

HUMAN RELATIONS

A Social Document of the
ULCA



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

A Series of Statements of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1922, 1936, 1946, 1952, 1956, 1958

First Expressions

1922: Minutes, 3rd Biennial Convention, ULCA, pp. 419, 422.

The Convention declared its conviction:

That the Christian law of love and justice demands that the autonomy and rights of the weaker nations should be recognized by the strong nations, that the rights of minorities, whether racial, political or religious should be respected and protected, and that freedom of religious faith and worship should be everywhere guaranteed.

1936: Minutes, 10th Biennial Convention, ULCA, pp. 358, 359.

The Convention resolved:

To acknowledge its due share of responsibility for the effective administration of the Gospel and all its benefits to the Negroes of the South.

1946: Minutes, 15th Biennial Convention, ULCA, pp. 461, 467.

The Convention resolved:

That we urge upon our people the practice of the principles of Christian Brotherhood in dealing with peoples of other races, color and nationalities.

General Statement

1952: Adopted by Board of Social Missions and Executive Board. Reported in Minutes, 18th Biennial Convention, ULCA, pp. 790-92.

Since one of the disruptive forces which hinders the will of God is prejudice and discrimination in human relations, the United Lutheran Church in America sets forth the following propositions as the basis for study, discussion, experimentation, and concerted action by its congregations and members.

Christian Principles

The Word of God, which the Church proclaims, reveals the righteous judgment of God upon sinful man, and sets forth the distinctive power of Christ to redeem him.

1. God the Father is the Creator of all mankind. We are made in His likeness. In the light of the common creation of all men, differences in physical characteristics or social background are only of incidental importance.
2. God condemns all injustice, all hatred, all abuse and persecution of men. His judgment is revealed in the moral sickness of all men and in the torn fabric of our common life.
3. God's atoning grace embraces every man. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, God offers redemption to all. Christ died for all mankind. All men have equal worth in God's sight.
4. Forgiveness through the Cross restores men to fellowship with God. Through the remission of sins the way is opened to reconciliation between men. The love of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Cross, leads men to the deepest kind of human fellowship and mutual service. By the power of the Cross men can overcome prejudice, discrimination, and exploitation which sinfully distort God's order and are the basic cause of social tension.
5. God calls all men through the Gospel to Christian brotherhood. Love, which flows from God, seeks to create justice and true community. Love for one's fellow men is the necessary counterpart of love for God. God calls men to serve Him by serving each other.
6. In God's providence Christians, different in racial, geographical, economic, and social backgrounds, may use their differences to contribute to the total enrichment of life. No group is self-sufficient. By the exercise of justice and brotherhood men may cooperate in building true human community.
7. The abiding love of Christ, our Lord, impels us. We dare not separate ourselves from that love. Christ is the one Word of God, to whom we must listen and whom we must trust and obey in life and death. Thus Christians must face all human relationships in the spirit and power of Christ's love.

Human Rights and Responsibilities

In the light of these truths of Christian Faith the Church ought to help its people by offering a common witness to guide the individual conscience. Consistent Christian living requires that men shall seek to accord to each other the observance of the following rights and their matching responsibilities:

1. To possess and to respect the life and dignity of the human person as a child of God for whom Christ died.
2. To worship God without human distinctions in the Church, the Body of Christ.
3. To develop his God-given talents through education and cultural pursuits in order to use these talents in answer to God's call.
4. To establish a home in living space and housing conducive to a wholesome family life.
5. To occupy the place in economic life for which he is individually fitted, being free to advance therein on the basis of character and ability.
6. To share the privileges and obligations of community life, having equal access to all public services, including those related to health, education, recreation,

social welfare, and transportation, and receiving equal consideration from persons and institutions serving the public.

7. To exercise one's citizenship in elections and all the other processes of government, having freedom for inquiry, discussion and peaceful assembly, and receiving police protection and equal consideration and justice in the courts.

Propositions for Christian Action

The foregoing declaration of Christian principles in the field of human relations and the enunciation of human rights and their attendant responsibilities derived therefrom, inevitably point toward Christian action. In working out the implications of our faith we face an awesome and urgent task in overcoming the evil tensions and injustices in human relations that obedience to God requires us to challenge. Christians ought to lay the following propositions to heart:

Acknowledge Our Sin

Evil tensions and injustices resulting from racial and cultural practices must be faced before God. The unacknowledged sins of pride, fear, injustice and hatred have added a great moral peril to our present situation. Men must learn in repentance to seek God's atoning grace and renewing Spirit so that society may attain its true basis in God's order.

