The following resolution was approved by the delegates at a plenary of the Thirty-Second General Synod.

**Supporting Survivors Of Rape and Sexual Violence Through An Ongoing Church-Wide Observance of Break The Silence Sunday (BTSS)**

**A Prudential Resolution**

WHEREAS, in the more than thirty years since General Synod Fourteen the church has made little progress in truly supporting survivors of rape and sexual violence;

WHEREAS, survivors of rape and sexual violence are hesitant to come forward and share their stories with clergy or congregations because of theologies that perpetuate, glorify, or even encourage suffering and that advocate quick and uncomplicated forgiveness;

WHEREAS, the church, across traditions, has often been complicit in protecting perpetrators within their own communities and congregations, and the church has perpetuated the victim blaming and shaming, mirroring the painful doubt and disbelief survivors face in the wider society, and contributing to the rape culture in which we all live;

WHEREAS, due to the intensely personal nature of the crimes, the relationships that often exist between perpetrator and victim, and the challenges of the criminal justice system, the scope of rape and sexual violence is difficult to measure.

WHEREAS, it is estimated that every ninety-eight seconds someone in the United States is sexually assaulted;

WHEREAS, the most conservative statistics estimate that one in every six women and one in every thirty-three men in the United States will be the victim of an attempted or completed sexual assault in their lifetime and that an estimated 63,000 children are sexually abused each year.

WHEREAS, we are in the midst of a cultural transformation, in the United States and around the world, with the #metoo movement empowering survivors to come forward and share their stories of rape, abuse, sexual harassment, and other sexual violence;

WHEREAS, with the testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee by Dr. Christine Blasey Ford during the confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, the United States has clearly seen the challenges survivors face in coming forward with their stories, particularly after many years of carrying those stories in silence;

WHEREAS, the backlash many survivors face after telling their stories often forces them back into silence and fear, and frequently complicates or damages healing already accomplished;

WHEREAS, the scriptural testimony of Genesis (1.26-27, 5.1-2, and 9.6) along with Psalm 8.3-8, James 3.9 and others affirm that humanity is created in the very image of God;
WHEREAS, in Judges 19 the story of rape and violence ends with a clear call to the faithful to, “Consider it, take council, and speak out” (Judges 19.30);

WHEREAS, in numerous healing stories in the Gospels (Matthew 9.20-22, Mark 5.25-34, Mark 10.46-52, Luke 17.11-19, Luke 18.35-43) Jesus, reaching out to those in need who have come to him for healing and hope, declares “your faith has made you whole”, recognizing that the speaking the truth of our stories can save us;

WHEREAS, the scriptural testimony of 2 Corinthians 5.17 declares that through faith in Jesus Christ we are all a new creation;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty-Second General Synod calls upon the national church leadership, Conferences, Associations, and local churches to speak out in support of survivors of rape and sexual violence, offer care to individuals, including silent supportive witness in courtrooms, and advocate for sexual violence prevention education;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the national setting of the United Church of Christ, as an act of repentance and commitment to healing add an annual observance of Break The Silence Sunday (BTSS) to its calendar with the suggested date of the fourth Sunday of April so as to occur within national sexual assault awareness month;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that local churches be invited to participate in an annual observance of Break The Silence Sunday, on the suggested Sunday or any date or dates deemed appropriate, honoring within their worship, education, and community contexts the stories and struggles of survivors of rape and sexual violence, and encourage such an observance in the ecumenical community;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED due to the sensitive nature of the topics of Break The Silence Sunday, that all settings of the church are encouraged to treat survivors of sexual violence and their stories (paying particular attention to the needs of communities of color, LGBTQ+ identifying people, and people with disabilities) with due care and preparation, allowing time for education, self-care, and gathering of resources;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that all settings of the United Church of Christ be encouraged to educate clergy and laity on how to support survivors of rape and sexual violence including trauma-informed care, and to advocate on behalf of those not yet ready to speak openly so that the voices of survivors do not speak alone.

FUNDING
Funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION
The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.
Information gathered by the National Crime Victimization Survey, the United States Department of Justice, the United States Department of Health and Human Services as well as other governmental and non-profit organizations via the Rape Abuse Incest National Network, RAINN; for further information on statistics and the prevalence of sexual violence visit https://www.rainn.org/about-sexual-assault