

## United Methodist Church

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When approved by the General Conference, resolutions state the policy of The United Methodist Church on many current social issues and concerns. Only the General Conference speaks for The United Methodist Church (The Book of Discipline 2000, 509). The 1996 General Conference approved a rule stating: “Resolutions shall be considered official expressions of The United Methodist Church for twelve years following their adoption, after which time they shall be deemed to have expired unless readopted.” (The Book of Discipline 1996, ¶ 510.2a).

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#### **Use of Reclaimed Paper, 1972**

Be it resolved, that the General Conference request the publisher, boards, agencies, and all local churches to diligently seek suppliers of recycled or reclaimed paper for all possible uses whenever practicable and possible.

Be it further resolved, that the General Conference request that all said agencies use only recycled or reclaimed paper whenever possible for all printing, mimeographing, correspondence, and other uses of paper.

#### **Law of the Sea, 1980, 1996**

We recognize that “All creation is the Lord’s, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it” (¶ 160).

We are called to repent of our devastation of the physical and nonhuman world, because this world is God’s creation and is therefore to be valued and conserved.

Nowhere is this need greater than in relation to the sea. In 1970 the United Nations agreed that those areas of the seabed beyond national boundaries were the “common heritage” of humankind. This means that the resources belong to everyone.

The best hope for global cooperation is through the United Nations, where representatives of the nations of the world developed the Law of the Sea.

The Law of the Sea conference worked to produce a fair and just law for the ocean, in which all nations will benefit. No one nation will have all of its interests satisfied, but mechanisms will be set up to maintain order and peace, and both developed and developing countries will have worked on the regulations.

The Law of the Sea Treaty is concerned with protecting this “common heritage” of humanity. It would:

- guarantee unimpeded access to over 100 straits, facilitating commercial transportation;
- prevent conflicts over fishing waters;
- enforce environmental regulations forbidding countries to dump harmful wastes that spoil the ocean waters;
- share equitably the ocean resources, oil, fish, minerals, and prohibit unjust exploitation of these resources by the powerful;
- regulate access to the waters of coastal countries to permit research of the marine environment;
- limit the continuing extension of national sovereignty over international waters and settle legal disputes arising therefrom;
- prevent the division of the world into competing camps depending on powerful navies; and
- create an international agency to manage cooperatively the international seabed resources.

We also affirm our support for the evolution of effective “commons” law, such as the treaties for the Antarctic, climate, biodiversity, and outer space, which support our obligations of stewardship, justice, and peace.

Further, we urge all United Methodists to become informed about the Law of the Sea and to call upon their governments to commit themselves to just and equitable implementation of the Law of the Sea and to the ratification of the treaty.

### **Energy Policy Statement, 1980, 2000**

Humankind enjoys a unique place in God’s universe. On the one hand, we are simply one of God’s many finite creatures, made from the “dust of the earth,” bounded in time and space, fallible in judgment, limited in control, dependent upon our Creator, and interdependent with all other creatures. On the other hand, we are created in the very image of God, with the divine Spirit breathed into us, and entrusted with “dominion” over God’s creation (Genesis 1:26, 28; 2:7; Psalm 8:6). We are simultaneously caretakers with all creation and, because of the divine summons, caretakers with God of the world in which we live. This hybrid human condition produces both the opportunity and the twin dangers for humans on this planet.

The first danger is arrogance: that we may overestimate the extent of human control over our environment and the soundness of human judgments concerning it; that we may underestimate the limits of the planet where we live; and that we may misunderstand “dominion” to mean exploitation instead of stewardship.

The second danger is irresponsibility: that we may fail to be the responsible stewards of the earth. As stewards entrusted with dominion, then, we will demonstrate our faith in God by shaping the new human society that will emerge in the twenty-first century. We cannot, therefore, neglect the task of seeking to embody in the world the values that we hold in covenant with God. Nor can we forget the forgiving grace in Jesus Christ, which alone makes us bold enough, or the hope in Christ, which alone keeps us from despair.

## **The Values Involved in Energy Policy**

The decisions that humans are now making will either enhance or degrade the quality of life on the planet. We have entered an era of greater energy interdependence. As the world confronts global issues such as climate change, energy inequity, and pollution, energy-related problems will require international solutions based upon the values of justice and sustainability.

The Scripture that provides the motive for our action in the present energy crisis also lays the foundation for the values that we seek to realize. These values underlying the policies we advocate are justice and sustainability.

(1) Justice. Ever since the first covenant between God and Israel, and especially since the eighth-century prophets, the people of God have understood that they bear a special concern for justice.

“Let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an everflowing stream” (Amos 5:24)

is a cry echoed in hundreds of contexts throughout the Old and New Testaments. Biblical righteousness includes a special concern for the least and the last: the poor, the captive, the oppressed (Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1-2). Energy policies that Christians can support, then, will seek to actualize the multifaceted biblical vision of justice. They will be policies that close rather than widen the gap dividing wealth and poverty, rich nations and poor. They will be measures that liberate rather than oppress. They will be programs that distribute fairly the benefits, burdens, and hazards of energy production and consumption, taking into consideration those not yet born as well as the living. They will thus be strategies that give priority to meeting basic human needs such as air, water, food, clothing, and shelter.

(2) Sustainability. Only recently have we humans come to recognize that creation entails limits to the resources entrusted to us as stewards of the earth. In particular, we have come up against limits to the nonrenewable fuels available for our consumption and limits to our environment’s capacity to absorb poisonous wastes. These double limits mean that humans can betray their stewardship either by using up resources faster than they can be replaced or by releasing wastes in excess of the planet’s capacity to absorb them. We now know that humans have the capacity to destroy human life and perhaps even life itself on this planet, and to do so in a very short period of time. Energy policy decisions, therefore, must be measured by sustainability as a criterion in addition to justice. In terms of energy policy, sustainability means energy use that will not: (a) deplete the earth’s resources in such a way that our descendants will not be able to continue human society at the level that is adequate for a good quality of life, and (b) pollute the environment to such an extent that human life cannot be sustained in the future. These guidelines for sustainability must include considerations of quality of life as well as mere biological continuance.

We enjoy a highly sophisticated, industrialized world. It is not a realistic option for us to return to a world where people read by candlelight and heat with wood. Also, we should be aware of the tragic effects that steadily increasing energy costs will have, especially upon the aged and poor members of our society. All options available to the rich nations are not open to peoples in other parts of the world; hence, we should endeavor to develop just and equitable energy policies.

We must creatively explore all sustainable energy options available to us. There are environmental problems connected with certain energy options. We believe that the environmental problems of each energy source should be fully assessed. For example, the large-scale use of our coal resources poses many problems. Underground mining, in addition to operational accidents, causes disabling illness or death from black lung. Strip-mining can despoil an area and ruin it for further use if restoration measures are not practiced. The burning of coal causes large-scale pollution and seriously alters the environment by increasing the carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere, contributing to global warming.

Hydroelectric power also has its problems. In addition to deaths from industrial accidents, many dam sites are (or were) attractive scenic areas. Destroying (or diminishing) such natural beauty areas is objectionable to most of us. Possible dam failure with the resultant flood damage must also be considered in evaluation of this source of power.

The use of petroleum products creates severe environmental problems. Tankers and offshore wells have created spills that have devastated seacoast areas; the damage is long-lasting or permanent. Air pollution, far from being under control, is a serious health problem, especially in centers of dense population.

The nuclear energy option also has many problems to be faced. The hazards in storing radioactive wastes for thousands of years and the destructive potential of a catastrophic accident involve a great risk of irreversible damage to the environment or to the human genetic pool.

(1) We support strenuous efforts to conserve energy and increase energy efficiency. A transition to energy efficiency and renewable energy sources will combat global warming, protect human health, create new jobs, and ensure a secure, affordable energy future. Economists have concluded that a greater increase in end-use energy can be gained through conservation and energy efficiency than through any single new source of fuel. Furthermore, conservation is nonpolluting and job producing. We include under conservation: insulation, co-generation, recycling, public transportation, more efficient motors in appliances and automobiles, as well as the elimination of waste, and a more simplified lifestyle. The technology for such steps is already known and commercially available; it requires only dissemination of information and stronger public support, including larger tax incentives than are presently available.

(2) All United Methodist churches, annual conferences, general boards and agencies are to be models for energy conservation by doing such things as: installing dampers in furnaces, insulating adequately all church properties, heating and lighting only rooms that are in use, using air circulation, purchasing energy efficient appliances, and exploring alternative energy sources such as solar energy. Local churches, camps, and agencies are urged to become involved in programs such as the Energy Stewardship Congregation program, thereby witnessing our shared values of justice and sustainability.

(3) All United Methodist Church programs and mission projects must model our sustainable and just energy values. We particularly urge the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) to support and fund renewable and energy efficient mission projects; and we urge the Church Architecture Office of the General Board of Global Ministries to make energy conservation and the use of renewables a prime design feature in new building design and renovations.

(4) We support increased government funding for research and development of renewable energy sources, especially solar energy, and government incentives to speed the application of the resulting technologies to our energy needs, wherever appropriate. The greatest national and international effort should be made in the areas of conservation and renewable energy sources.

(5) We encourage international lending institutions and aid agencies to promote sustainable and just energy policies.

(6) We oppose any energy policy that will result in continuing exploitation of indigenous peoples' lands. The despoiling of indigenous peoples' lands and the increased health and social-economic problems that have resulted because of oil exploration, hydroelectric projects, and the mining of coal and the milling of uranium must cease.

(7) We support national energy programs that will not increase the financial burden on the poor, the elderly, and those with fixed incomes. If a rapid rise in the price of fuel is necessary to smooth out distortions in the energy economy, as many economists believe, then means should be found to cushion the impact of such price increases on the poor. Furthermore, energy policies must guarantee universal service to all consumers, protecting low-income and rural residents.

(8) We support full cooperation of all nations in efforts to ensure equitable distribution of necessary energy supplies, the control of global warming, and rapid development and deployment of appropriate technologies based on renewable energy resources such as solar, wind, and water energy generation.

(9) We strongly encourage The United Methodist Church at all levels to engage in a serious study of these energy issues in the context of Christian faith, especially the values of justice and sustainability.

## **Environmental Stewardship, 1984**

### **I. A Theology of Stewardship and the Environment**

All creation is under the authority of God and all creation is interdependent. Our covenant with God requires us to be stewards, protectors, and defenders of all creation. The use of natural resources is a universal concern and responsibility of all as reflected in Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

In the Bible, a steward is one given responsibility for what belongs to another. The Greek word we translate as steward is *oikonomos*, one who cares for the household or acts as its trustee. The word *oikos*, meaning household, is used to describe the world as God's household. Christians, then, are to be stewards of the whole household (creation) of God. *Oikonomia*, "stewardship," is also the root of our word "economics." *Oikos*, moreover, is the root of our modern word, "ecology." Thus in a broad sense, stewardship, economics, and ecology are, and should be, related.

The Old Testament relates these concepts in the vision of *shalom*. Often translated "peace," the broader meaning of *shalom* is wholeness. In the Old Testament, *shalom* is used to characterize the wholeness of a faithful life lived in relationship to God. *Shalom* is best understood when we experience wholeness and harmony as human beings with God, with others, and with creation itself. The task of the steward is to seek *shalom*.

Stewards of God's Creation. The concept of stewardship is first introduced in the creation story. In Genesis 1:26, the Bible affirms that every person is created in God's image. But this gift brings with it a unique responsibility. Being created in God's image brings with it the responsibility to care for God's creation. God chose to give human beings a divine image not so we would exploit creation to our own ends, but so we would be recognized as stewards of God. To have dominion over the earth is a trusteeship, a sign that God cares for creation and has entrusted it to our stewardship. Our stewardship of all the world's resources is always accountable to God who loves the whole of creation and who desires that it exist in *shalom*. The intention of creation was that all should experience *shalom*, to know the goodness of creation. In the Old Testament, "fullness of life" means having enough, sufficient, to experience the goodness of creation. By contrast, our age has come to define "fullness of life" as more than enough. The desire of many for excess begins to deny enough for others, and *shalom* is broken. That all should participate in creation's goodness is a fundamental of stewardship.

Another theme of *shalom* is that in creation we are all related. Humans are not self-sufficient. We need God, others, nature. The story of the garden (Genesis 2) attempts to picture the complete and harmonious interrelatedness of all creation. There is *shalom* only when we recognize that interrelatedness and care for the whole. When we violate the rules of the garden, we are dismissed. In ecological terms, when we violate the principles of ecology, we suffer environmental damage.

As the story of the garden shows, God's intention of *shalom* was not carried out. Sin intervened, and the *shalom* was broken. But God offered a way to restore *shalom* - redemption. And as God's stewards we have a role in that redemption. Stewardship, then, is to become involved wherever wholeness is lacking and to work in harmony with God's saving activity to reconcile, to reunite, to heal, to make whole.

Stewardship has to do with how we bring all of the resources at our disposal into efficient use in our participation in the saving activity of God. Environmental stewardship is one part of our work as God's stewards. As stewards of the natural environment we are called to preserve and restore the air, water, and land on which life depends. Moreover, we are called to see that all life has a sufficient share of the resources of nature. With new hope rooted in Christ and with more obedient living as stewards of the earth, we can participate in God's healing of creation.

## **II. United Methodist Historical Concerns**

Since the beginnings of the Methodist movement, there has been a concern with what we today call “environmental concerns.” Wesley’s emphasis on “cleanliness” came as he observed a land of open sewers, impure water, unplanned cities, and smoke-filled air. In the mines and mills, squalor and filth were everywhere, as was disease. The substantial decline in the death rate in England from 1700 to 1801 can be traced to improvements in environment, sanitation, and a wider knowledge of concepts of basic health such as those advocated by Wesley.

## **III. Principles for Christian Stewardship of the Environment**

### A. Responsible and Equitable Use of Natural Resources.

We support measures which will lead to a more careful and efficient use of the resources of the natural world. We urge United Methodists to analyze their consumption patterns and to seek to live a simple and less resource-dependent life.

We encourage programs which will recycle solid materials of all sorts—paper, glass, wood, building materials, metals, plastics, etc.

We urge United Methodists to participate actively in community recycling programs and urge the establishment of such programs in communities without these programs.

We believe that natural resources, outside the control of different nations, from the genes that form life to the air and outer space, are the common heritage of all humanity, and therefore must be developed and preserved for the benefit of all, not just for the few, both today and for generations to come.

