

United Church of Christ General Synod Resolutions

Disabilities and Mental Health Justice

21 GS: Reclaiming the Church's Ministry of Health and Healing

21 GS: Affirming Health Care Coverage for United Church of Christ Authorized Ministers and Their Families

22 GS: Calling the People of God to Justice for Persons with Serious Mental Illness (Brain Disorders)

25 GS: Called to Wholeness in Christ: Becoming a Church Accessible to All

30 GS: Developing Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged Congregations for Mental Health

30 GS: Dismantling Discriminatory Systems of Mass Incarceration in the United States

31 GS: Toward Disability Justice: A Call to the Church and Churches

21st General Synod Resolution: Reclaiming the Church's Ministry of Health and Healing

Background

Health is harmony with self and others, the environment, and with God—a continuum of physical, social, psychological, and spiritual well-being. Health ministry is the promotion of healing and health as wholeness as a mission of a faith community to its members and the community it serves. Health partners are many, both paid and volunteer, laity and clergy, all are committed to sharing the compassionate love and grace of Jesus Christ through the health and healing ministries of the UCC.

The health minister/parish nurse serves as a member of the ministry team of the local church. The health minister (a person having a health care background that may or may not be a parish nurse) facilitates the promotion of health and healing via health educational programs, spiritual care, referrals to appropriate health care providers, as well as through support groups and personal health counseling. The parish nurse, a registered professional nurse, promotes health and wholeness through the practice of nursing as defined by the nurse practice act in the jurisdiction in which he/she practices. Parish nurses function as health counselors, resource persons, spiritual caregivers, health educators, small group facilitators, and coordinators of health ministry volunteers.

Resolution

WHEREAS, recognizing many illnesses and premature deaths may be prevented by lifestyle choices and belief systems, (i.e. diet, exercise, substance abuse, violence, and risk-taking behaviors), health ministers/parish nurses integrate current medical and behavioral knowledge with the belief and practices of a faith community to prevent illness and promote wholeness; and

WHEREAS, the UCC Statement of Health and Welfare (1985) states that, "Based on our understanding of Shalom—of God's intent for harmony and wholeness within creation—and on the examples of Jesus Christ's ministry which expressed God's intent through acts of love and justice, we must be committed as a church to a mission of Shalom and to a lifestyle compatible with that mission;" and

WHEREAS, essential elements of a health ministry/parish nursing program include (but are not limited to):

- a philosophy of health and wholeness as a part of the faith community's mission;
- a designated person or team to be concerned about health ministry;
- a commitment to continued learning regarding health and wellness issues;
- a process to develop and evaluate health and wholeness goals and objectives;
- health education and programming according to assessed health needs of the congregation;
- awareness of health and wellness celebrations designated in the UCC calendar; and

WHEREAS, General Synod Eighteen (June, 1985) adopted the "Mission Statement on Health and Welfare" which states that: It is clear that the whole church is involved in this mission (in health and welfare). Whether represented in local churches, associations, conferences, or national

level bodies the whole church is itself the creation of God's compassionate mercy in Christ, and as such, the instrument of God's intention for all humankind. (II Corinthians 5:13-21); and

WHEREAS, good health is a part of God's intention for all people, health involves the whole person—body, mind, and spirit and healing and health care are valid ways of proclaiming the Gospel and ministering in the name of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, the Gospel proclaims that health is a relationship to God set forth in Baptism and Holy Communion in which God makes wholeness as the Divine Gift.

The wholeness ascribed by God as a gift recognizes that illness and disability exist, but the presence of these does not define the individual in the sight of God, or limit the ability of such individuals to be in a whole relationship with God; and

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ recognizes that God calls certain of its members to various forms of ministry in and on behalf of the church for which ecclesiastical authorization is recognized by commissioning, licensing, and ordination; health ministers and parish nurses may feel called to one of these authorized ministries; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Twenty-first General Synod encourages local congregations to develop/include in their mission a commitment to health and wholeness, engage health and wholeness issues through an ongoing health cabinet/health ministry team, and consider the implementation of a health ministry/parish nurse program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Twenty-first General Synod calls upon the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries and Office of Church Life and Leadership, in conjunction with conferences, United Church of Christ seminaries, the Council on Health and Human Services Ministries and local congregations, to begin and/or continue to develop resources that support the development and enrichment of health ministry programs in local churches; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Twenty-first General Synod calls upon conferences and associations to:

1. Establish or designate a body to address health and human service issues confronting members and their communities; and
2. Recognize health ministry and parish nursing as a specialized ministry; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Twenty-first General Synod calls upon the Office of Church Life and Leadership to recognize and consider including health ministry/parish nursing in the listing of specific church-related ministries qualifying for commissioned ministry, and to consider developing guidelines and educational standards to be included in the United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry.

Subject to the availability of funds.

21st General Synod, AFFIRMING HEALTH CARE COVERAGE FOR UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AUTHORIZED MINISTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by the Pacific Northwest Conference

SUMMARY

This resolution is based on the belief that clergy and their families need to be provided health, dental and vision coverage when they begin a new ministry.

