



Report – Available at General Synod – on Work in Support of “A Resolution to Abolish the Growth and Existence of Private Prisons”

United Church Funds is an Associated Ministry of the United Church of Christ, investing on behalf of churches and institutions of the UCC, with the mission of “Investing for a Just World for All.” As part of this mission, United Church Funds works to make the corporations in which we invest more sustainable and less harmful to communities and creation.

The 21st General Synod stated that “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” and that “African Americans, Latinos and Latinas, and indigenous peoples are disproportionately incarcerated.” That General Synod also noted that “our nation’s prison industrial complex now includes operation of prisons by private companies and Wall Street investment house 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.” (97-GS-54)¹

In 2017, as part of a determination of those industries and practices we believe are antithetical to investing for a just world for all, United Church Funds created an exclusionary screen on private prisons. We no longer invest in corporations that operate private prisons. We are proud of this important step. We recognize, however, that not owning these companies is only part of the problem. For example, many banks are active in lending to private prisons.

As a founding member of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, the UCC has been active, through United Church Funds, in seeking that the banks in which we’re invested stop funding private prisons. We have been a part of engagements with JP Morgan Chase, Wells Fargo, SunTrust and others seeking that they examine how their investments in prison companies run afoul of their own commitments to human rights and of international human rights law.

In part based on these engagements, UCF is gratified that several banks have recently made commitments to end their finance of private prisons, including Wells Fargo, JP Morgan Chase and U.S. Bank.^{2 3}

¹ http://rescarta.ucc.org/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp?doc_id=8abee2f6-352d-48f9-958b-49a311bc4489/ucoc0000/UD000001/00000022

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/banks-bow-to-pressure-to-stop-profiting-from-trumps-immigration-policy-but-big-tech-remains-defiant/2019/03/10/87bec704-40ea-11e9-a0d3-1210e58a94cf_story.html

³ <https://www.iccr.org/investors-welcome-jpmc-decision-withdraw-private-prisons>

United Church Funds commits to advocating that suppliers to prison operating corporations cease these activities. Food providers, phone providers and other service providers have high levels of risk for contributing to the abuse of the rights of prisoners.

UCF supports the concepts and many of the recommended actions of the proposed General Synod 32 resolution "A Resolution to Abolish the Growth and Existence of Private Prisons." While we would prefer that the resolution recommend that suppliers and financiers of private prisons be advocated for change before divestment, we support the spirit of the resolution and have made significant strides to act in accordance to its call for justice.