of Grace should compel Christians and their churches not only to work for laws that will protect the sacredness of persons, but to go beyond existing laws to devote themselves in ministries that affirm and protect the sacredness of all persons.

For Christians, to live according to Grace means to return good for evil in all relationships of life. If anything is clear in the teachings of Jesus, it is that the principle of retaliation is foreign to the Kingdom of God. Jesus explicitly rejected the principle of retaliation in Exodus 21:23-25, saying rather, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (See Mt. 5:38-48.)

It is not surprising that Christians have difficulty living according to Grace, and find themselves reverting to Law in many of the relationships of life. This is due in part to the fact that they live in the world and participate in the kingdoms of this world. It is due, also, to the fact that their own redemption is not complete. Within the Christian church, it is a measure of the power of the Gospel that persons continue to struggle with issues that arise from the violation of the sacredness of persons. In the struggle it is important that they deal with each other in love, with patience and kindness. It is not without reason that Jesus the Messiah, in his prayer recorded in John 17, expressed great concern that his followers be able to live in the world but not be of the world.

This Commission reiterates its call, made in our 1991 report, that "...the General Assembly calls upon all Cumberland Presbyterians to pray for the peace of the church, to repent of allowing this debate (on abortion) to divide us, to hear the pain of Christian sisters and brothers struggling with this issue, and to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit speaking through those who hold opposing points of view" (1991 Minutes of the GA, p. 154).
DIVISION OF CHURCH GROWTH AND EVANGELISM

For several years, at its own incentive, the Commission worked preparing a paper which reflected on a Theology for Evangelism. The resulting paper, "Biblical and Theological Basis for Evangelism", was submitted to the 1991 General Assembly. (General Assembly Minutes, 1991, pps. 146-152.) That 1991 General Assembly directed the Commission to work with the Division of Church Growth and Evangelism to prepare a conjoint statement. (pg. 269 1991 General Assembly Minutes) This charge was reiterated by the 1992 General Assembly (p. 157, 1992 General Assembly Minutes) To this end, a representative of the Division of Church Growth and Evangelism submitted a paper to the Commission and accepted their invitation to discuss that paper during the September, 1992, meeting. Further consultation occurred between representatives of the two agencies with the intention of devising a consolidated paper. Subsequently, a condensation of the paper submitted to the Commission by the representative of the Division of Church Growth and Evangelism was printed in the "Missionary Messenger" January, 1993, (pps. 17-20).
ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH INTERACTION

A. CONSULTATION AND CHURCH UNION (COCU)

"Doctrinal disagreement and dispute have been major factors in the division of the Christian Church since early in its history." And yet, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, condemning those Christians who were polarizing around one or another theological viewpoint. ("The COCU Consensus" p.v) Efforts to find and articulate theological agreement among divided churches began in 1962 between 9 member denominations: African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Episcopal Church, International Council of Community Churches, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church; and 3 observer denominations: Lutheran Council in the USA, Reformed Church of America, and the Roman Catholic Church.

Of particular interest to this Commission is the recognition by COCU of the necessity to incorporate the theological insights of black Christians, and of women for any form of unity to occur.
RESOURCING PRESBYTERIES AND LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

Display Table. The Commission calls attention to its display table which features brochures revolving around social concerns in which Cumberland Presbyterians are actively involved. In addition, 3 videos are being shown which relate enriching experiences of volunteers and professionals who work with people who have AIDS: "Unconditional Love" produced by the United Methodist Church, "In the Midst of Winter" produced by AIDS Seattle, and "Care Tears" produced by the City of Fort Worth for the AIDS Interfaith Network.

Respectfully Submitted,

Commission on Theology and Social Concerns
Sacrament of the Lord's Supper: The 1988 General Assembly referred to the Commission on the Ministry and the Commission on Theology and Social Concern a memorial concerning the Constitutional revision which would be necessary to grant Licentiates the privilege of officiating at the Lord's Supper (pps. 178-179 GA Minutes, 1988). These two Commissions conferred, and discussed the possibility for two years. In the end it was decided that no such Constitutional amendment would be proposed or implemented without a thorough investigation in the area of sacramental theology, doctrine of ministry, ecclesiastical and historical issues. The Commission on Theology and Social Concerns undertook to do that investigation, reporting its findings and conclusions to the 1992 General Assembly (pps. 154-157 GA Minutes, 1992). Through the Recommendation of the Commission on Theology and Social Concerns, the 1992 G.A. formed a joint Task Force to study and make recommendations regarding the serving of the Lord's supper to all congregation. Rev. Tim Suenram, and Rev. Joe Butler, of the Commission were a part of that Task Force, with Dr. J. David Hester also in attendance. The report and recommendations of the Task Force will be presented outside of the Commission's Report.

The Commission considers the proposals of the Task Force to be a first step as the Cumberland Presbyterians seek to clarify its understanding of the mystery of the Lord's Supper, and to bring such insight into congruent polity of the church.
The 1991 General Assembly directed the Commission to do a "comprehensive study" on the Sanctity of Life. (p. 2700, 1991 General Assembly Minutes). To this end, the Commission solicited input from a variety of leaders in the denomination, and then submitted a condensation of a paper written by Dr. Hubert Morrow to the 1992 General Assembly. (pps. 157-160). The 1992 General Assembly then adopted this paper as a resource and directed the Commission to produce and make available a study guide from the context of Dr. Morrow's paper. (p. 269 1992 General Assembly Minutes).

This the Commission is attempting to do. In consultation with staff of the Board of Christian Education, the Commission drew up a Proposal for a Study Guide which envisioned a study aimed at three primary audiences: youth, parents of teens, and adults. The hope of the Commission is that participants in the study would come to recognize the implications of what it means that all people are sacred in the eyes of God, and how that informs and forms relationships with God, self, and one another. The Commission also anticipates that these materials, when produced, may have a wider circulation and meet a broader need than within the Cumberland Presbyterian Churches alone.

Rev. Harold Davis agreed to do the actual writing of the Study Guide in consultation with staff and members of the Board of Christian Education. The first draft of the Study Guide is currently being reviewed by members of the Commission and should be available for publication by early fall.

**Recommendation 2:** That the General Assembly approve a one time expenditure of no more than $1,000 for the purpose of printing and distributing the Study Guide and paper, "Theological Reflections on the Nature and Sacredness of Persons."
Responding to a Memorial from North Central Presbytery, the 1991 General Assembly acted to establish a Social Concerns Sunday for the 1991-92 and 1992-93 church years (pg. 270, G.A. Minutes, 1991) and desired that the Commission on Theology and Social Concerns make recommendations of subjects for special emphasis of concern throughout the denomination.

The concerns and challenges that face the church in the waning years of the 20th century are complex and many faceted. To designate one concern, and acknowledge its existence for only one Sunday of the year, would do little more than acknowledge the existence of a problem. Therefore, the Commission is seeking to name a social concern of the year, and to make available a wide range of materials and activities centered on that particular area of concern for use by presbyteries, congregations, and individuals within those congregations.

Plans are being developed in partnership with the Board of Finance, Foundation, and Management to develop a theological understanding for Stewardship of the Environment for the year 1995 and to conjointly prepare materials for use throughout the year by various groups within the church.
1993  CO-OPERATIVE EFFORT
(Board of Finance, Foundation and Management
Social Concerns Sunday

'Bill Akin, Peace and Justice Center of Memphis
1) Use of Alcohol; 2) the AIDS epidemic; 3) Teen-age Pregnancy; and 4) Strengthening the Family.

B. UNITED BOARD FOR CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

Cooperative work with the then Federated Board of Christian Education was accomplished when several members of the Commission served on the various Task Force groups which investigated and reported on what the Federated Board identified as pressing social issues. We affirm their efforts and are pleased that the Board of Christian Education is making available the results of the work of those groups through publications on 1) Use of Alcohol; 2) the AIDS epidemic; 3) Teen-age Pregnancy; and 4) Strengthening the Family.
POWER OF LANGUAGE

Human language is powerful. Through language we can express admiration, devotion, dislike, distrust, love, and hatred. Language can affirm or condemn, educate or titillate, communicate or excommunicate. Through language, we build a social world. We name, categorize, reward, punish, humiliate, or empower.

Words are tools of human expression, and yet sociolinguists have discovered that when speakers from different regions or different ethnic groups talk to each other, their words will often not be understood exactly as they were meant. It is even difficult when the speakers come from similar backgrounds, even when the word in use symbolizes a very concrete "thing." In the end, words are symbolic, inexact pointing both speaker and listener to a particular object, activity, or meaning.

Take the word "door", for instance. "Door" can symbolize the opening in a wall, used as either an entrance or an exit, or it can symbolize that which closes that opening in the wall. But deciding between the opening or the closing is only a part of the interpretation of what the speaker means by the word "door." Imagine a couple who agree that they need a new front door to their home. They go to shop for a door. One is a traditionalist: doors should be plain wood, unadorned. The other, raised in a house where the front door had pane of beveled glass, which allowed light rays to filter into the house in a rainbow spectrum, felt it was foolish to get another plain wood. One is concerned about safety, the other about the wood weathering poorly. One is worried about expense, the other about beauty. They shop, compromise, and eventually find a metal door, with a few panes of glass, at an acceptable price. They buy a model neither of them knew existed until they were willing to name their concerns, explore new ideas, and open themselves to the possibility that neither was wrong, but also that neither had the full picture of the possibilities of meaning in the word "door."

Our attempts to communicate through words become even more difficult when we speak of intangibles, feelings, and values. Words like "love," "soon," and "tired," carry a heavy measure of personal context that differ in meaning from moment to moment, from speaker to speaker, culture to culture. Each word carries an explosive potential from being misused or misunderstood. "You said you loved me ... yet you did such and or!" "You said you would wash the dishes soon, but now it's an hour later!" "You said you were too tired to cut the grass, and now you want to go play golf!"

How much more difficult it is for us when we attempt to express our understandings of the mysteries of life--of faith, of religion, of the divine! The words that we use to communicate these intangible mysteries have the potential power to harm as well as the power to heal. Throughout the ages, men and women have been aware that words which speak to or about the divine have power within themselves. Figures in the Old Testament even feared to say the name of the Divine: God spoke to Moses, saying merely, "I am what I am."

Concerns for the Church
Nowhere is the power of words more forcefully felt than in worship. Hearing the Bible read will move us; a good sermon changes us; prayers renew us and heal us. Indeed, we believe that God created all things through the power of words: God spoke, and the world came to be.

And so it is little wonder that finding just the right words is especially important in the church. The church today is rightly concerned about finding the best words to use in its worship. This concern, however, has been so sharply focused that the question of "inclusive language" now threatens the unity of the church and the credibility of its witness to the world. Some in the church honestly worry that "inclusive language" means goddess worship or new age theology. They fear that they will be told to omit the Lord’s Prayer and to pray "Our Mother." On the other side, some are afraid that everyone who speaks of God as "He" secretly wants all women to stay in the home and to keep out of leadership in the church or in society.

These are exaggerations, but it is exaggerations like these that we have most to fear. We appeal to everyone in the church to try to understand the point of view of Cumberland Presbyterians with whom they disagree, to seek accurate information, and to refuse to spread misinformation.

**Issues in the Debate**

There are two types of inclusive language. The first type is inclusive of all human beings. For instance, years ago, we might have said, "Jesus Christ came to save all men." Today, almost everyone would say, "Jesus Christ came to save every man and woman, boy and girl," or more simply, "Jesus Christ came to save every human being." Why make the change? Because we want everyone to feel included in the gospel message. We do not want our words to leave anyone out.

Sometimes, it is not so obvious how our words leave people out. For instance, if we speak only about "couples," or "families," unmarried people or widows and widowers may feel as if we do not want to include them. Or if we say, "Every elder did his best," it sounds as if we do not appreciate the contributions of the women who are elders. We could just as easily say, "All the elders did their best." Probably everyone supports this sort of inclusive language.

However, many who use inclusive language themselves do not want to rewrite hymns, much less the Bible, in order to make it inclusive. They may feel that rewording hymns for inclusivity will harm the original poetry, or they are uncomfortable with changing the words of the Bible, even though they realize, of course, that the Bible we use is already a translation. Others, on the other hand, believe that including everyone is such an important goal that hymns and the Bible translations themselves should be re-phrased.

We do not expect that the church will resolve this quickly or easily. Therefore, we urge everyone to understand the concerns of those with whom they disagree.

The second type of inclusive language refers to God. It tries to speak of God in ways that show how God is richly inclusive of all dimensions of creation, especially male and female. The church agrees that the triune God is not a mate.
much less a man. God is the creator of all that is; God is above the dichotomies of the creation; God is equally the God of men and women. And we also all agree that the Bible most often uses male terms to refer to God. The Bible routinely speaks of God as "He." Jesus refers to God as "my Father," and he tells his disciples to pray, "Our Father." Jesus is referred to by the Bible as "the Son of God" and as "the Lord." In a few Biblical texts feminine references are used to describe God. In Isaiah 42:14 God is compared to a woman giving birth. Jesus speaks of himself as being like a hen with a brood of chicks (Matthew 23:37). Everyone in the church recognizes this.

The question before the church is this: Should we alter our language today in order to balance the male and the female terms for God? Should our language about God be inclusive of male and female?

Once again, the arguments pro and con are strongly theological. Those who favor finding more inclusive language are concerned that even if our language about human beings is inclusive, exclusive language about God will show that we still favor men over women. If we only speak of God as male, then men will be seen as closer to God or more God-like. God, whose mercies are ever new, waits for us to offer praise that is full of new and rich language about the full glory of our creator.

Others believe that our language about God has been given to us in the Bible and in the teachings of Jesus, and that we are not permitted to change it or to find additional ways of speaking or praying. We are authorized to baptize only "in the name of Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." When we pray, we are to say, "Our Father." It is not our right to change the instructions.

Both sides in this debate have strong arguments. We do not believe this question will be easily resolved. We believe that all Cumberland Presbyterians on both sides of the argument sincerely want to praise God and to invite all people into the church. In this sense, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church is an inclusive church. "Whosoever will may come."

Let everyone know we agree on this:

Every human being is included in God's invitation.

Every human being, male or female, is a full expression of God's image.

It is the intention of the Commission to develop a Study Guide on the Power of Language which would encompass those specific issues known as "inclusive language" as well as other issues in communication which arise out of a constantly developing and changing language.

Respectfully submitted,

Commission on Theology and Social Concerns
SANCTIONS ON SOUTH AFRICA

In reaction to the policy of apartheid in South Africa, the General Assembly of 1989 instructed the Board of Finance to instruct its money managers to place sanctions on investments in that country. This was achieved by June, 1990. Since that time, apartheid policies have been lifted, elections are held in 1994, and Nelson Mandela has spoken before the United Nations, urging the economic actions be dropped. The Commission would encourage the removal of divestment policies from other institutions such as state and local governments.
A. BOARD OF FINANCE, FOUNDATION, AND MANAGEMENT

The concerns and challenges that face the church in the waning years of the 20th century are complex and many faceted. The Commission seeks to offer in-depth resources about a limited number of issues, and to encourage presbyteries, congregations, and individual members to draw educated conclusions about their own responses to these problems. To this end, the Commission is joining in partnership with the Board of Finance, Foundation, and Management to designate the year 1995 as the year of the Environment.

Therefore, the Commission plans to prepare sermons, Children's Sermons, liturgies, prayers, book reviews, and a list of resources to be used throughout 1995 in a variety of settings. A statement of a theological stance regarding Christians and the environment follows:

We believe that the God who is known to us in Jesus Christ is the Creator of the whole universe, the planet Earth, and all that is within. God pronounces the creation good. The planet as a whole, and the interwoven ecosystems that connect life on earth, are filled with the beauty of our God. Each species has its place in God's sovereign will, and the value of all creatures is established by the God who creates them, not by their usefulness to us.

We confess that we offend against the glory of the Creator when we disregard or defile the splendor of creation. We confess that we have regarded nature as raw materials waiting for us to manipulate, to sell, and to consume. We reject the belief that we have an unbridled right to poison the earth, eliminate other species, or destroy ecosystems.

We believe that God cares for all creatures of the planet, that all share the same air and water, and that all are made of the dust of the ground. Human beings share, with every other living thing, the same basic chemistry of life. Although we are one with creation, God has created us in God's own image and charged us with responsibility for creation's care.

We reject the view that this divine charge licenses us to use or exploit nature. We equally reject the view that we are nothing but part of nature and that we bear no special responsibility for the whole. When we fail to accept our God-given responsibility, or when we refuse to respect the limits God has placed upon us, we act in sin. Our greed harms us and other human beings, but it also hurts other creatures, destroys ecosystems, and offends the Creator. Our misuse of creation jeopardizes our own health and the survival of generations unborn. We put all life at risk. But most importantly, we spurn God's right to enjoy the wonders of the whole earth.
We believe that all creation awaits God's ultimate redemption. In Jesus Christ, God becomes flesh, sharing not just our human nature but taking on the common stuff of the whole creation. We believe, therefore, that God values the creation and holds open a place for all creation in God's final consummation. The entire cosmos offers praise to God. In Psalm 148, the sun and moon, the mountains and seas, the animals and even the wind are all enjoined to praise God. God seeks the full chorus of creation's song. In Romans 8:19-21, we read that creation as a whole groans in bondage, awaiting its redemption, when the whole creation will glorify God. We are created to live in such a way that does not mute any part of the praise offered by creation and other creatures, or deprive God of any glory due to God's name.

We reject as untrue the belief that God intends this world as a disposable creation, to be discarded on the way to redemption. We reject the idea that only human souls are valuable to God or able to give God glory. We commit ourselves to finding a transformed way of thinking and living, in harmony with the limits of the creation and with God's plans for it.

Others may treat nature as if it were not God's creation. We believe that God is Creator, and our beliefs require that we act. In our homes, farms, shops, offices, schools and churches, we will act as friends of God's creation. We will conserve, protect, and beautify the earth. In faithfulness to God and to what we believe, we commit ourselves to live as a part of creation, to defend other creatures and the viability of ecosystems, to make personal and institutional decisions that affirm our love for God's earth, and to hope for the day when, with heaven and with all the earth, we will rejoice in the presence of our Creator and Redeemer.

In addition, the Commission has prepared an Affirmation of Faith which consolidates the beliefs developed above. It is our hope that local congregations will find it worthy of use in a variety of

**AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

We believe that the God who comes to us in Jesus Christ is the Creator of the whole universe. God pronounces the whole creation good, and each species has its place in God's sovereign will.
We confess that we have regarded nature as raw materials waiting for us to manipulate, to sell, and to consume.

We believe that God cares for all creatures of the planet, that all share the same air and water, that all are made of the dust of the ground, and that we all share the same basic chemistry of life.

We confess that our misuse of creation jeopardizes our own health and the survival of generations unborn. We put all life at risk, and we spurn God's right to enjoy the wonders of the whole earth.

We believe that God seeks the praise offered by the whole creation. Sun and moon, mountains and seas, animals and wind offer praise to their God. The creation is not disposable, for God seeks the fall chorus of creation's song, and we are not to silence any voice.

In our homes, farms, shops, offices, schools and churches, we will act as friends of God's creation. We will conserve, protect, and beautify the earth. We commit ourselves to live as a part of creation, to defend all creatures and ecosystems, to make personal and institutional decisions that affirm our love for God's earth, and to hope for the day when, with heaven and with all the earth, we will rejoice in the presence of our Creator and Redeemer. Amen.

It is the hope of the Commission that other agencies of the church join in focusing on the issue the Environment during 1995, and that congregations consider the theme in Sunday School lessons, 'cation Bible School, youth groups, retreats, etc. In addition, the Commission exhorts those Cumberland Presbyterians who are in the position of making business decisions to do so, being aware environmental impact beyond that required by the government.
POWER OF LANGUAGE

The waning years of the twentieth century finds the Christian Church aware of challenges to the way in which we talk about people as well as the way in which we talk about God. Traditional patterns of speech are being examined and re-examined. For many who are impatient with old ways of speaking, language is seen as a tool of inflicting injustice and oppression. The call for clear and equal language regarding people insists that language must change in order to be both clear and fair.

The debate about God-talk is intense, not just in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, but in many denominations in the United States. Too often, the debate has divided the church into opposing camps of "liberal" and "fundamental." Those in one camp insist that masculinity expresses the very nature of God, and that only these forms of speech communicate faithful insights into the divine nature. Those in the opposing camp claim
that all human speech about God is figurative, that we can never fully express God, and that no human idea, no human language is capable of expressing God's character.

It is the contention of the Commission that one way of resolving this debate is to take a thoughtful look at the nature and power of language itself. Language and the art of communication are a means to an end; we speak with words in order to convey thoughts, ideas, philosophies, good news. Before we can debate "words", it is necessary to debate what is the end we seek.

The Commission suggests that those interested in pursuing this field of inquiry read such hooks as F. R. Hiakawa Language in Thought and Action, the 6 part PBS series hosted by James McNeil on the history of English which is now available in bookstores, and Bill Bryson's Made in America, Wm. Morrow Publishing. Each of these books illustrates ways in which language has changed, ion illustration used is how the invention of
the printing press forced people into adopting a common Lammi; with "rules" and "order."

In order to facilitate its work, the Commission has invited some 25 - 30 Cumberland Presbyterians to write two page papers on the topic of how language has impacted their lives. Responses have already come from a variety of people living in a variety of settings and with a variety backgrounds. The Commission intends to develop these responses and to create a study guide for u by local congregations on the "Power of Language."
One of the leading causes for concern in contemporary society is the issue of violence ... in the home, on the streets, in the workplace, in the media, and between nations. The Commission has pondered the appropriate response to violence by Christians. To this end, the Commission has received a paper on Violence, authored by Steve Mosley. Members of the Commission have responded and brought questions to the paper. In addition, other Cumberland Presbyterians have been asked to add suggestions to the paper. Rev. Mosley has met with the Commission on two occasions, and will continue to be available to the Commission during its deliberations on this issue. In addition, Bill Akin has met with the Commission and offered insights and suggestions. The Commission intends to hear. Paula Womack and Ken Sehested of the Baptist Peace Fellowship. The Commission is open suggestions as to the most effective means of transmitting its research and its conclusions to the church at large.
YEAR OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

By action of previous General Assemblies, the Commission has worked with the Board of Finance, Foundation, and Management to designate the environment as the focal social concern for the year 1995. To this end, the 1994 General Assembly approved a theological statement regarding Christians and the environment as well as an Affirmation of Faith to be used in worship and other settings. The worship of the 1995 General Assembly is focused on this particular concern. The Commission is well aware that many other agencies in our society are also focusing on the environment and that it may seem to be a redundant issue. However, the Commission feels that it is through our theological stance that we gain deeper impetus into what we do, AND that Christians seek to witness their faith through their actions. Environmental issues challenge each and every Christian to review his or her personal lifestyle; the concerns challenge every congregation to examine the life of the church and to seek ways in which to live compatibly with the earth that we proclaim to belong to God.

A Bible study has been written by a member of the Commission, Joe Butler, in conjunction with his D/Min work at Memphis Theological Seminary. It will be available for use by all congregations. In addition, each member of the Commission has read and reviewed a variety of books on environmental concerns. The Board of Finance, Foundation, and Management will distribute these reviews, along with a series of sermons on the subject.
D. AIDS

Several years ago, the Commission requested that a "Day of Prayer for Persons with AIDS" be added to our church calendar. Since that request, the designation has been changed to a "Day of Prayer for Persons with AIDS and Other Incurable Diseases."

Several concerns have been brought to the Commission regarding this "Day of Prayer:" the first is that the original intention of inviting congregations to focus on AIDS has been weakened; the second concern is with the fatalism implied in the words "Other Incurable Diseases;" and the third concern is that the "Day of Prayer" is located in a church calendar already overloaded with "special days."

The Commission is not aware of a large number of congregations who actually have observed this "Day of Prayer." Perhaps this is because of poor communication, perhaps it is because of the busy church calendar, perhaps it is because congregations do not know "how" to recognize such a day, and perhaps it is because many congregations are unaware of the increasing numbers of Cumberland Presbyterians whose lives have been changed because of AIDS.

At the same time, the Commission is aware of those increasing numbers as well as hearing the frustration of many pastors who are ready and willing to minister to those in their congregations, if only they would reveal themselves. Whenever the church of Jesus Christ fails to minister to those who are "sick or in prison," it has failed to fulfill the obligations of Christ's command to "do it to the least of these." This failure may be caused, in great part, because of the stigma that surrounds AIDS ... a stigma that causes many to fail to come forward, even to their pastors, and especially to their congregations for fear of judgmental condemnation. And the failure may be, in part, because of fear of the disease itself on the part of pastors and congregations. The Commission feels that prayer for those with the disease, and for those whose loved ones have the disease, is a necessary first step in overcoming those fears.

Three "Day of Prayer" observations are worthy of recognition and duplication:

1) At Mission Ridge church in Arlington, TX, the Worship Committee distributed ribbons to each worshipper. The large ribbon was white, symbolizing God's power of healing, and smaller fringe ribbons in a variety of colors hung from the white, symbolizing the variety of life-threatening diseases. Many of these life-threatening illnesses were then named by members of the congregation.

3) The Cumberland Presbyterian church in Olney, Texas, invited a young mother from Fort Worth who is HIV + to speak with the congregation during morning worship. The Day of Prayer was particularly appropriate for Olney, since the community had just experienced its first known AIDS death.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the wording on the "Day of Prayer" be changed from "Other Incurable Diseases" to "Other Life-Threatening Illnesses".

Because of the crowded Sunday calendar for Cumberland Presbyterians, and because this disease often wipes out artificial boundaries that divide people, the Commission encourages Cumberland Presbyterians to avail themselves of ecumenical opportunities for prayer and worship. In the tears of others, we find solace and healing. Two such opportunities exist in many communities, not only in the United States, but world wide. World AIDS Day, December 1, receives recognition as a day to mourn, as well as a day to educate. The Candlelight Memorial March in May, 3rd Sunday, is a day of remembering across the United States. The Commission would encourage Cumberland Presbyterians to participate in activities on those two days, or in communities where nothing is being done, to instigate ecumenical endeavors in this direction.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That December 1, World AIDS Day, in addition to the Candlelight AIDS Memorial March on the 3rd Sunday of May be added to the Cumberland Presbyterian calendar.
A. ECUMENISM

One of the goals of the Commission is to encourage communication and dialogue between people with differing theological opinions within the Cumberland Presbyterian church. At the same time, the Commission feels that communication and dialogue between people of different denominations is also constructive to a people's understanding of the faith. Such dialogue occurs at national and international levels through Cumberland Presbyterian representation on the Caribbean and North American Area Council, World Alliance of Reformed Churches. While the Board of Missions works with many ecumenical organizations such as the Rural Church Network of the United States and Canada, the Coalition for Appalachian Ministry, and the National Farm Work Ministry, these relationships are primarily ones of "ministry" and not of theological reflection. Since the Commission on Theology and Social Concerns is charged with theological reflection, it would seem appropriate that a person from a different denomination be a member of the Commission. The Commission is aware of a great wealth of very capable people with varied viewpoints who live in the Memphis area. It is our intention to systematically invite some of these people to dialogue with us during the coming years.
POWER OF LANGUAGE

The waning years of the 20th century finds the Christian Church aware of challenges to the way in which we talk about people as well as the way in which we talk about God. Traditional patterns of speech are being examined and re-examined. Many who are impatient with old ways of speaking claim that language has been a tool of inflicting injustice and oppression – an instrument of power. Others call for language regarding people which is both clear and fair. All of those in the debate point to the insensitivity of their opponents as they struggle with words, how they are used, what they mean on the surface, and what they might mean under the surface.

The debate about God-talk is even more intense, not just in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, but in many denominations in the United States. Too often, the debate has became polarized, neither side listening to the other, with sub-layers of intensity, emotion, fear, anger, and defensiveness.

It has been the contention of the Commission that one way of resolving this debate is to take a thoughtful look at the nature and power of language itself. Language and the art of communication are a means to an end; we speak with words in order to convey thoughts, ideas, philosophies, good news. Before we can debate "words," it is necessary to debate what is the end we seek.

A year ago, the Commission invited some 25-30 Cumberland Presbyterians to write a two page paper on the topic of how language has impacted their lives. The Commission has now collated those responses, along with input from studies on linguistics and worship, into a four part study guide on the "Power of Language". This paper is available from Commission members at General Assembly, and will appear as a series in the Missionary Messenger. The Commission reminds those who study this paper, to begin at the beginning, and to acknowledge that the intention of the Commission is to invite people to think about the power of language in their own individual lives. It is our hope that the studies would be done not only by individuals, but also by small groups who will recognize that members in the group might come to differing conclusions at the end of the study. Above all, we hope for prayerful reflection, openness to new ideas, and tolerance for those differing conclusions.
THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF VIOLENCE

"VIOLENCE: WHAT IS THE RESPONSE OF THE FAITH COMMUNITY?"

INTRODUCTION

In an article on violence from a historical perspective, Joe B. Frantz quotes the Kansas City Times as reporting on a robbery in 1872 at the Kansas City Fair. It was probably perpetrated by the James' Gang. A ticket seller was killed, a little girl was shot in the leg, and $1,000 was stolen. The article read that the robbery was "so diabolically daring and so utterly in contempt of fear that we are bound to admire it and revere its perpetrators." People sit in awe of perpetrators of violence. If not in awe of the perpetrators, people sit in awe of their fearlessness. Maybe that is part of the problem: we are afraid. Because persons cannot get a handle on their own fears, they admire courage in others, even when that courage is manifested in violence.

Our nation heralds and makes heroes of violent persons. What child's ears do not perk up when listening to stories of Billy the Kid, the James' Gang, Bonnie and Clyde, Al Capone, etc? The media makes heroes of some of the most violent criminals. The movie industry makes some of the most violent seem like story book heroes.

A LOOK AT THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines violence as "the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on or damage to persons and property." This definition seems to suffice for those dealing with "violence" as a problem. People are aware that violence is a problem, and most are living in fear because of it. The fear is a problem in and of itself. Also, most would categorize "violence" to better get a handle on the issues involved. One could find plenty of readings on the subjects of gang violence, domestic violence, criminal violence, national violence, international violence, institutional violence, terrorism, violence with psychological causes and many others. While violence can be seen in many different arenas, it would seem for the intent of this thesis that a generalized understanding of violence would be of primary importance for the church. This is not to say that violence in any individual arena would not have characteristics specific to that arena. This is definitely so, but violence has common characteristics in all arenas.

THE NATURE OF VIOLENCE AND THE FAITH COMMUNITY

The Faith Community could accept the definition of "violence" as stated above from the dictionary, without any problem. Indeed, if violence is "the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on or damage to persons and property," the Faith Community could say unequivocally that violence is SIN.

Violence goes against all the teachings of Jesus. Violence is an act of war within an individual, between persons, between groups, between communities, between religions, between nations, etc. Violence is a sin that is against all the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Violence is an act of aggression and is usually done for selfish gain. Violence is a manifestation of an unresolved problem. Unfortunately, violence is frequently seen as a way of resolving problems. In light of this, one can begin to see that violence is a way to protect what we have, get what we want, or pay back for a perceived wrong against us. It is a part of how we view ourselves. There are many causes of violence: greed, lust, hunger for power, fame-seeking, anger, hurt, fear of loss, etc. There are many motives for violence, and these motives are generally accompanied by intense passion. However, at the heart of violence is selfish gain. Selfish gain takes many different manifestations. Some would want to limit the cause of violence to a particular manifestation of selfish gain. Such a viewpoint would be dangerous for it would open the door for more justifications and rationalizations about the issue of violence on a personal level. Biblically, James 4:1-17 establishes this understanding.

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Violence is a way of dealing with persons or things we do not care for and with which we do not know how to deal. Violence, in essence, is an act of war that destroys all that is good and Christian in our world. Bill Akin of the Peace and Justice Center of Memphis says, “Violence is related to injustice.” Maybe, it could even be said that violence is the ugliest manifestation of injustice in our world.

In the end, violence is symptomatic of a deeper problem; it is a manifestation of all that is evil. The first step for the church is to come to the understanding that the tendency to violence exists in all of us.

Peace is the answer to violence. Indeed, Christians follow the Prince of Peace and are charged with bringing peace to the world. The question is: how is this done? It would seem that an understanding of the sinful nature of violence, the symptomatic awareness that all is not right inside the individual, the group, the community, or the nation would demand that the Faith Community stand against “the powers that be” rather than against one another, or even against those outside the Faith Community. (See Ephesians 6:10-18)

Peace is not an easy choice, but rather it is a radical demand of our Savior who instructed that we “love one another as we love ourselves.” Sometimes “self” must go through conversion and transformation before “self” can be loved. To try peace, when all that is within a person is hostile, can be a great form of denial.

It should also be pointed out that virtues such as peace and justice can be sought without ever dealing with the causes of conflict. On the surface, such action sounds good, but fails to erase any hostile feelings and the drive for power and control within the individual. Violence is not a choice. It is a way of life. It is the world’s way.

Too many well intentioned church folk would reduce the gift and power of choice to choosing between doing or not doing an action. True choice that is the gift of God comes in accepting or not accepting Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. The choice to accept Jesus Christ comes with the citizenship in the Kingdom about which Matthew speaks. In that Kingdom are new mandates, a new way of living, new motivation, and new life. Can a person as a Christian choose anything but peace as opposed to violence?

Such a choice cannot be reduced to a legalistic approach to Christian living. The choices must arise out of gratitude for the gift of love and acceptance of God; they must not be choices made to influence “God’s love” or the “grace of Jesus.”

Christianity is a way of life. Within that way of life are precepts of faith, hope, and love that are antidotes to the illnesses of sin and of violence. The way of the world is also a way of life – a way that is full of sin. In the way of the world, sin is rationalized, justified, denied, and glorified.

The Faith Community understands that violence is a part of human nature, but that violence is against the divine nature. Human nature and the ways of the world are very legalistic; the divine nature is the way of GRACE. Human nature and the way of the world are very judgmental. The divine nature is the way of mercy and forgiveness. Human nature and the way of the world demand retribution, punishment, and sometimes death. The divine nature demands new life.

**THE CHURCH AS PART OF THE PROBLEM**

In the church, it seems to be easy to ignore the problem of violence and hope it will simply go away. This may be so for several reasons. The church may not yet see the problem of violence as our problem.

We, in the church, tend to feel that the problem of violence belongs to the police, the courts, the government, the schools, any other secular institution, but not to the church. The church fails to see that every local congregation is touched in some way by violence whether it is aware of it or not. Every congregation has persons who have been victims of violence in some way. It may be through domestic violence in the past or in the present. It may have been rape, or some other criminal act of violence. The people of the congregation may or may not know the violence has occurred. One of the problems is that, instead of turning to the Faith Community for healing and support, people are afraid of what the church will think. Far too often, victims of violence have a fear of judgmentalism from the Faith Community; such fear compounds the nature of the violence.

In addition, leadership of the Faith Community is often reluctant to address the problem for fear that victims will view the church as “meddling.” The end result is that both the individual and the Faith Community are victimized.
Add to this the problem of addressing the perpetrators of violence. What do we do with this person? Surely, perpetrators are in fear of judgment. Surely, they fear condemnation and being ostracized. Again, the same fears hobble the Faith Community so that it, too, is afraid to act.

At this point, the Faith Community is often schizophrenic. When the church does not know how to respond to a problem, it tends to go back to the ways of the world that are familiar, rather than wrestling with the way the Faith Community should be. The result is that the Faith Community begins to expound on "how the world should take care of the problem" in a worldly way. It becomes easy, the course of least resistance, to displace the responsibility and the blame to someone else.

It is possible that the church also fails to see that the decay of values that leads to violence is directly related to the mission and the essence of the Great Commission of Jesus (Matt 28:18-20). In fact, there is no way that the church can be the true community of faith while sitting on the sidelines, allowing the rest of the world to worry about the problem of violence. By abdicating the responsibility as leaders in peace, the church might as well abdicate to the world the responsibilities of Christian discipleship.

Far too often, the church fails to see where it promotes violence. Any time the Faith Community reverts to the ways of the world, the church promotes violence. The church may find the legalism of "an eye for an eye" more comfortable to live with and easier to follow than the mandate of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:38-48) that would tell us what to do with our enemies. Jesus never taught the Faith Community not to have enemies. Rather, He taught what Christians were to do with enemies: Love them, pray for them, turn the other cheek when struck by them, offer them your shirt when they steal your coat, walk with them farther even if they have dragged you part of the way. Such radical love surely would lead to a change in the Faith Community, and hopefully lead to a change in the enemy.

A THEOLOGICAL APPROACH OF THE FAITH COMMUNITY TO VIOLENCE

One religious leader has suggested these steps in the Faith Community's struggle to respond theologically to violence:  

1. There must be "repentance" from our own commitment with violence, and the Faith Community must "counter seeing violence as a solution to violence."

It is clear, one cannot make peace by doing violence for violence is a contradiction of peace. Violence merely fosters more violence. While it can be argued that violence has brought peace in times of war, it should be noted that long lasting peace could only happen when other measures were taken after the violence ended. Some have suggested that Augustine's "Just War" criteria, commonly utilized when justifying military involvement in a war, be amended to include peace-making activities at the conclusion of the conflict.

Christians proclaim that God's ultimate answer to violence and all death was Easter and life. It is only in a true commitment to Easter and to life that the Faith Community can repent from violence and repent from allowing violence to be a solution to a multitude of problems, including the problems of violence itself. The church is called to proclaim life! The Faith Community is the vehicle through which God gives life to the world and gives life abundantly. Therefore, the church can never, with integrity, support violence as a solution to anything.

2. The Faith Community must be in touch with its focus on [Christian] "values, rooted in justice, compassion, and mercy."

If, indeed, violence is related to injustice, it can even be said that violence is the ugliest...
manifestation of injustice in our world, and is a direct contradiction to the Christian values of justice, compassion, and mercy. Therefore, the church must re-visit the values taught in the scriptures and reflect on the consistency of those values with the mandates of faith and love. The Faith Community must proclaim life through justice and compassion and mercy to a dying world that uses destruction in solving its problems.

For instance, the world values human "individualism." With that individualism comes some of the major causes of violence: greed, power and control struggles, insecurity, lust for recognition and fame, frustration, pressure to succeed, lack of knowing legitimate alternatives for anger, hatred, paranoia, and resentment, etc. It is very difficult for the church to recognize values that are problems because philosophies such as individualism are held in such high esteem in the 20th century American world. Thus, problems which individualism contributes to are usually ignored.

Someone has posited that a "crisis of Spirit" is engulfing our world. Alvin Toffler's "Future Shock" suggests that rapid technological advance has far exceeded any advance in the human spirit. The Faith Community struggles to proclaim Christian precepts of faith in a world of computers, lasers, advanced weaponry, and new philosophies. The good news of the gospel does not change; however, the world must find new ways of proclamation that will reach a "tuned out" audience. This "Crisis of Spirit" is directly related to the problem of violence as it utilizes its proclaimed values and all the spiritual fruits that St. Paul alludes to in his letter to the Galatians. (Galatians 5:22)

A woman walked into the pastor's study. Tears were flowing down her cheeks. She shared the sad story of how her husband had left several years before and how he had persisted in frequent affairs during the marriage. She would wake up mad, trying to figure out ways of getting even. Her resentment had grown until a war raged inside her. She felt peace would not come until the ex-husband was "done in." She had previously visited five or six other ministers who had questioned if she really had a problem. They told her, "We don't blame you for being angry after going through what you have. You have the right to feel the way you do!" These ministers apparently were not "in touch with their focus" on Christian values. The present minister looked at the woman and said, "You have no right at all to harbor such resentment! Let's see. Your ex-husband did very wrong. He packed up in the middle of the night and left you and the children. He had been sleeping around. He still sleeps well at night as far as you know. You lay awake, toss and turn, get angrier and angrier while the perpetrator sleeps well. The victim suffers. If what you say is true, this person did a grievous wrong. However, that was then. This is now. He sleeps; you lie awake. There is only one cure. YOU MUST FORGIVE HIM!" Needless to say the young woman thought the pastor was out of his mind. Yet through some serious counseling, she was able to offer a prayer in which she said, "Lord, I do not want to forgive him! I do not think he deserves forgiveness! Yet the pastor says I must. I cannot go on like this any more! I FORGIVE HIM! I FORGIVE HIM!" The very next day, the woman shared with the pastor that she had slept all night for the first time in years.

The Faith Community must focus on Christian values no matter how difficult or absurd! Forgiveness is not easy. (See Matt 18:21-22).

3. The Faith Community must "nurture 'community'." Communities focusing on building the community idol of individualism bring destruction of the community." This paper has emphasized calling the "church" the "Faith Community." Viewing the church as community opens a door to solving the problem of violence. The best weapon against individualism is a strong conviction for, and commitment to, community and the values that are a part of community. Once again, individualism destroys; community gives life. The church is called into community in order to accomplish the missions assigned by our Lord.

WHAT IS THE RESPONSE OF THE FAITH COMMUNITY?

The Faith Community must come to grips with the nature of violence in relation to the precepts of faith. This has to be an internal action. Only through painful self examination based on scriptural
teachings can the church rise to the call to proclaim the Good News to a dying, violent world. An understanding of who the church is in relation to our creator is a must. It is important that the church know Whose we are, and in light of that knowledge, embark upon the mission to which it is called. (See Matt 28:18-20)

The President's Task Force on Victims of Crime recently reported:

All too often, representatives from the religious community come to court only to give comfort, support, and assistance to the accused. This is indeed a noble endeavor, and this Task Force would not seek to discourage it. However, what we do seek, here as elsewhere, is a balance, a recognition that the victim certainly no less than the victimizer is in need of aid, comfort, and spiritual ministry.

Frequently, ministers and their congregations can be a source of solace that no other sector of society can provide. It is in recognition of the unique role of the ministry that we offer the following recommendations.

1. The ministry should recognize and address the needs of crime victims,
2. The ministry should develop both seminary and in-service training on the criminal justice system, the needs of victims, and ways to restore victims' spiritual and material health
3. The ministry should also recognize and address the needs of perpetrators!

