

Mission Statement on Health and Human Service United Church of Christ

The mission of the United Church of Christ arises out of faith in God who calls the worlds into being, creates humankind in the divine image, and intends for us the blessing of wholeness and harmony with God, with creation, with other persons, and within ourselves. In health and human service, that mission must serve God's intent for humankind made fully manifest in Jesus Christ, conquered sin and death and reconciled humanity, nature, and God.

In the life of Jesus and in his ministries of teaching and healing, we learn the way of discipleship.

We rejoice in the power of God to make all things new and in the gift of the Holy Spirit through which the Church is empowered to continue Jesus' ministries of compassion, justice, and transformation, serving the well-being and wholeness of all God's people.

The mission of the United Church of Christ in health and human service is rooted in the ministry of Jesus Christ and empowered by God's spirit.

The Witness of Scripture

According to scripture, the tasks of mission are the liberation of the oppressed and the reconciliation of the alienated through acts of love and justice.

In faith,

We too are called

To preach good news to the poor;

To proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind;

To set at liberty those who are oppressed; and

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18)

We too are called

To feed the hungry;

Welcome the stranger;

Shelter the homeless;

Clothe the naked; and

Comfort the sick and imprisoned. (Matt. 25:31ff)

Traditions of Ministry

The Church has always understood itself to be an extension of Jesus Christ's ministry in the world. The *diakonia* of the early church — the ministry of healing, service, care, compassion and hospitality — served the needy neighbor in Christ.

Today within the United Church of Christ social service and social action are seen as integral and complementary forms of ministry. Church-related social services and institutions serve the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual needs of children, youth and families, the aging, the sick, and the

developmentally disabled. Church-related social action and policy formation cover a wide range of contemporary issues which include: urban life, poverty, housing, health care, family life, women's issues, child care, aging, hospice, racial and ethnic concerns, needs of persons with disabilities, peace, and refugees and immigration. As social services and social action ministries remain faithful to Jesus Christ's ministry in the world, they will respond to the changing needs and new possibilities among people and within society, working always toward liberation from life's bondage and reconciliation of the alienated.

Responding to the Human Situation

The Church's ministries in health and human service have been significantly aided in recent years by new insights from the social and natural sciences. We know there are dynamic, interrelated biological, emotional and spiritual realities which function within every human person. We know that each person is shaped by the social, familial and spiritual communities in which she or he lives. We know that disease or disharmony may occur in any of these interrelated realities within human lives, affecting the whole person and requiring ministries of healing, care and cure. Where the Church is involved in healing ministries in the name of Jesus Christ, it is engaged in the work of reconciliation and liberation.

In medical science, social science and health care, preventive health care is highly valued. Individual responsibility for maintaining good health is encouraged and supported. The relationship of the natural environment to human well-being is emphasized as critically important. Our responsibility as individuals and corporate bodies to maintain and improve the natural environment is an ethical consequence of our understanding of the integrity of creation.

The Church's mission in health and human service must reflect this wholistic understanding of human personhood and of life itself. New scientific knowledge can be understood theologically as an expansion in human awareness of the elements of shalom. God's Spirit is ever at work, inviting us to participate in God's creative transformation of human need.

Thus informed by scripture, tradition, and human experience, our faith compels us to seek new ways to enable the liberation of the oppressed and reconciliation of the alienated through new acts of love and justice. When we do so, we must answer the questions: What are the dimensions of that mission? Who is involved in that mission?

What are the Dimensions of that Mission?

Faithful to our tradition and to our call to listen afresh to God's voice, the United Church of Christ is called to engage in the following ministries:

1. Education and Nurture Within the Church for Healthy, Wholistic Ways of Living.

Faithful stewardship of God's gifts, including our bodies, has always been taught within the Church. Increasingly, we are learning of the components of good health and of the individual's ability to influence or control many modern diseases. Incorporating this knowledge into our lifestyles becomes a part of stewardship. Since our society does not yet give high priority to prevention in health care, it is especially appropriate for the Church, in its healing ministry, to engage in preventive health education and to nurture personal responsibility for health maintenance. Programmatic initiatives need to incorporate research, theological reflection, and evaluation. The Church seeks to understand stewardship in the broadest sense and will include such concerns as:

- An understanding of the moral implications of a healthy lifestyle;
- Education and preparation for life changes from early childhood to late life;
- Awareness of the impact of the fear of death and of human extinction on human health and well-being;
- Ethical concern for consumption by wealthier nations amid starving populations and global poverty.

