

91-GS-56 Voted: The Eighteenth General Synod adopts the Pronouncement "In Support of Quality, Integrated Education for All Children in Public Schools."

PRONOUNCEMENT IN SUPPORT OF QUALITY, INTEGRATED EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

As Christians we believe that God desires for children the life abundant which comes from the fullest development of their gifts - physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual. Because our public schools reflect the economic, ethnic, and racial inequities of our society, we protest the virtual re-segregation of our public schools, which is resulting from the widening gulf between the poor and the well-to-do. We advocate for equal educational opportunities and quality, integrated public education for all children, to prepare them for the multicultural and multiracial realities of American life. We support equalized funding for all schools, and work for the day when public schools will offer all children the quality and varieties of education and other services they need to participate fully in the creation of a just and peaceful society.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The Sixteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ, demonstrating its concern for persons in our church-related institutions and for children in our churches schools, declared Education to be a priority of the church. Now is the time to extend that concern to the education of the millions of children, including most UCC children, who attend our public schools.

We act now virtually at the eleventh hour, for the public schools have come increasingly to reflect the ethnic, racial, and economic inequities of our country. We as Americans live in a two-tier society, one in which those who are well off can claim for themselves the best of everything, whether it be in what they eat, where they live, what medical help they may call upon, or where their children will be educated. Those who are poor have what is left; in education, they have the public schools.

Because the poor and their children are disproportionately people of color, the educational inequities in our public schools reinforce the racial/ethnic injustices of our society. Thus, in many areas, as public school populations become "majority minority," we observe a virtual return to segregated education, built on white and middle class flight from school and neighborhood integration. But if "separate but equal" was unjust prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*, it is equally unjust now, since the educational opportunities offered by schools of mostly well-to-do suburbs and those offered by poorer areas are not only separate but painfully unequal as well.

More and more of our city schools, forced to rely on a shrinking and aging tax base for local support, find themselves unable to offer education of the quality to be found in suburban schools, schools which are often only a few miles away geographically but light years away in their educational opportunities. Even when

states fund each child, whatever his/her school district, at the same level, disparities in local tax bases put inner city and remote rural schools at a crippling economic disadvantage. The results of these inequities are unequal educations for the poor and the well off, higher rates of dropping out and school failure among the poor, and a growing sense of hopelessness among many teachers, parents and students.

We cannot be unaware of the dangers in such inequalities of opportunity. In a recent article in the New York Times, reporter Peter Applebome observes that the problems of the poor are becoming "toxic," but that most Americans are "insulated by money and geography" from the realities of poverty. Of the effects of poverty on the inner cities, Applebome stated...

... (such ramifications) can be far reaching. They strain big-city budgets, produce criminal behavior that is altering urban life, poison race relations, and threaten to create an under educated work force that could haunt the nation for decades. (All these factors) serve as a reminder of the depths of the nation's social ills. (New York Times, Vol. CXL. No. 48,494, January 28, 1991, p. A1,A20)

We cannot permit the "insulation" from these problems of many in the UCC to hinder us from action. As demographic change creates an America which is no longer majority white, and as poverty increases for persons of color, the educational inequities visited upon poor children will damage the entire nation if we do not act now to correct them. We must oppose there-segregation based on housing and class which dooms poor children to a life-long disadvantage.

We must resolve to offer to all our children the life abundant meant for them. We in the UCC have always affirmed education, both as an end in itself and as a means to many ends, including that of full participation in the economic, social, and religious life of our country. We need to reaffirm and enlarge our commitment to quality, integrated, and multicultural education for all, and to build that commitment into the educational experiences of the vast majority of our nation's children, those who attend our public schools.

The public schools belong to us, the people, and are controllable by democratic means. If we have the will, we can act to ensure that all schools offer equal education for all children, that the funding, multicultural and academic offerings and enrichment programs which exist in one school system exist in - or are accessible to - all schools and all school children. We can and must act to protect the public schools against those who slander them out of hidden anti-democratic, racial, or class biases. But most particularly, we must protect the children in those schools, for such is not only the kingdom of heaven be-'realized democratic dream of equal opportunity for all, regardless of race, ethnic origin, or social class.

STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN CONVICTION

The Eighteenth General Synod affirms the belief that the ancient prophet Micah speaks for God, and that in the call to "do justice" (6:6-8), Christians are required to transform the institutions of our society so that they provide what rightly belongs to all people and no longer deny access for some.

The Eighteenth General Synod further affirms the belief that God, in Jesus Christ, embraces the world through reconciliation, "breaking down the dividing walls of hostility (Ephesians 2:14)," thus gracing us with courage and hope in the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

These dividing walls in American society are evermore exacerbated by the segregation of communities, resulting from institutional racism and the increasing injustice of classism. This growing pattern of racial and economic isolation in our society is substantial and growing. It affects not only the equity and quality of life for poor people, but it also hinders all people from celebrating the diversity of God as demonstrated in the diversity of God's people. This trend must be arrested.

We affirm the vision that each child be given the opportunity to develop as did God's unique child who "grew big and strong and full of wisdom" (Luke 2:40), in order to become a full partner in a multicultural, multiracial world. They must be freed from the socio-economic oppressions that permeate our society. Quality, integrated public education can begin this process.

PROPOSAL FOR ACTION "IN SUPPORT OF QUALITY, INTEGRATED EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS"

WHEREAS, the Eighteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ has adopted the Pronouncement "Quality, Integrated Education for All Children in Our Public Schools," and since Education is a priority of the United Church of Christ, we acknowledge painfully that poor children - a disproportionate number of whom are children of color - do not receive an education equal to that available to other children; we are called to take action to correct this injustice and to work for the day when all public schools will offer all children the quality of education which will enable them to participate as equals in the creation of the just and peaceful society for which we work and pray.

THEREFORE, the Eighteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon all local churches, conferences, national instrumentalities, and other bodies:

to address within their local communities the issue of quality, integrated public education for all children, regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, handicapping conditions, family income level, or neighborhood residence;

to work against the developing re-segregation of our public schools, and to take legal actions as necessary to combat segregation;

to advocate for educational funding that will provide appropriate resources for each student in all public schools;

to work with secular and ecumenical agencies to protect and strengthen public education as a bulwark of democracy and as a way into full participation in our society for all children;

to insure the delivery, by school district, of full educational services to children in their boundaries without permanent residential registration, i.e. those on the streets, in shelters, and in transitional housing;

to advocate for school-based health clinics to serve children whose families are without adequate health care;

to encourage the use of public schools as major and accessible centers of community life, offering before and after school care to children with working parents, literacy and high school equivalency preparation to adults, and summer programs which affirm the pleasures of reading for neighborhood children and their families.

The Eighteenth General Synod calls upon:

local United Church of Christ congregations to encourage participation by their members in school elections, activities, programs, and festivals, to celebrate yearly the educational achievements of teachers, administrators, and school children; as well as to encourage, assist and educate parents on the value of multicultural education for all children.

conferences to advocate on the state level for legislation that assures equitable funding and quality, integrated educational opportunities for all public school districts and for the children and educational programs in them. To accomplish this we urge conferences to form public education committees to work on all issues related to quality integrated education;

the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries to recommend and/or publish materials, and provide resource personnel to help people in our churches reaffirm our traditional support for public education and come to a critical examination of educational programs and policies; to promote both adult, youth, and intergenerational literacy and reading programs; and to support programs of public school and church cooperation aimed at helping public school children achieve success;

the Coordinating Center for Women to inform the churches of the many opportunities for men and women for professional and volunteer outreach to children and other learners;

the Commission for Racial Justice to address the relationship of cultural, psychosocial, economic, racial, and ethnic conditions which deprive all children of their opportunity to be educated in a multicultural environment;

the Office of Communication to publish articles and reports in United Church News and other UCC publications which highlight initiatives made by local churches, conferences, and instrumentalities in support of quality integrated education for all children;

the Office for Church in Society, in collaboration with instrumentalities, conferences, and churches, to advocate for legislation that promotes and strengthens the public schools and the literacy of our general population.

IMPLEMENTING BODY

The Board for Homeland Ministries shall be the body responsible for coordinating and reporting on the development and implementation of strategies and programs of the above directional statements and goals in consultation with other aforementioned bodies.

Subject to the availability of funds.