The Eighteenth General Synod enacted a pronouncement and resolution proclaiming Health Care For All as a priority and declared that an equitable accessible system of universal health care in the United States is consistent with the moral and justice imperatives of the Christian Gospel. The United Church of Christ's campaign, "Health Care for All" is still a priority! The Church continues to speak prophetically that health care is not only a basic human right but a human need that includes everyone. As people of faith we believe that it is a moral imperative to transform health care so that it is: inclusive, accessible, affordable and accountable.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" Isaiah 58: 6-7 26

"You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt," Exodus 23:9, this is the, "Sitz im Leben," situation in life, of a pastor and family beginning a ministry in a new setting. Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples," Isaiah 51:9, such is the promised blessing for God's people.

Paul's theology rooted in 2 Corinthians 8:13+14 underlines the importance establishing healthy relationships with clergy and family in a new setting, "I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance."

Ethically, we are all responsible for the wellbeing, health and care of God's people. The Health Care Justice Program of the Justice and Witness Ministries of our denomination have stated "Our Church speaks prophetically that health care is a basic right and that our health care system must provide comprehensive, quality, affordable, accessible and available health care for all.

WHEREAS, General Synod adopted the resolution, "Access to Health, Dental, and Disability Insurance for United Church of Christ Clergy and Lay Employees and Their Families," 99-GS-50.

Sarah Lund draft 6/28/18

WHEREAS, the Twenty-first General Synod adopted the resolution, "Reclaiming the Church's Ministry of Health and Healing," 97-GS-46

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ has adopted a Mission Statement on Health and Human Service which states: "The mission of the United Church of Christ arises out of faith in God who calls the worlds into being, creates humankind in the divine image, and intends for us the blessing of wholeness and harmony with God, with creation, with other persons, and within ourselves. In health and human service, that mission must serve God's intent for humankind made fully manifest in Jesus Christ, conquered sin and death and reconciled humanity, nature, and God.

In the life of Jesus and in his ministries of teaching and healing, we learn the way of discipleship.

We rejoice in the power of God to make all things new and in the gift of the Holy Spirit through which the Church is empowered to continue Jesus' ministries of compassion, justice, and transformation, serving the well-being and wholeness of all God's people.

The mission of the United Church of Christ in health and human service is rooted in the ministry of Jesus Christ and empowered by God's spirit."

WHEREAS, this mission statement calls us to seek justice, "thus informed by scripture, tradition, and human experience, our faith compels us to seek new ways to enable the liberation of the oppressed and reconciliation of the alienated through new acts of love and justice. When we do so, we must answer the questions: What are the dimensions of that mission? Who is involved in that mission?"

WHEREAS, the process the United Church of Christ uses for pastors and churches rarely provides opportunities for pastors and their families to move from one church to the next without a break between positions, and many of our clergy cannot afford the cost of providing their own insurance through COBRA for the months between ending one position and beginning another.

WHEREAS, the understanding of a minister being "Self-employed" may work well for IRS purposes, in actuality ministers are employed by the church or a related organization or agency.

WHEREAS, the nature of interim ministry does not provide for coordination of placements by churches, conferences, national settings and related organizations agencies, and thus does not provide smooth seamless transitions from one position to the next.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-eighth General Synod of the United Church of Christ reaffirms that offering adequate and equitable health, dental, and vision coverage for United Church of Christ Authorized Ministers and their families through the Pension Boards is an important justice issue, and is part of our covenant together as members of the United Church of Christ.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-eighth General Synod of the United Church of

Christ encourages the Executive Council to create a Task Force including representation from the Executive Council, Conferences, The Pension Boards, Covenanted Ministries, and Affiliated and

Associated Ministries to enter into conversation and address issues of providing continuity of coverage for Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ and their families as they move among churches and other settings of the United Church of Christ. WE ASK THAT THIS BODY REPORT BACK TO THE TWENTY-NINTH GENERAL SYNOD.

THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that leaders in the National setting, Conferences, Associations, and Local Churches settings shall seek to encourage the Pension Boards serving the United Church of Christ to offer to make medical coverage available to all clergy and their family members when they are called to, or begin a new position within the life of our church. AND TO educate and encourage enrollment in the United Church of Christ health, dental, and vision plans for the purposes of keeping health care costs affordable, and to assist churches in exploring options for funding their employees' United Church of Christ health, dental, and vision plans.

FUNDING

Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Executive Council, Local Church Ministries, the Conferences, Associations of the United Church of Christ, and The Pension Boards are requested to implement this resolution.

22nd General Synod CALLING THE PEOPLE OF GOD TO JUSTICE FOR PERSONS WITH SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESSES (BRAIN DISORDERS)

Background

There exists in society and even in the church, great stigma and discrimination against persons with serious "mental illnesses" (Brain Disorders); this is both a ministry and a social justice issue.

All people are created in the image of God and worthy of being treated with dignity, respect and love. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (1 John 13:34-35).

