



PNEC at General Synod 32 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin June 21-25, 2019

Reports from General Synod Delegates on Their Committee Assignments Dealing with Resolutions

About Resolutions...there are two types of resolutions: Witness and Prudential

Resolution of Witness is an expression of the General Synod concerning a moral, ethical or religious matter confronting the Church, the nation, or the world, adopted for the guidance of the Officers, Covenanted, Associated or Affiliated Ministries, or other bodies as defined in Article VI of the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ; the consideration of Local Churches, Associations, Conferences and other bodies related to the United Church of Christ; and for a Christian witness to the world. It represents agreement by at least two-thirds of the delegates voting that the view expressed is based on Christian conviction and is a part of their witness to Jesus Christ. The text of the proposed resolution should be so phrased as not to bring into question the Christian commitment of those who do not agree.

Prudential Resolutions: A Prudential Resolution establishes policy, institutes or revises structure or procedures, authorizes programs, approves directions or requests actions by majority vote.

Committee 1 - "A Resolution to Abolish the Growth and Existence of Private (For Profit) Prisons"

Resolution of Witness

This resolution highlighted how the prison population in the US has increased 500% in the last 40 years making us the world's leader in incarceration. The increase can be tracked back to 1984's Crime Bill (War on Drugs) as well as the School to Prison Pipeline where many states look at the scores of Standardized Reading tests to determine future bed usage in private prisons.

Private prisons have fewer staff/fewer well-trained staff, low pay and higher violence rates, lack of medical treatment and because they are private, they lack the oversight of the state. These private prisons are run by corporations such as Geo Group and Core Civic being the largest of the Real Estate investors. The average cost in a private prison (think Lehigh and Northampton County prisons) is \$9,500 a year per inmate. A for Profit prison spends \$35,500 a year per inmate. And no matter what an inmate does within the walls of the prison-work on job skills, get an education, etc., it will not shorten their sentence. If an inmate has a chronic health condition (ex. Mental Health or Diabetes) their medications are taken away for 30 days and then medications of lower quality and that are less effective.

This denies the possibility that people change. Private prisons are a perpetuation of slavery. Our committee approved this resolution and the UCC call out this injustice, abolish the growth of private prisons and insure the humane treatment of humans. The resolution calls upon the US Congress, State legislatures and local governments to ban government contracting with, or approval of, the existence of Private Prisons. It was further resolved that the UCC calls for appropriate legislation accompanied by the appropriate oversight mechanisms of US Congress, State Legislatures, and local governments to immediately require existing Private Prisons to provide optimum spiritual, medical, physical, and mental care, as well as safety measures. – Virginia Schlegel

Committee 2: Reaffirming the United Church of Christ's Commitment to Interreligious Relations and Deploring Religious Bigotry

Resolution of Witness

Discrimination and violence toward people of different faith communities is a very real and serious problem in the United States and throughout the world. Considering all the acts of violence occurring throughout the world, as the United Church of Christ, we believe that we need to reaffirm that we are committed to interreligious dialogue. It is of the utmost importance that we take the time to educate ourselves about other religions, commit ourselves to forming relationship with one another and stand together against this violence. – *Becky Moyer*

Committee 2: A Resolution on Ecumenical Relationship with Iglesia Evangelia Unida De Puerto Rico

Prudential Resolution

The United Church of Christ and Iglesia Evangelia Unida De Puerto Rico have been working closely together for many years. The UCC is a united and uniting church, committed to working closely with other denominations to do Christ's work in this world. Iglesia Evangelia Unida De Puerto Rico is now recognized as an ecumenical partner and we will continue to work together to find ways to promote the closest possible relationships between our churches. – *Becky Moyer*

Committee 3: Global Forced Migration

Resolution of Witness

Global Forced Migration, the forced displacement of people from their homes and/or their countries, is a trend that continues across the globe with no sign of reversal. This resolution calls upon members of the UCC in all settings to pray, learn and actively engage in education about the issue, and to support activities (ie: Global Ministries and One Great Hour of Sharing) and policies which advocate for the US to work with the global community. – *Joyce Kohler*

Committee 4: Establishing an Action Team to Conduct a Listening Campaign and Bring Recommendations on the Future of Christian Witness at General Synod

Prudential Resolution

This was a resolution brought forth by people from mostly the Massachusetts and Northern California Conferences.