We support the concept of common heritage where people have the right to enough of the resources of the universe to provide for their health and well-being; and we believe that God’s creation is intended to be used for the good of all as a precious gift, not for warfare or economic oppression of others.

### B. Right to Live in a Community Free of Toxic and Hazardous Substances.

We advocate that governments:

- (a) aggressively assess the extent of possible toxic and hazardous waste disposal problems within their jurisdictions;
- (b) require that the entity or entities responsible for the problem pay for hazardous waste cleanup and for any health damages caused by the improper or inadequate disposal of such substances; and
- (c) severely penalize those convicted of illegal disposal of hazardous and toxic materials.

We encourage measures to minimize the use of toxic and hazardous substances.

We oppose the practice of exporting materials banned in one nation for use in another nation.

We advocate that all parties with information on the health effects of a potentially toxic or hazardous substance make these data available to users of the substance.

We support measures to strengthen the public’s right-to-know about chemical substances in their communities. Communities have a right to know whether their water, air, soil, or food is clean and free of toxic pollution.

We support applying the “Precautionary Principle,” shifting the burden of proof to polluters to show that their air and water emissions are safe, rather than making citizens prove that emissions pose a health threat.

We support the right of those groups that would be affected by a nuclear, toxic, or hazardous material waste repository or incinerator to be involved actively in all decisions to locate such repositories or incinerators in their neighborhoods or jurisdictions.

We urge a halt to nuclear and toxic waste disposal at sea and stringent controls on toxic waste disposal in the soil.

### C. Right to Clean Air.

We believe clean air is a basic right and necessity for all life. We must clean up and prevent air pollution, which threatens the health of our families and the survival of all life on the planet. To ensure that we protect future generations and our natural environment from the harmful effects of air pollution and leave a legacy of clean air:

We advocate the adoption and strict enforcement of adequate standards (health-based air quality standards to protect vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, and people with asthma) to control outdoor air pollutants such as vehicle and industrial smokestack emissions.

We urge all United Methodists to car pool, use mass transit, drive fuel efficient cars, and find other ways of reducing vehicle and industrial emissions.

We must give special attention to the long-term effects of air pollution, such as the depletion of the ozone layer, global warming, and acid rain; we support international and bilateral efforts to eliminate the cause of these problems.

We advocate that all large polluters, specifically power plants, refineries and chemical manufacturers, irrespective of age or fuel use, meet standards based on the least polluting process in each industrial sector.

We advocate the adoption and strict enforcement of adequate standards to control indoor air pollutants, such as chemical fumes from gas stoves and furnaces, pesticides, cleaning materials, formaldehyde, candles, paint, photocopy machines, radon and carpets, as well as particulates such as dust, mold, and asbestos fibers.

We advocate prohibiting smoking and providing adequate fresh air ventilation in all indoor facilities.

### D. Minimization of Chemical Use.

We recommend the concept of integrated pest management (IPM), natural control systems, and crop rotation.

We urge that greater restrictions be placed on the export of restricted agricultural chemicals and that development and aid agencies encourage the use of agricultural techniques which rely less heavily on agricultural chemical use.

We recommend that industry, consumer groups, and governmental agencies aggressively investigate and study the long-range effects of chemicals used for the processing and preservation of food products, since many of these chemicals are harmful to animals and humans.

### E. Responsible Land Use.

We encourage economic and farming practices which conserve and promote the improvement of topsoil.

We urge that governments provide farmers with incentives for more careful management of this precious resource.

We urge that the careful maintenance of the productivity of farm land be the central goal of all management of agricultural lands.

We urge governments to preserve the most productive soils for agricultural purposes.

We advocate for the preservation of forests (including reforestation), wetlands and wild areas for ecological balance, wildlife production, water quality, air quality, and the human spirit

#### F. Preservation of the Diversity of Life.

We believe that the wondrous diversity of nature is a key part of God's plan for creation. Therefore, we oppose measures which would eliminate diversity in plant and animal varieties, eliminate species, or destroy habitats critical to the survival of endangered species or varieties.

We support national and international efforts to protect endangered species and imperiled habitats.

#### G. Right to Abundant and Clean Water.

The water on this planet is a sacred gift from God. To ensure that water remains pure and available to all:

We urge that steps be taken by all people to ensure more careful management and preservation of ground water sources.

We support the right of native peoples to the first use of waters on their lands.

We urge that industrial, municipal, agricultural and individual consumers of water develop and use water-conserving technology and practices.

We believe that water is a gift from God that needs to be kept clean. We advocate measures that will address polluted runoff that is threatening to public health; protection of waters for future generations; wetlands preservation to clean water and sustain wildlife; the public's right to know that their water is safe for drinking, swimming, and fishing; and effective enforcement against illegal pollution.

#### H. Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology.

We urge that the ethical and environmental effects of new technologies be fully examined before these technologies are used on a widespread basis. We acknowledge the constantly imperfect state of our knowledge of the effects of new technology and urge the development of those technologies most in accord with God's plan of wholeness for all creation.

#### I. Minimization of the Military's Impact on the Environment.

We oppose the production and testing of weapons designed to destroy or harm God's creation, such as all chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons.

We urge the abolishment of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and urge the cleanup of sites contaminated by chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons waste.

### **IV. Involvement**

We urge all United Methodists, their local churches, boards and agencies to examine their roles as stewards of God's earth and to study, discuss, and work to implement this resolution.

All general agencies shall develop appropriate resources to implement this resolution.

### **Common Heritage, 1984**

The common heritage is a pioneering concept in actual international cooperation and sharing of the benefits of the world's resources. This concept stems from the underlying premise that resources outside the control of different nations should be under a just and equitable system of management. Several principles are a general guide to what a common heritage area may be. These include the need for full participation in decision-making for all nations; the use of the resource area only for peaceful purposes; no nation allowed an exclusive claim; the transfer of technology; and development of the resources for the benefit of all humanity while ensuring future generations the use of the area and resources as well.



### Past, Present, and Future Implementation

The international community has been developing the concept of common heritage through the United Nations Law of the Sea Treaty and the Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies. The system that has evolved in the Law of the Sea is one to which most countries have agreed, although no one nation has been totally satisfied. Nations are continuing in the process to complete the implementation of the concept through the ongoing Law of the Sea process. The concept of the common heritage is being expanded to include, but is not limited to, the air we breathe; water, which sustains all life; the genetic variability of plants and animals upon which future agriculture and medicine may depend; Antarctica; the moon and other planets; and outer space.

### Biblical and Theological Base

The common heritage concept has its roots for people of faith in the biblical understanding that all creation is under the authority of God and that all creation is interdependent. Our covenant with God requires us to be stewards, protectors, and defenders of all creation. The use of natural resources is a universal concern and responsibility of all as reflected in Psalm 24:1: “The earth is the LORD’S and the fullness thereof” (Revised Standard Version).

The New Testament confronts us with the implication of the Old Testament understanding when it asks us how we use our resources in relation to our brothers and sisters. John the Baptist prepared us for Jesus’ ministry by stating, “Those who have two coats let them share with those who have none; and those who have food let them do likewise” (Luke 3:11, RSV). This philosophy was carried forth into the early church by incorporating the belief that the way in which one shares one’s goods is a reflection of how one loves God. This is stated in 1 John 3:17 (RSV): “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”

### Our Denominational Witness

The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church apply these basic biblical perceptions to how we use the resources of creation, in the statement: “We believe that Christian faith denies to any person or group of persons exclusive and arbitrary control of any other part of the created universe. Socially and culturally conditioned ownership of property is, therefore, to be considered a responsibility to God” (§ 67A).

The Social Principles also remind us that “upon the powerful rests responsibility to exercise their wealth and influence with restraint” (§ 69B). Furthermore, the statement says that as United Methodists “we applaud international efforts to develop a more just international economic order in which the limited resources of the earth will be used to the maximum benefit of all nations and peoples” (§ 69B).

United Methodists have affirmed the common heritage since 1976 and have worked to see the common heritage become codified into international agreements for Law of the Sea, the moon, and Antarctica. Statements of Understanding

In light of the uneven patterns of utilization of the world’s resources and in light of our own understanding of the gospel and United Methodist tradition, we affirm these principles:

1. Specific natural resources belong to all humanity, and therefore must be developed and preserved for the benefit of all, not just for the few, both today and for generations to come.
2. All people have the right to enough of the resources of the universe to provide for their health and well-being.
3. God’s creation is intended to be used for the good of all as a precious gift, not for warfare or economic oppression of others.

## Recommended Actions

Therefore, as United Methodists we are called to:

1. Work for and support the process of legal implementation of the common heritage concept as understood in the Law of the Sea Treaty and the Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, as vehicles to address a more just and responsible use of God's creation;
2. Request that the appropriate general agencies of The United Methodist Church study and develop a broad biblical and theological understanding of the common heritage concept, which should include but not be limited to Antarctica, outer space, plant and animal genetics, air, and water;
3. Request that the appropriate general agencies of The United Methodist Church develop and distribute resources for education about, and become advocates for, the common heritage concept; and
4. Study these materials on the common heritage as individuals, local congregations, general program agencies, and other groups.

### **Indoor Air Pollution, 1988**

The United Methodist Church stands in a long tradition of profound concern for the health and physical well-being of the human family.

For Jesus, the abundant life embraced the physical well-being as well as emotional and spiritual health; he performed acts of healing as signs of the reign of God.

John Wesley was, in his day, at the forefront of the advocates of physical health, and the churches that formed The United Methodist Church have a long record of health and welfare ministries.

Our Church has addressed in various ways the issues of environmental contamination, especially outdoor pollution and workplace hazards. Indoor air pollution has also emerged as an important dimension of overall air contamination, and extensive research has demonstrated the acuteness of this problem. Indoor air pollution affects in a very serious way persons with respiratory problems, allergies, chemical sensitivities, and ecological illnesses. This is an emerging problem for churches, because air pollutants in church buildings can be serious deterrents against attendance at worship and other church activities for some persons.

Churches are generally unaware of the extent to which persons are either prevented from being in church facilities by pollutants or endure them only at considerable personal discomfort or illness.

Sources of indoor pollution in church buildings include chemical fumes from gas stoves and furnaces, pesticides, cleaning materials, formaldehyde, candles, paint, photocopy machines, restroom deodorizers, and radon, as well as particulates such as dust, mold, and asbestos fibers.

Additional pollutants are brought into church buildings in the form of perfume, cologne, and other scents; dry-cleaning odors; and cigarette smoke (which itself releases over 1,000 chemicals into the air).

The problem in church buildings is compounded by: (a) the general absence of effective air circulation systems that can mechanically circulate fresh air, and (b) the improved insulating of buildings in recent decades, which, while conserving heat, also reduces the rate of air exchange and allows the buildup of concentration of the indoor pollution. U.S. government studies have shown indoor air pollution levels to be as much as eight times higher than outdoor air pollution.

Indoor air pollution is not only a problem for those most seriously affected; the long-term effects of such pollution could potentially be detrimental to everyone. In our century, the human body is forced to cope with an incredible level of chemical exposure, for which the long-term effects are only partially known. Lung cancer and other sickness resulting from exposure to smoke, whether to smokers themselves or to involuntary smokers exposed to sidestream smoke, are the most widely publicized of the potential long-term effects on everyone.

There is much that churches and church institutions can do to minimize the effect of indoor air pollution. Some churches have already taken steps to reduce indoor air pollution and to address the needs of those seriously affected.

We urge local churches and Church agencies and institutions at all levels to: (a) invite those with special sensitivities to share the handicaps and suffering that they bear due to indoor air pollution; (b) prohibit smoking in all indoor facilities; (c) provide adequate fresh air ventilation or high-quality air cleaning equipment, if necessary; and (d) take an audit of sources of indoor air pollution and take remedial steps.

We ask the Health and Welfare Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, in consultation with those most seriously affected, to: (a) draw up and promote guidelines for addressing indoor air pollution, and (b) to investigate and develop a vigorous program to eliminate the use of tobacco in churches and Church institutions.

Further, we ask the General Board of Church and Society and conference church and society agencies to advocate strong legislation in all nations at all levels of government for the adoption and attainment of indoor air pollution standards and for laws that regulate chemical contamination of public areas, workplaces, and the overall environment.

Finally, we ask all United Methodists to make an inventory of the pollution levels in their homes, schools, workplaces, and public areas and to take steps to reduce environmental pollution for the sake of ourselves, our loved ones, our communities, and future generations.

### **Environmental Health and Safety in Workplace and Community, 1988, 2000**

God's covenant with humanity affirms that God is involved in the healing of individuals (Proverbs 3:7-8) and includes the mandate to protect the community from dangers that threaten the health and safety of the people. At the beginning of Methodism, John Wesley provided medicine and medical treatment at no cost to the poor in London and Bristol. In addition to pioneering free dispensaries in England, Wesley emphasized prevention of illness. In his book *Primitive Physic*, he dealt with nutrition and hygiene, as well as treatment of the sick. The first Social Creed, adopted by the 1908 General Conference of The Methodist Episcopal Church, declared that workers must be protected "from dangerous machinery, occupational disease, injuries, and mortality," and that working conditions must be regulated to safeguard the physical and moral health of the community. Today as well, the church is called to declare that the health of every individual is part of community health, including safe and healthy conditions in places where people work. The church has a responsibility to pronounce clearly the implications of God's law of love for human health. Where human life and health are at stake, economic gain must not take precedence.

#### **A. Public Health and Safety Hazards**

Public health hazards originate from a variety of sources, including organisms (e.g., bacteria, fungi, and viruses), physical conditions (e.g., hazardous machinery, excessive noise, repetitive motion), toxic chemicals, and radiation. Such hazards can produce infectious diseases, disabling injuries, incapacitating illnesses, and death. Toxic substances and related hazards such as ionizing radiation threaten the exposed individual to additional hazards such as cancer and sterility, and they also threaten future generations with birth defects and gene mutations.<sup>1</sup>

## B. Declaration

Public health and safety is dependent on effective prevention and active protection before illness or injury have occurred. To fulfill God's commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves, we should support action to protect each individual's health and to preserve the health of the community. To this end, we declare:

(1) Every individual, including those with disabilities, has a right to a safe and healthful environment unendangered by a polluted natural world, a hazardous workplace, an unsanitary community, dangerous household products, unsafe drugs, and contaminated food. This human right must take precedence over property rights. Moreover, the necessary preservation of human life and health must not be sacrificed or diminished for economic gain. It is unconscionable that anyone should profit from conditions that lead to the disease, disability, or death of another.

