

TITLE: "A RESOLUTION TO ABOLISH THE GROWTH AND EXISTENCE OF PRIVATE PRISONS

BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE:

As believers in Christ, we must abhor and actively battle against any individual or industry which derives profit from human misery. We are admonished as followers of Christ to "Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured." (Hebrews 13:3) Acknowledging and following our Lord's example of upholding the cause of the oppressed (Psalm 146:7; Luke 4:8) we pursue this resolution embracing the belief that in God's world we are tied together in the humanity of every person and the responsibility of each of us to refuse to perpetuate the bondage

HISTORICAL FOUNDINGS:

In a previous affirmation citing opposition to private prisons, the United Church of Christ has stated: "For more than 40 years, the United Church of Christ has affirmed our commitment to improving the criminal justice systems of state and federal governments, citing our belief that prisons should be primarily institutions for the training and rehabilitation of the inmates. We base this affirmation on our call to service, justice, and restoration through faith. To sell facilities to private companies for the purpose of profit is a violation of these fundamental beliefs."

TEXT OF MOTION

WHEREAS, we are each created equal and in the image of God (Genesis 1:26; Galatians 3:28), an indisputable truth in our faith tradition which leaves no room for profiting from the bondage of any human being;

WHEREAS, the U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration in the world and African Americans, Latinos, Latinas, and indigenous peoples are disproportionately incarcerated in the United States;

WHEREAS, between 2000 and 2015 the number of people incarcerated in private prisons increased by 45%, compared to an overall rise in the prison population of only 10%.

WHEREAS, income and profit for private prisons are dependent upon maintaining a large and stable inmate population. Therefore, the incentive for increasingly imprisoning human beings is based upon greed and without regard for alternatives to incarceration, or efforts to achieve justice reform or rehabilitation.

WHEREAS, whereas there are proven instances of inadequate health care for incarcerated persons, death and injury suffered by incarcerated persons caused by inadequate security staffing levels and inadequate training for security staff which are attributable to cost saving measures that bolster the profits of privately owned or operated prisons.

WHEREAS, insidious partnerships have been successfully pursued to increase the number of persons housed in private prisons. Said partnerships lend governmental support and structure to profiting from imprisonment of human beings. Specifically, the private prison industry has collaborated with

organizations which assist in developing and advocating for passage of model legislation that is shared and often adopted by states, such as “Three strikes” laws and mandatory minimum sentences with virtually no opportunity for parole. Said legislation and other laws similarly supported by the private prison industry serve to increase the inmate population of the facilities from which profit is realized. Through these actions the private prison industry has gained power to establish and grow prisons beyond any conceivable need.

WHEREAS, corporate and/or systemic structures, or individuals which derive profit from the imprisonment of human beings serve to perpetuate the legacy of slavery, oppression and heartless greed which the United Church of Christ has long sought to expose and correct;

WHEREAS, we are admonished as followers of Christ to “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured;” (Hebrews 13:3)

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That the Illinois Conference UCC calls upon the body of the United Church of Christ, through General Synod 32 in 2019 to:

1. Enable and encourage local churches and conferences to develop methods to:
 - a. Raise the church's consciousness of the theological, social, racial, ethnic and economic inequities which accompany the existence and/or increase of privately held and operated prisons.
 - b. Monitor and advocate against proposals for state and federal criminal justice and sentencing laws which serve to increase and support the increase of the inmate population of privately held or operated prisons.
 - c. Actively identify investors or suppliers of privately owned or operated prisons and take action to divest and advocate for divestment from support of said businesses.
2. Specially call upon the U. S. Congress and state legislatures to ban State or Federal contracting with or approval of the existence of privately owned or operated prisons.
3. Specifically call for appropriate legislation to immediately require existing privately owned or operated prisons to provide health care, mental health care and safety measures which promote the optimum physical and mental health and safety of current inmates of said institution.

Submitted by: The Chicago Metropolitan Association and co-sponsors: Justice and Witness Ministry Team of the Chicago Metropolitan Association and Justice and Witness Ministry Team of the Illinois Conference