

## **Chapter Nine: The Status of Women in Church and Society**

### **Women in the Church**

#### **ACSWP Introduction**

One of the places where the church has had the opportunity to live up to its proclamations for the equality of all persons is in the status that it gives women in its own life and work.

The 1971 Assembly of the UPCUSA articulated "basic principles" for the church's action on the status of women (UPCUSA, 1971, p. 299), and made appeals to its church-related colleges and seminaries to work towards equal representation on all boards and administrative positions (UPCUSA, 1971, p. 302). Finally, the Assembly sent down overtures D and E to its presbyteries providing for election to church offices in all judicatories "... giving attention to a fair representation of both the male and female constituency ..." of the respective congregations, presbytery, commission, synod, Assembly, etc. (UPCUSA, 1971, pp. 305-306).

The 1974 UPCUSA Assembly endorsed a "Bill of **Rights** for Ministers' Spouses," reproduced below, because of concern for the treatment of ministers' spouses -- mostly women -- by congregations (UPCUSA, 1974, p. 104). Concern for women the church caused the 1982 UPCUSA Assembly to state "... that sexual harassment is not to be condoned ..." (UPCUSA, 1982, p. 433). In 1991, the General Assembly also passed "Policy and Procedures on Sexual Misconduct" which included suggested changes to the *Book of Order*, to the presbyteries (PC(USA), 1991, pp. 78-92).

A large ecumenical gathering called Re-imagining ... God, Community, the Church, held in Minneapolis in November 1993 was a central focus for the 206th General Assembly (1994). The conference was planned in response to the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998). More than 2,000 people attended from 32 denominations, 49 states and 27 countries. More than 50 overtures were presented to the Assembly dealing with this conference. The Assembly adopted a report which was written in response to the overwhelming number of overtures and resolutions which addressed the concerns of many Presbyterians. (PC(USA), 1994 pp. 86-90)

#### **1971 Statement - UPCUSA, p. 299**

2. In the Church, men and women must act as equal partners and contribute to the ministry of the Church all the talent God has given them . . .
3. Since women are called to be partners with men, they must accept all forms of service in the Church including leadership positions in the decision-making processes . . .
4. The church must challenge and change anything which interferes with a person's full development and wholeness. It must reject attempts to force persons into stereotypes which destroy personhood and deny human freedom and creativity. The church should not program life-styles for its members. Each person living in responsible relationship to the whole community is free to decide what that style will be.

#### **1971 Statement - UPCUSA, p. 309**

[Overture F was sent down to the presbyteries for approval and provided a change in the form of government to specifically state] *shall be open to all regardless of race, ethnic origin, sex, or marital status.*

**1974 Statement - UPCUSA, p. 104**

It seems necessary to affirm and define the following **rights** that are due to each minister's spouse as a child of God:

1. An equal right to seek employment of his or her choice.
2. An equal right to freely choose church membership or non-membership.
3. An equal right and responsibility to serve the mission of the church as a member, without special obligations or privileges.
4. An equal right as a member of a congregation, to be considered for election to the session and other boards and committees.

**1982 Statement - UPCUSA, p. 433**

The 194th General Assembly (1982) encourages each agency, council, judicatory, seminary, or educational institution related to the United Presbyterian Church to go on record stating that sexual harassment is not to be condoned, disregarded, or treated lightly, and that it shall provide a stated procedure for dealing with cases of sexual harassment.

**1994 Statement - PC(USA), pp. 86-90**

[The 206th General Assembly (1994), in response to the overtures and resolutions regarding the "Re-Imagining God, the Community, the Church . . ." conference, made several statements of commitment regarding the role of women in the church.]

"A consequence of this controversy has been the impression that the church is indifferent to the pain and estrangement of women and has ignored that fact that women's concerns are not always welcome at the center of the church's life. ...We affirm in the strongest possible terms that the body of Christ is made up of women and men. God calls both women and men to ministries in the life of the church. Any attempt to silence or marginalize any voices is not worthy of Christ's body. We reaffirm our church's commitment to solidarity with women, especially in the important task of thinking theologically . . . We affirm the importance of women's voices and work in the church and the important task of developing and articulating our theology."

**2000 Statement - PC(USA), p. 28**

In light of recent actions by other Christian denominations, the 212th General Assembly (2000) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

1. Expresses respectfully and publicly its Christian concern for and solidarity with women who are being denied the exercise of their pastoral gifts.
2. Reaffirms the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s support for women's pastoral roles at a time when many religious bodies worldwide continue to restrict the hopes, education, and roles available to women. Believing the empowerment of women to be part of Christianity's gift to the world, we grieve when women with gifts for ministry are blocked from exercising them.
3. Directs the church to make available resources such as the reports produced in both our predecessor denominations supporting the ordination of women that provide clear Biblical and Confessional support for the ordination of women in order to equip our congregations to reaffirm support for women's pastoral roles.

**2004 Statement - PC(USA), pp. 91, 965-966**

**On The Murders of Women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico**

[The 216th General Assembly (2004) approved the following:]

That the 216th General Assembly (2004) do the following:

1. Instruct the Stated Clerk to express the concern, dismay, and grief of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to President Vicente Fox and Governor Patricio Martinez Garcia, State of Chihuahua, Mexico, over the systematic murder and disappearance of large numbers of young women in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, over the last eleven years.
2. Request that wherever they are able, representatives of Pasos de Fe Border Ministry, our binational ministry in the Ciudad Juarez area, express the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s deepest sympathy to the families and friends of the more than 350 young women murdered and the more than 4,500 young women who have disappeared.
3. Instruct the General Assembly Council to communicate our concern to appropriate ecclesiastical partners and civil institutions to help focus international attention on the violence and marshal regional and national support for competent, timely, and complete investigation.
4. Direct the General Assembly Council to participate in, and request the Moderator of the 216th General Assembly (2004) to represent the PC(USA) in, a service to be planned by Pasos de Fe, the presbyteries of Sierra Blanca and Tres Rios, in dialogue with the church in Mexico and other ecumenical partners to join in public witness and worship that cries out for justice and claims the promise of the Resurrection.

**2006 Statement** – PC(USA), pp. 36-37, 677-678

**Item 08-12. Joint Resolution from ACWC and ACREC Regarding the Women of Color Consultation Report and Recommendations**

The 217th General Assembly approved the following amended item:

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) and the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) recommend that the 217th General Assembly do the following:

1. Create a task force to respond to the recommendations in the Women of Color Consultation (WoCC) report (see Appendix A). This task force should include representation from ACREC and ACWC, as well as members identified from Presbyterian Women and the National Cross Caucus. As part of the response to the recommendations, the task force will design a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the recommendations in the WoCC report. This task force will report to the 218th (2008) General Assembly.
2. Direct the General Assembly Council (GAC) to provide sufficient funding and staff support for the ACREC/ACWC joint task force.
3. Direct the GAC to provide sufficient funding and staff support to ensure a regularly recurring Women of Color Consultation.
4. Equip all GAC staff to be responsive to the needs of women of color as part of their continuing commitment to valuing the gifts that all people bring to the PC(USA). GAC staff should continue to be encouraged to reflect on and incorporate the values articulated in the Report on Creating a Climate for Change Within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved by the 216th General Assembly (2004).
5. Encourage all members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to read, study, and respond to the WoCC report and recommendations.