

**RESOLUTION RESPONDING TO AIDS: AN AUDIT OF AIDS
DISCRIMINATION
IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

[Adopted by the Seventeenth General Synod, United Church of Christ, Fort Worth, Texas, June 28-July 5, 1989.]

Background

Over 1.5 million Americans are estimated to have been infected with HIV, and available data indicate that more than half of those persons will develop AIDS within 10 years of infection. Federal health officials project that by the end of 1992, 365,000 Americans will have developed AIDS, with 263,000 deaths. In 1992 alone, according to this estimate, 80,000 new AIDS cases will occur. But the uncertainties are great; the total cases by 1992 could, in this projection, range from 205,000 to 440,000 diagnosed cases. None of these statistics include persons with AIDS Related Complex (ARC); only cases conforming to the AIDS diagnostic categories of the United States Centers for Disease Control, which exclude ARC, are reported.

Currently, discrimination against persons with AIDS/HIV (due largely to fear, prejudice and misinformation) is rampant and is one of the main problems preventing an effective national response to the AIDS epidemic. The Report of the Presidential Commission on the Human Immunodeficiency Virus Epidemic found that as long as discrimination occurs, and no strong national policy with rapid, effective remedies against discrimination is established, individuals who are infected with HIV will be reluctant to come forward for testing, counseling and care. This fear of potential discrimination will limit the public's willingness to comply with the collection of epidemiological data and other public health strategies, will undermine our efforts to contain the HIV epidemic, and will leave HIV infected individuals isolated and alone.

The Presidential Commission Report also found that “discrimination against persons with HIV infection in the workplace setting, or in areas of housing, schools and public accommodations is unwarranted because it has no public health basis.”

Most of the recommendations of the Presidential Commission have not been implemented since the issuing of the report. At the federal level, legislation is pending before Congress which would provide anti-discrimination protection for persons with AIDS/HIV and their caregivers, families and friends. At the state and local levels of government, there is no unified response to the problem of discrimination. Twenty-six states have extended anti-discrimination protection to persons with AIDS/HIV, usually under provisions prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities. Five states have enacted statutes explicitly to protect persons with AIDS/HIV from discrimination. Locally, few cities have passed ordinances prohibiting discrimination against persons with AIDS/HIV in housing, employment and public accommodations.

The Sixteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ recognized the need for an end to discrimination against persons with AIDS/HIV. Both the Pronouncement and the Proposal for Action on Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a Pandemic specifically addressed the right of persons with AIDS/HIV to housing, health care, and assurance that their jobs are secure. Additionally, the Proposal for Action encouraged all United Church of Christ congregations, instrumentalities, bodies, agencies, colleges and seminaries, as well as health and human service institutions, to review their personnel and benefits policies to insure that persons with AIDS/HIV do not experience discrimination within the church as employer.

Those provisions of the General Synod 16 Proposal for Action on Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a Pandemic related to employment by United Church of Christ judicatories, agencies, institutions and bodies, have not been broadly implemented. This resolution, therefore, seeks specific implementation of an AIDS Discrimination Audit and a process for reporting to the Eighteenth General Synod.

Text of the Resolution

Whereas, the United States Public Health Service conservatively estimates that 1 to 1.5 million Americans are currently infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and data indicate that more than half of those persons will develop Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) within 10 years of infection; and

Whereas, the church is called to minister to all persons through a healing ministry of reconciliation, compassion and justice; and

Whereas, it is our calling and responsibility to strengthen and heal one another within the human family and to recognize that our unity within the human family is broken where any are excluded or are subject to any discrimination or inequitable treatment; and

Whereas, the Bible reminds us that “if one member suffers, all suffer; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Corinthians 12:26); and

Whereas, persons with AIDS/HIV often suffer discrimination daily in housing, employment, insurance, public accommodations, public services, service delivery and responsiveness to their special needs; and

Whereas, persons with AIDS/HIV currently have no legal recourse against such discrimination; and

Whereas, the Report of the Presidential Commission on the Human Immunodeficiency Virus Epidemic found that “HIV-related discrimination is impairing the nation’s ability to limit the spread of the epidemic”; and

Whereas, in 1983, the Fourteenth General Synod, in its Resolution on Acquired Immune deficiency Syndrome, declared its “compassionate concern and support” for all persons with AIDS, their lovers, spouses, families and friends; and

Whereas, in 1987, the Sixteenth General Synod, in its Pronouncement on Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a Pandemic, recognized that “persons with AIDS and their families deserve sensitive pastoral care, comprehensive, quality medical and social services, housing, and health care insurance;” and

Whereas, that same Pronouncement recognized that “persons with AIDS need to be assured that their jobs are secure...” and that “employers, including the United Church of Christ related bodies, need to develop just employment policies and practices;” and

Whereas, the Sixteenth General Synod, in the Proposal for Action on Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a Pandemic, called upon members and congregations of the United Church of Christ to “work to establish state and local policies which protect the constitutional rights of persons affected by AIDS;” and

Whereas, that same Proposal for Action called upon “congregations, Conferences and instrumentalities to review personnel policies and benefits to insure that persons with AIDS and those otherwise directly affected by AIDS are not discriminated against in employment, or in eligibility for and access to full benefits;” and

Whereas, that same Proposal for Action called upon the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries to encourage “United Church of Christ related colleges and seminaries to study AIDS and AIDS-related issues” and to “develop just and equitable personnel policies;

Therefore, Be It Resolved, the Seventeenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ:

1. Directs the Executive Council of the United Church of Christ to implement, with all deliberate speed, a church-wide AIDS Discrimination Audit and evaluation of nature and degree of discrimination existing within all United

Church of Christ Conferences, Instrumentalities, boards, agencies, health and human service institutions, related colleges and seminaries and all other UCC related bodies confronted by persons with AIDS/HIV in the areas of: employment; insurance; other employment benefits, including confidentiality of results; service delivery; responsiveness of clergy and support staff; and

2. Calls upon each of the said judicatories, agencies, institutions and bodies to implement steps to alleviate any discrimination discovered as a result of the AIDS Discrimination Audit, or by any other means, in the areas delineated; and
3. Directs the Executive Council to receive and compile results of the AIDS Discrimination Audit from said judicatories, agencies, institutions and bodies and to report the results of the AIDS Discrimination Audit and the steps taken to alleviate any discrimination against persons with AIDS/HIV discovered by the AIDS Discrimination Audit to the Eighteenth General Synod in Norfolk, Virginia in 1991; and
4. Urges all congregations of the United Church of Christ to conduct an audit of their own employment, insurance, benefits, testing and service delivery practices and requirements and to implement steps to alleviate any discrimination against persons with AIDS/HIV discovered by said AIDS Discrimination Audit.

Financial Implications: Subject to availability of funds.