2. Direct Services.

A. Local Churches and Organizational Structures

The church must reclaim its ministry of healing through local churches and organizational structures. The roots of disease are diverse and may include brokenness of mind, body, spirit and relationship. The Church is called to claim and to extend to all who suffer the healing power of God, conveyed through the love, support, forgiveness, and prayer. The Church is also called to be a resource for healing within the wider community. Through cooperative efforts among local churches, within ecumenical and interfaith coalitions, and the public health community, the church may be involved in vital healing ministries. Those ministries may extend to support and training for volunteers and staff as well as programming within neighborhood health and community based human service organizations.

B. Institutions and Service Agencies of the Church.

Certain specialized needs are appropriately addressed by the Church through the development and support of institutions to provide direct care or service. Private entrepreneurs for whom competition and the marketplace are controlling forces provide much of the institutionally based health and human service in the United States. The Church provides a significantly different model of institutional care, rooted in faith-based commitment to compassion for all people, concern for the whole person, and a high ethical standard in business and health and service-related decision-making.

Rapid change in human need, forms of care, treatment options, the economics of health and human service delivery, and prevention and health maintenance practices is a contemporary reality. The Church must be a participant in change, both in shaping its direction and in responding to it. The efficient provision of effective human service, in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, will continue to challenge institutions of the United Church of Christ in our time.

3. Advocacy and Empowerment

The Church's mission is advocacy for full and just access to health and human service for all.

Bringing forth God's shalom is justice work that always involves exposing and opposing inequalities and injustices. Jesus taught that God stands with the poor and the devalued by ministering among, and standing with, "the least of these." Thus, an essential part of the Church's commitment to health and human service ministry is advocacy on behalf of those who are oppressed or disadvantaged. Priorities within our concern for the health and the well-being of others include:

- Adequate health care, and related social services, including mental health

- services, within urban, suburban and rural communities;
- The impact of changes in public or governmental programs which pay for health and human service;
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- Full accessibility for the disabled, including access to employment as well as the removal of physical barriers which limit freedom of movement;
- The availability of affordable and accessible housing;
- Sexual and emotional abuse, harassment and bullying, domestic and other forms of family violence.

The allocation of our nation's resources has an impact on the effective provision of health and human service. The Church must be a strong advocate for those priorities which serve life and human fulfillment. Those priorities include, but are not limited to:

- Access to the necessities of life: food, clothing, shelter and health care;
- Adequate, fact-based health education, including sexual and mental health, for people of all ages;
- Improvement and protection of the environment;
- A just standard of health care that is accessible to all;
- An emphasis upon prevention over rescue in medical care;
- A revision of insurance and reimbursement mechanisms to provide preventive as well as acute health care, whether institutional or home based;
- Access to effective birth control and safe, legal abortion;
- Access to the means to protect oneself from infectious diseases (HIV, Hepatitis C, tuberculosis, etc.);
- The humane use of medical technology;
- The right to die with dignity.

What is Involved in that Mission?

The call to demonstrate and convey the compassion of Christ is implicit in the call to be the Church. Whether represented in local churches, association, conferences, or national-level bodies, the whole Church is itself the creation of God's compassionate mercy in Christ, and as such, the instrument of God's intention for all humankind. (II Cor. 5:13-21)

The mission of the United Church of Christ in health and welfare, therefore, belongs to the whole Church. At the same time, various parts within the UCC undertake portions of that mission, and roles in relation to it, on behalf of the whole.

Local churches conduct multiple ministries in health and human service ranging from education and nurture, to direct service, to advocacy and empowerment, to pastoral care, counseling and spiritual support.

Conferences and Associations of the United Church of Christ are involved both in terms of their own activities and in relation to the work of ecumenical and interfaith coalitions and of institutions and health and human service programs within their geographic area.

The General Synod sets basic policy and direction for the national expression of the church and

recommends policy and direction to local churches, Conferences and Associations.

Implementation of General Synod policies is the responsibility of the Covenanted Ministries, the Associated Ministries and the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries of the United Church of Christ and its member institutions.

Thus all expressions of the United Church of Christ are vital partners in the Church's mission in health and human service. Each engages its ministry in the name of Christ and on behalf of the whole Church. Our UCC mission in health and human service belongs to all who have been called by God in Christ. Where the Church is, there is the mission. Where the Church is, there are those who have been called to live "for the sake of the other." Where the Church is, there are those engaged in *diakonia* — the ministry of healing, service, care, compassion and hospitality — the love and grace of God made visible in our mission in health and human service.