

ON RECOGNIZING OPIOID ADDICTION AS A HEALTH EPIDEMIC, ENSURING
ACCESS TO TREATMENT AND PHARMACEUTICAL CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

Submitted by the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries

A Resolution of Witness

SUMMARY

This resolution urges the recognition of the increasing prevalence of opioid addiction as a health epidemic and calls for more affordable and accessible addiction treatment. Further, this resolution urges pharmaceutical companies to exercise corporate responsibility and fully assess their role in the epidemic and enact practices to curtail the availability of opioids in a responsible way which does not create more harm while ensuring access to appropriate use.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE

“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-29)
Jesus’ healing ministry was for all those he encountered. He turned none away and demonstrated God’s healing presence knows no social boundaries. Jesus healed the leper and the hemorrhaging woman, even when those around him were frightened because they were considered unclean. To be followers of Jesus’ example, we must remove the stigma of opioid addiction and set aside any prejudices we carry for those who are in need of healing from this terrible epidemic. Affordable and accessible addiction treatment is out of reach of too many and creates further separation of the human family. Further, pharmaceutical companies must recognize the responsibility they carry in this epidemic and create corporate cultures which set aside profits and focuses on only doing good and not harm. As followers of Jesus, we must reach out to the sick and hurt, and challenge the powers who have lost touch with sacredness of human life.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

Whereas, faith leaders and pastors of all faiths including the United Church of Christ have a unique vantage on the opioid crisis, observing individuals’ sufferings, families’ anguish, and the shame of addiction that prevents the necessary discourse to help curb this national affliction; and

Whereas, opioid medications provide crucial pain management for terminal diseases and certain chronic conditions; and

Whereas, interference with access to opioid medications for individuals suffering from terminal diseases and chronic conditions is unethical and should be avoided; and

Whereas, in 2016 the number of overdose deaths involving opioids was five times higher than it was in 1999, and on average 115 people die every day from an opioid overdose¹; and

Whereas, a recent study by the RAND Corporation showed that while the number of Medicaid recipients receiving medication to treat opioid addiction has increased, the increase is smaller in poorer counties and in areas with greater black and Hispanic residents²; and

Whereas, pharmaceutical or health care companies that make or distribute opioid drugs face growing potential liability from lawsuits along with regulatory, medical and public pressure to drastically reduce their use, including 27 U.S. states and more than 400 cities, counties, and other entities suing these corporations³; and

Whereas, according to the White House Council of Economic Advisors, the opioid epidemic cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$504 billion in 2015, equivalent to 2.8 percent of GDP⁴;

Therefore, be it resolved, that the General Synod of the United Church of Christ urges that all settings of the United Church of Christ and its members recognize opioid addiction as a health epidemic and calls on Congress to increase Medicare and Medicaid funding to treat the addiction;

Be it further resolved that the General Synod recognizes that opioid addiction is not a determinant of a person's worth, and commits to public discourse on the need for just and equitable treatment to lessen the stigma from asking for help and treatment;

Be it finally resolved that members and settings of the United Church of Christ use all manner of activism, including shareholder activism of opioid pharmaceutical manufacturers and distribution corporations, to hold accountable those who are acting in bad faith with the American people, either by irresponsibly marketing, distributing, and prescribing to individuals or by criminalizing those who become addicted.

FUNDING

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

IMPLEMENTATION

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>

² <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2018/06/25.html>

³ <https://www.addictioncenter.com/community/states-filed-suits-against-opioid/> and https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3135410

⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/images/The%20Underestimated%20Cost%20of%20the%20Opioid%20Crisis.pdf>

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