Text of the Resolution

WHEREAS, serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder (manic depression), unipolar disorder (clinical depression), obsessive/compulsive disorder, panic anxiety disorder are biological brain disorders and need to be treated as any other biologically based medical problem of any other organ of the body;

WHEREAS, the 1990's have been declared the decade of the brain and pioneering research has resulted in new knowledge and new effective medications;

WHEREAS, these brain disorders can now be treated as precisely and effectively as other medical disorders (e.g. a higher rate of success in such treatment than for cardiovascular disorders);

WHEREAS, there continues to be strong stigma and discrimination in society against people with these brain disorders in social relationships, health insurance coverage, employment, etc.;

WHEREAS, there is great inequality in health insurance coverage for these medical conditions compared to coverage of any other physical, medical illness/disorder (diabetes, Parkinson's, etc.);

WHEREAS, at least one in four families (including church families) has a family member with one of these brain disorders;

WHEREAS, at least 30 million Americans, including at least 12 million children have these brain disorders; and

WHEREAS, the church is called to be a community which breaks through fear and isolation to offer love, hope, care and healing;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-second General Synod requests the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries and/or its successor body to make it a priority to educate congregations

about these disorders and encourage congregations to be truly inclusive, welcoming churches, ministering with and to persons with these disorders and their families;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Executive Council is requested to petition The Pension Boards - United Church of Christ to provide insurance coverage for these brain disorders equal to any other physical illness; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Office for Church in Society and/or its successor body is requested to promote advocacy in state legislatures and in Congress for equality in health insurance coverage and other antidiscrimination legislation which affects this population of people.

Funding for this action will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

25th General Synod, “Called to Wholeness in Christ: Becoming a Church Accessible to All”

05-GS-32 VOTED: The Twenty-fifth General Synod adopts the resolution “Called to Wholeness in Christ: Becoming a Church Accessible to All”

CALLED TO WHOLENESS IN CHRIST: BECOMING A CHURCH ACCESSIBLE TO

ALL

WHEREAS the Biblical vision of the Great Messianic Banquet is of all gathered at the table with bounty for all; and WHEREAS any barrier that limits the wholeness of all, diminishes all; and

WHEREAS medical and scientific advances continue to reduce the death rate from infections, injuries, and other conditions, and more people survive to continue life with some disability and close to twenty percent of the US population identify themselves as having some level of disability, and over the age of eighty the percentage is much higher, so that all members of United Church of Christ congregations will be touched by a disability in some way at some time in their lives, and

WHEREAS the overwhelming majority of people with disabilities want to exercise choice in where and how they live, work, play, worship and serve; and

WHEREAS implementing the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 calls upon the church to take specific measures within each ministry of the church.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Twenty-fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls on Conferences, Associations, Congregations, seminaries and colleges, campus ministries, camps, covenanted ministries and all other UCC organizations to embody the philosophy of inclusion and interdependence, embark on study and reflection activities about disabilities, disabilities rights, and ways congregations are able to become accessible to all (A2A), remove or overcome barriers to welcoming and including all people in the work and witness of the United Church of Christ, and to support and implement provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

The Twenty-fifth General Synod acknowledges the uniqueness of every congregation and organization, and urges that these communities consider a progression of ministry and concern not only “to” or “for” people with disabilities but also ministry “with” and “by” people with disabilities.

The Twenty-fifth General Synod is aware that individuals who have lived with disability for some time say the real limitations to living, moving about, working and relating to others are not their particular impairments but the barriers they encounter in the social and physical environment.

Recognizing that discrimination against people with disabilities is complex, pervasive, and sometimes well-intentioned, and remembering that the United Church of Christ seeks to be multicultural, multiracial, open and affirming and accessible to all, this Twenty-Fifth Synod urges Conferences,

Associations, congregations, seminaries and colleges, campus ministries, camps, covenanted ministries and all other organizations of the UCC to develop both short-range and long-term accessibility and inclusion plans, which may include some or all of the following activities:

- a) Establish Conference level Inclusion Task Forces charged with needs assessment, planning, and education;
- b) Join the Accessible Congregations Campaign of the National Organization on Disability.
- c) Continue to make improvements in United Church of Christ buildings and facilities to achieve full physical accessibility;
- d) Encourage local churches to establish Inclusion Committees and/or Inclusion Coaches to help conduct any accessibility or inclusion evaluation and modify existing curriculum and practices when needed.
- e) Seek out and befriend mentors in the disabilities community, keeping in mind the slogan, “Nothing about us without us.”
- f) Consider ways to invite/include people with disabilities to participate in and lead worship services and other programming. This may involve hiring professional support or acquiring specialized technology.

30th General Synod: DEVELOPING WELCOMING, INCLUSIVE, SUPPORTIVE AND ENGAGED CONGREGATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

WHEREAS, most people believe that mental illnesses are rare and happen to someone else, when in fact, mental illnesses are common and widespread with an estimated 1.5 million Americans (1 in 4) experiencing some form of mental illness in a given year;

WHEREAS, there continues to be strong stigma and discrimination in society against people with these brain disorders in housing, employment, social relationships, (including how they are treated in our churches);

WHEREAS, many uninformed people believe people with mental illnesses are likely to be violent, while in reality, people with mental illnesses are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators;

WHEREAS, the public mental health system, which previously served as a safety net for people with the most severe mental illnesses, has suffered from dramatic funding cuts in the last decade, and our prisons and county jails now house more people with mental illnesses than psychiatric hospitals do;

WHEREAS, faith and spirituality can be an important component of recovery from mental illnesses and addictions;

WHEREAS, a mental illness or brain disorder in the family affects not only the ill family member, it profoundly affects other family members and loved ones and the entire family structure;

WHEREAS, people having a diagnosable brain disorder and/or substance abuse disorder are potentially at a higher risk for suicide;

WHEREAS, the church is called to be a community that breaks through fear and isolation to offer love, hope, care and healing;

WHEREAS, Jesus showed us the way to reach out to those who are ill or marginalized to offer companionship, compassion and support;

THEREFOE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod encourages United Church of Christ congregations to adopt covenants to be ISE (welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, Engaged) Congregations for Mental Health.

