

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRINCIPLES FOR REFORM OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

WHEREAS our criminal justice policies in the United States have resulted in an imprisonment rate that is higher than that of any other country, and

WHEREAS the resulting imprisonments are seriously flawed by economic disparity and racial profiling, and

WHEREAS a high majority of those serving prison terms have committed crimes of nonviolence which could be more effectively addressed in treatment or diversion programs, and

WHEREAS criminal justice policies in the United States are currently directed toward punishment of offenders and seldom address the needs of the victims, and

WHEREAS the present approach to criminal justice and violence is simply not working as demonstrated by:

a continuing high crime rate; a high recidivism rate among those who have “paid their debt to society”

extremely high personal and social cost to the victims and offenders who are discarded by society

a heavy burden on the financial resources of every community, and

WHEREAS the restorative justice principles being adopted by many communities offer a positive alternative to punitive/retributive principles, and

WHEREAS this movement offers opportunities for the pain of victims to be heard and addressed; expects offenders to take responsibility for the harm they have caused; and, when possible, brings together victim, offender, and community members to form an agreement about how amends can be made, and

WHEREAS this movement offers a redemptive path to a productive and acceptable role in society for the offender as opposed to joining a growing body of permanent outcasts, and

WHEREAS participants in these community-based processes find them to be energizing, empowering, and healing, giving victim and offender a sense of ownership in the resolution of their own conflict and giving community members a greater sense of hope and possibility,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-third General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon Justice and Witness Ministries and its Criminal Justice and Human Rights Staff to develop and promote an educational campaign that sets forth restorative justice principles as well as examples of:

where and how the principles have become working expressions within the life of local churches

where and how they have become ministries and missions within the broader community

where and how churches and larger judicatories have succeeded in affecting public policy, laws, and institutional change in the judicial system

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the goal of this educational effort is to create and facilitate a social transformation through effective advocacy that leads to public, private, and faith programs that more nearly express justice for all people of every class, race, and gender and brings shalom to our communities,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the General Synod call on all churches, associations, and conferences to actively promote these goals.

Funding for this action will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

Resolution of witness. Requires a two-thirds vote for passage.