

A Call to Reduce Global Poverty and Hunger

To all who are concerned with making known to a suffering world the teachings and compassion of Jesus Christ, now is a critical time for addressing the crisis of extreme poverty and widespread hunger. While the number of persons living in a continuous state of hunger remains staggering, for the first time in history it is believed that humankind has the prospect of resolving this suffering within a generation. Response to hunger and human need is not a new calling for Christians. The churches have a long history of such ministry in their communities and around the world.

Through the serving of meals in local soup kitchens and by providing shelter for the homeless, congregations live out the biblical mandate to “share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house” (Isa. 58:7). Through the Global Food Crisis Fund and other generous giving to many ministry areas for the poor and hungry, the Church of the Brethren continues to build on its history of developing programs and opportunities for Brethren to fulfill the call of Christ to feed the hungry and clothe the naked (Matt. 25:36).

For generations, Brethren have sought to live out that call among sisters and brothers around the world as evidenced in the pioneering ministries introduced in India, Nigeria, and Ecuador in health services, wells, and agricultural training; in the founding of such far-reaching efforts as Heifer International and SERRV; in helping to establish CROP and Church World Service; in continuing to place mission and service personnel in community development assignments; in conducting agricultural exchanges and disaster services irrespective of ideological differences; and in promoting and monitoring socially responsible investment. Drawing from its vital rural heritage, the Church of the Brethren has made a significant impact on food security and the alleviation of poverty in specific settings.

The call to the Church of the Brethren in these early years of the 21st century is to join our voice with many sisters and brothers who are also speaking with renewed vigor about a global response to the poor and the hungry. The collective voices of the churches, as well as people of other faiths, have focused on a series of broad goals to bring health and wholeness to communities around the world. Crafted through a United Nations process, these goals are grounded in the same moral directives and high regard for all humankind to which Christians have committed themselves. In summary, these goals are to:

- 1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger,
- 2) achieve universal primary education,
- 3) promote gender equality and empower women,
- 4) reduce child mortality,
- 5) improve maternal health,
- 6) combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases,
- 7) ensure environmental stability, and
- 8) develop a global partnership.

Together, these have been called the Millennium Development Goals. These global objectives set forth tangible and measurable steps for building a healthier, safer, and more just world by 2015. The United States signed and committed to achieve the Millennium Declaration along with 188 other countries at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000. Faith-based groups, non-governmental organizations, corporations, and individuals are urged to join together with the efforts of governments in attaining these outcomes.

The Church of the Brethren Annual Conference is encouraged by this swelling global voice to redress critical human want on a broader scale. We recommit ourselves to follow the teachings of Jesus that prompt our loving response to the poor and hungry. We recommend that congregations, agencies, and members revisit the 2000 Annual Conference Statement on Caring for the Poor, using this and other study materials to prayerfully engage the questions of hunger and poverty. We call on all levels and structures of the denomination to identify with and pursue the Millennium Development Goals, joining others in advocacy and action and building upon decades of experience locally and globally.

“Draw out your soul to the hungry,” states one version of Isaiah 58:10. “In a world where injustice and inequities are the cause of so much suffering, misery, and death, the church cannot be silent. The church, as Christ’s body, must place itself clearly on the side of the poor and the oppressed” (Statement on World Mission Philosophy and Program, 1981 Annual Conference).

Through prayer, study, and concrete action, let us resolve to act so that those who know extreme poverty and hunger might enter more fully into the abundance of God’s love.

Action of the General Board: At its October 2005 meeting the General Board approved the statement and endorsed the Millennium Development Goals. The General Board recommends adoption of the statement by the 2006 Annual Conference.

Appendix

Church of the Brethren Policy on Poverty and Hunger

The Church of the Brethren has many statements on issues related to hunger and poverty as well as other issues addressed by the Millennium Development Goals. The following are selected portions from statements of the church since 1973. The most recent document is the 2000 Annual Conference paper, *Caring for the Poor*. Specific recommendations for the church from this paper are listed at the end.

“The Christian faith teaches that all persons are entitled to a humane standard of living. The Church of the Brethren has recognized this right to a humane standard of living throughout its history in its frequent calls for practical help for those in misfortune or with serious, unmet needs. . . . Although we have made great achievements as a nation, we have yet to live up to our potential and responsibility in caring and providing for those persons among us who are still deprived of the basic necessities that make for a humane standard of living.” Annual Conference 1973

“The Church of the Brethren is committed to feeding the hungry, helping the impoverished, healing the broken and promoting freedom, justice, and reconciliation among all men. . . . Our bread is a material concern, our brother’s bread is a spiritual concern.”

“The global crisis of hunger is primarily a challenge potentially generating hope and new commitment. The crisis gives us an opportunity to participate more energetically in the radical transformation of human values, social realities and distribution systems. If the world is to change, we Western Christians must change, for we control the resources that must be invoked to set humankind on a new course.” Annual Conference 1975

“The Church of the Brethren seeks to shape its own programs and to influence other institutions in order to encourage the United States to: acknowledge that food is a human right and to make this right a guiding principle in deciding economic policies . . . channel its foreign economic aid through multilateral agencies in which the poor nations enjoy equitable representation.”