BE IT FUTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod encourages congregations to work to eradicate stigma around mental illnesses/brain disorders, and to offer support to persons with and those impacted by mental health challenges, including their family members, loved ones and others concerned.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod encourages advocacy by all settings of the church for broader and more just access to quality mental health services including private and public insurance coverage. This advocacy includes services for all persons with mental illness who are falling

through the fraying safety net, especially persons in jails/prisons, and persons who are homeless.

FUNDING The funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries and other entities of the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

30th General Synod, DISMANTLING DISCRIMINATORY SYSTEMS OF MASS INCARCERATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Submitted By Connecticut Conference, Justice and Witness Ministries (A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ), Michigan Conference, Missouri Mid-South Conference, Pennsylvania Southeast Conference and the Southwest Conference

A Resolution of Witness

SUMMARY

The United States imprisons more of its own people than any other country in the world. While the U.S. comprises 5% of the total global population; it alone accounts for a staggering 25% of the world's prison population. Indeed, more than 2.2 million people are currently incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails, while more than 5 million additional persons are under the supervision of its justice system, either on probation or on parole. All totaled, there are over 7 million people currently subject to the U.S. criminal justice system.

Moreover, the U.S. prison population is far from representative of the nation's population as a whole. For instance, while African American males comprise only 6% of the U.S. population, they make up 40% of those in prison or jail. African American males have a 32% chance of serving time at some point in their lives, while white males have only a 6% chance.

"Mass incarceration on a scale almost unexampled in human history is a fundamental fact of our country today—perhaps the fundamental fact, as slavery was the fundamental fact of 1850. In truth, there are more black men in the grip of the criminal-justice system – in prison, on probation, or on parole – than were in slavery then. Over all, there are now more people under 'correctional supervision' in America – more than six million – than were in the Gulag Archipelago under Stalin at its height." 2

Accompanying these one million incarcerated African American males are 283,000 Hispanics, whose own numbers represent a 219% increase in the last ten years. Hispanic males have a 17% chance of serving time at some point in their lives as compared to 6% of white males, as noted above.

Prisons and jails have become America's "new asylums." The number of individuals with serious mental illness in prisons and jails now exceeds the number in state psychiatric hospitals tenfold. Most of the individuals who are mentally ill in prisons and jails would have been treated in the state psychiatric hospitals in the years before the deinstitutionalization movement led to the closing of the hospitals, a trend that continues even today. Nationwide, people with mental health conditions constitute 64% of the jail population.³

1 U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. U.S. Census Bureau. 2 "The Caging of America," Adam Gopnik, The New Yorker Magazine, January 30, 2012. 3 U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Mental Health Problems of Prison and Jail Prisoners 2006.

Besides these shocking statistics, low income persons and young people are especially vulnerable to becoming entrapped in our prisons and jails. The conclusion is clear that the criminal justice system in this country constitutes a calamitous racial, health, and economic injustice.

As people of faith, we are called to dismantle systems that violate human and civil rights. This resolution is intended to mobilize members of the United Church of Christ to join the burgeoning movement of faith and community organizations to halt the rapidly growing trend of mass incarceration in this country and thereby dismantle the new caste system it has created.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

Woe to you who issue unjust laws, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice, and to rob the poor of my people of their rights. (Isaiah 10:1-2a)

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free. (Luke 4:18)

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. God has combined the members...so that there shall be no division within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (1 Cor. 12:12-13 and 24-26)

As Christians professing the teachings of the Prophets and Gospels, we are responsible for speaking and acting prophetically when the laws of the land are not just or fair to all communities they are intended to serve and protect.

While laws within the U.S. justice system are generally clear and are intended to be carried out without bias, statistics prove that current practices sustaining that system - from arrest to incarceration - often rob the needy and poor of their rights. We must proclaim release when a disproportionate number of the Body of Christ is held captive to systems that marginalize and oppress based on the color of skin, ethnic heritage, age, gender, or economic situation. Indeed, just as when one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers, so too when one member of the human family is affected adversely by an unjust system that denies access to the benefits of the laws meant to protect all, the whole human family is adversely affected.. We are called to start a movement of caring that affirms the God-given dignity of every person, and confronts the systemic racism in the on-going tragedy of mass incarceration.