Where to begin? Leaders in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints suggest three ways in which the Faith Community can live out its calling and practice the precepts of its faith:

1. Practice Forgiveness. The church must "proclaim the worth of persons living in violence."
2. "Reconciliation must come first, then persons are held accountable." This is different than punishment.
3. "Intentional peace teaching of children." For instance, teaching children non violent methods of conflict resolution; modeling to children peaceful ways of disagreeing and living with that disagreement; teaching and modeling ways of asking for what is wanted or needed, and then living with a "no" response. The care and nurture of all children is vital to the mission of the church, especially as they learn alternative behaviors to what is portrayed on the streets or in the media, and sometimes in their homes.

CONCLUSION

For the Faith Community to grapple with the issue of violence in our world, it must first have an understanding of the nature of violence in relation to the church; an understanding of the nature of violence in any given local community; a commitment to the Christian precepts of forgiveness, love, reconciliation, and redemption for both offender and victim; and a sincere commitment and desire to accomplish the Great Commission of our Lord. Some way and somehow, Christians must become committed to recognizing the sin that exists in each of us, and then to facing that sin from a faith perspective. (See Isaiah 11:1)

Respectfully submitted,
Commission on Theology and Social Concerns

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Excerpts from Final Report of the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime as reported in Victims of Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, Elderly Abuse, Rape, Robbery, Assault, Violent Death: A Manual for Clergy and Congregations, prepared by The Spiritual Dimension in Victim Services

*Presiding Elder Fran Mazzaferro*
1. VIOLENCE. The Commission has been reflecting on the issue of violence in our society, particularly as to the appropriate Christian response to violence. The attached summary of a theological understanding of violence (at the close of the paper) is the result of cooperative work by members of the Commission along with Steve Mosley and Bill Akin. Further work is being done in the area of a sociological understanding of violence. The issue is one that demands wider attention than one or two papers printed in the General Assembly Minutes, as violent acts impact everyone. As Christians we are called to follow the way of the Prince of Peace, and yet often it seems that a response to violence is another violent act.

The Commission feels that time for in-depth study/conversation on violence is necessary. To this end we propose a Workshop which would include subjects of racism, family violence, prejudice, hate crimes/messages, and a time of reflection on the violence that exists in each of us.


RECOMMENDATION 5: That as a vital part of this Workshop, the worship for Tuesday evening of General Assembly, be focused on the area of Christians as Peace-Makers.

2. RACISM. The Commission is aware that one of the underlying causes of violence in our society is that of racism. However, the Commission has recently been informed that even within the Cumberland Presbyterian family, racism flourishes. The entire church suffers when one Elder of one Cumberland Presbyterian church can "dis-invite" one young family from attending his church because of their skin color; this suffering intensifies when this young mother has been baptized and raised in the arms of a Cumberland Presbyterian church.

Often racism is not as overt, but occurs in manners much more covert. The Commission intends in the future to visit the subject of racism, both in the workshop in violence, but also in more study documents.

3. ABORTION. Nowhere in our church have more violent acts and angry words surfaced than in the discussion surrounding abortion. Two years ago the Commission presented its paper on the "Sacredness of Persons" for study, prayer, and reflection by Cumberland Presbyterians. This booklet was mailed to the clerk of every Session in every church. However, to all apparent purposes, few have availed themselves of the opportunity to dialogue in an open manner regarding this very complex issue. It is the opinion of the Commission that any pronouncement by this General Assembly would be counterproductive until such a time that each Commissioner has had ample opportunity to study our paper, and to grapple with the further ramifications of any action by the church regarding unwanted pregnancies.
Chapter One: Church Order, the Call of God and Ordination

I. Church Order

It might be nice if we could turn to a specific passage in the Bible and find a description of exactly how the church should be organized. It could have saved a lot of confusion and argument over the centuries. But we don't have in Scripture an exact blueprint for the church's government.

However, the New Testament is consistent in the conviction that the church must have some kind of organization. One well known expression of the principle is in Paul's advice in I Corinthians 14:40, "But all things should be done decently and in order." This statement has been a byword for the Presbyterian practice of church government.

Doing things decently and in order reflects our fundamental belief that the church is the body of Christ. Please read I Corinthians 12:12-27. Note that each part of the body fulfills its purpose for the good of the whole. Then, in I Corinthians 12:27-28, Paul moves from a statement about the church's unity, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it," to the importance of certain officers in the church, "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers."

The apostles were crucial in the faith and order of the early church. Their eyewitness testimony about Christ helped assure the truth of the Gospel. Led by the Holy Spirit the apostles began to take the Good News to all nations. When churches were established throughout the known world, the apostles held the highest authority.

But how was the church to be ordered when the apostles were not present? As the church expanded, the Twelve could not be everywhere, and how would the church be governed when the last apostle died?

Presbyterian Government

I and II Timothy give us the fullest descriptions of church offices beyond the apostolic era. Especially important for the Presbyterian form of government is I Timothy
5:17, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching the teaching. This implies that there were two kinds of elders: those who ruled or governed in the local church, and those who preached and taught. Historically in Presbyterian government the first have been called ruling elders and the second have been called teaching elders or ministers.

The term "double honor" can also be translated as "compensation." This suggests that from very early times the church has needed those who devoted their full time and energy to the proclamation of the Gospel and earned their livelihood from such service. Thus began the distinction between clergy and laity.

The Presbyterian interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:1-7, which speaks of overseers ("episkopos" in Greek), is that this refers to the same office as the teaching elder or minister, simply using a different word. The shared government of these teaching elders and ruling elders is implied in 1 Timothy 4:14, where "the laying on of hands by the council of elders" ("presbuterion" in Greek) seems to be a reference to Timothy's ordination.

The office of deacon is usually traced to Acts 6:1-6. When it became necessary to find people to attend to the distribution of goods to those in need, "seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom," were chosen. Otherwise, the apostles would have spent more time "waiting on tables" than preaching the word of God. More qualifications for the office of deacon are described in 1 Timothy 3:3-13.

Thus, the ordained offices for churches in the Presbyterian family are: the teaching elder, now called minister of the Word and Sacrament; the ruling elder, now usually simply called elder; and the deacon. Elders and deacons are considered laypersons even though they are ordained through vows, prayers, and the laying on of hands in a ceremony very similar to that of ministers.

Ministers are ordained by the presbytery, and this action signifies the connected, interdependent nature of the church. Elders are ordained in the local church to join with the pastor in guiding and governing the local church. But their office also includes service to the wider church, because they may be elected to represent the church at meetings of presbytery, synod or General Assembly. Deacons are ordained in the local church with authority limited to the local church where their primary tasks have been the church's ministry to those in need and the care of church property.

Other Forms of Church Government

There are, of course, churches which have different forms of government and also claim New Testament authority for them. The episcopal form of government, which is used by Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Methodist churches, believes that when 1 Timothy speaks of overseers or bishops (1 Tim. 3:1), elders (1 Tim. 5:17) and deacons (1 Tim. 3:8), it is outlining three levels of ordained ministry.

As the highest level of ordained ministry, bishops are regarded as the actual successors to the apostles. The laying on of hands at the ordination of a bishop is believed to confer this apostolic succession in an unbroken chain. Parish ministers, called priests in some churches, are the elders or presbyters in this system of church government. The deacon has certain duties in worship as well as in pastoral and community ministry. The office of deacon is a necessary stage of preparation for those who seek the office of minister, somewhat like the probationer status in our system. Some people choose to remain a
deacon for life. Some deacons are full time paid members of a church staff; others have a secular job and serve the church without pay.

The third main pattern of church government is the congregational system. Unlike the presbyterian or the episcopal systems, in congregational government, each local church governs itself in all matters. Each local church is related to other local churches of its tradition only to the extent that it wishes to be. It may choose to join with other congregations for collective mission and service, but in these matters and in its theology, the local church is the highest and final authority. Baptist churches are probably the best known example of congregational government. But within each Baptist congregation there is a minister and a board of deacons. Other congregational churches may use other terms for their elected lay offices.

The Presbyterian system of government is a kind of middle ground between the congregational and the episcopal. Each congregation has certain rights in order to express its own "personality," its way of doing things that best ministers to its people and its community. But congregations are to be connected to each other. They are not independent, but interdependent, with a theology and mission in common. Yet we believe this unity is best expressed not through an individual, the bishop, but through the presbytery, synod and General Assembly. In these church courts ministers and elders meet in equal numbers to make decisions and further the mission of the church. The Presbyterian middle ground is seen in the way pastors are called to churches. The church session has considerable authority to call whom it chooses, but presbytery must approve the call. But whether a church is part of a presbyterian, episcopal or congregational type of government, at the local church level the pattern is the same. Almost all local churches have a minister who serves as preacher, worship leader, and pastor and an elected body of lay persons who share in the governing of the church. This shared government between the individual who has special training and lay leaders who are mature in faith and elected by the people, is an almost universal pattern of the ordering of the church.

II. The Call of God

The church’s government and its ordained offices do not exist simply for the sake of order. They are ways of responding to God’s call. The apostles were called to their service of Christ and as we continue the ministry first given to the apostles we too are called. A full treatment of the meaning of the call of God in the church cannot be given here, but a few points should be kept in mind.

The Necessity of God’s Call

God calls us into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This is what we mean by grace. We do not presume through our own effort or ability to be worthy of salvation. But we have heard a call. For some the call has been like an invitation. For others it has been more like a summons. However it has been heard, all Christians have been called to come and follow Jesus. We respond in faith and commit ourselves to grow in grace and love. All Christians, whether ordained or not, have a vocation, a calling from God, to serve God in their daily life and work.

The Sign of Baptism
Baptism is a fitting and powerful symbol of the call of God to salvation in Christ and of each believer's response. Whether a person is ever ordained as a deacon, elder or minister, baptism is a sign of the one call to discipleship for all Christians, laypersons and clergy. One reason that the Cumberland Presbyterian Church recognizes the validity of baptisms in other churches, whether it was by sprinkling or immersion, is to testify that God's call is to everyone everywhere. This one baptism powerfully unites us to believers of all Christian denominations throughout the world.

The Call to Ordination

We also believe there is a call of God to the ordained offices of the church. Such a call is not so much to a higher status in the community of faith, but to a particular manner of service through fulfilling certain functions in the life of the church. This call from God is heard by the individual, but it is tested by the church. As we saw in the passages from I Timothy, deacons, elders and ministers are to demonstrate maturity of faith. They cannot be ordained unless their fellow church members have elected or approved them to be. All church officers are to undergo periods of training for their office. In these ways God's call to the individual is validated by the church.

Conversely, sometimes the church helps a person to hear God's call. Those who may be too modest to step forward on their own may hear the voice of God speaking when a fellow church member says, "We relieve you could serve well as an elder or a deacon." Those who have been "fighting the call" to the ministry may respond favorably if other Christians, especially their pastors, come to them and encourage them about their gifts for ministry.

III. Ordination

The Sacred Offices of the Church

We have looked at Bible passages which describe the ordering of the church, discussed the presbyterian and other forms of church government, and thought about the nature and necessity of God's call. Now we can summarize some basic understandings about ordination.

Ordination is the way that the church appoints certain individuals, who have been called by God and given gifts for service, to assume certain responsibilities in the church, in order to serve the common good. Ordination is the church's judgment that a person is mature in faith and well suited for the duties of a particular office — deacon, elder, or minister.

Ordination is an expression of the church's purpose to serve Jesus Christ and of the order and authority required for that service. In our civil government the desire for order requires us to entrust the authority of enforcement to certain individuals. Judges, legislators and members of the executive branch of government including law enforcement officers have been given authority by the consent of the governed. Similarly, as the whole church listens to God's leading and as individual believers hear God's call to particular service, the church raises up from among itself ordained leaders.

We believe the validity of ordination is not dependent upon a literal, historical succession from the twelve apostles, but upon the living church being faithful to the apostolic message.
Ordination to the office of deacon focuses on the love of neighbor by which Christians are to be known and enables the church's ministry to those in physical and material need in church and community.

Ordination to the office of elder focuses on the spiritual maturity toward which each Christian should grow and enables the church's leadership to be shared between clergy and laity.

Ordination to the office of minister focuses on the importance of Word and Sacrament for nurturing the life of faith and extending the Gospel to those who do not yet believe.

Competence and Professionalism

As we noted, I Timothy 5:17 can be translated, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of compensation, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." This suggests that from the earliest days the church has had those who earned their living from their service to the church. Verse 18 tends to confirm this interpretation as it reads, "for the scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,' and, The laborer deserves to be paid."

Today when people offer themselves for the ordained ministry they are making what American society usually calls "a career choice." The ministry is regarded as a profession, like law, medicine or education. As a profession, the ministry requires education and a commitment of one's very self to the work. Like a doctor, a minister is always on call when an emergency arises. To continue the comparison, allowing those who have not completed their education to serve as stated supplies of churches may be thought of as a medical internship or practice teaching.

Looking at ministry as a career or profession may influence our understanding of ordination perhaps without our being fully aware of it. As in most churches, educational achievement is a constitutional requirement for ordination in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (Constitution 6.34). Church members expect their ministers to be competent in worship leadership, preaching and pastoral care. Ordination may seem as much a certification of professional competence as a sacred office of the church. Perhaps it is both and rightly so.

For Discussion

1. Read one or more of the following accounts of God's call to persons in the Bible: Genesis 12:1-9 (Abraham); Exodus 3:1-4:17 (Moses); I Samuel 3:1-4:1 (Samuel); Acts 9:1-30 (Paul). In what ways did God speak directly to the person being called? In what ways were other people involved in helping the person respond to God's call?

2. Which of the following are most crucial in ordination to the ministry and how do they relate to each other?

   - Call from God
   - Approval by the church
   - Education
   - Gifts and talents for the ministry
Commitment
to serve
Personal fulfillment of the minister

3. The Constitution (Section 6.31) states that "presbyteries should be careful to ordain no one until fully satisfied with his or her qualifications for so important a work." Is the ordained ministry understood by most people as an important work? Is it understood as the highest office of the church? Do people understand ordained ministry primarily in terms of its functions in the church or is it seen as a different, higher status of a Christian? Or both?

4. Do you think of ordination to the ministry and ordination as an elder or deacon as quite similar or quite different? In what ways? Should a required part of a ministerial candidates's education and preparation be to serve as an elder or deacon in a church? (Note: the Constitution 6.17 now requires an elder who becomes a candidate for the ministry to resign as elder.)

5. What are the responsibilities of a minister and of an elder in worship? Some say that having ordained ministers lead worship helps us be reminded that in worship we encounter God's word and actions, not human words and actions. Does this make sense to you? Does it mean that only ordained ministers should lead worship, preach, or administer the sacraments? The session is called to "assemble the congregation and provide for worship when there is no minister." (Constitution 4.5k) Does this mean that elders should have full authority to lead all parts of worship in the absence of a minister?

Chapter Two
"Word and Sacrament"

No Cumberland Presbyterian would feel out of place at a Sunday worship service which included a sermon, a baptism and a celebration of the Lords' Supper. Some might be looking at their watches before it was over, but there would be nothing disturbing about it. However, throughout its history, the typical Cumberland Presbyterian Sunday worship service has been centered on the reading and preaching of the Word of God, with neither sacrament being celebrated.

Indeed it is only because of this worship pattern that the church could approve licentiates or candidates as stated supplies for congregations even though they lacked authority to administer the sacraments. The sacraments were not needed every week; preaching was.

How did the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (and most other Protestant churches in America) develop this pattern for Sunday worship?

A Little History

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther (1483-1546) posted the 95 Theses, or articles for debate, on a church door in Wittenburg, Germany. That date, generally considered the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, marks a watershed in the way Christians believe and worship. One part of Luther's argument with the Roman Catholic Church was about the moral conduct of church officials. Another was about the authority of the Bible compared to church tradition. Yet another was understanding faith in Christ as a dynamic
personal relationship rather than something that is received in an almost automatic way through the sacraments of the church. This led to changes in worship.

In the centuries leading up to Martin Luther, the reading and preaching of the Word were largely neglected. Most churchgoers could not read. Many parish priests were not well trained nor committed to their calling. The worship service was conducted in Latin, which few people understood.

The central act of worship became the transformation of the consecrated bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. These were believed to be rather literally, as ancient church fathers had put it, the medicine of immortality." Yet, the lay people themselves began to refuse to drink the wine of Communion. Est they spill Christ's blood through carelessness, and many were reluctant to receive the bread because of fear of unworthiness. We cannot fully imagine how superstitious the average person was in the Middle Ages and how much like magic the Lord's Supper seemed to most.

This form of worship struck Luther as out of balance, to say the least. Christians needed solid instruction in the Bible through sermons preached in their own language and they also needed a weekly observance of Communion. Luther wanted to move from a worship centered on the sacrament to a service with two equal parts - Word and Sacrament.

John Calvin (1509-1564) was born in France a generation after Luther was born in Germany. Calvin agreed with the main ideas of the Protestant Reformation begun by Luther. By stressing also belief in the sovereignty of God, Calvin became the founder of the Reformed branch of Protestant Christianity, of which all Presbyterians are a part.

Like Luther, Calvin also believed that Word and Sacrament should be the twin centers of regular Sunday worship. Christ, the Word of God, was present when the scripture was read and truly preached, and, the Word of God, was present when the Lord's Supper was rightly administered. Calvin believed in spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament without believing that any change occurred in the bread or e itself.

Calvin also departed from the Roman Catholic practice of Communion in several other ways. The minister stood behind the Communion table, facing the congregation rather than toward an altar with his back to the people. The people received both the bread and wine, and these were distributed to the people by lay leaders of the church, not by the minister only.

This weekly Communion continued for a time in Calvin's churches in Geneva, Switzerland, and Strassburg, France. But, as people more and more saw a theological battle going on between Protestants and Roman Catholics, there was a tendency to reject all traces of Roman Catholic practice. Thus, weekly observance of Communion became less important. A service centered on the reading and preaching of the Word seemed sufficient. By the late 1530's Calvin had agreed with lay leaders to hold Communion once a month.

The Reformed leader Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) established a pattern in Zurich, Switzerland, of observing Communion four times per year (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and once in the autumn). Zwingli believed an infrequent celebration and a simple liturgy, consisting mainly of Paul's instructions in I Corinthians 11, and a brief prayer, would help purge the sacrament of any superstitious belief surrounding it. Zwingli also encouraged the people to receive Communion while seated in the pew, rather than walking forward to the front of the church.

Thus, in the 1500's the Reformed Churches developed patterns which influence our practice of the sacraments today. The celebration of the Lord's Supper has been characterized by: infrequent observance; lack of extensive liturgy or ceremony; and the use of church officers, especially elders, to actually deliver the elements to the people. For most Cumberland Presbyterians Communion elicits a feeling of reverence, not because of the
elements themselves, but because of a holy remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection.

**About Baptism**

We saw in the previous section that in regard to the Lord's Supper Reformed Protestants almost seemed to be saying, "If the Roman Catholic Church did it this way, we will do it another." In regard to Baptism, however, there was less change. The Reformers rejected the idea that Baptism was required for a person's salvation but continued the Roman Catholic practice of baptizing infants. The mode of baptism was a matter of indifference to the early Reformers. Both immersion and sprinkling were acceptable.

It was another group which began in the 1500s, the Anabaptists, meaning "Re-baptizers," who believed that infants should not be baptized; only those professing personal faith should. They also insisted on immersion as the proper mode of baptism. These views influenced Baptists and other groups in Europe and America.

For Cumberland Presbyterians, as for most Christians, baptism is to be administered only once. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation into the Christian life whether it is administered to an infant on the affirmation of the parents' faith or to an adolescent or adult upon their profession of personal faith.

Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper are called sacraments because they were instituted by Jesus Christ, and they each convey God's grace through common physical objects - water, bread, and wine. Yet because baptism is the once in a lifetime sacrament and the Lord's supper is the regular and frequent sacrament, what is true of one may not always be true of the other.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church recognizes the validity of baptisms in other churches if they were baptisms with water and in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is also desirable that baptisms in our church be recognized as valid by other churches.

While Communion is to be celebrated regularly, baptism, it has often been said, should be performed without undue delay nor undue haste. There is precedent in the universal church for delaying baptism until several are ready to be baptized or until the creek is warm enough or until the bishop makes his visit. Having only ordained ministers administer baptism is in accord with wider church practice. The church has long said, however, that in an emergency any Christian may baptize someone.

**But What Does It All Mean?**

The history of the sacraments in the church has seen its share of disagreements and even today you can get good arguments going among people of different denominations about Baptism and communion. However, among many Protestant churches and Roman Catholics an area of broad agreement about the sacraments has emerged over the last 30 years.

In 1982 a short document called "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" outlined the points at which many branches of the church might agree on the nature and meaning of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. This document might be of use to groups who wish to study the sacraments in greater detail. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church was one of many churches which made an official response to this document. (General Assembly Minutes, 1986)
Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper have what theologian David Tracy calls "an excess of meaning." That is, there are more meanings and levels of meaning to each sacrament than we can ever grasp or express. As is also stated in the Cumberland Presbyterian Directory for Worship, neither baptism nor Communion should be restricted to one meaning. The impact on our lives is deeper when we bear in mind the richness of the various themes present in each sacrament.

Among the several meanings of baptism are:

Participation in Christ's death and resurrection;
Conversion, forgiveness of sin, pardoning, and cleansing; The outpouring of the Holy Spirit;
Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the household of faith.

Among the several meanings of the Lord's Supper are:

Thanksgiving to God the Father; Memorial of Christ's sacrificial death;
Encounter with the Risen Christ; Communion or fellowship of believers.

For Discussion

1. Have any members of your study group ever been part of a church which observed the Lord's Supper every Sunday? What was their experience of the meaningfulness of weekly Communion? How often would you personally wish to receive the Lord's Supper?

2. Is it possible for Sunday worship to have two centers, Word and Sacrament, as Luther and Calvin wanted? Or is it inevitable that one will dominate the other? Does the sacrament detract from the preached Word or add to it?

3. Which of the four meanings of Communion mentioned above (or a meaning not mentioned above) has been stressed the most in your experience? Which do you think about most when the Lord's Supper is taking place?

4. Which of the four meanings of Baptism mentioned above (or a meaning not mentioned above) has been stressed the most in your experience? Which do you think about most when a Baptism is taking place?

5. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church recognizes as valid the baptisms of other churches if they are done with water and in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church also welcomes all Christians to receive the Lord's Supper when it is celebrated. Does this openness toward other Christians make sense to you, or should more restrictions apply?

Glossary of Terms

Anglican - The Church of England in various nations around the world. In the United States it is the Episcopal Church. Anglicans are often considered a middle ground between Protestants and Roman Catholics in matters of worship and belief.
Apostles - Title given to the disciples after Jesus' resurrection as they were sent forth to preach the Gospel.

Candidate - The first stage of preparation for ministry. Persons are received by a presbytery as a candidate for ministry on the basis of their sense of God's call and recommendation from their church session.

Clergy - The ordained ministry, as distinct from the laity.

Confession of Faith - A document which sets forth a system of belief, particularly common for churches of the Reformed tradition.

Congregational - A type of church government in which the local church has final authority in matters of doctrine and worship.

Constitution - The outline of church government. It is one part of the Cumberland Presbyterian Confession of Faith.

Episcopal - A type of church government in which bishops are the highest level of ordained ministry.

Eucharist - Another name for Communion or the Lord's Supper. It comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving.

General Assembly - The highest church court or judicatory for churches with a presbyterian system of government.

Immersion - Mode of baptism in which the person is submerged beneath water.

Laity - Church members who are not ordained ministers.

Licentiate - The second stage of preparation for the ministry. Candidates are usually licensed when they enter seminary. Historically, licentiates were allowed to write and deliver their own sermons; candidates were to read sermons which ministers had prepared.

Liturgy - Literally the "work of the people," it usually means the prayers or responses that are to be used in certain portions of a worship service, especially in the Communion service.

Ordination - A service of worship, prayer and the laying on of hands in which a person is set apart for one of the office of the church - minister, elder or deacon.

Presbyterian - A form of church government in which elders are elected to lead the church.

Presbytery - The church court or judicatory just above the church session, consisting of the ministers and churches in a certain geographical region.

Probationer - A collective term meaning both candidates and licentiates.
Reformed Churches. The branch of Protestant churches which trace their heritage to John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. All Presbyterian churches are part of the Reformed church tradition.

Sprinkling. Mode of baptism in which water is applied to the person's head.

Stated Supply. A person who regularly preaches and pastors a congregation as a less than full-time call. The d supply may be a student, a retired minister or one who also has a secular job.

Synod - The church court or judicatory above the presbytery.

Transubstantiation. Roman Catholic doctrine that the bread and wine of the Eucharist become the body and d of Christ, though this is not a visible change in the elements.

Word - A term with many meanings in Protestant and Reformed theology. The Word primarily refers to Christ as the Word of God. The Word can also refer to the Bible, preaching, and all of God's saving initiative toward people.
UNWANTED PREGNANCY

The Committee has reflected that many of the social issues facing the church today can be located in a lack of personal responsibility and a failure to consider the well being of the community at large. Such communal responsibility is outlined by Paul when he wrote: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church..." (Col 1:24)
2. Providing housing, food, and clothing for women with unwanted pregnancies, as well as medical care during their pregnancies, deliveries, and post partum.


4. Securing access to adoptive, protective, and legal services as necessary.

5. Providing assistance with transportation to these services, counseling, and other helping agencies.

6. Seeking public policy that provides for affordable Childcare, housing, healthcare, immunizations, nutrition, and counseling.

7. Providing various forms of respite for parents for times of renewal (i.e. foster parenting, foster grandparenting, babysitting opportunities, parenting co-ops, etc.)
1. Racism
The Committee is discovering that one of the more rampant forms of violence in contemporary society is that of racism. In working to evolve a method and procedure for bringing racism to the attention of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Committee chose to have its Spring Meeting in Huntsville, Alabama, which allowed us to spend time in dialogue with representatives of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America. We appreciated their warm welcome, hospitality, and the use of their comfortable meeting rooms.

After much soul searching, each member of the Committee confessed to harboring some form of prejudice and discrimination as well as a communal complicity in the cultural disease known as racism and perpetuating the results of the sin of slavery. We plan to continue to wrestle with the question: How do we find forgiveness and move into a future of reconciliation with those who share our faith and our name?

2. Hunger
The Committee feels that hunger in many forms in our world is one of the most inhumane forms of Violence perpetuated in society as it strikes those who are the least able to defend themselves. Decisions that are made by those who have much frequently affect millions of those who are barely eking out an existence. We applaud the on-going efforts of the CPW to address the issue by letter-writing campaigns to their congressional representatives, as well as the efforts of individual congregations to address local hunger concerns. The Committee recognizes that Scriptures such as Matthew 25:31-46 clearly point to our responsibility to 'feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick.' Those Christians who live in a land of plenty such as the United States are called to their communal responsibility to the hungry in the rest of the world, not only through direct hands on efforts, but also to resist the tendency of over-consumption of food and food products.

3. Land Mines
A third form of Violence that the Committee had addressed concerns the remnants of war between nations that continue to injure innocent civilians in their home lands. Through the efforts of the Humans Right Watch, and because of the publicity generated by Senator Patrick Leahy we have become aware that more than 100 million antipersonnel land mines remain in such countries as Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Honduras, Cambodia, Afghanistan and Mozambique. The U.S. military also continues to lay such mines in the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea. Legislation has been proposed to Congress to ban the use and export of land mines. According to an editorial in the Washington Post these weapons of war generate "an awful, unending toll on civilians when the soldiers go home." In an effort to work through the problem of removing these mines (estimated cost of $33 million) Canada is planning a conference in December 1997 at which nations can sign an international treaty which bans the production, transfer, stockpiling or use of antipersonnel land mines.
Our *Confession of Faith* says, "the scriptures are the infallible rule of faith and practice, the authoritative guide for Christian living" (1.05). However, as Dr. Hubert W. Morrow states in his book *The Covenant of Grace*, "The fact that the Bible is the one and only infallible source of beliefs about God does not insure that persons will always formulate these beliefs correctly" (1996, 26). The authority of scripture has little meaning apart from a commitment to disciplined reading and understanding of scripture. This reading and understanding must then move to growing in and living by the grace of God reflected in the Scripture as the infallible or "authoritative guide for Christian living." Our primary concern is for every Christian to begin a life-long journey of understanding scripture and growing in grace. In relation to this concern, we note with appreciation The Year of the Bible emphasis endorsed by the 168th meeting of the General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Understanding scripture is centered in the Christ event. Our Confession goes on to state that "God’s word spoken in and through the scriptures should be understood in the light of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The authority of scripture is founded on the truth contained in them and the voice of God speaking through them" (1.06). This understanding encompasses both the Old and New Testaments and reflects God’s love and grace given to us through Jesus Christ. As the Gospel of John says, "From (Christ’s) fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and trust comes through Jesus Christ" (1:16-17).

There are other components involved in properly understanding scripture. Again, as our *Confession of Faith* states, "in order to understand God’s word spoken in and through the scriptures, persons must have the illumination of God’s own Spirit. Moreover, they should study the writings of the Bible in their historical settings, compare scripture with scripture, listen to the witness of the church throughout the centuries, and share insights with others in the covenant community" (1.07).
There has been much concern about worship and its meaning to our church. Styles seem to be changing as the newer generations grow into leadership positions and the growing churches seem to be the ones willing to change. Our Confession of Faith and The Directory for Worship contain much of our understanding of what worship is and how we should go about it. It does not preclude the use of contemporary music or worship styles. We encourage congregations to explore different expressions of worship and what elements, if any, they may want to adapt for their own congregations. We would like to affirm that there are many valid styles of worship as long as our focus is on God, and encourage our congregations to individually explore them.
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE CALL TO MINISTRY

The Committee was asked by the General Assembly Council (GAC) to prepare reflection papers on the call to ministry to be used by the Leadership Task Force of the GAC. Two papers were developed by the committee: "The Call" in Historical and Theological Perspective and Biblical Reflections on the Call. These papers are available on the Committee's web site.
The Unified Committee is alarmed at the potential abuses in the practice of human cloning specifically, and genetic engineering in general, because of the possible devaluing of God's role in the creative act of humanity. In order to learn more about this issue, the Reverend Virginia Espinoza was sent to the conference entitled: "What Does It Mean to be Human?" held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in November of 2000. The Committee will continue an in-depth study of this issue.

In the meantime, we believe that the church should voice its alarm through all appropriate means. The committee will provide study papers and theological reflections on its web site and through other means such as The Cumberland Presbyterian and Cumberland Flag. As a result of this concern, the following recommendation is made by the committee.

TO BOTH ASSEMBLIES:

RECOMMENDATION 3 : That the General Assembly go on record as being opposed to human cloning and convey that opposition to the appropriate governmental agencies, professional organizations (such as the American Medical Association), and religious institutions.
many possible resources, for this study.
PORNOGRAPHY

Experimental research, psychology, personal testimony and scientific studies have all been tools in the pornography debate. Yet neither side of the debate has viewed all of these tools collectively and thus "proof" of harm has proved somewhat elusive. When all of these aspects are considered together, there is little doubt that this is a harmful addiction. Pornography use is a choice and those who choose to use it risk suffering harmful side effects. Research suggests "porn" is like an addictive drug; a little can get you hooked and too much can damage your life.

Polls taken at Promise Keeper events for Christian men consistently show, by a wide margin, one of the concerns that men struggle with the most is pornography and sexual purity. What passes today as "family hour" entertainment on TV would have been rated X a few years ago and not allowed on television.

US News and World Report said the porn industry grossed $8 billion in 1997. Sex is used to sell for businesses that aren't even selling sex. The billions of dollars spent on advertising are proof that visual images persuade. Pornography's selling point is visual images. A poll done by Newsweek in 1998 found that 86% of men admitted to using porn regularly. At that time 80% of internet sights were porn related and there were over 1000 bulletin boards devoted to it. That same year "dial a porn" phone sex was a 6 billion dollar business, and there were more hard core porn outlets in the US than McDonald's restaurants. This year there are public offerings on Wall Street for internet porn companies.

Pornography shapes attitudes and the way people view relationships and sex roles, specifically by "normalizing" aggression towards women for some men in sexual and other interpersonal encounters and increasing the tolerance for aggression toward women in the larger culture. Sexual interest and sexual acts of any kind are mistaken for acts of love. In the absence of love, people seek intimacy through porn and sex.

Casual sex is portrayed as exciting and desirable outside of a committed relationship. Beauty is measured by proportion of body parts, shaping unrealistic expectations of what a woman's body should look like. Porn's messages about sex and sexual fulfillment are misleading. Fulfillment comes from personal, human relationships, not media.

Studies show that boys ages 12 through 17 are among the primary consumers of porn. This becomes a major source of sex education. Teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS are completely nonexistent in porn, giving a false belief that there are no adverse consequences to behaviors. Teaching that sexual experimentation with anyone, anywhere is a major theme considered "fun" in porn. Porn teaches that women enjoy being stripped, forcibly abused, and even raped. Perversion is branded in the minds of children as normal behavior. One such message is that women are sex toys readily available for sexual fulfillment by anyone and are devoid of value, worth and feelings. These messages, found to hurt adults, have an even greater impact on kids.

The typical child molester befriends the child, and after building "trust," introduces the child to porn, sometimes "kiddy" porn, to break down inhibitions and lure the child to participate in sexual activities. These acts are then videotaped or photographed and used to blackmail child victims. Consider that Gallup reported in 1995 that 1.3 million children were sexually abused. The AMA estimated that same year that 61% of sexual assault
victims were under the age of 18. Approximately one in three girls is sexually abused before age 18 according to Hopper and one in six boys before the age of 16.

The Internet caused explosive growth for the pornography market. It is essentially the fastest, cheapest and most anonymous porn outlet. Only certain commercial sites require a credit card to enter and most sites display hard-core "Teasers" through which computer users connect to porn sites within seconds.

The Internet Online Summit held in 1997 in Washington, D.C. revealed that 70 percent of children viewing pornography on the Internet are doing so in public schools and libraries. Few measures have been taken thus far to protect children from porn and Internet predators in public access points. The American Library Association has even taken the hard core stance that any attempt to filter what children have access to in public libraries is "censorship" and is to be opposed with any means necessary.

Corporate America has been negatively affected by Internet porn use since "about 16 million to 20 million people in North America are estimated to use the Internet, with about half gaining access primarily at work." (New York Times, 1996) One analysis by Nielsen Media Research in New York, found that IBM, Apple Computer, and AT&T together lost more than 347 eight-hour days of employee time in a single month to the Penthouse magazine website alone. The Alternative Sex group web site, owned by Playboy, is accessed 4.7 million times per week by up to 1/2 million different users.

Whether for recreational use or an addiction, porn affects relationships with spouses, family members, work associates and even strangers. It is often viewed in secret and this clandestine use of porn creates deception within a relationship. The signs and symptoms of a chronic porn user are not unlike those of an unfaithful lover. Regarding relationships, porn also portrays women as sex objects and reflects even in the day to day poor treatment of the female counterpart. It introduces a third partner into the relationship, weakening commitment, and promoting the allure of forbidden relationships, namely adultery and prostitution. It leads to unreal expectations of sexual fulfillment, stimulates interest in the deviant, and promotes fantasizing, distracting the user from real life and relationships. One study found a link between porn use and hostility, thus encouraging violence and rape in regular users.

A person is hooked on pornography when they keep coming back for more, unable to turn down just one more glance. Just like drugs, alcohol or other addictive substances, porn, through sexual release, brings about significant mood alteration and gives an intensely pleasurable high from one's own brain chemicals. Four elements characterize the sexual addict:

C. Addiction - Porn provides a powerful stimulant or aphrodisiac effect, followed by sexual release, most often through masturbation. The exciting and powerful imagery can then be recalled and elaborated on in subsequent fantasies.

C. Escalation - Over time, addicts require more explicit and deviant material to get "high." They may push their partners into increasingly bizarre sexual activities.
And they come to prefer the imagery of porn, accompanied by masturbation, to sexual intercourse itself, diminishing their capacity to express real affection.

C. Desensitization - Books, magazines or films first perceived as shocking, repulsive or immoral - though still sexually arousing - are seen as acceptable. The sexual activity depicted becomes legitimized in the person's mind, and they come to believe that "everybody does it."

C. Acting Out - There is an increasing tendency to act out behaviors viewed in porn. Addiction locks persons into these behaviors - no matter what the negative consequences. It weakens marital and family bonds and as the result of unfulfilled sexual urges, increases the probability of a person committing a serious sex crime.

Consider that among 932 sex addicts studied, 90% of men and 77% of women said porn was significant to their addictions. A recent complaint filed by a New York librarian said that boys as young as 10 years old were repeatedly viewing porn on the library computers while masturbating in full view of other patrons. The longer one is involved with porn, the fewer inhibitions they seem to have.

Porn's impact on crime is twofold. Live porn or sexually oriented businesses (SOBs)—strip clubs, massage parlors and the like—attract crime to a community; and the general content of porn supports sexual abuse and serves as a how-to for sex crimes, primarily the molestation of children. Land Use Studies in 16 US cities support that the presence of SOBs has detrimental effects on the surrounding community. In Phoenix neighborhoods alone, where SOBs were located, the number of sex offenses was 506% greater; the number of property crimes 43% greater; and the number of violent crimes, four percent higher.

In Oklahoma City, a more than 150 SOBs were eliminated, the rape rate declined more than 27% over six years. During that same time, rape rates in the rest of the state continued to rise more than 19%. Researchers have linked porn and crimes of sexual aggression because of porn's sexually violent undertones. One study involving a group of inmates noted that 21% cited the media as a source of information about crime techniques with books and magazines most often cited. Most hard-core porn depicts sexual aggression toward women as "forced, violent sex depicted as 'pleasurable rape,' and increases male viewers' subsequent aggressiveness toward females...increases the willingness of a man to say he would rape a woman...strengthened the attitude that women want to be raped.

Though pictorially less graphic than most porn, magazines like Playboy and Penthouse still carry risk of harm. They are often the entry point for young boys who find them under their dad's bed or view them at school, brought in by a classmate. They support the "hyper masculine" cultural prototype that supports male dominance and the use of women as sexual objects, and they start children on the escalating road toward porn addiction.

I have not approached this topic from a theological point of view, but the Bible is very clear that sexual activity of any sort is to be confined to the marriage relationship. It instructs
us to place before our eyes only those things that are wholesome and praiseworthy and good. Porn does not fit into those categories. It seems self evident to me that the Church should be addressing this evil as well as all the others that keep us from being the "image of Christ" to our faltering society.

Prepared for the Committee on Theology and Social Concerns
by Robert McClure September 2000.

REFERENCES


2001
Theological and Biblical Reflection on Women in

Ministry
A study paper prepared for the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns
February 23, 2001
by
Renee A. Curtiss

Although the Cumberland Presbyterian Church has been ordaining women to the office of Word and Sacrament since 1889, the practice is still one that is disputed and hotly debated at the grass roots level. The 1984 Constitution of the Confession of Faith, clearly supports the ordination of women to the offices of pastor, elder and deacon. As a denomination, we are proud to have been the first Presbyterian body to ordain a woman. The ordination of Louisa M. Woosley in 1889 was however, marked by an enormous theological debate within the denomination.

Our internal statistics, as well as the personal experiences of most clergywomen, indicate that the issue is far from settled, even in the year 2001. For this reason, the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns, offers this paper as a resource for studying and evaluating the issue of women in ministry and leadership within the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

As with any topic within the church, it is absolutely essential that a thorough and sound theological and biblical foundation be the bedrock upon which all praxis is derived. Therefore we will begin our study here.

It seems appropriate and logical then, to begin at the beginning. Genesis 1:26 (NRSV):

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind (Hebrew: Adam) in our image according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God, God created them, male and female God created them.

God saw everything that God had made and indeed, it was very good.

This creation story is the first of two and is often overlooked or even forgotten in light of the Adam and Eve story. Let us take a closer look at these
two creation accounts. It will be helpful to note the Hebrew at some points which will be bracketed and italicized. Genesis 1:27 says:

So God created humankind *[adam]*: human being, no sexual connotation] in God's image, in the image of God he created them; male *[zakar]* and female *[negebah]* he created them;

or in another rendering: "male and female created he them and called their name 'Adam'" – humankind. Human nature, not masculinity, is "in the image of God," and this human nature consists of maleness and femaleness. There is no suggestion of inferiority or superiority of any kind.

Another perspective of the image here is reflected on by Grenz, who says that ultimately what it means to reflect God's image is to be in relationship or community. Our God is a God of community as any doctrine of the Trinity will clearly indicate. Throughout all eternity, God is community, the fellowship of the Three Persons who constitute the triune God. He states:

As the first creation narrative declares, when God created humankind, God built into creatures—created male and female—the unity-in-diversity and mutuality that characterize the eternal divine reality. Consequently, neither the male as such nor the isolated human is the image of God. Instead humans-in-relation or humans in community ultimately reflect the *imago Dei*. Such human fellowship encompasses diversity and illustrates mutuality (p.171).

So we deduce, God establishes a covenant relationship with all of humanity, not just the male portion.

Let us now turn our concentration to the second creation account, which has historically been interpreted by many in such a way as to justify the subjugation and subordination of women to men and therefore used as a basis for denying women to serve in leadership positions within the church.

The second chapter of Genesis records: "In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens...then the Lord God formed man *[adam]* from the dust of the ground..." When creation of the physical world—plants and animals—is completed, there is still something to be desired "....but for the man there was not
found a helper as his partner” (Gen. 2:20b), one who will be with him. The term "help" or "helper," [ezer], is found twenty-one times in the Old Testament, twice in this chapter. From the other nineteen uses, sixteen times the help is God; the other three speak of relative equals. Never does the word connote subordination. When the text speaks of God as our help [ezer], it is of course acknowledging God's strength and power for us, not God's subordination to us. Isn't it ironic then, that we would want to interpret [ezer] in the context of Genesis 2 as meaning subordinate? When God creates Eve from Adam's rib, God's intent is that she will be—unlike the animals—a power (or strength) equal to him.

The second term "meet" (KJV), "fit" (RSV), or "partner" (NRSV) is a translation of [neged], a preposition. Elsewhere in the Old Testament it is translated as "before," "in the presence of," "in the sight of," "over against." The sense in this verse has been rendered as "a mirror image of himself, in which he recognized himself." We may conclude that neither term [ezer or neged] indicates subordination of one to the other. According to Grenz:

The creation of woman 'for man' or as his 'helper' means that she rescues him from his solitude—'then God said it is not good that the man should be alone' (Gen.2:18) Rather than being cast in a subservient role, she is thereby elevated in the narrative as the crowning achievement of God's saving intent in the Garden” (p. 165).

