

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

3 4 **Resolution of Witness in Support of Adult Survivors of Child Abuse and Neglect**

5 6 **A Resolution of Witness**

7 8 **Submitted by Central Atlantic Conference**

9 10 **Summary:**

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12 This resolution encourages the various settings of the United Church of Christ (UCC), especially
13 its congregations, to address publicly the healing needs of adult survivors of child abuse and
14 neglect by reinforcing the truth that survivors are not to blame for their victimization and that the
15 United Church of Christ welcomes them in experiencing God’s love and compassion within a
16 community that is called to radical inclusivity. To this end, it asks the UCC’s national setting to
17 create and disseminate an educational curriculum that can be used by churches as they seek to
18 minister compassionately and effectively to such survivors. It also encourages the various
19 settings of the UCC to advocate at the state and federal levels for various legislative and policy
20 reforms that will safeguard the rights and facilitate the healing of survivors. Adoption of this
21 resolution will be groundbreaking because for the first time, a national organization in the United
22 States – either secular or religious – will publicly proclaim its solidarity with, acceptance of, and
23 support for adult survivors of child abuse and neglect. And the hope is that by “living in” to this
24 resolution, the United Church of Christ will come to be identified as a safe place for survivors to
25 experience healing and true fellowship.

26 27 **Biblical, Theological, and Historical Grounding:**

28
29 The noted German theologian Martin Luther once said, “If you preach the gospel in all aspects
30 with the exception of the issues that deal specifically with your time, you are not preaching the
31 gospel at all.” Doubtless, there are problems intrinsic to the human condition that are troubling to
32 us all. Nevertheless, if there is a particular area of concern that emerges into our consciousness
33 and pricks our conscience here and now, then we must deal with it, no matter how dark its place
34 of origin. And one such relevant area of concern has been brought to our attention by a specific
35 group of sufferers who have come looking for help, looking to God for healing, and trusting that
36 our houses of worship will be homes of refuge and healing for them – indeed, that they will be
37 one of the few places of safety that they will ever know in their lives. These sufferers have been
38 traumatized by being assaulted and violated; they have been taken to the dark places of
39 someone’s soul. These are the survivors of child abuse, the victims of physical, verbal, and
40 sexual violence – and most often by those entrusted to protect, nurture, and guide them into
41 adulthood.

42
43 And regrettably, the church historically has failed to welcome and support these survivors.
44 Indeed, many of them have entered the offices of clergy looking for comfort and encouragement;
45 and almost as many have left feeling more trapped and guilty than they did before they sought
46 ecclesiastical support and succor. Imagine the dismay of the survivors in the presence of the

47 church's attitude of dismissal! Most often, it has only been by the grace of God, and not also
48 through the ministrations of the church, that they have survived their childhood horrors.

49
50 To be sure, the church has here only followed the precedent set by King David and Absalom in
51 relation to the violation of Tamar by her half-brother, Amnon (also the King's son), as recorded
52 in 2 Samuel 13: 1-22. Tamar's father, David, covered up the scandal, as did her brother,
53 Absalom, who took the desolate young woman into his home. Indeed, Tamar was declared
54 "disgraced" through no fault of her own and was asked to keep silent.

55
56 But demanding silence from victims is not the counsel of the Divine, who instead implores *us* to
57 "open (our) mouths, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy."
58 (Proverbs 31: 9) Indeed, God admonishes *us* to "do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one
59 who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor; (to) not mistreat or do violence to the
60 stranger, the orphan, or the widow; (and to) not shed innocent blood in his place." (Jeremiah 22:
61 3)

62
63 Still, the church overwhelmingly continues to disregard the still-speaking voice of God and to
64 ignore the pleadings of survivors. Perhaps it fears the potential damage to the reputations of
65 persons and families if it should listen and respond in Christ-like ways to the cries of survivors.
66 And, of course, some of the abusers themselves have been (and are) leaders in the church. But
67 the time has now come for the church to feel and act differently toward adult survivors of child
68 abuse and neglect – and to do so in a decisive and emancipative way.

