

## RESOLUTION 1 Ban the Box

Whereas Scripture teaches us to provide a refuge for the outcasts and that in welcoming a stranger we welcome Christ into our midst;

1 Whereas our Social Principles “affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God” and support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to employment;

2 Whereas the majority of the over 325,000 ex-felons in Virginia who have completed all court-imposed punishment find it almost impossible to obtain gainful employment because most employers use a check box on their job applications to ask if the applicant has a felony conviction/arrest record – and then pass over applicants who check that box, even though the vast majority of such offenses were nonviolent and the ex-offenders have since tried to turned their lives around;

Whereas the inability to obtain employment makes it impossible for ex-offenders to support themselves and their families, and thereby contributes to a vicious cycle of higher unemployment, increased crime, more recidivism and higher taxes to support imprisonment;

Whereas this vicious cycle begins early in life for a large segment of our population – as revealed by recent studies which have found that by age 23, half of all black males and 40 percent of all white males have been arrested – and thereby virtually destroying the lives of such persons and depriving our nation of contributions they could make to our society;

3 Whereas these trends affect not only men but also women, with the number of women in prison nationally “increasing at a rate fifty percent higher for women than for men since 1980,” and among all persons incarcerated in Virginia over eight percent are women – with such women who are the head of a single parent household facing especially daunting challenges upon their release;

4 Whereas 14 states and at least 96 cities and counties (including 13 cities and counties in Virginia) have enacted “ban the box” policies to eliminate questions about an applicant’s criminal history from the initial employment

application so that selection of persons to be interviewed will be based on skills and qualifications for a specific job position;

5 Whereas several major corporations, including three of the nation's top retailers – Home Depot, Target, and Walmart – have enacted ban the box policies by removing questions about criminal history from their job applications, thereby joining several other employers who have taken steps to end hiring exclusions that make it nearly impossible for anyone with a criminal record to get a job, even if that offense be in the distant past;

6 Whereas deferring questions about any criminal history or conducting a criminal background check until after an applicant is selected for an interview, given a conditional offer of employment or found otherwise qualified for the job will provide an opportunity for applicants to demonstrate their qualifications and enable employers to select the most qualified applicants;

Whereas jobs relating to public safety, handling finances or requiring contact with vulnerable populations such as working with children and the elderly will continue under 147 RESOLUTIONS law to require full criminal background checks prior to employment, and Whereas, as some perceptive members of the clergy have pointed out, while banning the box is about fairness for people with records, it is also good for the “economy and for the safety of our communities to ensure we’re maximizing job opportunities for everyone.”

**7 Be it hereby resolved by this 234<sup>th</sup> Session of the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church that:**

- 1. We commend the states, municipalities and private employers who have eliminated questions about past criminal history from their initial job applications in order to provide all job applicants an opportunity to be considered on the basis of their qualifications for a specific job.**
- 2. We call upon our Virginia state legislators to enact legislation banning questions about criminal history from the initial job application for public and private employment so that questions about criminal history or conducting a criminal background check can be deferred until after an applicant has been selected for an interview, given a conditional offer of employment or otherwise found qualified for a specific job.**

- 3. We urge private employers to follow the example of those private employers who have already banned the box from their employment applications.**
- 4. We urge our clergy and lay members to contact their state legislators, urging support of a ban the box policy for Virginia.**
- 5. We authorize the Board of Church and Society to join with other like-minded groups in a campaign to ban the box in Virginia and request that it keep the Conference updated on progress toward this goal.**

Submitted by Dot Ivey on behalf of the Board of Church and Society

1. Isaiah 16:4; Matthew 25:31-46. 2. Social Principles of The United Methodist Church 2013-2016, ¶162. 3. "Study: Half of all black males, 40 percent of all white males arrested by age 23," Press Release, University of South Carolina, 6 Jan 2014, accessed 8 Feb 2014, [http://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2014-01/uosc-sho010314.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2014-01/uosc-sho010314.php). 4. "Fact Sheet: Trends in U.S. Corrections," The Sentencing Project, [www.sentencingproject.org](http://www.sentencingproject.org); "Annual Report of the Quarterly Report of Demographic, Offense and Health Information of Offenders Incarcerated in VADOC Facilities - CY2014," Virginia Department of Corrections, 2015, accessed 11 Feb 2015, <http://leg2.state.va.us>. 5. The 14 states that have enacted 'ban the box' policies are: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico and Rhode Island. In Virginia, Alexandria, Arlington County, Charlottesville, Danville, Fairfax County, Fredericksburg, Harrisonburg, Martinsville, Newport News, Norfolk, Petersburg, Portsmouth, Richmond, Roanoke, and Virginia Beach have enacted ban the box policies. Nationally, other cities that have enacted this ban include Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Detroit, Durham, Memphis, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, DC. <http://bantheboxcampaign.org/>; "Advancing a Federal Fair Chance Hiring Agenda," National Employment Law Project, accessed 11 Feb 2015, <http://www.nelp.org/>; "Victory! Georgia becomes the first state in the South to "ban the box" on state employment applications," Georgia Justice Project, accessed 24 Feb 2015, [www.gjp.org](http://www.gjp.org). 6. "Advancing a Federal Fair Chance Hiring Agenda," National Employment Law Project, accessed 11 Feb 2015, <http://www.nelp.org>. 7. Father Gregory Boyle and Rev. Joseph Clopton, "Fair hiring policy gets an unfair rap", The Sacramento Bee, accessed 8 Feb 2014, <http://www.sacbee.com/2013/09/10/5721634/another-view-fair-hiring-policy.html>.

