

Final
657

February 18, 1976

Dear Mr. Gregory:

The President has asked me to reply to your letter of January 27~~x~~
~~1976~~ expressing the opposition of the United Church Board for World
Ministries to the creation of a Northern Marianas Commonwealth. We
appreciate receiving the views of the Board concerning this issue.

Self-determination has been the key consideration in our efforts
to work out the future status of the Trust Territory of the Pacific
Islands. We have sought a status arrangement that would meet the
desires of the people of the Territory in keeping with our responsibilities
to the United Nations as well as to our own commitment to the principle
of self-determination.

The history of our negotiations with the Trust Territory
representatives, I believe, will bear out this claim. The Joint Committee
on Future Status on behalf of the Congress of Micronesia in 1971
rejected commonwealth status. The Congress of Micronesia instructed
the Committee to negotiate for a relationship of "free association."
The people of the Marianas District, however, did not accept this
decision. Through their elected representatives, they requested the
United States to enter into separate negotiations with them for a
commonwealth relationship.

Photocopy from Gerald R. Ford Library



We had hoped that the various districts of the Trust Territory would be able to find a common approach to their future political status. There are, however, considerable differences in history and culture between the people of the various districts which are separated by thousands of miles of ocean. The decision of the people of the Northern Marianas was consistent with the desire that they have made known for more than twenty years for a permanent association with the United States.

The United States agreed to the request of the Northern Marianas District and negotiations were opened in December 1972.

The resultant Covenant establishing the Commonwealth received unanimous approval in the Marianas local legislative bodies, including the Marianas District Legislature. A plebiscite held last June in the Northern Marianas under United Nations observation confirmed this choice by an overwhelming majority.

Since the other districts of Micronesia have indicated their desire for a different status from that sought by the Northern Marianas, the United States has indicated that it is ready to continue negotiations toward a conclusion that will satisfy their aspirations *as well*.

Sincerely,

Roland L. Elliott

Paul R. Gregory
 General Secretary, Mission Division
 United Church Board for World Ministries
 475 Riverside Drive
 New York, New York 10027



RLE/Nsc/JH