

Resolution by the Session of Nassau Presbyterian Church
Proposed by the Mission Committee
Developed by the Advocacy Subcommittee
First Reading: 02/17/05
Adopted: 03/17/05

To The Nassau Presbyterian Church Community,

As members of the session we continually seek God's guidance when trying to understand our call to leadership in this congregation. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) offers the claim that elders must work

“individually and jointly to strengthen and nurture the faith and life of the congregation committed to their care. Together with the pastor, they should encourage the people in worship and service of God, equip and renew them for their tasks within the church and for their mission in the world” (G-6.0304).

Furthermore, the Session of the church has the responsibility to provide opportunities whereby

“members may be better equipped to articulate their faith and to witness in word and deed to the saving grace of Jesus Christ” (G-10-0102a).

Within the wider life of our community, the session must encourage faith development and the responsibilities of church membership within the followers of Christ. We believe that part of God's claim upon all of us is the call to be

“working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment” (G-5.0102i).

Recognizing that the Session speaks to and not for the congregation, with this resolution the Session of Nassau Presbyterian Church calls upon the members of our congregation to engage faithfully in study and dialogue related to the impact of our Christian faith on current opinions and policies related to world events.

RESOLUTION

Whereas the teachings of Jesus require His followers to heal the ill, succor the weak and provide balm to those who suffer, and that our life in Christ calls us to work actively to lift up those laid low by sickness, and that Christ Himself models for us a ministry of healing the injured and binding the wounds of the broken in the midst of disease, privation and suffering; and

Whereas New Jersey has the fourth highest AIDS mortality rate of any state in the nation with more than half of the cases stemming from injection drug use; but is one of only two states without any legal access to sterile needles; and

Whereas the provision of sterile IV needles would forestall and deter the spread of HIV/AIDS; cities with such programs report a 29 percent decline in the spread of HIV/AIDS among their IV drug using population and cities without such a program report a five percent increase in the incidence of HIV/AIDS; and

Whereas these programs have been shown to work efficaciously without encouraging further IV drug use; and

Whereas in October 2004, former Governor James McGreevey signed an executive order allowing for needle exchange programs that was challenged in court by several state legislators, suspending the start of a needle exchange program, and thus permitting the spread of further infection and disease; and

Whereas our state elected officials have within their powers the ability to enact new laws to make lawful and legal these and additional sterile needle exchange programs, including bills pending before the New Jersey Legislature; and

Whereas our Presbyterian tradition informs us that people of good conscience may disagree as our polity respects and preserves dissent and the voice of the minority, and that a voted position of a governing body (i.e. Session, Synod, General Assembly) is not intended to bind the conscience of individual members of the community, but rather is intended to reflect the will and voice of the elected commissioners:

Now, therefore, it is resolved by the Session of Nassau Presbyterian Church, meeting on March 17, 2005, that the State of New Jersey, the Acting Governor of the State of New Jersey, Richard H. Codey, and the members of the Legislature of the State of New Jersey are encouraged to:

- enact legislation making lawful and legal the use of and distribution of clean needles to deter and retard the spread of HIV/AIDS;
- in the interim, carry out the provisions of the executive order signed and promulgated by former Governor James McGreevey allowing such use and distribution;
- end all litigation aimed at preventing the adoption of the policies and practices provided for by the executive order signed and promulgated by Governor McGreevey; and
- provide adequate funding to support the expansion of needle exchange as a means of protecting public health and helping to deter and retard the spread of HIV/AIDS.

We, as a congregation, the body of Christ in this time and place, pray for and work toward the healing of those who are afflicted by HIV/AIDS disease, particularly in our home state of New Jersey. We bring to this matter, as to all of life, our faith in Jesus Christ and hold out His love and peace as sources of hope and inspiration to those who suffer from this disease.

David A. Davis
Pastor

Carol A. Wehrheim
Clerk of Session