69
70 To be sure, the issue to consider is not so much that or how the church has heretofore ignored or
71 denied the hidden hurts of survivors; rather, what is of utmost moment is what the God whom
72 Jesus decisively reveals declares about the long-term insidious and invidious effects of childhood
73 abuse and neglect and what we should be doing to respond constructively to them here and now.
74 Granted, the United Church of Christ's historical (and historic!) witness has partially responded
75 through resolutions advocating for the welfare of children, including those concerning "Child
76 Abuse & Exploitation of Youth" (1983 GS 14), "In Support of the Rights of God's Children"
77 (1993 GS 19), and "Creating a World Safe for Children Free from Violence" (1995 GS 20). But
78 that witness has lacked a clarion call proclaiming the UCC's commitment to provide safety and
79 healing to, as well as advocacy for, the survivors of such abuse and neglect. This resolution
80 would provide that much-needed and long-awaited call.

81
82 There are countless individuals sitting in our pews right now that have survived a horrendous
83 journey to one of the darkest corners of the human soul, a place that harbors justification for any
84 form of child abuse. This resolution seeks to bring the still-present wounds of those survivors
85 into the light of God's comfort and healing by declaring that the church and each of its members
86 as a follower of Christ have a responsibility to provide help and comfort to those who have been
87 violated, even and especially by family members; to those in need of reassurance and justice; and
88 to those who have been damaged and distressed by childhood abuse and neglect. And our open
89 arms will let each and every survivor know that as a member of the United Church of Christ,
90 "You are in a safe place." In so doing, we will heed the call of the God of Jesus, who invites us
91 to "bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

92

93 **The Text of the Motion:**

94
95 WHEREAS, Jesus declared in Matthew 25:40, “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done
96 it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me”;

97
98 WHEREAS, Jesus asked in Matthew 7:9, “What man is there of you, whom if his son asks for
99 bread, will he give him a stone?”;

100
101 WHEREAS, Jesus says in Matthew 18: 6-7, “But who so shall offend one of these little ones
102 which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he
103 were drowned in the depth of the sea”;

104
105 WHEREAS, one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually assaulted before they reach the
106 age of eighteen;¹

107
108 WHEREAS, the incidence rate of child abuse and neglect is 10 times as high (40 children per
109 1,000 children per year) as the incidence rate for all forms of cancer (3.9 individuals per 1,000
110 individuals per year),²

111
112 WHEREAS, children in their first year have the highest rate of victimization (24.4 children per
113 1,000 children) among individuals in respect to any one-year span in the national population;³

114
115 WHEREAS, 80% of perpetrators are parents;⁴

116
117 WHEREAS, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), or the various forms of abuse and neglect
118 (e.g., psychological, physical, sexual) that children experience often as a result of household
119 dysfunction (e.g., domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness), are the most preventable
120 causes of serious mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse in women, and high-risk behavior (e.g.,
121 IV drugs, promiscuity) for HIV, as well as significant contributors to the leading causes of death
122 in the general population (heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, and suicide);⁵

123
124 WHEREAS, ACES have a negative impact on child development, as manifested in adverse
125 neurobiological effects (e.g., brain abnormalities, stress hormone dysregulation), deleterious
126 psychosocial consequences (e.g., poor attachment, poor socialization, poor self-efficacy), and
127 significant health-risk behaviors (e.g., smoking, obesity, substance abuse, promiscuity);⁶

128
129 WHEREAS, ACES also have significant long-term consequences, including the occurrence and
130 recurrence of various diseases, dysfunctional coping and disabilities (e.g., major depression,
131 suicide, PTSD, drug and alcohol abuse, heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, sexually
132 transmitted diseases, intergenerational transmission of abuse), and assorted social problems (e.g.,
133 homelessness, prostitution, criminal behavior, dysfunctional parenting, inordinate utilization of
134 health and social services), often resulting in shortened lifespans;⁷

135
136 WHEREAS, the estimated total lifetime financial costs associated with all confirmed cases of
137 child maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological abuse and neglect) is
138 approximately \$124 billion *for every year of maltreatment*;⁸

139
140 WHEREAS, arbitrary statutes of limitations deny most adult survivors of child abuse and neglect
141 some means of just recompense for the crimes committed against them as children, as it is very
142 common for survivors to struggle for decades (and long after the expiry of such statutes) before
143 properly making the connection between childhood abuse and the struggles they often
144 experience;