Furthermore, the essential protection of the physical and moral quality of human life must not be compromised by competing considerations of capital investment and return, or diminished by society's insistence on affluence, luxury, and convenience. Environmental health and safety regulations must not be compromised by private property rights or risk-benefit analysis.

(2) Public health hazards must be prevented in order to avoid the serious individual and community consequences of injury, illness, and untimely death, including disability, physical pain, mental anguish, lost human potential, family stress, and the diversion of scarce medical resources.

(3) Public health hazards to future generations, such as toxic substances and wastes that produce birth defects and gene mutations, must be prevented in order to avoid a legacy of disease, disability, and untimely death. No generation has the right to assume risks that potentially endanger the viability of future life.

(4) The public health risks of technological development must be fully researched and openly assessed before new technologies are introduced into the home, the workplace, the community, or the environment. Consumers and workers have the right to know what technologies and substances are used in the workplace, in foods, and other products.

(5) The preservation and protection of human life from public and environmental health hazards is a fundamental responsibility of government that must be maintained by active public support and adequate public funds. All levels of government must enforce public and environmental health and safety laws.

(6) Preventive health care should be taught in educational institutions to persons in every age group at every level of society. Health professionals in all branches of medicine and public health, and those in related fields, should be encouraged to practice preventive medicine, implementing community preventive health strategies, and assist patients in the adoption of healthy lifestyles. Programs should be implemented that educate and inform consumers and workers about physical, chemical, biological, and radiological hazards of products, services, working conditions, and environmental contaminants.

(7) The right to a healthy and safe workplace is a fundamental right. Employers must assume responsibility to eliminate hazards in their workplaces which cause death, injury, and disease and to work together with their employees and employee organizations to achieve this objective.

## C. General Recommendations

We call upon all local churches, annual and central conferences, and general boards and agencies of The United Methodist Church to provide for the safety and health of persons in their meeting places and work places; and to educate and to encourage advocacy for public and environmental health and safety in the community as indicated in the declarations above.

### **Black-Owned Farmland, 1988**

WHEREAS, according to the agricultural census of 1978, Black farmland loss was two-and-one-half times greater than the loss rate for white farmers; Black farmers as a group, compared to other farmers, depend more heavily on farming for an income and have less off-farm income; the continuing loss of ownership and control of agricultural land by Black American farmers has reduced their ability to achieve economic viability and financial independence; this loss has been accelerated by the Black land owners' lack of access to capital, technical information, and legal resources needed to retain and develop agricultural land holdings into stable, income-producing, self-sustaining operations;

WHEREAS, the 1982 Civil Rights Commission study entitled "The Decline of Black Farming in America" reported many actions and inactions on the part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and, in particular, the Farmers Home Administration that have contributed to Black land loss; a follow-up study in 1983 showed the Farmers Home Administration's record to be worse than the year before; there were many specific recommendations in the two reports that are yet to be followed through on;

WHEREAS, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission's study predicted that, if present trends continue, there will be no Black-owned farms by the year 2000;

WHEREAS, the dislocation of Blacks in agriculture and the disruption of rural Black family life contributes to unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, child and spouse abuse, loss of identity, loss of community leadership, increasing absentee land ownership, and a decline in attendance and participation in rural Black churches across the countryside;

WHEREAS, we as United Methodists take seriously Paul's advice: "If one member suffers, all suffer together";

Therefore, be it resolved, that The United Methodist Church go on record supporting the crucial need for the Church and the government to provide financial, technical, and management assistance to help stop the decline of Black-owned farmland in America.

Be it further resolved, that the General Conference of The United Methodist Church call upon the secretary of agriculture to provide grants to agricultural colleges to help develop new marketing strategies for limited-resource farmers and to help disseminate information on existing viable marketing strategies—preference to be given to historically Black agriculture (1890 land grant) colleges where available.

Be it further resolved, that the General Conference of The United Methodist Church ask the secretary of agriculture to seek initiatives linking government, private, church, and other community resources to offer support and to aid Black farm owners.

Finally, be it further resolved, that the General Conference of The United Methodist Church ask the President of the United States and the secretary of agriculture to press for a just and enlightened public farm policy that will preserve the diverse ownership of land as well as the continuation of Black-owned family-operated farms.

### **Environmental Justice for a Sustainable Future, 1992**

Humankind is destroying the global ecological balance that provides the life-support systems for the planet. Signs of the crisis are evident all around us. The global ecological imbalance produces environmental destruction.

Polluted air pervades the atmosphere. Garbage abounds, with little space for disposal. Polluting gases destroy the ozone layer and cause global warming. Deforestation leads to soil erosion, a lack of carbon storage, inadequate water quantity and poor quality, and the loss of species, and thus a reduction in biological diversity. The misuse of pesticides and fertilizers contributes to the poisoning of our soils and creates products harmful to all life. Present social, political, and economic development structures fail to provide the basic necessities of food, clothing,

and shelter for an estimated 5.4 billion people. Additionally, at least one billion people live in absolute poverty. The environmental crisis results in social unrest and mounting violence.

### **Historical and Theological Concerns**

Through the ages, a theological base for the domination of creation was found in Genesis 1:28: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over . . . every living thing that moves upon the earth.” Misinterpretation of “subdue” and “dominion” has been used to justify much of the nature-destroying aspects of modern civilization.

The scale of human activity has grown so large that it now threatens the planet itself. Global environmental problems have become so vast that they are hard to comprehend. Between 1955 and 1990, the human population has doubled to 5.4 billion. During the same time, the consumption of fossil fuels has quadrupled. Increasing evidence suggests that the carbon dioxide from fossil fuels has already caused a noticeable warming of the globe. Destruction of habitat, especially tropical rain forests, is causing the loss of species at an ever-increasing rate. Valuable topsoil is being depleted. There is a recurring hole in the ozone layer. More ultraviolet radiation now reaches the earth, which may cause more cancers, poorer crop growth, and damage to the immune systems of humans and other animals.

Confronted with the massive crisis of the deterioration of God’s creation and faced with the question of the ultimate survival of life, we ask God’s forgiveness for our participation in this destruction of God’s creation. We have misused God’s good creation. We have confused God’s call for us to be faithful stewards of creation with a license to use all of creation as we see it. The first humans had to leave the garden of Eden when they decided they had permission to use all of creation despite warnings to the contrary. We have denied that God’s covenant is with all living creatures (Genesis 9:9). We have even denied that all of the human family should enjoy the covenant. We forget that the good news that we are called to proclaim includes the promise that Jesus Christ came to redeem all creation (Colossians 1:15-20).

We believe that at the center of the vision of shalom is the integration of environmental, economic, and social justice.

We are called to eliminate overconsumption as a lifestyle, thus using lower levels of finite natural resources.

We are called to seek a new lifestyle rooted in justice and peace.

We are called to establish new priorities in a world where 40,000 children die of hunger each day.

Therefore, we are called to a global sense of community and solidarity leading to a new world system of international relationships and economic/environmental order. In this way, the misery of one billion poor now living in absolute poverty can be alleviated and the living ecosystem be saved.

### **Principles for a Sustainable Future**

The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church remind us that “all creation is the Lord’s, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it” (§ 160). D

Development must be centered in the concept of sustainability as defined by the World Commission of Environment and Development: “to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The Christian understanding of sustainability encompasses this concept. Fundamental to our call as faithful witnesses is the meeting of human needs within the capacity of ecosystems. This ensures the security of creation and a just relationship between all people. Sustainable development, therefore, looks toward a healthy future in three vital areas: the social community, the economy, and the environment.

## **Conclusion**

The United Methodist Church will strive for a global sense of community to help achieve social, economic, and ecological justice for all of creation.

We will focus on the conversion to sustainable practices in the following areas:

### **Atmosphere**

- Support measures calling for the reduction of carbon dioxide, chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), methane, nitrogen oxides, and sulfur dioxide, believed to cause the greenhouse effect and acid rain.
- Support measures calling for the elimination of CFCs to stop the depletion of the ozone layer.
- Support the cleanup of environmental problems through economic incentive, appropriate enforcement measures, and sanctions against those causing pollution.

### **Earth**

- Support integrated and sustainable natural resource management.
- Commit to the “Greening of the World” through the limiting of all emissions of pollutants that damage forests and reforestation.
- Work for ecologically sound agricultural practices that produce healthy food and a clean environment.
- Protect biodiversity among both animals and plants.

### **Water**

- Support integrated, sustainable management to reduce or eliminate factors contributing to limited water quantity and poorer quality.

### **Energy**

- Support improved energy conservation and greater reliance on new and renewable sources of energy.
- Support the development of efficient mass transportation.
- Support a call for a sustainable national energy policy.

## **Actions\Recommendations**

We call upon the agencies and local congregations of The United Methodist Church to take the following actions:

### **Council of Bishops**

- Communicate to the church the urgency of responding to the ecological crisis.
- Model for the church a “ministry of presence” by going to places where humans and ecosystems are endangered by environmental destruction.

### **General Council on Ministries (GCOM)**

- Initiate basic research on the changing attitudes on environmental issues among United Methodist members.
- Request each United Methodist agency to include an evaluation of their corporate action taken toward sustainable environmental practices as a part of their 1995–96 Quadrennial Report.

### **General Board of Church and Society (GBCS)**

- Develop programs that help annual conferences and local churches become more involved in sustainable practices in public policy and personal aspects of the ecological crisis. These programs would emphasize conversion to a sustainable society.

### **General Board of Discipleship (GBOD)**

- Develop curriculum and programs (for all ages), in consultation with GBCS, that emphasize ecological responsibility as a key element of discipleship.

### **General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM)**

- Join with the GBCS in working with mission partners through the National, World, and Women’s Divisions to prepare for and participate in the environmental recommendations that will flow from the United Nations

Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED).

- Conduct a survey, with the assistance of all mission partners, to identify environmental concerns and develop projects geared to the solution of common concerns.
- Initiate an audit of all National, World, and Women's Division and UMCOR-sponsored projects as to their environmental effect on the global ecological balance.
- Establish an eco-mission intern group to work on ecology issues under the sponsorship of the National and World Divisions.
- Include global environmental issues in the training of all GBGM missionaries.
- Facilitate dialogue between religious groups, other nongovernment organizations, and government agencies on the formation and methods of popular participation.

#### General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM)

- Include a greater awareness in clergy education and training of the global ecological crises.

#### United Methodist Communications (UMCom)

- Produce programs that stress Christian responsibility for the future of creation and include models of The United Methodist Church's involvement in environmental justice.

#### General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA)

- Assist the church in its effort to be ecologically responsible in its own use of resources by collecting statistics on local churches' and general agencies' use of energy, water, paper, and recycling to monitor the progress of the church in these aspects of stewardship.

#### General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (GBPHB)

- Develop investment guidelines, in consultation with agencies, to evaluate its securities in light of whether those corporations have a positive history of care for creation.

#### Local Congregations

- Develop programs to incorporate the concerns of ecological justice into their work in evangelism, social concerns, mission activities, stewardship, trustees, and worship.

### **Environmental Racism, 1992**

The United Methodist Church is committed to understanding and eliminating racism. One generally ignored aspect is environmental racism. People of color are disproportionately affected by toxic contamination due to the production, storage, treatment, and disposal process of hazardous materials and wastes. African American, Hispanic North American, Asian American, Native American, and third world communities are usually the least able, politically and economically, to oppose the sitings of these facilities.

Research has documented the following:

(1) Race is consistently the most statistically significant variable in the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities. Three of the five largest commercial hazardous waste landfills in the United States are located in communities of color; communities with commercial hazardous waste facilities have two to three times the average minority population of communities without such facilities; and three out of every five African Americans and Hispanic North Americans live in communities with toxic waste sites.<sup>1</sup> The predominantly African American and Hispanic south side of Chicago has the greatest concentration of hazardous waste sites in the United States.

(2) Communities where hazardous waste incinerators are sited tend to have large minority populations, low incomes, and low property values. The minority portion of the population in communities with existing incinerations is 98 percent higher than the national average. In Houston, Texas, six of eight municipal incinerators are located in predominantly African American neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup>

(3) Communities of color have greater cancer rates than white communities.<sup>3</sup> Many environmental groups are calling for a study of the linkage between environmental contamination and increased cancer rates.



(4) Fifty percent of the children in the United States suffering from lead poisoning are African American.

(5) Farm workers' children (mainly Hispanics) in the United States suffer a higher rate of birth defects due to their mothers' exposure to pesticides during the early stages of pregnancy. In farm worker communities, children with cancer are common. Pesticide exposure among farm workers causes more than 300,000 pesticide-related illnesses each year.<sup>4</sup>

(6) Navajo teenagers have cancer rates seventeen times the national average, due to countless uranium spills on Navajo lands that contaminated their water, air, and soil.<sup>5</sup>

(7) The growing trend during the 1980s and 1990s has been to dump toxic wastes in developing countries.<sup>6</sup> Countries such as Liberia have been offered much-needed foreign capital if they accepted several shipments of toxic wastes in the past few years. Unfortunately, these countries often lack the appropriate infrastructure to adequately handle the environmental and health problems that accompany these wastes.

Other evidence suggests that the problem is worsening. The findings of the Interdenominational Hearings on Toxics and Minorities, held in September 1990, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the General Board of Church and Society-sponsored consultation on Responding to Communities Facing Toxic Hazards held in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in October 1990, poignantly demonstrated that communities are still having problems related to toxic contamination more than ten years after the media exposed the problems.

Our society's attitude toward the production and disposal of hazardous products is one of "out of sight, out of mind." But "out of sight, out of mind" is most often where the poor and powerless live and work. These communities have thus become toxic "sacrifice zones." This pattern of racism represents a serious challenge to the conscience of all Christians. We ask our local churches, conferences, and general agencies to join with other religious bodies and groups in actions to end this form of racism:

(1) We request the Council of Bishops to address environmental racism in any formal communication to the denomination concerning racism or the environment.

(2) We urge annual conferences, districts, local churches, and general agencies to become more involved with community groups working to alleviate environmental racism.

(3) We urge all general program agencies and the General Commission on Religion and Race to:

- (a) disseminate the "stories" of people and communities affected by environmental racism;
- (b) find expertise, build leadership, and develop networks that can help empower people within communities in crisis; and
- (c) develop programs that help annual conferences, districts, and local churches respond to these concerns.

