

## No. 0317

(Sense-of-the-Assembly)

### A CALL FOR CHURCH-WIDE SUPPORT OF THE ECUMENICAL CHURCH LOAN FUND (ECLOF) AND OIKOCREDIT

**ADOPTED** by the General Assembly

**Summary:** This resolution is intended to encourage all of the entities of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to help the poor peoples of the world by supporting by investment or donation organizations that provide funds for the poor to establish their own businesses.

**Background:** Two billion people live on \$1/day and half of the world on \$2/day or less. With no formal employment, they must find another way to make a living. To start or upgrade their business, together with their neighbors, they need capital. Without collateral they are essentially unbankable and susceptible to loan sharks.

Two Christian organizations that enable third world entrepreneurs to obtain low interest loans are (1) ECLOF (Ecumenical Church Loans Fund) established by the World Council of Churches in 1971, and (2) Oikocredit (formerly known as Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society) and also established by the World Council of Churches in 1975. Groups dealing with these organizations know that the vast majority of those living in poverty are hard-working people, who, when given the opportunity, will work themselves out of poverty and into a productive and stable life.

ECLOF was established to provide loans specifically aimed at combating the root causes of under-development and at promoting social justice and self-reliance. ECLOF's Development Capital Fund makes loans to groups involved in income generating activities such as agriculture, fishing, small-scale industries, and trade. The maximum loan is \$50,000, and the Fund is supported by contributions and grants.

Oikocredit is a social justice development bank that does its work primarily by providing credit to cooperatives in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere. More than 400 groups of weavers, coffee farmers, fisherman, taxi drivers, and others have been supported in their struggle for a better future since 1975. Additionally, more than 50 financial intermediaries worldwide use Oikocredit funding to provide hundreds of thousands of people with microcredit. Loans range from \$100,000 to one million dollars. Oikocredit obtains its capital by selling shares with a minimum investment of \$1,000. In the USA, the Calvert Foundation handles and processes all investments.

Both groups approaches means financing:

1. Groups (mainly cooperatives, not individuals).
2. Activities that are wanted by local people (not by outside agencies).
3. Only if there is grassroots commitment and the people participate directly in the operation and management of the business.
4. Where women are direct beneficiaries and participate in decision-making, in structures and procedures related to conceptualization, organization, implementation, control, and evaluation.
5. Only activities that respect the environment.

ECLOF and Oikocredit have much in common: sharing one mission and vision but with two different ministries. The two organizations have therefore formulated a Strategic Alliance to maximize their efforts and resources and work toward enhanced complementary in their services to the needy.

**Biblical Rationale:** The Scriptures call on people of faith to be caring for the poor, as God has done:

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. (Deuteronomy 10:17-18 NRSV).

The Scriptures call upon people of faith to share in one's harvest with the poor:

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes from your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this. (Deuteronomy 24:19-22 NRSV).

The Scriptures record Jesus' teaching of the righteous, feeding the hungry, giving the thirsty a drink, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned:

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer them, Truly I tell you, just 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).

**WHEREAS**, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and our global partners support development which promotes sustainability, the integrity of creation, justice, equality, and democratic, grassroots participation;

**WHEREAS**, the Board of Church Extension and the Division of Overseas Ministries were among the early supporters of the establishment of Oikocredit and ECLOF;

WHEREAS, organizations such as ECLOF and Oikocredit:

1. Enable poor people to become economically self-supporting.
2. Promote the economic position of women.
3. Benefit the local community.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the 2003 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina on October 17-21, 2003,

Calls upon the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in all its settings (general

administrative units, recognized organizations, commissions, committees, congregations, and other bodies) to consider seriously the support of organizations such as ECLOF and Oikocredit that provide low interest loans to the world's poor and to encourage members and friends to do likewise; and

Urges the Church in its various settings to develop plans for participation, educational resources, and partnership or covenanted sponsorship of organizations that provide low interest loans to the world's poor.