For more than forty years, the United Church of Christ General Synod has affirmed its commitment to improving the criminal justice systems of state and federal governments, motivated by its belief that prisons should be primarily institutions for the training and reform of inmates and vehicles of rehabilitative and restorative justice. To sell prison facilities to private companies for the purpose of profit disregards this fundamental belief. Indeed, the privatization

(corporate ownership and management) of the prison industrial complex, which has a vested interest in promoting and sustaining the practice of mass incarceration, has become a serious issue in this country, particularly impacting persons who do not have sufficient financial resources for an adequate defense.

Especially since the Civil Rights Movement, the UCC has produced and proclaimed various resolutions and pronouncements defending and promoting basic human rights; however, such resolutions and pronouncements have required continual reaffirmation because of ongoing infringements of civil liberties. Racial and class bias has only worsened in recent years. The current climate of disenfranchisement through economic and legal injustice now requires the UCC once again to rearticulate its vision of and commitment to the common good vis-à-vis the problem of mass incarceration, with attention to supporting viable grassroots movements and facilitating constructive political discourse.

MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference conducted nine statewide justice commission hearings to listen to the stories of those who through personal experience and/or family connections have been directly impacted by the current trend of mass incarceration. The findings from those hearings are summarized in *Bearing Witness: A Nation in Chains* (2014). We will rely upon that report and others to ensure that the voices of those most impacted are heard.

Please see the next section on Institutional Capacity for an outline of the action plan, the specific outcomes of which will be the responsibility of resolution co-sponsors.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

The success of this resolution is built on the assumption that the national setting will provide network coordination and national policy advocacy; however, local and regional social change is dependent upon conference and local leadership engagement.

Justice and Witness Ministries will convene Conference working group members who will advise on key activities that support the movement in their areas. All UCC conferences will be encouraged to participate. Justice and Witness Ministries will track and report on the numbers of Conferences and United Church of Christ congregations involved in this effort. The National Working group will collaborate with members of the United Church of Christ Network of Prison Chaplains and the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network to in order to enhance our understanding of the various and complex issues that inmates experience.

Each of the co-sponsoring Conferences will appoint a volunteer working group to lead efforts to:

- 1) Encourage local congregations to engage in prayer, consciousness raising, and education about the crisis of mass incarceration;
- 2) Collect and maintain current state and county prison data and document personal experiences of the systemic injustice inherent within their boundaries.

3) Pressure local lawmakers to endorse public policies that promote government accountability for both prison management and justice system reform, oppose the corporate ownership of prison beds, and implement restorative justice programs.

4) Renew efforts to engage in Sacred Conversations on Race, specifically addressing the crisis of mass incarceration arising from racist and classist presuppositions and practices.

5) Encourage local congregations to work with the local parole office to create safe and sacred spaces where formerly incarcerated persons are allowed to gather to identify and support their re-entry into the community.

6) Encourage local congregations to support or establish literacy centers and mentoring programs specifically to meet the educational needs of children, youth, and their parents.

PROBABILITY OF INFLUENCING SOCIAL CHANGE

United Church of Christ leaders across the country are in the best position to advise on issues of local and regional importance. In order to strengthen the national movement, Justice and Witness Ministries will coordinate with ecumenical and interfaith partners who have identified this issue as a top priority, including but not limited to Ecumenical Advocacy Days, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, Christian Churches Together, and the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference.

It is our judgment that this situation calls on the General Synod use its BOLD PUBLIC VOICE AND WITNESS to bring attention to and address this national crisis through the following resolution.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS, since the 1980s, non-violent drug offenses have led to substantial sentencing of people of all races; however, punishment lodged against African Americans has been extreme.

For example, the rate of drug use among White and African Americans is the same, African American men comprise 66% of the people in prison for drug use.

WHEREAS, African American men are currently more likely to be controlled by the criminal justice system, prosecuted more often, sentenced for longer terms, often prohibited from voting, and disqualified from serving on a jury, all the while continuing to suffer discrimination in employment, housing, and federal assistance.

WHEREAS, Justice Commission Hearings on Mass Incarceration conducted by the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference found evidence supporting author Michelle Alexander's position that mass incarceration is the "New Jim Crow," creating a system of modern-day enslavement. According to the findings, "it is apparent that the system of mass incarceration in the U.S. is replete with human rights violations by standards of the U.S. Constitution and the United Nations International Standards of Conduct." 5

4 Alexander, Michell. *The New Jim Crow: Mass incarceration In the Age of Colorblindness*, The New Press, New York, 2010. 5 *Bearing Witness: A Nation in Chains*, The Samuel DeWitt Conference, 2014.

WHEREAS, the private prison industry aggressively solicits contracts from federal and state governments to provide facilities for prisoners, and specifically target detention of undocumented immigrants; many of which contracts require a minimum of 90% utilization of jail bed space. Texas leads the nation in the number of private prison beds, and New Mexico outsources the largest percentage of its inmate population to private corporations (43.8%) in the nation. Arizona, which now incarcerates over 13% of its prisoners in private prisons and is known as the national epicenter for incarcerating undocumented immigrants.

WHEREAS, people of color bear the brunt of our “criminal justice” system, no one is exempt from the problems of prosecutorial overreach, a poor public defender system, uneven sentencing, unreasonable parole practices, lack of funding for re-entry programs, and the use of prisons to house people for whom treatment for mental illness is not available.