At General Synod, Committee 4 members worked long, hard, and in good faith with one another to come to consensus about what to do with this resolution. The committee members were polite and respectful with one another, and almost everyone seemed to be in general support of the spirit of the resolution. However, there were many concerns about how complicated and expensive it would be to carry out the wishes of the resolution, and almost everyone thought that the resolution was much too wordy and cumbersome. Therefore, Committee 4 made some major edits to the resolution. Committee 4 shortened up the resolution quite a bit and simplified it a great deal.

The edited version of the resolution that was sent to the floor of General Synod 32 in Milwaukee called for "A listening campaign throughout the denomination in all of its expressions that would ask how the various settings of the denomination most energetically and thoroughly carries out Christian mission and witness." The revised resolution calls for the UCC Board of Directors to work with the Council of Conference Ministers to figure out an effective implementation plan for this "listening campaign."

In the end, this shortened and revised version of Resolution 4 passed on the floor of General Synod 32 by a vote of 372 to 228 (with 93 abstentions). – *John Snyder-Samuelson*

Committee 5: Resolution Regarding the Use of Plastic Foam (i.e. Styrofoam)

Resolution of Witness

This resolution discussed the implication of our nation's reliance on plastic foam (also known as styrofoam) and the impact its continued use has on humans, animals and the earth. Single-use plastic foam products are a known pollutant used throughout the United States in the form of coffee cups and take-out foods containers. These products are comprised of styrene and benzene, known carcinogens which impact and threaten human and animal life. Additionally, because it takes 500 years for plastic foam to decompose its components enter our waterways and oceans, thereby threatening our world's ecological system and existence.

As followers of Christ called to be good stewards of human life and the earth, this resolution, adopted by the Thirty Second General Synod encourages Conferences, Associations, Congregations and individuals to avoid the use of plastic foam in food packaging and other activities churches, and church related facilities, and simultaneously educate the same and members of congregations about the impact of plastic foam and encourage the use of alternatives such as ceramic or other dishwasher-safe products whenever and wherever possible. – *Greg Edwards*

Committee 5: On Support for the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act of 2019

Resolution of Witness

This resolution addressed the issue of climate change, caused largely by pollution from using fossil carbon, which continues to cause problems from drought, sever weather storms, flooding, rising ocean levels, ocean acid increase, and species destruction. Supporting this Act introduced by the US House of Representatives in 2019, with bi-partisan cosponsors, ultimately means that we, as a Church, are in support of placing a fee and dividend approach to our nation's continued extraction of fossil carbon, and giving that fee to homes and families in the United States to offset probable costs incurred by ultimately moving to more energy efficient means to redress climate change and protect the environment and all species. The Thirty-Second General Synod adopted this resolution in support of The Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act of 2019, H.R. 763 with the provision of encouraging all settings of the United Church of Christ to seek ways to lean more about climate change and solutions, and make available resources to learn about and engage with people of other faiths on climate change as well as speaking out for energy innovations and conservation to reduce climate change. – *Greg Edwards*

Committee 6: Denouncing Acts of Violence, Hatred, and Racism Carried Out in the Name of Neo-Nazi and White Supremacist Ideologies

Resolution of Witness

During our time in Committee, it was very clear that we need to be open to discussions and not close the door to others who may differ in their opinions, but we must also act in a way that exhibits what we believe. Through these discussions, the Committee fervently stood by the ideology that we are all created equal in the eyes of God and as such should treat all of our siblings with that same respect. It was important for the delegates to see language that addressed how to respond to white supremacy discourses but also encouraged intentional dialogue with groups holding diverging opinions. General Synod voted overwhelmingly to support this resolution of witness and calls upon us as UCC congregations to stand up but also encourage open dialogue. – *Christian Creyer*

Committee 7: Designating the Mental Health Network of the United Church of Christ as a Historically Underrepresented Group

Prudential Resolution

Mental health is a major concern for people in our churches and communities. Approximately 1 in 5 people age 18 and over lives with a diagnosable mental illness.

According to the World Health Organization, “one in four people in the world will be affected by a mental disorder at some stage of life”. Unfortunately, having a mental illness still has stigma attached, even in the church. During committee deliberations, many individuals, both clergy and members, who have a mental illness, said they were afraid of letting people know this.

This resolution sets in motion a way for local congregations to increase their knowledge of mental health and possibly becoming a WISE Congregation (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supported, and Engaged) in Mental Health. Resources on mental health and churches are available at uccresources.com. If your congregation is interested in becoming designated as a WISE congregation, information is available at the above site or at www.mhn-ucc.org

As a Historically Underrepresented Group (HUG), the UCC Mental Health Network (MHN) can better help the UCC be a denomination that loves all, welcomes all, and seeks justice for all. As a HUG, the UCC MHN can empower persons living with mental health challenges and ensure that those impacted by them are not only heard, but also given a seat at the table and empowered with not only a voice, but with a vote. – *Doug Taylor*

Committee 7: The Colectivo De UCC Latinx Ministries Requests to be Recognized as a Historically Underrepresented Group

Prudential Resolution

Although the UCC has made pronouncements committing to be multiracial and multicultural both within and among and multicultural congregations, the number of Latinx congregations has only increased 3.8% from 2005-2015.

