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

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries

SUMMARY

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

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE

“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-29)

Jesus’ healing ministry was for all those he encountered. He turned none away and demonstrated God’s healing presence knows no social boundaries. Jesus healed the leper and the hemorrhaging woman, even when those around him were frightened because they were considered unclean. To be followers of Jesus’ example, we must remove the stigma of opioid addiction and set aside any prejudices we carry for those who are in need of healing from this terrible epidemic. Affordable and accessible addiction treatment is out of reach of too many and creates further separation of the human family. Further, pharmaceutical companies must recognize the responsibility they carry in this epidemic and create corporate cultures which set aside profits and focuses on only doing good and not harm. As followers of Jesus, we must reach out to the sick and hurt, and challenge the powers who have lost touch with sacredness of human life.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

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

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

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

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

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

Whereas, according to the White House Council of Economic Advisors, the opioid epidemic cost
the U.S. economy an estimated $504 billion in 2015, equivalent to 2.8 percent of GDPiv; and

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

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

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

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

FUNDING

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

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