WHEREAS, jails and prisons hold more individuals with serious mental illness than the largest remaining state psychiatric hospital in 44 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. In 2012 there were estimated to be 356,268 inmates with severe mental illness incarcerated, at the same time, there were approximately 35,000 patients with severe mental illness in state psychiatric hospitals proving that the number of mentally ill persons in prisons and jails was ten times the number remaining in state hospitals.⁶

WHEREAS, the growing prison industry is producing a vast underclass of former felons. The situation regarding prisoner reentry is dire. About three-quarters of a million prisoners are being released in the community each year. They face extreme hardship in housing, employment, family reunification, health and mental health care, and general isolation and alienation. They also suffer from debt (required restitution and associated parole and probation fees, fines, and penalties, with little or no income), as well as possible voting and entitlement disenfranchisement.

WHEREAS, estimates indicate that unduplicated expenditures to maintain the prison industrial complex are \$300 billion per year. The burden of such expenditures has led to the increasing privatization of that complex, especially in rural areas with small populations, where there is a need for employment and other commerce, including suppliers of goods and services. As a business, the first priority of private companies is profit; therefore, income for private prisons depends entirely on maintaining a large and stable inmate population. But the demand for guaranteed occupancy rates runs counter to efforts toward early release, alternative sentencing, and other forms of restitution, especially in cases of non-violent crimes.

WHEREAS, private prisons are exempt from some fundamental legal reporting mechanisms, including public reporting of crimes and escapes and the Freedom of Information Act. While confirmed data is hard to find, reliable sources indicate that the largest percentage of person incarcerated in private prisons are African American men and women.

WHEREAS, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, the link between academic failure, delinquency, violence, and crime is welded to reading. Reliable data indicates that 85% of juveniles who interface with the court system are functionally illiterate and 70% of inmates in 210 prison cannot read above fourth grade reading level. Inmates who receive no reading help have a 70% chance of returning to prison; this risk reduces to 16% for those who receive such assistance.⁷

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ identifies mass incarceration as a critical human and civil rights issue in the U.S. because of its disparate impact on and disenfranchisement of people of color, youth, and people with limited economic resources; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ reaffirms its commitment to speak and act prophetically to disrupt and dismantle the growing prison industrial complex in the United States;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, to turn this tide of institutionalized racism and economic injustice by mass incarceration in the United States, that Justice and Witness Ministries, Conferences, and local congregations are encouraged to provide opportunities for education, mobilization, public witness, and public policy advocacy as outlined in the action plan.

FUNDING

The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries and other entities of the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

⁷ U.S. Department of Justice and the National Institute for Literacy.

31st General Synod Toward Disability Justice: A Call to the Church and Churches

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by UCC Disabilities Ministries

Summary

This resolution recognizes that the experiences of people with disabilities (PWD) have changed since the UCC last spoke on the issue of inclusion of people with disabilities. This resolution is designed to provide guidance to various settings of the UCC on the social justice goals that are inherent to being Accessible to All (A2A).

Biblical and Theological Rationale

As Christians we believe that all persons are created in the image of God. The World Council of Churches 2016 statement on disabilities, *The Gift of Being*, has solidified a theological understanding of the global church that “[o]ur Creator made all human beings after God’s image and likeness, not only some human beings. From the perspective of the church it is exclusion, not inclusion, that requires an argument.”¹ Given this understanding the UCC must continue to grapple with what it means not only to be an Accessible to All (A2A) Church but also how to really include PWD once PWD have gained access to church buildings, church community, community worship, and even church leadership.

Inclusion is not only a matter of being present with one another. Inclusion goes beyond accessibility. Inclusion means that the needs and concerns of one member of the body of Christ are understood and responded to by the whole Body of Christ. Inclusion is a form of solidarity.

To be inclusive of people with disabilities, who have been called by God, to be part of the community of Christ is also to be advocates for the issues of social justice that specifically impact PWD. PWD, including persons with mental health issues, continue to be marginalized in society.

In the gospels we encounter a Jesus who so often knows what the other most needs before they ask. We encounter therein a Jesus who heals a variety of persons. The one thing that is constant among the various healing narratives of the gospels is that every time Jesus heals an individual they are empowered to rejoin the community. Theologically speaking the rejoining of the community is the key component of all these narratives. In each healing narrative the disability of the person being ‘healed’ is considered to have an “impurity”, and thus be “impure”, according to the Levitical laws. So in healing Jesus reverses the Levitical codes, challenging the religious and civil authorities to assert their own power in saying who is to be included in God’s community and God’s Justice and who is not. Jesus knew that persons needed to be both included fully in society and find in that society a measure of justice that respected who they were.

In Luke 17:11-19 we have the gospel account of Jesus and ten persons with leprosy. These persons are ones who have been excluded from living with the rest of the community because of the Levitical codes. Jesus does not ask if they wish to be healed nor does he promise they will be. Jesus does not ask what they want. Jesus simply sends them directly to the priests, the only ones with the authority to declare that they may reenter society. Jesus sends the persons with disability to challenge the temple hierarchy.