145
146 WHEREAS, eliminating such statutes of limitations will provide many such survivors the
147 opportunity to gain just recompense from their perpetrators and/or the organizations that failed to
148 protect them (e.g., schools, daycare centers, religious associations, sports clubs, activity clubs);⁹
149

150 WHEREAS, many survivors of child abuse and neglect often experience spiritual struggles in the
151 course of healing, trying to come closer to God as they question how God could allow such
152 abuse and neglect to happen in the first place.¹⁰ Indeed, trauma can shake people's faith in a
153 natural or divine order and cast them into a state of existential crisis whereby they begin to lose
154 trust in an all-powerful and good God, assume that their world is anything but safe and well-
155 ordered, and believe that they themselves are wicked and deserving of bad outcomes;¹¹
156

157 Whereas, for some survivors, the loss of positive religious beliefs (e.g., in the goodness of others,
158 in spiritual and faith traditions, in a beneficent God) or the learning of negative religious beliefs
159 (e.g., that bad things happen because of divine sanction or retribution for individual sin or sins)
160 that often accompanies traumatization can be debilitating. Indeed, such loss or learning can fuel
161 the shame, guilt, despair, and hopelessness that undergird suicidality and harmful risk taking, as
162 well as adversely impact the ability and desire to show love to others.¹²
163

164 WHEREAS, insofar as the retention or acquirement of authentic religious beliefs and a
165 salubrious spirituality protects some survivors against suicide or contributes more generally to
166 their process of healing, the traumatized may also come to a point in their recovery when they
167 benefit by giving service back to others, both within and outside their religious community.
168 Finding ways that survivors can serve others or contribute to a higher cause can help them find
169 meaning and purpose in what they have experienced and in their lives. Often the survivors'
170 religious community can facilitate this kind of service, helping them to take down the walls they
171 have put up to protect themselves.¹³
172

173 WHEREAS, abused children normally do not tell anyone about their abuse; and even when they
174 become adults, they either never tell anyone or wait for years/decades before disclosing their
175 abuse because of the fear of negative responses from others;¹⁴
176

177 WHEREAS, in United States history, not one President or member of Congress has ever put the
178 plight of adult survivors of child abuse on the national agenda;

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180 WHEREAS, the media has been complicit in the fact that there has never been a national
181 discussion about the plight of adult survivors of child abuse and neglect; and
182

183 WHEREAS, there is no national database to report accurately on the number of adult survivors
184 of child abuse and neglect in the United States, thus negatively impacting the capacity to provide
185 adequate services for survivors;¹⁵
186

187 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of
188 Christ not only reaffirms and supports past General Synod resolutions advocating for the welfare
189 of children but also now calls upon the various settings of the UCC to address publicly the
190 healing needs of adult survivors of child abuse and neglect by reinforcing the truth that survivors
191 are not to blame for their victimization and that the United Church of Christ welcomes them in
192 experiencing God’s love and compassion within its community of radical inclusivity;
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194 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of Christ
195 encourages each Association and congregation of the United Church of Christ to educate its
196 members that adult survivors are, for the most part, invisible because of the compulsion they
197 have felt since childhood not to self-disclose, as well as to train its members to respond
198 positively to those who are ready to self-disclose (probably for the first time) through words and
199 deeds that are accepting, validating, non-judgmental, and non-pressuring;
200

201 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of
202 Christ asks the UCC’s national setting to assist in such educating and training by creating and
203 disseminating a study guide that can be used by churches as they seek to minister
204 compassionately and effectively to adult survivors of child abuse and neglect; and
205

206 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of
207 Christ calls upon the various settings of the UCC to work with state and federal representatives
208 to strengthen the Americans with Disabilities Act so that mental disabilities are accommodated
209 just as much as physical disabilities in the workplace; to encourage state and federal lawmakers
210 to develop a standardized method of reporting child mental, emotional, physical, and sexual
211 abuse and/or child neglect by clinicians, criminal justice organizations, social service providers,
212 healthcare organizations, insurance companies, researchers, and public policy makers; to
213 encourage state and federal lawmakers to eliminate statutes of limitations for child abuse and
214 neglect, as such statutes infringe upon the procedural due process rights of adult survivors of
215 child abuse and neglect by denying them access to the courts and thereby to legal justice; and to
216 work with the media and state and federal legislators to focus strongly on the need to support
217 adult survivors of child abuse and neglect.
218

