

Fair Trade Coffee Petition

Submitted to UMC General Conference, 2004



A petition has just been submitted to the General Conference of the United Methodist Church being held in Pittsburgh in the spring of 2004. It calls for **all agencies of the church, local congregations and their affiliated organizations, which use coffee to purchase coffee for corporate and personal use through the fair trade partner, Equal Exchange or through another similar fair trade organization.**

The reason such a petition has become necessary is because small family farmers in developing countries are losing their livelihood to large plantations with corporate ties. Coffee originates from either large plantations that are traditionally run and owned by wealthy landowners or small operations that are primarily owned by impoverished farmers. These small farmers frequently live in isolated communities relying on middlemen to buy their coffee invariably at the lowest price possible. The way the system is set up and the farmers' inability to get a just return for their labor is essentially guaranteed and they are condemned to a life of extreme poverty. Small family farmers are being pushed into a situation where they no longer can sustain a living wage. This frequently results in loss of their farm that may have been in the family for generations and the family becoming destitute.

Our United Methodist Social Principles state that "we support measures that would reduce the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few," that "we advocate for the rights of people to possess property and to earn a living by tilling the soil;" and that "we call upon our churches to do all in their power to speak prophetically to the matters of food supply and the people who grow the food for the world" (§ 163).

Also, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) joined forces in April 2002 with Equal Exchange to launch a denomination-wide coffee program. Through this partnership, any

United Methodist church or individual buying coffee through Equal Exchange's Interfaith Program can now order coffee through UMCOR (at the Equal Exchange web site). For every case of coffee ordered, UMCOR receives approximately 5% of purchase price from Equal Exchange to be used in UMCOR's small farmer economic development programs.

Why is a partner like Equal Exchange important? As a fair trade organization, Equal Exchange purchases all of its coffee from small farmer cooperatives according to Fair Trade standards. These co-ops, businesses owned and governed democratically by the farmers themselves, enable their members to compete in a marketplace that would otherwise lock them out. Equal Exchange also shares risk with farmers by offering advance credit to co-ops for their coffee, often passed on to the farmer in the form of a prepayment for their coffee. This provides the farmers with funds between harvests, money for farm improvements, seedlings, and training programs as well as family expenses helping them to stay out of debt.

Why bother? When you buy fair trade coffee you are **causing systemic change** in the marketplace! You are bringing biblical justice into the economic community, with a share in productive power as seen in the provision of land to every family unit (Num. 26; Lev. 25). The mathematics is simple: **More coffee purchased means support for more family farmers.**

Buy coffee, tea or hot cocoa mix at the Alternative Christmas Market on Sunday, December 7.

- Ken Kreutziger



**Every
Cup is a
Cup of
Justice!**