

**No. 9715**

**(Sense-of-the-Assembly)**

**RESOLUTION ON POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY**

ADOPTED by the General Assembly

WHEREAS, the vast majority of law enforcement officers serve with accountability and integrity as they daily put themselves in harm's way for the good of the community. Because the actions of some do not adhere to the high standards of law enforcement, they put the community's welfare in jeopardy; and

WHEREAS, numerous civil disorders of this century were the result of police abuse, or the perception of police abuse, by law enforcement officers against persons of color and/or residents of low-income communities. Shredding the peace and stability of our neighborhoods, heightening racial tensions, and costing millions of dollars in property damage, such disturbances take a severe toll on every segment of our society; and

WHEREAS, the Reconciliation Program of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) recognized this critical problem as a social justice issue as early as 1984, when it funded a National Conference on Police Accountability held in Milwaukee, cosponsored by the Greater Milwaukee Conference on Religion and Urban Affairs and Citizens Alert of Chicago, a participating group of the Church's network, Church Action for Safe and Just Communities; and

WHEREAS, after the April, 1996 televised beating of immigrants by Riverside County sheriff's deputies in California, religious leaders there asserted that the church has a moral mandate to be a voice for the voiceless and called for a full investigation and immediate evaluation of training procedures, reminding Christians that Jesus was beaten, reviled and killed for us, and that we can show our love for God by never becoming complacent with violent conduct; and

WHEREAS, reports from cities across the country indicate that there now exists a crisis of national proportions in police community relations; and

WHEREAS, formal recognition of the critical issue of social justice related to police abuse is reflected in program support and/or resolutions by the National Interreligious Task Force on Criminal Justice, the Reconciliation Program of Illinois/Wisconsin, the Women's Division of the United Methodist Church, Board for Homeland Ministries of the United Church of Christ, Wellington Avenue United Church of Christ (Chicago), the First United Church of Oak Park (Illinois) and the Presbyterian Church (USA); and

WHEREAS, among the thousands of other victims of police brutality, two members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are tragic examples of such abuse. They are Blake Todd of Park Manor Christian Church in Chicago, and Anthony Baez of Second Christian Church in the Bronx:

In 1994, Blake Todd, 30, in a case of mistaken identity, was shot and killed by an off-duty police officer who had a history of abuse. Mr. Todd was doing a outdoor repair job at the time he was killed; and

In 1994, Anthony Baez, 29, died as the result of an illegal choke-hold by a New York City police officer angered when a street football game resulted in his squad car being hit by a ball thrown by Mr. Baez; and

WHEREAS, experience across the nation has shown that persons of racial/ethnic background, such as Native Americans, African Americans, and persons of Asian, Hispanic and Pacific Island origin, are especially at risk in this regard and often lack the resources and support to protect themselves against unlawful infringement of their human rights;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), meeting in Denver, Colorado July 25-29, 1997 issue a call to:

1. Ask the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to offer its prayers and expressions of sympathy for all who have experienced police abuse, especially the families of Blake Todd and Anthony Baez; and
2. Ask congregations to commit to the appreciation and support and partnership with police officers toward the goal of human and effective law enforcement, ask congregations to pray for law enforcement officers as they daily risk their lives to strive for peace and justice and to pray for their families, and
3. Urge that the membership of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) at local levels encourage better funding for police work, improvement in the screening and training of police candidates, and provision of counseling and other forms of support necessary for those engaged in this vitally important service to our communities, and
4. Urge all congregations to join in ecumenical and interfaith efforts to establish and/or participate in community-based programs designed to monitor police policies and conduct, including mechanisms for independent review procedures, and
5. Urge General, Regional and Local leaders of the Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ) to speak out publicly on issues of police accountability.