This Resolution calls for a Colectivo de UCC Latinx Ministries to be organized and recognized as a Historically Underrepresented Group. It also asks the Church to assist strengthening and supporting mission and ministries of Latinx people with the UCC. – *Doug Taylor*

Committee 8: Stewardship of Exhibit Space as a Resource for a Mission of Justice

Resolution of Witness

This Resolution called for exhibits in the General Synod hall to be in accordance with resolutions previously passed at General Synod, aimed specifically at the Faithful and Welcoming Churches, which advocate against ordaining LGBTQ+ clergy or allowing same-sex marriage. The committee broadened the language to include advocacy against any UCC-defined Historically Underrepresented Group; plenary tabled the entire resolution indefinitely. This means that the resolution did not come to the floor for further discussion, but has been referred to the UCC Board for discussion and review. Neither the UCC Board or the UCC ONA Coalition was supportive of the resolution, as they felt it limited conversation & discussion. – *Cecilia Baxter*

Committee 9: Supporting Survivors of Rape and Sexual Violence Through an Ongoing Church-Wide Observance of Break the Silence Sunday (BTSS)

Prudential Resolution

Break the Silence Sunday's purpose is to provide resources to help churches support survivors of rape and sexual violence. This committee did the work they were charged to do making changes to the resolution so that it might be its best. They added a whereas clause recognizing the ways in which the church

across traditions has been complicit in protecting perpetrators, and contributing to rape culture through blaming and shaming victims and that the work of BTSS is, for the church, an act of repentance and commitment to healing.

We added language to clarify when churches might observe BTSS as some congregations and communities have other commitments on the fourth Sunday of April. We enhanced the idea that BTSS is not simply the subject of worship, but should be a part of the educational and community work of congregations.

We included a further resolved clause calling for all settings of the church to treat survivors and their stories with care – particularly among communities of color, LGBTQ+ identifying people, and people with disabilities – making sure to gather resources for education and self care.

The suggested date for Break the Silence Sunday is April 26, 2020. Resources are available to congregations. Email Rev. Moira Finley at breakthesilencesunday@gmail.com or visit their website at breakthesilencesunday.org.

Committee 10: Resolution Calling on the United States to Pull “Back from the Brink” and Prevent Nuclear War

Resolution of Witness

Committee 10 deliberated on a plan to prevent nuclear war. We discussed several options and plans of action and ultimately passed the resolution in an attempt to maintain peace between nations. – *Jordan Smith*

Committee 11: Discerning, Articulating, and Resourcing the Nature, Purpose, Composition, Covenantal Autonomy and Definition of ‘The Basic Unit of Life and Organization of the United Church of Christ’ for the Twenty-First Century

Prudential Resolution

What does “covenant” mean in the United Church of Christ? How do our churches feel blessed by being in covenant with each other and the wider church? What responsibilities does each unit of the church have in a covenant relationships? How do we honor our covenantal responsibilities through our relationship with churches and agencies in other denominational or faith traditions?

These are just some of the questions that led the 32nd General Synod to support convening a working group to formulate guidelines for “local church covenant and autonomy, parameters for local church accountability and the oversight of local churches, a provision for releasing congregations from the UCC” and more, to be made into a Manual on the Local Church. – *Sharon Harfman*

Committee 12: Resolution Calling Upon the United Christ of Christ Board to Bring Bylaws Revisions that Include Non-Binary Gender Language

Witness Resolution

The pastor of a church located in the Southern California-Nevada Conference spoke to the committee. He explained that he had invited several youth from his church to attend General Synod. Much to his dismay, he was approached by a few of the youth who felt that they would not be welcome at synod because of the exclusive language used in the by-laws. So the pastor and the youth of his church set out to propose a resolution to make the by-laws more inclusive.

The entire committee member assigned to Resolution #12 felt the wording of the by-laws could be and should be changed to be more inclusive. One of the statements in the motto of the United Church of Christ read, “We believe that each person is unique and valuable. It is the will of God that every person belong to a family of faith where they have a strong sense of being valued and loved.” If the youth in the Southern California-Nevada Conference did not feel that they were welcome, what would the LGBTQ and transgendered youth within the United Church of Christ around the nation be feeling?

