

Advocating for Justice in the Prison Industrial Complex

WHEREAS, the prophetic voice in Hebrew Scripture in Isaiah proclaims,

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners ...” (Isaiah 61:1);

WHEREAS, Jesus speaks of his mission and ministry,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free ...” (Luke 4: 18);

WHEREAS, we read instruction to Christian communities in 2 Corinthians 5:17,

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new" and in Hebrews 13:3 "remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured;"

WHEREAS, the U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration in the world and the number of people in the U.S. in the criminal justice system will soon surpass the number in higher education;

WHEREAS, spending on prisons and security now approaches our spending on national defense, although serious and violent crimes have dropped for the past decade;

WHEREAS, our nation's prison industrial complex now includes operation of prisons by private companies and Wall Street investment houses compete to underwrite private tax-exempt bonds while small rural communities increasingly look to the prison industry to replace lost farm-related and unskilled blue-collar jobs;

WHEREAS, the State of Arizona now incarcerates over 13% of its prisoners in private prisons ranking it 11th highest in the U.S. and is the national epicenter for incarcerating undocumented immigrants, Texas leads the nation in number of private prison beds, and New Mexico outsources the largest proportion of its inmate population to private corporations (43.8 %) in the nation;

WHEREAS, legislation has been proposed in the Arizona State Legislature to privatize 2000 prison beds;

WHEREAS, the Governors of 48 states, including those in our Southwest Conference UCC, have recently received letters from Corrections Corporation of America proposing the following:

“CCA (sic) is earmarking \$250 million for purchasing and managing government-owned corrections facilities. The program is a new opportunity for federal, state or local governments that are considering the benefits of partnership corrections. ... Physical requirements for facilities that would be eligible for purchase by the fund would include:

- A minimum rated occupancy of 1,000 beds;
- A structure age of no more than 25 years;
- A designation that the structure is suitable for immediate occupation or is already occupied by an inmate population; and
- An assurance by the agency partner that the agency has sufficient inmate population to maintain a minimum 90 percent occupancy rate over the term of the contract.”

WHEREAS, there exists a large body of research challenging claims of CCA and other private prison contractors of economic benefits and cost savings for states contracting to incarcerate prisoners in private prisons, for employment and economic benefits to communities where prisons are built, and questioning incentives for programs of rehabilitation where profits are generated for stock holders based on “occupancy” of prison beds;

WHEREAS, much contradictory evidence exists about the merits of prison labor especially as prison laborers diminish jobs for local community workers;

WHEREAS, the Eleventh General Synod of the UCC called for a moratorium on the construction of new prisons and jails and the Twenty-first General Synod of the UCC adopted the "Resolution: Prison Industrial Complex";

WHEREAS, the church must speak with prophetic clarity about injustice that promotes violence rather than public safety and about profit-making from incarceration and human trafficking;

WHEREAS, the church must speak with a pastoral heart and presence to those families wounded by injustice;

WHEREAS, there is a fundamental conflict between the goal of for-profit private prisons of earning profit for their shareholders and the ultimate goal of rehabilitation of our prison system; therefore, be it resolved that the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Southwest Conference United church of Christ calls for the abolition of for-profit private prisons.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Southwest Conference United Church of Christ calls for each setting in our Conference to commit to study and learn about the nature and dynamics of the private prison industry in our regions;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Southwest Conference United Church of Christ authorizes agents of our Conference to advocate for justice in the prison industry;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we examine our investments to ascertain our participation, if any, in those entities participating in the private prison industry.