Motion from the Subcommittee on Disposition
March 5, 2021

The Subcommittee on Disposition moves:

The United Church of Christ Board, sitting as the General Synod Committee on Disposition, adopts the Report of the Subcommittee on Disposition.

Report of the Subcommittee on Disposition

The Subcommittee on Disposition recommends:

The United Church of Christ Board, sitting as the General Synod Committee on Disposition, receives the items of business submitted to the Thirty-third General Synod and recommends disposition as follows:

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Background: From Standing Rules of the Thirty-Third General Synod, Paragraph XI

Disposition Options:

A. Items that are expected to be routine, non-controversial, or dealt with in a special hearing will be reported directly to the plenary session by the Business Committee. This might include, but is not limited to, such items as the budget, amendments to the Constitution or Bylaws, statements of commendation, recognition, and celebration, and certain Resolutions. The Business Committee may place some of these items on a Consent Agenda. The Consent Agenda will be approved by delegates in the opening plenary of the General Synod. Proponents of Resolutions placed on the Consent Agenda will have two minutes to speak to their Resolution before the Consent Agenda is moved. Items may be removed from the Consent Agenda by a majority vote of the General Synod. If a Resolution is removed from the Consent Agenda, it will be assigned to a committee or considered in a plenary session of the General Synod.

B. All proposed pronouncements and proposals for action shall be assigned to committee.

C. Items that are complicated or controversial that require background discussion and study, that merit and need a hearing process, or that have a system-wide impact will be assigned to a committee. The proposer shall supply a resource person to the committee.

D. Any proposed business item that reiterates or reaffirms previous action shall normally be referred by the General Synod to the body or bodies implementing such action. A referral for implementation is, in itself, a statement that the General Synod is already on record with the intent of the business item and that the policy base for implementation is already in existence.

E. Items addressing issues addressed by one of the two preceding General Synods shall be referred by the General Synod to implementing bodies.

F. If a proposed motion differs significantly from previous policy or action of the two preceding General Synods, it shall be assigned to a committee. The burden of proof is on those submitting the proposal to explain how it is different.

Definitions:

1. Resolution of Witness: A Resolution of Witness is an expression of the General Synod concerning a moral, ethical or religious matter confronting the Church, the nation, or the world, adopted for the guidance of the Officers, Covenanted, Associated or Affiliated Ministries, or other bodies as defined in Article VI of the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ; the consideration of local churches, Associations, Conferences and other bodies related to the United Church of Christ; and for a Christian witness to the world. It represents agreement by at least two thirds of the delegates voting that the view expressed is based on Christian conviction and is a part of their witness to Jesus Christ. The text of the proposed resolution should be so phrased as not to bring into question the Christian commitment of those who do not agree.

2. Prudential Resolutions: A Prudential Resolution establishes policy, institutes or revises structure or procedures, authorizes programs, approves directions or requests actions by majority vote.
The following resolution has been received by the Office of the General Minister and President prior to the deadline established by the Standing Rules of the Thirty-third General Synod.

Receipt and release of this resolution for pre-Synod consideration by delegates and other interested parties should not be considered an indication it will come before the General Synod. This resolution is now being researched by the Board of Director’s Subcommittee on Disposition and its staff, before consideration by the full Board of Directors in March 2021. Any resolution must meet all of the requirements of the General Synod Standing Rules (see Standing Rule 11). The Board of Directors will decide in March whether this resolution meets those requirements and make a determination as to its disposition.

