



August 2011

To all congregations in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

One of the actions taken by last summer's 219th General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was to affirm the Charter for Compassion (<http://oga.pcusa.org/publications/charterForCompassion.pdf>).

The charter is the product of a multi-faith, web-based collaboration. It was created in response to growing misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and, thus, increased hostility between religious traditions around the world. The charter calls for treating each human person with “justice, equity and respect” out of deep compassion for each; teaching appreciation for cultural and religious differences; and nurturing “informed empathy” with those who suffer.

The charter's emphasis on the role of compassion in motivating response to the suffering of any others is fully consistent with the biblical tradition and Reformed theology. Our *Book of Order* reminds us of the role of compassion in the life of followers of Jesus:

“... In daily life, Jesus took ordinary acts of human compassion— healing the sick, feeding the hungry, washing feet—and translated them into ways of serving God” (W-1.2004).

“God sends the church in the power of the Holy Spirit to exercise compassion in the world,

- “a. feeding the hungry,
- “b. comforting the grieving,
- “c. caring for the sick,
- “d. visiting the prisoners,
- “e. freeing the captives,
- “f. sheltering the homeless,
- “g. befriending the lonely”(W-7.3001).

“... Concern for the world may be enacted in prayer and ministries of compassion, justice, peacemaking, and witness” (W-3.5302).

“Discipleship may be expressed ... beyond the church cooperating with all who work for compassion and reconciliation” (W-4.3002).

The charter’s call for a positive response to religious and cultural differences echoes the long-time Presbyterian support for basic human rights, including the right to determine one’s own beliefs and participate in the religious community of one’s choosing. In 1949, the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America endorsed the UN Declaration of Human Rights, beginning an ongoing series of declarations by assemblies in the area of human rights, including religious rights, that continues to this day.

The *Book of Order* affirms the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s commitment to taking a positive approach to cultural and religious differences:

“The mission of God pertains not only to the Church but also to people everywhere and to all creation” (F-1.0404).

“The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels seeks new opportunities for conversation and understanding with non-Christian religious entities” (G-5.0102).

General Assemblies provide practical and theological guidance for such efforts. Presbyterians, congregations, mid councils, and General Assembly programs resist forces of division that seize on our God-given diversity to spread misunderstanding and mistrust. We affirm that humanity is bound together. We work for peace. We live with compassion. And we witness to our faith in Jesus Christ who calls us to love God and love our neighbors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gradye Parsons".

The Rev. Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)