The Business Committee of the Thirty-Third General Synod has recommended this proposed resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

**A RESOLUTION TO BAN THE PRACTICE OF CONVERSION THERAPY**

**A Resolution of Witness**

Submitted by the Open and Affirming Coalition and the Mental Health Network

**SUMMARY**

This Resolution urges congregations and other settings in the United Church of Christ to advocate for a ban on “conversion” or “reparative” therapy—a medical practice legal in all 50 states that attempts to change or “repair” the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ+ persons in the belief that their orientation or identity is a mental illness. The Resolution further urges congregations and other settings to strengthen their efforts to reach their LGBTQ+ neighbors, especially youth, with the Good News that their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression are gifts from God.

**BACKGROUND**

Conversion therapy has existed in one form or another since the late 19th century. While the practice has caused demonstrable harm to the mental and physical health of LGBTQ+ persons, conversion therapy continues to be legal throughout the United States. According to practitioners of conversion therapy, the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ+ persons is a disease, defect or developmental disorder. This claim has been repudiated by every professional association in the field of health care, many of which have advocated for a ban on the discredited practice.

According to a report published the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law (June 2019), 698,000 adults in the United States have experienced conversion therapy, and 20,000 LGBTQ+ youth will be subjected to conversion therapy if state legislatures refuse to act.

Also according to the Williams Institute (June 15, 2020), LGBTQ+ people who were subjected to conversion therapy have shown a greater risk of suicidal thoughts and attempted suicide than LGBTQ+ people who had never experienced this therapy, including
- 92% greater odds of lifetime suicidal ideation,
- 88% greater odds of attempting suicide,
- 75% greater odds of planning to attempt suicide.

The consensus of the mental health care profession was summed up in the “Position Statement on Attempts to Change Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, or Gender Expression” released by the American Psychoanalytic Association in 2012. They found:
“Psychoanalytic technique does not encompass purposeful attempts to “convert,” “repair,” change or shift an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such directed efforts are against fundamental principles of psychoanalytic treatment and often result in substantial psychological pain by reinforcing damaging internalized attitudes.”

BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

The biblical tradition affirms that all human beings are made “in the image of God.” (Gen. 1:27) The church’s witness affirms that “in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith” and that “all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 26-28) We are therefore to “love our neighbor as ourselves” (Lev. 19:9-18 and Matt. 22:40) and act with empathy towards all others (cf. the “Golden Rule” in Lev. 19:18 and Matt. 7:12).

The capacity to love and seek love is God’s gift to all human beings. Love is a reflection God’s inner life as Trinity—the three divine persons whose love cannot not be contained but is poured out in God’s acts of creation and redemption. Human love in its many expressions is therefore God’s design for humanity, and is offered to all without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity. The psychological and spiritual damage inflicted by “conversion therapy” on LGBTQ+ people, especially youth, violates the image of God that is embodied in every human being, harms our neighbor, and denies to others the grace we claim for ourselves.

HISTORICAL GROUNDING

For nearly five decades, General Synods of the United Church of Christ have repeatedly affirmed the dignity, humanity and rights of LGBTQ+ persons. This Resolution follows the trajectory set by a number of resolutions and pronouncements adopted by previous General Synods since 1975, including “Resolution Deploring the Violation of Civil Rights of Gay and Bisexual Persons” (11th General Synod 1977), “Resolution Calling on United Church of Christ Congregations to Declare Themselves Open and Affirming” (15th General Synod 1985), “Resolution Deploring Violence against Lesbian and Gay People” (17th General Synod 1989), “Prevention of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth Suicide” (22nd General Synod 1999), “Affirming the Participation and Ministry of Transgender People within the United Church of Christ and Supporting their Civil and Human Rights” (24th General Synod 2003) and “Equal Marriage Rights for All” (25th General Synod 2005). Common to all of these actions is the belief, grounded in our faith, that LGBTQ+ persons share in the image of the Creator, and like all other persons deserve protection from violence, deprivation of rights, and any other violation of their dignity as human beings.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS the medical practice known as “conversion therapy” or “reparative therapy” regards LGBTQ+ persons as abnormal or defective, and attempts to change or “repair” non-conforming sexual orientation or gender identity through widely-discredited therapeutic practices,
WHEREAS conversion therapy for adults is legal in 50 states and all U.S. territories, while conversion therapy for youth and children is still legal in 30 states,¹⁰ and

WHEREAS many studies have shown that attempts to change or “repair” sexual orientation or gender identity are associated with compromised mental health including, among other harms, lifelong suffering as the result of internalized shame, increased risk of suicide, and difficulty in forming stable and lasting relationships,¹¹ and

WHEREAS a survey of at-risk LGBTQ+ youth published by the Trevor Project in 2020 showed that 42 percent who were subjected to conversion therapy had attempted suicide, while the attempted suicide rate of transgender and non-binary youth during or after conversion therapy was even higher at 57 percent,¹² and

WHEREAS virtually every professional association in the health care industry has declared that conversion therapy is ineffective, unethical or harmful, including the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychoanalytic Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association, and the National Association of Social Workers,¹³ and

WHEREAS in December 2020 UCC denominational leaders joined Archbishop Desmond Tutu and more than 400 other Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu faith leaders as signatories of the statement “Declaring the Sanctity of life and the Dignity of All” which called “for all attempts to change, suppress or erase a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression—commonly known as ‘conversion therapy’—to end, and for these harmful practices to be banned.”¹⁴

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that The Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ, affirming the dignity and worth of all people, deplores the practice of “conversion therapy” or “reparative therapy” that denies LGBTQ+ youth and adults the opportunity to experience the blessings of love and human integrity, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that The Thirty-Third General Synod urges parents, authorized ministers and care-givers in the United Church of Christ to protect those in their care from any practice or program that purports to “cure” their sexual orientation or gender identity, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that The Thirty-Third General Synod urges congregations and all other settings of the church to advocate for state and federal laws protecting adults, youth and children from “conversion therapy” by banning the practice, and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that The Thirty-Third General Synod urges congregations and other settings to strengthen their efforts to reach their LGBTQ+ neighbors, especially youth, with the Good News that their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression are gifts from God.

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

1 "LGBTQ+" is a common abbreviation for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer." The plus sign indicates that no acronym can fully express the rich diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities in the human family. Another common abbreviation is "LGBTQIA+," which includes the intersex and asexual communities.


3 Human Rights Campaign. The Lies and Dangers of Efforts to Change Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity. www.hrc.org/resources/the-lies-and-dangers-of-reparative-therapy


5 Human Rights Campaign. See original citation.

6 Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. Conversion Therapy and LGBT Youth. http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/conversion-therapy-and-lgbt-youth

7 Williams Institute. See citation above.


9 Human Rights Campaign. See original citation.

10 Movement Advancement Project. See original citation.

11 American Psychoanalytic Association. See original citation.


13 Human Rights Campaign. See original citation.