

1                                   **Resolution of Support on Safe Church and Healing Communities**  
2                                   **Submitted by Pilgrim United Church of Christ, Carlsbad, CA**

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4   **BACKGROUND STATEMENT**

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6           Five years ago Pilgrim UCC experienced a time of great trauma when a registered sex  
7 offender came to our door and asked to be included as an active member. We were  
8 completely unprepared for the firestorm that followed within our church family, among the  
9 parents at our preschool and daycare center, and in local and national media. Our pastor and  
10 church leaders were vilified and rifts developed within the church that we feared would  
11 never be healed.

12           We were stunned at the number of members who shared that they had experienced  
13 childhood sexual abuse. Members whose past sexual abuse experiences had been buried or  
14 kept quiet were re-traumatized by this person's presence. What ensued was one of the most  
15 significant events in our church's history. It presented a potential for a significant loss of  
16 members and a diminished ministry or for a profound deepening of our ministry and a  
17 stronger church. We scrambled to find resources in the UCC or other faith communities to  
18 assist us at that time and confronted a vacuum. Fortunately, we discovered that one of our  
19 members, Dr. Jaime Romo, who was himself a survivor of sexual abuse by a priest in the  
20 Catholic church of his childhood, also possessed of an EdD. with a specialty in organizational  
21 behavior, and a developed spirituality that allowed him to see the pain in both victim and  
22 perpetrator. Jaime was able to guide the congregation through a dialogue that provided a  
23 safe space for members to confront the pain of their past injuries while developing safe  
24 church guidelines that would address both the current crisis and prevent future crises.  
25 Pilgrim was able to move forward with a plan that respects the dignity of any prospective  
26 member who might come forward in the future with a history of sex crimes and also provides  
27 for the physical and emotional safety of church members.

28           In short, we have gone from hurting to healing. As we stand here five years later, we  
29 have not only been able to turn a media nightmare into a national teachable moment, but we

30 have embraced the challenge as a church, adopted a safe church policy, and commissioned a  
31 minister of Healing and Healthy Environments to teach other churches how to both protect  
32 children and minister to sex offenders. Sadly, few churches have been willing to face this head  
33 on, despite the following:

- 34 • One out of four girls and one out of six boys will be sexually abused by their 18<sup>th</sup>  
35 birthday (Finkelhor, 1990).
- 36 • The rate of child abuse is ten times the rate of cancer (Sadler, Chadwick, & Hensler,  
37 1999).
- 38 • Ninety-three percent of sex offenders describe themselves as “religious” (Abel et al.,  
39 1987).
- 40 • Offenders known to have abused many children who maintained significant  
41 involvement with religious institutions “had more sexual offense convictions, more  
42 victims, and younger victims” (Eshuys & Smallbone, 2006).
- 43 • In a survey of 2,864 church leaders, 20% knew of a sex offender who was attending or  
44 serving as a member of their church (Liataud, 2010).
- 45 • Many victims suffer significant emotional and spiritual damage.

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47 Despite these realities, seminarians, ministers, and congregational leaders are generally not  
48 prepared to respond effectively either to offenders or victims of sexual abuse.

49 It is appropriate, therefore, for church and other leaders to treat sexual abuse as an  
50 ongoing and systemic problem – rather than an individual one. Nevertheless it continues to  
51 be a topic that is ignored until in most cases, it is too late.

52 Many years ago, the UCC determined that without courageous leadership and  
53 resources provided by the national body, most churches would be too fearful to welcome the  
54 LGBT community and those with HIV/AIDS. By becoming Open and Affirming, by  
55 providing resources such as the Affirming Persons, Saving Lives curriculum to churches, the  
56 United Church of Christ made a powerful statement about the dignity and worth of all. The  
57 value to society and to the vitality of the UCC cannot be underestimated.

58 Pilgrim United Church of Christ respectfully requests that our Southern California-  
59 Nevada Conference support this courageous step by adopting the enclosed resolution for  
60 healing and healthy communities. We hope that it can be brought forward by the conference  
61 to the national body of the UCC. We suggest a budget which assesses each congregation with  
62 \$250.00 toward financing the work needed to make this a national movement. With your  
63 leadership we can let our members who were victims as children feel a sense of sanctuary in  
64 the sanctuary, we can ensure that no child in the UCC becomes a victim on our watch and we  
65 can be a beacon to other faith communities afraid to tackle this very difficult issue.

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## 67 **THE RESOLUTION**

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69 WHEREAS, the safety and well-being of all God's children is of utmost importance and  
70 concern in our life and our service as the Church body of Christ;

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72 AND WHEREAS, all forms of abusive behavior and especially sexual behavior, exacts  
73 immeasurable spiritual, psychological, and physical costs in terms of suffering, human  
74 potential, social stability, and damage to the credibility and commission of all churches;

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76 AND WHEREAS, an estimated thirty-nine million people, alone, in the United States have  
77 experienced sexual abuse in some form;

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79 AND WHEREAS, we , as an instrument of Christ's compassionate peace, are called as a  
80 Church body to create environments and communities in which victims of abusive behavior  
81 can find support and healing;

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83 AND WHEREAS, we, as an instrument of Christ's justice, are called as a Church body to  
84 prevent abuse and abusive behavior and to deal with and resolve directly and fairly instances  
85 of abuse should such arise in our communities;

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87 BE IT RESOLVED, that the Southern California Nevada Conference recommends the  
88 provision within the Conference of an educational program of direct curricular study and  
89 resource availability to furnish and support: 1) the development, creation, and assessment of  
90 safe church policy at the congregational, association, and conference levels; 2) the creation  
91 and maintenance of healthy and healing church communities and environments at the  
92 congregational, association, and conference levels; and 3) the development of a safe church  
93 and healthy and healing communities support network and 4) that such recommendation will  
94 be sent to the national body of the United Church of Christ.

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96 Funding for implementation will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the  
97 Conference and the funds available.