(4) We call upon the General Board of Church and Society to:

- (a) advocate a moratorium on the siting of hazardous waste treatment, storage, and disposal facilities in low-income/people-of-color communities;
- (b) advocate comprehensive legislation that remedies these injustices and adequately protects all citizens and the environment; and
- (c) develop programs that help annual conferences, districts, and local churches respond to these concerns.

(5) We request the General Council on Ministries to assist the General Board of Church and Society in conducting research in this area.

(6) We call upon the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits and other church investors to sponsor shareholder resolutions on environmental racism issues and to urge corporations to sign guidelines for corporate conduct on the environment (such as the Valdez Principles developed in cooperation with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility).

(7) We urge individual United Methodists to:

- (a) become aware of how and where their community's wastes are disposed and who in their community is adversely affected by the production and disposal of industrial chemicals; and
- (b) make a personal commitment to reduce their use of hazardous chemicals by one each day;

(8) We call upon the U.S. federal government to:

- (a) institute comprehensive risk-assessment studies of communities at risk and their affected populations;
- (b) enable these communities to participate in clean-up decisions that affect them directly;
- (c) institute a budget and staff in the Environmental Protection Agency to monitor toxic waste siting in low-income/people-of-color communities;
- (d) give these communities priority in receiving Superfund funding to clean up existing sites; and
- (e) prohibit hazardous waste exports and imports.

(9) We urge industry to:

- (a) assess the adverse impacts of their production and disposal processes on workers and surrounding communities;
- (b) implement comprehensive Toxics Use Reduction (TUR) programs;
- (c) develop nontoxic alternatives to commonly used hazardous materials;
- (d) comply with local, state, and federal environmental and safety laws;
- (e) respond to community concerns and grievances;
- (f) sign comprehensive environmental guidelines developed with public input, such as the Valdez Principles;
- (g) develop industrywide standards for environmental accounting and auditing procedures similar to those required for financial accounting.

## **New Developments in Genetic Science, 1992, 2000**

### **I. Foreword**

The 1988 General Conference approved a statement affirming the positive prospects and warning of the potential dangers of genetic technologies. The General Conference authorized the establishment of a representative task force to:

- (1) review and assess scientific developments in genetics and their implications for all life;
- (2) take initiatives with industrial, governmental, and educational institutions involved in genetic engineering to discuss further projections and possible impact;
- (3) convey to industry and government the sense of urgency to protect the environment as well as animal and human life;
- (4) support a moratorium on animal patenting until the task force has explored the ethical issues involved;
- (5) cooperate with other churches, faith groups, and ecumenical bodies sharing similar concerns;
- (6) explore the effects of the concentration of genetic engineering research tasks and applications in a few crops; and
- (7) recommend to the 1992 General Conference such further responses and actions as may be deemed appropriate. The term genetic science was adopted to identify collectively the aforementioned issues, and the task force was thus named the Genetic Science Task Force.

The task force was appointed in March 1989. Task force members include scientists, educators, health professionals, ethicists, theologians, a social worker, a lawyer, and a farmer. Informational hearings in the following areas provided basic data on the issues: Houston and College Station, Texas; Boston, Massachusetts; Washington,

D.C.; San Leandro, California; Ames, Iowa; Durham, North Carolina; and Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Testimony was received from geneticists, physicians, theologians, ethicists, social workers, attorneys, officers of biotechnology companies, journalists, insurance executives, governmental regulatory agency representatives, educators, and persons with genetic disorders and the family members of such persons. The hearing process formed the basis of the recommendations contained in this resolution. A more complete discussion of issues can be found in the complete report of the task force to General Conference.

## **II. Our Theological Grounding**

The United Methodist doctrinal/theological statement affirms that “new issues continually arise that summon us to fresh theological inquiry. Daily we are presented with an array of concerns that challenge our proclamation of God’s reign over all of human existence” (The Book of Discipline 1988, ¶ 69).

One of the concerns that merits critique in light of theological understandings is genetic science. The urgent task of interpreting the faith in light of the biotechnology revolution and evaluating the rapidly emerging genetic science and technology has only begun. The issues demand continuing dialogue at all levels of the church as persons from diverse perspectives seek to discern and live out God’s vision for creation.

The following affirmations provide the theological/doctrinal foundation of the task force’s work and recommendations. These historic affirmations represent criteria by which developments and potential developments in biotechnology are evaluated by the community of faith, the church. The task force urges the whole church to join in the urgent task of theological inquiry in what has been called the genetic age.

### **A. All creation belongs to God the creator**

Creation has its origin, existence, value, and destiny in God. Creation belongs to God, whose power and grace brings the cosmos out of nothingness, order out of chaos, and life out of death. Creation is a realm of divine activity as God continually seeks to bring healing, wholeness, and peace. All creation is accountable to God; therefore, all existence is contingent, finite, and limited. Creation has been declared “good” by the Creator, and its goodness inheres in its fulfillment of the divine purpose. The goodness of our genetic diversity is grounded in our creation by God.

### **B. Human beings are stewards of creation**

While human beings share with other species the limitations of finite creatures who owe their existence to God, their special creation “in the image of God” gives them the freedom and authority to exercise stewardship responsibly. This includes the knowledge of human life and behavior as it is being expanded by genetic science. The biblical imperative is that human beings are to nurture, cultivate, and serve God’s creation so that it might be sustained. Humans are to participate in, manage, nurture, justly distribute, employ, develop, and enhance creation’s resources in accordance with their finite discernment of God’s purposes. Their divinely conferred dominion over nature does not sanction exploitation and waste; neither does responsible stewardship imply refusal to act creatively with intelligence, skill, and foresight.

The image of God, in which humanity is created, confers both power and responsibility to use power as God does: neither by coercion nor tyranny, but by love. Failure to accept limits by rejecting or ignoring accountability to God and interdependency with the whole of creation is the essence of sin. Therefore, the question is not, Can we perform all prodigious work of research and technology? but, Should we? The notion that the ability to do something is permission to do it ignores the fundamental biblical understanding of human beings as stewards accountable to the Creator and as contingent, interdependent creatures. Although the pursuit of knowledge is a divine gift, it must be used appropriately with the principle of accountability to God and to the human community and the sustainability of all creation.

### **C. Technology in service to humanity and God**

God has given human beings the capacity for research and technological invention, but the worship of science is idolatry. Genetic techniques have enormous potential for enhancing creation and human life when they are applied to environmental, agricultural, and medical problems. When wisely used, they often provide positive—though limited and imperfect—solutions to such perplexing social problems as insufficient food supply, spread of disease, ecological deterioration, overpopulation, and human suffering. When used recklessly, for greedy profit, or for calculated improvement of the human race (eugenics), genetic technology becomes corrupted by sin. Moreover, we recognize that even the careful use of genetic technologies for good ends may lead to unintended consequences. We confess that even our intended consequences may not be in the best interest of all.

### **D. From creation to redemption and salvation**

Redemption and salvation become realities by divine grace as we respond in faith to God's action in Jesus Christ to defeat the powers of sin that enslave the human spirit and thwart the realization of God's purposes for creation. Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God's eternal Word and wisdom. His redemptive life, ministry, death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit reveal God's vision for humanity. Having distorted God's good intention for us in creation, we now are called to be conformed to God's true image in Jesus Christ.

Through the affirmation of the goodness of creation and the saving work of Christ, God has claimed all persons as beloved sons and daughters with inherent worth and dignity. Therefore, we understand that our worth as children of God is irrespective of genetic qualities, personal attributes, or achievements. Barriers and prejudices based on biological characteristics fracture the human family and distort God's goal for humanity. The community of Christ bears witness to the truth that all persons have unity by virtue of having been redeemed by Christ. Such unity respects and embraces genetic diversity, which accounts for many differences among people. Love and justice, which the Scriptures uplift and which Jesus Christ supremely expresses, require that the worth and dignity of the defenseless be preserved and protected. As the community of Christ, the church seeks to embody love and justice and to give of itself on behalf of the powerless and voiceless.

### **E. God's reign is for all creation**

The coming of God's reign is the guiding hope for all creation. Hebrew Scripture and the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ affirm that God's reign is characterized by liberation from all forms of oppression, justice in all relationships, peace and good will among all peoples, and the healing of all creation. It is both the vision of God's new heaven and new earth and the recognition of our limits that must inform and shape our role as stewards of earth and life in the emerging age of genetics. It is in the context of God's sovereignty over all existence, our hope for the coming of God's reign, our awareness of our own finitude, and our responsibility as stewards that we consider these issues and the following recommendations.

## **III. Issues in the Development of Genetic Research and Technology**

### **A. Why the Church is addressing these issues**

God's sovereignty over all creation, our status as stewards of creation's resources, and the church's nature as a nurturing and prophetic community living toward God's reign over all existence propel us to consider the theological/ethical implications of genetic science. As genetic science probes the very structure of biological life and develops means to alter the nature of life itself, the potential for relief of suffering and the healing of creation is enormous. But the potential for added physical and emotional suffering and social and economic injustice also exists. Developments in genetic science compel our reevaluation of accepted theological/ethical issues, including determinism versus free will, the nature of sin, just distribution of resources, the status of human beings in relation to other forms of life, and the meaning of personhood.

## **B. Genetic science affects every area of our lives**

The food we eat, the health care we receive, our biological traits, and the environment in which we live are all affected by research and developments in genetic science. As stewards of and participants in life and its resources, we seek to understand, to evaluate, and to utilize responsibly the emerging genetic technologies in accordance with our finite understanding of God's purposes for creation. The divine purpose includes justice, health, and peace for all persons, and the integrity and ecological balance of creation. The uses of genetic science have the potential for promoting as well as thwarting these aspects of the divine purpose.

Genetic issues are much more pressing than is generally recognized. Every community contains individuals and families who daily face genetic concerns in the workplace or as result of their own genetic makeup. The rapid growth of genetic science has increased our awareness of these concerns, has created new concerns, and has accelerated the theological, ethical, and pastoral challenges that genetics poses to persons of faith.

## **C. Scientific change now leads societal change**

The rise in importance of science and technology has been one of the most significant developments in the last 400 years. Beginning with the industrial revolution, we have witnessed a succession of revolutions: the technological, the atomic, and the biological. Each of these revolutions has presented society with a host of religious challenges and threats that have taken enormous and ongoing efforts to resolve constructively. The very nature of work, perceptions of the world, international relations, and family life has changed in part because of these revolutions.

A major dimension of the biological revolution is genetic science. Less than fifty years ago, the actual genetic substance of living cells, DNA, was firmly identified. Now, altering DNA in plants and animals, even humans, in order to correct disorders or to introduce more desirable characteristics is being done. Genetic developments in medicine and agriculture promise to alter the very nature of society, the natural environment, and even human nature. Christians must evaluate these developments in light of our basic understanding of God as creator and of humans as stewards of creation, including technology.

## **D. Genetic science challenges society**

Biotechnology based on genetic research is already upon us. Thousands of people and millions of dollars are devoted to genetic science. Gene therapy has already been introduced as an experimental medical treatment. Extensive research is being conducted in plant and animal genetics, with significant implications for the food supply, farm policy, agricultural economics, and ecological balance. The efforts to identify the estimated one hundred thousand human genes (the Human Genome Project) are well underway with funding from both the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Energy.

In spite of the rapid growth in genetic research, many people tend to see genetics merely as an extension of the changes in medical, agricultural, and other technologies. In fact, genetic science crosses new frontiers as it explores the essence of life. The implications of genetic research and development are so far-reaching that society must consider the effect of these developments on persons, animal and plant life, the environment, agriculture, the food supply, patent policies, and medicine. Delays in commercializing some of the technologies may afford society and the church additional time to address the implications, but the time available for serious reflection on the consequences of these technologies prior to their implementation is brief.

## **IV. Questions About Biotechnology**

New developments in technology always challenge society's imagination and understanding. Technology is often viewed either with awe or with fear. The popular view of the geneticist alternates between a saint who cures all disease and a mad scientist who creates monsters or perverts life. The extreme image must be avoided as society raises questions about the technologies themselves and questions how they should be properly developed and

controlled. Although genetic technologies are similar to other technologies, genetic science and technology force us to examine, as never before, the meaning of life, our understanding of ourselves as humans, and our proper role in God's creation.

Several basic questions can provide a framework within which to evaluate the effect of genetics (or any other new technology) on any segment of society. The questions revolve around issues of appropriateness, availability, efficacy, and accessibility.

## **V. The Patenting of Life Forms**

The patenting of life forms is a crucial issue in the debate over access to genetic technologies. Some claim that patenting of life will give complete control to the owner and so limit access. Others insist that the scientists and funding agencies or institutions must have some return on their investment. A compromise that many societies have worked out in order to provide economic returns for those who have developed a technology while providing access, eventually, to the entire society is the patent, or exclusive control of a technological invention for a period of years. But should exclusive ownership rights apply to the gene pool? In 1984, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church declared genes to be a part of the common heritage of all peoples. The position taken by the church in 1984 is consistent with our understanding of the sanctity of God's creation and God's ownership of life. Therefore, exclusive ownership rights of genes as a means of making genetic technologies accessible raises serious theological concerns. While patents on organisms themselves are opposed, process patents—wherein the method for engineering a new organism is patented—provide a means of economic return on investment while avoiding exclusive ownership of the organism and can be supported.

## **VI. Affirmations\Recommendations\Conclusions**

### **A. General**

(1) We affirm that knowledge of genetics is a resource over which we are to exercise stewardship responsibly in accordance with God's reign over creation. The use of genetic knowledge in ways that destabilize and fragment creation is resisted as a violation of God's vision of justice, peace, and wholeness.

(2) We caution that the prevalent principle in research that what can be done should be done is insufficient rationale for genetic science. This principle should be subject to legal and ethical oversight in research design and should not be the prevalent principle guiding the development of new technologies. Applications of research to technologies need moral and ethical guidance.

(3) We urge adequate public funding of genetic research so that projects not likely to be funded by private grants will receive adequate support and so that there will be greater accountability to the public by those involved in setting the direction of genetic research.

(4) We urge that genes and genetically modified organisms (human, plant, animal) be held as common resources and not be exclusively controlled, or patented. We support improvements in the procedures for granting patents on processes and techniques as a way to reward new developments in this area.

### **B. Medical recommendations**

#### **(1) Testing and Treatment**

(a) We support the right of all persons to health care and health-care resources regardless of their genetic or medical conditions.

