

**Resolution- 01 Concerning Care for Children, Youth,
and Biological Parents Affected by State Foster
Care Systems in the United States
RA 01
(Sense-of-the-Assembly)
Care for Children, Youth, and Biological Parents
Affected by State Foster Care Systems in the United States**

WHEREAS, Scripture affirms: “Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.” (Psalm 127-3);

WHEREAS, Scripture calls for us to love one another, even as Christ has loved us (John 13:34);

WHEREAS, the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports over 402,000 children in State custody across the United States;¹⁴

WHEREAS, children removed from their families of origin are in need of unconditional love and the support of family;

WHEREAS, children aging out of foster care are without the support of a permanent or “forever” family;

WHEREAS, youth aging out of foster care are more likely to experience homelessness;

WHEREAS, youth aging out of foster care are less likely to complete a college degree at the same trajectory as youth in the general population of the same age;

WHEREAS, the number of youth aging out of foster care has increased in recent years;

WHEREAS, birth parents are also children of God and in need of Christ’s unconditional love;

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is called to be the beloved community;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Regional Assembly of the Christian Church in Georgia (Disciples of Christ), meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, November 13-14, 2015, calls upon the local churches to become spiritual families and people of support to God’s children – young and old – who are living in, or affected by foster care;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that members of the Christian Church in Georgia (Disciples of Christ) pray for and support mothers and fathers who have become separated from their natural children due to State mandated processes;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that individual members of the Christian Church in Georgia (Disciples of Christ) prayerfully consider ways in which they can support and advocate for a child in foster care;

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that congregational members of the Christian Church in Georgia (Disciples of Christ) prayerfully seek ways to learn more about foster care laws in the State of Georgia, and to advocate for legislation that recognizes modern family structures, and that fully support and effectuate the full nurturing and caring of vulnerable young people in our communities.

Respectfully submitted:

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Background:

In 2013, approximately 6 million children in the U.S. were reportedly victims of some form of abuse, neglect, or maltreatment at the hands of their parents, family members, or other persons purportedly charged to care for them.¹ Over 670,000 children were removed from their homes or families of origin and placed in protective or temporary custody of the State² due to neglect (79.5%), physical abuse (18%), or sexual abuse (9%).³ While some were able to reunite with their families, still approximately 402,000 children remain in State custody (i.e., foster care) in the United States on any given day.⁴

The purpose of foster care is to provide temporary and safe shelter for children separated from their families due to abuse, neglect, or other challenges. The goal is to allow biological parents time to resolve whatever issue(s) that forced the State-mandated separation from their child(ren). Ideally during this separation, biological parents receive social and support services that will provide the tools necessary for healthy parenting so that they may assume the safe care of their children. Sadly, in some instances, parents are not able to resolve their challenges, and children are left to languish in foster care for far too many years. Further still, some biological parents lose their parental rights, leaving their children, then, legally free for adoption. In some cases, these children are found permanent or “forever” families through adoption, in which they can become members of a new family. But sadly, and in far too many cases, many young people will never return to their families of origin, or may never be placed for permanent adoption.

In 2013, over 23,000 youth “aged out” of the foster care system, either because they could not be reunited with their families of origin, or the State did not find permanent homes for them. “Aging out” is the point at which youth are forced to leave State custody because they have become too old to receive foster care services.⁵ In short, 23,000 young people met their 18th birthday without benefit of a “forever family.” This represents an increase in the percentage of youth aging out of foster care in recent years – from eight percent (8%) in 2003 to ten percent (10%) in 2013.⁶ After having been forcibly removed from their families of origin, 18-year-olds are now forced to leave the protection of the State with nowhere to turn and no one to provide support and guidance into adulthood – a rite of passage many people in the general population take for granted.

According to Children’s Rights (a national advocacy organization for the protection of abused and neglected children), youth who age out of foster care are less likely to graduate from high school. By age 26, approximately 80 percent of persons aging out of foster care earned at least a high school degree or GED compared to 94 percent in the general population.⁷ Furthermore, youth who age out of foster care are less likely to attend or graduate college. Again, by age 26, four percent (4%) of foster care youth had earned a 4-year college degree, while 36 percent of same-aged youth in the general population had done so.⁸

More than half of all young people entering foster care are people of color.⁹ African-Americans, in particular, are disproportionately represented in the foster care system. While African-Americans comprise only 13% of the U.S. population, they represent over 26% of all children in foster care.¹⁰

State welfare agencies have come under fire in recent years due to the untimely deaths of children in foster care. Whereas the State is charged with ensuring the safety and well-being of children, many children either fall through the cracks, or child welfare workers find themselves overwhelmed by unmanageable caseload sizes. Consequently, various organizations in Georgia have sought either foster care reform or privatization of foster care processes. For example, on the issue of foster care reform, Children’s Rights claim to be “the only organization in the United States dedicated solely to turning dangerous child welfare systems into safe havens for kids in need.”¹¹ Referring to the state of Georgia, they write: “When Children’s Rights first took action in metropolitan Atlanta in 2002, kids in foster care often went six months or more without caseworkers visiting their homes. By 2013, caseworkers made over 98 percent of required monthly visits to children.”¹²

Another organization seeking to improve the foster care process is FaithBridge. A Christ-centered nonprofit, FaithBridge “is changing the way America does foster care by mobilizing, organizing and equipping local churches to solve their community’s foster care crisis.”¹³

The Christian Church in Georgia (Disciples of Christ) can also contribute to the support of those affected by foster care through innovative ministries, community networks, and programs. As Christians, we are charged with caring for one another, as Christ cares for all of humanity. *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* ~ John 13:34-35 NIV.

1. Children’s Rights, “Child Abuse and Neglect,” <http://www.childrensrights.org/newsroom/fact-sheets/child-abuse-and-neglect/> (accessed 8/29/2015).
2. Children’s Rights, “Foster Care,” <http://www.childrensrights.org/newsroom/fact-sheets/foster-care/> (accessed 8/29/2015).
3. Children’s Rights, “Child Abuse and Neglect,” <http://www.childrensrights.org/newsroom/fact-sheets/child-abuse-and-neglect/> (accessed 8/29/2015).
4. Children’s Rights, “Foster Care,” <http://www.childrensrights.org/newsroom/fact-sheets/foster-care/> (accessed 8/29/2015).
5. Children’s Rights, “Aging Out,” <http://www.childrensrights.org/newsroom/fact-sheets/aging-out/> (accessed 8/29/2015).
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Children’s Rights, “Foster Care,” <http://www.childrensrights.org/newsroom/fact-sheets/foster-care/> (accessed 8/29/2015).
10. Ibid.
11. Children’s Rights, “Foster Care Reform,” www.childrensrights.org/our-campaigns/foster-care-reform/ (accessed 8/29/15).
12. Ibid.
13. FaithBridge Foster Care, [www. faithbridgefostercare.org](http://www.faithbridgefostercare.org) (accessed 8/29/2015).
14. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/trends_fostercare_adoption2013.pdf (accessed 8/29/2015).