

General Synod 20 Resolutions United Church of Christ

Violence in our Society and World

Summary

Violence touches all of us. Its roots are deep and entangled around issues related to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and economics, among others. Violence pervades our past, shapes our present reality and threatens our future. Violence is not far removed from our lives. It is very close to home, indeed, it is often in our homes. Children see murders on the street, witness domestic violence in their homes and are assaulted with a constant stream of violence on the movie screen, on the television and on the radio. Children not only observe violence on a daily basis, they are often its victims. Adults have often responded to violence through isolation, building higher walls and fences, buying more sophisticated burglar alarms, purchasing guns for protection and abandoning life in the public sphere. Meanwhile the government's response is too often to build more prisons, eliminate opportunities for rehabilitation and cut prevention programs which would offer young people an alternative to violent streets and homes.

All of us suffer from the increase in violence in our society. We are, understandably, fearful and even at times paralyzed by the magnitude of the problem. Indeed, a lack of hope is often at the root of violence and it is all the more essential for us, as people of faith, to identify and lift up the source of hope and healing along with the possibilities for faithful action which we can bring to the epidemic of violence. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral,

begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it...Returning violence for violence multiplies violence...Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." As a church let us assess the toll that violence levies against us all. Then may we proceed to invert the descending spiral of violence into an uprising of hope.



Biblical / Theological / Ethical Rationale

"Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise." Isaiah 60: 18.

Violence is an exertion of force so as to injure or abuse. Violence encompasses violations of trust and infringements upon the integrity, wholeness, or health of another or of oneself. To indulge in violence is to deny the full humanity of the person violated and to treat that person as an object to be used and/or discarded.

Ultimately violence breaks faith with the belief that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God [Genesis 1: 26-27] and thus worthy of respect.

The climate of violence is the climate of despair. Despair characterizes those who are violent, threatens those who are violated and marks those who regret violence but are resigned to its inevitability.

Violence is commonly conceived in individual terms with a single perpetrator and a single victim. The reality, however, is far more complex. Violence is a part of the very structures that define the way we relate to each other socially, politically, economically and spiritually. None of us is solely victim, perpetrator or bystander. Violence manifests itself in our language, in our social structures and in our public policy as it lingers in our land. Recent immigrants to the United States and gay and lesbian people are current targets of increased hate crime violence, as other groups have been in the past.

Text of Resolution

WHEREAS the American Missionary Association, the Commission for Racial Justice, the Coordinating Center for Women in Church and Society, the Office for Church in Society, and the Twentieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ seek to have the whole church begin to address the pandemic of violence in our society;

WHEREAS our Christian convictions call us to be peacemakers in a world in need of peace;

WHEREAS violence is assaulting all persons through physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, and through the media;

WHEREAS homicide is the leading cause of death for African-American youths 15 to 24 years old and every 4 hours an African American child is killed by a gun;

WHEREAS nearly 50,000 children were killed by guns in the United States between 1979 and 1991, almost equaling the number of Americans killed in Vietnam, and the number of children killed in gun-related incidents is the equivalent of a classroom full of students every two days;

WHEREAS domestic violence occurs every 15 seconds in this country and is the leading cause of death for women; with 30 percent of women murdered in the United States being the victims of husbands, boyfriends or former partners;

WHEREAS children and the elderly, the most vulnerable in our society, are not safe in their homes or communities and are afraid for their lives;

WHEREAS the incidence of rape continues to increase, leaving no girl or woman free from threat either at home or in public places;

WHEREAS violence pervades all our lives, from suburbs to inner cities, in rural areas of the country, in streets, homes, schools and even churches;

WHEREAS the United States is the leading weapons dealer in the world, supplying 70 percent of the international weapons market;

WHEREAS the acceptance of violence as a "norm" in our society is a violation of the most fundamental of all our Christian beliefs; and

WHEREAS all persons deserve a place to live where they know love and can live without fear;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

that the Twentieth General Synod publicly and actively opposes violence as a societal norm;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twentieth General Synod calls upon the Commission for Racial Justice, the Coordinating Center for Women in Church and Society, the Office for Church in Society, the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, and the United Church Board for World Ministries, in collaboration with the Conferences:

- to facilitate nationwide hearings on violence in the next biennium, inviting local church members and members of the larger community to testify about the impact of violence in their lives and to share strategies they have used to respond to violence in their communities, and to report to the Twenty-First General Synod on the results of these hearings and proposed strategies;

- to facilitate opportunities for United Church of Christ members to participate in local, regional and national gatherings to form partnerships and offer training and assistance in setting up programs to end violence;

- to pursue legislation in the United States Congress, State Legislatures and the United Nations that will help diminish the acceptance of violence in any form and restrict the availability of instruments of violence using every means possible to advise our leaders and the leaders of the world that the violence must stop;

- to work with members of local congregations to provide education in peaceful alternatives for conflict resolution and explore alternative forms of nonvio-

lent entertainment; and

- to help local congregations to educate and heighten personal awareness of personal and family attitudes, forms of discipline and language of violence such as jokes or threats;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twentieth General Synod:

- Calls on all local churches, Conferences and Associations to become involved in ending the violence in our society and endorses the national project of United Black Christians "Churches as a Safe Space;"

- Calls upon United Church of Christ members to advocate for public policy programs which address the root causes of violence and poverty; and

- Encourages each local congregation to organize its own peace action team to develop resources for alternative entertainment activities and family violence awareness and prevention curriculum;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twentieth General Synod encourages all members of the body of the United Church of Christ to register their opposition to all forms of violence by calling or writing television stations, media producers, and companies involved. Furthermore, when such action fails to receive results, to boycott specific products made or sold by advertisers of programming that sensationalizes acts of violence and/or portrays violence as the only solution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twentieth General Synod supports the President of the United Church of Christ in speaking out boldly and prophetically on this issue across the country.

As a church let us assess the toll that violence levies against us all. Then may we proceed to invert the descending spiral of violence into an uprising of hope.

Subject to the availability of funds.