

## ACSWP Introduction

In response to the AIDS crisis, in 1983, the General Assembly of the PC(USA) voted to ". . . become an advocate of God's justice by expressing the concern of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at the immensity and complexity of this escalating epidemic . . ." (PC(USA), 1983, pp. 96 & 815). In 1986, the Assembly adopted a resolution on AIDS which contained strong anti-discrimination provisions. (PC(USA), 1986, p. 496).

In 1988, the Church adopted a paper, "To Meet AIDS with Grace & Truth," confessing that its response to AIDS had been tardy, despite the 1986 General Assembly's warning that ". . . the rate of infection [is predicted to] double every nine to twelve months," and its declaration that ". . . AIDS and ARC should be viewed as illnesses, and not as the punishment for behavior deemed immoral . . ." (PC(USA), 1986, pp. 495-496). It cautioned the church against making moral pronouncements about AIDS and affirmed, "that all peoples are precious to God and urge congregations, governing bodies, and agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to renounce the popular notions of God's wrath toward AIDS sufferers . . ." (PC(USA), 1988, p. 362).

In 1991, the General Assembly adopted a resolution in response to several overtures urging that more be done to implement "To Meet AIDS with Grace and Truth." The Assembly noted that ". . . the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has made a commendable beginning, but new evidence indicates a much more critical situation," and voted to instruct the ministry units to report back to the Assembly "how their ministries are affected and will be affected in the future by the HIV and AIDS crisis, and how they plan to allocate resources to live out Jesus' ministry of healing love, compassion, and justice for persons affected by AIDS . . ." (PC(USA), 1991, p. 101-102). The 1992 General Assembly took steps ". . .to engage the total Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) including all governing bodies, congregations, and members in meeting this challenge," which included instruction to the General Assembly Council and its Theology and Worship Ministry Unit to designate a Presbyterian HIV/AIDS Day, and to the ministry units and the finance committee ". . . to expand their efforts to prevent, educate, minister, and advocate in the HIV/AIDS crisis . . ." (PC(USA), 1992, p. 878) [O].

### **1983 Statement – PC(USA), pp. 96 & 816**

. . . the 190th General Assembly (1978) of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America voted to support the social and legal human rights concerns of gay and lesbian persons, the community that has been most affected by this medical emergency, and the community that is done the most disservice by the lack of public information and prejudice concerning the nature of this disease; and

Whereas the present administration proposed in 1983 to make a 20 percent cut in staff for the Center for Disease Control and further program budget cuts for the CDC alone, in addition to the 30 percent cutback in CDC funding imposed in 1982 . . .

[Therefore, the 195th General Assembly (1983):]

Encourage the public news services to provide wider dissemination of information concerning this fatal disease through the public media, both printed and audiovisual, the churches, and the medical-professional community. Urge the President, members of Congress, and the appropriate federal agencies to provide the National Institute of Health and the Center for Disease Control with increased funding and high priority for medical research on AIDS and its related and often fatal diseases.

### **1988 Statement – PC(USA), pp. 362-363**

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels, in all places, should be a community of openness and caring for persons with AIDS and their loved ones, working to overcome attitudinal and behavioral barriers of race, social class, and sexual orientation that hamper acceptance of and positive ministry with sufferers from this disease. . . . Educational efforts must include reliable medical and scientific information, as well as theological and biblical components that enable participants to address issues related to death and dying, human sexuality, and recognition of people's fear and lack of knowledge. Such educational efforts can prepare congregations to respond appropriately

when they learn that a member or persons in the community have been infected by the HIV or diagnosed as having AIDS, and can lead to the development of compassionate, rational policies, educational materials, and actions . . . We call upon the Social Justice and Peacemaking Unit of our General Assembly to take the following initiatives and urge synods, presbyteries, and congregations to:

1. Work for public policies and the allocation of resources to ensure the availability of appropriate medical, psychological, and support services for persons infected by the HIV. These programs should support independence and self-determination for persons with AIDS.
2. Advocate that children infected by the HIV be permitted to attend regular school at every level so long as they are able and wish to do so.
3. Oppose mandatory HIV testing and advocate for the development and use of accurate testing procedures that are voluntary, made readily available to high-risk groups, and which guarantee confidentiality and anonymity as well as counseling services.
4. Support AIDS prevention education throughout community and church life that provides the information required for persons to engage in behavior which reduces or eliminates the risk of infection; because sexual and intravenous drug using activities can begin at a young age, encourage school boards to initiate AIDS education activities at the elementary school level; affirm the necessity for comprehensive health education including human sexuality and drug abuse prevention designed for children and youth; support massive public distribution of factual AIDS educational materials.

