

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

1 **A RESOLUTION TO ABOLISH THE GROWTH AND EXISTENCE OF PRIVATE**
2 **PRISONS**

3
4 **A Resolution of Witness**

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6 **Submitted by the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ and the Chicago**
7 **Metropolitan Association of the Illinois Conference**

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9 **SUMMARY**

10 This Resolution calls the United Church to actualize our affirmation against private prisons
11 through methods designed to achieve the abolition of such prisons.

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13 **BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE**

14 As believers in Christ, we must abhor and actively battle against any individual or industry
15 which derives profit from human misery. We are admonished as followers of Christ to
16 “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are
17 being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.” (Hebrews 13:3) Acknowledging
18 and following our Lord’s example of upholding the cause of the oppressed (Psalm 146:7; Luke
19 4:8) we pursue this resolution embracing the belief that in God’s world we are tied together in
20 the humanity of every person and the responsibility of each of us to refuse to perpetuate the
21 bondage

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23 **HISTORICAL GROUNDING**

24 In a previous affirmation citing opposition to private prisons, the United Church of Christ has
25 stated: “For more than 40 years, the United Church of Christ has affirmed our commitment to
26 improving the criminal justice systems of state and federal governments, citing our belief that
27 prisons should be primarily institutions for the training and rehabilitation of the inmates. We
28 base this affirmation on our call to service, justice, and restoration through faith. To sell
29 facilities to private companies for the purpose of profit is a violation of these fundamental
30 beliefs.” (1,2)

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32 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

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

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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; (3,4)

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38 WHEREAS, between 2000 and 2015 the number of people incarcerated in private prisons
39 increased by 45 %, compared to an overall rise in the prison population of only 10 %.(5)

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

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46 WHEREAS, there are proven instances of inadequate health care for incarcerated persons, death
47 and injury suffered by incarcerated persons caused by inadequate security staffing levels and
48 inadequate training for security staff which are attributable to cost saving measures that bolster
49 the profits of privately owned or operated prisons. (6,7)

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51 WHEREAS, insidious partnerships have been successfully pursued to increase the number of
52 persons housed in private prisons. Said partnerships lend governmental support and structure to
53 profiting from imprisonment of human beings. Specifically, the private prison industry has
54 collaborated with organizations which assist in developing and advocating for passage of model
55 legislation that is shared and often adopted by states, such as “Three strikes” laws and mandatory
56 minimum sentences with virtually no opportunity for parole. Said legislation and other laws
57 similarly supported by the private prison industry serve to increase the inmate population of the
58 facilities from which profit is realized. Through these actions the private prison industry has
59 gained power to establish and grow prisons beyond any conceivable need. (8,9)

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

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

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69 **NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Thirty-Second General Synod of the United
70 Church of Christ calls upon the national setting of the United Church of Christ to enable and
71 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.

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73 **THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Thirty-Second General Synod of the
74 United Church of Christ calls upon the U. S. Congress and state legislatures to ban State or
75 Federal contracting with or approval of the existence of privately owned or operated prisons.

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77 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that the Thirty-Second General Synod of the United Church of
78 Christ calls for appropriate legislation to immediately require existing privately owned or
79 operated prisons to provide health care, mental health care and safety measures which promote
80 the optimum physical and mental health and safety of current inmates of said institution.

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82 **FUNDING**

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

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86 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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

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Footnotes for a Resolution to Abolish the Growth and Existence of Private Prisons

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