A RESOLUTION OF IMPLEMENTATION TO END MASS INCARCERATION FOR NON-VIOLENT OFFENSES

Submitted by the Leadership Circle of Shalom United Church of Christ, New Haven and Church of the Redeemer, New Haven

WHEREAS Jesus said to his disciples that when the Son of Man comes in majesty, he will say to those on his right, “I was in prison and you visited me,” (Matthew 25:36) identifying himself with the “least of these,” and Jesus performed his ministry in the context of his proclamation quoting the prophet Isaiah that “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”; and

WHEREAS the United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, 6 to 10 times greater than other wealthy industrialized nations, and surpassing in both absolute and per capita terms countries such as Russia, China, Cuba and Iran; and

WHEREAS rates of incarceration in the U.S. quintupled in the past 40 years, with persons of color, especially black men, incarcerated in vastly disproportionate numbers, more than half for non-violent crimes, and receiving longer sentences than white persons for the same offenses; and

WHEREAS the so-called “War on Drugs” has become the primary mechanism for a pervasive system of racialized social control: even though a majority of illegal drug users are white, three-quarters of people imprisoned for drug use are persons of color; and

WHEREAS in 1976 and 1977, the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ passed Criminal Justice resolutions to study operations and results of the Connecticut justice system, and in 1982 and 1986, subsequent resolutions expressed concerns about inequality in sentencing and the disparate impact of incarceration on the poor; and since then, the numbers are greater and the unequal impact of incarceration on people of color and those living in poverty is now substantially worse than it was in the 1980’s; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that we the delegates to the 147th Annual Meeting of the Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ, in the spirit of Jesus who proclaims “release to the captives…,” and says that the way we treat prisoners is the way we treat him, call upon members of Connecticut Conference Churches to express to all elected officials in our local communities, our state, and our nation that this system of mass incarceration is unjust and a morally outrageous abuse of human rights; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Sacred Conversations on Race Ministry Team and the Associations continue to educate people and Congregations of the Conference and vigorously support actions to substantially remedy this human rights abuse at all levels of our society; and
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED we ask the Connecticut Conference’s Legislative Advocate to prioritize work on ending mass incarceration by informing congregations about and by advocating for the passage of legislation that promotes alternatives to mass incarceration such as: racial and economic justice in criminal sentencing; treatment programs for drug offenders and those with mental illness rather than criminalization and incarceration; re-entry services for ex-offenders; and the implementation of restorative justice principles in all possible circumstances; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that this resolution, if affirmed, be put into proper form for submission to the 2015 General Synod.