

**DISMANTLING THE NEW JIM CROW**

WHEREAS, The “New Jim Crow,” the term used to describe the marginalization and re-subjugation of African Americans under the guise of the so-called War on Drugs, various get-tough-on-crime policies, and mass incarceration, is causing horrific pain, untold suffering, and irreparable damage to millions of African Americans;

WHEREAS, millions of African American men and women are under control of the criminal justice system, unable to vote or serve on juries but able to be discriminated against legally in employment, housing, and federal assistance;

WHEREAS, even though the rate of drug use among white and Black Americans is the same, African Americans are prosecuted more often, receive harsher sentences, and serve longer terms for violations of laws prohibiting the use and distribution of drugs. Indeed, men of color comprise sixty-six percent of the people in prison for drug use (African Americans forty-two percent and Hispanics twenty-four percent);

WHEREAS, young African American men comprise fourteen percent of young men in the United States, yet comprise forty percent of young men in prison;

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court of The United States has held that such glaring statistical disparities are inadmissible as reasons for bringing actions to remedy these injustices, even in states in which ninety percent of people imprisoned for violations of drug laws are African Americans;

WHEREAS, General Synods of the United Church Of Christ have passed resolutions and pronouncement calling the church to action to help find solutions to the resurgence of racism, the seemingly endless War on Drugs, the problem of mass incarceration and the growth of the prison-industrial complex, and the reality of racial and class bias in arrests and sentencing, as well as resolutions and pronouncements calling the church to seek justice in policing, housing, and employment for people who have served felony sentences, to address inadequate legal representation for the indigent, to provide training and rehabilitation for prison inmates, and to restore voting rights for people who have served their time;

WHEREAS, not only the War on Drugs continues unabated but also the privatization of the prison industrial complex grows unimpeded, with the result that the United States, with only five percent of the world’s population, incarcerates twenty-five percent of the world’s prisoners, the highest percentage of incarceration in the world;

WHEREAS, Justice Commission Hearings on Mass Incarceration conducted by the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference found evidence supporting author Michelle Alexander’s position that mass incarceration is an essential aspect of the “New Jim Crow,” creating a system of modern-day enslavement. (2014 Report, Bearing Witness: A Nation in Chains). Indeed, according to the findings, “it is apparent that the system of mass incarceration in the U.S. is replete with human rights violations by standards of the U.S. Constitution and the United Nations International Standards of Conduct”;

WHEREAS, the growing prison industry is producing a vast underclass of former felons. Indeed, the situation regarding prisoner re-entry is dire. About three-quarters of a million prisoners are being

released in the community each year. They face extreme hardship in housing, employment, family reunification, health and mental health care, and general isolation and alienation. They also suffer from debt (required restitution and associated parole and probation fees, fines, and penalties, with little or no income), as well as voting and entitlement disenfranchisement;

WHEREAS, as a result of such legally permissible disenfranchisement, more African American men were disqualified from voting in 2014 than in 1870, the year the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified;

WHEREAS, in some of our largest cities, the high school dropout rate is over fifty percent; in public schools across America, only ten percent of eighth grade Black males read at or above a proficient level; and, in our national capital, three of every four young African American males can expect to serve time in prison; and

WHEREAS, the link among academic failure, delinquency, violence, and crime is welded to reading (The U.S. Department of Justice). Indeed, reliable data indicates that 85% of juveniles who interface with the court system are functionally illiterate and 70% of inmates in prison cannot read above fourth grade reading level. Inmates who receive no reading help have a 70% chance of returning to prison, while the risk of recidivism reduces to 16% for those who receive such assistance;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ support and reaffirm prior resolutions and pronouncements calling the church to continue sacred conversations on race and to engage in prophetic speech and action directed at eliminating systemic racism in all its guises, ending the "War on Drugs," stopping mass incarceration and the growth of the prison-industrial complex, ending racial and class bias in arrests and sentencing, implementing justice in policing, housing, and employment for people who have served felony sentences, addressing inadequate legal representation for the indigent, providing training and rehabilitation for prison inmates, and restoring voting rights for people who have served their sentences;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ identify the "New Jim Crow," defined as the disenfranchisement, marginalization, and re-subjugation of African Americans and accordingly the creation of a permanent caste of second-class citizens, as a critical human and civil rights issue in the United States on account of its devastating political, legal, and social effects upon African Americans, other people of color, youth, and people with limited economic and other resources; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ urges Justice and Witness Ministries, Conferences, Associations, and local congregations to provide opportunities for education, including a resource with information on the biblical and theological foundations on race, mobilization, public witness, and public policy advocacy to dismantle the New Jim Crow and to turn this tide of institutionalized racism and economic injustice.

#### FUNDING

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