After it was decided that the resolution had merit, it became the mission of the members of Resolution #12 to make the changes that would enhance it. Within a matter of a few hours, we were pleased to submit a revised document that will be forwarded to the Board. – *Brenda Hobson*

Committee 13: Resolution on Oversight of the Local Church and Its Covenantal Relationship with the Association in which it Holds Standing as a Local Church of the UCC

Prudential Resolution

The resolution that Committee 13 was tasked with was very similar to the resolution that Committee 11 worked on and was about the United Church of Christ's Manual on Church. The goal of this resolution was to encourage a closer resolution between Associations, Conferences, and requested that the UCC's Board of Directors provide Associations and Conferences with guidance on how to release a local church from being a member of the UCC, especially after several years of no attendance, communication, or financial giving. During the Committee's meeting the biggest concern was with the word "releasing" because there was thought that an Association or Conference would simply end their relationship with a local church without just cause. Ultimately, the Committee recommended to the plenary that the resolution be tabled and that no further action be taken. Upon voting, the General Synod plenary agreed with the recommendation. – *Doug Brace*

Committee 14: Jesus Said, "Follow Me"

Resolution of Witness

During our educational intensive, we discussed who Jesus was. We learned that Jesus was not the Blonde Hair Blue eyed person who is portrayed in famous pieces of artwork, but a real person whom due to his background would today be faced with difficulties in regards racism, immigration, ect. Our Committee discussed the United Church of Christ's thoughts on the inclusion of all individuals in our churches and welcoming them extravagantly just as Jesus would have done. This resolution encourages members to walk in Jesus' footsteps and embrace the gifts, and talents of those that may be culturally different from ourselves and welcome them into our congregations with open arms and extravagantly. – *Mandy Muschett*

Committee #15: Let Justice Roll Down – Declaring Support for the Green New Deal and Affirming the Intersectionality of Climate Justice with all Justice Issues

Resolution of Witness

This committee read, studied, and discerned the Congressional Resolution "The Green New Deal." It is a resolution of Congress (not legislation), which means it provides a vision for the direction for public policy. It lays out a plan for tackling climate change with a big vision. In the resolution presented to the General Synod, there were a number of factors that the committee discerned together were important for us to address as a church. First, that climate change is real, and we are the primary cause of climate change. As people who care about creation, we see this as a crisis and that we have the ability to act in ways that can curb the current rate of climate change. The committee also found that the majority of people do not know the content of the Green new Deal, and we encourage people to read and understand the contents of the congressional resolution. We recognize that vulnerable communities are disproportionately impacted by climate change. For example, poor communities feel more of the effects of climate change like access to clean drinking water, or the challenge of rebuilding in an impoverished community devastated by a natural disaster. The Green New Deal proposes a vision for a coming together of business, innovation, community leaders, and government too come together to address climate change in a comprehensive way that creates jobs while slowing the rate of climate change. As people of faith, we believe we are called to protect people and the environment. Here is a quote from the frequently asked questions about the Green New Deal as to the motivation for our committee to support this resolution:

As for the fact that the Green New Deal Resolution is a declaration of aspirational commitment and is not legislation – because the UCC relies heavily on covenant, we may have valuable insights as advocates for this Congressional resolution. If humanity has any hope of providing our children with a livable home, each and every country must do all it can to transition from fossil fuel to sustainable energy as fast as possible. Countries will only undertake this transition if they have reason to trust that virtually all other countries are doing likewise. In other words, when it comes to addressing climate change, the norm of national autonomy must give way to covenantal trust. This is an area where the UCC can make a valuable contribution. – *Joanne Marchetto*

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Resolutions Direct to Plenary (no committee assignments)

Protection of Immigrant Children and Their Families

This resolution came directly to the General Synod floor as a prudential resolution: a resolution of witness which establishes policy, institutes or revises structure or procedures, authorizes programs, approves directions, or requests actions by a majority vote.

The specific resolution spoke to halting the practice of separating minor children of immigrant families from being separated from their families upon entry into the US. It was resolved for the United Church of Christ to advocate for the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, and other applicable governmental departments and agencies to immediately end the practice of separating minor children from their parents except in rare instances when the parents pose a threat to their own children, and that minor children who already have been taken from their parents be quickly reunited with them.

