

Economic Justice for Women Who Are Poor
A Resolution Approved By General Synod XVII (1989)

Background

The impoverishment of women is a global issue of immense proportions. War, famine, natural disasters and countless generations of economic, cultural, social and religious subordination of women have combined to keep most of the women of the world locked in patterns of endless poverty.

Hunger, disease, frequent child bearing, poor sanitation, lack of education, inadequate services or resources all take their toll most severely on women and their children. Our hearts are moved by the wretched state of homeless refugees who are victims of war, drought or disaster, by women and children struggling to survive in teeming, overcrowded cities or primitive bush. We often fail to recognize the relationship of the plight of women in poverty around the world to our own economic system, and we fail to recognize and understand the basic issues underlying the poverty of all women.

Closer to home, the numbers of women and their children living in poverty has become a recognized scandal in this rich and powerful nation; in a society called by its leaders to be more compassionate, kind and gentle; in a culture rich in a heritage of mission and ministry to the poor.

Poor women live in all of our communities: young and old; often ill and uneducated; unemployed, single mothers living in crowded public housing or hidden on rural back roads. Their welfare payments may be as small as \$230 per month.

Women and children huddle homeless in train stations and doorways; welfare hotels in the midst of New York's midtown spill out hundreds of children to play on city streets. Their mothers are not homeless, but their poverty sentences them to a precarious and dangerous existence in a neighborhood where the pimp and the crack dealer are heroes.

Our large cities, small towns and local communities are filled with the elderly and aged, the large majority of whom are women. They live alone and in poverty, or are warehoused in crowded nursing homes dependent on care that can be bought with a Social Security check.

Immigrant women, migrant workers, non-English speaking women – all of whom are marginalized by culture and circumstance are among the poorest women in our midst.

Mentally or physically handicapped women, some turned out after years of public or private institutional care; women with no skills or resources or family support are impoverished and hopeless.

Displaced homemakers, deserted or widowed in middle age without support or access to even minimal service are plunged into poverty at a time when no resources are available to them.

Women without resources, jobs or hope are further disadvantaged when faced with a problem pregnancy. The right of poor women to reproductive freedom must mean the freedom to choose from among the options available to all women. To exercise the right to control their reproductive lives is the foundation of personal integrity and freedom of choice for all women. When that choice is denied poor women by the denial of Medicaid funding for an abortion as one of the choices she might make, the freedom of all to choose is endangered and diminished.

Vulnerability, low self-esteem, poor health and nutrition, loss of productivity and the absence of any hope or realizing the potential God intends for all of us results as poor women's hopes are diminished. Each of us is diminished and the generations to follow are endangered by the deprivation suffered by poor women and their dependent children. The common factor in all of these women's lives is economic deprivation. The roots of this deprivation are the racism and sexism that permeate our culture. It is a systemic problem.

Members of families with children make up close to one-third of America's homeless population. One in four of all preschoolers and one in 5 of all children are poor. In single parent families one in every two children is poor, and among the children of teen age mothers 84% are poor. 43% of all black and 37% of all Hispanic children are poor. We are first in the developed world in exporting arms, but offer no child allowances, parental leave or child care supports for working parents. Since 1980 the federal per person outlay for military defense has increased 43% and federal programs for low income families have decreased 6%.

While the church in many places and settings is seeking to minister to women in poverty, the church is in need of reform and should be held accountable.

The capacity to challenge, inform and mobilize the Church for action on behalf of poor women is possible within present funding. The will to do so is within us. The question to be answered is: "What is the depth of our will to use our resources to end the poverty of women in our society?"

Text of Resolution

WHEREAS, we are called to greater ministry and compassion;

WHEREAS, we are called to be more effective witnesses for justice in a hurting world;

WHEREAS, we are called to listen to the cries of our sisters in poverty and join in efforts to alleviate their suffering;

WHEREAS, we are called to be advocates for those who are poor – for women, children, the elderly who live in poverty;

WHEREAS, despite the presence or possibility of programs and laws to address this concern, the capacity of our society to meet the needs of poor women has not been sufficiently challenged;

WHEREAS, the resources that might provide care and healing to build up the poor have been diverted to other uses in recent years;

WHEREAS, the elimination of national funding in the Medicaid program covering abortion has limited the reproductive choices of women in poverty;

WHEREAS, the number of poor women and children has grown at an alarming rate in recent years;

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ has joined with other faith communities around the world to accept the challenges to be in solidarity with women in the decade 1988-1998;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon the Church to be an advocate for poor women and children in our midst;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon all national agencies, Instrumentalities and other bodies to continue to monitor legislation, develop advocacy programs to educate and inform the Church about the issues of facing poor women, and to develop such direct services as may be appropriate;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon all members of the United Church of Christ in the Conferences, Associations and local churches to request local, state and national governments to enact or enforce legislation and programs to benefit poor women. Such programs will:

- support the creation of affordable housing, not welfare warehousing for women who are poor;
- support efforts to pass legislation that makes quality health care available and accessible to all women and children regardless of their economic status;
- support welfare programs for poor women that are not punitive or demeaning workfare programs that deprive the poor of dignity and a livelihood;
- support efforts to pass comparable worth legislation, guaranteeing women and men equal pay for work of comparable worth, including women employed by the church;
- support legislation to provide adequate, affordable child care for families with working parents;
- support education and training programs that will be available to poor women and offer them skills that can help them rise above the poverty level;
- support the right of women to reproductive freedom, including restoration of Medicaid funding for abortions;
- support the campaign to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment;
- support legislation and programs to improve and enrich the lives of women who are disabled as well as poor;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon members in the Church to study the issues of women and poverty in a global context and to raise consciousness, educate and call others in the Church to action as an act of solidarity with their sisters around the globe.

Financial Implications: Subject to the availability of funds.