

## KENTUCKY COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Commission on Justice Ministries (Religion and Public Policy)

INTERIM Policy Statement on Responding to Persons with Disability Concerns

Adopted by the Executive Board, December 3, 1991

The following theological rationale is taken from the booklet, That All May Enter, Responding to People with Disability Concerns, Presbyterian Church, (USA), 1989, from the U. S. Catholic Bishop's 1978 statement on persons with disabilities, and from a letter by Dan Robinson, Office of Social Concerns, Diocese of Owensboro,

The Christian Church is a community of faith responding to God's healing and empowering work in the Christ. This mission of Jesus meant good news for the poor, release for captives, recovering of sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18). As signs of his ministry, Jesus pointed to his gifts for persons who were blind, lame, or lepers, physically impaired, the deaf, and even the dead. Christ's followers are called to continue the ministry of reconciliation that God carried out in him (II Cor. 5:18).

Christian faith has always recognized both the glory and frailty of human life. Our glory is that God has created us in the divine image and called us to be ministers. Our frailty is evident in our dependence in infancy and old age and in our vulnerability throughout all of life.

People with disabilities, like everyone else, have normal struggles and hopes. On top of these are added the special challenges of their own conditions. Therefore, their giftedness--having been created in the image of God--sometimes flows from their disabling condition, but sometimes flows from gifts that have nothing to do with that condition. The difficulty comes when they are strictly defined as being equal to their condition. This is sometimes reflected in our language: "He's a paraplegic," or "She's mentally retarded."

Christ addresses us in our strength and in our weakness. He reminds us that we human beings need one another. It is our responsibility and our opportunity to strengthen and to heal one another within the human family, especially one another within the church, where we recognize that, "if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (I Cor. 12:26). And the church in this respect makes us aware of the kingdom of God, with its claim upon, and its promise for, all humanity.

Within the human society some people are identified, in common language and in public law, as "handicapped." They bear in evident and painful ways the frailty of all life. Many are "handicapped" by the labels and boxes they are pushed into by society, and not by their physical, emotional, or developmental disability. The strongest of human beings is at any moment only a microbe or an accident away from the ailments and disabilities that are conspicuous in others.

Our contemporary society has a special need for the ministry of persons with disabling conditions and to such persons. As the church learns to recognize human weakness-in-strength and strength-in-weakness, it begins to discover the cost and joy of discipleship. It finds that the sharing of burdens is the sharing of opportunities. It witnesses to God's gracious love.

**THEREFORE, THE KENTUCKY COUNCIL OF CHURCHES** supports and encourages additional legislation, governmental regulations and programs that protect and clarify rights of persons with disabling conditions and provide necessary action to see persons with disabling conditions can assume their rightful roles in society as functionally independent, self-fulfilling persons contributing to the common good of society. Advocacy in this area shall include but not be limited to measures:

- to eliminate physical barriers;
- to provide employment for persons with disabling conditions;
- to make available a variety of educational and training opportunities;
- to work for the elimination of attitudinal barriers;
- to work toward the goal of transportation in every community that is regularly available and reliable at a reasonable cost to riders/passengers with disabling condition; and
- to provide for affordable, accessible housing.