The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body. The Council of Conference Ministers is beginning work on this resolution by visiting Washington, DC, the UCC Public Polity Office and Capitol Hill in September. – *Bonnie Bates*

Nehemiah's Life: A Call for Congressional hearings on Violence in America

Saying violence in America has risen to “crisis levels,” delegates of the United Church of Christ General Synod are calling on Congress to hold hearings to uncover causes and receive suggestions for actions to reduce incidents of violence. We heard the story of Nehemiah Williams, the 34-year-old son of a ministerial colleague who was killed in a suburban Chicago parking lot. As a General Synod, we are calling upon Congress to address the violence that happens in every neighborhood in our country. No one is exempt because the face of violence is everywhere. We are called to write letters and encourage our Congressional Representatives to stand up and do to raise this to the level of an epidemic in our society. – *Christian Creyer*

On Recognizing Opioid Addiction as a Health Epidemic, Ensuring, Access to Treatment and Pharmaceutical Corporate Responsibility

Opioid addiction is now considered a major health issue. 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 overdose.

This Resolution calls on the Church and members to engage in all manner of activism activities, 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. – *Doug Taylor*

A New Conference in Southern New England

This resolution came directly to the General Synod floor as a prudential resolution: a resolution of witness which establishes policy, institutes or revises structure or procedures, authorizes programs, approves directions, or requests actions by a majority vote.

The specific resolution asks that the General Synod recognize a new Conference in Southern New England and vicinity, provisionally named the TA1 Conference of the United Church of Christ, and grant it standing as a conference, terminating the standing of the Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island Conferences, and the Associations of which will become Associations of the New Conference.

This resolution is the culmination of eight years of work among these three conferences as they seek to unify into one conference in Southern New England. The formation and standing of the new conference becomes effective on January 1, 2020. – *Bonnie Bates*

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Committee Chair Overview by Maria Brace

Why me? Why was I asked to chair a committee at General Synod? I still don't know the answer. But I do know that it was an incredible learning experience.

When you are asked to chair a committee you are not given your committee assignment until after the day and a half of training. The idea is that you learn the process of leading the committee first and it doesn't matter what the assignment is – the process is the same no matter your assignment.

For this General Synod I was assigned to be the chair for Committee #1 – “A Resolution to Abolish the Growth and Existence of Private Prisons.” The process began on Friday afternoon with an educational intensive, a time when all delegates assigned to a committee have the opportunity to learn about the background of the topic presented in the resolution. This provides the necessary information for all to make informed decisions. The work of the committee took place on Sunday morning. Approximately seventy delegates were assigned to my committee. Our time began with an opening meditation, followed by one of the authors of the resolution giving an overview of what drove her to write the resolution.

The committee members then took approximately two hours to go through the resolution and make it stronger. The end result of Committee #1 was a unanimous decision to recommend that the General Synod adopt the resolution (as amended) which will guide the message by our elected leaders to our local churches about private prisons.

The process was exciting, exhilarating, educational – and most of all, exhausting.

Why me? Who knows? But what a gift I was given and one that I will hold close to my heart forever!

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Summary of PNEC/PSEC Conversations on Tuesday Evening before Closing Worship

For four years, the Penn Northeast Conference and the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference were in conversation with one another about visioning the possibility of forming a new conference with a united vision and mission. Those conversation came to a pause after the fall meetings of our conferences in 2018. Since that time, the leadership of both conferences have taken some time to help us process all that has happened, to listen to the thoughts, feelings, and reactions of our people. Many folks in the Penn Northeast worked very hard to discern a vision and communicate new possibilities. When the Joint Conference Visioning ended, at that time, there was no process in place for us to continue our conversations. Some people were hoping to begin conversations again while others were feeling deep hurt. We needed some time.

After the PNEC Board had our retreat in May, we discerned that it was time to open a conversation with the folks from PSEC. While at General Synod, Bonnie and I met with Bill Worley, PSEC Conference Minister, and Jennie Strauch, PSEC Moderator. We had a good conversation. We identified some staff anxiety and fear in PSEC, and recognized the emotional impact of the process for both Conferences. We thought it would be good to encourage our two delegations to gather over dinner and continue this conversation. What we discovered is that we do love doing ministry together, and we have been at this process for a long time. There was confusion in the process at the PSEC meeting which led to the “no” vote. There were also some leadership failures which we are attempting to learn from. The conversation was hard because there is still some pain and confusion. But this does not discourage us from having the conversation for healing and working together.

In the next couple of months, Bill will be coming to our Conference Board to speak with our leadership. Bonnie has been invited to attend the PSEC Consistory meeting. We do not know where we will go from here, but our hope is that by talking with one another, we can move forward in healing and love.

Joanne Marchetto, PNEC Moderator

9/12/19