It is important to note here, that our interpretation of a text depends on where we are standing. We cannot deny the presuppositions that we bring to a text and how they impact our interpretation. It is however, our responsibility to be aware of these biases in our reflection.

To those who still insist that the woman being taken out of the man's rib, is subordinate, the first ruler, the second ruled, we might recall that "...the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground,” (Gen.2:7a). The words contain a point not reproducible in English: for, in the Hebrew, 'ground' [adamah] is in form the feminine of 'man' [adam].

We see the coming into being of woman. A most profound image: God builds woman out of man's "essential stuff." There could be no clearer picture than this: the most intimate belonging to each other. Adam was incomplete without his counterpart; now human nature is complete. "Therefore a man leaves his father and
his mother and clings to his wife..." (Gen.2:24a). The "therefore" speaks of their oneness in completing each other.

The creation accounts in chapters one and two of Genesis depict a humanity created in the image of God. This humanity is to be in a relationship of mutuality and equality, recognizing the divine image in one another and their need for interdependence and mutual support. The Confession of Faith in section 1.11 summarizes it this way:

Among all forms of life, only human beings are created in God's own image. In the sight of God, male and female are created equal and complementary. To reflect the divine image is to worship, love, and serve God.

If this is the proper order of creation, then why the need for this paper? We need not look far for the answer, Genesis 3 offers an explanation for the disruption of the original order.

Put simply, the disintegration and disruption is a result of sin and the Fall.

To the woman
God said, 'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'

This is not the way God created things to be, but because of sin, it is the way God has allowed things to be. It is precisely at this point that the relationship of mutuality between male and female was corrupted, leading instead to a relationship of discrimination and subjugation of women to men.

By the grace of God, however, this is not the final word. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega and it is he who has the last word on any and all issues. The final say is this—Christ redeems us (all humanity) from sin and is the restorer of the original order. We are no longer living under the curse of sin, but under the grace of God through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As stated in 2Cor. 5:17, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away: see, everything has become new!" Also from Galatians 3:27-28: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."
God invites us to work in this new kingdom order through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit chooses to work where the Spirit wishes and with whom the Spirit wishes. The spirit's freedom of movement is noted in Joel 2:28-32 and again in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. Acts 1:13-14 states:

When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

On Pentecost when all of these were filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter stood up and recited from the prophet Joel:

In the last days it will be, God declares that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall
prophesy.

Not only is there evidence in scripture that the Spirit works in many and various ways—but the evidence of this is before our very eyes. The Spirit is unbounded and works in and through persons without regard to their ethnicity, nationality, social-economic status, intellect, education, age, or yes— even gender.

It is also important to note the historical Jesus’ attitude toward women. He more often than not, defied the traditions and customs of his time. He talked to women, even to the despised ones: to the woman of Samaria (John 4:17); the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24) whom he commended for her faith.

He accepted women’s ministry to and for him. He taught them, an unheard of thing at that time, and called them not to limit their work to "housewifely" ministrations "....Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying" (Luke 10:39) was commended, for she understood that'...there is need of only one thing: (Luke10:42a). She had chosen "...the better part which will not be taken away..." (Luke 10:42b). Jesus allowed a woman who was a "sinner" to wash and anoint his feet saying: "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48b). He healed men and women; accepted a woman's precious oil to anoint him for burial and includes her in the proclamation of the gospel: "...wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her" (Mark14:9; Matt.26:6). Women went with him on the road to Golgatha, and they were the last ones to whom he spoke before the crucifixion (Luke23:27). They went to see where Joseph of Arimathea laid him (Mark15:47 & parallels) and when the Sabbath had passed, they went back with the spices. At the empty tomb the women were the ones to hear the white robed figures announce: "he has been raised...go, tell his disciples and Peter..." (Mark 16:6-7). The women "...told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (Luke 24:10-11). It was a woman (John 20:11-18; women in Matt. 28:1-10) who were first greeted by the Risen Lord.

Initiation into this new community replaces the covenant sign of Israel that marks only the male members of the community. The right of baptism is the same to men and women who die and rise with Christ. Women thus are joint heirs and announcers of the good news.

Many commentators and Christians consider that the absence of women among the Twelve speaks against women in spiritual office. These same observers fail to note that, if this were true, it would speak against Gentiles in spiritual office too. The eleven Jews, aware that Judas's place has to be taken, consider two other Jews and cast lots for them. True, no Gentiles are among the converts yet, and women are, but the judging of the twelve tribes was not so imminent as to exclude waiting for the Gentiles. The point is this: If in the divine economy the Twelve are to represent the new "priesthood" or authentic ministry of the gospel, they fail to represent women and Gentiles alike. The barrier between Jew and Gentile was as great as between male and female, and both barriers were removed by Christ.
It is also worth noting that some writings attributed to Paul are often noted in denying women to the office of ministry and leadership within the church. To this opposition we render a simple argument of logic. It is time for honesty and consistency in the interpretive act. If one is compelled to a literal interpretation of the scripture, then it is imperative that this be pervasively consistent. For example in I Corinthians 14, if one deems appropriate the literal interpretation of "women are to keep silent in the churches" then the praxis should reflect this interpretive approach.

Therefore, there would be no female voices in choirs or congregational singing. There would be no women praying out loud. There would be no women teaching Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. There would be no women's missionary society's or fellowships, unless that is, they were silent gatherings. The silencing of the feminine voice means all of this and more. The ramifications of which would undoubtedly be devastating to the Church.

How is it then, many have interpreted this silencing to be applicable only for positions of leadership within the church? It is time to stop proof texting for our personal advantage or status. In order to be true to the text, it is also imperative that the scripture be interpreted in light of its historical and cultural context. Paul's letters and those attributed to Paul were addressed to particular people and churches within a particular context. These churches were grappling with concrete issues of which the author was attempting to specifically address.

Before making a judgment on the issue of women in leadership within the church, one must look at the writings of Paul which support the concept. Paul on his missionary journeys preached to and converted men and women, and considered men and women his fellow workers. The tentmaker couple, Aquila and Priscilla (or Prisca), with whom he dined and worked at Corinth, and sailed to Ephesus, remained his friends. When Apollos came to Ephesus and spoke in the synagogue with insufficient knowledge of the faith, "...Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Later Paul writes: "Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 16:3). The long list of greetings found in Romans 16 includes the names of eighteen men and eight women. It is here that we hear also of "...our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchrae."

It is noteworthy to mention what the Confession of Faith states in 1.07: "In order to understand God's word spoken in and through the scriptures, persons must have the illumination of God's own Spirit. Moreover, they should study the writings of the Bible in their historical settings, compare scripture with scripture, listen to the witness of the church throughout the centuries, and share insights with others in the covenant community."

Gains have certainly been made regarding women in ministry, yet, we still have a long way to go. We still express our faith in words that exclude women; we still pay clergywomen lower salaries than we pay clergymen; we often regulate
women to declining churches; and we still perpetuate myths and stereotypes that assign second-class status and roles to women.

A women in ministry research project in the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ in June of 1991 entitled Where We Stand makes this important note:

For many congregations the discrimination [against women] comes in the form of an assumption that men's competence can be trusted [as compared to women's competence]. For women, trust is rarely granted automatically, but must be tested and proven, and there is always a reserve of uncertainty in members of the congregation.

Works Cited


APPENDIX B

Ordained Women Ministers
in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church
selected years, 1960-2000
information gathered from the *General Assembly Yearbook*

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<td>23</td>
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<tr>
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<td>706</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>793</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

![Graph showing the number of ordained women ministers from 1960 to 2000.]

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selected years, 1960-2000

information gathered from the *General Assembly Yearbook*

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![Graph showing the number of ordained women ministers and the percentage of women ministers over selected years, 1960-2000.](image-url)
### Number of Ordinations
#### Of Women by Year

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### Number of Ordinations
#### Of Women by Decade

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordinations</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>

### Women Preparing for Ordained Ministry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students at Memphis Theological Seminary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students in Program of Alternate Studies</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Women Probationers (August, 2000 — from Division of Women, Board of Missions)</td>
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## Types of Call for Women Ministers, 1960

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Stated Supply</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Call</td>
<td>17</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Average membership of church served (Pastors and Stated Supplies) 24.6

![Pie chart showing percentages of different types of call for women ministers in 1960]

- **Pastor**: 3%
- **Stated Supply**: 28%
- **Without Call**: 59%
- **Professor**: 3%
- **Retired**: 7%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Call</th>
<th>Number of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pastor</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Chaplain</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Call</td>
<td>9</td>
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</table>

Average membership of church served (Pastors and Stated Supplies) 20.5

Types of Call for Women Ministers, 1970
<table>
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<th>Number of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Chaplain</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Call</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Types of Call for Women Ministers, 1980

![Pie chart showing distribution of types of call for women ministers in 1980.](chart)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Call</th>
<th>Number of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant/Associate Pastor</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stated Supply</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Chaplain</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital or Institutional Chaplain</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denominational Staff</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Call</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Average membership of church served (Pastors and Stated Supplies) 59.4

**Types of Call for Women Ministers, 1990**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Call</th>
<th>Number of women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Pastor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Assistant Pastor</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stated Supply</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastor, church of another denomination</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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Average membership of church served (Pastors, Co-Pastors, and Stated Supplies) 43.5

Types of Call for Women Ministers, 2000
APPENDIX B

Ordained Women Ministers
in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church
selected years, 1960-2000
information gathered from the General Assembly Yearbook

<table>
<thead>
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</table>

![Graph showing the number of ordained women ministers from 1960 to 2000.]

![Graph showing the percentage of women ministers from 1960 to 2000.]

Percentage of Women Ministers

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Ordained Women Ministers
in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church
selected years, 1960-2000
information gathered from the *General Assembly Yearbook*

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![Graph showing the number of Ordained Women Ministers and the percentage of Women Ministers from 1960 to 2000](image)
## Number of Ordinations
### Of Women by Year

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## Number of Ordinations
### Of Women by Decade

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</tr>
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<td>Pastor</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Stated Supply</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Call</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average membership of church served (Pastors and Stated Supplies) 24.6

**Types of Call for Women Ministers, 1960**

- Pastor: 3%
- Stated Supply: 28%
- Without Call: 59%
- Professor: 3%
- Retired: 7%
### Types of Call for Women Ministers, 1970

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Call</td>
<td>9%</td>
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Average membership of church served (Pastors and Stated Supplies) 20.5
### Types of Call for Women Ministers, 1980

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Call</td>
<td>9</td>
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</table>

- Pastor: 14%
- Stated Supply: 9%
- Chaplain: 5%
- Retired: 32%
- Without Call: 40%
### Types of Call for Women Ministers, 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Call</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Average membership of church served (Pastors and Stated Supplies) 59.4
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<tr>
<th>Type of Call</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Call</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average membership of church served</strong></td>
<td><strong>43.5</strong></td>
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</table>

**Types of Call for Women Ministers, 2000**

Without Call: 22%
Co-Pastor: 27%
Retired: 13%
Denomination: 3%
Professor: 7%
Chaplain: 13%
SS/Other: 5%
Associate/Assistant: 10%
"It is tempting to pretend that minorities on Death Row share a fate in no way connected to our own that our treatment of them sounds no echoes beyond the chambers in which they die. Such an illusion ultimately corrosive, for the reverberations of injustice are not so easily confined...And the way in which s choose who will die reveals the depth of moral commitment among the living."

U. S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan
McClesky v. Kemp

A. THE BIBLE AND THE DEATH PENALTY

As Cumberland Presbyterians, we believe that the Bible is "the infallible rule of faith and practice As such, it provides the lens through which we interpret our reality and the base of our engagement with our culture and government. It is appropriate and necessary that we examine the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as we discuss capital punishment in the United States.

The limits of this paper will not allow a treatment of all biblical texts used in relation to capital punishment, What follows is a brief exegesis of two texts often cited in support of or opposition to the death penalty. First, it will be important to say a word about proper and improper interpretation of scripture.

The Confession of Faith of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America establishes clear guidelines for the interpretation o (exegesis) of biblical texts.

1.06 God's word spoken in and through the scriptures should be understood in the light of the birth life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The authority of the scriptures is founded on the truth contained in them and the voice of God speaking through them.

1.07 In order to understand God's word spoken in and through the scriptures, persons must have the illumination of God's own Spirit. Moreover, they should study the writings of the Bible in their historical settings, compare scripture with scripture, listen to the witness of the church
throughout the centuries share insights with others in the covenant community.

We have observed these guidelines in our work with the texts that follow. It is not possible to simply lift out of context certain biblical texts and use them to prove a point, no matter which point one is trying to prove. This is an improper use of scripture that serves to distort the total biblical witness. The exegesis that follows will take the guidelines of the Confession of Faith seriously.

Any serious Christian interpretation of scripture must begin with "the birth, life, death resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth." The ministry of Jesus as it was interpreted through Matthew, Mark, and John provide several opportunities for reflection on the death penalty.

B. BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go al. second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow you

This text comes within the larger context of the Sermon on the Mount, a collection of teachings Jesus that Matthew places toward the beginning of his gospel. These teachings form the foundation of a particular ethic that becomes central to Matthew's gospel, and plays a central role in the other gospels as the ethic of the cross. Simply put, Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection take on the tenor of suffering love. The rubric of suffering love is one that forms a people into the shape of the cross. A particular people, formed by the cross, no longer conducts itself according to the laws of retribution, but according to the law of

This text from Matthew must be seen in this larger context or else we run the risk of proof-texting. Jesus is teaching a new way of life in
this text, a life that is cruciform in its shape. Most of Jesus' teaching and ministry actions can be seen within this theologia crucis, theology of the cross, (Martin Luther)

Those who argue against the death penalty see this as a foundational text. In this teaching it is that Jesus is speaking against a form of justice that seeks retribution for injustice. Instead of retribution, teaches that injustice be met with a suffering love that is willing to sacrifice rights for the sake of grace directly quoting a law from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) that is often used by death penalty proponents to support their view, Jesus in essence reinterprets it in light of suffering love.

Those who argue for the death penalty see this text as a specific example of interpersonal relation but not intended to be applied to governmental policy. Indeed, they argue, to take this text as a Christian try to apply it to secular governmental policies, is to breach the line that separates church and state. Christians should certainly practice grace and forgiveness when they have been personally wronged, always see reconciliation between parties in a conflict. But the government has certain communal responsibilities pertaining to its role to protect society and maintain order that compel it to exercise justice according severity of the crime committed. The death penalty is one means of exercising this governmental responsibility.

Death penalty advocates argue that Christians are naive at best to think that Jesus' ethic of suffering love can be legislated. Are we to simply release all prisoners, since incarceration is a form of justice punishment for offenders of society's laws? It seems a slippery slope toward chaos when we open the door to an ethic such as this to hold sway in our society.

These arguments from death penalty proponents emerge from a particular understanding of the of government that takes its cue from Romans 13, to which we now turn.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then
do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.

(Romans 13:1-4 NRSV).

It is clear in this passage that we are being called as Christians to support the government as a servant of God for order. The authority of government bears the sword in order to punish the bad, not the good. Therefore, death penalty proponents see capital punishment as a legitimate use of this sword for the purposes of justice and order.

Others read this text as affirming government, as long as government exercises its laws within the larger context of God's purposes. However, this cannot be seen as a blanket endorsement of all that a government seeks to do. Paul Achtemeier writes, "Is the Christian under obligation to support whatever policies the governing authorities may deem appropriate, whether these policies are for the good of the people or simply for the purpose of keeping those governing authorities in power? Is that what these verses mean? That is the interpretation given to them in the late thirties and early forties of the twentieth century by a group within the Protestant church in Germany, who for nationalistic reasons called themselves 'German Christians.'"

Does Paul here make Christians obligated to obey all the laws of whatever government happens to hold power over them? Does this passage mean that we are to unequivocally give Christian approval and sanction to whatever our government does, simply because it happens to be our government? The answer, they argue, is no. Whenever Christians see a clear conflict between a governmental policy and the teachings of Jesus Christ, they should oppose that policy and do all in their power to influence its removal.

Christians should not frivolously disregard civil authority. As long as government is acting as a servant of God, by upholding justice and maintaining order, it is to be obeyed and supported. If government, however, acts in ways contrary to God's will and way in the world, it is to be opposed.

Death penalty opponents believe the United States has a healthy protest tradition that is built into our democratic society, enabling us to peacefully petition the government, using all the tools of moral and political power at our disposal, to challenge injustice. If a church discerns that a particular law is
either in fact unjust, or unjustly administered, it is not precluded by this text from challenging that law.

While we all look to the Bible as our infallible rule of faith and practice, we can and do interpret it with some diversity. Any statement by a church body will not end this diversity. Therefore, we encourage the continual engagement with scripture on the part of all our members as we continue to struggle with this important issue.
CALL FOR A MORATORIUM

Our brothers and sisters in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and nineteen other religious groups having recently issued the following call for a moratorium on the death penalty in the United States: "There is strong evidence that the death penalty is applied in a racist manner.

In 1990, the United States General Accounting Office reported a pattern of evidence indicating racial disparities in charging, sentencing, and imposition of the death penalty:

`Nationwide, 82% of those put to death have been convicted of murdering a white person even though people of color are the victims in more than half of all homicides. In 82% of their studies, race of the victim was found to influence the likelihood of being charged with capital murder or receiving a death sentence, i.e., than those who murdered blacks. This finding was remarkably consistent across data sets, states, data collection methods, and analytic techniques. The finding held for high, medium, and low quality studies.' (U. S. General Accounting Office, Report GGD-90-57, Death Penalty Sentencing: Research Indicates Pattern of Racial Disparities, February 26, 1990, at 5).

Of the recorded 17,000 legal executions in the history of the United States, only 35 have been for white killing black, and a mere five of those have occurred since capital punishment recommenced in 1975.' (Michael L. Radelet, Executions of Whites for Crimes Against Blacks: Exceptions to the Rule?, 30 Soc. Q 529, 1989).
The United States Congress has failed repeatedly to pass the Racial Justice Act, which would allow prisoners to challenge their death sentences using standards recognized as normal in civil racial discrimination cases.

Prisoner appeals have been severely curtailed, increasing the risk of imprisonment and execution of innocent people:

`Gross deficiencies exist in the area of representation of indigent defendants.

In a series of rulings since 1991, the Supreme Court has drastically restricted the rights of death row prisoners to appeal their convictions and death sentences in federal courts, even in cases where prisoners present compelling evidence of innocence. Counsel for impoverished capital defendants are most often undertrained and underpaid. Judges routinely deny lawyers' requests to hire experts or to pay for investigative fees.' (Marcia Coyle, Carter Center Symposium on the Death Penalty. Georgia State University Law Review, pp 379-380, 1997).

About 90% of those persons facing capital charges cannot afford their own attorney. No state has met standards approved by the American Bar Association for appointment, performance, and compensation of counsel for indigent prisoners.

On January 31, 2000, Governor George H. Ryan of Illinois declared a moratorium on executions of any more death row inmates in his state.

In 1996, new legislation drastically limited federal court review of death penalty appeals and gutted public funding of legal aid services for death row prisoners.
Many of the states with established death rows are considering moratorium resolutions similar to the one declared by Governor Ryan.

The American Bar Association had concluded that administration of the death penalty is a haphazard maze of unfair practices with no internal consistency. In February 1997, the ABA House of Delegates adopted an extensive Death Penalty Moratorium Resolution.

In June 1997, nineteen diverse religious organizations united to call for a nationwide moratorium on executions. To date, more than seven hundred religious and secular organizations are sounding a clear and visible public call for a moratorium on executions now.

"And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America join the Call for a Moratorium by:

1. Calling for an immediate moratorium on all executions in all jurisdictions that impose capital punishment.

2. Directing the Stated Clerks of the CPC and CPCA General Assemblies to communicate the Ill for an immediate moratorium to the President of the United States, our representatives in Congress, well as the governors and legislators of the 23 states with persons incarcerated while awaiting execution.

Respectfully submitted,
The Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns
CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

A. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE DEATH PENALTY IN THE UNITED STATES

Theological reflections on the death penalty in the United States should begin by establishing the social context of the death penalty as it is currently practiced in this country. Following this, an exegesis of two pertinent biblical texts traditionally used to oppose or defend the death penalty will be undertaken. These biblical texts will be brought into conversation with the Reformed Tradition as it is articulated in the Confession of Faith of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church/Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America. These social, biblical, and theological reflections will provide the foundation for a position recommended for adoption by the General Assembly of both the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America pertaining to the death penalty.

B. THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE DEATH PENALTY

1. Abolitionist and Retentionist Countries

Over half of the countries in the world have now abolished the death penalty in law or practice. Amnesty International’s latest information shows that:

- 75 countries and territories have abolished the death penalty for all crimes
- 14 countries have abolished the death penalty for all but exceptional crimes such as wartime crimes
- 20 countries can be considered abolitionist in practice: they retain the death penalty in law but have not carried out any executions for the past 10 years or more

making a total of 109 countries that have abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

86 other countries retain and use the death penalty, but the number of countries that actually execute prisoners in any given year is much smaller.

2. Progress Toward Worldwide Abolition

More than three countries a year on average have abolished the death penalty for all crimes in the past decade.

Over 30 countries and territories have abolished the death penalty for all crimes since 1990. They include countries in Africa (examples include Angola, Cote d’Ivoire, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa), the Americas (Canada, Paraguay), Asia (Hong Kong, Nepal), Europe (Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Poland, Turkmenistan, Ukraine).

3. Moves to Reintroduce the Death Penalty

Once abolished, the death penalty is seldom reintroduced. Since 1985, over 40 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or, having previously abolished it for ordinary crimes, have gone on to abolish it for all crimes. During the same period only four abolitionist countries reintroduced the death penalty. One of them, Nepal, which reintroduced the death penalty for murder, has since abolished it for all crimes; one, the Philippines, has resumed executions, but there have been no executions in the other two (Gambia, Papua New Guinea).

4. Death Sentences and Executions

During 2000, at least 1,457 prisoners were executed in 27 countries and 3,058 people were sentenced to death in 65 countries. These figures include only cases known to monitoring agencies; the true figures are certainly higher.

In 2000, 88 percent of all known executions took place in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the USA. In China, the limited and incomplete records available to monitoring agencies at the end of the year indicated that at least 1,000 people were executed, but the true figure was believed to have been much higher. In Saudi Arabia, 123 executions were reported, but the total may have been much higher. 85 people were executed in the USA. At least 75 executions were carried out in Iran. In addition, hundreds of executions were reported in Iraq but many of them may have been extrajudicial.

5. Use of Death Penalty Against Child Offenders

International human rights treaties prohibit anyone under 18 years of age at the time of the crime being sentenced to death. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the American Convention on
Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child all have provisions to this effect. More than 110 countries whose laws still provide for the death penalty for at least some offenses have laws specifically excluding the execution of child offenders or may be presumed to exclude such executions by being parties to one or another of the above treaties. A small number of countries, however, continue to execute child offenders.

Seven countries since 1990 are known to have executed prisoners who were under 18 years old at the time of the crime — Congo (Democratic Republic), Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, USA, and Yemen. The country that carried out the greatest number of known executions of child offenders was the USA (14 since 1990).

6. The Deterrence Argument

Scientific studies have consistently failed to find convincing evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments. The most recent survey of research findings on the relation between the death penalty and homicide rates, conducted for the United Nations in 1988 and updated in 1996, concluded: "Research has failed to provide scientific proof that executions have a greater deterrent effect than life imprisonment and such proof is unlikely to be forthcoming. The evidence as a whole still gives no positive support to the deterrent hypotheses."

7. Effect of Abolition on Crime Rates

Reviewing the evidence on the relation between changes in the use of the death penalty and crime rates, a study conducted for the United Nations in 1988 and updated in 1996 stated that "the fact that all the evidence continues to point in the same direction is a priori evidence that countries need not fear sudden and serious changes in the curve of crime if they reduce their reliance upon the death penalty."

Recent crime figures from abolitionist countries fail to show that abolition has harmful effects. In Canada, the homicide rate per 100,000 population fell from a peak of 3.09 in 1975, the year before the abolition of the death penalty for murder, to 2.41 in 1980, and since then it has declined further. In 1999, 23 years after abolition, the homicide rate was 1.76 per 100,000 population, 43 percent lower than in 1975. The total number of homicides reported in the country fell in 1999 for the third straight year.

8. International Agreements to Abolish the Death Penalty

One of the most important developments in recent years has been the adoption of international treaties whereby states commit themselves to not having the death penalty. Three such treaties now exist:

- The Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which has now been ratified by 43 states. Six other states have signed the Protocol, indicating their intention to become parties to it at a later date.
- Protocol No. 6 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms ("European Convention on Human Rights"), which has now been ratified by 39 European states and signed by three others.
- The Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights to Abolish the Death Penalty, which has been ratified by eight states in the Americas.

Protocol No. 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights is an agreement to abolish the death penalty in peacetime. The other two protocols provide for the total abolition of the death penalty but allow states wishing to do so to retain the death penalty in wartime as an exception.

9. Execution of the Innocent

As long as the death penalty is maintained, the risk of executing the innocent can never be eliminated. Since 1973 more than 90 US prisoners have been released from death row after evidence emerged of their innocence of the crimes for which they were sentenced to death. Some had come close to execution after spending many years under sentence of death. Recurring features in their cases include prosecutorial or police misconduct; the use of unreliable witness testimony, physical evidence, or confessions; and inadequate defense representation. Other US prisoners have gone to their deaths despite serious doubts over their guilt.

The Governor of the US state of Illinois, George Ryan, declared a moratorium on executions in January, 2000. His decision followed the exoneration of the 13th death row prisoner found to have been wrongly convicted in the state since the USA reinstated the death penalty in 1977. During the same period, 12 other Illinois prisoners had been executed.

Announcing the moratorium, Governor Ryan said, "I cannot support a system which, in its administration, has proven so fraught with error and has come so close to the ultimate nightmare, the state’s taking of innocent life...until I can be sure that everyone sentenced to death in Illinois is truly guilty, until I can be sure with moral certainty that no innocent man or woman is facing a lethal injection, no one will meet that fate."

10. The Death Penalty in the USA
85 prisoners were executed in the USA in 2000, bringing to 683 the total number executed since the use of the death penalty was resumed in 1977.

Over 3,700 prisoners were under sentence of death as of January 1, 2001.

38 of the 50 US states provide for the death penalty in law. The death penalty is also provided under US federal military and civilian law.

20,000 murders are committed in the USA each year. About 250 of these murderers are sentenced to death. An average of 17 persons a year have been executed by the states in the past six years.

Someone who kills a white person is 11 times more likely to receive the death sentence than someone who kills a black person; a black person who kills a white person is 22 times more likely to receive the death sentence. 90 percent of the defendants who are sentenced to death cannot afford their own legal counsel.

States that kill Death Row prisoners show no decrease in the murder rate.
CHURCHES UNITING IN CHRIST

On January 19-22, 2002, representatives of nine Protestant denominations, meeting in Memphis, inaugurated an ecumenical partnership called Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC). Jay Earheart-Brown participated in the weekend of worship, plenary sessions, and workshops as an official observer from the Cumberland Presbyterian Church at the request of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns. Other official observers represented an additional fifteen denominations.

The member denominations of CUIC include: African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Episcopal Church, International Council of Community Churches, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church. In addition to these nine member churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a Partner in Mission and Dialogue.

As a part of the CUIC agreement, the member churches officially recognized one another as true churches in which the gospel is truly proclaimed and the sacraments rightly administered. The churches also formally pledged to work in partnership with one another in local communities, regularly sharing in worship, sacraments, and mission. Each member denomination will maintain its own denominational structure and identity.

The Unified Committee is studying whether or not the Cumberland Presbyterian Churches should consider formal membership or partnership in CUIC. We will report to a later Assembly on our recommendations.
CLONING

The Unified Committee appreciates the General Assembly's position against the cloning of human beings. This issue continues to be of great concern to our committee because of ongoing activity in this area. We also have concerns with the related fields of genetic engineering and stem cell research. We will continue study of these topics and plan to request that Dr. Barbara Holmes assist us in our ethical and theological reflection on these issues. With Dr. Holmes' help, the future hope of this Unified Committee, is to sponsor a variety of joint activities involving Memphis Theological Seminary, University of Tennessee Medical School, and others.

For further study we recommend the Science, Religion and Technology Project of the Church of Scotland at http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/srtscot/cloning.shtml.
A CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN RESPONSE TO THE DEATH PENALTY

Violent crime is as ancient as humankind. Since Cain slew Abel, the blood of countless victims has out to the Lord (Genesis 4:10). Our hearts, too, cry out to the Lord who gives life whenever we see persons, families, and nations victimized by violence. We grieve with the families and friends of the victimized it society.

Furthermore, we agree with our friends in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that "violent e has a powerful, corrosive effect on society. Bonds of trust, the very assumptions that allow us to live our lives in security and peace, break down when violence strikes. Instead of living, we fear our neighbor. We especially fear the stranger."

We are angered and saddened by violence and the injustice involved in it. We, too, want to hold accountable those who commit violent crimes. Our valuing of human life and our understanding that all of life is sacred demands a response when violence threatens and destroys the life that we so cherish.

However, as followers of Jesus Christ, we also recognize that our feelings of sadness and anger make vulnerable to feelings of revenge and cause us to long for simple solutions, often, overly-simplistic solutions.

One such solution is currently embraced by the majority within the United States and is codified as taw states: capital punishment. We are convinced by the overwhelming evidence cited elsewhere in this document that the death penalty is contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Moreover, we are convinced that death penalty, as it is currently practiced in the United States, is unjust. It disproportionately punishes the poor and persons of color. It condemns to death and executes persons who were minors when they committed crimes and persons who are mentally handicapped. In addition to this, the death penalty has not proven any more of a deterrent to violent crime than the possibility of lifetime incarceration. All these factors, Ailed with recent efforts by governments of various states to address this issue, compels us to make the following statement as Cumberland Presbyterians:

We believe the death penalty is contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

We believe the death penalty violates the Confession of Faith’s understanding of God’s justice being tempered with love.

We believe that the government’s use of death as an instrument of justice places the state in the role of God, who alone is sovereign.
We believe the use of the death penalty in a representative democracy places citizens in the role of executioner. Christians cannot isolate themselves from corporate responsibility, including responsibility for every execution, as well as for every victim.

We believe there are currently no adequate safeguards to insure that innocent persons are not executed by the state.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the General Assemblies of the CPC and CPCA churches in the decision of the 1977 General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, that Cumberland Presbyterians support measures to abolish the use of the death penalty," and that the General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America declare our opposition to the death penalty.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the General Assemblies of the CPC and CPCA churches call upon governing bodies and members of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America to work for the abolition of the death penalty in those states which currently have death penalty statutes, and against efforts to reinstate such statutes in those which do not.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the General Assemblies of the CPC and CPCA churches urge continuing study of issues related to capital punishment within presbyteries and local congregations of the two denominations.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Stated Clerks of the CPC and CPCA notify the President and Congress of the United States, and all the state governors and legislatures of the action taken.
FOLLOW-UP ON A DIRECTIVE FROM THE 171st GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

This Unified Committee was directed by the 171st Assembly to "develop and/or list congregational resources that will empower the Christian community, by the grace of God, to pursue healing and reconciliation in all human relationships. We specifically request guidance, guidelines, and resources concerning premarital counseling that will enable the church to help couples build strong Christian marriages."

The Unified Committee has much more study to do in this requested area. It is evident to the Committee that there is an ever growing need for couples to be adequately counseled and prepared for the sacredness of the marriage covenant. For now, your Committee offers the following resources in assisting pastors and church leaders engaged in premarital counseling with individuals:

1. *The Confession of Faith for the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America*

2. *Pre-marriage Awareness Inventory Review Kit* by Peter C. Valands available from Logos Productions: 1-800-328-0200 or www.joinhands.com

3. *When a Couple Marries* by Jim Taylor and Marion Barnett

4. *Marriage and Sacrament* by Michael Lawler
STATEMENT CONCERNING LIBERIA, WEST AFRICA

Recently, violence and unrest have greatly increased in Liberia. Violence and unrest has risen to the point where the lives of Liberians are at risk. Therefore, the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns encourages all Christians to lift up the people of Liberia in prayer. Let us not soon forget the pain and suffering that the people of Liberia are experiencing. The Unified Committee would like to encourage individuals and congregations to discover ways to support and empower the people of Liberia to put down their arms of death and destruction. Let us also encourage the people of Liberia to seek peace and justice for all people. Peace and reconciliation can be the future of Liberia. This can be accomplished when we realize the struggles in Liberia affect our entire world.
STATEMENT ON THE TRAGEDY OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

Your Unified Committee met September 28-29, 2001 in the immediate aftermath of the event we have come to know as 9-11. Like the rest of our society, we were overwhelmed by the tragedy but we were also intensely aware of the need to bring our faith into play through theological reflection. We felt an obligation to call Cumberland Presbyterian Christians to do likewise. To this end, the following statement was published in The Cumberland Presbyterian. Though inadequate, we think this statement provides a starting place for our healing and for a renewal of hope.

"As your Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns met on September 28-29, 2001 we felt compelled to communicate with the Church in light of the devastating attacks on this nation that took place September 11th. Being compelled to speak is quite different from knowing what to say. We wanted, above all, to avoid the cheap theology and easy answers that so often plague the church and the nation at times like these. After quite some time of reflection and prayerful discussion three words seemed to focus the committee's dialogue -maturity, inclusion, and healing.

We believe that the faith that we hold dear has an opportunity to mature in these trying times. The paradigm for living our lives has changed forever. The principalities and powers that we trusted for our security were revealed as inadequate and even ephemeral as the towers collapsed, the Pentagon burned, the planes collided, and the casualty list grew. The isolated ways we live our lives were called into question as neighbor turned to neighbor for support and strength. The casual relationship so many of us have with our God became a deep and tangible cry for help from the One Source of hope. Faith is maturing in these trying times. Let us encourage that sort of growth.

We also fear for those who suffer from continued acts of irrational violence and hate in this ever-widening cycle of terror. Innocent citizens who share the same democratic values that our nation espouses are being targeted for abuse, both physical and psychological, because of their faith. We call on Cumberland Presbyterian Christians to embrace our neighbors of various ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds and, in so doing, bear witness to the Christ who "breaks down the dividing walls." We also call on our government for justice - but for justice against
the guilty. We must resist the temptation to consider the innocents who might well suffer as "collateral" or "incidental" to the violence the world faces. May the nation that upholds justice for all extend the hand of compassion to those most affected by these disasters, wherever they may be.

We believe that this is a time for healing. Our minds and hearts could scarce believe the message of pain that our eyes couldn't avoid. The scars of broken buildings and shattered lives bear overwhelming witness to the sin of this world. The incredible irony is that "by his scars we are healed." No adjective could describe the pain we feel, the despair that we face, and the fear that confronts us. But Christ is our example. The Great Physician does not sleep nor has our God developed laryngitis. The comfort of the Holy Spirit and soothing ways of faith are already turning the tide in this epidemic. The God who spoke us into existence now speaks of new ways of existing. We call on Cumberland Presbyterian Christians to stand tall and stand firm as people who have been healed and who are called to bring healing. The greatest labor of our lives is before us. Let us begin that work encouraged by our own experiences of New Life in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."
THE CONFESSION OF FAITH

What does the Confession of Faith of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America say to us about the ways we can approach this issue faithfully as Cumberland Presbyterians?

The law of God is taken up in Sections 1.19-1.22 of the Confession.

1.19 God gives the moral law to govern human actions and relations. It is the principle of justice woven into the fabric of the universe and is binding upon all persons.

1.20 The moral law is a gift of God's grace. While it consists of the basic principles of justice revealed in the scriptures and upheld by God, it does not wholly describe the pattern of his actions toward persons. The judgment of God, in which the moral law is upheld, is, at the same time, an expression of redemptive love.

1.21 The moral law is fulfilled in the gospel. Therefore, the behavior of Christians in human relations should reflect the pattern of God's behavior toward them, in which love and justice are intertwined.

1.22 The purpose of the moral law is to create wholeness or health in human life — spiritually, mentally, physically, socially. Therefore, it is the intention of the moral law that the forces of human personality which create integrity of life in all its aspects be used to achieve that wholeness.

Here we see clearly articulated a view of God's justice that recognizes that God's sovereign justice is always in the direction of redemption, and that love and justice are expressions of the same grace of God. It is hard to reconcile a punishment that is as unforgiving and as final as death with the restorative and redemptive justice-love of God. We echo our Lutheran sisters and brothers by calling for a society ruled by the law and influenced and nourished by the Gospel of Christ. Renewed by the Gospel, Christians, as salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13) and light of the world (Matthew 5:14), are called to respond to violent crime in the restorative way taught by Jesus (Matthew 5:38-39) and shown by his actions (John 8:3-11). Following Jesus leads to commitment to restorative justice. This commitment means addressing the hurt of each person whose life has been touched by violent crime. Restorative justice makes the community safer for all.

It is a reflection of our ministry to and with people affected by violent crime that we oppose the death penalty. 'Executions focus on the convicted murderer, providing very little for the victim's family or anyone else whose life has been touched by the crime. Capital punishment focuses on retribution, sometimes reflecting a spirit of vengeance. Executions do not restore broken society and can actually work counter to restoration.' (A Social Statement on the Death Penalty: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).

We believe that opposition to the death penalty is a more adequate reflection of the Confession of Faith's articulation of the moral law of God as an expression of redemptive love, and that restorative justice most closely approximates the justice/love that God wills for all humankind.

The Confession of Faith, under the heading "Christian Freedom," describes the proper relationship between Christians and governing authorities:
6.04 Believers who, under the pretext of Christian freedom, defy the proper exercise of just and lawful authority, either civil or ecclesiastical, are subject to the discipline of the church.

6.05 Christians owe ultimate allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord, and must never yield that ultimate allegiance to any government or nation, and should in Christian conscience oppose any form of injustice.

Again we see the tension between obeying and supporting the laws of the state and opposing those laws that we determine to be in conflict with the teachings of Christ, to whom we owe our ultimate allegiance. As we argue, the death penalty is unjust on many grounds, then it is the responsibility of Cumberland Presbyterians to oppose it.

Finally, the Confession of Faith deals more explicitly with the nature of civil government:

6.27 The purpose of civil government is to enable God's creation to live under the principles of justice and order. As it faithfully upholds the welfare of God's creation, civil government lies within the purpose of God and functions as a useful instrument to enable people to live in harmony and peace.

6.30 The covenant community, governed by the Lord Christ, opposes, resists, and seeks to change all circumstances of oppression — political, economic, cultural, racial — by which persons are denied the essential dignity God intends for them in the work of creation.

6.31 The covenant community affirms the lordship of Christ, who sought out the poor, the oppressed, the sick, and the helpless. In her corporate life and through her individual members, the church is an advocate for all victims of violence and all those whom the law or society treats as less than persons for whom Christ died. Such advocacy involves not only opposition to all unjust laws and forms of injustice but even more support for those attitudes and actions which embody the way of Christ, which is to overcome evil with good.

Here we find the Confession of Faith boldly advocating for Christians to stand and oppose, resist, and seek to change all circumstances of oppression. We believe that the death penalty in the United States is oppressive and unjust reality that all Christians should seek to change. We see this change as part of our ministry to and with persons who are the victims of violent crime.

As the previous excerpts from the Confession of Faith make clear, Cumberland Presbyterians hold that, through the divine activity of the law, God preserves creation, orders society, and promotes justice in broken world. God works through the state and other structures of society necessary for life in the present age.

The state is responsible under God for the protection of its citizens and the maintenance of justice and law order. However, this does not mean that governments have the right to take life. Nor does it mean that governments must punish crime by death. We increasingly question whether the death penalty has been and be administered justly.
Theological Reflections on Economic Disparities in US Health Care System

Lord, when was it that we saw you ...sick? Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.
Matt.25 vs. 37-40

Healing was an integral part of Jesus’ ministry. One of the earliest accounts of Jesus’ work is his healing of the leper described in Matthew 8:1-4. This story tells us about Jesus’ power to heal disease. Throughout the New Testament, there are accounts of his healing ministry that frequently refer to his compassion for the sick and his amazing power to heal all of them. He noticed those who were sick, even in the push and shove of large crowds, and he responded to them. Jesus not only restored physical health but also offered the real cure – forgiveness of sin. It is the restoration of wholeness, both physical and spiritual, that is central to Jesus’ healing ministry.

Through the work of the disciples, and in the life of the early Christian church, healing continued as a ministry of the church. Following Jesus’ lead, the healing ministry of the early church had as its ultimate goal the cure of the soul. It focused on health of the whole person. In James 5:14-15 its author describes the role of the elders of the church: Are there any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

In this paper we will consider the current health care system in the United States (US). We will look at the US-style employer-based health insurance with attention to whom it serves and whom it leaves out. From a practical point of view, we will consider a Christian perspective for evaluating the problem of lack of insurance in light of Christ’s example of compassion, reaching out to the sick, and responding to their needs.

The US health care system is one of great technological capacity. Medical care has made wondrous advances in its ability to diagnosis and treat disease. The one area in which the US system has fallen short is in offering health care services to all of its citizens. The problem is that not everyone has access to medical care. A growing number of Americans are uninsured lacking the ticket necessary to gain admission into this system of care. The latest Census Bureau survey reports that 41 million Americans were uninsured in 2001. This represents almost 15% of the US population.

Even more troubling is the persistent growth in their number. In 1980, the US had about 25 million uninsured, and that number has grown by about one million per year ever since, during both good and bad economic times. While public dialogue about the problem ebbs and flows, lack of insurance is a quiet crisis that continues to deepen.

Who are the uninsured? Most of them are working families. In fact, 8 out of 10 uninsured are members of working families. They are uninsured because their jobs do not offer health insurance benefits or the medical premiums are unaffordable. Most insured people, about 62%, depend on their employer for their health insurance. When the employer does not offer health insurance benefits, many go without.

If employer-sponsored health insurance is only available to about 62% of Americans, how do others secure health insurance coverage? Other sources of health insurance are government-funded Medicare and Medicaid or privately purchased health insurance.