This resolution seeks to have the voices of PWD included in the UCC's social justice work. This resolution seeks to have the priests, God's people, heed the voices of those whom Jesus has sent to testify about the injustices that are too often overlooked because they primarily impact the marginalized.

Previous UCC resolutions on including people with disabilities (PWD) in the life of the church have called upon the church to extend hospitality and have invoked the Messianic Banquet of Luke 14 as a theological imperative to include PWD. Believing the previous theological approach to inclusion still has its place, this resolution sets out a new theological basis for the church to speak on issues of disability justice. This new theological basis of Luke 17 is one in which the church itself is called to listen to the voices of PWD at the margins, and to respond to the issues they raise as crucial for their own lives. This resolution provides the UCC with a mandate from PWD about the justice issues important to PWD.

Background

For the past thirty years, the UCC has been an advocate for persons with disabilities who have been excluded by social norms and who are seeking to reenter society. The UCC Synod called for the church to interact with PWD in passing the resolutions "Persons with Handicaps" (GS 11, in 1977) and "Church and Persons with Handicaps (GS 12 in 1979). The UCC Synod passed a resolution calling for itself to be accessible to PWD at GS 13 in 1981. In 1983, GS 14 approved "Support of Voting Accessibility for Disabled". The UCC Synod called for the "Full Participation of Persons with Disability In the Life of the Church" at GS 15 in 1985. The UCC General Synod thoughtfully passed "Concerning the Church and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990" at GS 20 in 1995. GS 22 supported the "Calling of Clergy With Disability" in 1999. In 2005 GS 25 passed the resolution "Called to Wholeness in Christ" calling the UCC to be "Accessible to All." Most recently in 2015, GS 30 called on UCC settings to be WISE(Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged) around mental health.

While the UCC has been an advocate for PWD, most of this advocacy has centered around how the church itself could or should include persons with disabilities. There have also been times when the church has advocated against inclusion of PWD, such as when the UCC joined other American mainline churches to lobby for an exemption from the ADA for church properties, including seminaries. While being included in the church is central to the lives of many people with disabilities, the church is sometimes silent on justice issues crucial to PWD. This resolution seeks to prod the church to do more, aside from charity, to speak with a prophetic voice on the need for justice in the lives of PWD.

Points of Justice called for by this resolution

- UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). Based on the Americans with Disability Act, this UN Treaty is the major human rights treaty that speaks to the issue of disabilities. The Ecumenical Disabilities Advocacy Network (EDAN), a program of the World Council of Churches, has named the ratification of this treaty one of its goals and needs over the next few years. Those who work with EDAN in North America have been hampered in their efforts to support brothers and sisters in Christ around the world because neither the United States of America nor Canada has ratified the treaty.

The United States of America has already signed the treaty but the Senate failed to ratify it. The UCC Collegium of Officers has already endorsed the ratification of the CRPD. This resolution calls upon Synod to affirm the Collegium endorsement by resolving that the UCC supports the CRPD. This will allow our staff in JWM's Washington DC office to advocate for the CRPD knowing the whole UCC stands behind them.

- Americans with Disability Act (ADA) The ADA is considered the major civil rights legislation concerning disabilities and it was passed in 1990. UCC and other clergy were strong advocates for the original passage of the law in 1990. The ADA defines disability, provides housing and employment protection for PWD, among many other things. Periodically the law is reviewed and updated. Because of this it continues to be a target of politicization.

Disability activists are always vigilant when the ADA is reviewed because each time it is reviewed there are voices calling for the ADA protections to be weakened. By calling for the UCC to continue to advocate for the strengthening of and protection of the ADA, we are calling on the UCC JWM's policy advocates in Washington DC to keep the church informed about legislation that impacts the ADA and disability civil rights, and encouraging JWM to issue email alerts, email actions, and otherwise speak with a prophetic voice on the civil rights of PWD.

- Subminimum wage, fair wages, and unemployment. While the church is called to advocate for all people who face economic injustice, the church is too often silent on the issue of subminimum wage, fair wages, and unemployment as experienced by PWD. PWD experience rates of unemployment that almost double the unemployment rate for people without disability.² PWD have a higher unemployment rate than any other minority group.

PWD often experience unintended consequences when fair wages are instituted among selected industries. The median annual income for households that include PWD is approximately \$14,000 less than households that do not include PWD.⁴ PWD are more prone to poverty than peers without disability. PWD who rely on personal attendants to get them dressed, fed, and into the community often find themselves without caregivers when a given industry, such as fast food, raises its minimum wage above the legal minimum wage. This is because PWD, who are more likely to be poor, often cannot pay personal attendants more than the minimum wage which may be supplied by the state.

PWD are often subject to the subminimum wage. Based on the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, the Secretary of Labor can issue certificates that allow employers to pay less than minimum wage if they employ PWD.⁵ Only PWD are subject to the subminimum wage which allows selected employers to pay

PWD based on the amount of work that they can do rather than the minimum afforded to all other workers.⁶ Some workers with disability in America make less than a dollar an hour.

This resolution calls the UCC to include and consider the impact of unemployment and fair wages on PWD. This resolution also calls upon the UCC to be a prophetic voice and call for the end of the subminimum wage and to educate on this topic whenever the issue of fair wages is addressed.