THE ALLIANCE OF ASSOCIATE CONFERENCE MINISTERS OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST REQUEST TO BE RECOGNIZED AS A FORMAL GROUP

A Prudential Resolution

Submitted by the:
Iowa Conference
Nebraska Conference
New Hampshire Conference
South Dakota Conference

SUMMARY

The Alliance of Associate Conference Ministers (AACM) seeks to be recognized as a Self-Created Group according to United Church of Christ By-Laws, Article VI., existing to be a supportive expression of the Living Christ, in relationship with one another and with the Body of Christ, in all its forms. The term “Associate Conference Minister” is used ubiquitously in AACM documents to refer to all persons who serve in the role either designated as associate conference minister or all the various titles of those functioning in similar job responsibilities and expectations. AACM serves to support those who serve in a staff or called position doing conference ministry in the support of the conference minister and conference.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

The fundamental biblical grounding for the proposed recognition of the Alliance of Associate Conference Ministers is found in Christ’s farewell discourse in the Gospel of John, “…that all of them may be one,” John 17:21 (NIV). For centuries, this has been a scriptural basis for uniting Christians throughout the world.

In the context of the challenges of today’s secularizing culture and the opportunities created by increasingly powerful means of communication, we have been inspired by the Deutero-Pauline ambition, “…that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith…and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:12-13 (NIV). To us, this means that we are called to outgrow an attitude of “going it alone” that has been prominent in our polity for more than three hundred years (since the 1648 Cambridge Platform). It means that we are called to build a stronger and larger network of covenants
through which we can become stronger as the body of Christ serving across the breadth of the
United Church of Christ. It means that we can be much stronger by capitalizing on the many
ways we are increasingly interdependent in today’s world. This means building and maintaining
a covenental and collaborative relationship with all United Church of Christ Associate
Conference Ministers through the existence and support of the AACM.

The Alliance seeks to live out its purpose of:

- Building and maintaining a covenental and collaborative relationship with all United
  Church of Christ Associate Conference Ministers.
- Developing and maintaining a covenental and collaborative relationship with the United
  Church of Christ Council of Conference Ministers, officers of the Church, UCC
  Covenantal partners, and UCC Board of Directors.
- Being a resource to share information and best practices to promote excellence in our
  various ministries.
- Being a collective voice of advocacy for concerns important to the role and work of the
  Associate Conference Minister as they relate to the life of the United Church of Christ.

We believe that discerning God’s will and God’s call to us is best done in community, gathering,
listening and sharing with one another. This we have done through meeting and sharing ideas at
AM21 in 2018 and 2019 intentionally discerning a call to unite for the intention of being a
resource to share support, information and best practices to promote excellence in our various
ministries.

TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION

WHEREAS the United Church of Christ takes seriously our individual Christian covenant with
God as the primal covenant from which our human covenants are derived and by which they are
shaped. ¹

WHEREAS in the above view it is “the covenental relationship with God that creates the church
and, in turn created a covenental relationship among the people who are the church.”²

WHEREAS the United Church of Christ holds seriously the call to be an open and welcoming
faith community, accepting into the church body and leadership all facets of expression found in
God’s people, creating a rich diversity of expression, background, culture, sexual and gender
identity and expression.

WHEREAS the work of conference ministry and associate conference ministry places those
doing the work at the intersection of church life, between the Local Church and the National
Setting, including associations where those exist calling for “keeping communication flowing in
all directions, nurturing relationships, articulating and supporting covenental relationships.”³

WHEREAS in response to “[t]he Proposal for Action adopted by the Twentieth General Synod
called upon local churches, conferences and associations, those called and employed by the
church, and various national bodies to act in a variety of ways in support of the fair and just
compensation of all persons called and employed by the church” the AACM states it provides resources and advocacy to support ACMs in their positions.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ recognizes the establishment of the Alliance of Associate Conference Ministers, a Self-Created Group serving to support those who serve in a staff or called position doing conference ministry in the support of the conference minister and conference.

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** the Alliance of Associate Conference Ministers be identified as related in covenant to the United Church of Christ, through a primary relationship as a Self-Created Group with the United Church of Christ Board.