## RESOLUTION 2 Establish a Mentoring Ministry for Adolescents in the Community that It Serves

Whereas, educational success is frequently the essential element in achieving economic opportunity and social advancement; and

Whereas, the American educational system has fallen short of its goal of promoting economic and social mobility; and

Whereas, a recent landmark report on American education, entitled “Separate and Unequal,” found that the likelihood of children exceeding their parents’ educational level is “lower in the United States than in any other advanced nation”; and

Whereas, the federal Title 1 educational program, including No Child Left Behind, whose goal has been to improve the academic performance of economically disadvantaged children, has done little to improve student performance; and

Whereas, successful student performance results from significant investment by the student, of time and effort to learn; and

Whereas, many students being raised in poor families are performing worse than any other group because they are the least motivated to put in the time and effort to be successful; and

Whereas, in Virginia, nearly 20 per cent more students from middle to high income families graduate from high school than students from low-income families; and

Whereas, the situation in Virginia is most desperate and unjust for African-American young men, where about 40% of these students are not graduating from high school while only 20% of white males are not graduating from high school; and

Whereas, in responding to the commandment of Jesus to love others as Jesus has loved us, Christian men and women have been given clear direction to provide guidance and encouragement to those underperforming adolescents living in their communities; and

Whereas, included in the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church is the declaration: “We believe that every person has the right to education. We also believe that the responsibility for education of the young rests with the family, faith communities, and the government”; and

Whereas, because United Methodists believe that “quality education opens doors of hope and possibility”, the church has declared that serving others by advancing their education is a priority of the transformational process called “Rethink Church”.

**Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church calls on each congregation to establish a ministry to adolescents who are not reaching their full academic potential, where congregation members would provide these adolescents in their community with the guidance and encouragement that they so desperately need to be successful in school, thereby giving these students a greater chance for social and economic advancement and justice.**

*And be it further resolved that the Board of Church and Society of the Virginia Conference will offer information and support to any local church that seeks assistance in developing a mentoring program in its community.*

Submitted by Dave Stegmaier on behalf of the Board of Church and Society

## RESOLUTION 3 Responding to Requests from Christians in the Holy Land

Whereas it is God's will that all people enjoy peace/shalom/salaam, i.e. peace, security, prosperity, and right relationships with one another and the earth.

Whereas the psalmists calls us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122.6), and to "seek peace and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14) Whereas we affirm Israel's right to permanent, recognized and secure borders, and Palestinians' rights to self-determination and formation of a viable state; and,

Whereas the 2012 Book of Resolutions states "we seek for all people in the Middle East region an end to military occupation, freedom from violence, and full respect for the human rights of all under international law." Resolution #6073, 2008 Book of Resolutions, amended and readopted in 2012

Whereas "The United Methodist Church opposes continued military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, the confiscation of Palestinian land and water resources, the destruction of Palestinian homes, the continued building of illegal Jewish settlements, and any vision of a 'Greater Israel' that includes the occupied territories and the whole of Jerusalem and its surroundings (Resolution 6111: "Opposition to Israeli Settlements in Palestinian Land." 2012 Book of Resolutions); and,

Whereas we are called to support members of Christ's church around the world, including Palestinian Christians who are being forced to leave the Holy Land due to Israel's confiscation of their property and the severe hardships of living under occupation; and,

Whereas the Palestinian Christian community, through the Kairos Palestine document, has requested the support of the wider Church; (Kairos Palestine. "A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering" <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/content/kairos-document> Web. December 2009); and, 152 RESOLUTIONS

Whereas Palestinian Christian leaders have specifically requested the support of the United Methodist Church; (Letter to the United Methodist

Church from Rifat Odeh Kassis, General Coordinator, Kairos Palestine, November 28, 2014 [https://www.kairosresponse.org/Rifat\\_Kassis.html](https://www.kairosresponse.org/Rifat_Kassis.html). Web. January 2015); and, Whereas the 2012 General Conference reiterated the call to end the occupation, through boycotts of goods produced in the occupied territories (Resolution 6111: “Opposition to Israeli Settlements in Palestinian Land.” 2012 Book of Resolutions); and,

Whereas all UMC missionaries serving in the Holy Land over the last 25 years support concrete actions by our denomination to show our support of Palestinian rights. (United Methodist Missionaries Support Divestment from the Israeli Occupation, [https://www.kairosresponse.org/UMC\\_Missionaries\\_Divestment.html](https://www.kairosresponse.org/UMC_Missionaries_Divestment.html). Web. January 2015),

**Therefore, be it resolved that the Virginia Annual Conference shall create a diverse and representative task force to review and research actions that can be taken to respond to these requests by our UMC missionaries and our Palestinian sisters and brothers in Christ, and formulate recommendations for the 2017 annual conference; and, Be it further resolved that the Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church calls on the U.S. government, the government of Israel, and the elected Palestinian leadership to work for diplomatic and nonviolent solutions to the problems of the region, to respect the equality and dignity of all the region’s people, and to forge solutions based on the principles of international law and human rights.**

Submitted by John Copenhaver on behalf of the Board of Church and Society, *2016*