Medicare is the federal government program that finances health care for people over the age of 65 and some disabled persons. About 13% of Americans have health insurance coverage through Medicare.

Medicaid is the federal/state program that finances health services for some low-income, disabled, or elderly persons. The federal government pays about 50% to 77% of the Medicaid costs. The exact percentage the federal participation depends on the state’s per capita income. The states administer the program and pay the balance of the cost. Medicaid is the principal payer for nursing home care in the US. Almost 11% of Americans have insurance through Medicaid. As states experience fiscal shortfalls, they cut back on public health coverage programs such as Medicaid. This causes some low-income families to lose their health care coverage.

Our health care system’s heavy dependence on employers as providers of health care insurance coverage creates several problems for workers and employers alike. Younger workers and those who work in
service jobs are less likely to have health insurance. Age is a factor in the likelihood that someone will have health insurance. In fact, one quarter of individuals ages 18-34 do not have insurance coverage. Income and education level are also factors. The higher the education level and income level, the more likely a person is to have health insurance. Many with higher education levels are able to secure better paying jobs, which are more likely to offer health insurance benefits.

Race and ethnicity are also factors that play a role in access to health insurance. An example is the lack of insurance prevalent among Hispanics. In a January 15, 2003, article published in San Diego’s Union-Tribune, US Surgeon General Richard Carmona addressed the disparities Hispanics encounter in accessing health insurance. In California, one in four Hispanics lack health insurance compared to one in ten Whites.

Many employers encounter difficulties in taking on the role of provider of health insurance for its employees. Just as medical premiums are unaffordable for many families, premiums are unaffordable for small employers as well. In our own Cumberland Presbyterian denomination we struggle with the responsibility of providing health insurance coverage for our pastors. As health care costs rise, many small congregations find that meeting their share of health care premium costs can be daunting. In 1987 the General Assembly directed that all presbyteries should develop a plan within two years to include all ministers in the Denominational Health Insurance Program. Choctaw and overseas presbyteries were excluded from the directive. At present, only one third of the presbyteries are in full compliance.

While lack of health insurance hits lower income families the hardest, it impacts middle-income Americans as well. A growing number of uninsured are middle-income individuals who cannot qualify for insurance even if they can pay an affordable premium. Insurance companies that do not want to assume the financial risk of providing insurance to them may turn down individuals who have been diagnosed with a pre-existing medical condition. Insurance companies seek an insurer mix in which the health care costs of serving the sicker patients is spread across a group that includes many well patients whose care is less expensive. Insurance companies seek to avoid “adverse selection” - a term that describes having more people with a high risk of illness in a plan than those at a lower risk. Sometimes insurance companies charge more for groups that have high-risk individuals as part of the plan. In certain scenarios, insurance costs are so high that low risk individuals seek less expensive insurance alternatives. This leaves certain plans with less healthy enrollees and higher costs.

After learning about the insured and who they are, the question comes up – do they really need health insurance? Does it matter? The answer is a resounding yes! Research indicates that people who are uninsured simply do not receive the medical care they need often with dire health consequences.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a foundation well known for its work in the health care arena, is sponsoring a major public education campaign to raise awareness of the consequences of being uninsured in the United States. Former Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter have joined in this initiative to highlight the plight of America’s uninsured. More information can be found on their website at <www.coveringtheuninsured.org>. Their message is direct and disturbing -- the uninsured live sicker and die younger. Here are some examples that they present which illustrate the consequences of being uninsured:

- Uninsured women who develop breast cancer are twice as likely to die than insured women with the same diagnosis.
- Uninsured men are nearly twice as likely to be diagnosed with late stage colon cancer than insured men.
- Uninsured children who need medical or surgical care are four times more likely to go without than insured children with the same needs.
- Uninsured children are almost five times more likely to be unable to receive needed dental care.
- Uninsured children are four and one half times more likely to do without needed prescription medicines or eyeglasses.
- Uninsured children are more than one and one half times more likely to be missing some or all of their immunizations.

The problem is so prevalent that each of us can think of examples of friends and family members who have struggled with the problem of no health insurance. This is a problem with a familiar face – a young
couple working in service jobs that do not offer health insurance, a middle-aged colleague whose company has down-sized and has been laid off from his job while too young to qualify for Medicare coverage, a friend whose treatment for chronic depression is listed as a pre-existing condition that keeps her from qualifying for health insurance coverage.

There is a network for health care providers to serve the uninsured but it is not sufficient to meet all of the need. This network is composed of community health centers, free clinics, and public hospitals. Community health centers are community-based non-profit organizations that deliver primary health care services regardless of an individual’s insurance status. The health centers receive federal grants that assist them in providing care on a sliding fee scale basis. There are approximately 3,750 clinic sites for community health centers throughout the country. There are a growing numbers of faith-based clinics that rely on church support and volunteer health care providers to meet the needs of the uninsured in their communities. These faith-based organizations are making valuable contributions to the well being of their communities.

While their models of care are making important strides in extending health care services to those without insurance, they don’t come close to meeting the gap in care. Marcia Clemmitt, in an article entitled Caring for the Underserved: It’s a Tough Job and Nobody Has to Do It, which was published in the August 2000 Perspectives section of Medicine and Health, describes the loose network of primary care centers as “…a safety net that has not been created by any overarching plan and is maintained largely through the scrappiness and determination of individual people and organizations. As such, it is spotty in its coverage and constantly in danger of being torn away even for those it does cover by hard to predict economic downturns, the changing budgetary priorities of (government) and private funders. Whether an uninsured American has decent access to primary care depends almost entirely on where that person lives and the picture in any given area can change dramatically over time”.

Many times the uninsured turn to emergency rooms for care when a member of their family is ill. While emergency rooms often address the immediate needs, such as providing antibiotics when a child has a high fever due to an ear infection, emergency room care is not a good alternative in the long run. It is much more expensive than care delivered in a primary health care setting such as a doctor’s office or community health center.

A study was conducted as a part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Access Project in the summer of 2000 to learn more about how the uninsured finance their health care services. (For more information see Paying for Health Care When you Are Uninsured at <www.accessproject.org>). This study found that hospitals, including public safety-net hospitals, seldom provide discounts or waived fees. The most frequent form of financial assistance consisted of allowing payments in installments. About half of the respondents reported having unpaid bills and debt to the facility they turned to for medical care. About a quarter of those with unpaid bills said that having debt would discourage them from seeking care at that facility—even if they were sick. Families without insurance are often without a regular source of health care. They turn to more expensive emergency room care, which makes their financial plight worse. In the end, they may delay seeking medical services placing their own health and well being at risk.

There are several factors that are at play as the problem of the uninsured grows. First of all, the economy has slowed with resulting consequences for our employer-based health insurance system. A slow economy results in more unemployed workers who lose their health insurance when they lose their jobs. Small businesses looking for ways to cut expenses during lean times may cut back on the amount of health insurance offered or decrease their contribution to health insurance premiums. This can result in a problem referred to as under-insurance. Under- insurance occurs when an individual has coverage that is so poor, with such high deductibles, that the real benefits of having insurance are not secured. When costs are high, some businesses opt out of providing health insurance altogether. When fewer employers offer health insurance benefits to their workers, more people go without health insurance.

A second factor is rising health care costs. Rising health care costs are driven by general economy-wide inflation, inflation more specific to medical care, and increases in the quantity or intensity of medical care provided to patients. The cost of prescription drugs is a principle driver in increasing health care costs.

A troubling third factor is the fiscal shortfalls that a majority of the states currently face. States that have been able to fill in the insurance gaps through public programs are no longer doing so. One example is the
TennCare program in Tennessee. Though riddled with problems, the TennCare program successfully expanded the federal-state Medicaid partnership to include many uninsured Tennesseans in its program. Due to state fiscal shortfalls, the program has limited its eligibility leaving thousands with the potential of losing their health insurance coverage.

While the difficult issue of the uninsured is an economic problem, it is also a moral and cultural problem. And in this context, the church must find its voice. What does the church have to say about health care in this time and place? We can affirm the principles on which we will base the dialogue about health care solutions. These include God’s sovereignty over humanity and our value as children of God. We affirm God’s love for us, as demonstrated in Christ’s ministry, as whole human beings with both physical and spiritual dimensions. As a community of believers, we are responsible for and to one another to promote our common good and to care for each other. We affirm our desire for social justice that includes sharing of resources with one another. And, we take special care to include the most vulnerable or those who are frequently excluded. These principles can form the foundation of the conversation about what needs to be done to address the problem of assuring the health care for all. While there may be various approaches to solving the problem, a solution must be sought. At the very least, the church should speak out in favor of universal health care that includes all members of the community.

The 25th Chapter of the book of Matthew ends with a parable, which is not found elsewhere in the New Testament. It speaks to the final judgment when the Son of Man will come to separate the sheep, which are worthy to enter the Kingdom, from the goats. Judgment is based on mercy and compassion to the least of these – the stranger, the hungry, the prisoner, the unclothed and the sick. To receive one of the least is to receive Christ himself. There is an element of surprise that the ones who reached out to those in need did not do so for a reward but were motivated by mercy. They were unaware that they were serving Christ himself. This beautiful parable teaches us to be merciful and inspires us to be diligent in our quest to find a way to assure that God’s children have access to care when they are sick.

As your Committee considered issues surrounding health care it quickly became apparent that health care concerns are pervasive i.e., they apply to all ages, races, creeds, and geographical regions of this nation. In the Committee’s view it would not be overstating the fact to say that the Cumberland Presbyterian Church is, itself, in a health care crisis. The elements of the dilemma are many and each is complex. Indeed, standing in the shadow of the issue, it became apparent that something deeper, darker, and more threatening confronted us than one might at first expect.

One sacrosanct assumption in the national dialogue* about health care is that corporations and individuals have a “right” to accumulate money without constraint, or with minimal constraint. Indeed, it is difficult if not impossible to enter a dialogue about the issue without limiting the debate to financial concerns.

Having discerned this reality we find that we must deal with concerns of nationalism especially as they impact the faith of those who would follow Jesus Christ. There are those who believe that those who were seeking religious liberties founded this nation. While history is not entirely clear on this, for the sake of argument we will concede that point. Whatever the original intent, we would maintain that freedom in this nation is now understood in economic terms, the freedom to accumulate money and material things, in an almost exclusive sense. This, clearly, indicates a reality that brings the practice of our faith into conflict with the practice of society.

Your Committee would propose that intense and prayerful study is called for at this critical juncture. It would seem that the “national religion” of accumulation has overtaken the personal practice of our faith. In other words, the debate takes place on “enemy turf”; the tools of the gurus of accumulation and greed are the prevalent realities in our lives. Our faith denies that happiness can be achieved by accumulating material things but our televisions preach incessantly the opposite truth. There was a time when ostentatious display was considered problematic for Christians and conspicuous consumption was not acceptable practice for those who followed the itinerant preacher from Galilee. A quick glance at our church parking lots, or at the homes of parishioners and preachers, puts the lie to those assumptions.

Concerning health care we would propose that an economic debate couldn’t produce meaningful dialogue. Rather, we would propose that Biblical standards and faith perspectives are the venue, and the only venue, with the potential for resolution. To believe otherwise is to be in blatant denial about a fundamental Biblical teaching and to be subject to a continued hypocrisy that blesses the values of a corrupt society while denying the values of our faith.
To this end we call those Christians called Cumberland Presbyterian to a season of study and reflection about this crisis. We would note, "People with all kinds of diseases were brought to Jesus. He put his hands on each one of them and healed them." (Luke 4:40 CEV). We find no notice of insurance billing, sliding scales, or physician referrals. There is a record of Jesus sending forth his disciples with commands to "Heal the sick, raise the dead to life, heal people who are unclean, and force out demons." (Matthew 10:8) However, there is no record of instructions to make profits or declare dividends.

While it may be simplistic in the estimation of many we might suppose that our Lord's compassion and direction is relevant to our predicament. Jesus was informed by the powerful words of Scripture that were to direct a society based on faith. In Deuteronomy we read:

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws, and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and your flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud, and you will forget the Lord your God. (8:11-14)

These words seem to make clear what it is that will distract us, even alienate us, from the justice God requires of God's people. They open our eyes to altered priorities that reflect poorly on our place in the world.

Isaiah was pointed in his preaching against those who want more and more but care less and less -

Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field, till no space is left and you live alone in the land. The Lord Almighty has declared in my hearing: "Surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants." (5:8-9)

Amos continued the condemnation of unjust wealth and its effects on the poor in 3:15; 5:11-12 and Jeremiah eloquently stated the case in 22:13-16.

These positions of faith were not lessened in the early church. If anything, they were stated more boldly and with an emphasis that stands in the light of God's grace in Jesus Christ. See I Timothy 6:17-19 and II Corinthians 8:9-15 for insights on this revolutionary concept as well as the blunt teaching found in James 4:1-4 and 5:1-6.

We respectfully but emphatically declare our feeling that the time has come for radical faithfulness in the face of the idolatry our society practices. We beseech all Cumberland Presbyterian Christians to study, pray, dialogue, and ACT to make manifest the transforming realities of the Kingdom of God.

*This reflection deals with health care in the United States of America. While your Committee recognizes that the issue is surely universal we are limited to personal perspective as citizens and residents of the United States.

Resources

www.accessproject.org
Clemmitt, Marcia. Caring for the Uninsured – It’s a Tough Job and Nobody Has To Do it. Perspectives Section, Medicine and Health, August 2000.
www.covertheuninsured.org
McDonough, John E. Dr, Health Policy: The Basics The Access Project, 1999
We do know how old the problem of church and state is. It is a question as old as faith itself. How does a person of faith relate to civil government? It is an issue which still divides nations, particularly the political landscape of the United States. There are people who advocate a church state, where the government is run by religious opinions, narrowly defined by opinions of a minority of religious people. On the other hand, there are those who advocate Christianity as the official religion of the land, and religious freedom is granted to adherents to Christianity, but not to people of other faiths. There are still others who purport a completely secular society, absent of any religious faith at all. The purpose of this paper is to clarify the long held position of religious freedom among mainstream Christianity and to provide a framework within which people of various faiths can participate in the affairs of state, and lastly, to delineate the teachings of Jesus on this issue.

Religious Freedom

Religious freedom is a long-held tenet in United States politics. American colonial and early federal history illustrates the damage done to both church and state when the two were too closely intertwined. Some Colonies had firmly established churches. Even as States, some continued to have an official religion. The Salem witch trials were the work of the government in thrall to the religion of the day. The church's ability to turn to the government for enforcement did the church no great service.

On the other hand, the lethargy of the clergy may be attributed in part to their subsistence on government. Clergy being paid by the state did not bode well for the church's prophetic voice against state violation against issues of justice and peace for all people. Whatever the problems on the state level, the formation of "a more perfect union" isolated the government from religion and the religion from government. In fact, the Constitution stipulated that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office of public trust under the United States" (Article 4, Constitution of the United States). The only official qualifications for the presidency are that the President must have been born a citizen of the US, at least 35 years old before taking office and have been a resident of the US for 14 years (Article 2, P 1, Constitution).

The Confession of Faith of the Cumberland Presbyterians states clearly the relationship citizens should have with the government:

- The civil government should enable God's creation to live under the principles of justice and order (6.27).
- Civil government lies within the purpose of God (6.27).
- It is the duty of people to participate in civil government in such ways that are open to them (6.28).
- Civil government and persons elected to civil office may not assume control over or administration of the church. Their duty is to protect religious freedom of all persons and to guard the right of religious bodies to assemble without interference (6.29).
- The covenant community is to resist or oppose and seeks to change all circumstances of oppression by which persons are denied the essential dignity God intends for them in the work of creation (6.30).

It is the teaching of Jesus where we find he taught that each citizen has a responsibility to the state and also a responsibility to God. How is this balance of church and state accomplished without becoming completely secular without any influence from persons of faith or sectarian with one group's interpretation of their faith becoming the rule of the land?

A Framework for Various Faiths

The interplay between religion and state is complex, if anything. It should be understood that the American
philosophy of religious freedom should embrace three distinct, yet interrelated sets of rules: separation of church and state, integration of religion and politics, and accommodation of civil religion (Davis). Recognizing these three areas can assure the integrity of all faiths represented in this nation as well as to promote democratic principles.

Separation

"Separation of church and state" is the common way of describing the interplay between religion and state in the American system. While proclaiming "In God We Trust," as our motto, and extending "liberty and justice" for all, we also observe a national day of prayer. Separation does not mean that religion does not play a role in a civic life. It does.

A better way to think of separation is institutional separation. In other words, the constitution requires that the institutions of church and state not be interconnected, dependent upon, or functionally related to the other. Each should have mutual independence and autonomy from each other. Governments are not allowed to settle church disputes that involve doctrinal disputes. Likewise, the church has no authority to dictate law or public policy. This concept is a novel experiment in human history. As Supreme Court Justice Wiley Rutledge once declared, "We have staked the very existence of our country on the faith that separation of church and state is best for the state and best for the church" (Davis).

Integration

Although the separation idea is of extreme importance in American life, it does not express all that is involved in the interplay between church and state. Citizens are encouraged to participate as religious voices in the political process. If the system was one of total separation, it would preclude any religious voice or opinion to be heard in the courts. It is important that there is integration of religion and politics in our system.

The right of individuals, churches and religious bodies to engage in political advocacy and to make political pronouncements has never been seriously questioned in this nation's history. Issues of war, poverty, justice, peace, abortion, civil rights, world hunger, slavery, women's right, gay rights are by their very nature religious and moral issues which require religious voices to speak. Today virtually all religious groups in America have a public affairs office in Washington, D. C. to lead the lobbying efforts on moral issues. These groups, for the most part, do not consider these offices to exist for the promotion of self-interests, but as an effective means by which they give witness in public affairs based upon their understanding of their mission to the world.

Adherence to the integration of religion and politics also means that potential candidates and officeholders are free to speak about their religious views. The Free Exercise Clause gives them the right to speak freely about matters of faith. It is part of the American fabric.

Accommodation

The third component to religious freedom is the accommodation of civil religion, the public rituals that express the nexus of the political order to the divine reality. Civil religion is a sociological reality in every society. French Sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), was probably correct in suggesting that every society at its deepest foundation is religious, and the sovereign must act responsibly to respect and acknowledge this, lest the society itself deteriorate and pass into oblivion. Derek Davis adds that a nation which takes steps to acknowledge the sovereignty of God, even if in generic, symbolic ways, is not merely accommodating the wishes of the citizenry in the sense of filling a sociological need, but acting to affirm the divine reality. In any case, the accommodation of civil religion can be said to prevent the nations from steering too far in the direction of a secularized culture.

Civil religion has been for much of American history, and remains, a vital force. It is manifested in our own day in prayers at presidential inaugurations, the invocation, "God save this honorable court," used each time the Supreme Court hears an argument, "Under God" in the pledge of allegiance, and many other inscriptions which advocate religious truth. The question still remains, however, of how does a person of faith honor his or her country without being idolatrous and unfaithful to God in our faith.

Teachings of Jesus

What are the teachings of Jesus concerning religion and state? Robert Parham, a Christian Ethicist, suggests the following:

1. Practice discernment. When Jesus commissioned his followers to go into the world of wolves, he said, "Be wise as
serpents" (Mt 10:16). Wisdom means prudent thinking, careful consideration about the validity of what our and other leaders say, what they mean and what they really do.

2. **Preserve a high wall between Christ and culture.** Jesus said, "Give . . . to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21). Had Jesus accepted the head and title of the emperor on the Roman coin, he would have given his complete loyalty to the state. Jesus refused to worship the state. Indeed, war has a seductive power-power in which culture becomes our Christ, our source of worship. When that happens, we engage in idolatry.

3. **Pray for enemies.** Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44). Contrary to popular religion, Jesus never said pray only for our troops and ask for a shield of protection only around America. One of the greatest dangers of this hour is spiritual nationalism, in which we merge our nation with the will of God. Of course, we should pray for those in authority and for American troops, but authentic Christianity understands that we must pray for the welfare of all, including Saddam Hussein, his family, Iraqi soldiers and Islamic fundamentalists.

4. **Profess the limits of our vision.** Jesus said, "You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times" (Mt 16:3). In fact, we can predict some immediate, obvious events. But we most often fail to understand the deeper flow of global events with their unpredictable consequences. It is far better to admit that we see dimly than to trust in those who forecast the future with haughty certainty. Real Christian citizenship is rooted in humility about our limits of knowledge.

5. **Protect against the dangers of blindness.** Jesus warned about "blind guides" (Mt 23:16). He also said, "If one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit" (Mt 15:14). Parents often repeat Jesus' practical wisdom when they want their children to keep good company and tell their children not to follow blindly the crowd. Yet we often fail to follow our own advice when it comes to national matters. We get swept up in going with the majority opinion. Christians should keep both eyes open and resist the temptation to go with the crowd.

6. **Prepare for criticism.** Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Mt 5:11). Jesus knew that being self-defined and speaking truth could result in intense opposition and even persecution. When American Christians voice their moral principles today, they may experience name-calling, isolation, false accusations and even economic boycotts. But from the whipping posts of Virginia to the fire-hoses of Alabama, Christians have suffered the consequences for their convictions.

7. **Pursue peacemaking.** Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Mt 5:9). War-making makes the mission of the peacemaker more complicated. But war-making does not negate Jesus' high call to peacemaking. It does necessitate that Christians find ways to pursue peace, even if it means being drum majors against a crusade mentality and for human rights (Parham).

**Conclusion**

It is critical that one balances practicing one's faith with regard to others and their beliefs and one's commitment to be obedient to God one's own faith. Coupled with the fact that patriotism for one's country is vital to the balance of our civilization and to one's participation in one's government, people of faith, while contributing to our country, realize that Jesus is Lord and of His government there shall be no end. In the meantime, we pray, "Thy will be done on earth and it is in heaven."

Works Cited


*Confession of Faith*. Cumberland Presbyterian Church, August 2001.

A. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the study guide Capital Punishment A Faith Based Study by Reverend Hunter P. Mabry (published by Abingdon Press) be approved as the suggested resource and study guide for the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America.

This study guide is designed to help groups examine Capital Punishment, the difficulties with administering the penalty fairly, the common justifications offered for the penalty and alternatives to this form of punishment. The five session study responds to the following questions: What is the death penalty? What does the Bible say? What can we learn from Church history? What do Christian churches teach? What do family members of murder victims say?

The Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns is not presenting a paper this year.
REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON
MEMPHIS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY/HISTORICAL FOUNDATION/
THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL CONCERNS
(Appendix E)

I. REFERRALS

Referrals to this committee are as follows: The Report Number One of the Board of Trustees of Memphis Theological Seminary, The Report of the Board of the Historical Foundation, The Report of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns, The Report Number Two of the Board of Trustees of Memphis Theological Seminary.

II. PERSONS OF COUNSEL

Appearing before this committee was: Reverend W. Jean Richardson, Board Representative, Memphis Theological Seminary; Reverend Jay Earheart-Brown, President-Elect, Memphis Theological Seminary; Reverend Thomas D. Campbell, Director, Program of Alternate Studies; Ms. Syble Mitchell, Board Representative, Historical Foundation; Reverend Cliff Hudson, Board Representative, Historical Foundation; Ms. Susan Gore, Archivist, Historical Foundation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church/Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America; the Reverend William Montague, Representative of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns.

VI. REPORT OF THE UNIFIED COMMITTEE ON
THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL CONCERNS

1. ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Reverend William Montague presented a study guide, Capital Punishment A Faith Based Study, by Reverend Hunter P. Mabry along with comments and concerns of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns. The committee has learned during our own discussion of this issue of the great need for not only Cumberland Presbyterians, but Christians as a whole, must have as much information as possible for a comprehensive spiritual understanding of the issue of capital punishment. The committee concurs with this report but offers a substitute recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 12: That Recommendation 1 of the Report of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns, “That the study guide Capital Punishment A Faith Based Study by Reverend Hunter P. Mabry (published by Abingdon Press) be approved as the suggested resource and study guide for the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America,” be denied.

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the study guide Capital Punishment A Faith Based Study, by Reverend Hunter P. Mabry (published by Abingdon Press) be approved as a suggested resource and study guide for the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America and further that the 175th General Assembly encourage all congregations to pursue study on this issue.

Respectfully submitted,

The Committee on Memphis Theological Seminary/Historical Foundation/Theology and Social Concerns
A. THEOLOGY OF BAPTISMAL CONVERSION

The Committee is presenting the following paper – A Theology of Baptismal Conversion for consideration by the General Assemblies.

“A Theology of Baptismal Conversion”

Due to horrid circumstances in her past, rebellion grew until she professed to be an atheist. After all, how could God do this to her? Surely there is no God! Then because of the misery in her heart, she made a New Year’s resolution to give church a try. She tried several different churches. None seemed to bring anything new to her life, nor relief. Then she tried a church that changed things. Something happened! New life began. After only weeks, she (for the rest of this paper, this person will simply be named, Lady) professed Jesus Christ as Saviour, received baptism, and united with the church. The pastor did not know of her past until after the transformation.

There are several questions that come to mind. What happened? How did this happen? Why did this happen? Who did this? Where did this happen? When did this happen? These are important questions for the telling of any story. It seems the questions are a good way to approach a theological understanding of conversion.

This paper will address this issue. The importance of such a paper is gaining an understanding of conversion that is true to and inclusive of the doctrines of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. This is by no means an exhaustive study of the subject of conversion, but rather is an attempt to understand conversion as the grace of God at work in, among, and through us as Cumberland Presbyterians. There are varied beliefs about conversion; this paper is concerned with conversion and our Confession of Faith.

What happens in conversion?

What happened in the life of Lady. Could a past be so bad, that a person would be estranged from God, from family, from others in the world? Could it be so bad, that one would reject all belief in God? What do you do to share the gospel with such a person? Something happened! Is such a change what we call conversion?

The term, conversion, is found only once in the bible (NRSV). In Acts 15, we read:

Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." [2] And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. [3] So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. [4] When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

Verse three is the only place that conversion, or any form of the word is used in the NRSV. Our Confession of Faith does not use the term. So from where does use of the term come? Conversion is a popular and well used term in the life of the church.

Webster’s defines conversion as “A spiritual and moral change attending a change of belief with conviction.” The verb form to convert is defined in the following three ways: “1) To turn. 2) To turn from one belief or course to another. 3) to transmute; to transform.” The Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith defines conversion and states:

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1 This event occurred very recently in the congregation that the author pastors. Permission was granted by the subject of this story to include this in the paper.
2 All scriptural references in this paper will be from NRSV unless otherwise noted.
4 ibid.
The experience of God’s forgiveness and love and the reorientation of an individual’s life away from sin to grace and faith. Though the Hebrew and Greek Scripture texts rarely use the word for “conversion,” the Bible is filled with references embodying the root meaning—to turn or to turn around. All understandings of conversion involve three dimensions: the act of repentance, the experience of grace, and a new life of discipleship. Conversion becomes the sign of a turning away from sin and doubt to a new life of joy and faith through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Reformed tradition also stresses that this inner regeneration is accompanied by a life of discipleship and service. The link between conversion and witness is one of the distinctive marks of Reformed piety.5

Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms traces conversion to the Latin, conversio, meaning “turning around.” The dictionary defines the term as “One’s turning or response to God’s call in Jesus Christ in faith and repentance. It is profound in its effects in that it radically transforms one’s heart, mind, and will.”6

Using these definitions, one definitely might speak of conversion in terms of that change in direction that begins when one responds to the call of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit to a life of discipleship, marked by the initiation into the community of faith by baptism. Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about being “born from above.” The concept of birth is that of a beginning or a new beginning, not an ending. Conversion is like this. When a mother is expecting, she looks forward to the birth. That is not the end. It might be the end of a pregnancy, that part of life that must come to an end for a new life to begin. Pregnancy ends at birth. However, the new life begins! Nothing will ever be the same again. Parents discover that this new life demands changes. This new life needs feeding, attention, and teaching. It is not a life that is sealed in the womb. It is a life that screams, is hungry, grows strong and begins to walk and talk, and becomes the person it is born to be. Birth is a beginning of something strange, new, and exciting.

Conversion is new birth! Converts scream, laugh, cry. Converts are hungry. Converts are ready to grow. In an interview by the author, Dr. Hubert Morrow responded upon being asked the meaning of conversion, “It depends upon who is being converted. The literal definition of ‘conversion’ means changing from one situation or circumstance to another situation or circumstance that is so radical it effects who the person is.”8

However, converts have not arrived; they are merely on the way. Paul seems to recognize this when defending his rebuke to the Church at Corinth, “And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, . . . .”9

Conversion at its best is life long! Many think in terms of process. One might speak of the journey of conversion. Converts are being converted all their lives. They are growing in grace. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God”.10 The race is an analogy of Paul. The race must be run with conversion taking place all the way until like Paul, it can be said, “As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of

7 John 3:1-8
8 Morrow, Dr. Hubert, An interview by the author on the subject of “conversion”, January 29, 2004.
9 1 Corinthians 3:1-2
10 Hebrews 12:1-2
righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”11

As defined earlier, one of the definitions of convert is to transform. This is a term used in the New Testament, and is used in the present tense as something that is in the act of happening. Paul states, “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”12 We “are being transformed.” This use is a continuance. Transformation is to happen continually.

The Confession of Faith13 uses terms that work well with this understanding of conversion and that seem to be in keeping with this understanding of conversion presented thus far. As will be addressed later in this paper, the journey of conversion is living in relationship with God. “Only by growth in grace can the believer experience the fullness of relationship with God.”14 The Confession of Faith speaks of regeneration:

Those who are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ continue to know a sinful nature. They continue to experience within themselves the conflict between their old selves and their new selves, between good and evil, between their wills and God’s will, between life and death. Regeneration is God’s renewal of believers and is solely of God’s grace. Those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ are recreated, or born again, renewed in spirit, and made new persons in Christ. Regeneration is necessary because all persons who are separated from Christ are spiritually dead and unable of themselves to love and glorify God. Regeneration is necessary because all persons who are separated from Christ are spiritually dead and unable of themselves to love and glorify God.15

Is this what happened to Lady? It certainly appears that it may very well be. If so, who is responsible for this conversion?

Why is conversion necessary?

One can look at Lady’s life and realize that there was definitely something that needed to change. Lady blamed God for letting terrible things happen to her. Eventually, she decided that because things happened to her, there must be no God. Even though victimized, she further alienated herself from God by turning against him. Others may break relationship with God and go their merry way to try life on their own, needing no one other than themselves.

The culture in which we are born teaches us that this is good. You must do it for yourself, for no one else is going to do it for you. Even our popular music gives accolades to those who “did it my way.” As the child grows, first steps are taken. There is a fall. Throughout the journey of life, falls seem to be a part of life. Somewhere along the journey, a person tries to take first steps again. This time, there is alienation with God. Hubert Morrow says,

“Adults who never made a ‘profession of faith’ and hear the gospel, and the gospel speaks to them personally and they are under ‘conviction’ (from the revival period), then the conversion experience involves first, a confession: ‘I am a sinner alienated from God seeking God’s mercy and forgiveness.’ . . .[Persons] must learn what it means to be alienated from God, in effect to be a rebel. Conversion [begins] with the person crying out, ‘I acknowledge that I am a sinner. Help save me! . . .It is important to teach children to learn what it means to acknowledge that we are alienated from God!”16

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11 2 Tim 4:6-8
12 2 Corinthians 3:18
14 Ibid. 3.11
15 Confession of Faith, 4.14-4.16
16 Morrow
The Confession of Faith speaks of this blatant alienation from God and the abuse of the freedom which God gave humans,

In rejecting their dependence on God and in willful disobedience, the first human parents disrupted community with God, for which they had been created. They became inclined toward sin in all aspects of their being. As did Adam and Eve, all persons rebel against God, lose the right relationship to God, and become slaves to sin and death. This condition becomes the source of all sinful attitudes and actions. In willfully sinning all people become guilty before God and are under divine wrath and judgment, unless saved by God’s grace through Jesus Christ. The alienation of persons from God affects the rest of creation, so that the whole creation stands in need of God’s redemption.17

There is no doubt that our world and its ways are not the way of God. The prophet said, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Sometimes, even the Christian church contributes to this alienation. Athol Gill adds,

The Christian church has been one of the prime agents in spreading the gospel of ‘responsible living.’ In the process, the good news of Jesus has been reduced to the level of a motivational force designed to ensure the success of every venture we undertake, whether it be in the business world, on the sporting field, or in the realm of international diplomacy. Jesus is supposed to be the guarantor of this success. . . .But even within the mainstream, especially within white Protestantism, the aims and ideals of Christian living have often been tailored to the needs of individualism and consumerism. . . .Western Christians have not deliberately turned their backs on the good news of Jesus. There is a great reservoir of goodwill and good intention. Yet the life of Jesus and his disciples seems so totally foreign to the presuppositions of our contemporary society that we are almost unable to see any way forward—short of a fundamental conversion. Here is the rub: radical conversion is a risky business. It is a call to live life according to a different set of values, and with no guarantee of success.19

In our failures and in our brokenness, we often go further away from God. Often we blame God for our misery. Sometimes, we deny his existence. If there is a god, surely god is dead, at least to me. Then, there is the call.

Who is responsible for conversion?

Is this drastic change in Lady her own doing? Did she one day just decide that things need to be different in her life? What happened?

Athol Gill says,

Life on the road is possible only by the grace of God. With the sacrifices and suffering involved, it is beyond the capacities of people. This journey becomes a possibility only as God’s grace permeates our innermost being and we accept what God has made possible through Jesus Christ. By the grace of God, the seductive power of materialism may be broken as people are liberated to the joyful obedience of following Jesus along the road.20

God is the primary actor in conversion. The Confession of Faith says, “God acts to heal the brokenness and alienation caused by sin and to restore the human family to community through the reconciliation effected in Jesus Christ.”21 For reconciliation to be possible, God must change or transform us, if we will allow God to do so.

17 Confession of Faith 2.03-2.06
18 Isaiah 55:8-9
20 Ibid. p. 118.
21 Confession of Faith 3.01
This reconciliation is of God. “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.” Relationship with God is established only by “God’s mighty act of reconciling love.” This is “accomplished in Jesus Christ, the divine Son who became flesh to be the means by which the sins of the world are forgiven,” and this is “the only hope of reconciliation between God and sinful persons.” Again, the Confession of Faith states, God acted redemptively in Jesus Christ because of the sins of the world and continues with the same intent in the Holy Spirit to call every person to repentance and faith. The Holy Spirit works through the scriptures, the sacraments, the corporate worship of the covenant community, the witness of believers in word and deed, and in ways beyond human understanding. The spirit moves on the hearts of sinners, convincing them of their sins and their need for salvation, and inclining them to repentance and faith toward God.

In this, regeneration, addressed earlier in this paper, begins. It is that continued empowering of God that

...is accomplished by the Holy Spirit showing sinners the truth of Christ, enabling them to repent and believe God in the light of that truth and to receive the saving grace and forgiveness given in Jesus Christ. When empowered by the illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit, believers are able to love and glorify God and to love and serve their neighbors.

How does one respond to this kind of love and the working of the Holy Spirit?

Assuming that this is the Holy Spirit at work in Lady’s life, how did she begin this new life of regeneration and transformation? Are there options? Is there another way? Gill does not think so. He is emphatic that there are only two options when the Holy Spirit convicts and calls revealing God in Jesus Christ: discipleship or rejection. Gill goes as far as to say, “The demand of Jesus is unconditional and the response is all-embracing. When Jesus issues his call of grace, there can be no delay, no half-hearted response.”

The call is one of love and grace and is an invitation to discipleship. “Because life on the road begins with Jesus and because he is the goal of the journey, the call to follow is a call of grace and love. It is a call of grace and love because the Jesus who takes the initiative and issues the call is the incarnate grace and love of God.” “The call itself begins when Jesus sees the person. . . .Discipleship does not begin when people see Jesus and come to him. Rather, it begins when Jesus takes the initiative, when He sees them and calls them to follow Him.”

This grace and this love evokes, demands, and makes possible a radical response to the call of Jesus. Howard Thurman states that in the act of responding through commitment to Christ, “something happens, energy starts moving, pulsing . . . surrendering the life at the very core of one’s self-consciousness to a single end, goal, or purpose.” The demand is direct and simple, “Surrender your inner consent to God—this is your sovereign right—this is your birthright privilege.” Yet, a person does not have to respond to God in the affirmative! The Confession of Faith says, “Whoever will, therefore, may be saved”}

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22 John 3:16
23 Confession of Faith 3.07
24 ibid. 3.07
25 ibid. 3.08
26 ibid. 4.01-4.02
27 ibid. 4.17-4.18
28 Gill, pp. 27-28
29 Ibid. p. 32
30 Ibid. p.30
31 Ibid. p. 29
32 Ibid. p. 32
34 ibid. p. 20.
35 Confession of Faith, 4.03
but “persons may resist and reject this call of the Holy Spirit.” Thurman believes a man may co-operate with the Holy Spirit by “making himself open and available to it. And this fact is crucial. A man may elect not to do this and thereby create for himself many problems of inner chaos and confusion; these may or may not be assessed as such.”

Thus far, it is established that “God acts to restore sinful persons to covenant relationship, the nature of which is that of a family. It is established through God’s initiative and the human response of faith. Faith is the response of persons to this call of grace and love. “Saving faith is response to God, prompted by the Holy Spirit, wherein persons rely solely upon God’s grace in Jesus Christ for salvation. Such faith includes trust in the truthfulness of God’s promises in the scriptures, sorrow for sin, and determination to serve God and neighbor.” In this saving faith, Christians are empowered and enabled to travel the journey of regeneration and transformation. This is so even to the point of being followers. Mark states the call of Jesus, “He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’”

Conversion and Initiation into the Covenant Community

Where did Lady go? How did she respond to the call of God through the Holy Spirit? If we believe that God acts to restore sinful persons, where does this happen?

The Confession of Faith states that God does this in a family.

Since Christ’s coming, the covenant of grace is made effective chiefly by the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In these, together with other acts of worship and acts of love toward the neighbor, the gospel of the covenant of grace is set forth simply and yet in fullness with the spiritual power. Children have always been included with their parents in the covenant of grace. Before Christ came, the appropriate sign and seal thereof was circumcision. Since the advent of Christ the sign and seal is baptism.

It seems that in the context of this, the congregation becomes very important as that place where one responds, is accepted, is loved and nurtured, and begins to live the life of conversion empowered and enabled by God through the Holy Spirit. It is in the context of the congregation that a person professes Jesus Christ and is baptized.

Baptism is the initiation into the converted life. The Confession of Faith states that through adoption, God includes all who are regenerated and made new persons in Christ into the covenant family. This adoption is marked by baptism. It is the sign of the covenant. Even more, “In this sacrament the church witnesses to God’s initiative to claim persons in Christ, forgive their sins, grant them grace, shape and order their lives through the work of the Holy Spirit, and set them apart for service.”

Too often people speak of “getting baptized.” This phraseology gives credence to an individual’s ability to do something for themselves. It also becomes for many a work which individuals can perform to guarantee salvation. The Confession of Faith states that something else is so: “It is the privilege and duty of all believers to seek baptism for themselves and their children, and to accept its benefits. However, baptism is neither an indispensable condition of salvation or effective apart from life in Christ and the church.” Baptism is a sacrament, and as such, baptism is an experience of grace. Persons do not “go and

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36 ibid. 4.04
37 Thurman, p. 22
38 Confession of Faith, 3.02
39 ibid. 4.08
40 Mark 8:34
41 Confession of Faith, 3.02
42 ibid. 3.05-3.06
43 ibid. 4.20
44 ibid. 5.18
45 ibid. 5.22
get baptized.” Persons receive baptism as the gift that it is. In baptism, God claims persons into the community of faith. Baptism is the initiation into the family. It is the initiation into a relationship with God in which God continues to forgive sin. “Although believers sometimes disrupt their peace with God through sin and experience separation from God, yet they are assured that it is by God’s grace that they are accepted and the relationship is sustained. Only by growth in grace can the believer experience the fullness of relationship with God.

**Infant Baptism**

Since baptism is an experience of grace and part of the life in Christ and the church, it follows that infants are adopted into the family just as adults. In the context of the congregational life, parents bring children to receive that gift and that claim of God upon the child’s life. Again, “Children have always been included with their parents in the covenant of grace. Before Christ came, the appropriate sign and seal thereof was circumcision. Since the advent of Christ the sign and seal is baptism.” “It is the privilege and duty of all believers to seek baptism for themselves and their children, and to accept its benefits.” This cannot be reiterated enough! To deny a child baptism would be like denying a child water. There is no way for grace to be grace and exclude anyone as recipient, nor to place conditions for receiving it. In baptism, God claims all as part of the family. “Baptism is a sign of God’s love for us and of Christ’s grace extended to us. In baptism God claims persons as his own and marks them as peculiarly his, heirs of the covenant of grace.” Many never get beyond a theology of the mode of baptism to be able to see how wondrous and how great is baptism. In baptism, Jesus went in the water, but the heavens were torn apart and the spirit like a dove descended upon Him, and a voice cried out “This is my Son, I am well pleased.” In baptism, when anyone is baptized, the spirit descends like a dove and from the cloud of witnesses, the voice still cries out, “This is my child. I am well pleased.” The Directory of Worship in the Confession of Faith states:

Baptism is an act of worship of the whole church. It should, therefore, ordinarily be administered in the context of corporate worship. If there are compelling reasons to administer the sacrament in some other context than the regular worship of a congregation, members of the congregation should still be present and scripture, proclamation, prayer and affirmation of the faith of the congregation should be a part of the act.

The meaning and significance of baptism are never limited to the person receiving the sacrament, but its benefits relate to all, as those present who have been baptized recall their own membership in the covenant community, the claim of God upon their own lives, and their dependence upon God’s grace and forgiveness freely given.

This is so when parents bring a child to receive the wondrous gift of baptism, God through the cloud of witnesses proclaims, “This is my child. I am pleased.” Every family bringing a child for baptism and every congregation participating in the baptism of a child should share as many of the events of the worship service and baptism with the child growing in grace until the child has a memory of her/his baptism. The congregation must nurture the child in Christian growth and grace.