**FUNDING:** The 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, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

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4 Fair & Just Compensation A Report to the Twenty-first General Synod 97-GS-50 62-65
The following resolution has been received by the Office of the General Minister and President prior to the deadline established by the Standing Rules of the Thirty-third General Synod. Receipt and release of this resolution for pre-Synod consideration by delegates and other interested parties should not be considered an indication it will come before the General Synod. This resolution is now being researched by the Board of Director’s Subcommittee on Disposition and its staff, before consideration by the full Board of Directors in March 2021. Any resolution must meet all of the requirements of the General Synod Standing Rules (see Standing Rule 11). The Board of Directors will decide in March whether this resolution meets those requirements and make a determination as to its disposition.

**A Resolution to Advocate and Act to Change the Cash Bail Bond System to Eliminate Racial and Social Injustices Inherent in the Present System**

Submitted by the Southern Conference

**SUMMARY**

This resolution calls on the United Church of Christ to advocate and act to change the Cash Bail Bond System in the individual states and United States of America to be more just to the economically disadvantaged.

**BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE**

Isaiah 42:5-7 “Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: ‘I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.’”

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners . . . .”

Matthew 25: 31-33, 41-46 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. . . . Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For . . . I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”
Hebrews 13:3 “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured;"

**HISTORICAL GROUNDING AND CONNECTION TO THE UCC**

1. Considerable empirical evidence demonstrates that the cash bail system is corrupt, unfair and ineffective. The cash bail system requires pretrial defendants to pay hundreds to thousands of dollars to the courts, as secured through bail bondsmen, and usually requires low income individuals to agree to usurious terms for borrowing such funds. Lacking such funds, individuals are subject to incarceration prior to their trials, which then costs the state up to one hundred dollars per day for each individual. As such, several municipalities and states throughout the U.S. have successfully enacted other approaches to pretrial requirements for defendants accused of misdemeanors and some lesser felonies (1)^1.

2. The United Church of Christ has a long record of advocating reform of the cash bail bond system.
   
   **I.** Forty-six years ago (1973), the United Church of Christ’s Advising Body of the General Synod adopted the following CRIMINAL JUSTICE-PENAL REFORM statement as amended on Excessive Bail (73-GS-38)
   
   “The Ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ:
   
   i. Denounces the practice of setting excessive bail, especially in the case of political activists
   
   ii. Calls upon the Criminal Justice Priority Team of the United Church of Christ to develop viable revisions and alternatives to cash bail and transmit those to our membership, to congressmen, and legislators.
   
   iii. Make available staff consultative and financial support for local programs which share this goal, and for Conferences which in cooperation with other agencies are working toward this goal; said support may come in the form of a pilot project in one or more conferences.”

**II.** Forty-eight years ago (1971), the United Church of Christ endorsed the following goals and objectives: “The Eighth General Synod adopts the following Goals and Objectives for the priority, Racial Justice. To urge enactment of state and federal laws reforming the bail system. It should be provided that those defendants who would ordinarily purchase corporate bail will deposit their money with the court and they will recover 90% of this money after the completion of their cases. The acceptance to this nominal bail or personal recognizance bonding should be encouraged, especially where the defendants are employed. The court shall give priority to the trials of all cases where the defendants have failed to post bail. No person should be held in prison without bail longer than sixty days after indictment or the termination of the first term of criminal court after his indictment.”

3. The Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina has adopted a resolution asking for cash bail bond reform:
The 203rd Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina Act 2018-12 Resolution 203.12 “On examining the need for bail reform within the criminal justice system: Resolved, the 203rd Annual Convention of the Diocese of North Carolina supports actions to reform, and commits to examine, current judicial pretrial release procedures within our own state. The consideration of current pretrial release practices will be conducted in partnership with organizations currently engaged in the study of the money-bail system and steps will be taken in support of needed reforms. Pretrial-release practices will be considered for consistency with the teachings of Jesus concerning the equitable treatment of all people. Further, this consideration of the money-bail system of pretrial release is in keeping with the mandate of our baptismal covenant to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.”

4. States and jurisdictions across the country have changed or are investigating the ability to change bail bond systems toward systems that do not punish individuals for poverty itself. Results indicate that financial savings are available for individuals and the legal system, and defendants continue to appear for their court days.

