



AMERICAN MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

—A Majority Report

(A statement of the Sixth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church adopted October 9, 1972, by action GC72.9.155, as a majority statement of comment and counsel addressed to the members of the congregations of The American Lutheran Church to aid them in their decisions and actions.)

1. The presence of U.S. military forces in Southeast Asia rightly has become an urgent issue of human rights and justice. As a gathering of Christians, a caring community, a portion of God's people, we, the majority of delegates to this Sixth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, feel called to speak on an issue so divisive within our nation and throughout the world. We seek to express the Biblical message of truth, justice, compassion, peace, righteousness, repentance, forgiveness, hope, love, and reconciliation over against the inhumanity of war. We are called to emphasize human dignity, the infinite value of persons, the ability of institutions and social structures to perform effectively, and the welfare of all people. War, injustice, and the suppression of God-given human rights deny the infinite worth, dignity, and integrity of each person and limit the ability of social institutions to serve people.

2. We have come to the conviction that our military involvement in Southeast Asia, however well-intended, has proven to be a tragic mistake. We recognize that incomplete information, managed news, and propaganda hide from us many of the realities of the situation and cloud or distort our vision. We recognize also the complex historical developments and national policy decisions which led to our nation's involvement in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, we believe that our nation cannot accomplish its declared goals by destroying the people, the society, and the lands it claims to be helping. The means used are inappropriate to the ends sought. The consequences of further American military operations in Southeast Asia appear to us to outweigh by far the probable good to be won through continuing the conflict. The costs of military involvement—in the death, mutilation, wounds, agony, and heartbreak of persons, in the ravaging and scarring of the environment, in the diversion of scarce and irreplaceable resources from people-serving to people-destroying ends, in the breakdown of the institutions and structures which give moral fiber and strength to a society, in the lack of attention to such urgent domestic issues as poverty, racism, housing, quality of education, transportation, urban blight, and rural well-being—are beyond the limits justice allows. Unremitting military involvement continues the reign of death and destruction abroad and encourages violence at home. It aggravates and perpetuates an insensitivity to people and to human values. In our concern for America's own honor and America's own national self-interest we have

largely forgotten the people of Southeast Asia who have borne the brunt of the anguish, misery, suffering, and destruction imposed by this long, costly, and cruel struggle.

3. We who are members of The American Lutheran Church also are members of the world-wide Body of Christ, an international community. We value the love, concern, reproof, and chastening we gain from our partners in the Gospel in other lands. We continue to underscore the power of earnest and sincere prayers for peace. We join with others of the world-wide Christian community in praying that the fighting and killing may end immediately, that all prisoners of war may be released and those missing in action may be accounted for, and that members of the armed forces may be protected and freed for peaceful pursuits. We call upon all governments to stop all acts of military force throughout Indochina. We join in concern and prayer for the people of Southeast Asia as well as those of all nations who are bearing the burdens, the hate, the hostility, the rejection, the homelessness, the separation, and the other costs of this military involvement. We pray in the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord, that God's will be done and that we may have the wisdom to know and the courage to do His will.

4. Regardless of the responsibility others may bear for waging and prolonging this war, we as American Christians must accept our share of the responsibility for American military involvement in Southeast Asia. Too often we have uncritically accepted as right and proper whatever military involvement was proclaimed by governmental authorities as being in the national interest. Too often we have failed to pursue peace with the same vigor with which we have waged war. As evidence of the sincerity of our prayers and the earnestness of our repentance, we must be willing to participate, under the direction and control of the people of Indochina and in cooperation with other nations and groups, in rebuilding Southeast Asia out of the rubble of this futile war. We must use our influence to see that funds are available from government, church-related agencies, and other groups to aid in restoring these devastated lands and peoples.

5. The church, as a community of forgiven and reconciled persons, has a responsibility in healing the bitterness and relieving the frustration and guilt which this war has caused. We heed the call of the Psalmist "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14). We take seriously the word that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19).

—A Minority Report

(A statement adopted by the Sixth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, October 10, 1972, by action GC72.10.178, as a minority statement of comment and counsel addressed to the members of the congregations of The American Lutheran Church to aid them in their decisions and actions.)

WHEREAS, The presence of U.S. military forces in Southeast Asia rightly has become an urgent issue of human rights and justice, as a gathering of Christians, a caring community, a portion of God's people, we, the minority of delegates to this Sixth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, feel called to speak on an issue so divisive within our nation and throughout the world.

We seek to express the Biblical message of truth, justice, compassion, peace, righteousness, repentance, forgiveness, hope, love and reconciliation over against the inhumanity of war. We are called to emphasize human dignity, the infinite value of persons, the ability of institutions and social structures to perform effectively, and the welfare of all people. War, injustice, and the suppression of God-given human rights deny the infinite worth, dignity, and integrity of each person and limit the ability of social institutions to serve people; and

WHEREAS, We recognize also the complex historical developments and national policy decisions which led to our nation's involvement in Southeast Asia; and

WHEREAS, We recognize that incomplete information, managed news, and propaganda hide from us many of the realities of the situation and cloud or distort our vision; and

WHEREAS, It takes two sides to make war, and as is in our marriage, divorce, and remarriage statement we recognize both parties bear the burden of a divorce; and

WHEREAS, The President of the United States has effected a withdrawal of over one-half million military men; and

WHEREAS, The President of the United States has the latest of best information on the status of negotiations, prisoners of war, of the air support necessary to protect the South Vietnam military; therefore be it

Resolved, That we register our extreme distress in the wars of every age and this present war in Vietnam; and be it further

Resolved, That we recognize the faults of both sides in the involvement of war; and be it further

Resolved, That we commend the President of the United States in winding down the war and withdrawing over one-half million; and be it further

Resolved, That we request the President of the United States to negotiate a complete end of armed conflict in Southeast Asia which will:

1. Maintain the honor of our country.
2. Maintain the integrity of our treaties and commitments to the people of the world.
3. Facilitate the return of our prisoners of war as soon as possible.

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