

1971 RESOLUTION ON PRISON REFORM

WHEREAS. Christian Conscience demands that love for neighbor is a primary guide for the actions of men and society. The recognition that all men, rich and poor, prisoner and free, moral and immoral, are children of God calls for humane treatment and compassion for all men.

WHEREAS: The concern of Christ for those outcast by society, His love for the disinherited and disenfranchised of the earth, is of utmost significance to the Christian conscience. Christ's summary of religious ethics, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me," causes the Christian to speak out against inhuman treatment of "prisoners" by our society.

WHEREAS: Enough has been learned from the new human sciences of sociology, psychology and sociopathic behaviour, to say with new conviction "there but for the grace of God go I."

WHEREAS: In light of these elementary Christian beliefs the Connecticut Conference is outraged by the soul destroying experience of most American prisons. As Connecticut citizens, the Conference is particularly disturbed by the ineffective penal system in our own State.

WHEREAS: The Conference recognizes the many sincere efforts being made, the many conscientious people working toward improvements; however, they are not sufficient. The amount of pain and human suffering is horrifying, and general condition of our penal system is immoral, technically unsound, and expensive. Our prisons are a breeding ground for crime, recidivism is enormous and far too often vengeance is primary and rehabilitation secondary. Some of the conditions that are particularly disturbing to the Conference are listed:

The high number of bailable inmates confined for lengthy periods often in excess of six months while not convicted.

Lack of good medical, dental and psychiatric care.

Lack of educational opportunities for youth and adults while in prison.

Lack of alternative institutions such as halfway houses and minimum security institutions.

The low number of confined offenders participating in work and educational release programs.

The mixing of ages and hardened criminals with first-time offenders.

The small number of chaplains and trained treatment and rehabilitation personnel.

The total inadequacy of visiting facilities in Somers, Cheshire, and

Niantic Correctional Institutions and in all Correctional Centers.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: In light of these considerations the

Conference calls upon:

1. The Council for Christian Social Action of the United Church of Christ to develop statements concerning the Christian conscience and the need for prison reform.
2. The churches and members of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ to study and examine the prison conditions in our State and cooperate with all efforts for true reform and rehabilitation.
3. The churches and members of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ to join with others of good will in observing Sunday, October 24, 1971, as a time of mourning and remembrance for the 43 persons killed in the tragedy at Attica Correctional Facility on September 13, 1971.
4. The Governor, members of the State Senate and House of Representatives, Senators and Representatives to the U.S. Congress and the President of the United States to make prison reform a high priority of government concern and action.
5. The Conference Minister to appoint a task force of at least five (5) persons to study the educational facilities in correctional centers and correctional institutions and propose action by the next annual meeting.