

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

35 WHEREAS, 80% of perpetrators are parents;⁴

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

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

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

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63 WHEREAS, the estimated total lifetime financial costs associated with
64 all confirmed cases of child maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse,
65 psychological abuse and neglect) is approximately \$124 billion *for every*
66 *year of maltreatment*;⁸

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68 WHEREAS, many survivors of child abuse and neglect often experience
69 spiritual struggles in the course of healing, trying to come closer to God
70 as they question how God could allow such abuse and neglect to
71 happen in the first place.⁹ Indeed, trauma can shake people's faith in a
72 natural or divine order and cast them into a state of existential crisis
73 whereby they begin to lose trust in an all-powerful and good God,
74 assume that their world is anything but safe and well-ordered, and
75 believe that they are wicked and deserving of bad outcomes;¹⁰

76
77 Whereas, for some survivors, the loss of positive religious beliefs
78 (e.g., in the goodness of others, in spiritual and faith traditions, in a
79 beneficent God) or the learning of negative religious beliefs (e.g., that
80 bad things happen because of divine sanction or retribution for
81 individual sin or sins) that often accompanies traumatization can be
82 debilitating. Indeed, such loss or learning can fuel the shame, guilt,
83 despair, and hopelessness that undergird suicidality and harmful risk
84 taking, as well as negatively impact the ability and desire to show love
85 to others.¹¹

86
87 WHEREAS, insofar as the retention or acquirement of religious beliefs
88 and spirituality protects some survivors against suicide or contributes
89 more generally to their process of healing, the traumatized may also
90 come to a point in their recovery when they benefit by giving service
91 back to others, both within and outside their religious community.
92 Finding ways that survivors can serve others or contribute to a higher
93 cause can help them find meaning and purpose in what they have
94 experienced and in their lives. Often the survivors' religious community
95 can facilitate this kind of service, helping them to take down the walls
96 they have put up to protect themselves. ¹²

97
98 WHEREAS, abused children normally don't tell anyone about their
99 abuse; and even when they become adults, they either never tell

100 anyone or wait for years/decades before disclosing their abuse because
101 of the fear of negative responses from others;¹³

102 WHEREAS, not one President or any member of Congress in the history
103 of our country has ever put the plight of adult survivors of child abuse
104 on the national agenda;

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

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

113
114 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Central Atlantic Conference
115 of the United Church of Christ reaffirm and support past General
116 Synod Resolutions advocating for the welfare of children and now call
117 the church to address publicly the healing needs of adult survivors of
118 child abuse and neglect by reinforcing the truth that survivors are not
119 to blame for their victimization and that the United Church of Christ
120 welcomes them in experiencing God's love and compassion within
121 the church community;¹⁵

122
123 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that each association and congregation of
124 the Central Atlantic Conference be encouraged to educate its members
125 that adult survivors are, for the most part, invisible because of the
126 compulsion they have felt since childhood not to self-disclose, as well
127 as to train its church members to react positively to those who are
128 ready to self-disclose (probably for the first time) through responses
129 that are accepting, validating, non-judgmental, and non-pressuring;

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131 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Central Atlantic Conference work
132 with state and federal representatives to strengthen the Americans

133 with Disabilities Act so that mental disabilities are accommodated just
134 as much as physical disabilities in the workplace; encourage state and
135 federal lawmakers to develop a standardized method of reporting child
136 mental, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and/or neglect by
137 clinicians, criminal justice organizations, social service providers,
138 healthcare organizations, insurance companies, researchers, and public
139 policy makers; encourage state and federal lawmakers to eliminate the
140 statute of limitations for child abuse and neglect, as such a statute
141 infringes upon the procedural due process rights of adult survivors of
142 child abuse and neglect by denying them access to the courts; and work
143 with the media and state and federal legislators to focus strongly on the
144 need to support adult survivors; and
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146 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution, if approved, be put in
147 the proper form by the Board of Directors of the Central Atlantic
148 Conference for submission to General Synod 31(2017).

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- 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”
- ³ HHS Releases National Statistics on Child Abuse and Neglect for 2006, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Child Maltreatment 2006*
- ⁴ <http://www.safehorizon.org/page/child-abuse-facts-56.html>
- ⁵ <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/prevalence.html>
- ⁶ http://www.zerotothree.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
- ⁹ Walker, D. F., C. A. Courtois, and J. D. Aten (Eds.), (2015) *Spiritually Oriented Psychology for Trauma*, American Psychological Association.
- ¹⁰ Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- ¹¹ Colucci, E., & G. Martin (2008). “Religion and Spirituality along the Suicidal Path.” *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 38, 229-244.
- ¹² Richards, P.S., & A.E. Bergin (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Religious Diversity*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- ¹³ Ullman, Sarah E. (2003). “Social Reactions to Child Sexual Abuse Disclosures: A Critical Review.” *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, Vol. 12 (1) 2003.
- 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

1. *Allies in Healing: When the Person You Love Was Sexually Abused as a Child*, by L. Davis, MA (1991).
2. *Amongst Ourselves: A Self-Help Guide to Living with Dissociative Identity Disorder*, by T. Alderman, PhD & K. Marshall, LCSW (1988).
3. *Beyond Betrayal: Taking Charge of Your Life after Boyhood Sexual Abuse*, by R.B. Gartner, PhD (2005).
4. *Childhood Comes First: A Crash Course in Childhood for Adults*, by R. B. Gartner, PhD (2005).
5. *Conquering Incest: My Life as a Trauma Survivor*, by Diane Champé (2011).
6. *Cutting: Understanding and Overcoming Self-Mutilation*, by Steven Levenkron, MD (1988).
7. *Got Parts? An Insider's Guide to Managing Life Successfully with Dissociative Identity Disorder*, by A. T. W. (2005).
8. *Growing Beyond Survival: A Self-Help Toolkit for Managing Traumatic Stress (Revised Edition)*, by Elizabeth G. Vermilyea, PhD (2013).
9. <http://www.nasca.org/Graphics/ChildAbuseLives/CAives-600x800-text.htm>.
10. *I Can't Get Over It: A Handbook for Trauma Survivors*, by Aphrodite Matsakis, PhD (1992).
11. *It's Not You, It's What Happened to You: Complex Trauma and Treatment*, by Christine Courtois, PhD, ABPP, LLC (2014).
12. *Life After Trauma: A Workbook for Healing*, by Dena Rosenbloom & Mary Beth Williams (Second Edition; 2010).
13. *Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive*, by Daniel Siegel, MD (Tenth Anniversary Edition; 2013).
14. *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, by Ellen Bass, MS & Laura Davis, MA (2009).
15. *Writing to Heal: A Guide Journal for Recovering from Trauma & Emotional Upheaval*, by James W. Pennebaker, PhD (2004).
15. *Your Surviving Spirit: A Spiritual Workbook for Coping with Trauma*, by Dusty Miller, EdD (2003).

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