

03-GS-48 VOTED: The Twenty-fourth General Synod refers the resolution “To Explore the Implications of our Dietary Choices” to the Executive Council.

TO EXPLORE THE IMPLICATIONS OF OUR DIETARY CHOICES

WHEREAS, our bodies are God-given gifts that should be directed at glorifying and magnifying God, and Paul said, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19, NRSV), unhealthy diets predispose to a wide range of diseases; for example, diets heavily laden with meat and other animal products are associated with substantially higher risks of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, arthritis, and certain cancers (*Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 97 (1997), 1317-21). Doctors often encourage their cardiac patients to eat less cholesterol and saturated fat, and healthful nutrition earlier in life would help prevent coronary artery disease and other conditions. Since some fad diets are unhealthy, nutritional education should accompany any recommendations to change dietary habits; and

WHEREAS, Jesus said “For I was hungry and you gave me food . . . as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:35, 40, NRSV), yet 1.1 billion people are underfed and malnourished and tens of millions (mostly children) die of malnutrition-related diseases annually (*Worldwatch* Paper 150 [Worldwatch Institute, 2000]). While world hunger is a complex economic, social, and political problem that our dietary choices alone will not eradicate and while grazing in some lands unsuitable for growing crops can increase food production, contemporary production of animal foods aggravates world hunger because crop lands dedicated to animal grains could readily produce food for human consumption. Converting grains to meat wastes the majority of grains’ proteins and calories and all of grains’ carbohydrates and fiber. In 1998, thirty-seven percent of the world’s grain harvest was fed to animals for human consumption, and in the United States this figure was sixty-six percent (World Resources Institute <www.igc.org/wri/facts/datatablesforests.html>); and

WHEREAS, God gave Adam the special task to “till” and “keep” the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15), which suggests that humankind has a sacred task to be good stewards to God’s creation, since “all things were created through him [Christ-God] and for [Christ-God]” (Colossians 1:16, NRSV), yet many contemporary agriculture practices harm the environment; for example, intensive agricultural methods have often included heavy pesticide use that has been harmful to ecosystems. The inefficiency of converting grains into animal flesh means that meat production generally depletes far more of the dwindling water, energy, and topsoil resources than plant food production. Deciduous and tropical forests have been cleared for cattle grazing and other agricultural uses, contributing to global warming, deadly mud slides, permanent soil damage, and species

extinctions. It is widely agreed that contemporary resource use (including resources dedicated to food production) is not environmentally sustainable and threatens great hardships for humankind this century; and

WHEREAS, while highly mechanized, high-speed, intensive farming technologies have often increased food production efficiency and reduced prices for consumers, they have also had undesirable consequence for workers and many farmers, including the high injury rate among slaughter-house workers (Eric Schlosser, Fast Food Nation [2001]) and the waning viability of smaller, farmer-owned farms that cannot afford the large capital investments. The loss of farmer-owned farms has had profound effects on rural life, culture, and community; and

WHEREAS, Genesis 1:29-30 relates that Adam, Eve, and all animals in the Garden of Eden ate only plant foods, and Isaiah envisioned a return to plant-based diets at the end of time, and he prophesied a messianic age in which “the wolf shall live with the lamb,” “the lion shall eat straw like the ox,” and “they will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:6-9, NRSV). The Bible teaches that God cares about all creatures; for example, the psalmist wrote, “The Lord is good to all, and [God’s] compassion is over all [God] has made” (Psalms 145:9, NRSV). Jesus said that God feeds the birds of the air (Matthew. 6:26) and does not forget sparrows (Luke 12:6), but Jesus concurrently reminded listeners that they are of greater value than sparrows. Although Genesis 2:18-19 describes animals as put on earth as Adams’ companions and helpers, several biblical teachings indicate that, after the Fall, eating meat was not inherently sinful. For example, Noah was permitted to eat animals; Luke 24:43 describes Jesus eating fish; many people interpret Peter’s dream (Acts 10:10-13) as supporting meat consumption; Paul wrote in 1 Timothy (4:4) that “everything created by God is good” (NRSV); and 1 Corinthians 10:25 reads, “Eat whatever is sold in the meat market” (NRSV). These diverse teachings suggest that God-centered eating calls for study, reflection, and prayer; and

WHEREAS, the Hebrew Scriptures oppose cruelty to animals, for example, prohibiting yoking the ox with the much weaker donkey (Deuteronomy 22:10) and muzzling the ox as he plows the fields (Deuteronomy 25:4), and Proverbs 12:10 relates that “The righteous know the needs of their animals, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel” (NRSV). Jewish tradition, derived from rabbinic interpretation of the Bible, forbids cruel slaughter by rendering inedible any animal who is not killed with a single cut or who is killed with a nicked blade, yet animal welfare laws exempt “standard agricultural practices” in nearly every state. The federal Humane Slaughter Act, which requires that animals be rendered unconscious prior to slaughter, is poorly enforced (*Washington Post* [June 13, 2001]) and excludes poultry. Consequently modern slaughter often causes animals terror and pain (Gail Eisnitz, *Slaughterhouse* [1997]). Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful (Matthew

5:7), yet several widely used techniques designed to increase productivity cause animal suffering, including painful procedures without anesthesia, highly stressful crowding, frustration of animals' basic behavioral needs, and miserable conditions en route to slaughter, but we should also acknowledge that animal husbandry practices vary widely, and members of some species of farmed animals tend to be treated much better than others.

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages pastors and congregations of every local church to explore the ways in which one's dietary choices can be valid and meaningful expressions of Christian witness, particularly on Ecojustice Sabbath (early April); and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls on Local Church Ministries to develop educational curricula for Sunday school, adult education, and institutions of higher learning that

- 1) explore the relationship between dietary choices and our health, world hunger, the environment, the welfare of those working in animal agriculture, and animal well-being;
- 2) encourage reflection on how people can promote reforms in animal husbandry, such as identifying farmers who abide by more humane animal husbandry standards; and
- 3) provide responsible nutritional advice. (Several pastors and lay members have already offered to voluntarily work on preparing these curricula, and these people plan to develop curricula appropriate for different age levels that provide factual information and then encourage reflection and discussion by asking questions. These curricula will then be presented to Local Church Ministries for revision and approval.)

Funding for this action will be made in accordance with the overall mandates at the affected agencies and the funds available.