11-02 On Endorsing “The Charter for Compassion.”

Source: Presbytery

Committee: [11-02] Social Justice Issues B: the Exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the World

Topic: Unassigned


ASSEMBLY ACTION

On this Item, the General Assembly, acted as follows:

Approve

Voice Vote

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

On this Item, the Social Justice Issues B: the Exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the World Committee, acted as follows:

Approve

[Counted Vote - Committee]

Affirmative: 50

Negative: 2

Abstaining: 2

RECOMMENDATION

The Presbytery of National Capital overtures the 219th General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to affirm the Charter of Compassion and direct the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to communicate that support to all congregations.

“Charter for Compassion

“The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

“It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.
“We therefore call upon all men and women ~ to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

“We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.”

(www.charterforcompassion.org, created November 12, 2009)

RATIONALE

We know that:

“... In daily life, Jesus took ordinary acts of human compassion—healing the sick, feeding the hungry, washing feet—and translated them into ways of serving God.” (Book of Order, W-1.2004)

“God sends the church in the power of the Holy Spirit to exercise compassion in the world,

"a. feeding the hungry,
"b. comforting the grieving,
"c. caring for the sick,
”d. visiting the prisoners,
”e. freeing the captives,
”f. sheltering the homeless,
”g. befriending the lonely.” (Book of Order, W-7.3001)

“... Concern for the world may be enacted in prayer and ministries of compassion, justice, peacemaking, and witness.” (Book of Order, W-3.5302)

“Discipleship may be expressed ... beyond the church cooperating with all who work for compassion and reconciliation.” (Book of Order, W-4.3002)

We also know that 150,000 people of the Abrahamic faiths and beyond, from more than 180 countries, have contributed to the Charter for Compassion including the Interfaith Conference of metropolitan Washington through its thirtieth anniversary interfaith concert. The National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. has also endorsed the Charter for Compassion.

COMMENT

ACREC Advice and Counsel

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns advises that Item 11-02 be approved.
As the demographics of our church and our country are changing rapidly, ACREC believes that it is important to be aware of our place as Christians in the broader world and how we relate to people of other faiths. Therefore, we believe that a more diverse and open teaching of biblical and church history is needed in order to broaden the embrace of our neighbors.

Today’s youth and young adults are living in a different and nontraditional environment. In order to keep the church relevant in their lives, ACREC believes we need to provide

- a broader understanding of religions and beliefs;
- a relational understanding of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam and how they all relate to The Charter of Compassion;
- educational materials that assist in understanding their faith in the context of multicultural, multiracial, and multi-faith communities.

ACSWP Advice and Counsel

Item 11-02 from the Presbytery of National Capital overtures the 219th General Assembly (2010) “to endorse the Charter of Compassion and communicate that support to all congregations in the PC(USA).”

The Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) advises that Item 11-02 be approved.

Rationale

The Charter for Compassion is the product of a multi-faith, web-based collaboration in response to growing misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and, thus, increased hostility between religious traditions. This process is described at http://charterforcompassion.org/. The charter calls for treating each human person with “justice, equity and respect” out of deep compassion for each; teaching appreciation for cultural and religious differences; and nurturing “informed empathy” with those who suffer.

The charter’s emphasis on the role of compassion in motivating response to the suffering of any others is fully consistent with the biblical tradition and Reformed theology, as indicated in the overture. Its call for a positive response to religious and cultural differences is supported by the long tradition of the PC(USA) to support basic human rights, including the right to determine one’s own beliefs and participate in the religious community of one’s choosing. In 1949, the General Assembly of the PCUSA endorsed the UN Declaration of Human Rights, beginning an on-going series of declarations by assemblies in the area of human rights,
including religious rights, that continues to this day.

Endnote