

RESOLUTION RESPONDING TO AIDS: ENDORSEMENT AND ENACTMENT OF THE “TEN PRINCIPLES FOR THE WORKPLACE”

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

Background

Since 1981, more than 95,000 Americans have been diagnosed with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), more than half of whom have died. Additionally, the United States Public Health Service conservatively estimates that 1 to 1.5 million Americans are infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Available data indicate more than half of those who are HIV infected will develop AIDS within 10 years of infection. Studies suggest the majority of persons with HIV will eventually become ill. The total number of Americans with HIV infection remains unknown, partly because many people are reluctant to be tested for HIV antibodies due to fear of discrimination and ostracism.

The U.S. Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop, the Presidential Commission on the Human Immunodeficiency Virus Epidemic, and most public health officers and organizations have said that lack of anti-discrimination legislation is the single most serious impediment in fighting AIDS as a public health epidemic. Currently, persons with AIDS and those who have tested positive for HIV antibodies have limited protection from discrimination. There are some regulations prohibiting discrimination on the part of federal agencies but there is no protection from discrimination in the private sector in employment, transportation, public accommodations and health care for persons with AIDS/HIV.

Voluntary AIDS/HIV-specific policies and actions cannot replace the justice mandate of federal anti-discrimination legislation and enforcement. Until such legislation and enforcement exists, such actions are a necessary weapon in the fight against AIDS/HIV. The “Ten Principles for the Workplace” were developed by the Citizen’s Commission on AIDS for New York City and Northern New Jersey and have been endorsed by many for profit and non-profit corporations and organizations throughout the United States.

As Christians called by the One whose love embraces and empowers each human life, we bear a special responsibility to create affirming, supportive and secure work environments for each person within the United Church of Christ—in congregations, Associations, Conferences, Instrumentalities and related institutions and agencies. Because workplace security is vital to the self-esteem and dignity of working persons with AIDS/HIV, such affirming support positively affects their emotional, psychological and physical health, as well as their economic well being. Confronting the multiple realities of the AIDS pandemic, our commitment must also include insuring that persons living with AIDS/HIV will not face the indignity of discrimination in the workplaces of our church.

Text of the Resolution

Whereas, we are called as contemporary disciples of Jesus Christ to express our love of God through love of neighbor and through the active pursuit of justice; and

Whereas, more than 95,000 Americans have been diagnosed with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), more than half of whom have died; and

Whereas, the United States Public Health Service conservatively estimates that 1 to 1.5 million Americans are infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV); and

Whereas, the lack of federal AIDS/HIV-specific anti-discrimination legislation is the single most serious impediment in fighting the AIDS public health epidemic; and

Whereas, federal AIDS/HIV-specific anti-discrimination legislation, while necessary, would not be generally enforceable within communities of faith; and

Whereas, in 1983 the Fourteenth General Synod 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 adopted a Pronouncement on Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a Pandemic, calling upon the whole church “to become knowledgeable about AIDS and become leaders in the mobilization of compassionate ministries, effective public policy, and preventative education” in the fight against AIDS; and

Whereas, the “Ten Principles for the Workplace,” developed by the Citizen’s Commission on AIDS for New York City and Northern New Jersey, are principles which reflect the existing social policy on AIDS of the United Church of Christ; and

Whereas, endorsement of the “Ten Principles for the Workplace” affords an opportunity for the United Church of Christ to join with for-profit and non-profit corporations and organizations across the country in offering affirmation and support for persons with AIDS/HIV in the workplace, and their co-workers;

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

1. Reaffirms the Pronouncement on Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a Pandemic of the Sixteenth General Synod; and
2. Endorses the “Ten Principles for the Workplace” (appended to the resolution) and directs the UCC Executive Council to enact said principles in ways appropriate to its responsibilities; and
3. Directs the President of the United Church of Christ to communicate the “Ten Principles for the Workplace”, together with this resolution, to all UCC conferences, instrumentalities, and UCC related institutions, agencies, colleges and seminaries, commending the “Ten Principles for the workplace” for endorsement and enactment by those bodies and institutions; and
4. Calls upon each congregation of the United Church of Christ to study and reflect upon the “Ten Principles for the Workplace,” and urges endorsement and enactment of 1) the “Ten Principles for the Workplace” or 2) AIDS/HIV-specific principles for the workplace developed by the congregation that express the full intent of the “Ten Principles for the Workplace” in language appropriate to the congregation’s life and ministry.

Financial Implications: Minimal.

RESPONDING TO AIDS: TEN PRINCIPLES FOR THE WORKPLACE

1. People with AIDS or HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection are entitled to the same rights and opportunities as people with other serious or life-threatening illnesses.
2. Employment policies must, at a minimum, comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations.
3. Employment policies should be based on the scientific and epidemiological evidence that people with AIDS or HIV infection do not pose a risk of transmission of the virus to co-workers through ordinary workplace contact.
4. The highest levels of management and union leadership should unequivocally endorse non-discriminatory employment policies and educational programs about AIDS.
5. Employers and unions should communicate their support of these policies to workers in simple, clear, and unambiguous terms.
6. Employers should provide employees with sensitive, accurate, and up-to-date education about risk reduction in their personal lives.
7. Employers have a duty to protect the confidentiality of employees' medical information.
8. To prevent work disruption and rejection by co-workers of an employee with AIDS or HIV infection, employers and unions should undertake education for all employees before such an incident occurs and as needed thereafter.

9. Employers should not require HIV screening as part of general pre-employment or workplace physical examinations.

10. In those special occupational settings where there may be a potential risk of exposure to HIV (for example, in health care, where workers may be exposed to blood or blood products), employers should provide specific, ongoing education and training, as well as the necessary equipment, to reinforce appropriate infection control procedures and ensure that they are implemented.