#### **1989 Statement – PC(USA), p. 606**

**AIDS Discrimination Prohibition:** In regard to the life-threatening disease of AIDS and ARC (AIDS -Related Conditions), a person carrying the AIDS virus is not a threat to coworkers since AIDS -ARC are not spread by common everyday contact. For this reason, the AIDS antibody and/or AIDS virus status of an employee of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is not relevant information in regard to the health and safety of his or her coworkers. Therefore, the AIDS antibody test and/or AIDS virus test should not be used as a prerequisite for employment. Knowledge or presumed knowledge of AIDS antibody and/or AIDS virus status shall not be used to discriminate against an employee for any reason.

#### **1991 Statement – PC(USA), pp. 101-102**

Whereas, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is challenged to live out, as the body of Christ, Jesus' ministry of healing love, compassion, and justice; therefore, be it

*Resolved,* That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) take the following additional steps in the implementation of "To Meet AIDS with Grace and Truth" to

1. note the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) considers the AIDS /HIV crisis to be of utmost importance and urgency for the church and world and that the ministry units be directed to assess and develop an action plan for AIDS ministry;
7. involve, whenever and wherever possible, persons with HIV infection and/or AIDS in the assessment and allocation of needs and funding.

#### **1994 Statement – PC(USA), p. 575**

[In response to the AIDS epidemic, the 206th General Assembly (1994) declares:]

1. We are called to love. God does not punish with sickness or disease but is present together with us as the source of our strength, courage and hope. The God of our understanding is, in fact, greater than AIDS.
2. We are called to compassionate care. We must assure that all who are affected by the pandemic (regardless of religion, race, class, age, nationality, physical ability, gender, or sexual orientation) will have access to compassionate, nonjudgmental care, respect, support and assistance.
3. We are called to witness and do justice. We are committed to transform public attitudes and policies, supporting the enforcement of all local and federal laws to protect the civil liberties of all persons with AIDS and other disabilities. We further commit to speak publicly about AIDS prevention and compassion for all people.
4. We promote prevention. Within the context of our faith, we encourage accurate and comprehensive information for the public regarding HIV transmission and means of prevention. We vow to develop comprehensive AIDS prevention for our youth and adults.
5. We acknowledge that we are a global community. While the scourge of AIDS is devastating to the United States, it is much greater in magnitude in other parts of the world community. We recognize our responsibility to encourage AIDS education and prevention policies, especially in the global religious programs we support.
6. We deplore the sins of intolerance and bigotry. AIDS is not a "gay" disease. The numbers of women and children are increasing at alarming rates. It affects men, women and children of all races. We reject the intolerance

and bigotry that have caused many to deflect their energy, blame those infected, and become preoccupied with issues of sexuality, worthiness, class status or chemical dependency.

7. We challenge our society. Because economic disparity and poverty are major contributing factors in the AIDS pandemic and barriers to prevention and treatment, we call upon all sectors of society to seek ways of eliminating poverty in a commitment to a future hope and security.

8. We are committed to action. We, as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), individually and in our communities, will seek to respond to the needs around us.

### **1994 Statement – PC(USA), p. 507**

[The 206th General Assembly (1994) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):]

1. Encourages and challenges all congregations, presbyteries, and synods of the General Assembly to live out Jesus' ministry of healing love, compassion and justice for all God's children infected with HIV and AIDS -related diseases through ministries and educational efforts, including the request for and use of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) educational and worship materials, and resource persons available to them.

2. Instructs the three new programmatic divisions to review the manner in which they and their subdivisions are affected by and how they will be affected in the future by the HIV /AIDS crisis, and to report on any current and proposed action plans they have in support of all prior General Assemblies over the next three years -- 1995, 1996, 1997.

3. Instructs the three new programmatic divisions, through their appropriate subdivisions, to lift up before the next three General Assemblies the accomplishments of their own staff, the lower governing bodies, and congregations regarding models of ministry and support groups and education programs on behalf of persons and their families living with HIV /AIDS.