Accept Individual Responsibility

Each Christian must realize his moral responsibility to God for his actions affecting his neighbor. Each must examine his actions in the light of God's commands. Each must learn to show respect to all men as children of God and render justice to those with whom he deals. This obligation is crucial today in relation to members of minority groups.

Begin in the Home

Our families must nurture their members in Christian life and outlook so that people of different backgrounds are respected and treated with equal fairness and good will. Parents must be on guard neither to pass on to their children the sins of prejudice, nor to lead them in discrimination which is unbecoming to Christians. Rather, it is the duty of parents to lead their children, by precept and example, in interracial cooperation and understanding.

Continue at Work

All of us have special responsibilities in our daily work and economic activities to strive for justice for our neighbor, fair employment opportunities for all, and the removal of those economic handicaps from which minorities suffer. Christians in labor unions, business organizations, and industrial enterprises should take the lead in working for justice for oppressed groups. Minorities likewise should seek to fulfill in their employment their responsibilities to their employers and fellow-workers, and to the groups affected by their work.

Rally as Christians

Christians have special responsibilities as citizens to make society's laws and practices conform to God's order. Many human rights in which Christians believe, especially rights as to personal safety, citizenship, education, employment, and housing, are not being extended to all men. Christian brotherhood is impeded by practices enforcing segregation, God calls for, and human justice requires, speedy changes at every level and in every area of our society.

Community self surveys, to determine the areas where basic rights are being denied and what the opportunities for remedial action are, have proved useful. Fair Employment Practices Laws have proved generally beneficial in cities and states where they have been enacted. Citizens groups have secured fair use of educational funds, just action in the courts, and fairer treatment in press and radio for minorities. Christians should work for such constructive changes, and for public support of democratically enacted laws which conform to Christian society and must manifest in its own life the principles and attitudes of Jesus. The Church must seek to be true to its own nature as a community of children of God inclusive of every race, nation, and class who confess Christ as Lord.

Arouse the Church

The Church's agencies and institutions should seek to serve all people fairly without distinction because of racial or cultural background. All its congregations should be centers of action to develop Christian fellowship across human barriers, and to instill the spirit of equality and Christian brotherhood. To this end the United Lutheran Church in America calls its pastors and people to earnest study and remedial action.

After the Supreme Court Decision

1956: Minutes, 20th Biennial Convention, ULCA, pp. 1261, 1262,

The ULCA, recognizing its deep involvement in the moral crisis confronting the U.S.A. in the current controversy over desegregation occasioned by the Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954, affirms the Statement on Human Relations adopted by the Executive Board of the ULCA and the Board of Social Missions (April 1951), and calls upon all its congregations and people, exercising Christian patience and understanding, to work for the fullest realization of the objectives of that statement.

We believe that Christians have special responsibilities to keep open the channels of communication and understanding among the different groups in this controversy. Our congregations are encouraged to contribute to the solution of the problem by demonstrating in their own corporate lives the possibility of integration.

We furthermore state that due heed ought to be given the following principles by all and especially by those holding civil office, since they hold their power under God and are responsible to him for its exercise.

1. The public school system so necessary to the maintenance of a democratic, free and just way of life, must be upheld and strengthened.
2. All parties to the present controversy are in duty bound to follow and uphold due process of law, and to maintain public order.

Reaffirmation and Support

1958: Minutes, 21st Biennial Convention, ULCA, p. 1009.

Whereas, The United Lutheran Church in America is sensitive to the present challenges and opportunities in the realm of human relations and is conscious of its responsibility to provide leadership in this realm,

Therefore be it resolved that The United Lutheran Church in America commend the Board of Social Missions for its creative program directed toward improvement of race relations in harmony with the principles expressed by the 1956 Convention of the church in the "Statement on Desegregation" (1956 ULCA Minutes, pp. 1125, 1258-61); and,

Be it further resolved that the Church extend to all its pastors and congregations the assurance of its continuing approval, support and prayers in the Christian implementation of these principles.