(b) We support equal access to medical resources, including genetic testing and genetic counseling by appropriately educated and trained health-care professionals. We affirm that responsible stewardship of God's gift of human life implies access of all persons to genetic counseling throughout their reproductive life.

(c) We support human somatic gene therapies (recombinant DNA therapies that produce genetic changes in an individual which cannot be passed to offspring) that prevent or minimize disease and its effects. But we believe these therapies should be limited to the alleviation of suffering caused by disease. We urge that guidelines

and government regulations be developed for the use of all gene therapies. We oppose human germ-line therapies (those that result in changes that can be passed to offspring) because of the possibility of unintended consequences and of abuse. With current technology it is not possible to know if artificially introduced genes will have unexpected or delayed long-term effects not identifiable until the genes have been dispersed in the population.

We oppose both somatic and germ-line therapies when they are used for eugenic purposes or enhancements, that is, to provide only cosmetic change or to provide social advantage.

Furthermore, we urge that government regulations and professional organization guidelines be developed and effectively implemented for all gene therapies.

(d) We call on all nations to ban human cloning (the intentional production of genetically identical or essentially identical human beings and human embryos), whether such cloning is funded privately or through government research.

(e) We call for a ban on medical and research procedures which intentionally generate “waste embryos” which will knowingly be destroyed when the medical procedure or the research is completed.

## (2) Privacy and confidentiality of genetic information

(a) We support the privacy of genetic information. Genetic data of individuals and their families shall be kept secret and held in strict confidence unless confidentiality is waived by the individual or his or her family, or unless the collection and use of genetic identification data are supported by an appropriate court order.

(b) “-We support increased study of the social, moral, and ethical implications of the Human Genome Project. We support wide public access to genetic data that do not identify particular individuals.

(c) We oppose the discriminatory or manipulative use of genetic information, such as the limitation, termination, or denial of insurance or employment.

## C. Agriculture

(1) We support public involvement in initiating, evaluating, regulating, and funding of agricultural genetic research.

(a) We believe the public has an important policy and financial role in ensuring the continuation of research that furthers the goal of a safe, nutritious, and affordable food supply.

(b) We believe that the public should have input into whether a research effort, or its products, will serve an unmet need in food and fiber production and processing. We urge United Methodists to be active participants in achieving this accountability in all areas of the world.

(c) We believe that the benefits of research applications should accrue to the broadest possible public, including farmers and consumers.

(2) We support the sustainability of family farms, natural resources, and rural communities and urge that genetic research in agriculture and food products promote these goals.

## D. Environment

(1) As stewards of the planet Earth, we should strive to perpetuate all of God’s living creations as long as possible. We should be concerned not only with the well-being of humans, but also with the wholeness of the rest of creation. We should try to maintain ecological balance as God intended. Technologies such as genetic engineering can affect ecological balance. Genetic technologies must be used carefully to help sustain the planet.

(2) We caution that genetically engineered organisms be released into the environment only after careful testing in a controlled setting that simulates each environment in which the organisms are to be used.

(3) We urge the development of criteria and methodologies to anticipate and assess possible adverse environmental responses to the release of genetically engineered organisms.

(4) We urge that prior to the release of each organism, plans and procedures be developed to destroy genetically engineered organisms that may cause adverse environmental responses.

## E. What the church can do

(1) Expand education and dialogue around ethical issues in the development of genetic science and technology.

(a) We request that The United Methodist Church and its appropriate boards and agencies educate laity

and clergy on the issues of genetic science, theology, and ethics by conducting workshops and seminars, producing resource materials, and training pastors and laypersons to deal constructively with these issues. Sessions on the ethical implications of genetics technology should be included as part of seminary training, continuing education requirements for clergy, Christian educators' training events, adult and youth Sunday school curriculum, schools of mission and schools of church and society, and campus ministry programs.

(b) We request that clergy be trained to provide pastoral counseling for persons with genetic disorders and their families as well as those facing difficult choices as a result of genetic testing. These choices might include decisions such as those related to reproduction, employment, and living wills. Churches are encouraged to provide support groups for individuals and families affected by genetic disorders.

(c) We call on the church to support persons who, because of the likelihood of severe genetic disorders, must make difficult decisions regarding reproduction. We reaffirm the 1988 General Conference (The Book of Discipline 1988, ¶ 71G) position opposing the termination of pregnancy solely for the purpose of gender selection.

(d) We urge theological seminaries to offer courses and continuing education events that equip clergy to address theological and ethical issues raised by scientific research and technology.

(e) We urge the church to establish and maintain dialogue with those persons working to develop or promote genetics-based technologies.

The complexity and multifaceted implications of genetic science require continuing interaction among scientists, technologists, theologians, ethicists, industrial and corporate leaders, government officials, and the general public. The church can facilitate dialogue on the emerging issues. The Genetic Science Task Force hearings revealed a strong interest on the part of persons from various perspectives, experiences, and interests in exploring the ethical, theological, and societal implications of developments in genetics. Providing a forum for informed discussion will enable the church to inform the public, raise relevant theological/ethical concerns, expand and deepen theological exploration in light of contemporary developments, and more adequately support scientists and technologists who seek to live out their faith in their vocations.

The ethical concerns of the church need to be interjected into the laboratory, the factory, and the halls of government in an ongoing manner. Local churches, districts, annual conferences, and appropriate general agencies should participate in dialogues with university, industry, and government bodies.

(2) Produce resources to educate on genetics issues. General agencies of the church should develop additional interpretive resources on genetics issues.

(a) United Methodist Communications is urged to cooperate with the General Board of Church and Society to develop an episode of "Catch the Spirit" highlighting persons who testified to the Genetics Science Task Force.

(b) The Board of Discipleship is urged to develop curriculum materials stressing the ethical dimensions of the widespread use of genetic technologies in health, agriculture, and other industries.

(c) The Division of Health and Welfare Ministries of the General Board of Global Ministries is urged to develop materials in cooperation with United Methodist-affiliated hospitals on the ethical issues families may face regarding the use of new diagnostic tests and other procedures.

(d) The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry is urged to survey seminaries and United Methodist-affiliated schools for academic courses related to genetic science and to make this listing available through its publications.

(e) The General Council on Ministries Research Section is urged to survey United

Methodist general agencies and annual conferences requesting the names of informed speakers in the following categories:

- families affected by genetic disorders;
- clergy with experience in the fields of genetics research or genetics counseling;
- genetic counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other counseling professionals who work with individuals and families with genetic disorders;
- social and physical scientists researching the effect of genetic technologies on society;
- environmental, agricultural, and biomedical scientists;
- theologians and ethicists;



- farmers and others concerned about agricultural and environmental effects of these technologies;
- technologists and representatives of industry;
- physicians knowledgeable in genetic issues, especially obstetrician-gynecologists and pediatricians; and
- educators.

(3) Continue and increase The United Methodist Church's work in the area of genetics.

(a) The General Council on Ministries is urged to convene a meeting of general agency staff in early 1993 to review the work each agency plans in the 1993–1996 quadrennium relative to the ethics of genetic science technologies.

(b) The General Board of Church and Society is urged to continue its work in these areas, to publish a summary of the hearings it conducted on genetic science, and to monitor legislative and governmental actions related to genetic technologies.

(c) All general agencies are urged to cooperate with ecumenical groups as they seek to coordinate actions regarding the use of knowledge gained from genetic science. Concern for justice for persons and the integrity of all life should form the basis of our ecumenical witness.

(d) Local churches are urged to study the issues raised in this statement and to act on the recommendations.

### **God's Creation and the Church, 1996**

As disciples of Christ, we are called to be good stewards of God's creation. Accordingly, we call upon The United Methodist Church to adopt fresh ways to respond to the perils that now threaten the integrity of God's creation and the future of God's children.

Specifically, The United Methodist Church:

- designates one Sunday each year as a Festival of God's Creation, celebrating God's gracious work in creating the earth and all living things, incorporating into it the church's liturgical calendar, and developing appropriate ways for congregations to celebrate it;
- endorses the work of the National Inter-Religious Coalition for the Environment and the World Council of Churches Consultation on "Accelerated Climate Change: Sign of Peril, Test of Faith" and urges conferences and congregations to support their activities and programs;
- supports the annual observance of the United Nations' Environmental Sabbath and encourages conferences and churches to participate in their program;
- recommends that annual conferences establish annual awards to honor prophetic defenders of God's creation from within their own constituencies; and
- encourages a simplified and environmentally sound lifestyle throughout the church and requests that Church agencies, conferences, and congregations be stewards of God's creation by reducing levels of consumption and participating in programs that reuse and recycle goods.

### **U.S. Agriculture and Rural Communities in Crisis, 1996**

#### **I. Preface**

The United Methodist Church has long witnessed to rural peoples and their concerns. Each General Conference since 1940 has suggested responses for improving rural church and community life, and the economic and environmental well-being of rural peoples. The 1988 General Conference accepted a study on U.S. Agriculture and Rural Communities in Crisis. This resolution reaffirms that study and calls The United Methodist Church to continue its commitment to rural church ministry and its advocacy for agricultural and rural community concerns.

#### **II. Theological Statement: Land, People, and Justice**

God is the owner of the land (Leviticus 25); thus it is a gift in covenant that involves the stewardship of keeping and tending the land for present and future generations; as God's creation, land has the need to be regenerated that it may sustain life and be a place of joy. It is a common gift to all of life, requiring just patterns of land use.

Social, economic, and ecological justice with regard to the use of land was central to the Law. The land itself was to receive a rest every seven years (Leviticus 25:4). Voluntary charity or occasional care of the land was not enough. Israel's failure to follow the laws related to the land was considered a cause of the exile to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:21). The care of the land, the rights of the poor and those in need were at the center of the Law. Adequate food was regarded as an inherent right of all, such that the poor could eat grapes in a neighbor's vineyard or pluck grain when passing by a field (Deuteronomy 23:24-25). Owners were urged not to be too efficient in their harvest (Leviticus 19:9-10), so that gleaning by those in need was possible.

Indeed, the concept of equal access to community resources according to need formed the basis of the covenant the community was expected to embody. The caring for one's neighbor, especially one in need, became a religious obligation. Jesus both inherits and fulfills this tradition when he lists the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself as second only to the commandment to love God (Matthew 22:38-40).

The prophets saw the patterns of economic exploitation, social class consciousness, judicial corruption, political oppression, failing to care for the land, and exclusiveness as opposed to God's desire for full life and wholeness for all (Amos 2-8; Isaiah 5:1-13; 58:3-7; Jeremiah 2:7-8; Hosea 4:1-3). Some would suggest that both the contemporary world and Israel under the monarchy came to worship "bigness" more than God. Today, rural parts of the globe suffer from many of the same maladies as did ancient Israel. Land holdings have become more concentrated. The accumulation of material wealth often is worshiped as the solution to other spiritual and economic problems. Creation itself groans under a burden of eroding topsoil, toxic wastes, and polluted waters. Neither the land nor most of the people who work it can celebrate the wholeness God intended.

### **III. Major Findings**

#### **A. The Farm Crisis**

As the adverse economic conditions affecting rural America continue to be chronic, the patterns of diverse land ownership and control are disappearing. The structure of agriculture is changing. In 1986, the Office of Technology Assessment of the U.S. Congress estimated that about 72,000 farms may be lost each year until the year 2000. Most of the farms expected to be lost are family-sized units. Ethnic minority-owned and small-scale farms will decline further if present trends continue. A family farm is defined not by the number of acres in operation, but as an agricultural production unit and business in which the management, economic risk, and most of the labor (except in peak seasons) are provided by the family, and from which the family receives a significant part, though not necessarily the majority, of its income.

Declining land values, the relationship between farm product prices and incomes, farm debt and bankruptcies, forced land transfers and foreclosures, changes in the structure of agriculture, and tax policy continue to contribute to the loss of family farms.

African American and other minority farmers are even less likely than white farmers to benefit from any changes in the rural/farm economy. According to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Emergency Land Fund, if present land loss continues, there will be virtually no black farmers by the year 2000. Surveys of Native American farmers suggest that their situation may be nearly as bleak as that of black farmers. Farming is the leading occupation among Native Americans living on reservation lands. Asian Americans and Hispanics have historically been excluded from significant farm ownership.

Farm workers have difficult and dangerous work. Inadequate wages, benefits, and living facilities keep many farm workers in poverty.

Many farmers have internalized the external cause of their losses, which has led to deep depression, spouse and family abuse, alcoholism, mental breakdown, divorce, suicide, participation in extremist groups, and, on rare occasions, murder.

The farm crisis accelerates the loss of rural community.

### **B. Rural Community in Crisis**

The rural United States today is a contrast between beauty and desecration, isolation and industrialization, wealth and poverty, power and oppression, freedom and exploitation, abundance and hunger, and individualism and dependence. The nation's poorest housing and health facilities occur disproportionately in rural communities, as do the worst education, the worst roads and transportation systems, the least progressive justice systems, and the greatest poverty and malnutrition. Towns that not long ago were vibrant communities of economic, social, and spiritual life now have become ghost towns with empty businesses, abandoned homes, closed churches, and broken spirits. Broken homes, broken lives, suicides, bankruptcies, spouse and child abuse, unemployment, substance abuse and related violence, and other social catastrophes often make up the local news for many rural communities.

### **C. The Ecological Crisis in Rural Areas**

Much of the rural population of the United States depends on ground water from shallow wells, many of which are already polluted. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s 1984 survey of rural water quality found that almost two-thirds of the supplies tested exceeded EPA's drinking water standards for at least one contaminant.

Soil conservation practices such as contour plowing, crop rotation, windbreaks, and covering-cropping are sometimes negatively affected as farmers are pushed to farm more and more acres with bigger and bigger equipment.

The decline of conservation practices is paralleled by an increase in pesticide and herbicide use. While their use brings many benefits, there are still unanswered questions that need to be carefully examined.

Absentee land ownership and all its shortcomings are endemic to mining. Restoration of mined land continues to be a concern. Studies by the Commission on Religion in Appalachia reveal that mining interests often pay little heed to restoration laws and have the political clout to get away with ignoring them.

The loss of genetic diversity, including the consequences of the loss of native seed and animal varieties, is a concern.

The genetic engineering of plants and animals and the patenting of genes, plants, and animals raise major theological and ethical concerns.