Baptism does not preclude the child’s going prodigal. All of God’s children go prodigal. We believe,

As a consequence of temptation and the neglect of the means of grace, believers sin, incur God displeasure, and deprive themselves of some of the graces and comforts promised to

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46 ibid. 5.18  
47 ibid. 4.13  
48 ibid. 3.06  
49 ibid. 5.22  
50 ibid. p. 99  
51 Mark 1.9-11  
52 Confession of Faith, p. 100
them. But believers will never rest satisfied until they confess their sin and are renewed in their consecration to God.  

So what happens when the child comes home? The God of all prodigal children, and all the children at home, does not demand a reclaiming of the child. There is no new adoption process. God kills the fatted calf and throws a party and celebrates the return of the child that was waited for and watched for until the child’s arrival!

At some time, there is that something that calls the child home. Through whatever means God sees fit, the Holy Spirit prompts and convicts one to come to God. “Saving faith [not rebaptism] is response to God, prompted by the Holy Spirit, wherein persons rely solely upon God’s grace in Jesus Christ for salvation.” But remember, “Persons do not merit salvation because of faith, nor is faith a good work. Faith is a gift made possible through God’s love and initiative.”

The claim God makes upon a person, adult or child, is not temporary. While persons may freely wander away, God does not! It is in God’s not wandering away that persons experience the claim of God upon them. “God acted redemptively in Jesus Christ because of the sins of the world and continues with the same intent in the Holy Spirit to call every person to repentance and faith.” Persons publicly make professions of faith in the context of corporate worship. “This will be so for persons who are baptized as children of believing parents and also for persons who come to faith from outside the church. Both are reason for joy and rejoicing and for giving praise to God.”

Neither baptism nor profession of faith is the end to which we strive. Yet they are integral aspects of the conversion process:

Baptism signifies and represents the forgiveness of sin, the engrafting into Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives, and death and resurrection to new life. It is both proclamation and affirmation. It proclaims that God’s grace and love reach out to people before they are able to respond, and it affirms our new identity as members of the body of Christ. It sets people apart from the rest of the world, and claims them as participants in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

No person is worthy by her or his own merit to receive the gift of God’s grace conferred and proclaimed in baptism. Whether it is a believer who is baptized or a child of a believer, each is totally dependent on God’s grace and forgiveness freely offered in Christ through his church.

To use New Testament baptismal liturgy, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

**Conclusion**

Lady is on a journey!!! May we proclaim to this new convert:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, [2] who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood:

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53 *ibid.* 4.26
54 Luke 15.11-32
55 *Confession of Faith*, 4.08
56 *Ibid.* 4.09
57 *ibid.* 4.01
58 *ibid.* pp.104-105
59 *ibid.* pp. 99-100
60 1 Pet 2:9-10
May grace and peace be yours in abundance. (3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, (5) who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (6) In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, (7) so that the genuineness of your faith--being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (8) Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, (9) for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.61

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** That the General Assemblies of the CPCA and CPC accept this paper as an official position/belief of the Cumberland Presbyterian denominations.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** That this paper be printed in pamphlet form and made available to all the churches.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** That the section on infant baptism be pulled out and rewritten to stand alone for publication in pamphlet form and made available to all churches.

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61 1 Pet 1:1-9
REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL CONCERNS  
(Appendix H)

I. REFERRALS

The Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns presented a paper entitled “A Theology of Baptismal Conversion” for consideration by this committee.

II. PERSONS OF COUNSEL

The Committee heard from the following persons: Reverend Mark Chapman, Representative from the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns; Reverend Steve Mosley, member and author of the paper to be presented.

III. REPORT

The Committee began by looking at the recommendations as presented. Reverend Mosley provided editorial comment as to the nature and intent of the recommendations. Reverend Mosley shared in depth the inspiration for the paper’s creation, as found in the opening paragraphs. He shared that this paper, among other things, was an outward expression of his personal application and understanding of “Sacramental Theology.”

The Committee commends the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns for their past and continuing work in grappling with the theological and social issues that affect the lives and witness of all Cumberland Presbyterians. The Committee also expresses appreciation to Reverend Steve Mosley for the valuable and timely contribution of this paper on conversion and baptism. However, the Committee had concerns about certain aspects of the paper’s content.

RECOMMENDATION 1: That Recommendation 1 of the Report of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns, “That the General Assemblies of the CPCA and CPC accept this paper as an official position/belief of the Cumberland Presbyterian denominations,” be denied.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That Recommendation 2 of the Report of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns, “That this paper be printed in pamphlet form and made available to all the churches,” be denied.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That Recommendation 3 of the Report of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns, “That the section on infant baptism be pulled out and rewritten to stand alone for publication in pamphlet form and made available to all churches,” be denied.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church accept this paper as a resource for study and discussion (with the suggested title) “Understanding Conversion and Baptism.” Furthermore, that the paper be printed and made available to all churches, with the following editorial changes:

- That the word “could” replace the words “definitely might” in the first sentence of the first full paragraph on page 220.
- That the fourth and fifth sentences in paragraph 4 on page 220, which read “Converts are being converted all their lives. They are growing in grace” be combined to read, “Converts are growing in grace all their lives.”
- That the last sentence of paragraph 1 on page 225, under the heading “Infant Baptism,” which reads, “To deny a child baptism would be like denying a child water,” be deleted.
- That the word “grace” be substituted for the word “it” at the end of the first sentence of paragraph 2, page 225, under the heading “Infant Baptism.”

Respectfully submitted,
Committee on Theology and Social Concerns
A. GREED IN AMERICA

The Permanent Committee is presenting the following paper – *Greed in America* for consideration by the General Assemblies.

GREED IN AMERICA

What Is Greed?

Greed is “a desire to obtain more money, wealth or material possessions than one needs.” It’s “the quality of wanting more than one’s share; extreme or excessive desire.” Synonyms that usually substitute for the word and help us understand greed are *avidity* meaning, “greediness;” *avarice* having ”a greedy desire for money or property;” *cupidity* an “eager desire especially to possess something;” and *covetousness*, “the quality of being covetous - desiring things that belong to others.”

Thomas Aquinas, a Medieval Theologian said greed “is a sin directly against one’s neighbor since one man cannot over-abound in external riches, without another man lacking them...it is a sin against God, just as all mortal sin is in as much as man condemns things eternal for the sake of temporal things.”

In Exodus 20:17 the word of God forbids greed and covetousness. It says, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

This commandment was one of the ten fundamental laws given to Israel by God at Mt. Sinai. It was a commandment given to govern man’s relationship with man, teaching respect for life and property. This commandment was broken whenever a man by any means attempted to deprive his neighbor of his house, his wife, his cattle, or anything that belonged to his neighbor to enjoy it as his own.

Micah 2:1-2 warns, “Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! When the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them away by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage.” Here the prophet announces sorrow shall come upon the plotters of wickedness, the covetous, and the oppressor, those who plan to sin in order to take that which belongs to their neighbors. Here is an example of this sin in the life of Ahab, King of Israel, who set his covetous eye on the vineyard of Naboth.

And Ahab said to Naboth, Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money. But Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance. Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite said to him. He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat. His wife Jezebel came to him and said, Why are you so depressed that you will not eat? He said to her, Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it, but he answered, I will not give you my vineyard. His wife Jezebel said to him, Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food, and be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth. So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name and sealed them with his seal; she sent the letters to the elders and to the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city. And she wrote in the letters, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth at the head of the assembly, seat two scoundrels opposite him, and have them bring a charge against him, saying, You have cursed God and the king. Then take him out, and stone him to death. The men of the city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. Just as it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, they proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the assembly. The two scoundrels came in and sat opposite him; and the scoundrels brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth cursed God and the king. So they took him outside the city, and stoned him to death. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth has been stoned; he is dead. As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, Go take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead. As soon as Ahab heard

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1  Wilkipedia, the free encyclopedia, www.en.wilkipedia.org
3  Ibid. p. 136
4  Ibid. p. 135
5  Ibid. p.486
6  Ibid. p. 461
7  The Sin of Covetousness, “7 Deadly Sins”, www.deadlysins.com
8  Exodus 20:17 (NRSV)
9  Micah 2:1-2 (KJV)
that Naboth was dead. Ahab set out to go down to the vineyard of Naboth to take possession of it. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: Go down to meet King Ahab of Israel he is now in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. You shall say to him, Thus says the Lord: “Have you killed, and also taken possession. In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick up your blood. I will consume you, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the bounds of Jezreel. Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat; and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the air shall eat."

Ahab’s greed cost him everything he had, even his life. He wasn’t satisfied with just ruling ten-twelfth of the land as king. He wanted more. He wanted Naboth’s vineyard.

Why Is It So Important to Recognize Greed?
In Luke 12:15 Jesus warns us to be on our guard against all forms of greed. He tells us a person’s life does not consist of the abundance of possessions. Life is more than that. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Life is more than that which sustains it.

We must be able to recognize greed because it is a sin and any sin can lead to death. It was prohibited in the Decalogue, forbidden by the prophets, the early church, and by Jesus himself. The Bible lists it as one of seven deadly sins that God hates. These words of Christ, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God” should never be taken lightly.

Greed isn’t trivial or harmless. It affects all of us. Greed neglects the realm of the spiritual and ignores the welfare of others. Jesus said in Matthew 16:26, “For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”

The pursuit of wealth and possessions distracts us from spiritual things and the spiritual side of our nature. If a man loses his life, how can his riches, his honor and pleasure benefit him?

Earthly things can only be enjoyed on earth. Whatever we gain materialistically we will have to leave behind. The “things” that have occupied our minds will someday fall into the hands of others - people we leave behind. For them our treasured things may be meaningless. Job made a valid point when he said, “Naked I came from out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there.” He brought nothing into this world, and he knew he would take nothing out of it.

We must remember money and possessions are temporal things and should be viewed in that light. They are something to be used, not something to put our trust, security, and even our soul in jeopardy for. Money and possessions do not determine our worth or value. They are gifts from God to be used wisely. Therefore, if we waste God’s gifts selfishly or use them greedily, they will bring us nothing but misery and distress.

Jesus in Luke 12:16-21 tells a parable about a rich man. This man appears to be a law-abiding citizen. There’s nothing recorded in the scriptures that leads us to believe otherwise. He wasn’t a troublemaker, wicked, or engaged in some kind of shady business. Verse 16 simply said, “The land of a rich man produced abundantly.”

Apparently, God had blessed him. His barns were filled with goods. Now his land had produced abundantly again. This crop, along with what he had, presented a problem. What would he do?

There was nothing wrong with him being wealthy. The land he owned was very fertile and productive. His wealth wasn’t the problem but his attitude was.

And he thought to himself, what should I do, for I have no place to store my crops . I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods, and I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.

This rich man went wrong in failing to realize who gave him this wealth and why it was given to him. He saw his possessions as security. He felt he would enjoy them and have them for the future. His plan was to store up his goods and his grain. He felt they would provide him with stability, security, and happiness. Yet God had the final say. God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

The Results of Greed
Like this rich man, America is a nation that is blessed. She is a land of plenty – a nation where it would seem

10 Matthew 19:24 (KJV)
11 Matthew 16:26 (NRSV)
12 Job 1:21 (NRSV)
13 Luke 12:16 (NRSV)
14 Luke 12:20-21 (NRSV)
everyone should get his or her fair share. Yet there exists a big divide in America between the rich and the poor, the young and the old, blacks, whites, Hispanics and other ethic groups. How can this be? Can greed be a factor?

“America’s economy is the world’s largest and a major driver of the global economy.”15 America’s economy, “a system of managing the production, distribution, and consumption of goods,”16 is based on free enterprise and capitalism. Capitalism is “an economic system based on the ownership of land, factories, and other means of production by private individuals who compete with one another, using the hired labor of other persons, to produce goods and services for a free market for whatever profit may be obtainable. It’s the concentration of wealth with its power and influence in the hands of a few.”17

America’s economy is big business, and it is operated and managed by people of substantial wealth. Wealth is an important part of capitalism and commercialism. Therefore, greed has become a more acceptable practice in today’s society.

Robert Young’s book, the Transcontinental Railroad introduces us to greed in the construction and completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, a massive project that lasted from 1830-1893. It was a dream to link the east to the west by railroad.

Young’s book mentions bribes that were made, lies that were told, construction material priced more than the actual cost, bad bookkeeping, companies that reorganized under new names to avoid accountability, and the use of a work force that was underpaid and made to live in deplorable conditions. Yet some labeled the era as “America at it best.”

Greed was prevalent during the time of slavery in America. Slavery existed for political and economic reasons. During this time, it was hard for those who were involved, especially the slave traders and slave owners, to see that slavery was wrong. The slave traders and slave owners were blinded by their desire for wealth and their love of money.

Slavery in America was big business - big money. Men and women were brought from their homeland to America by force. They were transported on slave ships in living conditions that were sinful. When they arrived on American soil, they were sold like cattle and forced to live and work under deplorable conditions.

Arrianna Huffington’s book, Pigs at the Trough: How Corporate Greed and Political Corruption Are Undermining America, and Lou Dobbs’ book Exporting America give example after example of how greed is still playing a major role in business, in our nation, and in our citizens.

Greed is still able to thrive because we are becoming a nation defined by things. The society we live in says the larger your assets the more important you are as a person. But sometimes even making money isn’t enough by today’s standards. According to society, your value to yourself and others is determined by your possessions. The real mark of success is how much you obtain. What is your net worth? Our society measures and judges success by our acquisitions, what we own - our homes, cars, clothes, furs, and diamonds.

In almost every city and town where there are shopping malls you can see people spending endless hours in them. They walk around getting caught up in the smells, the sounds, and the window displays - avenues that can stir up their appetites and goad the greed in them. If people are not careful, they are hooked and will buy just for the sake of buying, unwilling to go home empty handed.

Therefore, people have more clothes than they will ever wear, more accessories than needed, more gadgets and objects than they know what to do with, and equipment they will never use faithfully. Their homes are filled with so much stuff you can hardly turn around in them; their garages are packed with so many things that their cars can’t fit in them; their closets, attics and basements are filled with things that will never be worn or used. We should ask ourselves, “Did they really need all that? Is there a reasonable explanation why they spent the money, time and energy to acquire all their stuff?”

We say we are a nation that trusts in God, we print it on our money, but do we really trust him? Or is it all about the money - what money can do for us - how it makes us feel?

America’s history and the Bible reveal to us the fate of greedy people. Their misery, their thinking, and what they will do at any cost to get what they want, is leading them on a path of sin and self-destruction that will cost them their souls.

What Is The Solution?

We must learn to watch out for signs of preoccupation with acquiring possessions. Does our mind tell us “we have to have that?” If so, then stop before buying and allow your heart to speak – and not your mind. We must learn to follow the biblical principles of not worrying about our material needs, not even basic matters such as food and clothing. Worrying is foolish, futile and a sin. It does not help any situation. It can’t produce clothes, food or even add years to our lives. But what it does is show a lack of faith in God and his promises to take care of us and provide for all our needs. While it is true both food and clothing are essential to sustain our physical life, life is greater than either or both. Let us learn a lesson from the raven and the lilies of the field. They are witnesses to God’s provision for food and clothing for His creatures. Jesus in the book of Luke said this about worrying.

15 Backgrounders, Tuesday, February 14th 2006, www.economist.com
17 Ibid. p 283
Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith? And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.11

We should ask ourselves, if such insignificant things as ravens and lilies receive such generous loving provisions from God, will not God’s children receive much better?

The Apostle Paul warns us that seeking godliness and contentment through material gain is futile. The problem with material things is just that, they are material. Material things can be seen. Faith is not rooted in what is seen. According to Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Therefore, things are eternal that are not seen but the things, which are temporal, are seen. When we seek after material things, like food and clothing, we seek after that which can be seen, and thus we live according to sight, rather than faith.

When we make this futile effort a lifestyle, we are simply asking for trouble. I Timothy 6:9-10 says “But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root to all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.” So what do we do? We need to ask God for the proper amount of things.

Today we hear so much about prosperity that it makes us feel that we are lacking. But are we? The scripture teaches us to be rich toward God and not to hoard possessions.

Our Confession of Faith teaches, “Christian Stewardship acknowledges that all of life and creation is a trust from God, to be used for God’s glory and service. It includes the conservation and responsible use of natural resources as well as the creative use of human skills and energies. These gifts of God are to be shared with all, especially with the poor.”

What is entrusted to us we should manage more wisely in order to make better use of it. Budget planning can be a way to help us accomplish this. Budgeting our money can help us make better choices and avoid some of the financial problems we encounter, for example overdrawing our checking accounts or spending more than we can afford. It can help us avoid greed. When we carefully put aside that which belongs to God first – the tithe, a tenth of our income to the cause of Christ – it makes us more conscientious in handling the rest of what we have for food, clothing, shelter, and the necessities of life.

As members of the body of Christ, his Church, our role is to joyfully help others. Like the good Samaritan, we must continue to reach out to the poor and those who are in need. We should not simply minister to physical needs, but we must go further. We should encourage people in need to take the necessary steps to improve their lives. We can point them in the direction of better money management, teach them to budget the resources they do have, encourage them to go back to school or seek a trade or skill. We must also help them to see their value to themselves, to their families, and to God. We must help them see that by becoming a productive, responsible citizen in our society they themselves can become givers, and it is the giver who is the biggest receiver. God blesses those who help others, Proverbs 11:25 says, “A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water.”

It’s important to realize that the choices we do make will impact our future, and as we look to the future, our expectations greatly affect how we live in the present. To determine what we deem to be important, we must take a closer look at the principles we are living by. Hebrews 13:5 says, “Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he said, I will never leave you or forsake you.”

The Conclusion

Greed leaves us no time or energy to care for our neighbors. We hear of their sorrows and problems, we would like to do something but we don’t have the time, energy or the resources to do so. We are tired at the end of the day just trying to carve out our piece of the pie - the America dream. We are trying to be accepted by the world and live up to the world’s standard. But the Lord said in II Corinthians 6:16-17, “And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are

18 Hebrews 11: 1 (NKJV)
19 I Timothy 6:9-10 (RSV)
21 Proverb 11:25 (RSV)
22 Hebrews 13:5 (RSV)
the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.”

Greed has caused us to live beyond our means. Many Christians are living from paycheck to paycheck. They are in bondage to credit cards. Churches are having special programs, bake sales, selling tickets and the like just to raise operating revenue because their members are in debt and will not tithe.

Yet, the Lord said in Romans 13: 8, “Owe no man anything, but to love one another.” and in Malachi 3:10, “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and prove Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”

Can the Church solve this problem of greed in America? Maybe not, but we can lift up a standard for the people. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid” and “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?” Therefore, based on Jesus’ declaration of the Church as a light in the world and the salt of the earth, we can be a powerful force in the war against greed. Let us begin first within ourselves and then within our communities of faith to overthrow greed by allowing the word of God to clean us, enlighten us, and help us to overcome this sin.

Resources Used or Consulted in the Preparation of this Paper:


Adam Clarke, Clarke’s Commentary, Vol. II Job- Malachi, (Nashville: Abingdon)


Anne Maquire, Seven Deadly Sins, (London: Published in the United Kingdom b

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the General Assemblies accept this paper as a study paper and that it be used to initiate thought and discussion within CPC and CPCA congregations.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the office of the stated clerks in both CPC and CPCA make this paper available to churches through the stated clerks of the presbyteries.

B. AMAZING GRACE (The Movie)

The Permanent Committee also presents the following summary regarding the movie Amazing Grace

Amazing Grace is a captivating film about the twenty-year struggle of William Wilberforce to see the slave trade abolished in the British Empire. In addition to a well-written screenplay and beautiful cinematography, the movie provides several key insights into Christianity’s struggle against the social injustices of our world. First, the viewer receives the

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23 II Corinthians 6:16-17 (KJV)
24 Romans 13:8 (KJV)
25 Malachi 3:10 (NKJV)
26 Matthew 5:14 (NKJV)
27 Matthew 5:13 (NKJV)
opportunity to see the inner struggle of the Christian to undertake such an endeavor. When struggling with the call to ministry or to politics during a dinner with the Clapham Circle they state, “We understand you are having problems choosing to do the work of God or the work of a political activist. We humbly suggest you can do both.” The point is taken that Christians are called to both a personal and active life of faith.

The second struggle the viewer is drawn into is the struggle to remain true to one’s calling. Wilberforce’s passion and commitment are evident throughout the movie – a commitment made before God, his fellow Christians, the secular culture, and those who are unable to help themselves. His commitment is called into question through the length of twenty years of labor and the onset of physical illness. This commitment is reinforced, however, by consultation with and strong encouragement of his mentor and spiritual guide, John Newton, writer of the hymn *Amazing Grace*. Newton displays a heartfelt fervor to see the atrocities of the slave trade, in which he had participated, wiped from the face of the earth.

The final struggle is the overall opposition created by the greed, apathy, and overall disassociation of society. From settings in the House of Parliament to that of slave ships, Wilberforce strives to bring the culture face to face with the atrocities that are being propagated by the many social sins. The faithfulness to the call to see the trade abolished climaxes in a heartwarming scene in the House of Parliament where Wilberforce’s efforts are finally acknowledged.

However, the many just efforts that are occurring around our globe today hear no such applause. Currently, there are over 27 million people in our world under the bondage of slavery. It is estimated that 14,000 to 17,000 men, women, and children are sold into slavery each year from the United States alone. Modern day slavery, sex trafficking, child labor are just a few of the contemporary atrocities. Wilberforce’s struggle remains to be won. The film seeks to raise awareness, as we learn from our history, and to rekindle a commitment to see outworking of Christ’s mission, to proclaim liberty to the captives, come to fruition.

As we consider the great commission given to us by our Lord, we must remember that it is in our going that we make disciples, baptizing them into the life of God through Christ, and teaching them in all areas of living – personal and social – to live out the kingdom of God on this earth as it is in heaven. *Amazing Grace* and the life of William Wilberforce have been offered for these purposes. May we both be inspired by and inspire others to do the same.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** That churches view the movie *Amazing Grace* and use it to stimulate thought and discussion within the congregation.
REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL CONCERNS
(Appendix G)

I. REFERRAL

Referral to this committee is as follows: The Report of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns.

II. PERSONS OF COUNSEL

Appearing before this committee were: Reverend Army Daniels, Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America and Reverend Steve Mosley, Representative of Permanent Committee on Theology and Social Concerns.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The committee reviewed the paper *Greed in America* and agree with the Permanent Committee on Theology and Social Concerns.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** That Recommendation 1 of the Report of the Permanent Committee of Theology and Social Concerns, “That the General Assemblies accept this paper as a study paper and that it be used to initiate thought and discussion within CPC and CPCA congregations,” be adopted.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** That Recommendation 2 of the Report of the Permanent Committee of Theology and Social Concerns, “That the office of the stated clerks in both CPC and CPCA make this paper available to churches through the stated clerks of the presbyteries,” be adopted.

The committee also discussed the movie *Amazing Grace*.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** That Recommendation 3 of the Report of the Permanent Committee of Theology and Social Concerns, “That churches view the movie Amazing Grace and use it to stimulate thought and discussion within the congregation,” be denied.

The committee is concerned with the numerous environmental and social injustices in the world and would like ways all churches could work to relieve these.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** That the Permanent Committee on Theology and Social Concerns look at ways to help church work towards healing our world (environmentally and social injustices in our world) and to also provide resources and means of action for congregations.

Respectfully submitted,
Committee on Theology and Social Concerns
A. CHRISTIANS TO SERVE THIS WORLD

Christians to serve this world
Contributing to the society as a response to grace
Based on the CPC Confession of Faith

“Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God”
(Matthew 5:9)

June 7, 2008

Committee on Theology and Social Concerns
Japan Presbytery
The Cumberland Presbyterian Church

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1. GREETINGS
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We thank our Lord for uniting all the churches spread around the world. It is thanks to God that new encounters in Jesus Christ occur in the coming memorable General Assembly in the history of Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

The Committee on Theology and Social Concerns of the Japan Presbytery would like to take this opportunity of introducing our activities that we cannot usually share with you. Space limitations have prevented us from telling about all the activities, but still we would be grateful if you could understand some of them and pray for their success.
2. REDISCOVERING CONFESSION OF FAITH

We regard the 1984 Confession of Faith of Cumberland Presbyterian Church as important guidelines on what to do to meet our social responsibilities. As a fruit of our studying Confession of Faith, Japan Presbytery adopted “Christians serving the present world: Guideline on social participation in response to grace, based on the CPC Confession of Faith” (see pages 7-9) in our assembly in November 2006.

As you may know, our Confession of Faith is derived from the Westminster Confession of Faith through revisions by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the 1814 and 1883 Confession of Faith of Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Studying the revisions, we discovered that the 1984 Confession of Faith expresses more concretely and explicitly than ever the role of Christians as powerful witnesses to the gospel concerning the peace that Jesus Christ brought us.

For example, the change from Westminster Confession of Faith 23.2 to the 1984 Confession of Faith 6.28 has eliminated the mention of a lawful war (“they may lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions”), while the Chapter “of the Last Judgment” has turned into “Judgment and Consummation,” where the authors focus on the judgment of past and present and go on to confess that war is an evil and something that “God abhors” since it “cause[s] needless suffering and death.”

This single example was enough to convince us that the 1984 Confession of Faith supplies explicit and appropriate guidelines on what churches should do to carry out their social responsibilities. The guidelines are summed up in 7 articles of “Christians serving the present world: Guidelines on social participation in response to grace, based on the CPC Confession of Faith.”

3. ON THE BASIS OF REPENTANCE

As one of the principles in our activities, we are willing to let you know that we stand on the basis of faith of “repentance.” The Asian-Pacific War was over in 1945, but it did not merely mean the defeat of Japan by the United States. Since the second half of 19th century, Japan became ambitious to exert control of Asian neighbors through political and military power. Japan first colonized Taiwan and Korea and after that initiated the war of aggression against China, before finally engaging in the war against the Allied Nations who held territories which later fell into the hands of Japan. As a consequence of Japan’s occupation, the lives of more than 20 million people in Asia were lost and innumerable people suffered from misery, pain and injures. The Japanese people themselves had also miserable experience beyond description such as a-loss of lives of more than 3 million people, etc. The end of the wars which results in Japan’s defeat signified that such a wrong course had come to a rupture.

The factors which drove Japan to such a behavior were of pursuing covetousness, having an anxiety about the international situation as well as believing blindly as if Japan were a very special nation united under the emperor (divine nation).

Under the circumstance, the churches in Japan finally fell into line with the wrong course of the state and took part in it due to a huge pressure from the state authority then. The leaders of the churches in Japan, besides cooperating in the war, went so far so as to force the churches in Korea to pay a visit to shrines, which means even forcing them to do idol worship.

Japan Presbytery, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, adopted on 15th, August, 1995, a resolution titled “Marking the 50th year since the end of the World War II: Penitence for sins of the past and Determination for the future” (material page 10), repented with all of our hearts that “we have been insensitive to our neighbors’ pain and not fully performed our mission to be ‘the salt of the earth’ and ‘the light of the world,’” and promised that “now we determine[d] to make not more faults and will hand the determination down to the next generation.” We have been taking our course in aspiration to accomplish our mission as a prophet in this world standing on the faith of repentance like this.

4. STANDING ON THE GOD’S VISION

As a consequence of the defeat in the war, Japan was given a new Constitution. If we read its preamble we can figure out that Japan, having a record of aggression and wrongdoing for a long period of time, will assume a stance of establishing a new relationship especially with peoples of Asia and Pacific areas by not using armed forces. Instead, Japan will build relationship based on “trusting in the justice and faith of peace-loving peoples.” In other words, the Japanese Constitution” is equivalent to one of the visible tokens of repentance for us. (Please refer to the material page 21)

We do not have enough margin to refer to the whole part of the “Japanese Constitution” but we have to mention here that the most representative and characteristic element of the “Constitution” is the article 9, “renunciation of war.” After reflecting on our history, we have promised that our country will not resolve ever any international dispute by using military force.
The prophet Isaiah proclaimed in his prophesy of a new vision that those admonished by God “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isaiah 2: 4NRSV) We comprehend the fact that the Japanese Constitution expressly stipulating “renunciation of war” was given to us on this world as a real gift of this eschatological vision of God preached by Isaiah.

As our Lord Jesus Christ said “peace-makers will be called children of God,” we assume duties of peace-making on earth, the more being in Christ, the better can know the value of it. Believing that the pacifist Constitution gifted as a “grace” in advance of any other countries in the world is a precious historical heritage bestowed with a universal value or in other words the sublime wisdom of human being, we do have a mission to keep preserving and upholding it.

5. IN THE PRESENT-DAY SITUATIONS OF JAPAN

However, presently there is an increasing movement on the surface that our society is going to return to the war time Japan, when she started to take the road to the war of aggression in pre-war time under the Emperor system. Thus, Japan rushed to the war, involving the people whose freedom of thought and creed were deprived by the government’s authority and they were compelled to be the single minded in the name of the Emperor. The flag of Hinomaru, being the “national flag of Japan” at that time was used to be the symbol of hegemony over Asia by colonialism and that of invasive wars that Asian people recall as a bitter experience of intolerable pains caused by the Emperor system. The words of the present national anthem, “kimiga-yo (meaning My Lord’s generation),” have remained un changed and still in use since the pre-war time, wishing for long life of and the supremacy of the Emperor and admiring him, who is though not god but human, for many generations to come. This is contradictory since the Constitution promulgated after the war (in 1948) guarantees us with the freedoms of thought and creed based on the reflections of the past errors. But, in spite of this guarantee, there is a growing tendency in public schools that children are coerced to hoist Hinomaru flags and to sing the national anthem in chorus in spite of unwillingness of teachers and pupils. It is intolerable for us Christians, who are believers in only one God, Jesus Christ, to be coerced to admire the human Emperor by singing the song with the words in praise of his eternity. We strongly oppose with a concern that such a movement may lead our children in schools to worship the Emperor by allowing coerced attention to him to make the past errors repeatable.

We have opposed prime ministers as leaders of this nation to visit Yasukuni Shrine to offer worship officially, where millions of the dead soldiers of the Asian-Pacific War have been enshrined to become god. Thus, the fact of the death itself may be praised eternally with the emotions of the bereaved families removed. We feel it would be the only way to show the Asian people our feeling of apologies and repentance (in a fruitful manner) by (continually) raising our voice against the issues of hoisting Hinomaru, and singing Kimigayo as well as being against the issue of visiting of our prime ministers to Yasukuni Shrine since this kind of conduct reflects the utter disgrace that we, Christians, cannot overlook.

Furthermore, there is a remarkable movement to modify Article 9 of the Constitution in an effort to invalidate it. In other words, Article 9 of the Constitution can be a cumbersome obstacle for those who are supportive of warfare, and to this end they are eager to promote an effort to remove Article 9 so that Japan could become a nation that can partake in wars again.

We stand at this point that “God’s judgment transcends this life, ever standing against all human attempts to deny dependence on God and to live without repentance, faith, and love” (Confession of Faith 7.07), and we raise our voice against the revision of the Constitution, and we pray for our ability to fulfill our duties as Christians.

6. LIVING TOGETHER FOR THE PEACE OF LORD

While living in the twenty-first century, we are confronted with various kinds of difficulties of the age, and, to our sorrow, we have never heard of a cease-fire from any part of the world for decades. As the global warming progresses, the Lord’s creation continually being endangered due to our covetousness. In addition, we cannot overlook the aspect of economic injustice incurred by the globalization. Under such circumstances we are requires to seek to realize “shalom”—the peace in our Lord.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church is a global church commissioned to proclaim the gospel in various parts of the world. We believe that our global church is blesses in the hand of our Lord. In order for our church to be truly global, we will have to pay attention with repentance not only to the issues of our personal interests but to all forms of (social) injustice that prevail worldwide, and we strongly wish to walk together without resorting to force but try to achieve improvement and act by Christ’s love, which is to overcome evil with god, seeking for reconciliation, love and justice to be widely spread among all people. (Confession of Faith 6.32 and “Christians serving the present world” 5)

In 1995 we have published a Presbytery resolution entitled “Marking the 50th year since the end of the World War II” which was particularly addressed to the Hong Kong Presbytery, expressing our repentance for the (imperial) colonialism and the invasive war against the Asians. In return for our resolution we have received a graceful response from the Hong Kong Presbytery entitled “Let us stand together in Christ for the cause of peace and justice.” The Hong Kong Presbytery accepted our (apologies and) repentance with utmost seriousness and they have invited us once again to become (joint) partners in our mission for the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of justice and peace and love.

We find in their response such noble and sincere words as “We have to show the sinful world love is real and
possible. “We can share deep empathy in the above word. This is because God’s love is the basis of the Confession of Faith of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and we believe God’s love in the only thing that will bring us the true peace and reconciliation.

Let us recall the holy words in the very beginning of our Confession of Faith that shows “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 NRSV). Thus, we believe that we shall be unable to fulfill the duty of reconciliation and to realize peace of God unless we rely on love of God.

May Jesus Christ, our Lord, embrace each of us with grace and peace!

Materials

Christians serving the present world
Guideline on social participation in response to grace
based on the CPC Confession of Faith

November 23, 2006
Japan Presbytery, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church

This document is based on subtitles of the 1984 Confession of Faith of Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1984COF), which are the summary of the present-day understanding of the CPC Confession of Faith of 1984. This was compiled in November 2005 by the Committee on Theology and Social Concerns of the Japan Presbytery, by comparatively analyzing the Westminster Confession of Faith, the American revisions to the Westminster Confession of Faith, the CPC Confession of Faith of 1814, the Confession of Faith of 1883, and the Confession of Faith of 1984.

Response to grace
1. Christians are responsible for every part of the life.
We serve God and the neighbors in every part of our lives as a response to grace.

1984COF / subtitle of 6.01 “To serve God (to live) not in fear of guilt and penal consequences of sin, but in response to grace”
1984COF / subtitle of 6.03 “Christians are made free so as to serve the Lord rather than evil”
1984COF / subtitle of 6.04 and 6.05 “Christians freedom and conscience take responsibility (obeying and opposing)”
1984COF / subtitle of 6.06-6.08 “Good works are not the means of salvation, but the response to grace through faith. God accepts the responses despite their imperfect motives.”
1984COF / subtitle of 6.09 “Good works encompass all the deeds in our life.”
1984COF subtitle of 6.01-6.12 “Christian gifts are to be shared by everyone, and the motive for the stewardship is gratitude for God.”

Freedom and conscience
2. Christians live by freedom and conscience in Christ.
We confess that only God is the lord of our conscience. Therefore, we will never yield our ultimate faith to anything other than God, such as the government or nation.

1984COF / subtitle of 6.02 “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and can free believers.”
1984COF / subtitle of 6.04 and 6.05 “Christians freedom and conscience take responsibility (obeying and apposing).”

Participating in the society
3. Christians tell God’s purposes to civil government of this world.
We take our opportunities to participate in politics, and to work on the government to meet the purposes set by God and accomplish their duties.

1984COF / subtitle of 6.27 “The purpose of civil government is to enable God’s creation to live under the principles of justice and order.”
1984COF / subtitle of 6.28 “It is the duty of Christians to participate in civil government.”
1984COF / subtitle of 6.29 “It is the duty of civil government not to assume control over or administration of the church but to protect the religious freedom.”
Social responsibilities
We will support those whose dignity has been hurt and offended, oppose to and resist any suppressive circumstances, and search for concrete plans to improve the situation.

1984COF / subtitle of 6.30-6.32 “The covenant community has the duty to change the circumstances of oppression, to protect fundamental human rights, and to promote reconciliation.”
1984COF / 6.22 “The church has responsibility to minister to the needs of persons in every crisis, including physical and emotional illness, economic distress, natural disasters, accidents due to carelessness, and death.”

Way of improvement
5. Christians try to achieve improvement not by worldly power, but by Christ’s love.
We will not resort to force, but try to achieve improvement and act by Christ’s love, which is to overcome evil with good.

1984COF / subtitle of 6.31 “The covenant community protects all who are deprived of human dignity (those victims of violence, law, or society), opposes to injustice to all the people, and supports attitudes and actions which embody the way of Christ, which is to overcome evil with good.” (Matthew 5:39, 9:35-38, 14:14, 15:32-39; Romans 12:19-21)

Christian stewardship
6. Christians share the gifts from God.
We engage in the mutual sharing of gifts with all persons, particularly with those in poverty, in token of our gratitude to God.

1984COF / subtitle of 6.10-6.12 “Christian gifts should be shared among all the people, and the motive for this is our gratitude to God.”

The abandonment of resorting to force
7. Christians realize peace.
We abhor wars and all other evils that cause needless suffering and death, and seek to promote reconciliation, love, and justice among all persons.

1984COF / subtitle of 6.32 “The covenant community protects all who are deprived of human dignity (those victims of violence, law, or society), opposes to injustice to all the people, and supports attitudes and actions which embody the way of Christ, which is to overcome evil with good.”
1984COF / subtitle of 7.05-7.08 “God’s judgment is experienced in history.”
1984COF / subtitle of 6.32 “God gives the message and ministry of reconciliation to the church.”

Presbyterian Resolution marking the 50th year
since the end of World War II
Penitence for sins of the past
And Determination for the future

August 15, 1995
Japan Presbytery

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, we, Japan presbytery of Cumberland Presbyterian Church, as a part of the Church, Christ’s body whose head is Jesus Christ the Lord, confess our sins against God and neighbors. And we express our determination for the future.
Since the Meiji Restoration our country had committed a sin of covetousness under the Emperor’s sovereignty invading and colonizing Asian countries. Especially in the Fifteen Year’s War which includes the Asian-Pacific War, it brought disaster and misery to people in Korea, China and other countries. In such a circumstance, the churches in Japan couldn’t fulfill their duty as a “watch” who should give warning to the aggression of state authority but rather took part in it. Furthermore, not only did it commit a sin of idolatry under the influence of State Shintoism which had deified the Emperor, but also assisted the government in coercing Asian churches to pay a visit to Shinto Shrines.
Born after the war, our church hasn’t had any direct involvement with it. However, Cumberland Presbyterian body
of the Meiji period established by the missionary Hails and other leaders joined Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan (UCCJ) Church in the beginning. Thus we cannot say we have nothing to do with the war. Furthermore, we are collectively responsible for sins and faults of the wartime because we belong to the one Christ’s body. Therefore we confess our sin and repent from the heart.

After the war, our country came to embrace a new polity in which the sovereignty shall rest with the people. But its responsibilities of colonization and aggression have been left ambiguous. The government hasn’t yet apologized to or compensated the victims and the bereaved of the war.

Rather there is an ongoing reality that the country continuously coverts Asian countries making economic invasion under the name of “aid for economic development” or “job creation” and inflicts pain upon many people devastating forests, damaging fisheries, exploiting labor power, destroying traditional cultures and lives, and buying and selling human being through prostitution tourism. Within the country, it violates human dignity of the resident Koreans who had been originally compelled to work in Japan under its colonial rule and many other foreign residents. Although the situation is like that, we have been insensitive to our neighbors’ pain and not fully performed our mission to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” We have to confess and repent from the bottom of our heart.

Seeing the 50th year since the end of the war, we kneel down before God, the ruler of the history, to confess and regret that our perception of the nation’s and churches’ sins has been insufficient, and that repentance hasn’t been made to God and the neighbors. Now we determine to make not more fault and will hand the determination down to the next generation. Based on this will, we preach the World of God and reveal God’s will. We oppose, resist, and seek to change all circumstances of oppression—political, economic, cultural, racial—by which persons are denied the essential dignity God intends for them in the work of creation (Confession of Faith 6.30). We seek to promote reconciliation, love and justice among all persons, classes, races, and nations (Confession of Faith 6.32).

May God bless our resolution and help us accomplish it.

Resolution adopted by Japan Presbytery,
The Cumberland Presbyterian Church on November 24, 2003

Let us stand together in Christ
for the cause of peace and justice

A response of the Hong Kong Presbytery
To the Japan Presbyterial Resolution, marking the 50th year
Since the end of World War II

The Hong Kong Presbytery of Cumberland Presbyterian Church
47-57 Temple Street, Ching Hong Building, 1/F, Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Presbytery receives the Presbyterial Resolution of the Japan Presbytery with deep empathy. We understand the sorrow and remorse of our brothers and sisters in Japan for the action of their government in the Asian Pacific War. Your Resolution expressing remorse, apology and determination for peace and justice will serve as a balm for healing. Words spoken with such sincerity have to be received with utmost seriousness. We are thankful for these words and we feel compelled to respond.

Your apology in solidarity with your people for the sin of covetousness and aggression of the militarist government is received with humility on our part. We know full well that as sinful human beings our people and government too are capable of terrible things. In fact your apology and our accepting of it join us together in our common condition of being human, the plain daily necessity of forgiving and being forgiven. It is true that our people had suffered immensely because of the Japanese invasion, and the bitterness we have long harboured has for decades troubled our heart. Your words of repentance expresses in deep humility come as liberating words. They are liberating not only for you but also for us. We too are liberated from the bitterness in memory of the hurts of the past. We are willing to let go whatever bitterness that may still be lingering in our heart, to set aside all ill feeling due to the past. We are willing to work hand in hand with you for better understanding and mutually enriching relation between our two peoples.

However, in as much as we wish to lay the past to rest, the painful lesson of the War should not be put behind us easily. It is to re-presented time and again as a powerful reminder of the evil of war and God’s wrath against it. It is our hope that the Chinese and Japanese people, once divided by the war, are now joined together for the cause of peace because of the agonizing experience of the War. We acknowledge that not only the Chinese, the Korean and other Asian peoples had suffered; the Japanese people too had also suffered immensely due to the War. Therefore we all understand the human
misery caused by the wars. With such common experience we are willing to stand together with you to work for the cause of peace.

It is also our conviction that there is no true and lasting peace without justice. Therefore we join you in denouncing any form of national covetousness, any form of aggression, including economic exploitation of one country against another. Indeed, we have to be alert to any possible revival of imperialistic nationalism, colonialism and militarism. We stand with you to fight against all these vices at all cost.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, let us be united as witness to the love of God by our loving one another. We have to show the sinful world love is real and possible. If we are truly the work His love, the workmanship of His loving kindness will shine forth in us. So, on this occasion of reconciliation marking the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, we wish to extend our hands of friendship and partnership to our brothers and sisters in Japan and invite them once again to become partners with us in our mission for the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of justice, peace and love. We affirm once again that we are open to all possibilities of cooperation and mutual assistance with you in extending the Kingdom of God in both Japan and China.