“The Church of the Brethren recognizes the principle that the church has specific responsibility to defend and respond to the rights and needs of the poor, the disadvantaged, and those with insufficient power to assure their rights, and the principle that no person is created for poverty, but all are born for a full place at the table of the human family.”

“Hunger, poverty, war, and broken relationships are evidences of sin working in human structures. These point up the need for repentance and restitution for the restoration of justice in the earth.”

“Economic institutions should promote the capacity, willingness, and likelihood of peoples to embrace economic equity at the expense of material self-aggrandizement; to substitute for selfish competition, cooperation to meet the needs of one another; to implement justice toward other classes, nationalities, and ‘enemies’ by sharing wealth and power in practical ways and to build community, nurtured by local roots and encompassing all humanity. We call upon all Christians and other persons of good will to join with the Church of the Brethren to reverse the widening of the gap between rich and poor. In order to conserve energy, food, and other resources needed by the poor, we must reexamine our patterns of consumption.” Annual Conference 1977, Statement on Justice and Non-violence

“We support new government measures to provide emergency food and shelter to the homeless and housing policies that will make available to each person affordable, decent housing.” Annual Conference 1989

“Poverty is therefore not an ‘out-there’ problem, but an ‘everywhere’ problem.” Annual Conference 2000, Caring for the Poor

Caring for the Poor

Recommendations of the 2000 Annual Conference Statement:

1. In the firm belief that experience helps beget mission, we recommend that each congregation develop at least one direct, hands-on ministry with the poor or develop one new activity that will undergird the congregation’s commitment in ministry with the poor.

2. We recommend that congregational study experiences be used to discover and explore our faith basis for ministry with the poor. Bible studies and our denominational heritage provide strong motivation for an active, caring ministry with the poor.

3. We recommend that congregations use their experience in ministry with the poor to inform themselves of the legislative and political issues having impact on the poor and speak to those issues with their legislators at local, state, and national levels. The biblical witness and our own experiences as a community of faith suggest that there is a corporate or societal responsibility to deal with the problems of the poor, such as the Year of Jubilee. This extends beyond personal, hands-on responses and includes advocacy on behalf of the poor.

4. Congregations are encouraged to partner with urban/ethnic congregations of the Church of the Brethren in shared ministries, including fellowship, finances, and joint programs. Congregations may also find meaningful relationships with congregations of other denominations strategically placed in their own communities that will create strengthened shared ministries with the poor. These partnerships may be especially helpful as congregations begin their ministries with the poor.

5. Congregations are encouraged to contact their local social service agency office. What gaps in service or absence of resources do they see as persons prepare to enter the workforce? Can they link the congregation with organizations they can partner with in specific ministries with the poor?

6. The committee recommends that each District Conference annually include at least one insight-sharing session in which congregations can share their experiences in ministry with the poor. This forum would provide opportunity to share examples, concerns, resources, and encouragement and truly build up the body of Christ.

7. We recommend that three to five slots be reserved annually in the Ministry Summer Service Program for participants to serve in urban/ethnic congregations and that adequate financial resources be appropriated to accomplish this. These opportunities would increase the awareness of the problems of the poor in individuals considering a career calling in ministry. Such firsthand knowledge is essential as we develop our ministries with the poor.

8. We recommend the development of anti-racism training on a regular basis for boards and field staff reportable to Annual Conference. This training could then become a part of each new employee's standard orientation. This recommendation recognizes racism as one enduring structural factor related to poverty in the United States and seeks a method to increase staff capacity to respond. Other areas of concern might also be highlighted, e.g., rural isolation and poverty.

9. We recommend that the Cross Cultural Ministries Team be authorized to provide counsel and advice to our district executives and congregational life team leaders

as these goals are implemented over the next five years and to prepare a progress report to be presented to the 2005 Annual Conference.

10. Congregations need support as they begin or expand their ministry with the poor. We recommend that the Church of the Brethren develop a “magazine” of resources, one that includes examples of what has worked well for different congregations, descriptions of programs and activities, and sources for congregational exploration as churches develop ministries with the poor. We recommend that this responsibility be assigned to the Congregational Life Team program and that support be provided that will enable this resource to be updated routinely and be reflective of ministries appropriate to all congregational sizes and settings. This resource might become a routine part of the In Our Midst—Congregational Resources.

The Millennium Development Goals

The United States signed and committed to achieve the Millennium Declaration along with 188 other countries at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000.

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1: Halve, between 1999 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day.

Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Target 3: Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Target 5: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Target 6: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

Target 7: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Target 8: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Target 10: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Target 11: Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Target 12: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, nondiscriminatory trading and financial system (includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction—both nationally and internationally).

Target 13: Address the special needs of the Least Developed Countries (includes tariff- and quota-free access for Least Developed Countries' exports, enhanced program of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries and cancellation of official bilateral debt, and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction).

Target 14: Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states (through the Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and 22nd General Assembly provisions).

Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term. Some of the indicators are monitored separately for the least developed countries, Africa, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing states.

Target 16: In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.

Target 17: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.

Target 18: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies.

Action of the 2006 Annual Conference: Annual Conference adopted the recommendation of Standing Committee that the resolution entitled "A Call to Reduce Global Poverty and Hunger" be adopted.