

The Business Committee of the Thirty-Second General Synod has recommended this proposed resolution be sent to a Plenary of the General Synod.

1 **ON RECOGNIZING OPIOID ADDICTION AS A HEALTH EPIDEMIC, ENSURING**
2 **ACCESS TO TREATMENT AND PHARMACEUTICAL CORPORATE**
3 **RESPONSIBILITY**

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5 **A Resolution of Witness**

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7 **Submitted by the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries**

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9 **SUMMARY**

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11 This resolution urges the recognition of the increasing prevalence of opioid addiction as a health
12 epidemic and calls for more affordable and accessible addiction treatment. Further, this
13 resolution urges pharmaceutical companies to exercise corporate responsibility and fully assess
14 their role in the epidemic and enact practices to curtail the availability of opioids in a responsible
15 way which does not create more harm while ensuring access to appropriate use.

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17 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE**

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19 “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.
20 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will
21 find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-29)
22 Jesus’ healing ministry was for all those he encountered. He turned none away and demonstrated
23 God’s healing presence knows no social boundaries. Jesus healed the leper and the
24 hemorrhaging woman, even when those around him were frightened because they were
25 considered unclean. To be followers of Jesus’ example, we must remove the stigma of opioid
26 addiction and set aside any prejudices we carry for those who are in need of healing from this
27 terrible epidemic. Affordable and accessible addiction treatment is out of reach of too many and
28 creates further separation of the human family. Further, pharmaceutical companies must
29 recognize the responsibility they carry in this epidemic and create corporate cultures which set
30 aside profits and focuses on only doing good and not harm. As followers of Jesus, we must
31 reach out to the sick and hurt, and challenge the powers who have lost touch with sacredness of
32 human life.

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34 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

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36 Whereas, faith leaders and pastors of all faiths including the United Church of Christ have a
37 unique vantage on the opioid crisis, observing individuals’ sufferings, families’ anguish, and the
38 shame of addiction that prevents the necessary discourse to help curb this national affliction; and

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40 Whereas, opioid medications provide crucial pain management for terminal diseases and certain
41 chronic conditions; and
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43 Whereas, interference with access to opioid medications for individuals suffering from terminal
44 diseases and chronic conditions is unethical and should be avoided; and

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46 Whereas, in 2016 the number of overdose deaths involving opioids was five times higher than it
47 was in 1999, and on average 115 people die every day from an opioid overdoseⁱ; and

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49 Whereas, a recent study by the RAND Corporation showed that while the number of Medicaid
50 recipients receiving medication to treat opioid addiction has increased, the increase is smaller in
51 poorer counties and in areas with greater black and Hispanic residentsⁱⁱ; and

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53 Whereas, pharmaceutical or health care companies that make or distribute opioid drugs face
54 growing potential liability from lawsuits along with regulatory, medical and public pressure to
55 drastically reduce their use, including 27 U.S. states and more than 400 cities, counties, and other
56 entities suing these corporationsⁱⁱⁱ; and

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58 Whereas, according to the White House Council of Economic Advisors, the opioid epidemic cost
59 the U.S. economy an estimated \$504 billion in 2015, equivalent to 2.8 percent of GDP^{iv};

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61 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirty-Second General Synod of the United Church
62 of Christ urges all settings of the United Church of Christ and its members to recognize opioid
63 addiction as a health epidemic

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65 Be it further resolved that the Thirty-Second General Synod calls on Congress to increase
66 Medicare and Medicaid funding to treat opioid addiction;

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68 Be it further resolved that the Thirty-Second General Synod recognizes that opioid addiction is
69 not a determinant of a person's worth, and invites a public discourse on the need for just and
70 equitable treatment to lessen the stigma from asking for help and treatment;

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72 Be it finally resolved that the Thirty-Second General Synod urges all settings of the United
73 Church of Christ to use all manner of activism, including shareholder activism of opioid
74 pharmaceutical manufacturers and distribution corporations, to hold accountable those who are
75 acting in bad faith with the American people, either by irresponsibly marketing, distributing, and
76 prescribing to individuals or by criminalizing those who become addicted.

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78 **FUNDING**

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

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82 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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

ⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2018/06/25.html>

iii <https://www.addictioncenter.com/community/states-filed-suits-against-opioid/> and
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3135410

iv <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/images/The%20Underestimated%20Cost%20of%20the%20Opioid%20Crisis.pdf>