Coming to know and work with the Japan Presbytery in the Cumberland Presbytery family in the past ten years has filled our hearts with great joy. We hope and participate to work even more closely together with you in years to come.

Resolution adopted by Japan Presbytery,
The Cumberland Presbyterian Church on November 24, 2003

For Realization of Peace

A resolution declaring ourselves
Against the compulsion of the cooperation with war

“Blesses are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9, NRSV)

We, of the Japan Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, have been hoping that our nation should observe the Japanese Constitution, respect fundamental human rights, and pray for peace in the world, repenting of sins it committed in the past. In spite of our wish, however, three emergency-related bills, “legislation to define the nation’s response to foreign military attack,” “Law on the Establishment of the Security Council of Japan,” and “bill to amend the Self-Defense Forces Law,” were approved in the Diet and enacted on June 6, 2003. These laws define “a situation of armed attack” as “a situation where an armed attack actually takes place (including the case in which an attack threatens to take place), or a very tense situation where an armed attack is widely predicted.” Ambiguous expressions such as “threaten” and “predict” allow us to be engaged in combat by easily regarding any event as an emergency. The statement “the people should be ready to give necessary cooperation ...” also encourages the people to cooperate the nation on a war. Furthermore, the laws merely mention “respect” for fundamental human rights, which lie at the core of the Japanese Constitution, and stipulate that there may be restrictions on the respect of the rights in order to cope with an armed attack. No one can force us to obey these laws and to cooperate with war.

We, as peacemakers, have reached the following resolutions.

1. We maintain pacifism, as is stated in the Japanese Constitution.
   The Japanese Government has presented new emergency-related bills such as “legislation on the protection of the Japanese nationals” in order to get prepared for an emergency, and tries to alter Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which renounces war. We are against such a movement.

2. We will make an effort to love our neighbors.
   We cannot accept the government’s attempt to build legal framework for war contingencies, where they regard neighboring countries as potential anxieties on the assumption that they make a military attack against Japan. We aspire to a peace not by being hostile to them, but by persistently telling them about the love for our neighbors and preaching the gospel of reconciliation based on the Bible.

3. We will not cooperate to make war.
   (1) We would give priority on Sunday services even an evacuation drill based on an emergency law should take place at the same time.
   (2) We will not offer a church, a minister’s house, or any other facilities or land attached to a church with the aim of cooperating on a war.
(3) We will act in concert with those who refuse to cooperate on a war on the basis of freedom of thought and religion, and will pray for them.

“Yasukuni Shrine” is a serious problem for us.

The shrine created in the latter half of 19th century is sacred to the memory of dead soldiers in battle field for the emperor. Until the end of the war, the shrine was the object of worship for all the nation and for them to be worshiped in there as a war dead was considered as the greatest honor. Therefore, “Yasukuni Shrine” continued to achieve a role of a “symbol of militarism” as well as “mechanism to glorify the death on the field of battle and to support the war”

After the war, according to the GHO’s order “Yasukuni Shrine” became no longer under control of the army and naval army too and became one of the religious corporations. However, some statesmen try eagerly to enhance national value of Yasukuni Shrine as a place to give high praise to the war dead by way of their paying a visit to Yasukuni Shrine.

As this is a move toward glorification of war and conceiving an ambition to transform our country into a nation prepared for making wars, we have been strongly opposing to it.

Attention: Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi

Declaration against paying a visit to
Yasukuni Shrine

During that our nation provoked and continued the war of aggression into Asian countries, we, Japanese Christians committed the sin to accept it, recognize it and furthermore even cooperate on it. Consequently, we Japan Presbytery, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church repented of this sin and afterwards we have been continuing to wish, pray speak out and behave ourselves for standing resolutely on the fundamental principle of the Japanese Constitution such as pacifism, sovereign power resided in the people and basic human rights. The Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, on the contrary, trampling down our dearest wish, not only has repeated his visit to the shrine once a year since when he paid a visit on 13th, August, 2001 just after taking office, but also recklessly dared to make his 6th visit on the 15th, August. We make a strong protest against the visit to Yasukuni Shrine of the Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi for the following reasons.

The Prime Minister Koizumi is quoted as saying about the issue of paying a visit to Yasukuni Shrine, “It is an issue of individual mind and it is not for me to say I should do this or not.” And he is not willing at all to listen in a humble way to the criticism from both inside and outside the country. However, last September, the Osaka High Court of Justice passed judgment on paying a visit to Yasukuni Shrine of the Prime Minister as infringement of article 20 of the Constitution prescribing the separation of politics from religion based on the reason why his visit “gives an impression that the state supports especially Yasukuni Shrine and promotes a specific religion.” There should be no excuse for the one who takes the office of prime minister to justify his own deed on the pretext of the “issue of each individual’s mind,” in defiance of this High Court’s judgment. This reaction is obviously against the article 99 of the Japan Constitution prescribing “The Emperor of the Regent as well as Monisters of State, members of the Diet, judges, and all other public officials have the obligation to respect and uphold this Constitution.”

The Prime Minister insists—“I paid a visit as a mark of sincere respects to those victims who had to dedicate their lives for defending their fatherland and protecting their families” but the intrinsic qualities of Yasukuni Shrine are explicitly indicated in his words. Yasukuni Shrine, during and before the war, used to be the place to visit with the purpose of worshipping those who “dedicated their lives” for “their fatherland” and showing “respects” to them. This function itself urged the people on wars of aggression resulting them into “victims.” Therefore, it is undeniable to affirm that paying a visit to Yasukuni Shrine is a deed to glorify and praise the wars in contrary to “his thought laying stress on what we will never provoke the war again while reconsidering the past,” which means the people will be forced to sacrifice themselves again for the state. And this is also clearly deviated from the spirit of pacifism of the Japanese Constitution enacted as a fruit of the determination of Japanese people as stated in the Japanese Constitution—“We, the Japanese People resolved that never again shall we be visited with the horrors of war through the action of government.”

Furthermore, the Prime Minister’s visit to Yasukuni, is an act to scoop out deep hurts in the heart for the war victims of Asian countries who were injured and killed during the wars of aggression and their descendants. In conclusion, the visit to the shrine made boldly by the Prime Minister on 15th, August, the very day to print heartily the responsibility of wars on mind should be regarded as equal as making a scrap paper of the war responsibility and abandoning to follow suit the path which guides toward a real reconciliation.

For the above reasons, we make a stiff protest against the visit to Yasukuni Shrine made by the Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.
The national anthem of Japan is actually specified in the law as “Kimigayo” and the national flag as “Hinomaru”. We however, have been opposing to that. Because “Kimigayo” is the hymn of the emperor while “Hinomaru” is deeply rooted in the imperial system and has been regarded as a symbol of colonial denomination and of war of aggression. We, Christians can not tolerate singing “Kimigayo” that praises the emperor as a human being.

In spite that in the Constitution, the freedom of thought and creed is guaranteed, to sing “Kimigayo” is introduced with coercion on the scenes of school education. We strongly oppose to the circumstance because we translate it as an attempt to attract the people’s minds to the emperor and to make the sins and faults in the past wartime happen, again by way of implanting again an ideology in which the emperor is regarded as the nucleus of our national community into the children on the scenes of school education.

Supporting the judgment of
Tokyo Regional Court
Ruling the compulsion of
“Hinomaru/Kimigayo” unconstitutional

November 16, 2006
Japan Presbytery, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church
Committee on Theology and Social Concerns

The law deciding “Hinomaru/Kimigayo” as national anthem and national flag respectively was institutionalized in 1999 in defiance of many civilians’ opinions. The government at that occasion, made a reply: “Hinomaru/Kimigayo shall not be introduced in a compulsive manner on the scenes of school education.” In spite of this reply, the number of cases of punishment inflicted upon the teachers for the reason of not standing up, etc. when “hoisting Hinomaru and singing Kimigayo in unison” has been remarkably increases. During the period from the year 2000 to 2004, those officially reprimanded are counted 471 among which Tokyo metropolitan area occupies a remarkable proportion such as 64% with 301, which represents an unusual situation.

Under the circumstances, an epoch-making judgment was given. The 401 persons of the staff of Tokyo Metropolitan high schools organized a group of plaintiff and files an action to demand “confirmation of non-existence of the professional duty of singing national anthem in unison, etc.” against Tokyo Metropolitan Government and Tokyo Metropolitan Education Commission (hereafter, “TMEC”). The Tokyo Regional Court (presiding judge: Fujinami Kouichi) gave an judgment totally in favor of the plaintiff declaring that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government’s communications and/or orders with regard to the “national flag/national anthem” for the use in graduation ceremonies infringe the freedom of thought and conscience of the staff who are against the compulsive introduction of “Hinomaru/Kimigayo” and also violate the article 19 of the Constitution. We appreciate and support this judgment, for it advocates the freedom of thought and conscience.

The judgment pointed out as follows: “It is an undeniable historical fact that both Hinomaru / Kimigayo were keeping employed as a spiritual prop and stay for imperialistic nationalism and militarism during the period since Meiji Era until the end of World War II.” Presupposing the above remark, the judge stated definitely that “although according to the law of national flag/national anthem, Hinomaru and Kimigayo have been actually instituted as national flag and national anthem respectively, neither Hinomaru nor Kimigayo can be recognized as having a neutral value yet among the nation from the religious and political point of view.” And he concluded that “making a person stand up and sing in unison coercively even with dealing severely such as imposing punishment with a person is an excessive action which infringes the freedom of thought and conscience of so called minorities.”

In accordance with the reconsideration on the fact that the school education had played a role to support militarism for the period of before and during the war, Basic Education Law established after World War II stipulated: “Education shall not be the subject to improper control, but shall be directly responsible to the whole people.” (Article 10) The judgment is an epoch-making one recognizing that the communications and/or directions issued by TMEC correspond to this “improper control.” The coercive introduction of “Hinomaru/Kimigayo” into school education scenes is dangerous in the sense that a bunch of blindly obedient and self-disciplined teachers can be formed by the state authority. TMEC has to be responsible for accepting the judgment with utmost seriousness and bringing the coercive introduction of “Hinomaru/Kimigayo” to an
end.

We, however, should not be too optimistic about this judgment. If the “retrogressive revision” of the “Basic Education Law,” the highest priority agenda among all others in the Prime Minister Abe’s government aspiring to establish the national system fully prepared for making wars should be achieved, we fear the coercive introduction of “Hinomaru/Kimigayo” would be even more encouraged, for the education must subordinate to “what the law prescribes.”

We, Christians have to keep having our concern same as before about the violation of the “freedom of thought and conscience” by the introduction with compulsion of “Hinomaru/Kimigayo” in public school education scenes. While this mindset can serve for advocating “freedom of thought and conscience” of civilians, it can also be a fight for upholding the “freedom of religion.”

We are the ones who have now resolutely determined with a deep remorse never to repeat such sins and faults that many churches had once kept their tongue quiet being submitted to war structure and that had compromised with the state system united under the emperor’s sovereignty. We, therefore, fully support this judgment which has recognized the compulsive measures imposed by the public authority as “improper control.”

THE CONSTITUTION OF JAPAN

Preamble:

We, the Japanese people, acting through our duly elected representatives in the National Diet, determined that we shall secure for ourselves and our posterity the fruits of peaceful cooperation with all nations and the blessings of liberty throughout this land, and resolved that never again shall we be visited with the horrors of war through the action of government, do proclaim that sovereign power resides with the people and do firmly establish this Constitution. Government is a sacred trust of the people, the authority for which is derived from the people, the powers of which are exercised by the representatives of the people, and the benefits of which are enjoyed by the people. This is a universal principle of mankind upon which this Constitution is founded. We reject and revoke all constitutions, laws ordinances, and precepts in conflict herewith. We, the Japanese people, desire peace for all time and are deeply conscious of the high ideals controlling human relationship and we have determined to preserve our security and existence, trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world. We desire to occupy an honored place in an international society striving for the preservation of peace, and the banishment of tyranny and slavery, oppression and intolerance for all time from the earth. We recognize that all peoples of the world have the right to live in peace, free from fear and want. We believe that no nation is responsible to itself alone, but that laws of political morality are universal; and that obedience to such laws is incumbent upon all nations who would sustain their own sovereignty and justify their sovereign relationship with other nations. We, the Japanese people, pledge our national honor to accomplish these high ideals and purposes with all our resources.

Article 9:

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May, 1974</td>
<td>Declaration against ([Bill of Yasukuni Shrine])</td>
<td>Director, Parish of Japan</td>
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<td>Michinobu Ikushima</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 29, 1989</td>
<td>Declaration (against deification of emperor, etc)</td>
<td>Japan Presbytery</td>
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<td>(Extraordinary General Meeting)</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 24, 1991</td>
<td>Declaration against the Gulf War in the Middle East</td>
<td>Japan Presbytery</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 15, 1995</td>
<td>Presbyterial Resolution “Marking the 50th year since the end of World War II: Penitence for sins of the past and Determination for the future”</td>
<td>Japan Presbytery</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 23, 1999</td>
<td>Presbyterial Resolution “For realization of peace: against the national system”</td>
<td>Japan Presbytery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 5, 2000</td>
<td>Prepared for making wars and united under the emperor”</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
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<td>“Note of Protest” against Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori (against his observation of divine nation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 15, 2000</td>
<td>“Note of Protest” against Tokyo Metropolitan Governor Shintaro Ishihara (against his paying a visit to Yasukuni Shrine, the mobilization of Self-Defense Forces for the maneuver for the prevention of disasters)</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 25, 2001</td>
<td>Urgent Appeal “For non-adoption of school manuals compiled by [Tsukuru Kai]”</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 15, 2001</td>
<td>“Demand for not visiting to Yasukuni Shrine of Prime Minister” to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 8, 2001</td>
<td>Addressed to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi “For the peaceful settlement of the [simultaneous and multi attacks of terrorism] against the United States”</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2, 2001</td>
<td>“Note of Protest” against “Kirisuto Sinbunsha” (Christian Newspaper Company) (against the article about the birth of princess Aiko in the imperial prince’s family)</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 24, 2002</td>
<td>Presbyterial Resolution “For realization of peace: opposing to terrorism, armed retaliation and [Patriot Law]”</td>
<td>Japan Presbytery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 29, 2002</td>
<td>Addresses to members of the Diet “Request for reconsideration on the emergency-related bills and international contribution based on the pacifist Constitution”</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 7, 2003</td>
<td>Addressed to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi “Protest against the participation in the wars of the United States”</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 23, 2003</td>
<td>Addressed to the President of the US “Strong demand for withdrawal of armed attack project to Iraq”</td>
<td>Japan Presbytery</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 24, 2003</td>
<td>Presbyterial Resolution “For realization of peace: against the compulsion of the cooperation with war”</td>
<td>Japan Presbytery</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 10, 2004</td>
<td>Addressed to Prime Minister Koizumi, Defense Secretary Ishiba, Minister of Foreign Affairs Kawaguchi “Deliveryance of the 3 compatriot hostages, demand for immediate withdrawal of Self-Defense Forces”</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 28, 2004</td>
<td>Addressed to Prime Minister Koizumi, Minister of Foreign Affairs Machimura “Urgent representations for deliverance of the hostages”</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 25, 2005</td>
<td>Addressed to Prime Minister Koizumi “Declaration against visit to Yasukuni Shrine”</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 23, 2005</td>
<td>Presbyterian Resolution “Marking the 60th year since the end of World War II: now, in pursuit</td>
<td>Japan Presbytery</td>
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<td>September 8, 2006</td>
<td>Addressed to Prime Minister Koizumi</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
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<td>“Declaration against visit to Yasukuni Shrine”</td>
<td>Chairman Kazuhiko Furuhata</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 16, 2006</td>
<td>“Supporting the judgment of Tokyo Regional Court ruling the coercive introduction of [Hinomaru/Kimigayo] unconstitutional”</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 23, 2006</td>
<td>“Christians serving the present world: Guideline on social participation in response to grace, based on the CPC Confession of Faith”</td>
<td>Japan Presbytery</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 15, 2006</td>
<td>Addressed to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
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<td>“Opposing to [Revision] of Basic Education Law”</td>
<td>Chairman Kazuhiko Furuhata</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 24, 2007</td>
<td>Addressed to Prime Minister Abe</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
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<td>“Declaration against bill of a national referendum aiming at realizing the Constitution”</td>
<td>Chairman Kenta Karasawa</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 25, 2007</td>
<td>Addresses to the press “Ring an alarm to an abnormally high-speed deliberation in the House of Councilors !”</td>
<td>Committee on Theology and Social Concern</td>
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<td>Chairman Kenta Karasawa</td>
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**RECOMMENDATION 1:** That the General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church commend Japan Presbytery for their struggle in faith, for their adherence to the Confession of Faith, and for the listening to the mandates of the Holy Scripture.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** That this paper and the work of Japan Presbytery be distributed to all presbyteries as a study document demonstrating the need for all Cumberland Presbyterians to study, learn, and understand our doctrine, practices, and beliefs; and to possess the ability to struggle in faith with issues confronting our world today.

**B. IMMIGRATION CHALLENGES AND THE DIFFICULTY OF BEING LEGAL IN THE UNITED STATES**

Of great importance in our country today, especially in light of the present economic situation, is the issue of immigration and legality. It seems so simple. “One can go to the proper authorities and sign up and become legal.” “If they want to live here, they should obey the laws of this great land and get legal.” “Otherwise they should be sent back.”

These are the kind of comments that are heard quite often. At least this makes for good news reporting and political platforms. However, the issue of becoming legal is not a simple black and white issue. Most of us really do not know what is required to become legal, nor do we understand the process.

The following papers reflect the difficulty from two different perspectives. One is the perspective from a Hispanic working with a new church development in Arkansas. The other is from Lynn Thomas, who works with the Cross Culture Ministries of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Both reflect upon the problems of Hispanics, but we should remember that this problem occurs with any from any foreign country.

The following are the two papers.

**Stuck at the Traffic Light:**

The Red Tape for the Green Card

By Ricardo Franco

In September 2003, I received the invitation to come and work as a missionary among the Hispanics with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in the State of Arkansas. At that time, I was living with my family in Birmingham, Alabama while doing a one-year internship with the Presbyterian Church in America. That invitation was the beginning
of an unknown path in my journey as a disciple of Jesus as well as the beginning of a long, expensive, and frustrating experience as an immigrant in this country.

The first challenge we faced was that of uncertainty. We were under a B1 (Business Visa) for one year while at Birmingham. But accepting the invitation to work with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Arkansas meant that we would have to return to Colombia and apply in the American Embassy at Bogotá for a different visa (R1 Religious Worker) in order to be able to come and start our mission in Arkansas. We sold everything we had in Colombia, and we spent that money to buy the tickets to come to America. It sounds simple, but when you think about having to take your whole life (church, family, friends, furniture, pictures, and etcetera) and packing it in eight suitcases of 50 pounds each, it is more complicated than what it sounds.

So we took the few things we had and traveled to Russellville, AR. We left our belongings there and returned to Colombia without knowing if we would get the R1 visas. I remember our two teenage daughters asking my wife and me, “What things are we going to take with us to Colombia? What things are we going to leave in Russellville? What if we do not get the visas?”

Fortunately in December 2003, the United States Embassy in Bogotá granted the visas. I received a category R1 visa, and Josefina and the girls received category R2 (Religious Worker Dependent) visas. Between the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and ourselves, we spent around $15,000 in airline tickets, application fees, and legal advice from an Immigration lawyer. I thanked God for what I thought was a “done deal”, but I did not know the surprises and challenges that were waiting for us in the next years.

We moved to Russellville, AR in January 2004. In the first five or six weeks, I began to realize that the change from being a simple visitor with a B1 visa to being a worker in the United States was more complicated than I first thought. When I tried to open a regular checking account, I came across something called “The USA Patriotic Act”. This was the first time I heard about that in my whole life. The lady in the bank made herself very clear when she told me, “Yes, Mr. Franco, after 9/11 and for security reasons, we have to verify your Social Security number, photo ID, and diver’s license before we can open an account in this bank in your name.”

Wow! The problem was I had none of those documents. I replied, “Here is my passport and my visa. Here is the payroll check from the church I’m working with.” She told me that she did not have a way to verify whether my passport was false or genuine; therefore, I could not open the account that day. I said to myself, “Well, if all that I need is a Social Security number, a photo ID, and a Driver’s license, I’ll get it and I’ll come later this week.” What a naïve thought! It took me and my friends from the Hispanic Task Force more than three months before I could open a checking account. Why?

Let’s start with the Social Security number. After filing the applications at the local Social Security office, providing them with a copy of my passport, visa, and I-94 document (this is a little form that the official of immigration gives you when you enter to the United States), I had to wait almost two months until the Federal Social Security office confirmed the authenticity of those documents. (Please note that two of those documents were issued by the U.S. government just a month before.)

While waiting for the Social Security number, I underwent the odyssey of getting a state driver’s license. I studied the book with enthusiasm and went to take the written test. At the office, the official asked for at least two documents of identification, and here we go again. I only had my Colombian passport. I had several documents from my own country to prove my identity, but the law only recognizes certain documents such as a Social Security number, state photo ID, birth certificate, or military ID. Finally, I could take the written test, and a date was appointed for the road test. “When you come to take the road test,” said the official, “you have to bring this permit, the registration of the vehicle and the proof of insurance.” Great! It was time to go and buy insurance for my vehicle. But what a surprise! You have to have a driver’s license to be able to insure a car. I ended up taking the road test in the church’s van a month later and getting my car insured after that.

I will not describe several incidents similar to this one that took place when I requested basic utilities services such as: energy, phone, Internet, and TV cable. In other words: you cannot do anything in this country unless you have a Social Security number and a driver’s license. Without losing my hope in the system, I continued working hard until those documents were in my wallet. The day that the Social Security card came in the mail, I prayed: “Now, we are ready to go. Thank God!”

With my recently gained experience, I felt it was time to initiate the same process with Josefina my wife. I didn’t know that a more disconcerting discovery was ahead. Josefina had the R2 visa. She was a dependent of the R1 religious worker and therefore was not entitled by the immigration laws to receive a Social Security number. The same rule applied for Joanna and Susana.

That meant that for more than three years Josefina, Joanna, and Susana could not function as normal individuals in this system. Besides all the social limitations, their legal status in this country was questioned time and time again at the schools, banks, businesses, and governmental agencies.

After many attempts of submitting many applications and documents and enduring patiently for weeks while the government “corroborated the authenticity of the documents,” Josefina finally obtained a driver’s license and Joanna and
Susana their state photo IDs. We faced the same “Catch-22” when we tried to obtain health insurance for them. [Editor’s note: This means that the persons cannot work and cannot obtain health insurance. One must have a Social Security card to obtain health insurance. The family was finally able to receive a non-working Social Security card, but still could not legally work to help defray costs of becoming legal.]

The only way out of this mess, we were told, was to get residence status (the famous Green Card.) But, this is a story for later!

Our first year here was over, and the time to file the tax return came. I was introduced to an animal, similar to that of Daniel’s prophecy “with many heads”, and called the Internal Revenue Service. Up to this point, I thought that the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Services) was the only wild monster in the bureaucratic jungle, but now I learned that there were many of those animals out there. To make the long story short, I want to say that to claim my wife and two daughters as dependents, I had to obtain the ITI Number (Individual Tax Identification Number) which is the document that replaces the Social Security number. After filling out the application form five times, we finally received the numbers, and we filed our taxes. Six months later, we received a letter from the IRS stating that, “Nonresident aliens from Colombia filing on Form 1040NR are not allowed to claim an exemption for their children.” Thank you, IRS, for making me waste my time filling out the application forms five times so that at the end you can tell me this!

Our desperation and frustration was growing, and we knew that the only way out was to obtain residence status in this country. Thus, I began again. But, what did we need to do to get the Green Cards?

First of all, you had to have worked with the religious organization that is sponsoring you for at least two years before you can initiate the process. So we had to wait until January 2006, but meanwhile I started collecting all the documents that were required. Are you tired reading this account? Guess how tired we were at that point.

The whole process of preparation endured more than a year. At that time, I came across the news that the INS required a letter from the IRS certifying that the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was a non-profit religious organization. We had to have a 501C3 resolution letter! Please, give me a break! The Cumberland Presbyterian Church has been doing ministry in this country for two centuries, and here we are trying to prove it? But we did it. With the collaboration of the Board of Missions, the Hispanic Task Force, and a private Certified Public Accountants firm, we obtained a 501C3 letter.

In total, we filled about 30 application forms: Petition for a Special Immigrant; Application to Register Permanent Residence, Medical Examinations of Aliens seeking Adjustment of Status, Biographic Information, and others plus all the necessary documentation with each form. We spent about $10,000. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church paid $3000 to an Immigration lawyer that instructed us in the first part of the process. My family paid the rest. We filed our case on October 2006, and we were told that we should receive a communication from the INS within 180 days.

In December of 2006, our R1 & R2 visas expired. They were issued at the USA embassy in Bogotá, Colombia in December 2003 for a period of three years. Therefore, from that point on, we stayed in a kind of legal “limbo” immigration-wise. The visas expired, and the petition to adjust our status was pending. The more critical implication at that juncture was that my authorization to work legally under the R1 visa expired. But do not panic! The bureaucratic immigration system has one more document: the EAC (Employment Authorization Card). At that time, my expertise filling out application forms began rendering its fruits. Yet, there were more fees, pictures, fingerprints, and photocopies. We received the EAC cards.

With this document, Josefinas was able to obtain her Social Security number in February 2007. So it took her more than three years from the time we came to the United States to be able to work legally in this country or to take a course on a college level without paying exaggerated tuition costs.

In March 2008, three members of our family1 received the anticipated Green Cards that, by the way, are not green but blue. This is so paradoxical. The Green Cards arrived in the mail box with a letter of welcome and a Guide for New Immigrants. In this guide, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services welcomed us to the USA five years after we arrived! Believe it or not, the Guide has a section entitled, “Getting Settled in the United States”, in which there is information about how to get a Social Security number, how to get a driver’s license, and how to pay taxes “now that you are a resident.” So, how in the world do the INS folks pretend that somebody is going to survive legally in this country while waiting for a residence card? There is no wonder so many people decide to go the other way: the shortcut of the illegality and the acquisition of fake documents on the black market.

¹ At the time of the writing of this account (September 2008) and after 23 months waiting, Susana my youngest daughter has not obtained her residence card yet. I have called the Immigration Services several times, and the only response is that they are checking her background. We had to go two times to have her fingerprints taken because, as the functionary of Immigration said, “They were expired.” I did not know that fingerprints expired!

Immigrant Challenge in the USA
By Lynn Thomas
The immigrant population in the USA has reached impressive numbers in the past several years. As a point of context; the largest minority group for most of the nation’s history has been black Americans. That changed during this decade, Hispanics are now the largest US minority group and that will probably continue to be the case long into the future. Undoubtedly this will have an impact on US politics, social-programs and the every-changing American culture. Within this population of immigrants a new American phenomena has developed that is unique to the Spanish speaking immigrant. It is estimated that there are from 6 to 10 million unauthorized Hispanic (Spanish speakers) living in the USA. These are often called “illegals” or “illegal aliens” or “undocumented workers”. These terms are relatively new to American immigration. For most of America’s history, there were just immigrants. This sub-group of unauthorized immigrants falls into two categories: Those who cross US boarders and do not pass through any immigration check point; and those who enter the country legally and stay past the time they are authorized to stay in the USA (visa violation). In truth, most unauthorized visitors fall into the second category. Interestingly, there are many other language group and non-Hispanic nationalities who overstay their visas and become unauthorized, but there is virtually no mention of them in the media. For example, one large group of unauthorized people working in the USA are Canadians.

These facts create many challenges for the Hispanic living and working in the USA, both legal and illegal workers. Our pastors and churches deal with issues related to American immigration day-in and day-out. The following are some of the challenges our Hispanic pastors’ report:

**Insecurity**

The Hispanic living in the USA who is unauthorized does not see government agencies or government officials as their friend. All are suspect. The new immigrant to the USA has little understanding of how the American system of justice works. As a result they are very timid to approach: police, firemen, city officials, school officials, even charity organizations. This has resulted in two challenges:

1) Many unauthorized Hispanic visitors do not approach, under any circumstance, services of the community that are for their safety and well being.

   Example: The fire department in one community was providing free smoke alarms to people who lived in trailers. Many Hispanics live in low cost housing – trailers. The Firemen didn’t speak Spanish and their attempts to get the Hispanics to open their doors and accept the smoke alarm was frustrated at best. The uniforms and strange men standing at the door looked questionable to the Hispanics. They were suspicious that the men were there to deport them.

   Example: A Hispanic is very reluctant to report theft, assault, extortion or spouse abuse. Police involvement could lead to their detention and deportation. The trend in recent years has been to empower local police to enforce immigration laws, thus causing a widening distrust between the police and Hispanic immigrants.

   Example: Charity and church organizations that send workers to the Hispanic community that are dressed in ties, suits and/or go in two’s or threes are avoided by the Hispanics. They fear they might be “la amiga” (customs officers) coming to arrest unauthorized visitors.

2) Many unauthorized Hispanic visitors suffer at the hands of people who take advantage of the fact that they know the Hispanic will not seek justice if exploited. This fact has far reaching implications and many shades and colors.

   Example: Hispanic use cash when shopping. There have been several reports from our pastors that church members, when shopping in major supermarket or department stores, have had the experience of a cashier withholding (pocketing) the change. Argument is futile, because it could lead to police intervention. The dishonest cashier knows the Hispanic will only moderately express objection, but the Hispanic consumer will not appeal to store management for fear it will become a police issue.

   Example: Gangs are known to target Hispanic homes to rob them. They know the Hispanic community is a cash society that can not use banks. They also know that Hispanics will usually not report theft, even a home invasion, to the police.

   Example: There was a trailer park in one city in which the owner would require a one month deposit and first months rent before the person could move into the trailer. After two weeks he would evict them and move in a new family. There was no fear of protest to the police from those being exploited.

   Example: In some very sad cases our pastors have reported people in their churches who immigrated by passing over to Mexico-US boarder under the guidance of a “coyote” (A person paid to lead small groups across the boarder). During the trip, often in remote areas, the coyote and accomplices have robbed and raped those who have paid them. They know once in the USA these people will not report the abuse to the police.

All of these issues related to security have created a sub-class of people living in the USA who do not or can not expect justice. Their only defense is to hide from society as much as possible and live within their own community of fellow Hispanics who suffer the same challenges. In other words, they work in our yards, build our buildings, process our food –
but hide with their families for fear of exploitation.

Our Hispanic pastors, by in-large, have not taken political stands on these issues. The response has been pastoral. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church does not encourage illegal activities. But, we don’t see it as our place to enforce US laws in relation to immigration. Our role in society is to be salt and light to all, regardless of their legal status or personal problems or mistakes in life.

Legal Documents

The key to all aspects in living in the USA is related to two important documents that function as national ID cards, they are: a social security card and a driver’s license. Banking, car insurance, medical insurance, buying property, education, social services, even receiving food from community food banks depends on one or both of these cards.

A person legally enters the USA with a visa. Most visas granted are visitor’s visas, they do not allow a person to work. A non-Us citizen can obtain a social security card via a work visa. With the social security card a person can apply for a driver’s license. An unauthorized worker has two options: acquire a false card or live without the card and suffer the consequences. Many do the later, but they will use fictitious numbers from time to time when a physical card is not requested.

With no social security card there is no hope of a driver’s license (except in a couple of US states). As a result numerous people are driving in the USA with no training and no car insurance. Unlike most other countries in the world, the US uses the driver’s license as an ID card. Most other countries have an ID card and the driver’s license is just to validate one can drive. The American driver’s license is not only a license that says one knows how to drive, but it is also used as an ID card by most every business, airport, bank, or organization in the USA. As a result, all states grant a type of driver’s license for non-drivers. It is not for driving; it is for ID. But, even this card requires a social security card.

Example: “Alabama ID Cards are issued to non-driving residents for identification purposes in lieu of a Alabama drivers license.” Dept Motor Vehicle, Alabama

These document problems have had an impact on not only the Hispanic community, but all communities in the USA. For example:

By-in large the Hispanic community is a cash society. They do not use banks because it is difficult to open accounts. This is not safe and it also results in an underground cash economy.

Most unauthorized workers do not have a driver’s license. Few American cities have integrated mass transit, thus people must drive. Most Latin American cities, even small ones, have integrated mass transit. Thus, many of the new Hispanic immigrants to the USA have never driven before coming to the USA. Most unauthorized Hispanics drive with no license and they have no car insurance because they have no other option. If there was mass transit, they would use it. If they could buy insurance, they would. Ironically, the effort to discourage illegal immigration by putting the driver’s license in direct relationship to legal status in the USA has created millions of untrained drivers with no insurance. Have new license laws requiring social security cards before granting a license made America any safer? The problem is that until a driver’s license is just that, a license showing one is trained to drive, American roads will increasingly become unsafe for all.

Another consequence of the difficulty of getting a driver’s license has been the feeling of abuse on the part of the Hispanic. More than one Hispanic family has been stopped by the police when driving to church, work or school. The local police in the town stop them for some infraction (brake light out) and then fines them for not having a driver’s license, not having insurance as well as the brake light. This has happened several times to several families and results in hundreds of dollars in fines each time. Some families report being stopped multiple times by the same policemen. The Hispanics (right or wrong) believe the police are taking advantage of them by raising money for the city/town using this as a means of revenue generation. Some even suspect the officer of raising money for himself. This is probably not the case, but it goes to the sense of injustice that the Hispanic often feels.

America need cheap labor and the Hispanic population has provided that labor. Those who employ unauthorized workers are asked to obtain a social security number. The unauthorized worker only has to present a 9 digit number to their employer. There is no clearing house for social security numbers. Withholdings are taken from the new employee’s pay and applied to the FICA account of that number. Even though that account does not exist or may exist in someone else’s name, the funds still become part of the national treasury. The government never says, “We can’t receive these funds because they do not correspond to a social security number.” It is estimated that there are billions of dollars in the USA treasury that have been withheld from the pay checks of these false social security numbers. These funds will never be returned or used for the benefit of the undocumented worker. This has two results: The social security program is subsidized by the undocumented workers who pay into the system but will not receive any benefits. Many Hispanic (right or wrong) feel the US Government is using them to support a social security system that is in crisis. The other consequence is the reality that the undocumented worker will not receive a modest pension, medical care at retirement or disability should they be disabled. As far as a safety net, it does not exist for the undocumented Hispanic. If they do not return to their country of origin, what will be their plight
in the USA? If they have lived here for decades working and raising their families, is it realistic to believe they will abandon
the USA, their children and grandchildren at retirement and return to their home country? There is no pension here for them
and there will be no pension waiting for them in their home country if they return. At some point, poor and indigent people
who immigrate to the USA decades in the past are going to become a serious problem in American society. Unauthorized
visitors have no right to welfare or other government programs for the poor and indigent.

When working with the undocumented Hispanic in the USA one realizes they do feel used. They are constantly told
how valuable they are by their employers. They work hard for low wages and people respect that. On the other hand, they
also know there is a double standard, much of America resents them. The lack of access to documents that one has to have
to live in the USA sends a strong message as to what their place is in the USA. The message is, we need you to work long
and hard, stay on the job site, but don’t be part of our cities and communities.

All of our Hispanic pastors are social workers. As a result of the document challenge, they find themselves working
long hours trying to help Hispanics in the community with many serious problems. Usually our pastors do not have access
to any government resources to help them solve these problems. Further more, the Hispanic has no political advocate to
bring their hardships to law makers. They can not vote and thus have no influence.

Legal Immigration

The perception among most Americans is one can easily immigrant to the USA. They assume one fills out a paper
or two and then moves easily to America. Nothing is farther from the truth. If there were a rational legal way to immigrate
to the USA, there would be much less illegal immigration. The more frustration there is about unauthorized visitors, the
more laws are passed which only makes legal immigration that much harder. Legal immigration to the USA takes years of
legal paper work and thousands and thousands of dollars. For the rich or highly educated, it is a much easier process and
takes much less time. When a person looks at how difficult it is to immigrate to the USA, even for a short time to work,
they quickly realize it is almost impossible. They then realize it is much more practical to arrive on a tourist visa and just
not return to their home country when it expires. That is how most unauthorized workers come to the USA. The ease of
finding a job and the salaries they make (although modest) encourages them to ignore the hardships of living “illegally” in
the USA.

The key to the illegal immigration problem is legal immigration. Unfortunately, the approach so far has been to
slow or stop immigration by making immigration more complicated. Every effort to complicate immigration only results
in more illegal immigration. There needs to be a way for people to legally come to the USA, work, pay taxes, be part of the
community and return to their home country. The problem with the way things are now is one dare not return to their home
country or they risk not being able to return to the USA> Many Hispanic workers in the USA don’t plan on staying in the
USA when they come, but they get stuck in the USA because they can’t return to their home country. One can fly home after
overstaying their visa, but they cannot fly back into the USA once their name is in the system as one who overstayed their
visa. Thus, the only way back in is the dangerous boarder crossing. For most, it is best to not risk this and thus they stay in
the USA.

All our pastors report on homesick church members. People who want to go home and see family and friends but
can’t. We also see lots of disconnected families. Families that are living with few to no close family relationships. There is
also a large number of men who left their wives and children to come to USA to make money. Some have lived separated
from their wife and children for years. This has lead to all types of sad situations.

All of the church’s Hispanic pastors (Korean and Sudanese as well) are confronted with immigration law issues. The
frustration is, it is difficult to get correct answers to one’s specific immigration problem. Writing or calling an immigration
office for information on one’s immigration problem is almost a lost cause. No one answers the phone or answers the
letter. These are not US citizens asking a US government office for help, they are “foreigners” with no place to complain
should the government give poor service. Immigration officers recommend one use an attorney. Immigration law is now
so complicated and contradictory, that even attorneys are not certain how to process legal papers. As a side note, more and
more unscrupulous attorneys take immigration law cases having little to no knowledge of immigration law. They have
learned immigrants will pay well if one can give them the hope of resolving their legal problem. Sadly, many immigrants
have dashed dreams as attorneys take their fees and deliver virtually nothing. In some cases folks are in worse shape than
they were before employing the attorney. Our pastors have experienced this first hand with their own legal issues. CP
pastors must have and maintain legal status if they work for the CP Church, that is our policy. To help others, they have to
be in a legal position in which they can help.

There is a huge need for competent and affordable legal advice in relation to immigration issues. More significantly,
there is a need for US immigration law reform.

The Role of the Church

There is clear Biblical support for Christians helping immigrants. In various places the people of faith are called
upon to show compassion to the foreigner, even in the Old Testament mosaic codes (Lev. 19:33, 34; Deut. 10:18, 19). As one looks at the sociological, regulatory and political realities of the immigrant community in the USA there is a temptation to put ones energy into political and regulatory reforms. However, the church’s greater influence and power to effect change is found within itself. In reality this is where it has the most authority and opportunity to bring about change. So what should the role of the church of the USA be in relation to immigration?

First, the church should support those on the front lines of this challenge. The cross-culture pastors are the ones that carry this burden of ministry in a difficult and complex situation. The common faith of the CP cross-culture church (i.e. Hispanic) and the CP church in the USA is a ready made bridge for multi-cultural fellowship. The cross-culture pastor working with US English speaking pastors is a realistic means to bring the communities together in mutual support and appreciation. Many in the immigrant community have isolated themselves because of many fears. There is a need for bridges of support and encouragement. Relationships with people who are established (in American society) afford the new immigrant with a “friend” who can stand by their side and help protect them from exploitation. The role of the church is two fold: One to be an advocate for the defenseless in the local community. To speak-out and affirm our mutual Christian relationship and proclaim the fact they are part of our community – the community of Faith. Secondly, to encourage our English speaking church leaders and members to develop relationships with new immigrants in our cross-culture CP churches and missions. Governments and politicians will have to work out the regulatory issues, but regardless of the political outcome, the faith community should live in community – specially, a multi-cultural community.

Secondly, on a more practical level the church should seeks ways to provide useful resources to our cross-culture pastors and leaders. There is a great need for access to legal council. For instance, the CP church has a person employed to deal with health insurance issues. The church may also need to put an immigration attorney on retainer to assist our cross-culture community. Another challenge is many in our cross-culture churches are driving with no license. They attend church fruations risking fines and even arrest, not to mention the risk of accidents. More than one cross-culture pastor has expressed need for a van to help pickup people who need transportation to church events. The socioeconomic reality of many of our cross-culture churches makes the purchase and up-keep of a van cost prohibitive. The church should seeks ways to help our cross-culture churches obtain and maintain affordable transportation. Our cross-culture pastors need resources that will afford them the opportunity to meet together and gain mutual support. They are in unique ministries, unlike ministries most churches in America experience. They need resources that allow them to meet with others dealing with the same issues so that they can share their experiences, learn from each other and receive mutual support. The church needs to invest in special events that bring people within the CP Church of different cultures together in fellowship. We should be more intentional to do events and activities that are sensitive to the “other” culture and use those events as opportunities to build relationships. Just inviting people of different cultures to an event does not integrate the cultures; it takes planning and design to pull the cultures into relationship.

These are just a few of the many ways the church can respond in practical ways to this need. Although many of the challenges immigrants face in the USA are the result of government policies and regulations, the church can play an important role in removing fears, giving assistance and building multi cultural faith communities of mutual respect and support.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** That these two papers, Stuck at the Traffic Light: The red Tape for the Green Card and Immigrant Challenges in the USA, be approved as study papers on immigrant challenges and becoming legal and that they be sent to all presbyteries as study papers.
REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL CONCERNS
(Appendix D)

I. REFERRAL

Referral to this committee is as follows: The Report of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns.

II. PERSONS OF COUNSEL

 Appearing before this committee was: Reverend Missy Rose.

III. REPORT OF THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL CONCERNS

A. REPORT FROM THE JAPAN PRESBYTERY

The committee was sensitive to the unique cultural context of the Japan Presbytery as presented in the report submitted to our committee. Given their efforts,

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Recommendation 1 of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns, “that the General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church commend Japan Presbytery for their struggle in faith, for their adherence to the Confession of Faith, and for the listening to the mandates of the Holy Scripture,” be adopted.