219 **Funding:**
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221 The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the
222 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.
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224 **Implementation:**
225

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

- ¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/ace/prevalence.htm> ACE Study - Prevalence – Adverse Childhood Experiences
- ² Child Welfare League of America, “Testimony submitted to the House Subcommittee on Select Education of the Committee on Education and the Workforce for the hearing on CAPTA: Successes and Failures at Preventing Child Abuse, August 2, 2001”
- ³ HHS Releases National Statistics on Child Abuse and Neglect for 2006, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Child Maltreatment* 2006
- ⁴ <http://www.safehorizon.org/page/child-abuse-facts-56.html>
- ⁵ <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/prevalence.html>
- ⁶ http://www.zerotothree.org/maltreatment/trauma/can_narrative_4-26-15-v213.pdf
- ⁷ https://www.sccgov.org/sites/cac/Documents/training/SanJosePlenaryTICW_000.pdf
- ⁸ http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2012/p0201_child_abuse.html
- ⁹ Samaritan Safe Church, *Child Sexual Abuse Prevention*,
<http://scclanc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Why-PA-must-reform-SOL-FINAL-5-9-16-scc.pdf>
- ¹⁰ Walker, D. F., C. A. Courtois, and J. D. Aten (eds.), (2015) *Spiritually Oriented Psychology for Trauma*, American Psychological Association.
- ¹¹ Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- ¹² Colucci, E., & G. Martin (2008). “Religion and Spirituality along the Suicidal Path.” *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 38, 229-244.
- ¹³ Richards, P.S., & A.E. Bergin (eds.), (2000). *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Religious Diversity*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- ¹⁴ Ullman, Sarah E. (2003). “Social Reactions to Child Sexual Abuse Disclosures: A Critical Review.” *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, Vol. 12 (1) 2003.
- ¹⁵ <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/statistics/nis/#n4>

RESOURCES

1. *Allies in Healing; When the Person You Love Was Sexually Abused as a Child*, by L. Davis, MA (1991).
2. *Amongst Ourselves: A Self-Help Guide to Living with Dissociative Identity Disorder*, by T. Alderman, PhD & K. Marshall, LCSW (1988).
3. *Beyond Betrayal: Taking Charge of Your Life after Boyhood Sexual Abuse*, by R.B. Gartner, PhD (2005).
4. *Childhood Comes First: A Crash Course in Childhood for Adults*, by R. B. Gartner, PhD (2005).
5. *Conquering Incest: My Life as a Trauma Survivor*, by Diane Champé (2011).
6. *Cutting: Understanding and Overcoming Self-Mutilation*, by Steven Levenkron, MD (1988).
7. *Got Parts? An Insider’s Guide to Managing Life Successfully with Dissociative Identity Disorder*, by A. T. W. (2005).
8. *Growing Beyond Survival: A Self-Help Toolkit for Managing Traumatic Stress (Revised Edition)*, by Elizabeth G. Vermilyea, PhD (2013).
9. *I Can’t Get Over It: A Handbook for Trauma Survivors*, by Aphrodite Matsakis, PhD (1992).
10. *It’s Not You, It’s What Happened to You: Complex Trauma and Treatment*, by Christine Courtois, PhD, ABPP, LLC (2014).
11. *Life After Trauma: A Workbook for Healing*, by Dena Rosenbloom & Mary Beth Williams (Second Edition; 2010).
12. *Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive*, by Daniel Siegel, MD (Tenth Anniversary Edition; 2013).
13. *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, by Ellen Bass, MS & Laura Davis, MA (2009).
14. *Writing to Heal: A Guide Journal for Recovering from Trauma & Emotional Upheaval*, by James W. Pennebaker, PhD (2004).
15. *Your Surviving Spirit: A Spiritual Workbook for Coping with Trauma*, by Dusty Miller, EdD (2003).
16. <http://www.naasca.org/Graphics/ChildAbuseLives/CAlives-600x800-text.htm>