## **IV. The Church Responding to Crisis**

In some areas the churches have been helpful in assisting farmers to cope with the loss of their farms and in aiding others to help keep their farms. Unfortunately, in many cases, churches have been ineffective in fulfilling this ministry. A number of reasons have been cited for the church's shortcoming:

Many church members are still accepting a theology that "goodness" means "success," and that failure means that God has punished the person for his or her "sins."

Many clergy are not adequately trained to minister to the needs of the hurting families in their communities. In general, clergy are more involved in responding to congregational needs than to the needs of the larger community.

In many rural areas, churches are still operating under an independent rather than a cooperative model.

## **V. A Call for Change: What Needs to Be Done?**

### A. The local churches, charges, and cooperative parish ministries are called to:

- (1) Intentionally develop ministries to meet major needs that exist today in rural United States, including:
  - (a) take responsibility for assisting with mending the brokenness of community life in rural society;
  - (b) strengthen their ministry and mission with rural churches and communities;
  - (c) lift up the responsible stewardship of natural resources; and
  - (d) build bridges of understanding and partnership between rural and urban congregations and communities.

(2) Implement the recommendations of the General Board of Discipleship's 1992 study on "Strengthening the Small Membership Church."

### B. The districts are called to:

- (1) Develop and/or strengthen their missional stance in rural areas;
- (2) Create cluster groups and other supportive networks within the district to facilitate spiritual formation; and
- (3) Encourage cooperative leadership through more creative use of available personnel and appropriate technology.

### C. Annual conferences are called to:

- (1) Analyze their rural crisis response and provide funding for an effective and ongoing response;
- (2) Place personnel strategically in order to respond to rural needs; insist that pastoral appointments be made with the needs of entire communities in mind, and not just the needs of the congregation;
- (3) Become public policy advocates, speaking out as a church, creating awareness and understanding, and bringing about positive change;
- (4) Cooperate with other church and secular agencies in a rural response;
- (5) Be in partnership with seminaries to develop programs, including "teaching" parishes and internships, to equip ministers to serve in rural areas;
- (6) Develop programs to invest conference foundation funds in rural economic development needs;
- (7) Discover ways to enable the ethnic ownership of farmland;
- (8) Model and support the team ministry concept at every level, including cluster groups and other supportive networks to facilitate spiritual formation;
- (9) Develop programs for volunteers-in-mission in rural areas;
- (10) Encourage sustainable agricultural practices by United Methodist family-owned farms.

### D. The general church is called to:

- (1) Use its seminaries to prepare clergy to be more effective pastors in rural areas, using the "missionary training" model, knowing that many ministers not accustomed to rural life enter into an area where there is a new "language," a new lifestyle, a new culture;
- (2) Cooperate ecumenically and with other groups to develop responses to the problems of rural areas;
- (3) Better learn the skills of personnel placement, so that appointed ministers in rural areas will have a long enough tenure to build trust/understanding relationships necessary for becoming pastors to the community. Place more mission (and similar) personnel in rural ministries;
- (4) Recognize Rural Life Sunday as a special day in the church year, combining in the one day the emphases of Rural Life Sunday, Soil Stewardship Day, Earth Day, World Environment Day, and Rogation Sunday;
- (5) Provide opportunities for U.S. and third world farmers to share innovations and knowledge;
- (6) Carefully analyze and monitor all church agencies' programs to ensure sensitivity to the present rural crisis;
- (7) Emphasize, in all appropriate literature and training programs, the importance of soil stewardship and ecology as a part of total Christian stewardship. General agencies should report annually on their stewardship of farm and rural lands they own;

- (8) Consider using a significant portion of the investment funds of all church agencies for investment in local church-based community economic development in rural areas;
- (9) Urge all church agencies to continue to promote the cooperative style of ministry, especially cooperative parish ministries, as a model of God's desire for life in community;
- (10) Aggressively research corporate ownership of agriculture and its effects upon life in rural areas and advocate necessary responses based upon the findings of this research;
- (11) Request that the General Board of Discipleship Curriculum Resources Committee periodically develop curriculum resources on the issues raised in this resolution, in coordination with the General Board of Church and Society and the General Board of Global Ministries, and make such materials available to all churches; and
- (12) Call upon the General Board of Church and Society and the General Board of Global Ministries to develop other materials to interpret this resolution.

E. Bishops are called to:

- (1) Work toward longer-term rural appointments (with a goal of a minimum of four years) of clergy leadership to provide more stability in rural areas; and
- (2) Foster cooperative styles of leadership in rural churches by more creative use of available ministerial personnel and appropriate technology.

**F. Federal legislators and administrators, as they develop farm and rural policies, are called to:**

- (1) Develop policies that will enable farm families to receive a just return for their labor and investments. These new policies would:
  - (a) reverse the loss of family farms;
  - (b) provide for credit to family farmers at affordable interest rates;
  - (c) develop a marketing and government support system that will guarantee the cost of production to farm families;
  - (d) initiate participatory democratic processes with farmers to determine if mandatory production goals, which would discourage overproduction of some commodities, are needed to move toward a balance between supply and demand;
  - (e) greatly reduce government payments to large corporate farming interests;
  - (f) create programs that would enable new families to enter farming as a vocation;
  - (g) create incentives for family farmers to shift from current production-oriented modes to a sustainable and regenerative agriculture; and
  - (h) ensure the participation of family farmers regardless of race and sex.
- (2) Discourage concentration in ownership and control of land and money and move toward land reforms that broaden ownership of land;
- (3) Require soil and water conservation practices for farm operations that participate in federal programs; include farmers in the planning of such requirements;
- (4) Reduce the federal deficit without burdening family farms;
- (5) Reform federal tax laws to remove unfair competition and discourage tax shelter-motivated capital in agriculture;
- (6) Maintain an emphasis on direct loan activity, resist attempts to reduce the level of direct loans in favor of guarantees, and increase the Limited Resources Loan program for qualified farmers;
- (7) Provide for commodity reserves, isolated from the market, to be established at a level adequate to protect consumers from supply disruption and meet domestic agricultural disaster and global humanitarian food aid requirements;
- (8) Ensure that most federally supported programs of research and education in agriculture focus on small and medium-sized family farm operations, with special attention paid to minority farmers, and that county committees, which administer these programs, be inclusive of women and minority farmers;
- (9) Fund major new research initiatives and programs through the federal land grant institutions, including black land grant colleges, to ensure the development of long-term, sustainable, and regenerative agriculture;
- (10) Develop farm policies that will encourage farm-owned and controlled businesses and cooperatives for

processing, distributing, and marketing farm products;

(11) Develop policies that will respect the guaranteed land and water rights of all minority peoples;

(12) Develop and support programs in cooperation with community-based organizations to improve the quality of life in depressed rural areas, with attention given to health care, transportation, education, employment, law enforcement, housing, job training, and environmental protection;

(13) Develop national and regional water and energy policies that assure that those who benefit from energy and water projects pay a substantial portion of those costs;

(14) Recognize and protect the right of farm workers to organize into unions of their own choosing, to be covered by minimum wage laws, and to receive adequate benefits, including social security, health care, and unemployment;

(15) Discourage export policies that would hurt small farm agriculture in developing countries and hinder efforts toward food self-sufficiency in those countries;

(16) Prohibit the importation of produce containing residues of pesticides or other chemicals that are banned for U.S. producers, and revise permitted residue levels when the pesticide is banned;

(17) Urge the federal government to declare moratoriums on foreclosures in states where lenders are participating in debt restructure or mediation programs; and

(18) Seek out international cooperation in developing an international food policy.

#### **G. State governments are called to:**

(1) Develop systems of mediation to resolve conflicts between borrower and lender;

(2) Develop and enforce fair and just tax systems that ensure that those with great wealth and political power pay their fair share of taxes;

(3) Ensure that state subsidies for water benefit small and medium-sized operations;

(4) Protect security of farm products stored in elevators by farmers;

(5) Develop and support farmers' markets and marketing cooperatives;

(6) Pay special attention to the education and relocation of jobless persons, commit state resources to the establishment of industries or agencies that will increase the job/tax base, and maintenance of an acceptable quality of social services for all;

(7) Allocate funds to monitor all state programs and economic development projects for their impact upon the socioeconomic and natural environments;

(8) Urge the development and maintenance of conservation programs that supplement federal programs and environmental standards that exceed federal minimums;

(9) Sell bonds to help farmers secure low-interest loans, with special attention given to minority farmers and others with similar needs. Assist such families in identifying and securing loans from such sources;

(10) Ensure that state marketing regulations benefit small and medium-sized operators;

(11) Ensure that most state-supported programs of research and education in agriculture focus on small and medium-sized family farm operations, with special attention paid to minority farmers; and

(12) Fund major research initiatives and programs through state and/or corporate grants to ensure the development of long-term, sustainable, and regenerative agriculture.

#### **H. Government and private lending agencies are called to:**

(1) Continue to restructure existing loans to allow for lower payments over a longer period of time, and with lower interest rates, as agreed to by lender and borrower through a mediation process;

(2) Require the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other lending agencies to have more balanced and consistent lending policies and practices and to assess fairly the spending of authorized funds on farm operations;

(3) Urge the U.S. government to change accounting procedures to allow banks that participate in debt restructure agreements to write off any potential losses over a ten-year period; and

(4) Give priority for purchases to minority, foreclosed, beginning, and re-entering farmers when foreclosed land is offered for sale.

#### **I. Local government and community are called to:**

(1) Develop land use and land reclamation policies, supported by adequate funding, to preserve productive

farmlands;

- (2) Organize and support local groups to provide legal aid, financial advice, counseling, and other support service for rural persons;
- (3) Monitor programs to assure that all community planning is ecologically sound, socially responsible, and includes persons of color and women;
- (4) Foster a positive community spirit with a variety of local programs that enhance the community members' well-being and self-worth;
- (5) Develop and support measures that ensure a fair tax treatment of all in the community;
- (6) Support the development of local programs to meet such special needs as better housing, health care, transportation, and recreation;
- (7) Develop local representative, long-range planning committees to monitor and advise elected or appointed officials and community groups; and
- (8) Cooperate with state agencies to develop policies so that farmers markets in their communities may be able to accept food stamps and WIC certificates for purchases.

#### **J. Multinational, national, and local business groups are called to:**

- (1) Examine their corporate policy in relationship to an understanding of and responsiveness to the values of rural lifestyles represented by smaller farm-sized units; and
- (2) Implement just policies concerning the ethics of research; short-term and long-term ecological effects; conservation of resources; water and energy use; local, national, and export marketing; labor use; and the availability of and access to financing and credit.

#### **The More Difficult Task**

The more difficult task for the church is to take clearly and intentionally the prophetic role. The church has a clear record of helping the world address such issues as clean water and air, civil rights, nuclear warfare, arms expenditures, and world hunger. The church must likewise take responsibility for addressing the problem of agriculture. The outcome of human history will be determined by our resolve to achieve a favorable future for agriculture.

Unless we change some basic directions, we are not just in a period of transition; we are headed for disaster for all nations. Some basic directions that must be changed include:

- the movement toward investor-owned land in increasingly larger corporate units; the separation of ownership, management, and labor;
- the increased reliance upon high inputs of nonrenewable resources such as fossil fuels and chemicals;
- the continued decline in rural populations from rural areas, especially those who have been directly involved in food production;
- the increasing chemical toxicity of our water systems, air, rain, waste dumps, and vegetable and animal products;
- the continuing loss of cropland through erosion, salinization, urbanization, conversion, and other processes;
- the disappearance of world forest resources and the resulting changes in weather patterns;
- the loss of atmospheric ozone;
- the continuing and growing use of the world's basic resources for armaments; and
- the loss of our centuries-old genetic seed bank.

#### **Three Ethical Guidelines**

We can change the direction of agriculture and rural development, but we need guidelines. A preferred agriculture must have three attributes:

- (1) It must be just. A just society and a just agriculture provide the means whereby people can share in the inheritance of the earth so that all life can fully be maintained in freedom and community. The purpose of a just

agriculture should be for the maintenance and renewal of the necessary resources for food, clothing, and shelter, for now and for the future.

(2) It must be participatory. For an agriculture to be just, everyone has the right to be consulted. Participation in society and in the ongoing process of creation is the necessary condition for justice. Participation requires a recognition of everyone's right to be consulted and understood, regardless of that person's economic, political, or social status. Participation is not possible without power. In such decision making, everyone has the right to be consulted about such issues as expenditures for armaments, nuclear power, forms of employment, social services, and so forth.

(3) It must be sustainable. A sustainable agriculture is one where the idea of permanent carrying capacity is maintained, where yields (agriculture, energy production, forestry, water use, industrial activity) are measured by whether or not they are sustainable rather than by the criteria of yields per acre or profits. In a sustainable agriculture, waste products can be absorbed back into the ecosystem without damage. A just, participatory, and sustainable agriculture would meet basic human needs for food and fiber, regenerate and protect ecosystems, be economically viable, enhance the quality of life for farm families, be supportive of rural communities, be socially just, and be compatible with spiritual teachings that recognize the earth as a common heritage and responsibility. For Christians, the idea of sustainability flows directly from the biblical call to human beings to be stewards of God's creation.

#### **Affirming the Household EcoTeam Program, 1996**

The United Methodist Church is committed to protecting and preserving the environment for the benefit of present and future generations. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church remind us that "all creation is the Lord's, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it" (§ 160). Many of our churches already sponsor recycling and other "environment friendly" projects.

We commend to our churches and United Methodist families a new, "human scale" program to help save the earth. The Global Action Plan, based in Woodstock, New York, along with local organizations nationwide, sponsors the Household EcoTeam Program.

This program can be organized by small groups of friends, family members, neighbors, or coworkers, who form an EcoTeam to support one another in working on monthly action areas such as reducing garbage, improving home water and energy efficiency, Eco-wise consuming, and so forth. There is a parallel program for children, "Journey for the Planet." Workbooks and other materials are available to EcoTeams at nominal cost.

The Household EcoTeam Program is similar in many ways to the Methodist Class System, which did so much to energize and build The Methodist Church. This same organizational method can now be used in local churches to preserve and protect the environment and to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

We commend the EcoTeam program to our churches and direct the General Board of Church and Society to make information about it available to the church.