Because of the desire to make editorial changes in the recommendation printed in the preliminary minutes of the General Assembly,

RECOMMENDATION 2: That Recommendation 2 of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social concerns “that this paper and the work of Japan Presbytery be distributed to all presbyteries as a study document demonstrating the need for all Cumberland Presbyterians to study, learn, and understand our doctrine, practices, and beliefs; and to possess the ability to struggle in faith with issues confronting our world today,” be denied.

The committee desired that this information be made available to all presbyteries rather than distributed, and that the purpose of the study of these reports, the hope of possibilities for reconciliation when we come into conflict, would be explicit.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That this paper and the work of Japan Presbytery be made available to all presbyteries as a study document demonstrating the need for all Cumberland Presbyterians to study, learn, and understand Cumberland Presbyterian doctrine, practices, and beliefs; and to possess the ability to struggle in faith with issues confronting our world today, including possibilities of how we can reconcile with those with whom we have come into conflict.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That Recommendation 3 of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns, “that these two papers, Stuck at the Traffic Light: The red Tape for the Green Card and Immigrant Challenges in the USA, be approved as study papers on immigrant challenges and becoming legal and that they be sent to all presbyteries as study papers,” be denied.

Due to editorial changes, the committee approved the following recommendation:

B. IMMIGRANT CHALLENGES

The committee desired that these papers be “made available” rather than “distributed,” and desired to explicitly name that these papers were written from particular authors’ experiences rather than from a universal point of view.
RECOMMENDATION 5: That Presbyteries encourage congregations to study immigration issues and provide the papers, “Stuck at the Traffic Light: the Red Tape for the Green Card” by Ricardo Franco, and “Immigrant Challenges in the USA” by Lynn Thomas, which are based on the authors’ experiences, to help with that study.

Given the nature of immigration into the United States, the committee recognizes that all people and all congregations will begin or continue dealing with immigration issues in the future. Recognizing the complexities of becoming legal in the United States as an immigrant, we recommend the following:

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Cumberland Presbyterian Church minister to immigrants by befriending and assisting them in adapting to their new culture by exercising Christian hospitality and that immigrants be encouraged, with the assistance of the Church, to begin or continue the process of becoming legalized residents of the United States of America.

C. GLOBAL WARMING

The committee received a presentation from the Reverend Missy Rose with a power point presentation pointing out issues of ecology on the earth. Her presentation was informative and moved our committee to much debate. She offered to create a video presentation that can be distributed to people throughout the church for study on the subject. Since that video presentation is not yet available, the committee recommends the following:

RECOMMENDATION 7: That Recommendation 4 of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social concerns, “that the powerpoint presentation on Global Warming and Green House Gases prepared by the Reverend Missy Rose be made available on CD for the General Assembly Commissioners and Stated Clerks of presbyteries for study on the problem and what we as the faith community can do in response. Theology and Social Concern Committees of presbyteries and churches should be encouraged to make use of this vital tool,” be denied.

Because the committee’s discussion confirmed that this subject is an important social concern for people of faith, we recommend the following:

RECOMMENDATION 8: That the matter be referred to the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church for further study, clarification, and editing, adding information regarding Global Stewardship, in the expectation of a final video production to be reviewed by that body.

D. OTHER ISSUES

Ms. Debby Marston distributed information to the committee regarding a global orphan crisis. The orphan population was characterized by Ms. Marston as a population that is not only underserved, but in many cases is not served at all. Given this information, in the hope that this subject will be discussed in the future, we recommend the following:

RECOMMENDATION 9: That information given to the body by Ms. Debby Marston, “How to Help Orphans” by Roger Olson, “From Faith to Action” prepared by the Firelight Foundation, and “A Last Resort: The Growing Concern About Children in Residential Care” prepared by Save the Children, be referred to the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

The Reverend Chris Warren distributed a paper he had written shortly after a trip to explore and study issues of immigration from Mexico to the United States. Given this information, in the hope that this subject will be discussed in the future, we recommend the following:

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the paper written by the Reverend Chris Warren on immigration issues be referred to the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Respectfully submitted,
Committee on Theology and Social Concerns
A. LET’S NOT WAIT FOR THE NEXT CATASTROPHE

Mrs. Debbie Marston met with the committee to share the work she is involved with Bethany Christian Services. She reported on the plight of orphans globally. The committee presents the following report from Debby Marston:

According to UNICEF, an estimated 163 million children are orphans. Of that number, some 14 million under age 15 have been orphaned by AIDS alone, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa. Children are being armed for war and are forced into child prostitution. A common response of citizens of western and industrialized nations has been to step up intercounty adoptions and donate funding to establish residential care for orphaned children. However, building institutions to house orphans does not operate in children’s best interests. The implications of raising children in institutions are troubling. Adoption professionals spend much of their training hours preparing prospective adoptive parents to deal with the difficult adjustment a child will have transitioning from institutional care to family life. The regimentation and strict routine necessary to provide care for large numbers of children are very different from the affectionate nurture families afford. Attachment issues abound, brought about by the inevitable neglect children suffer when there are too many children and too few caregivers.

According to The Orphan Foundation, fewer than half of the orphan population in Eastern Europe will survive to their 20th birthdays. Fifty percent of those that do live to age 20 will become involved in organized crime, prostitution and drugs. In the United States, many young adults continue to live in their parents’ homes until age 24, while approximately 25,000 foster children age out of the system each year, with no permanent family to turn to in times of need. The orphan crisis is worldwide, impacting children in every country on the globe.

The United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was signed by participating nations on September 2, 1990. Previously, the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924 indicated, “the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth.” The CRC obligates us to assume the rights and duties of parents in order to protect and care for orphaned children. More significant to Christians is God’s call to care for these vulnerable little ones.

Throughout Scripture, we are admonished to take care of the weak and helpless members of our society. In Zechariah 7:9-10, we find, “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.’” Isaiah 1:16 states, “Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.” In Psalm 82:3-4 we find, “Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

Finally, in James 1:27 we read, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” There is a clear call from God to care for the less fortunate, the most vulnerable of whom must be children.

Several Christian organizations are collaborating in order to mobilize churches in proactively reaching out to orphans. Focus on the Family, Hope for Orphans and Show Hope are partnering in an effort to recruit Christian families as adoptive parents for children without permanent families. Bethany Christian Services, the largest licensed child-placing agency in the United States is embarking on a campaign to develop a network of orphan advocates in churches throughout the U.S. Bethany also partners with the Christian Alliance for Children in Zambia. Through donations, CACZ provides infant formula, prescription drugs and social work support to children and families in need.

According to Bethany, “[CACZ’s] Milk and Medicine program is a community-based, family-centered intervention designed to save children under the age of 2 who are at risk of abandonment, institutionalization, or death.” With the HIV/AIDS pandemic infecting 14% of Zambia’s population of 11.9 million, 800,000 children have lost one or both parents. The Milk and Medicine program helps care for these orphans and allows them to stay in the care of extended family members rather than in an institution.

It is possible to look at the statistics – the vast numbers of vulnerable children around the world – and wonder what can possibly be done to save them. Christian agencies such as Compassion International and Bethany Christian Services offer opportunities for caring individuals to sponsor specific orphans and vulnerable children through monthly donations. Intercountry and domestic adoption provides couples and individuals the chance to make a difference in a child’s life. There are literally millions of children waiting to become part of permanent families. Additionally, governments and social service agencies are beginning to recognize that children have the right to grow up in their own country and in intact families. Citizens of countries like China, Colombia, Russia and Korea, just to name a few, are being encouraged to adopt domestically. Family reunification efforts are growing. Programs like Zambia’s Milk and Medicine allow children to stay with a single father after a mother’s death, or with grandparents or aunts or uncles. There are many opportunities for one person to make a difference. Perhaps it is possible to save the world – one child at a time.

Eleven years ago, a newborn baby girl was abandoned on the streets of a city in China. She was found and taken to a nearby police station. Her parents could not be located, so she was taken to the local orphanage. She was found to be
healthy. Although other girls in her orphanage were placed for adoption with Western families over the next two or three years, for some reason she was passed over, until she was considered to be too old to be adoptable. Bethany Christian Services, partnering with The China Centre for Adoption Affairs, held a Hope Camp for the children of the orphanage in which this little girl, now 11, resided. Each child was interviewed, with the help of an interpreter, and allowed to perform at a talent show. Each child was videotaped. The videotapes and medical information were made available to approved and waiting families. One family, formerly only interested in an infant or toddler, spoke with their social worker about what they could do to speed up their adoption process, as they had already been waiting over two years for a placement. The social worker shared information about this healthy 11 year old girl, and the family agreed to pray about and for her. They became convinced that she was their daughter and request matching with her. She arrived in the U.S. in early 2010 and is now living happily with her forever family. The fact that she had been taking English classes in her school in China has helped her transition tremendously.

A 3 year old boy, born with severe special medical needs, was adopted six years ago. He is profoundly deaf, has one kidney, has no speech, and had to have surgery on his hands, as he was born with some of his fingers fused together. He communicates with sign language. Despite his limitations, this child is described by his parents as one who “lights up a room.” His joyful, mischievous nature wins the hearts of everyone he meets.

Another boy, now almost six years old, was born with multiple special needs, including serious heart problems. His prospective adoptive family learned of him from the family that adopted his best friend. Now these little friends will be able to be reunited, as the two families have become friends through their parallel adoption journeys.

“Ted” was 13 years old when he attended one of Bethany and CCAA’s Hope Camps. He was described as handsome, intelligent, healthy, athletic, and good natured. China will not allow children to be adopted once they reach age 14, so there was much urgency felt among the adoption social workers who were advocating for a family for Ted. Sadly, no family was found before time ran out, and Ted was removed from the list of waiting children.

Not all adoption stories have happy endings. Just as Jesus prophesied that the poor would always be with us, it seems that orphans will always wait, needing parents who never come to take them home. For this reason, Christians must answer God’s call to take care of the fatherless – those orphaned due to circumstances over which they have no control. We are called to make a difference by caring for orphans, whether through adoption, sponsorship programs, or support of organizations that help keep families intact in their own country and culture. We, who are called, must respond in faith, that even a small effort by one individual can make a difference in the life of a child.

“Once a man was walking along a beach. The sun was shining and it was a beautiful day. Off in the distance he could see a boy going back and forth between the surf’s edge and the beach. Back and forth this boy went. As the man approached he could see that there were hundreds of starfish stranded on the sand as the result of the natural action of the tide.

The man was stuck by the apparent futility of the task. There were far too many starfish. Many of them were sure to perish. As he approached, the boy continued the task of picking up starfish one by one and throwing them into the surf.

As he came up to the boy he said, “You must be crazy. There are thousands of miles of beach covered with starfish. You can’t possibly make a difference.” The boy looked at the man. He then stooped down and picked up one more starfish and threw it back into the ocean. He turned back to the man and said, “It made a difference to that one.”

B. VIOLENCE

The Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns has been wrestling for years with a way to address the issue of violence in our world. Violence is a critical issue, and we know this. Violence is also an issue that is very difficult to narrow down in discussion. The committee believes there is a theological approach that is simple and is something we all can do.

The theological premise of an approach to violence is the belief in life. For the next several years we will offer simple steps toward living nonviolently. The following was approved by the committee. We are Resurrection people living in a world that knows too much about violence and the death it generates. The Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns offers the following as a means of bearing witness to God as God of Life in a world that is violent and dying: A modest step to affirm life and begin to oppose violence. Cumberland Presbyterians will not speak violently to one another.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That this be approved as a way for Cumberland Presbyterians to begin to work against violence.
REPORT OF THE UNIFIED COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL CONCERNS
(Appendix D)

I. REFERRAL

Referral to this committee is as follows: The Report of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns.

II. PERSONS OF COUNSEL

 Appearing before this committee was: Reverend Steve Mosley, representative of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns.

A. APPRECIATION TO REVEREND LANNY JOHNSON

The term of the Reverend Lanny Johnson expires in 2010 and he will not be serving another term. Reverend Johnson has faithfully served the committee. The General Assembly owes a debt of gratitude for his work.

RECOMMENDATION 1: That Recommendation 1 of the Report of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns, that “The Stated Clerk of the General Assembly be requested to write a letter of appreciation to the Reverend Lanny Johnson and his family for his time and commitment to the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns,” be adopted.

B. ADOPTION

The committee calls attention to the paper “Let’s Not Wait For the Next Catastrophe” and makes the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the General Assembly commend Ms. Debby Marston on her writing of “Let’s Not Wait For the Next Catastrophe.”

RECOMMENDATION 3: That “Let’s Not Wait For the Next Catastrophe” be communicated to each Presbytery and each commissioner of General Assembly is strongly encouraged to take it home and share it with each of their own congregations.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Churches seek ways to minister to orphans around the world and that they also seek to strengthen families through supporting the Cumberland Presbyterian Children’s Home.

C. VIOLENCE

LIVING IN A SPIRIT OF PEACE
The Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns approved the following statements. “We are Resurrection people living in a world that knows too much about violence and the death it generates. The Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns offers the following as a means of bearing witness to God as God of Life in a world that is violent and dying: A modest step to affirm life and begin to oppose violence: Cumberland Presbyterians will not speak violently to one another.”

RECOMMENDATION 5: That Recommendation 2 of the Report of the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns, that “This be approved as a way for Cumberland Presbyterians to begin to work against violence,” be denied.

The committee submits the following statement in place of the above statements:

WHEREAS violence both afflicts and affects our world and
WHEREAS Cumberland Presbyterians are followers of Jesus Christ, the Prince of peace and
WHEREAS we have been commanded to love our enemy, (Matthew 5:44) and
WHEREAS we have been told to do unto others as we would have done to us (Matthew 7:12) and
WHEREAS we have been commanded to live at peace with everyone as far as it is possible (Romans 12:18) and
WHEREAS the Savior has told us that all men will know that you are my disciples by your love for one another, (John 13:35) and
WHEREAS we are told that we will be required to give an account of every careless word (Matthew 12:36)
THEREFORE, the Committee On Theology and Social Concerns believes that a first step to witnessing our commitment to following the Prince of Peace is to continue to examine our thoughts, words, and deeds, ensuring they conform to scripture and show love to both our enemies and to ourS fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That this be approved as a way for Cumberland Presbyterians to witness to our faith and oppose the spread of violence in the world.

Respectfully submitted, Committee on Theology and Social Concerns
Reflections on a Divided Church

(Theological Imperatives for the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America)

R. C. Sproul, noted evangelical theologian within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and professor of systematic theology and apologetics at Knox Theological Seminary, tells an interesting story of the old city of Geneva, Switzerland. A public park in the city contains a lasting memorial to the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. The central attraction is a very interesting wall adorned with statues of John Calvin, John Knox, Huldrych Zwingli, Theodore Beza, and others. Chiseled into the stone, Sproul points out, are the Latin words Post tenebras lux (After darkness, light.)

These words, according to Sproul, “...capture the driving force of the Reformation. The darkness referred to is the eclipse of the gospel that occurred in the late Middle Ages. A gradual darkening of the gospel reached its nadir, and the light of the New Testament doctrine of justification by faith alone was all but extinguished.”

While the purpose of this paper is not necessarily a defense of justification by faith, it hopefully will serve as a catalyst and a reminder that church structures, irrespective of their institutional and/or denominational formations, are forever struggling between the poles of light and darkness. The late Howard Thurman of Howard University refers to such a reality as the luminous darkness, which he suggests that even during periods of chaotic and/or creative tension, the sovereignty of God yet reigns, and does so in spite of its practitioners.

The history of theological discourse has always been an ever-spiraling mandate toward some higher and noble goal. Such is demonstrated in the readings of the Reformation. As Cumberland Presbyterians believing in the grace of God and the priesthood of all believers, we come together in “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 5:5-6, NIV.) Therefore our commanded blessing is to approach God hand in hand.

Throughout history, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America (from this point on to be referred to as the CPC and the CPCA), have been joined at the hip. Having been grounded and influenced by our birth in the Cumberland region, both denominations have rightly sought unification.
At times unity looked promising, only to falter at the altar of style, culture, economics, political structure, and social realities found in mainstream America. No one can logically ignore the impact and devastation inflicted upon the Cumberland denominations by the external forces from without and the internal forces from within. Both struggle over issues dealing with the human psyche; namely cultural sensitivity, racism, classism, sexism, hermeneutical issues, and others.

Out of such a context, suspicion, unfamiliarity, and the unwillingness to learn from the other arise. The realities of culture have at times been brutal and seemingly unforgiving. Such realities must not prevent unity and inclusiveness between the Cumberland denominations. To succumb to this reality would be to engage ungodly morality at the expense of true reconciliation. Human beings do have the capacity to “set things right,” but only if there is the joint effort between two or more parties. As Rheinhold Niebuhr suggests, “...Man is moral...society is immoral.” Using this paradigm as a structured vision, one could assume that humankind has the moral authority to transform darkness into light because it, more than any other entity, is God’s greatest creation, “...a little lower than the angels.”

At present, with all due respect to the many attempts on the part of both denominations, both denominations are divided along the lines that have previously been mentioned. The ongoing divide is neither convenient nor healthy. Reflecting on the biblical and theological imperatives that confront our consciousnesses, such strides, or lack thereof, on both sides demonstrate the worst in theological formulations. Citing Acts 2, for example, the various racial/ethnic representatives present were of “one accord.” Their cultures, as evidenced in their language, worship, and the like, were neither primal nor necessary to their receiving the visitation of the Holy Spirit. The fact that they were of one accord, in spite of their varying cultures, was an attestation of their primary focus; Jesus, the Christ! H. Richard Niebuhr’s book, Christ and Culture, is a literary example of the fact that Christ works “in culture, around culture, beneath culture, and beyond culture.” The religious life of our congregations can ill afford to be defined in terms of the use of language, worship styles, hermeneutics and the like. Christ wishes to meet us where we are and not where we have been.

All too often church fathers and mothers have sacrificed spiritual opportunity for ecclesiastical expediency. We place too much emphasis on organizational structure over spiritual formation. There must be a balance of the two. Caught between ecclesiastical mandates and political correctness, both denominations have missed addressing significant moral and social issues in history because of covert and overt mindsets. In reality, in spite of all the great things both have accomplished in the name of Christ, much more could have been achieved if only radical faith and practice would have persevered. What more could our congregations have accomplished during periods of great debate concerning the brokenness of the world such as warfare, the Civil Rights Movement, the HIV AIDS controversy, Apartheid, genocide in Africa, the brutality against women and children in Asia, the Middle East, and other parts of the world by walking hand in hand? What can be accomplished now and in the future
If theology is to be investigated, as Barth points out, it must be acted upon. The involvement in theological discourse cannot cease in the classroom or in safe havens called church sanctuaries. Theology must move from scrutiny to activation within the arena of human habitation. We Cumberland Presbyterians must join hands; we must live out unity. Our congregations must be encouraged to involve themselves not merely in short-term mission trips, noble and important as they may be, but long-term mission concerns at home and abroad. If God is the God of all people, then the Church, as an institution, must discover ways and means to address the critical needs of an oppressed humanity. And to this end, it matters not who starts the process.

Unity cannot and will not occur without a serious effort on the part of all Cumberland Presbyterians and congregations. The embracing of “radicalism” must be a part of the evangelistic equation. Radicalism does not imply or suggest violence or unethical or unlawful courses of action on the part of the church. For every action there is a reaction, and the church must be willing to answer the call of our one Lord Jesus to “deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me.” We can no longer accommodate ourselves to a comfortable religion at the expense of souls being lost by our unwillingness to act. Cumberland Presbyterians must not merely speak of unity but insist upon unity. As we were reminded by Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Either we learn how to live together as brothers and sisters, or die as fools.”

What if our beginning point is formulated on the principle of the cross? Only then will we be able to join hands and work in Christian unity so we can follow one Lord in one faith with one baptism as is commanded in Scripture.

**Recommendation #1:** That this paper be accepted as a study paper.

**Recommendation #2:** That the following Action Steps be implemented as soon as possible:

1. This committee encourages each presbytery to move forward with the recommendation of the GA’s of each church to form a committee on theology and social concerns, if not previously formed, to take proposed actions to deal with relevant issues that face the body of Christ daily.

2. That each presbyterial committee encourage local congregations where the churches have overlapping boundaries to organize joint activities between the cpc and cpca to provide opportunities to build better relationships between the two churches such as holding joint activities through worship, pulpit exchange, times of fellowship, revivals, VBS, and discussion of the papers produced by this committee.
3. In addition, presbyteries might also consider ways that committees, boards and agencies might begin working together. Committees on ministry and missions, Christian education committees, and camping programs would all benefit from joint interaction. Examples of ways presbyteries can work together include having advisory members participate in the other denomination’s meetings, workshops, projects for the Cumberland Presbyterian Women, working together on local, regional, and even denominational mission efforts including Habitat for Humanity, and raising money for disaster areas around the world.

4. To encourage the Ministry Council of the CPC and the General Assembly Mission Board of the CPCA to meet jointly to explore opportunities and to share ideas, set goals and objectives for the future, engage in joint activities in Christian education, stewardship, missions, and evangelism.

5. Since we have had 20 years with no discussion on union, we recommend that both general assemblies again begin dialogue on how we can live out our oneness in Christ.

Submitted by the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns
“COME LET US DISAGREE TOGETHER”  
BEING FAITHFUL IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT

The following statement might qualify as a perfect illustration of an understatement: “Christians have disagreed passionately with each other throughout our history.” Truth is, we have frequently disagreed forcefully with each other, so much so that oftentimes when we look back on our history, we are dismayed by the behavior of our forebears and wonder how followers of Jesus could be so hate-filled in their responses to one another. Perhaps, then, one source of agreement among us today would be that we wish not to follow in these footsteps left by past believers.

Such a desire is not so easily carried out, however, when we still disagree passionately among ourselves. As this paper is being written, any number of issues divides Christians in many churches, including some CP and CPCA churches. Since we know there were causes of conflict in the past and believe there likely will be new ones in the future, the Joint Commission on Theology and Social Concerns has chosen to ask Cumberland Presbyterians via this paper to give attention to the issue of conflict itself (rather than any specific source of conflict). The Commission’s concern is this: What will we do when we disagree over theology and social concerns? How are we to be faithful to Jesus in the midst of conflict with others who are following Jesus differently from us?

There are a number of fruitful arenas wherein we might seek answers to these questions. For example, there are good studies on the process of conflict resolution from which church folk can benefit. In this paper the Commission proposes that we turn to our foundational document, to Holy Scripture, and allow Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian believers to help us. First Corinthians is an excellent text for our concerns because the new community of believers to whom Paul was writing was embroiled in conflict (see 1 Cor. 1:11). Furthermore, they were treating one another badly as they disagreed among themselves (see, as an example, 11:20-22). Examining Paul’s counsel to them, therefore, should be instructive for us for those times when we find ourselves in conflict.

After some background information regarding the circumstances surrounding 1 Corinthians, we will examine two passages within the letter. The first, 1:18-31, gives Paul’s opening response to the conflict among Corinthian believers. The second, 12:12-27, presents Paul’s discussion of “the body of Christ” as part of his response to one conflict among them, a concern over spiritual gifts. The lessons gained from these texts can then allow us to consider how we might respond faithfully to one another in the midst of conflict.

The Background of the Writing of 1 Corinthians

Since every biblical text was written by a real human being to other real human beings living in a certain time and place, the more we know about these people, their times, and their places, the better we may read these texts. We begin our study of 1 Corinthians then by noting that Paul, an apocalyptic Jew who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Jewish Messiah who had come to launch the Messianic Age, arrived in the Greco-Roman city of Corinth (located in what we now call Greece) sometime near 50 CE and successfully “planted a church” there. Both the city of Corinth and the believers who responded to Paul’s preaching shape the story which unfolds from this point.
The great Greek city of Corinth was conquered by the Romans in 146 BCE, showing the rest of Greece the price of opposing Rome’s interests. Julius Caesar re-founded the city in 44 BCE. Sitting astride a narrow isthmus (in what is now southern Greece) between the sea lanes leading to Italy on one side and Asia on the other, the city’s commercial, political, and military advantages virtually demanded its re-establishment. When Rome decided to do so, it hastily recruited such people as former slaves (called freedpersons), displaced peasants, and unemployed military veterans to re-populate the city. Scholars have referred to these new Corinthians as a chaotic mixture of “dislocated, deracinated individuals, the most successful of whom had good reason to cast off unpleasant reminders” of their former lives.¹ The seaports brought much commerce to the city as well as settlers from around the Mediterranean world eager to participate in a booming economy. This commerce, in turn, created a prosperous banking system so that great personal wealth was generated for the new Corinthians, among whom was formed a “local ruling class of self-made women and men”² loyal to the ways of the emperor. Such opportunities were not available to most people in the Roman Empire. So Corinth was a new (though old) Roman city with new opportunity, new money, new people, new leaders, etc. Its environment was chaotic and competitive. The city has been compared to San Francisco during the gold rush days.

The new community of Jesus followers which Paul called into being reflected the diversity in the city: these believers were Jew and Gentile, male and female, high-born, slave, and every socio-economic class in between. Some of them apparently also reflected the competitiveness of the city in their dealings with fellow believers. While in Ephesus during his so-called “Third Missionary Journey” (about the year 53 CE), Paul got news that “issues” had arisen among Corinthian believers which had led to factions and infighting among them. Some of these issues were no doubt due to the challenges of relating to one another (e.g., slaves and non-slaves, men and women, etc., were unaccustomed to relating to one another). Others were the result of cultural differences (e.g., Greco-Roman folk struggling with Jewish apocalyptic thinking), and others simply to being so new at following Jesus. Ethical and theological debates were bound to occur in such a setting. But Paul seems to have perceived that there was one particular issue lying beneath many of the problems surfacing among the Corinthian faithful: Some of the believers considered themselves wise, spiritual, and superior to others in the community (see e.g., 1 Cor 3:18, 4:6-8). Impressed with their own spirituality, they treated other believers as “less than” themselves. Such a status-seeking spirituality would have been at home in the culture of Corinth, but it was wrecking the new Christian community there as believers sought to “beat down” those who disagreed with them. Paul wrote the letter we call 1 Corinthians to address this situation.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

After greeting the Corinthian saints (1:1-4) and offering his opening prayer (1:4-9), Paul turns to his reason for writing as he calls the believers to turn aside from the “schisms” (1:10) which he has heard are plaguing them (1:11-12). At 1:18 he is ready to begin his theological rationale for calling them to unity with the passage we Christians often call “The Foolishness of the Cross.” Here is a text worth exploring.

The focus of this text is knowing God. We should remember the biblical understanding of “know,” which, as one seminary professor once said, isn’t “head knowledge” (see Gen. 4:1). There is a world of difference between knowing as the intellectual acquisition of
facts (for ex., knowing that $2 + 2 = 4$), and *knowing* your spouse, your sibling, your best friend, or God, etc. Paul is concerned about the latter kind of knowing (see 1 Cor. 13:12).

One key aspect of Paul’s discussion in the text is *wisdom*. We do not, Paul says, know God through wisdom (v 21). Indeed, God has made foolish “the wisdom of the world” (v. 20) even as God’s wisdom seems like foolishness to unbelievers (v. 18). The repetition of the idea of wisdom suggests that it had become an issue among Corinthian believers. Perhaps they valued persuasive arguments or deducible logic as was found in the great Greek philosophical traditions. Whatever they favored, Paul called it the “wisdom of the world” and declared that it was not the way to know God.

We can note that, while deducible logic had not held a lofty place in many Jewish traditions, some Jews had their own form of proving to others that they understood God better: signs. The great acts of God in Jewish history, particularly those associated with the Exodus, were signs which made God known.

But Paul insists we know God through neither wisdom nor signs. The central claim he makes in this passage is:

A For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,

B But we preach Christ who was crucified,

A’ A scandal to Jews and foolishness to Greeks… (vv 22-23).

These two verses are arranged (above) in a *chiasm*, a rhetorical technique commonly used by speakers in an oral culture to make their presentations clear and memorable to their hearers. In our literary culture, both writers and speakers commonly present their primary points at the end of their compositions. But orators in oral cultures often arrive at the climactic moment in the middle of their speeches and then finish by repeating the main tenets of the argument so as to drive the primary point home. Paul has shaped his presentation in this part of his letter (which would have been read aloud, making it oral communication though it was written) so that his central and climactic claim is in v. 23a: *we preach Christ crucified*. Neither the wisdom of the world (for Greeks) nor signs (for Jews) enable us to know God, but Paul preached Christ crucified which is the wisdom and power of God (for both Jewish and Greek believers).³

So, Paul claims, we know God through the crucified Jesus. To appreciate his claim we need first to forget 2000 years of veneration of the cross. We need to forget the gold cross necklaces many of us wear and the beautiful crosses which adorn many of our sanctuaries. In the first century Roman Empire crucifixion was not only a horribly painful way to die. It was also a most shameful and degrading way to die. The Corinthians who first heard Paul preach would likely have thought that only misguided and pathetic fools who thought they could challenge Rome without a massive army behind them were crucified. Such fools ended up dead with their idiocy displayed for all to see. In just such a fool, Paul says, we know God.

But how is this so? If Jesus was the Messiah of God, how did he end up on the wrong end of Roman crucifixion? The Christian story is that Jesus’ crucifixion shows us the depth and breadth of God’s love. Jesus came to announce God’s love for the whole creation (John 3:16). As he touched lepers, ate with tax collectors and sinners, and
healed blind beggars and the daughters of Syro-Phoenician women he threatened the order established by its rulers wherein some were favored and sat on top of the world, while others were unclean, outcast, and beneath anyone’s concern. Everybody else figured out their place in between and behaved accordingly. But Jesus’ life showed that he considered no one unworthy of God’s favor. Then, when the rulers told him to stop his nonsense, he loved the people too much to do so. When the rulers said they’d kill him if he didn’t stop, he still loved them too much to do so. And when they finally set out to stop him violently, he even loved his enemies too much to respond with violence against them. Consequently, while many people look at the crucified Jesus and see only a loser, others see the breadth and depth of God’s love. For them, therefore, the cross makes known that God is about loving, not about winning. The God of Jesus is not like the God of Rome. Jesus’ followers know God as the God who is love.

This understanding of Paul’s claim fits well with his assertion later in the letter that “love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:8) and that “faith, hope, and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love” (13:13). Furthermore, Paul’s claims in 1 Corinthians fit well with the central place given to love by other New Testament writers. The writers of the Synoptic Gospels understood Jesus to have taught that the greatest commandments are love God with all you are and love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 22:35-40; Luke 10:25-28). The writer of John understood Jesus to have said, “This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends…” (15:12-14a). The writer of 1 John famously wrote,

    Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born from God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God because God is love. In this the love of God is revealed among us, that God sent his only begotten son into the world so that we might live through him (4:8-9).

So, to the Corinthians who considered themselves superior to other believers, to a community wracked by competition and conflict, Paul wrote that the greatest of those things which are eternal is love, and that in the cross of Jesus we know God (and the depth and breadth of God’s love). Against the backdrop of the rest of the New Testament we understand that God loved us so much that God sent Jesus to live out God’s love, and Jesus’ love was so strong that he continued to love even as he was unjustly condemned precisely because he loved. The God whose children the Corinthians claimed to be was all about love. Thus the Corinthians should be as well. If they won all the arguments and triumphed in all the conflicts but did not love one another, Paul insisted, they would be nothing (paraphrasing 1 Cor. 13:1-3).

The Joint Commission on Theology and Social Concerns can think of no reason to assume that Paul would not give the same counsel to Cumberland Presbyterians when we disagree. Thus, if we win all the arguments and triumph in all our conflicts but do not love one another, Paul would tell us we are nothing. We hasten to add here that this counsel does not mean that Paul would tell us to give up our convictions or to be silent about them. Certainly no one can accuse Paul of yielding his convictions or not speaking out about them! Rather, Paul’s counsel calls us to hold to and advocate for our convictions while we love others who hold different convictions as strongly as we hold ours. But this task is not at all easy. Let us, therefore, ask Paul for some advice on how we might live out his counsel.
Having offered his theological rationale for calling Corinthian believers to unity, Paul turns his attention to conflicts which have threatened their unity such as perceived competition between himself and Apollos, lawsuits among believers, troubling sexual practices, and eating meat sacrificed to idols. As chapter 12 gets underway he is ready to address yet another area of contention among them: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters,” he begins (12:1a). In chapter 14 we will discover that some Corinthian believers were particularly impressed by the gift of speaking in tongues. In a context where some believers considered themselves spiritually superior to others, tongue speaking was likely coveted because it was “showy,” thus, proving the speaker to be very spiritual (at least in the minds of some). These believers’ efforts to show off their tongue speaking were seriously disrupting worship times. But before addressing spiritual gifts in the context of worship in chapter 14, Paul will first lay a theological foundation for understanding spiritual gifts generally. As he does so, he gives us the beloved image of the church as the “body of Christ,” an image which speaks to our concern for loving one another when we disagree.

In the first part of chapter 12 Paul focuses on the source of the gifts: there are varieties of gifts, services, and activities but the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God is the source of them all (12:4-6). After reviewing some of this variety among the gifts (12:8-10), he returns to the one source of them all: “All of these are activated by one and the same Spirit” (12:11a). His point is clear: if the Spirit is the originator, giver, and activator of all the gifts, then how can we consider the recipients of some gifts to be worthy of greater esteem than others as if they (rather than the Spirit) were responsible for them? Furthermore, how can we consider some gifts to be less needed than others?

With his point about the one true source of the gifts now made, Paul is ready in verse 12 to address differences among the gifts. If the one Spirit is the source of all the gifts, why is there such a variety among the gifts? The answer, Paul says, is because believers are the “body of Christ” (12:12-13). And the body “does not consist of one member but of many” (12:14). Paul elaborates on this point at length. Hands and feet, though very different, are both part of the body (12:15). If all the body were an eye, then how could it hear (12:17)? Heads need feet, eyes need hands (12:23). We treat some parts of the body differently than other parts (more protective of some parts, more open with other parts, 12:23-24). But all these different parts together make up one body (12:20). Indeed, the different parts are necessary in order to be a body. If everyone is a hand, we don’t have a body. We just have a bunch of hands (12:19). Consequently, the different parts need each other, which creates mutuality and interdependence among the parts (12:26). So it is with Christ, Paul says. “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (12:13).

An implication of the particular claim Paul makes in verse 13 is that difference is not limited to spiritual gifts. Here Paul mentions diversity in ethnicity (Jews or Greeks) and socio-economic class (slaves or free). In other contexts he mentions diversity in gender (Gal. 3:28), in theological perspective (Gal. 2:6-9), even in eating practices and observance of special days (Rom. 14:1-6). Clearly the early believers were quite a “motley crew.” Just as clearly Paul accepted the diversity, even appreciated it.
One implication of Paul’s teaching for our current discussion is this: diversity among us is a necessity if we would be the Body of Christ. We can—and according to Paul, we should—recognize and appreciate our differences rather than fear them or try to hide, fix, or eliminate them. For only when there is variety among us do we have the opportunity to be the body of Christ.

We can illustrate Paul’s point by reflecting on our history. If Martin Luther had not disagreed with the Catholic Church over indulgences (and other points as well), then there may not have been a badly needed Reformation of the Church (not only did Protestantism come into being, but the Catholic Church was also reformed through these events). If English Separatists had not disagreed with the idea of a state church, then freedom of religion might not be one of the treasured freedoms of the American landscape. If abolitionists had not disagreed with mainline churches over slavery, it might have taken us even longer to exorcise that demon from our midst. If Louisa Woosley had not disagreed with the Church’s position on the ordination of women, then the Cumberland Presbyterian Church might have been as slow as others to recognize that God calls whom God chooses regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or anything else that we have used to prohibit someone’s ordination. In each of these cases the Church struggled with the disagreements. No claim is made here that coping with difference is easy. But in each of these cases the Church was reformed, transformed, deepened, and enriched because of those who voiced different perspectives and those who dared to hear them rather than remove them from the community. Consequently, our differences have enabled us to come closer to being the Body of Christ than before we disagreed. Our history shows us how right Paul was on this point: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (12:12).

So, our “different members” enable us to be the Body of Christ as Paul encouraged us to be. He rarely got upset over differences. Instead, he got upset when believers who differed with one another treated one another badly. As an example, he disagreed with Corinthian believers who believed that eating meat sacrificed to idols was no big deal (1 Cor 10:18-20). But he was upset with them because they did not care that their behavior was hurtful to others (1 Cor. 8:9-13). We shouldn’t be surprised, then, that he follows the discussion of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12 with these words: “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol” (1 Cor. 13:1). And so we find ourselves right back to the significance of love in the lives of believers.

Practically Speaking

With this examination of Paul’s counsel to believers in Corinth who disagreed with each other in our minds, we can now ask ourselves, what we can learn for the times when we disagree with each other. Cumberland Presbyterians will benefit by discussing this question and seeking answers together. The Joint Commission on Theology and Social Concerns offers the following suggestions for consideration in our conversations.

Paul tells the Corinthians that we know God through the foolishness of the cross, which, in that culture, indicates that God is concerned with loving, not winning. Later in the letter he declares that love never ends and is the greatest of the things which abide forever.
Paul’s teaching is echoed throughout the New Testament. We Cumberland Presbyterians would do well to recognize anew the central and foundational importance of love in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul insists that diversity among us isn’t just inevitable; it’s also necessary if we are to be the Body of Christ (rather than a collection of hands or ears or feet). Christians in general and Cumberland Presbyterians in particular are different from one another in how we look, believe, worship, and act (and likely in other ways). When we are different, we are bound to have conflict. It’s simply going to happen. And it’s usually not much fun. Conflict isn’t, however, always a sign that something is wrong. It might indicate that we’re embracing diversity rather than avoiding it, which means we are striving to be the Body of Christ.

Finally, if we focus anew on “God is love,” and that the cross reveals God to be more concerned with loving than “winning, and if we embrace the diversity which allows us to be the body of Christ, then perhaps we’ll find ourselves able to disagree together rather than having our disagreements tear us apart. We may find that we can hold our convictions deeply, advocate for them passionately, AND love those who disagree with us at the same time. We may discover that loving is more important than winning. In so doing, we can bear a great witness to our world that we are indeed children of God whom we came to know in Christ crucified.

Joint Commission on Theology and Social Concerns
CP and CPCA Churches

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2This descriptive phrase is from Horsley and Silberman, The Message and the Kingdom, 163.
3All of 1:18-31 can be arranged in a chiasm as a number of scholars have shown. While their chiasms differ slightly, all of them have v 23a in the center. “We preach Christ crucified” is clearly the center of the passage.
A CONFESSIONAL APPROACH TO DISCRIMINATION

The introduction to the 1984 Confession of Faith states, “There is a direct relationship between the church’s confession of faith and her life and witness as a people in covenant with God and each other. The faith of the church orders and shapes the life of the people of God . . .” As part of the Presbyterian and Reformed family the Cumberland Presbyterian Church is a church based on a Confession of Faith. The Confession of Faith for Cumberland Presbyterians is not to take the place of Scripture but to give direction and guidance to our community. It exists to provide a framework upon which we, as a covenant community, can affirm our faith and have a basis upon which to bear witness to all of creation of the grace of God as it is displayed in the person of Jesus.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church formed itself around the idea that all people were free to respond to the call of the Holy Spirit and come into covenant relationship with their creator. The Cumberland Synod, meeting in 1813 set forth four points of dissention from the Westminster standards. The first point was, “There are no eternal reprobates.” By stating this dissention the founding fathers of our denomination made the bold claim that all people stood equally before God and were free to enter into relationship with God.

As we have journeyed from that original confession, our denomination has grown as a covenant community. We have wrestled with issues such as slavery and the ordination of women. The journey has not always been smooth and at times portions of the Church did not see eye to eye however up till this point the Cumberland Presbyterian Church has always come out on the side upholding the belief that there is dignity in every living creature and adjusted our practices accordingly.

Our society at the present moment once again offers our denomination a chance to affirm our faith in the light of our Confession of Faith and the scripture. We see the effects of racism and discrimination. Many of our brothers and sisters in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America have felt the effects of being profiled and suffered injustices at the hands of those in power. We also see states passing laws allowing discrimination based upon religious beliefs. We see the effects of these laws in the news on a regular basis. As a denomination who seeks to define itself based upon God’s unconditional love for all of humanity, the time is now for us to stand and confess our faith and stand against the domination system which seeks to oppress and exploit.

In this paper I propose three affirmations upon which to combat discrimination in any form. These affirmations are drawn from the 1984 Confession of Faith and the supporting scriptures. These affirmations build upon one another just as our Confession of Faith builds upon itself to tell the story of scripture. These affirmations seek to provide a position for the Church as she seeks to be a voice of witness to the love of Jesus for all people and to faithfully fulfill her calling to care for her neighbor.

THE DIGNITY OF ALL PERSONS

First and foremost the Cumberland Presbyterian Church Confession of Faith affirms the dignity of all persons as created being of God. Section 1.10 states, “God is the creator of all that is known and unknown. All creation discloses God’s glory, power, wisdom, beauty goodness, and love.” Cumberland Presbyterians believe that all that is made comes from God and that this creation is good. Throughout the first chapter of Genesis one sees the declaration that as God looked over creation it was declared good. This goodness which is inherent in all of creation on the basis that all things were made from God must be affirmed as a basis upon which we build relationships with others.
Section 1.11 states, “Among all forms of life, only human beings are created in God’s own image. In the sight of God, male and female are created equal and complementary. To reflect the divine image is to worship, love, and serve God.” Cumberland Presbyterians recognize that the human family has abused the freedom which was given to us as part of creation (Sections 2.01 and 2.02). We recognize that, “In rejecting their dependence on God and in willful disobedience, the first human parents disrupted community with God, for which they had been created. They became inclined toward sin in all aspects of their being.” (Section 2.03) We also confess in section 2.04 that “this condition becomes the source of all sinful attitudes and actions.” Cumberland Presbyterians understand and affirm the existence of sin but we do not affirm that this sin takes away a person’s humanity. Sin may de-face the image of God but it does not erase it. The church’s call is to help people to understand that in Christ this broken relationship has been reconciled and that there is healing for the broken image of God in all of us. However we, as the covenant community, can only effectively accomplish this mission if we recognize that God’s image exists in all people regardless of who they are or what their station in life is. The image of God is inherent in persons due to their status as created beings of God.

