Supporting Adult Survivors of Child Abuse and Neglect

Summary: A resolution sponsored by the Chesapeake Association and endorsed by the CAC Board of Directors, to be submitted for consideration by the CAC delegates to the 2016 CAC Annual Meeting. In employing biblical-theological reasoning and citing empirical and social science data and research, this resolution calls upon the CAC to welcome, support, and advocate for adult survivors of child abuse.

WHEREAS, Jesus declared in Matthew 25:40, “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me”;

WHEREAS, Jesus asked in Matthew 7:9, “What man is there of you, whom if his son asks for bread, will he give him a stone?”;

WHEREAS, Jesus says in Matthew 18: 6-7, “But who so shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea”;

WHEREAS, one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually assaulted before they reach the age of eighteen;¹

WHEREAS, the incidence rate of child abuse and neglect is 10 times as high (40 children per 1,000 children per year) as the incidence rate for all forms of cancer (3.9 individuals per 1,000 individuals per year);²

WHEREAS, children in their first year have the highest rate of victimization (24.4 children per 1,000 children) among individuals in respect to any one-year span in the national population;³
WHEREAS, 80% of perpetrators are parents; 4

WHEREAS, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), or the various forms of abuse and neglect (e.g., psychological, physical, sexual) that children experience often as a result of household dysfunction (e.g., domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness), are the most preventable causes of serious mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse in women, and of high-risk behavior (IV drugs, promiscuity) for HIV, as well as significant contributors to the leading causes of death in the general population (heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, and suicide); 5

WHEREAS, ACES have a negative impact on child development, as manifested in adverse neurobiological effects (e.g., brain abnormalities, stress hormone dysregulation), deleterious psychosocial consequences (e.g., poor attachment, poor socialization, poor self-efficacy), and significant health-risk behaviors (e.g., smoking, obesity, substance abuse, promiscuity); 6

WHEREAS, ACES also have significant long-term consequences, including the occurrence and recurrence of various diseases and disabilities (major depression, suicide, PTSD, drug and alcohol abuse, heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, sexually transmitted diseases, intergenerational transmission of abuse) and assorted social problems, (homelessness, prostitution, criminal behavior, dysfunctional parenting, inordinate utilization of health and social services), often resulting in shortened lifespans; 7

WHEREAS, the estimated total lifetime financial costs associated with all confirmed cases of child maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and neglect) is approximately $124 billion for every year of maltreatment; 8
WHEREAS, many survivors of child abuse and neglect often experience spiritual struggles in the course of healing, trying to come closer to God as they question how God could allow such abuse and neglect to happen in the first place. Indeed, trauma can shake people’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast them into a state of existential crisis whereby they begin to lose trust in an all-powerful and good God, assume that their world is anything but safe and well-ordered, and believe that they are wicked and deserving of bad outcomes;\(^9\)

Whereas, for some survivors, the loss of positive religious beliefs (e.g., in the goodness of others, in spiritual and faith traditions, in a beneficent God) or the learning of negative religious beliefs (e.g., that bad things happen because of divine sanction or retribution for individual sin or sins) that often accompanies traumatization can be debilitating. Indeed, such loss or learning can fuel the shame, guilt, despair, and hopelessness that undergird suicidality and harmful risk taking, as well as negatively impact the ability and desire to show love to others.\(^{10}\)

WHEREAS, insofar as the retention or acquirement of religious beliefs and spirituality protects some survivors against suicide or contributes more generally to their process of healing, the traumatized may also come to a point in their recovery when they benefit by giving service back to others, both within and outside their religious community. Finding ways that survivors can serve others or contribute to a higher cause can help them find meaning and purpose in what they have experienced and in their lives. Often the survivors’ religious community can facilitate this kind of service, helping them to take down the walls they have put up to protect themselves.\(^ {12}\)

WHEREAS, abused children normally don’t tell anyone about their abuse; and even when they become adults, they either never tell
anyone or wait for years/decades before disclosing their abuse because of the fear of negative responses from others;\textsuperscript{13} WHEREAS, not one President or any member of Congress in the history of our country has ever put the plight of adult survivors of child abuse on the national agenda;

WHEREAS, there has been no national discussion in the media about the plight of adult survivors of child abuse and neglect; and

WHEREAS, there is no national database to report accurately on the number of adult survivors of child abuse and neglect in the United States, thus negatively impacting the capacity to provide adequate services for survivors;\textsuperscript{14}

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ reaffirm and support past General Synod Resolutions advocating for the welfare of children and now call the church to address publicly the healing needs of adult survivors of child abuse and neglect by reinforcing the truth that survivors are not to blame for their victimization and that the United Church of Christ welcomes them in experiencing God’s love and compassion within the church community;\textsuperscript{15}

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that each association and congregation of the Central Atlantic Conference be encouraged to educate its members that adult survivors are, for the most part, invisible because of the compulsion they have felt since childhood not to self-disclose, as well as to train its church members to react positively to those who are ready to self-disclose (probably for the first time) through responses that are accepting, validating, non-judgmental, and non-pressuring;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Central Atlantic Conference work with state and federal representatives to strengthen the Americans
with Disabilities Act so that mental disabilities are accommodated just as much as physical disabilities in the workplace; encourage state and federal lawmakers to develop a standardized method of reporting child mental, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and/or neglect by clinicians, criminal justice organizations, social service providers, healthcare organizations, insurance companies, researchers, and public policy makers; encourage state and federal lawmakers to eliminate the statute of limitations for child abuse and neglect, as such a statute infringes upon the procedural due process rights of adult survivors of child abuse and neglect by denying them access to the courts; and work with the media and state and federal legislators to focus strongly on the need to support adult survivors; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution, if approved, be put in the proper form by the Board of Directors of the Central Atlantic Conference for submission to General Synod 31(2017).

1 http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/ace/prevalence.htm ACE Study - Prevalence – Adverse Childhood Experiences
2 Child Welfare League of America, “Testimony submitted to the House Subcommittee on Select Education of the Committee on Education and the Workforce for the hearing on CAPTA: Successes and Failures at Preventing Child Abuse, August 2, 2001”
5 http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/prevalence.html
6 http://www.zerothethree.org/maltreatment/trauma/can_narrative_4-26-15-v213.pdf
7 https://www.sccgov.org/sites/cac/Documents/training/SanJosePlenaryTICW_000.pdf
8 http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2012/p0201_child_abuse.html
14 https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/statistics/nis/#n4
15 Past UCC resolutions advocating for child welfare include: (1) 1983 GS 14 – Child Abuse & Exploitation of Youth; (2) 1993 GS 19 – In Support of the Rights of God’s Children; (3) 1995 GS 20 – Creating a World Safe for Children Free from Violence.
RESOURCES


5. **Conquering Incest: My Life as a Trauma Survivor**, by Diane Champé (2011).


11. **It’s Not You, It’s What Happened to You: Complex Trauma and Treatment**, by Christine Courtois, PhD, ABPP, LLC (2014).


For further information, please contact the resolution’s author, Diane Champé, edchampe@msn.com.