- **Public education** Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 guaranteed children with disabilities access to the education institutions that receive federal funding. Among other requirements the law requires that children with disabilities be educated in a way that meets their needs as adequately as non-disabled children are educated to meet their needs. The law also calls for children with disability to be included with children without disability to the extent that it is appropriate to do so. The social effects of ableism continue to challenge this legally defined right for children with disabilities to receive an education. Just as all are included in the Body of Christ, the church is called to be a prophetic actor in protecting the inclusion of PWD in educational programs and access to education for PWD.

- **Health Disparities** Most people with disabilities have an anecdotal experience they can share about being denied or receiving poor health care due to living with a disability. Ableism is entwined in America's medical industry and health care delivery systems. The 'medical model' of disability has long defined disability as "abnormal" and something that must be "fixed", "cured" or otherwise made not to exist. Scholars have noted that "[i]ndeed, given that the social welfare and healthcare systems in the US reveal inconsistencies in the actual delivery of services that seemingly mark some identifiable populations as de facto less deserving of resources under baseline, normal conditions, it is worthwhile to consider how these groups would fare in the event of a national medical emergency such as a flu pandemic."⁷ Treatment in pandemics, equal access to transplant medicine, and even the offer of life sustaining treatment that would be offered to a person without disability is a concern for many in the disability community. This resolution calls upon the UCC to continue to advocate for equitable health coverage for all persons and for members and staff of the UCC to seek out and create educational opportunities to learn about the health disparities faced by PWD.

- **Police Brutality** PWD are often the victims of police brutality, and often these incidents do not remain on the front page and thus are forgotten. Often encounters between PWD and police escalate into violence because police are not trained to recognize disability and thus assume all persons can/should respond in the same way.⁸ The eugenics movement intentionally created a stigma that PWD and persons with mental health conditions were by definition criminals, while the eugenics movement may be dormant, this stigma remains active in society.⁹ Recent studies indicate that half of persons killed by police in the line of duty have a disability.¹⁰ Race continues to be a main factor in police killings but the intersectionality of race and disability clearly cross when persons die from police interventions. This resolution calls upon the United Church of Christ develop an active response to the intersectionality of race and disability in relation to police brutality and death by police force. This resolution further calls upon local congregations and seminaries to be sources of education about disability/mental health awareness and places where police can interact and gain experience with PWD in safe non-threatening settings.

- Disaster Preparedness PWD are often not considered in disaster preparedness planning. A survey of many preparedness plans revealed that no plans explicitly indicated whether they had systematically identified or included vulnerable groups in the planning process or that they were committed to identifying those groups.¹¹ The survey stated “It is noteworthy that countries were more likely to develop policies to protect or compensate those who may become disadvantaged by a pandemic than those who are likely to suffer disproportionately because they are already disadvantaged.¹² Attention to disaster planning that includes PWD is needed to adequately plan for the needs of PWD in emergencies. This resolution calls for the UCC in all its settings to be proactive in including PWD in developing disaster preparedness planning and plans.

Text of the Motion

WHEREAS the United Church of Christ General Synod Twenty-Five has called upon all settings of the UCC to be “Accessible to All” (GS resolution Called to Wholeness in Christ, 2005);

AND WHEREAS the UCC Collegium of officers has already publically supported a call for the United States of America to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED that the Thirty-First General Synod calls the United Church of Christ in all its settings to commit to disability justice;

THEREFORE LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of Christ, and all other settings of the UCC, be an advocate for the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD);

THEREFORE LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages the national setting to monitor legislation and court decisions that involve the Americans with Disability Act and other legislation that impacts persons with disability and use this information to invite other settings of the church to serve as a prophetic witness to the inclusion of all persons in society;

THEREFORE LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of Christ urges all settings of the United Church of Christ to be a prophetic voice for wage equality and proclaim of the injustice of the subminimum wage whenever the UCC advocates for fair wage;

THEREFORE LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls for the continued right of people with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate public education;

THEREFORE LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED THAT the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls on all United Church of Christ camps to include persons with disability in mainstreamed age appropriate camps and include people with disability in all camps;

THEREFORE LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of Christ urges all UCC settings, including the Pension Boards, to be advocates for affordable and equal health care insurance without prejudice to preexisting conditions inclusive of mental health;

THEREFORE LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of Christ invites all UCC settings to develop awareness of health disparities experienced by PWD who may not be offered or made eligible for organ transplant, or other life sustaining treatment, because they live with disability;

THEREFORE LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of Christ urges the national setting, and all other UCC settings, to develop an active response to the intersectionality of race and disability in relation to police brutality and death by police force, and further calls upon local congregations and seminaries to be sources of education about disability/mental health awareness and places where police can interact and gain experience with PWD in safe non-threatening settings;

FINALLY, LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages UCC Disaster Ministries to include the need for disaster preparedness among PWD in their disaster response plans and that disaster ministry teams in all settings of the church engage PWD to develop emergency preparedness.

Funding

The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

Implementation

The UCC Collegium of officers in consultation with the UCCDM Board of Directors, and other appropriate ministries will determine the implementing body.