### **ACSWP Commentary**

In 1998, the 210th General Assembly approved Overtures 98-66 and 98-76 that dealt with persons living with AIDS and HIV. The heart of these overtures was in their concern for persons who are living with HIV /AIDS and their involvement in the workplace. The overtures lifted up the fact that "in the past two years, medical research and development have produced a new class of AIDS drugs called Protease Inhibitors that have reduced the lethal virus to undetectable levels in a fortunate percentage of those able to tolerate and to afford these drugs." However, "there are still many unknowns about the longevity, effectiveness, and side-effects of these new drugs on those who return to employment. When such persons are employed, they face multiple obstacles including: the loss of Medicare and Medicaid, with which they purchase the drugs and which make it possible for them to seek employment; loss of Social Security Disability Insurance and/or Supplementary Security Income; and loss of their private, long-term disability insurance if they attempt a return to work, such insurance coverage being denied in future applications because of preexisting conditions." (PCUSA, 1998, p. 691) Attempting to address these and other issues, both overtures called for public policy and funding to provide access to these lifesaving drugs for people living with HIV /AIDS. In addition, they called for advocacy on behalf of persons living with HIV /AIDS in terms of their seeking employment, and re-qualifying for assistance if failing health requires them to give up employment. The full text of both overtures can be found at PC(USA), 1998, pp. 690 - 691, 694 - 695.

### **1998 Statement – PC(USA), p. 695**

The 210th General Assembly (1998) [of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)] direct[s] the Congregational Ministries Division and National Ministries Division through the General Assembly Council to:

1. Work for public policies and funding to provide access to these lifesaving drug treatments for those affected by HIV /AIDS.

2. Advocate for persons . . . who are living with HIV /AIDS and seek employment by directing the Office of the Stated Clerk to send a communication to the Social Security Administration, the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, and the Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Justice, urging the implementation of policies and necessary legislation to protect the benefits that allow access to the medications and other treatments that make work possible, including policies and legislation that would not require persons to requalify for these assistance programs in the event that failing health requires giving up employment.

4. Urge congregations and governing bodies to offer volunteer, part-time, and/or full-time positions to those seeking employment in order that they might build a current work history as they seek other employment.
5. Support continued HIV /AIDS prevention education that both stresses the reality that HIV /AIDS remains incurable and that provides information for persons to engage in behaviors that reduce or eliminate the risk of infection.

**2000 Statement – PC(USA), pp. 443-444**

[The 212th General Assembly (2000) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):]

1. Appropriate[s] up to \$90,000 over three years to be used exclusively for programs and not for administrative costs for the National Office of Health Ministries to conduct Regional Care Team Conferences to educate, train, and empower deacons and interested church members in organized Care Teams to reclaim the ministry of health to those affected by life-challenging disease, as set forth in Scripture as "one of sympathy, witness, and service after the example of Jesus Christ" and "to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless and to any who may be in distress within and beyond the community of faith" (*Book of Order*, G-6.0401, G-6.0402).
2. Direct[s] the General Assembly Council to advise the Congregational Ministries Division and the National Ministries Health Ministries Division through their appropriate existing departments and staff to take the following action:
  - a. Confer with the leadership team of Presbyterian AIDS Network and other caring organizations of the PC(USA) concerning their direct experience with the development of Care Team ministries.
  - b. Having identified Care Team models that are effective, work with the Presbyterian AIDS Network in sharing this model of ministry through synods and presbyteries, in order that local churches and their boards of deacons (or other such organizations with similar duties) might enlist their consideration and participation in the development of the Care Team ministries in all churches.
  - c. Ensure that these processes are carried out over the next three years and prepare a report that will be made to the 215th General Assembly (2003) concerning the results of this effort on behalf of individuals and families having experienced Care Team support in the midst of life-challenging diseases.d.That bilingual personnel be available and materials be offered in different languages (Spanish, Korean, English, and others) in accordance with demographics of each location.