#### **Caring for Creation—A Study from a Native American Perspective, 2000**

WHEREAS, we worship and honor a God who is Creator and Sustainer of all we have and are, and seek to cherish and care for God's creation, but have failed in our stewardship, and,

WHEREAS, in Christ God has healed our alienation from God and extended to use the first fruits of the reconciliation of all things, and

WHEREAS, God calls us to commit ourselves to extend Christ's healing to a suffering creation and await the time when even the groaning of creation will be restored to wholeness, and



WHEREAS, we are called to commit ourselves to work vigorously to protect and heal that creation for the honor and glory of God, whom we become fully aware of through Christ;

WHEREAS, we and our children face a growing crisis in the health of that creation in which we live, through which, by God's grace, we are sustained;

WHEREAS, we continue to degrade this creation through land degradation, deforestation, species extinction, water degradation, global toxification, the alteration of the atmosphere, and human and cultural degradation;

WHEREAS, many of the degradations are signs that we are pressing against the finite limits God has set for creation;

WHEREAS, with continued population growth, these degradations will become more severe and our responsibility is not only to bear and nurture children, but to nurture their home on earth and we recognize that human poverty is both a cause and a consequence of environment degradation;

WHEREAS, Native Americans whose religious cultures for centuries have taught them how to care for creation; and

WHEREAS, Native Americans through this unique perspective on caring for creation are convinced that environmental problems are more spiritual than technological;

Therefore, be it resolved, that the 2000 General Conference mandate the following:

(1) That there be developed a four-year study on "Caring for Creation from a Native American Perspective."

(2) The General Conference directs the Native American Comprehensive Plan working with program agencies of The United Methodist Church and other Native American entities, to develop the study.

(3) That up to \$80,000 be allocated to complete the study with resources, and provide a report with recommendations to the 2004 General Conference.

### **A Dioxin-Free Future, 1996**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) 1994 report entitled The Scientific Reassessment of Dioxin affirmed health warnings made twenty years ago—that the "background" levels of dioxin, a deadly chlorine-based chemical, pose a serious threat to the health of the general U.S. population.

The EPA concluded that dioxin compounds cause several types of cancer. Exposure to toxic chemicals such as dioxin is widely suspected to be related to the increasing rates of cancer in the United States. The rate of testicular cancer has tripled in the past thirty years, the rate of prostate cancer has doubled in the past ten years, and the rate of breast cancer in the United States has risen from one in every twenty women in the 1960s to one in every eight women today. More women have died of breast cancer in the last two decades than the number of U.S. soldiers killed in World War I, World War II, and the Korean and Vietnam wars.

The EPA report stated that there is reason to believe that dioxins at extremely low levels cause a wide range of other serious health effects, including reproductive impairment, learning disabilities, developmental injuries, and the increased risk of diabetes and endometriosis. Furthermore, even low levels of dioxin impair the ability of the immune system to fight infectious disease. The EPA report says that there is no level of dioxin below which the immune system is not affected.

The EPA concluded that the levels of dioxins already lodged in human bodies are already close to levels known to cause serious health problems. According to the EPA, the average person is exposed to dioxin levels 50 to 100 times greater than the maximum allowable amounts designated by the federal government in 1985.

Some persons have what the EPA calls “special” exposures, including certain occupational groups, people living near dioxin emitters, and people who consume higher than average levels of meat, fish, and dairy products. Human exposure to dioxins begins early in life, since dioxin crosses the placenta. Nursing infants take in four to twelve percent of their lifetime dose of dioxin within the first year of their lives, a period during which they are most susceptible to the effects of such toxins.

Toxic pollution, a clean environment, and efficient, nonpolluting technologies are essential to a sound economy. With a single program—dioxin phaseout—much of the world’s most severe toxic pollution could be stopped.

The United Methodist Church calls on cancer research organizations to move to a prevention-based approach to cancer research and funding, including more studies on the relationship between cancer and chlorine-based toxins in the environment.

We support a phase out of the production of dioxin, beginning with the immediate action on the three largest sources of dioxin: incineration of chlorine containing wastes, bleaching of pulp and paper with chlorine, and the entire life cycle of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic.

We support worker production programs for people working in industries that make toxic chemicals or result in toxic by-product and related chemicals, who may lose their jobs with a phaseout of these chemicals. Such programs could include a “Workers’ Superfund” program.

We direct the General Board of Church and Society to cooperate with the Health and Welfare Ministries unit of the General Board of Global Ministries to work with companies, governments, and medical institutions to implement the above recommendations.

## **Steps Toward a Dioxin-Free Future, 1996, 2000**

### **Theological Foundation**

According to the Social Principles, “All Creation is the Lord’s and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it” (§ 160).

### **Background**

1996 General Conference Resolution - “A Dioxin-Free Future”: The 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church passed a resolution called “A Dioxin-Free Future,” based on facts from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s 1994 Draft Dioxin Reassessment, which affirmed health warnings made 20 years ago - that the background levels of dioxin, a deadly chlorine-based chemical not found in nature, pose a serious threat to the health of the general U.S. population. (For specific health threats, please refer to the text of the resolution.)

The resolution supports a phase-out of the production of dioxin, beginning with immediate action on the three largest sources of dioxin: incineration of chlorine-containing wastes, bleaching of pulp and paper with chlorine, and the entire life cycle of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic.

It also directs the General Board of Church and Society to cooperate with the Health and Welfare Ministries unit of the General Board of Global Ministries to work with companies, governments, and medical institutions to implement the above recommendations.

Medical waste incineration is a major source of dioxin contamination; this conclusion was raised by the same 1994 EPA Dioxin Reassessment report mentioned above.

Dioxins are created by the disposal of synthetic chlorinated organic compounds. Though the factors which determine dioxin formation during incineration are not fully understood, they are released into the environment during combustion of chlorinated plastic products, predominantly polyvinyl chloride (PVC).

The use of PVC products by the health care industry began after World War II and has grown rapidly, especially the single use or short term use applications (i.e. “disposables”). These account for most of the organically bound chlorine in medical waste.

The American Public Health Association’s (APHA) warnings: The APHA in Resolution #9304 recognizes that “virtually all chlorinated organic compounds that have been studied exhibit at least one of a wide range of serious toxic effects such as endocrine dysfunction, developmental impairment, birth defects, reproductive dysfunction and infertility, immunosuppression and cancer, often at very low doses.”

“First Do No Harm” is a binding principle in medical ethics.

Some alternatives are available or in development: Appropriate alternative products composed of nonchlorinated material are currently available for many, though not all, health care uses of chlorinated plastics. Highly effective programs for the reduction of hospital waste have been initiated in the U.S. and programs for the substitution of other materials for PVC are in place in some hospitals in Europe.

Be it resolved that the General Conference of The United Methodist Church:

- (1) Challenges all United Methodist-related health care institutions, United Methodist health care professionals and workers, and United Methodist individuals and congregations to begin immediately to take action to change health care policies and practices in order to stop the harm being caused by the nonessential incineration of medical waste and by generating a waste stream that is more toxic than necessary.
- (2) Urges all health care facilities to explore ways to reduce or eliminate their use of PVC plastics.
- (3) Calls upon all health care professionals and workers to encourage health care institutions with which they are associated to adopt policies that will lead to the reduction and elimination of the use of PVC plastics.
- (4) Suggests that health care facilities hire or assign professional staff to evaluate the potential for persistent toxic pollution associated with the life-cycle of products the facility purchases.
- (5) Strongly urges medical suppliers to develop, produce and bring to market appropriate, cost-competitive products that can replace those that contain PVC or other chlorinated plastics. Any substitution for a chlorinated plastic product must provide a less toxic alternative with concern for the full public health implications of the replacement, including infectious considerations.
- (6) Encourages government oversight agencies and private accrediting bodies to incorporate requirements for education about the reduction of toxic pollution in their certification standards.
- (7) Encourages study and evaluation of alternative products and practices that will lead to the reduction and elimination of the use of PVC products; also encourages programs to provide technical assistance and training to health care facilities that seek help in the reduction of their reliance on chlorinated plastics.

## **NUCLEAR ISSUES, 1988, 1992**

### 15. Nuclear Safety in the United States

#### Theology

God has given humans a special charge to “guard and keep” the earth (Genesis 2:15). Nuclear technology presents a special challenge to our call to be stewards of God’s creation because of the risks involved in the production, handling, and disposal of long-lived nuclear byproducts (such as plutonium) in the energy and weapons-production cycles. As long as society continues to use nuclear power to produce energy and weapons, we have a special responsibility to ensure that God’s creation be protected for present and future generations by insisting that the entire production cycle be as safe as possible.

The problem of nuclear safety is of worldwide concern. It is the responsibility of the church to use its influence internationally to prevent the devastation that could result from nuclear disasters.

### **United Methodist Policy**

The United Methodist General Conference affirmed the use of nuclear power for energy production but noted that the “nuclear energy option also has many problems to be faced” (The Book of Resolutions 1984; page 160). Among these many problems, it particularly identified the health hazards from “ionizing radiation [that] threaten the exposed individual to additional hazards such as cancer and sterility, and also threaten future generations with birth defects and gene mutations” (The Book of Resolutions 1984; page 238).

The General Conference urged society to examine the ethical and environmental effects of technological developments and ensure that these technologies be in accord with God’s plan of wholeness for all creation. It also “oppose[d] the production of nuclear weapons and the resultant production of tremendous amounts of nuclear waste that endangers the environment” (The Book of Resolutions 1984; page 339).

### Background

#### Nuclear Power

The accident at Chernobyl on April 28, 1986, demonstrated the dangers involved in the production of nuclear energy. This accident was much larger than the one at Three Mile Island. However, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s Reactor Safety Study points out that accidents even larger than Chernobyl are possible for U.S. reactors. Despite the difference between the design of the Chernobyl plants and the designs of most U.S. plants, there are, according to the Reactor Safety Study, many accident scenarios possible in U.S. plants that could lead to substantial releases of radiation. Those safety analyses indicate that even after the improvements instituted after the Three Mile Island accident, there is a substantial chance of a core meltdown among the 107 currently licensed U.S. commercial nuclear power plants over the next twenty years.

In the past few years, while other nations with a sizable commitment to nuclear power have increased their efforts to improve nuclear power-plant safety, the U.S. efforts have been inadequate. Countries such as Japan, West Germany, and Sweden have demonstrated that there are practical and reasonable options available to improve reactor safety. These nations’ records show outstanding quality in plant construction, plant materials and equipment, extensive preventive maintenance programs, outstanding levels of human performance, plant reliability, and few unplanned shutdowns, equipment failures, or personnel errors. In the U.S., the nuclear power industry is plagued by human error (operators falling asleep on the job), poor maintenance practices, poor management, poor design, and a serious gap in contractor accountability. In 1985 alone, there were almost 3000 plant mishaps and 764 emergency shutdowns, up 28 percent from 1984.<sup>1</sup>

### **Department of Energy Reactors**

The Department of Energy (DOE) operates over 200 nuclear facilities. Among its main responsibilities are the production and testing of this country’s nuclear weapons program. The DOE facilities are generally more antiquated than civilian plants and are not subject to review by outside agencies. Five of these facilities are the main nuclear weapons production reactors. Four are located on the Savannah River in South Carolina; the fifth is the “N-Reactor” at Hanford, Washington (a complex where poor disposal of wastes in the past has created a radioactive landfill known as “one of our largest contaminated areas”). The containment systems in these plants have been criticized as being inadequate and not capable of meeting minimum civilian standards. In 1986, the DOE agreed to submit its five weapons reactors to state and federal waste disposal rules and shut down the Hanford “N-Reactor” for safety improvements. The cleanup of the Hanford site alone could cost over \$100 billion. Yet most DOE plants continue to be exempt from the far more rigorous examination of commercial reactors by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

## **Emergency Planning and State Rights**

After the Three Mile Island accident, rules were instituted to improve public safety in case of a nuclear accident. The new rules required the participation, in emergency planning exercise, of local and state officials. In 1986, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, in response to two state governors' challenge to the viability of utility-produced emergency plans, requested that it be allowed to approve utility emergency evacuation plans in the event that state and local officials refuse to participate in the emergency-planning process. This rule change would ease the licensing of future nuclear reactors and seriously diminish public participation and review of safety measures, as well as increase the dangers of a serious accident.

## **Nuclear Wastes**

One of the most controversial and costly components of the nuclear fission process is the creation of radioactive byproducts. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission divides wastes into two different categories according to the level and duration of radioactivity: high-level and low-level wastes. Since the 1950s, the Department of Energy has been searching for a viable way to dispose of the wastes created by commercial nuclear reactors (irradiated fuels) and high-level wastes from weapons production. These wastes are highly radioactive and will remain radioactive for long periods of time. Presently, these wastes are stored within nuclear facility sites, creating what one member of Congress called hundreds of "de facto nuclear waste dumps."

The Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 set a schedule for the location, construction, and operation of two high-level waste geologic repositories, one in the east, and one in the west. Unfortunately, the U.S. nuclear-waste policy remains in disarray. Political considerations have taken precedence over safety and scientific considerations, and there has been improper and inadequate consultation and cooperation with state governments and Native American tribes. Clear examples of the fragmented and problem-ridden condition of the U.S. nuclear-waste policy include an April 1985 proposal to build a Monitored Retrievable Storage (MRS) facility within the state of Tennessee (an interim facility to make up for expected delays in the permanent repository schedule); and a May 1986 DOE recommendation for a permanent waste-storage site in Texas, Nevada, or Washington, and postponement of further siting activities for an eastern site (in order to avoid placing a nuclear waste site in states where the Department of Energy expects strong political opposition). The MRS facility is intended to receive 15,000 metric tons of nuclear waste (20 percent of the capacity of the permanent repository) and package it for delivery to a permanent repository for final disposal. Critics feel that the MRS proposal is being offered by DOE solely as an expedient way of relieving utilities of the burden of on-site, spent fuel storage. Little research has been done as to the increased hazards of such a plan. Building the MRS would increase the likelihood of a transportation accident due to the need to ship waste twice. Moreover, there will likely be political pressure to convert the MRS into a "semipermanent" repository without careful environmental review.

## **Recommendations**

The United Methodist Church expresses its deep concern over the use of a technology with severe environmental and health impacts without appropriate and extensive safety measures in the production, handling, and disposal processes. We also reiterate our opposition to the use of nuclear technology for the production of weapons.

