

**RESOLUTION TO ESTABLISH VOLUNTARY FUND FOR LEGAL SUPPORT TO  
NONVIOLENT ARRESTEES**

1    **Whereas** we seek to live as committed followers and disciples of Jesus,

2    **Whereas** we live continuously under human governments whose laws and decrees often run  
3 counter to Jesus' teachings of loving neighbor, caring for the least, living as peacemakers, creating  
4 shalom, and practicing welcome to marginalized peoples,

5    **Whereas** prayerful and faithful discernment has led some, since the origins of Christianity, to  
6 actively resist the unjust laws and decrees of human governments,

7    **Whereas** we participate in a manifestation of Christ's body, the United Church of Christ, that has  
8 often offered faith-based critiques of the government under which we live, at all levels (regardless  
9 of which political party dominates at a given time),

10   **Whereas** this faith-based critique and resistance leads some to participate in acts of protest and  
11 non-violent civil disobedience,

12   **Whereas** this participation in acts of protest and non-violent civil disobedience creates the risk of  
13 arrest and its associated expenses (e.g., bail and legal expenses),

14   **Whereas** prayerful and faithful discernment sometimes leads those who do not (or cannot)  
15 participate in protest and nonviolent civil disobedience to act in support and solidarity with those  
16 who do,

17   **Be it resolved that:**

18   The Michigan Conference, UCC, establish a 'pass-through' line item under the Prophetic Integrity  
19 Mission Area Team (PIMAT) budget designated as "Legal Support for Nonviolent Arrestees."

20   **Be it further resolved that:**

21 The Michigan Conference, UCC, designate \$25 under this budget item as a 'placeholder'  
22 amount.

23 PIMAT be given charge of assessing requests to open this item for contributions, opening this  
24 budget line for contributions, and administering these funds.

25 In assessing the appropriate use of this line item and the direction of the funds it receives that  
26 consideration be given to resolutions passed by the UCC General Synod and by the Michigan  
27 Conference at its annual meetings.

28 When it is opened, PIMAT assist individuals and organizations (or congregations) with the  
29 solicitation of funds for this line item.

30 Submitted by Phoenix Community Church, UCC, Kalamazoo MI, July 2017. Endorsed by Justice &  
31 Peace Team, Edgewood United Church, UCC, July 2017.

## **Resolution to Establish Voluntary Fund for Legal Support to Nonviolent Arrestees**

### BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

Actions undertaken to actively oppose unjust dictates from human governments come to us, first, through Hebrew scripture.

- In the book of Exodus we learn that the midwives Shiphrah and Puah "feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them." (Exodus 1: 15-17)
- The well-known stories of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3) and Daniel in the lions' den (Daniel 6) are tales firmly anchored in resistance to the dictates of governing authorities.
- The prophets call God's people again and again to condemn injustice and stand with the powerless.

In the scriptural testimony of the New Testament we find Jesus:

- Claiming the prophetic call to "proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4: 18b).
- Calling us to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might" and to love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22: 37-39)
- Teaching people to give "to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22: 21).

These words of Jesus call us to continuously examine where our highest loyalties and deepest commitments lie. In word and in action Jesus teaches that those loyalties and commitments do not belong to humanly established law and practice.

"The biblical lifestyle," declares the 20<sup>th</sup> century American theologian William Stringfellow, "is always a witness of resistance to the status quo in politics, economics, and all society. It is a witness of resurrection from death. Paradoxically, those who embark on the biblical witness constantly risk death - through execution, exile, imprisonment, persecution, defamation, or harassment - at the behest of the rulers of this age. Yet those who do not resist the rulers of the present darkness are consigned to a moral death, the death of their humanness. That, of all the ways of dying, is the most ignominious." (*Instead of Death*)

Martin Luther King, Jr. reminds us that the church is called to be "a 'colony of heaven,' called to obey God rather than man" ("Letter From Birmingham Jail").

We seek to love God and love neighbor. We pray and work for God's will "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6: 10). We each discern our role in this work. The proposed resolution could help empower and aid some among us for the work to which they are called and invite each of us to participate in bearing witness to resurrection from death and resisting the powers of moral death among us.

## OTHER BACKGROUND

In the first seven months of 2017 numerous clergy and laypeople have been arrested throughout the United States as a result of demonstrations related to various issues, including:

- Federal healthcare proposals (Washington, DC, July 13)
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement tactics (Los Angeles, April 13 and Boston, April 24)
- General protests against the current administration's policies (Chicago, February 22)
- State budget proposals and processes (Connecticut, June 5)

This list represents a small portion of recent demonstrations and arrests.

Events such as these stand in a long history of faithful Christian witness against injustice that has often included the risk of arrest and legal reprisals. This history of active resistance to unjust authority begins with those who refused to pledge allegiance to the Roman Empire or to engage in the Empire's wars. It continues distinctly through folk such as our Anabaptist and Quaker kin, appears in U.S. history in movements such as the abolitionists and the suffragists, and finds a powerful model in the anti-Nazi Confessing Church of Hitler's Germany.

In recent years the work of justice and peace has exposed some followers of Jesus to legal consequences for activism related to issues such as:

- Civil rights
- Apartheid
- Environmental defense
- Nuclear armaments
- LGBTQ rights
- Unjust warfare

Much of this faith-based activism includes nonviolent demonstrations and intentional acts of civil disobedience. Allies of that activism often establish bail and legal defense funds to provide assistance for activists. The Standing Rock Legal Defense Collective is an excellent current example of this. Other examples of similar efforts to pool resources come to us from sources as diverse as unionization struggles, the civil rights movement, ACT UP (a 1980's AIDS advocacy group), and anti-war movements.

Numerous precedents for providing bail and legal assistance through collecting funds exist. Establishing the means for collecting such funds in the Michigan UCC would be a concrete expression of support for, and solidarity with, those who feel called to bear public witness to the work of justice in ways that may risk legal consequences.