**2001 Statement – PC(USA), pp. 335-336**

The 213th General Assembly (2001) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), out of profound concern for families, communities, and nations ravaged by the HIV /AIDS epidemic, [voted to do the following]:

1. Designate the year 2002 to 2003 to be a year of Global AIDS Pandemic Awareness in the church.
2. Urge all entities of the church to
  - a. pray for families, communities, and nations suffering from the epidemic;
  - b. consider generating funds for Extra Commitment Opportunities established to address the global AIDS epidemic and all funding entities to consider making AIDS a priority concern;
  - c. remember World AIDS Day on December 1.
3. Commend the Worldwide Ministries Division for
  - a. establishing two new mission personnel positions to address AIDS in Africa;
  - b. providing leadership to the cross-divisional PC(USA) strategy team in order to address the AIDS pandemic as it relates to our international partner churches;
  - c. its support of presbytery and ecumenical partnerships, in particular partnerships that strengthen AIDS ministries around the world;
  - d. participating in the World Health Organization's Massive Effort (a collaborative initiative with international agencies, private corporations, and nongovernmental organizations to address the diseases of poverty: Malaria, Tuberculosis, and HIV /AIDS).
4. Directs the Worldwide Ministries Division (WMD) to
  - a. support the administrative and programmatic needs of the two new WMD mission personnel positions that will address AIDS in Africa;
  - b. consider establishing a mission personnel position to assist churches working to address the AIDS epidemic in Southeast Asia, which may soon be at the epicenter of the epidemic;
  - c. support indigenous efforts, such as literacy, income generation, and other basic development projects that address underlying gender inequalities that intensify the epidemic and to do so in a culturally sensitive manner and to allocate resources in a just manner to men and women and addressing the unique needs of men and women and children;

- d. establish funding for the provision of financial and technical support to indigenous efforts in all regions of the world that seek to develop programs and educational materials concerning gender inequalities that exacerbate the pandemic;
  - e. facilitate partnerships between Presbyterian women's groups in the United States and women's groups in partner churches and ecumenical organizations;
  - g. maintain a database of women's groups and partnerships between women's groups that are working to address gender inequalities and HIV /AIDS;
  - h. develop materials on the global pandemic and its gender dimensions to be sent out in the already established resource packet mailing for World AIDS Day;
  - i. consider establishing a two- to three-year staff position with International Health Ministries focusing on community- and congregation-based initiatives that target support for people infected and affected by HIV /AIDS and, in particular, orphans.
5. Request that the Worldwide Ministries Division AIDS Task Team and the Presbyterian United Nations Office host a consultation or educational event on the gender dimensions of the AIDS pandemic, and invite partner churches, ecumenical leaders, and faith-based woman's organizations in different regions of the world to participate and help plan the event.
  6. Encourage congregations and national and local AIDS networks to
    - a. educate their constituencies about the global pandemic by holding educational events or writing articles about the issue;
    - b. engage in advocacy efforts, such as the World Health Organization's (WHO) Massive Effort Against the Diseases of Poverty (Malaria, HIV /AIDS, and Tuberculosis) and to increase funding for prevention strategies and to make affordable medications available to countries in the developing world.
  7. Direct the Stated Clerk to write a letter to the president of the United States, calling upon the United States government to allocate greater resources towards addressing the epidemic and poverty that fans it, as well as prevention and affordable treatment initiatives recommended according to the WHO Massive Effort, and to show flexibility regarding trade agreements and intellectual property rights so that life-saving drugs can be available to all affected populations.
  8. Direct the Stated Clerk to write a letter to members of Congress, alerting them of the 213th General Assembly (2001)'s approval of "Women and AIDS: A Global Crisis" and how to obtain a copy.
  9. Request the Presbyterian Washington Office and the Presbyterian UN Office to support advocacy efforts to address the massive effort against the diseases of poverty, and the need to make affordable medication available to countries in the developing world.
  10. Commend the work of the Jubilee 2000 campaign in advocating for debt-relief programs and encourage Presbyterians to continue their work with this campaign.
  11. Commend the United Nations, in particular UN AIDS, for its global leadership in addressing the epidemic.
  12. Direct the Stated Clerk to write a letter to UN AIDS, commending their efforts and encouraging them to support faith-based initiatives that seek to curb the HIV /AIDS epidemic by teaching abstinence, being faithful in marriage, as well as the use of condoms as viable measures of HIV /AIDS support by churches in the developing world.

