

The United Church of Christ & Criminal Justice Reform

Because we are followers of Jesus, we are called to be present as ambassadors of healing, restoration, and justice in jail cells, courtrooms, and detention centers.

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Our Historic Witness

Throughout its history, the witness of the United Church of Christ General Synod has reflected a faithful and prophetic engagement with our calling to address injustice in the criminal justice system. Through its resolutions on criminal justice, the General Synod has provided a solid foundation for our continuing work on criminal justice reform.

On Juvenile Justice - General Synod 23 (2001)

Whereas children and youth are important members of our families, churches and communities; Whereas the juvenile justice system of the United States arrests, detains, charges, convicts and penalizes young people in an unfair manner, resulting in disproportionate numbers of poor youth and youth of color represented in the juvenile justice system; Be it resolved, that the 23rd General Synod of the UCC expresses its concern for the injustices of the juvenile justice system which affect the lives of many young people and families... and affirms advocacy for fair and appropriate treatment of youth, especially as they are involved with or at risk for involvement in the criminal justice system.

Prison Industrial Complex - General Synod 21 (1997)

Whereas the U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration in the world and number of people in the U.S. criminal justice system will soon surpass the number in higher education; and whereas African Americans, Latinos and Latinas, and indigenous people are disproportionately incarcerated;

Hebrews 13:3

“Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured as though you yourself were being tortured.”

2 Corinthians 5:17

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”



and whereas our nation's prison industrial complex now includes operation of prisons by private companies; whereas the present prison system focuses on punishment and degradation rather than 'correction' or rehabilitation ... and diminished educational, social and training opportunities for prisoners ... therefore, be it resolved that the 21st General Synod of the UCC expresses its opposition to the growth in the prison population and the rapid construction of prisons.

Alternatives to Incarceration for Non-Dangerous Crimes - General Synod 14 (1983)

Whereas our criminal justice system generally does not provide the offender and victim in non-dangerous crime the alternative to settle differences between themselves, but leaves the victim without recompense, and sentences the offender to a prison term so that neither the victim no offender receive justice, and wholeness is not restored, and injustice piles upon injustice... The 14th General Synod supports the increased use of restitution and mediation practices... and supports greater use of community service, work release, educational release, furloughs and other alternatives to prison.

Alternatives in Criminal Justice - General Synod 13 (1981)

Whereas alternatives to incarceration (such as restitution) are less costly, more humane, and more effective than imprisonment in helping both victims and offenders; whereas our understanding of the Christian faith takes seriously the call to redemptive love, mercy and the sanctity of life; whereas the resumption of executions in this country has raised legal and moral questions about the ability of the state to administer such punishment justly and consistently; be it resolved, that the General Synod 13 calls for an immediate moratorium on executions and for the development of alternative programs, which include persons convicted of capital crimes.

Call for a moratorium on the construction of new prisons and jails - General Synod 11 (1977)

As religious people, we fail to see how the construction of new prisons, jails and juvenile facilities to continue and expand the use of incarceration addresses inequities.

Statement on Criminal Justice and Penal Reform - General Synod 10 (1975)

Whereas it is the purpose of the criminal justice system in the United States to help deter crime and, when a crime is committed, to deal justly and humanely with both the victim and the accused through due process of law, with equal justice equally applied; and whereas the current application of the criminal justice system in the United States is frequently punitive and prejudicial toward lower income and minority groups, which now comprise the bulk of the prison population; and whereas there is growing awareness of the current staggering cost and ineffectiveness of our criminal justice system; therefore, the Tenth General Synod of the UCC adopts the following goal: to maximize the involvement of the UCC, its agencies and conferences, associations and local congregations in a national campaign to promote progressive changes in the American criminal justice and penal system.

On Post Incarceration - General Synod 9 (1973)

Whereas employment discrimination against ex-offenders is a major reason that ex-offenders revert to a life of a crime in an attempt to survive; [whereas] the opportunity to obtain employment or to pursue, practice or engage in a meaningful and profitable trade, occupation, vocation, profession or business is an essential ingredient in the assumption of the responsibilities of citizenship; whereas it is not only consistent with Christian principles but also good public policy to encourage and contribute to the rehabilitation of felons and to assist them in the assumption of the responsibilities of citizenship; be it resolved that the 9th General Synod of the UCC urge the U.S. Congress and the legislative bodies of the fifty states and their subdivisions to enact legislation which will guarantee that no person shall be disqualified from employment by public or private employers simply because of a felony conviction....”