We recommend:

- (1) Reviewing the safety of operating plants. Each of the 107 operating commercial plants in the U.S. should be reviewed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Office of Technology Assessment of the U.S. Congress to identify design deficiencies and weaknesses that could contribute to or cause an accident.
- (2) Instituting improvement programs. Improvement programs should be instituted in areas of demonstrated weak performance such as management, personnel performance, equipment reliability, and contractor accountability.
- (3) Researching new designs for plant safety. New designs for existing and future nuclear plants should be researched and developed so as to eliminate the potential of a core meltdown accident.
- (4) Phasing out nuclear weapons production. We urge the closing down of the five weapons-producing reactors

and the Rocky Flats Plutonium Processing Plant, a thorough cleanup of any remaining nuclear wastes at these sites, and no more nuclear arms testing.

(5) Establishing uniform safety standards for civilian and military nuclear operations. We support having all nuclear operations in the U.S. subject to uniform basic safety provision. All Department of Energy nuclear operations should be licensed and reviewed by an independent agency such as the Nuclear Regulatory Commission or the Environmental Protection Agency. Department of Energy contractors should be held accountable to the same standards as civilian facility contractors and operators.

(6) Protecting neighboring populations. We urge that due attention be given to the protection of populations living near nuclear power plants or along routes used to transport nuclear materials by ensuring the communities' participation in emergency evacuation plans. We support maintaining evacuation planning zones for all areas within ten miles from a nuclear facility, and engaging the full participation of state and local officials in the planning process. We believe that the safety of all potentially exposed populations should be the guide in safety improvements to nuclear power plants, not narrow cost-benefit analysis.

(7) Instituting full liability and compensation. We hold that those corporations and governments responsible for nuclear accidents should be liable for cleanup and restitution to all victims of an accident.

(8) Reevaluating the U.S. nuclear waste policy:

(a) We urge a moratorium on DOE's proposed nuclear waste repository program;

(b) We urge Congress to establish an independent commission to review DOE's nuclear waste repository and Monitored Retrievable Storage Programs and to provide increased funding for the development of waste management technologies that will allow prolonged storage at the reactor site;-

(c) We urge that full public participation and consultation in any future nuclear waste repository siting and transportation routing be guaranteed through provision of grants to affected localities, states, and Native American tribes; and

(d) We urge a moratorium of the building of nuclear power facilities until an adequate national plan is developed and implemented for the permanent disposal of nuclear waste products.

(9) Decommissioning. We urge that the full cost of decommissioning (the dismantling and disposing of obsolete or closed power plants) be paid by the entities responsible for the construction and operation of nuclear facilities, not ratepayers or taxpayers.

(10) Conserving energy and finding alternative energy sources. The greatest national effort should be made in the areas of conservation and renewable energy sources. We support increased government funding for research and development of technologies that would decrease dependence upon nuclear energy as an electricity source and urge the development of incentives, including tax and appliance standards, to speed the adoption of these technologies.

(11) Cooperating with annual conferences. We urge the general church agencies of The United Methodist Church to assist central and annual conferences in their efforts to learn more about nuclear safety. Specifically, we urge general agencies of The United Methodist Church to assist annual conferences who have identified nuclear safety problems related to nuclear facilities, waste sites, and transportation routes within the bounds of those annual conferences.

We particularly urge the General Board of Church and Society to identify qualified nuclear safety experts who could assist annual conferences to understand and respond to nuclear waste and nuclear safety concerns in their areas.

### **Cease Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining, 2000**

WHEREAS, mountaintop removal coal mining is extremely profitable to the coal companies who practice it; and

WHEREAS, a large part of its profitability is that fewer miners are required than in the usual traditional methods of coal mining, and

WHEREAS, the entire tops of West Virginia mountains have been removed at Kayford, Kanawha County, at Blair, Boone County, at Sharpless, Logan County, and at Spruce River, Boone County, and at Wise County, Virginia, and mountaintop removal projects are proposed in Kentucky and Tennessee, and

WHEREAS, this removal of mountaintops has resulted in severe damage to homes of persons living in the nearby communities, along with damage to wells, the bombarding of their homes with “blast rock,” and massive amounts of dust, and

WHEREAS, the millions and millions of tons of earth and rock removed from the tops of mountains are dumped into the valleys next to these mountains, totally destroying the springs and headwaters of streams in these valleys, along with all plant and animal life in them, and

WHEREAS, mountaintop removal mining, by destroying home places, is also destroying ancestral ground, sacred ground where generations after generations have lived, gone to church, married, made and birthed babies, taken family meals, slept in peace, died and been buried, and

WHEREAS, staff employees of the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Natural Resources testified before the West Virginia Legislature in its 1998 session that the long-term effect of mountaintop removal is unstudied and unknown, and that it should be stopped until its long-term effects are known, and

WHEREAS, Psalm 24:1 firmly reminds us that “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; and the world and they that dwell therein,” and

WHEREAS, the sanctity and sacredness of human life and the natural environment should not be destroyed in the name of corporate profit,

Therefore, be it resolved, that the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, meeting in Cleveland, Ohio in May of the year 2000, implore those state and national governmental and regulatory agencies involved in mountaintop removal mining to halt this practice until scientific study of its long-term effect on human life and the natural environment has been accomplished.

### **Environmental Law — The Precautionary Principle, 2000**

As God’s people we are called to stewardship of the earth and all that dwells therein.

At this point in human history, the human race is experiencing warning signs that our bodies and the natural environment have limits to their abilities to absorb and overcome the harm from some of our actions, technologies, and substances. These warning signs include the dying off of plant and animal species, the depletion of stratospheric ozone, global climate instability and increased rates of some learning disabilities, reproductive disorders, cancers, respiratory diseases including asthma, and other environmentally related illnesses.

In addition to the issue of pollution, the earth is experiencing environmental problems such as global climate instability, the loss of bio-diversity, and the destruction of marine fisheries, which may threaten food supplies and lead to disastrous human health consequences.

There is continuing controversy in the promotion of world trade regarding the appropriate level of caution and protection of the environment. Where the preponderance of evidence would indicate that an activity will be harmful to the earth’s environment, producers of pollution have insisted that there be “scientific certainty” on each point in question before caution is exercised. This policy results in very substantial harm occurring to the earth and its’ creatures in order to prove that an activity is dangerous.

Current environmental regulations are aimed primarily at controlling pollution rather than taking the preventative approach of limiting the use, production or release of toxic materials in the first place. Under the current system, enterprises, projects, technologies and substances are in effect “innocent until proved guilty”, and the vast majority of chemicals in production have not been adequately tested for their effects on humans and ecosystems.

Producers of pollution have repeatedly used their influence to delay preventative action, arguing that the immediate expense of redesign to achieve pollution prevention is unwarranted in the face of any uncertainty about eventual harmful health effects.

The Precautionary Principle is considered to be an emerging general principle of international environmental law. The United States signed and ratified the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development which states: “In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by states according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.” (Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, June 14, 1992, 31 ILM 874)

Likewise the International Joint Commission in 1994 stated that “the burden of proof concerning the safety of chemicals should lie with the proponent for the manufacture, import or use of at least substances new to commerce in Canada and the United States, rather than with society as a whole to provide absolute proof of adverse impacts . . . The onus should be on the producers and users of any suspected toxic substance to prove that it is, in fact, both ‘safe’ and necessary, even if it is already in commerce.” (International Joint Commission, Seventh Biennial Report Under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 1978 to the Governments of the United States and Canada, 1994)

Likewise the Wingspread Statement of January 1998, formulated by prominent members of the environmental community, states: “When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established. In this context the proponent of an activity rather than the public should bear the burden of proof. The process of applying the Precautionary Principle must be open, informed, and democratic and must involve potentially affected parties. The process must include a comprehensive, systematic examination of the full range of alternatives, including no action.”

We urge all United Methodists in their daily lives and official capacities to hold society to this higher standard of care for God’s creation; that where the preponderance of evidence indicates the probability of harm from some action, even in the absence of full scientific certainty, that an alternative path must be found.

In this context we advocate for significant increases in efforts toward pollution prevention, for identifying goals for reducing exposure to toxic chemicals, for incentives to replace known toxic chemicals with the least toxic alternatives, and we support the practice of organic farming methods in order to reduce the use of toxic chemicals in agriculture.

We encourage government at all levels to promote and abide by the Precautionary Principle in order to protect human health and the environment.

We urge the United States to honor the Precautionary Principle during the negotiations of international agreements and to work toward the establishment of the Precautionary Principle as a guiding principle of international law.

### **Recycling and the Use of Recycled Products, 2000**

In Genesis 1:26-28, 2:7 and Psalm 8:6, God created all people in God’s image, and gave them responsibility for creation. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state: “all creation is the Lord’s and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it.” The deterioration of the environment is a global problem. As Christians we are called to “place a higher priority on changes in economic, political, social, and technological lifestyle to support a more ecologically equitable and sustainable world leading to a higher quality of life for all of God’s creation” (Social Principles ¶ 160). As members of God’s human community, we are called to be stewards of the land.

Since 1972 the General Conference has requested boards and agencies to use recycled paper. In 1996, the General Conference called for a phase-out of dioxin.



Therefore, be it resolved that the General Conference recommends that:

- general boards, agencies and publishers use recycled and “processed chlorine free” paper where economically feasible;
- United Methodist publishers collaborate in a study of ways to facilitate progress toward the goal of “processed chlorine free” paper, and report on progress to the 2004 General Conference;
- United Methodist agencies and churches educate the public and promote awareness of the benefits of recycling on the environment; and
- United Methodist agencies and churches participate in recycling programs for paper, plastic, glass and metal.

### **Family Farm Justice, 2000**

WHEREAS, John Wesley preached that the renewal of the image of God in creation is a goal of Christianity, and it is the Christian’s vocation to assist in that renewal; and

WHEREAS, the majority of producers and farmers caring for creation today understand themselves to be stewards holding a sacred trust from God, and as such are conservators of the land within that trust; and

WHEREAS, we are in the midst of a financial crisis in rural and agricultural areas; and

WHEREAS, the root cause of this financial crisis appears to be the sin of greed, which manifests itself at all levels, from the producers up to and especially including the multinational corporations in the agricultural-related industries; and

WHEREAS, this crisis promotes on the farm decision making based not in conservatorship or stewardship, but in profit making, which may result in harm to God’s creation; and

WHEREAS, God’s producers, farmers, and conservators of creation are not receiving a just and fair amount for the goods they produce; and

WHEREAS, we believe that rural persons/families should be able to enjoy the just fruits of their labor, as much as any of the rest of us; and

WHEREAS, this financial crisis has also created a spiritual crisis in many rural families,

Therefore, because we believe this to be a justice issue which affects our sacred trust of God’s creation, we resolve to respond to this need on both the general church and local church level in the following ways:

- (1) We resolve to direct the appropriate agencies of the general church to lobby both our national government and multinational corporations, to do all they can to bring justice to the local producers, by lobbying for fair and equitable prices for goods and services produced.
- (2) We resolve that the General, jurisdictional, annual conferences, and local churches encourage every pastor whose congregation is touched by these issues to invite caring laypersons to join her or him in making a personal visit to the home of every farm family in our parishes.

### **Our Social Principles**

#### **I. The Natural World**

All creation is the Lord’s and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God’s creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings. God has granted us stewardship of creation. We should meet these stewardship duties through acts of loving care and respect. Economic, political, social, and technological developments have increased our human numbers, lengthened and enriched our lives. However, these developments have led to regional defoliation, dramatic extinction of species, massive human suffering, overpopulation, misuse and over- consumption of natural and nonrenewable resources, particularly by

industrialized societies. This continued course of action jeopardizes the natural heritage which God has entrusted to all generations. Therefore, let us recognize the responsibility of the church and its members to place a high priority on changes in economic, political, social and technological lifestyle to support a more ecologically equitable and sustainable world leading to a higher quality of life for all of God's creation.

*A) Water, Air, Soil, Minerals, Plants* — We support and encourage social policies that serve to reduce and control the creation of industrial by-products and waste; facilitate the safe processing and disposal of toxic and nuclear waste and move toward the elimination of both; encourage reduction of municipal waste; provide for appropriate recycling and disposal of municipal waste; and assist the clean-up of polluted air, water, and soil. We call for the preservation of old growth forests and other irreplaceable natural treasures, as well as preservation of endangered plant species. We support measures designed to maintain and restore natural ecosystems. We support policies that develop alternatives to chemicals used for growing, processing, and preserving food, and we strongly urge adequate research into their effects upon God's creation prior to utilization. We urge development of international agreements concerning equitable utilization of the world's resources for human benefit so long as the integrity of the earth is maintained.

*B) Energy Resources Utilization* — We support and encourage social policies that are directed toward rational and restrained transformation of parts of the non-human world into energy for human usage and that de-emphasize or eliminate energy-producing technologies that endanger the health, the safety, and even the existence of the present and future human and nonhuman creation. Further, we urge wholehearted support of the conservation of energy and responsible development of all energy resources, with special concern for the development of renewable energy sources, that the goodness of the earth may be affirmed.

*C) Animal Life* — We support regulations that protect the life and health of animals, including those ensuring the humane treatment of pets and other domestic animals, animals used in research, and the painless slaughtering of meat animals, fish, and fowl. We encourage the preservation of all animal species including those threatened with extinction.

*D) Space* — The universe, known and unknown, is the creation of God and is due the respect we are called to give the Earth.

*E) Science and Technology* — We recognize science as a legitimate interpretation of God's natural world. We affirm the validity of the claims of science in describing the natural world, although we preclude science from making authoritative claims about theological issues. We recognize technology as a legitimate use of God's natural world when such use enhances human life and enables all of God's children to develop their God-given creative potential without violating our ethical convictions about the relationship of humanity to the natural world.

In acknowledging the important roles of science and technology, however, we also believe that theological understandings of human experience are crucial to a full understanding of the place of humanity in the universe. Science and theology are complementary rather than mutually incompatible. We therefore encourage dialogue between the scientific and theological communities and seek the kind of participation that will enable humanity to sustain life on earth and by God's grace, increase the quality of our common lives together.

*F) Food Safety* — We support policies that protect the food supply and that ensure the public's right to know the content of the foods they are eating. We call for rigorous inspections and controls on the biological safety of all foodstuffs intended for human consumption. We urge independent testing for chemical residues in food, and the removal from the market of foods contaminated with potentially hazardous levels of pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides; drug residues from animal antibiotics, steroids, or hormones; contaminants due to pollution that are carried by air, soil, or water from incinerator plants or other industrial operations. We call for clear labeling of all processed or altered foods, with pre-market safety testing required. We oppose weakening the standards for organic foods. We call for policies which encourage and support a gradual transition to sustainable and organic agriculture.