**2003 Statement – PC(USA), p. 585**

**Prostitution Around Military Bases**

[The 215th General Assembly (2003) approved the Report of Research Team with the following actions:]

1. Commend the work of the Presbyterian Council for Chaplains and Military Personnel, Women's Ministries program area, Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns, Presbyterian UN Office, and ECPAT USA on this issue.
2. Request that the research team write up its findings in detail, and publish the report on the PC(USA) Website.
3. Request that the Washington Office and the UN Office continue to work to address this issue.
4. Request that international mission personnel be educated through existing Web, newsletter, and training events about the problem of sex trafficking.
5. Request the Stated Clerk write a letter to the Armed Forces Chaplains Board in the U.S. Defense Department urging them to educate their networks and members about the moral and ethical failings present in the heavy participation of U.S. servicemen buying sex from trafficked and sexually exploited women.
6. Request that the Stated Clerk write a letter to the U.S. State Department commending them for their renewed efforts to address sex trafficking and encouraging them to also document in their annual report on trafficking the problem that exists around U.S. military installations;

7. Request the Stated Clerk to write a letter to the Defense Department urging them to enforce and train personnel in codes of conduct related to the sexual exploitation of women and children around bases and to address the cultural norms that erroneously suggest men are incapable of altering their behavior.
8. Direct the Stated Clerk to write a letter to the commanders of the U.S. Army, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Navy, and the U.S. Marine Corps in Korea urging them to conduct a full-scale investigation and/or collaborate fully with the Korean police in their investigation of murders and other human rights violations involving women working in camp towns when a U.S. military personnel or a civilian component of the U.S. Army, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Navy, or the U.S. Marine Corps in Korea is an alleged perpetrator.
9. Direct the Stated Clerk to write a letter to the government of the Republic of Korea and other host countries to take decisive steps to curb sex trafficking and develop protective measures against human rights violations of sex workers.
10. Request the PC(USA) Office of East Asia Pacific in the Worldwide Ministries Division to find ways to work with partner churches in the Republic of Korea to minister to sex workers in military camp towns by providing support systems that protect them from human rights violations and help them find alternatives to this work. [Note: The research team of two civilians and one military chaplain that went to South Korea to look into the situation of prostitution around U. S. military bases originated the above recommendations to the 215th General Assembly (2003). These recommendations are universally applicable and communications should be distributed broadly to all places we (U.S.A.) have bases.]

**2004 Statement** – PC(USA), pp. 90-91

**On Authorizing the Inclusion of a Fund to Combat HIV /AIDS and Diseases of Poverty in Africa in the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering-From the Presbytery of New Castle**

In response to this recommendation, the 216th General Assembly (2004) approved the following resolution  
The 216th General Assembly (2004) directed the General Assembly Council, Worldwide Ministries Division, of the PC(USA) to make a concerted, coordinated effort to lift up and publicize the existing Extra Commitment Opportunities pertaining to HIV /AIDS issues. There is no question that there is an overwhelming need for funds to address this crisis in Africa and around the world.

**2006 Statement** – PC(USA), pp. 36-37, 632

**Item 08-06. On Funding the Fight Against HIV /AIDS and Diseases of Poverty-From the Presbytery of Ohio Valley.**

The 217th General Assembly (2006) assembly approved Item 08-06 as amended.

The Presbytery of Ohio Valley overtures the 217th General Assembly (2006) of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to address the world AIDS pandemic by directing the Peacemaking Program to encourage congregations to use their 25 percent of the Peacemaking Offering and presbyteries and synods to use their portions of the Peacemaking Offering, to fight HIV /AIDS in the U.S.A. and globally, where those diseases are decimating whole populations. The funds generated will be utilized for education, prevention, care, and treatment of HIV /AIDS in the most afflicted areas of the world.

**2008 Statement** – PC(USA),pp. 58-59, 1078-1079

**Item 10-02-On Directing the General Assembly Council to Develop and Fund a Comprehensive HIV and AIDS Policy for the PC(USA)-From the Presbytery of the Pacific**

The 218th General Assembly (2008) approved the following amended statement with comment:

The Presbytery of the Pacific, recognizing that the HIV and AIDS pandemic is a critical matter of our faith and God's justice, overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to address the HIV and AIDS pandemic by directing the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), in consultation with appropriate General Assembly Council staff, PC(USA) networks, and church partners, to develop and fully fund a comprehensive study on HIV and AIDS for the PC(USA), recommending compassionate action and giving prophetic witness regarding issues related to people living with HIV and AIDS in the U.S.A. and around the world, and report to the 219th General Assembly (2010).

Comment: That those appointed to this study represent a broad range of folks theologically, since policies might be formed from this study.