As Cumberland Presbyterians affirm the dignity of all persons then we will begin to see that the discrimination of any person for any reason is not only wrong but is a sin against the God in whose image that person was created. Understanding and affirming the image of God in all persons also helps to understand our belief in the all-encompassing care that God provides to creation.

THE EXTENT OF GOD’S PROVIDENTIAL CARE

In recognizing that all persons are created in the image of God we also understand, as section 1.12 states, that “the natural world is God’s. Its resources, beauty, and order are given in trust to all peoples, to care for, to conserve, to enjoy, to use for the welfare of all, and thereby to glorify God.” God’s creation was given to humanity for the use of humanity. Creation is not meant to be hoarded or accumulated for the use and benefit of only a few but the resources we have are to be used for the benefit of all. We must always advocate for the fair and equal distribution of resources for the benefit of those who do not have access to them.

This understanding of the proper use of creation and resources is mirrored in God’s own providential care to creation. Section 1.13 states, “God exercises providential care over all creatures, peoples, nations, and things. The manner in which this care is provided is revealed in the scriptures.” Matthew 5:45 which is used as a supporting scripture reference for section 1.13 states, “For God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” God’s providence does not extend to a small few but to all of creation just as the benefits of the resources of creation also are to be used for the welfare of all.

This providence is for the purpose of setting creation free from its bondage to sin and death, and seeing it renewed in Jesus Christ (Section 1.15). Section 1.16 states, “God never leaves or forsakes [God’s] people. All who trust God find this truth confirmed in awareness of [God’s] love, which includes judgment upon sin, and which leads to repentance and to greater dependence upon divine grace. All who do not trust God are, nevertheless, under that same providence, even when they ignore or reject it. It is designed to lead them also to repentance and to trust in divine grace.” This is an important confession for the church. This statement recognizes that God is present to all of creation and for the very same purpose. All of creation receives the benefit of God’s continual and constant presence guiding and drawing all persons to trust in divine grace. This benefit is afforded to those who trust God and those who don’t. God’s providence is given due to God’s unconditional grace and God’s love for all of creation.

As we begin to affirm that God’s providence extends to all people we begin to recognize our role in ensuring that resources are afforded to all persons and we do our best to advocate that this is done equally and justly. We begin to recognize that God is present even to those who do not recognize it and if God is present to them then so must we be. As we affirm God’s all-encompassing providence then we also recognize any attempt to discriminate or withhold resources from another person is a sin. We are to
care and serve all persons equally as created beings of God as each and every one is cared for by their creator.

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH’S MISSION

We understand our mission as the church is “…to witness to all persons who have not received Christ as Lord and Savior” (Section 5.28). This however means much more than conversions and professions of faith. “The church is called into being and exists to reach out to those who have not experienced God’s grace in Christ and to nourish them with all the means of grace.” (Section 5.29). Having affirmed both the dignity of each individual and the extent to which God cares for all of creation, it is assumed that the nature of our mission, as the church, is to reach beyond the boundaries of our congregation and care for all of creation. What does this witness and nourishment look like in a society dealing with issues such as rampant discrimination and legalized marginalization?

Our confessional standards provide us direction in what this means in response to these challenges that we see in our present society. Section 6.30 states, “The covenant community, governed by the Lord Christ, opposes, resists, and seeks to change all circumstances of oppression—political, economic, cultural, racial—by which persons are denied the essential dignity God intends for them in the work of creation.” This statement of faith is the natural and logical outgrowth of the basic affirmation from our Confession as stated above. If all people are created in the image of God and if all people receive the benefit of God’s providential care then as God’s people we are to bear witness to these truths through our own actions as the covenant community.

Our work within society is spelled out even further in section 6.31. It states, “The covenant community affirms the lordship of Christ who sought out the poor, the oppressed, the sick and the helpless. In her corporate life and through her individual members, the church is an advocate for all victims of violence and all those who the law or society treats as less than persons for whom Christ died.” We as the church recognize the mission of Christ to those that society had deemed unworthy. Therefore since we are Christ’s body, we are called to continue that work. The confession calls us as the church to advocate for those marginalized and abused members of society. We as the church are their voice. We are the ones who come alongside of them just as Christ came along side us. We are Christ to them and, as their advocates, serve a prophetic role to our society.

Our confession, however, does not stop there. Section 6.31 continues by stating, “Such advocacy involves not only opposition to all unjust laws and forms of injustice but even more support for those attitudes and actions which embody the way of Christ, which is to overcome evil with good.” Our calling goes beyond merely opposing systems of injustice. We are called to support those attitudes which seek to witness to the way of Jesus. We are called to support vehicles of change. We must be involved in our community seeking ways to do good. This is a call to action. It is a call to not just be vocal but to be active. It is a call to actually do something as the church on behalf of those in society who are unable to do something on their own. Our mission as the church is not to just issue altar calls but to oppose any and all forms of injustice and seek to build a society based on the just and equitable treatment of all God’s creation. This is a society that is based upon the basic assumptions that everyone has dignity due to their status as creatures of God and that everyone is under the parental care of God.

We have been known as a church who avoids political situations. We maintained our unity during the Civil War by refusing to recognize the validity of abolitionists or their pro-slavery counterparts. During the civil rights era our church attempted to distance ourselves from those advocating for desegregation by refusing to recognize those engaging in civil disobedience. Our church has always taken the safe way of approving what was done in the past on our behalf rather than support and promoting it at the present time. If we are to be true to our confessional standards, then we must not be quiet any longer. We must address systems of oppression, injustice, and discrimination now. We cannot let another generation pass before we speak to these issues.
CONCLUSION

“God gives the message and ministry of reconciliation to the church. The church corporately and through her individual members, seeks to promote reconciliation, love and justice among all persons, classes, races, and nations.” (Section 6.32) This section of our confession reminds us of our mission and our calling to ministry that we have received in Christ as Christ’s church. It is an all-encompassing mission founded upon our foundational principles. All people have inherent dignity due to them being a creation of God. All people are under the providential care of this creator God. We, as God’s people, are called to uphold these truths in a society that all too quickly forgets this. In the beginning we advocated a gospel of “Whosoever Wills.” We still do, but the way that we bear witness to this gospel must change as we are faced with new frontier challenges.

Study Questions

Based upon an understanding of all people being created in God’s image how do we uphold the dignity of individuals?

How do we exercise stewardship in a way that honors the universal nature of God’s providential care?

Where are areas in society where you can see the unjust treatment of others? How can the church serve as witness to the dignity of all living persons in these areas?

What are ways that we engage in the ministry of reconciliation within our particular churches, presbyteries, and synods?

How do our churches maintain our commitment to the “whosoever will” gospel and our belief that there are “no eternal reprobates”?

Do we, as a church, still avoid political situations? Is this an appropriate response in light of our confessional directives?
HOMELESSNESS AS A JUSTICE ISSUE-A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE

Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Luke 9:58

Three days a week they come to Manna House, located near downtown Memphis. They come in ragged clothes, worn out shoes, the few belongings they have stuffed into backpacks. They come by themselves or in clusters of two or three. They come by foot or by bicycle. They come for a shower, a change of clothes, a bag containing socks and hygiene items. And coffee. Lots of coffee. They come to get off the streets for a while, to relax on the couches and stuffed chairs, or in the shady backyard to play checkers, chess, or Scrabble. Manna House is a place of hospitality for folks who are poor, unsheltered, and who need somewhere to stay for a few hours without anyone telling them to “move on.”

Another way Manna House offers hospitality to guests is through listening acceptance. Every person who comes has a story to share. The stories are about how they spent the night, an illness, about some hurt they are carrying around, or about a concern for another guest. Quite often the stories are about how they came to a place in their lives where they no longer have a permanent place to live.

Each story about how people land in a situation where they no longer have a shelter that they can call home is a bit different but many have common roots. For some it was the loss of a job, then the savings were used up and then there was no money to pay the rent. Many are unable to work due to physical limitations, quite often as a result from an injury at the place of employment. Many deal with addictions, mental health issues, or personality disorders that are untreated and leave them unable to concentrate or to be around other people in close quarters for more than a short time. Some have returned from wars and have been wounded, experience Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, or are otherwise scarred so that functioning in a so-called “normal” society has become extremely difficult. The stories that are told in the most halting and hushed tones are the ones told of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse as a child.

It’s impossible to accurately count the number of homeless people in America because they are so hard to locate. A report, “The State of Homelessness in America 2015” published by the National Alliance to End Homelessness counts over 578,000 adults as being without shelter. This report, however, does not count children. The National Center on Family Homelessness documents more than 2.5 million children who are living in what the U. S. Department of Education defines “the lack of a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence.” The Department documents that more than 1.2 million of these are students who sleep in cars, parks, and motels. An estimated 900,000 are in situations called “doubling up”. They reside with relatives or friends.

Children who grow up in foster care are much more likely to experience homelessness later in life. As they reach age 18 many are moved out of the system with few life skills that enable them to survive without the support of a family to encourage them. They are more likely than children reared in traditional families to engage in substance abuse, drop out of school, become incarcerated, and thus find themselves on the streets with few employment prospects and no place to go, and little trust in social systems to which they can turn. (National Alliance to End Homelessness)

According to a 2014 series of articles in the USA Today entitled The Cost of Not Caring, an estimated one-fifth of the people who live on the streets are suffering from some form of mental illness. Schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, or severe depression can all be managed with the right medication and counseling, but when the medicine runs out and there is no support or care given, then these disorders are left untreated and the struggles progress. Those who are without medicine or have no caregiver can quickly wind up living on the streets. They are often prone to public psychotic outbursts. The police, who have minimum training in dealing with the mentally ill, are called and the offender is usually jailed. Eventually, sometimes weeks or months, the charges are dropped and the person is released to go back on the streets and the cycle repeats itself.
The National Coalition on the Homeless estimates that as many as fifty per cent of people who are homeless have substance abuse problems. Addictions can be both a cause and a result of being homeless. Those who are addicted to drugs or alcohol can quickly spiral downward, losing employment, the support of families and friends, and then housing. There is often a connection between mental illness and substance abuse. These people are sometimes not eligible for public housing because of failed drug tests. Access to rehabilitation centers frequently is not an option because of the very nature of addiction. People who are addicted are very successful at convincing themselves that they are not addicted. If one does enter a recovery program the lack of a permanent place to live decreases the likelihood of the success of the treatment.

Another group with an elevated risk of homelessness are those who have been discharged from prison with no place to go (endhomelessness.org/file/4365_file_The_Demographics_of_Homelessness). Sometimes there are situations that occur while the person was incarcerated that have led to the breakup of the person’s family: divorce, illness, and any factor that causes families to become alienated. So a person is released from jail or prison and no longer has a home or a permanent address. Jobs are hard to come by for someone who as a criminal record, especially if there is not an address to list on a job application.

For LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) people the challenges of living on the street are greatly increased. They have endured the pain of being rejected by their families. LGBTs must face the social stigma of being whom they are which adds to the emotional and mental challenges of life on the streets. Not only is finding employment difficult, they very often are rejected by shelters that neither accept nor respect them as people. They are at a heightened risk of being victims of violence, theft, substance abuse, rape, and engaging in survival sex (prostitution). (nationalhomeless.org/issues/lgbt)

The Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress and the 2015 State of Homelessness in America both state that on any given night there are 50,000 veterans who have no place to call home. Service members who have served their country in a time of war come back to America to find that while their country supported the troops while they were in the military, there is a dearth of support when they are discharged. Contributing factors are a lack of income due to limited education and a lack of transferable skills, combat related physical and mental health issues and disabilities, substance abuse, and weak social networks due to problems adjusting to civilian life. The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans reports that the number of female veterans has increased by 242 per cent between the years 2005 to 2014. Forty per cent of female veterans who are getting assistance have children.

Divorce as a cause for homelessness is another factor that is difficult to document because it is so interrelated to all the other factors. The loss of a combined income, of a support system along with legal fees, health issues, and lack of a job all send people into a way of living that they had not planned on. (endhomelessness.org)

Despite our conventional perception that people who live on the streets are there because of bad choices or sinful living, homelessness can also occur when there is no family dysfunction, no divorce, no substance abuse, or cataclysmic event. There can be a series of unanticipated expenses that lead to loss of a home. Bills cannot be paid. Overdue notices arrive. Credit is denied or unattainable and eviction eventually results.

“The poor have it hard and the hardest thing they have is us.” Daniel Berrigan

Once the permanent address disappears the journey back to self-sustainability is difficult and the barriers often become insurmountable. The practice of payday lending heaps debt on people with no viable option for repayment. The monthly notes quickly become more than what borrowers spend on food. Grocery shopping itself becomes difficult, as folks do not have the means to buy in bulk. Without the use of an automobile transportation becomes an added expense. Cabs and bus fares eliminate trips to the supermarket so shopping at the high priced convenience stores consume more of the income. Public transit to a welfare office can turn that visit into an all day wait which means having to take time off from a job in which they can easily be replaced.

In the United States laws are being passed that criminalize poverty. New York City has recently passed an ordinance that forbids sleeping on subway trains (The New York Post, Feb. 3, 2016).”Despite
the fact that communities all over the country lack adequate affordable housing and shelter space, cities are continuing to penalize people forced to live on our streets and in our public spaces. Criminalization measures often prohibit activities such as sleeping/camping, eating, sitting, and/or begging in public spaces and include criminal penalties for violations of these laws. Some cities have enacted restrictions that punish groups and individuals for serving food to homeless people. Many of these measures appear to be designed to move homeless persons out of sight, or even out of a given city.”  How America Punishes Its Poor (TalkPoverty.org. by Rebecca Vallas).

Just before the 2016 Super Bowl the city of San Francisco forced people who had been living on the streets in an area that would host several events leading up to the game to leave. Those people were taken to shelters that were already overcrowded. The events for which they were removed were events that were free to the public, but evidently, not to the sector of the public who are unhoused (Christian Science Monitor, February 4, 2016).

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness”, Genesis 1:26

In all the demographic groups and all the factors that contribute to people being without homes there are several threads that intertwine but the most common reason is a breakdown of relationships: relationships between families, friends, support networks, government. The most damaging, saddest, and for Christians, the most telling broken relationship is the one between unsheltered people and the church. Over the decades as the rate of homelessness has increased, mainstream denominations have largely ignored what should be a major concern of Christianity: ministering to those in need.

In the first chapter of Genesis we are told that persons are created in the very image of God and are given the responsibility to be stewards of creation. Being created in God’s image assures that each person is valuable and full of dignity. Given that we are all that important to God we must treat all persons with the same respect.

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amos 5:24

God creates and sustains the creation and part of that sustainability is the calling God issues for justice. “For I the Lord love justice (Is. 61:4) “For the Lord loves justice (Psalm 37:28). The Lord, “who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing.” (Deut. 10:18).

God’s concern for oppressed people is addressed throughout the scriptures. Exodus 3:7-8 speaks of how God hates oppression and will act in history to relieve suffering. In Amos 2:7 God tells of how mistreating the poor and afflicted profanes God’s name. Similarly, we are told that when we address the problems of the poor, we are helping God (Proverbs 19:17) and when we do not we show contempt for God (Proverbs 14:31).

The justice of God of which Amos writes is unequivocally addressed to the relationship of those who are oppressed by those who rule over them. “Thus says the Lord God: “Enough, O Princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression, and do what is just and right. Cease your evictions of my people, say the Lord God” (Ezekiel 45:9).

According to the prophets not only does God call for all people to be treated justly, God will move against peoples and nations that refuse to do so. Amos and Isaiah warned that God would be so outraged because of unfair economic practices and idolatry that Israel and Judah would be destroyed and taken into captivity (Amos 2:7, 5:11, Is 10:1-4). People and societies that build wealth by oppressing the poor are not living compatibly with the will of God.

Perhaps the strongest and plainest instruction humans are given regarding how other humans are to be treated comes from Micah 6:8. “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?”

Doing justice does not mean merely helping the poor cope with their problems, but removing the injustice that oppressed them. To “love kindness” is to show compassion for all of God’s children and people who live on the bottom rungs of society; the homeless and hungry are the most deserving of our kindness. To walk humbly with our God calls for us to journey with God into the places where God goes no matter if those places are among people who are on the margins of society and not generally accepted
by society. We are called to humbly follow God’s commands for us to minister to those who are, as Pete Gathje, co-director of Manna House writes “on the margins of the marginalized.” (Manna House blog). Isaiah 9 and 11 speak of the promise of a Messiah who will bring righteousness and justice for all.

*Just as you did it to one of the least of these, who are members of my family, you did it to me.* Matthew 25:40

For Christians the plight of the poor and homeless becomes a justice issue. Our theological response to this injustice must be to offer love. (I Corinthians 13). The love we are called to share is manifested in hospitality and work to relieve the oppression of the poor.

Christian hospitality is centered in the life and presence of Jesus Christ. Jesus, in Matthew 5:17 said to the crowds gathered on the mountain that he had come to fulfill what the prophets foretold. Throughout the gospels Jesus moves from one group to another teaching that building the kingdom means reaching out to those who society has labeled as the outcasts. He heals the sick, cures the lame, feeds the hungry, and dines with sinners. In Luke 10:25-37 instruction is given on how we are to respond to those who have been cast aside. Echoing the prophets, Matthew 11:20-24 speaks to the woes that will befall unrepentant cities

Jesus goes to great detail in laying out what needs to be done in order to inherit the kingdom (Matthew 25:31-46). He identifies what non-actions will eliminate people from the kingdom and then proclaims that committing those very acts are the requirements for enjoying life in the kingdom.

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith, but do not works?* James 2:14

In 2010 the Iona Fellowship, a Cumberland Presbyterian community of faith in midtown Memphis, Tennessee, established a “Burrito Ministry”. Working out of the First United Methodist Church in downtown, a group of volunteers gathers every Tuesday to cook and assemble 160 burritos. After a prayer of gratitude for being called to serve, the group moves outside to an area beside the church where guests have assembled. Each guest is greeted with unqualified love and acceptance. Each one receives a bag with two burritos, a bottle of water, and some cookies. Donated clothing is handed out and during the cold weather months. Blankets, hats, scarves, gloves, shoes, and hand warmers are made available. The only action required of the guests is that they show up. The Burrito Ministry began on October 5, 2010 and has never missed a Tuesday. According to co-director Reverend Barry Anderson, through February of 2016 the Burrito Ministry has handed out over 42,000 burritos to those whom Jesus calls his brothers and sisters.

An outgrowth of the Burrito Ministry has been the Nashville Burrito Ministry, begun in 2013. A varying number of churches participate several of which are Cumberland Presbyterian.

The Urban Bicycle Food Ministry of Memphis (UBFM) also has its roots in the Burrito Ministry. Developed by a Cumberland Presbyterian minister, Reverend Tommy Clark, in 2012, the goal of UBFM is “to fulfill the gospel on two wheels”. Twice a week this group gathers to make burritos and then heads out on bicycles to meet the hungry where they are, and to engage people more intimately.

Room in the Inn Ministry began in a single church in Nashville in 1986 in response to the plight of unsheltered people shivering through cold winter nights. The concept is simple: offer a warm, safe place to spend the night, a bed, a hot meal, a shower, a change of clothes, a light breakfast, and friendly conversation. The guiding principle for Room in the Inn is the principle of respect for all people. There are now close to 200 churches in the Nashville area, including several Cumberland Presbyterian churches that are involved in this ministry to homeless people.

In 2011 Colonial Cumberland Presbyterian Church brought the Room in the Inn concept to Memphis. What began in one church has now spread to 23 churches in the Memphis area, including five Cumberland Presbyterian churches that welcome strangers in for food, warmth, and shelter. Guests are picked up at a designated area and taken to a church. Each church hosts 10-12 guests. This means that on every night of the week during the cold weather months (November 1 through March 31) shelter and a warm bed is provided for folks who live on the street. Not every church who participated in RITI has adequate facilities to host a group, so they travel to Colonial or other churches and serve as hosts for that night; providing the meal and fellowship. Any of these ministries can easily be developed in any town with proper planning and training.
Another common perception of homelessness is that it is unique to large cities. Certainly unsheltered people are more visible in the cities but homelessness is also pervasive in rural areas. An estimated 9 per cent of unsheltered people live in small towns. The causes for not having adequate shelter in rural areas is the same as that the cities: lack of affordable housing and inadequate income being the chief reasons, but all the factors that contribute to having no permanent address are at work in the small towns as well. Compounding the problem in rural areas is the lack of any support services. People will relocate to the cities where services are more accessible.

Having a smaller number of those to minister to does not prevent small town or rural congregations from providing ministries to people in need. Most counties have some sort of food bank (Community Food Banks) to which many churches contribute. An avenue that churches in closer proximity to urban areas use to help is to partner with ministries already in action. The West Union Cumberland Presbyterian Church now offers its building as a Room in the Inn ministry allowing the unsheltered people in an urban area to have “that country church” experience. The Hopewell Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Benton County, Mississippi has a “blanket party” every November right before Thanksgiving. Layers of fleece are purchased then stitched and knotted together to form a blanket that is big enough for an adult to wrap up in and be protected from the cold wind. The blankets are taken to Memphis where they are distributed to the guests at the Burrito Ministry or at Room in the Inn.

In Newbern, Tennessee the Cumberland Presbyterian Church busies itself stocking a clothes closet which provides clothing to people whose clothes are too tattered, too dirty, the wrong size, and too uncomfortable to continue wearing. The church provides a stock of healthy food staples for people whose pay is too low to purchase enough food to last till the next payday. The food pantry is open three Thursdays per month. Because of funding, the sharing is limited to one distribution per family per month. In this way the congregation is allowed to spend time that allows for conversation. Conversation allows for relationships and relationships build trust. As the trust builds guests begin to speak of others they know who are in need but who may be physically unable to come or who may have special needs and do not know how to sign up for assistance.

For Pastor Steve Rogers offering clothing and food has unveiled other needs. Rogers has learned that there are unsheltered people, including children in Newbern but they are not generally known about. They are able to “double up”, living with other family members or friends. The church is continuing to search for creative ways to minister to poor and unsheltered people in area where resources for that problem are severely lacking.

Project Vida, located in El Paso, Texas is a joint partnership between the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and PCUSA denominations and is supported by Presbytery del Cristo (Cumberland Presbyterian Church). Located in the center of El Paso in one of the nation’s most impoverished neighborhoods, the programs have been based on dialogue with the community to proactively address needs to include homelessness, housing, health clinics/education/wellness and education.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for the poor. The scriptures of the Bible continually call us out for being complicit with those who possess all the power and wealth and abandoning the people that God loves and cares about the most. As Christians who believe in the words of the Bible we are called to address the injustice and oppression in our society. We do this by participating in our ministries to those who live in need. We also do this by petitioning our governments; local, state, and national, to discontinue policies that place heavy burdens on the poor among us. We can address our elected leaders and the leaders of our communities and most of all, the leaders of our churches and call for them to engage the homeless on a more personal basis, to be in relationship with them, to listen to them, to hear their stories. When we come to truly know those who are oppressed, then we can begin to understand God’s outrage at injustice.
STUDY QUESTIONS

What good works am I (or my church) doing to care for the homeless and the poor?
What are some things I can do to get involved?
  Determine community needs.
  Involve others who are also concerned.
  Join homeless coalitions.
  Donate time, food, clothing or money,
  Contact local elected officials.

My church is small and we don’t have a lot of money. How can we do something and make a difference?

Share examples of what you, your church or community is doing to address homelessness and care for the poor. Send your examples to any member of the Unified Committee for Theology and Social Concerns. Member names and contact info can be found on the USTSC webpage.
A Question of Hermeneutics

The Christian community today is divided over many issues, despite persistent claims of “unity in Christ.” Apart from the obvious doctrinal distinctions between denominations and traditions, a basic rift historically has been between “liberals” and “conservatives,” with all sorts of gradations in between. The differences are theological, ecclesiastical, political and social. Yet the lines of demarcation are more fluid than is often realized, changing in relation to the topics under consideration. For example, though many conservative Protestants hardly regard the Catholic Church as Christian (and vice versa), the two might come together on attitudes about Roe v. Wade, or the ordination of women. Though liberal Protestants generally differ with the Catholic Church’s official position on abortion and birth control, many applauded Pope Francis’ comments on immigration, advocacy for the poor, and climate change in his recent visit to the United States. Liberal Christians, typically open to advocating for justice in the public sector, are suspicious of right wing Christians who display a political agenda. Yet both sides claim to believe in the separation of church and state, rejecting any notion that the state should have a regulatory role in church’s life. Practically all Christian groups proclaim the Bible to be the Word of God. However, they diverge significantly when it comes to the interpretation and application of that sacred text. It is the thesis of this essay that attitudes toward Scripture are at the root of many divisions in the Christian community.

How is the Bible the Word of God? And then, how should it be determinative for contemporary life? These are questions of hermeneutics, a term used so speak of the principles of interpretation of Scripture, as well as other ancient literature. Hermeneutics is like a “lens” through which Scripture is viewed. Inevitably the Bible reader is confronted with the challenge of bridging from the original sense and cultural context of the biblical text to our contemporary life, with application of biblical truth to today’s culture and circumstances. Some scholars refer to the “three worlds of the text,” meaning (a) the world behind the text, its background; (b) the world of the text, its situation in history and geography, along with its literary characteristics, such as poetry or narrative; and (c) the world before or in front of the text, that is, the contemporary situation of today’s readers. Because we affirm the Bible as the Word of God, we consider not only what is said to the original hearers but also what the text is saying to us. Though our attention often is directed at interpreting Scripture, the issue also is how Scripture interprets us! Sermons, Bible studies, presentations of Christian teaching and doctrine are exercises in hermeneutics. The serious Bible student engages in what might be called “creative listening” to the text, that is, seeking to discern the sort of material a particular passage is (such as poetry, prophecy, parable, history, narrative, exhortation, instruction, etc.) and what it may have meant to its original audience, then asking how God is speaking through that passage to our situation today.

There are those who adhere to a dogma of “the verbal plenary inerrancy of Scripture,” by which they mean every word of the Bible is absolutely true and unassailable, with the caveat that this is the case in the original texts – none of which are extant today. The principle of inerrancy affirms that God is speaking through the Bible, but it scarcely takes note of the fact that it was written by human hands over many centuries. Further, Scripture has been copied, translated and published innumerable times, always involving human agency.

On the other end of the theological spectrum there are those who regard the Bible as little more than “helpful hints” for living. Scripture, they feel, is ancient and therefore has practically no bearing on contemporary life. They may appreciate the Golden Rule or some other biblical
dictum that fits their own personal perspective, but to regard Scripture as determinative for their attitudes and decisions seems absurd. They adhere to the oft-repeated belief that ‘you can justify almost anything on the basis of Scripture’ as a means of dismissing the authority of the Bible. They note that the Crusades, the Inquisition, pogroms, slavery, racial and gender discrimination, papal infallibility, paternalism, divine right of kings and antagonism toward scientific discovery have all been supported by appeals to Scripture.

Somewhere in between these two extremes reside most of us. As part of the Presbyterian and Reformed family of Churches that traditionally takes a high view of Scripture, Cumberland Presbyterians revere the Bible as the Word of God. Nevertheless, we do not always look first to Scripture for guidance on matters of politics, business or life choices. Our worship services typically include multiple presentations and references to Scripture. Calls to worship, offertory sentences, responsive readings and benedictions are scriptural, and a sermon without biblical foundation is no sermon at all, we believe. Further, many congregations offer small group Bible studies, Sunday school lessons based on Scripture, seasonal biblical curricula for the Christian Year, and more. Our members and ministers utilize the wide range of Bible translations available today, along with study helps, commentaries and devotional literature. Even so, devout church folks too often neglect the study of Scripture and may express a sense of inadequacy and unfamiliarity with the content of the Bible.

The Confession of Faith for Cumberland Presbyterians affirms Scripture to be “the infallible rule of faith and practice, the authoritative guide for Christian living,” [COF 1.05]. The first question posed for the ordination of ministers, elders and deacons is: “Do you believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired word of God, the authority for faith and practice?” [Constitution 2.92, 6.36] The Directory for Worship suggests a form for public profession of faith and church covenant which includes a similar question of the new member: “Do you believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired word of God, the source of authority for faith and practice, and will you read and study them for guidance in living the Christian life?” [DFW, emphasis added] The Confession also offers comments about the proper interpretation of Scripture, a hermeneutic. “In order to understand God’s word spoken through the scriptures, persons must have the illumination of God’s own Spirit. Moreover, they should study the writings of the Bible in their historical settings, compare scripture with scripture, listen to the witness of the church throughout the centuries, and share insights with others in the covenant community.” [COF 1.07] We do not have an ‘anything goes’ hermeneutic! Our Confession, firmly based on the Bible, is our standard of doctrine and interpretation. Note what this statement does not affirm: that God wrote or dictated the scriptures; that the scriptures are viewed as “inerrant,” rather as “infallible” in matters of faith and practice. Instead of a rigid “bibliolatry,” the scriptures are considered to be the “authoritative guide.” It may seem to be splitting hairs to differentiate between “infallible” and “inerrant,” but there is in fact an important distinction between the two. The latter case often comes across as God literally dictating the Scripture – much like the views of adherents to the Koran or the Book of Mormon. But our Confession understands the matter differently. God speaks through the Bible, but does so by using the language, customs, culture, and (yes) weaknesses of human beings. Further, the doctrine of inspiration of the Holy Spirit we espouse includes not only the centuries-long process of writing the Scriptures, but also the canonization process, and the continuing work of interpretation and application of biblical truth from generation to generation. In this connection we can allow for a reasonable distinction between the ‘letter’ and the ‘spirit’ of many Scripture
texts, taking seriously the original context of the writing and today’s situation in mission and service.

While it is unlikely that differences between denominations in approach to Scripture will be overcome, perhaps it is not quite as unrealistic to work toward a common understanding of biblical interpretation within our own Churches. This has practical implications for our attitudes toward one another in small group Bible discussions, Sunday school classes, responses to messages from the pulpit and so on. At a time when unification between our two sister denominations is under prayerful consideration, let us make the conscious effort to remove any impediment to our unity that has biblical interpretation as a basis. We acknowledge that within both Cumberland Presbyterian denominations there is a wide range of biblical understanding and interpretation. With that said, we should resolve – first and foremost – to love one another, and as an expression of that love to listen to each other, affirming the even greater common ground we enjoy and embrace as Cumberland Presbyterians. Our goal need not be one hundred percent agreement on biblical interpretation, but rather a mature awareness and consideration of the diversity of theological perspectives that a global and multi-ethnic denomination manifests.

We believe Scripture to be the written Word of God. At the same time we affirm that Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, is the Word of God Incarnate, so that Scripture “should be understood in light of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.” [COF 1.06]. This suggests our reading of Scripture is Christocentric. Yet we readily understand that, for example, passages such as the Suffering Servant prophecies in Isaiah had an original meaning and impact that was not focused on Jesus Christ, though we in our reading and proclamation of those texts find him there. We believe further that God’s Word is also spoken – through creation, through prophets and apostles, and the proclamation and witness of the church. It is remembered that much of Scripture existed as oral tradition before being written. The conviction of inspiration by the Holy Spirit, necessary for understanding of Scripture, is an important component of our hermeneutic, so that the role of the individual believer as well as the corporate community of faith is taken seriously. In other words, we believe the Word of God is still speaking today!

What if we added a “missional” calibration to our hermeneutic lens? The word “missional” has come to mean the recognition that God’s mission, revealed in Scripture and supremely in Jesus Christ, is the only legitimate purpose of the church in the world. In fact the church is God’s strategy for mission in the world. We are a “sent” people -- sent to proclaim and demonstrate, teach and learn, the gospel of Christ in a world of spiritual, physical, emotional, economic, political need. It is sometimes not recognized that the Bible is a book about mission from beginning to end, that it was written by missionaries for missionaries [Kirk, p. 20]! This is a way of saying that Scripture points God’s faithful people outward to share (and seek to live out) God’s gracious Good News in a world overburdened with bad news. Scripture was written from faith for faith, indeed to inspire others to faith. It was written from within a specific culture and history, yet it has trans-cultural and timeless implications as God’s Word for all. Our Church’s forbearers were missional in their desire to spread the gospel across a vast frontier. The frontier of the 21st century beckons us to a reading, proclaiming and demonstrating of the biblical message that is missional for the time in which God has granted us to serve.

One of the strengths of the Cumberland Presbyterian Churches, again, is the wide latitude with regard to biblical understanding, worship style, approaches to ministry and mission. What needs greater cultivation, perhaps, is an appreciation of varying opinions. It would be helpful to lay aside the labels intended to diminish the faithfulness and motives of our brothers
and sisters in Christ – conservative and liberal, evangelical and traditional, right and left wing, along with the “isms” and “phobias” in currency today. If we agree that our calling is to serve God’s mission in the world, then a healthy dialog about strategies, ideologies, and emphases is more attainable, and genuine unity in Christ can grow.

WORKS CITED

FOR REFLECTION
1. What governing principles should characterize our use of Scripture?
2. Many Christians take some portions of Scripture literally, but not all. How is this difference in determination made?
3. Study Bibles and commentaries are helpful tools for biblical understanding. Does our church library include some of these?
   Suggested Resources:
   - Bible Dictionary
   - Harper Study Bible
   - Interpreter’s Bible Commentary Series
   - Interpretation Bible Commentary Series
4. If a small group were to devise a “Bill of Rights” for biblical discussion and attitudes toward differing viewpoints, what would that look like?
5. What role does prayer play in the ongoing work of biblical interpretation?

This Study Paper was submitted by the Unified Committee on Theology and Social Concerns and Adopted by the CPCA and CPC General Assembly Meetings in 2017.
IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING “ELDER ABUSE” - (A Social Response)

What is Elder Abuse?

The Administration on Aging (AoA) has reported that each year hundreds of thousands of older persons are abused, neglected, and exploited. Many victims are people who are older, frail, and vulnerable and cannot help themselves. They depend on others to meet their most basic needs. Abusers of older adults are both women and men, and may be family members, friends, or “trusted others.”

In general, elder abuse is a term referring to any knowing, intentional, or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to a vulnerable adult. Abuse can come in many forms: Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation, Emotional Abuse, Abandonment, and Self-neglect.

Physical Abuse: hitting, punching, slapping, burning, kicking, restraining, false imprisonment, giving excessive or improper medication;

Sexual Abuse: forcing a person to take part in any sexual conduct without consent, including making them participate in sexual conversation, forced to watch pornography; may also include cases where elder is no longer able to give consent (dementia);

Neglect: Depriving a person of food, heat, clothing, comfort or essential medication and needed services; deprivation –may be intentional - considered (active neglect); or, it could happen out of lack of knowledge or resources which is then considered (passive neglect);

Exploitation: warning signs -significant withdrawals from the elder's banking accounts; sudden changes in the elder's financial condition; items or cash missing from the senior's household; suspicious changes in wills, power of attorney, titles, and policies; addition of names to the senior's signature card; unpaid bills or lack of medical care, although the elder has enough money to pay for them; financial activity the senior could not have done, such as an ATM withdrawal when the account holder is bedridden;

Emotional Abuse: This is a verbal or nonverbal act that inflicts emotional pain, anguish, or distress on an older adult. Emotional elder abuse is almost always accompanied by another form of abuse, such as physical abuse. Emotional abuse of the elderly can range from a simple verbal insult to an extreme form of verbal punishment;

Abandonment: - Deserting a dependent elderly person with the intent to abandon them or leave them unattended at a place for even a while which is likely to endanger their health or welfare;

Self-neglect: warning signs-unusual weight loss, malnutrition, dehydration, unsanitary living conditions: dirt, bugs, soiled bedding and clothes, dirty or unbathed, unsuitable clothing or covering for the weather, unsafe living conditions (no heat or running water; faulty electrical wiring, other fire hazards).

Addressing Elderly in the Home

All seniors are reluctant to leave their homes, as you and I would be; for no one wants to give up their independence. Seniors are the last to admit to no longer being self-sufficient or able to take care of themselves properly.

The line between capable and dependent is often blurred, and it is often difficult to notice the signs when a senior is no longer capable of living alone. The fact is, while most independent
seniors are perfectly capable of caring for themselves, others may not be aware of their declining faculties, such as weight loss (forgetting to eat); messy finances (stacks of unpaid bills); suspicious new friends who hang around. While this can be a harmless and a beneficial relationship, it can also indicate the beginnings of a confidence scam.

**Addressing Pastoral Peace to the Family**

Pastoral peace can be provided if pastors and leaders are more educated on the topic of Elder Abuse. This would help to properly address issues with families where an elderly person might reside; or, how or what signs to look for in single elderly households.

2.63 of the Confession of Faith addresses the responsibilities for the pastors. The current responsibilities (g) and (j) below would work in conjunction with proper understanding of the subject title whereas it could be incorporated into discussion.

2.63(g) states: visit the people, especially the poor, the sick, the dying, and those with other critical needs. *(Elderly is a stage of people. Because the word elderly is not categorically mentioned in the list, it would be difficult to recognize the need for attention in this areas).*

2.63(j) states: counsel with people, in light of the scriptures, about their personal needs and problems… *(one would need more understanding of the subject to incorporate it into discussion).*

2.72 states: elders should inform the pastor of any concerns that need his or her attention.

(This concern must be recognized first whereas it can be shared with the pastor).

Under Introduction to the 1984 Confession of Faith, Page XV, Paragraph 3 states: The ancient truth which guides this confession of faith is of two sources: (1) the scriptures; and (2) the previous confessions of both Cumberland Presbyterian churches and the previous confessions of the church in its universal expression. All testimony to Jesus Christ must be tested by the scriptures which are the only unfailing and authoritative word for Christian faith, growth, and practice. All testimony to Jesus Christ is made within the context of the church universal and therefore must not be made in a narrow, sectarian manner or spirit.

The paragraph above attests to the fact that Confession of faith is more than a personal affirmation of faith; it is a scripturally driven testimony based on action through faith.

1 Timothy 5:8 says “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Our Confession of Faith affirms that the Cumberland Presbyterian are believers of the scripture; therefore, scripturally it would deem the Church as unbelievers if it failed not to at least try to help this stage of people who are considered as part of the church household.

We know it was not the intention that this fragile topic be excluded years ago; for “elderly abuse”, in any form, was unthought of due to honor bestowed upon those of old. It appears however that today, the elderly have become “the forgotten ones” of God’s children.

Reiterating and giving reference to paragraph 4, on Page XV under the Introduction to the 1984 Confession of Faith, we are indeed greatly indebted to the Confession of Faith of 1883, the Confession of Faith of 1814, and the Westminster Confession of Faith out of which the other two arose.
Let this now be the time that we, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, not only embrace the youth who are the future of our denomination, but “vigilantly” be there for our elderly who yet represent the spirit of the cornerstone upon which our denominational heritage stands.

Psalms 71:9 says “Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.” There is little that you can find in the scriptures on the Christian or Church’s responsibility regarding elderly abuse.

**Question:** Should the Cumberland Presbyterian Church speak out? Does it go against our belief? Is it deemed meddling to discuss or report suspected elder abuse?

Scripturally, this could fall somewhere close to Genesis 4:9 “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

According to Matthew Henry, “When a person is unconcerned in the affairs of others and takes no care when they have opportunity to prevent hurt—especially in their souls, -- that person in effect speaks Cain’s language.”

**Question:** How can we, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, show more concern in preventing harm or hurt on behalf of our elderly and more importantly, prevent the loss of souls?

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says -Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforted us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

**Question:** How can we as Cumberland Presbyterians assist in comforting the community of elderly who are recognizably in trouble?

**In conclusion,** the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, who looks to “The Confession of Faith” for guidance and direction, and seeks to be the voice of Jesus through his love, also seek to encourage our denomination of Christians to be that witness to the world who says, “We care about our Elderly and as Christians, we will be careful to stay vigilant in upholding God’s word by not casting the elderly off in their time of old age; but be more attentive to that which appears to be but is not, and to recognize the unrecognizable cry for help beyond the eyes of dignity which often prevents that cry”.

**STUDY QUESTIONS – Elder Abuse**

1. How can one recognize the warning signs of elder abuse?
   
   **Answer:** Changes in personality or behavior

2. What good works am I (or my church) doing for the elderly in my community?

3. What can I or my church do to help make a difference?
   
   a. Assess the targeted community needs of the elderly.
   b. Educate the church on recognizing the warning signs of Elder Abuse.
   c. Incorporate elderly home visit programs in the church.
   d. Periodically inquire about medications they’re taking; example -do they run out often?
e. Watch for possible financial abuse...no money for food or necessities.
f. Call and visit as often as you can. Help them to consider you trustworthy.
g. Allocate a church group which occasionally donates relief time for the caregiver
h. Cautiously intervene when abuse is suspected; contact local government officials.

4. Share examples of what you, your church or community is doing or has done to help offset, bring awareness to or help prevent suspected elder abuse, keeping in mind it can come in several forms including self-neglect. Below is an example of an increasing problem with aging:

Example: When dad will not give up the keys to his vehicle, the family will be the last ones he will listen to. This is when you bring in outside friends of the family or acquaintances who can assist you by being a witness to the concern of his driving. If the family is that concerned, neighbors, even towns’ people (if smaller town), will be concerned for his safety, not to mention possibly harming someone else. Also, ask a non-family member (he respects) to gently talk with him on a personal level and speak the possibility of community concern for his well-being. Then, re-address the issue. (If in a larger city, a patrolman will volunteer to speak to your father out of concern to help the family address the situation.)

If all else fails, you have one or two options: 1) Have their doctor write a letter to declare them incompetent to drive, therefore restricting their driver license; or 2) unnoticeably disable part of the cable from the battery whereas it will disable the vehicle. Depending on their mental awareness, this could resolve the problem.

No situation is addressed the same; however, their safety and protection is what matters.

5. Finally, if we as church members individually chose not to position ourselves personally to help, then donate money to the cause and sole purpose of educating and bringing awareness to the people about the realism of elder abuse...Who knows, you could possibly be protecting your own life down the line.

Your input and thoughts are encouraged. Please send to any member of the Unified Committee for Theology and Social Concerns. Member names and contact info can be found on the USTSC webpage.

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Dept. of HHS Administration on Aging (Elder Abuse) Last Modified 7/22/16

Confession of Faith 1984; Confession of Faith of 1883; Confession of Faith of 1814

Westminster Confession of Faith; Matthew Henry Bible Commentary

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