I. A recent study reports results of reform to the cash bail bond system in Philadelphia, PA (over the 2018 year) as successful and has been outlined by Jessica Smith, W.R. Kenyan, Jr. Distinguished Professor of Public Law and Government at UNC School of government, on her blog posting.

II. In a previous posting Ms. Smith lists the need for a change to pretrial adjudication being based on four main problems: public safety (wealthier individuals can buy their way out of incarceration); costs to taxpayers; fairness; and racial and ethnic disparities.

5. A comprehensive compilation of the research on pretrial alternatives to cash bail, based on nationwide research with ensuing recommendations for states, was published in February, 2019 by the Harvard Law School. This Guide to bail reform warns against the use of risk assessment tests that are too general, and often have inherent racial and economic biases. Instead, risk assessments which are validated for each location-specific population, and which are developed by an entity who will not profit from the use of algorithm is advised as necessary.

I. More than 100 civil rights, faith, labor, legal and data science groups released a shared statement of concerns about the use risk assessments.

6. An earlier set of cash bail guidelines for NC were published in 2016:

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS the U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, and African Americans, Latinos, Latinas, and indigenous peoples are disproportionately incarcerated in the United States;

WHEREAS since 2000, the vast majority of the jail population increase was caused by the detention of individuals prior to trial (pretrial) of which 60 to 70% were classified nonviolent minimum-security;
WHEREAS cash bail bonding is an over 2-billion-dollar industry;

WHEREAS the inability to make cash bail extracts an untold human cost on the accused due to their loss of employment, housing and, often times, family support;

WHEREAS there are proven instances of inadequate health care for incarcerated persons, death and injury suffered by incarcerated persons;

WHEREAS at least 70% of inmates in local jails are not convicted of any crime;

WHEREAS persons who cannot make bail are poor and four times more likely to receive jail time with sentences three times longer than those who do make bail;

WHEREAS bail set for people of color exceeds that for whites by 35% and Latinos by 19%;

WHEREAS three out of four criminal cases in state trial courts are for misdemeanors that, if proved, would result in fines and/or less than a year in jail;

WHEREAS political contributions made by the Bail Industry in between 2002 and 2016 exceeded $5,000,000;

WHEREAS money-based systems release nearly half of the most dangerous defendants with little to no meaningful supervision;

WHEREAS the US is the only nation besides the Philippines to have a legal commercial bail bond industry;

WHEREAS corporate and/or systemic structures, or individuals which derive profit from the imprisonment of human beings serve to perpetuate the legacy of slavery, oppression and heartless greed which the United Church of Christ has long sought to expose and correct;

WHEREAS we are admonished as followers of Christ to “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured;” (Hebrews 13:3)

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

a) That the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages the reform of the bail bond systems within individual states and the United States in order to eliminate the racial and social injustices inherent in the present cash bail bond systems,

b) That the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon all settings of the church to raise their consciousness of the theological, social, racial, ethnic and economic inequities which make possible the existence of the unfair and unjust bail bond systems,
c) That, to accomplish these goals, the Thirty Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon all settings of the church to seek partnerships with other organizations also working toward the goals.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon the U.S. Congress and state legislatures to reform the cash bail bond systems to be more just and humane.

FUNDING
The 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.


The following resolution has been received by the Office of the General Minister and President prior to the deadline established by the Standing Rules of the Thirty-third General Synod. Receipt and release of this resolution for pre-Synod consideration by delegates and other interested parties should not be considered an indication it will come before the General Synod. This resolution is now being researched by the Board of Director’s Subcommittee on Disposition and its staff, before consideration by the full Board of Directors in March 2021. Any resolution must meet all of the requirements of the General Synod Standing Rules (see Standing Rule 11). The Board of Directors will decide in March whether this resolution meets those requirements and make a determination as to its disposition.

A RESOLUTION ON PROTECTING WORKERS AT CHURCHES AND OTHER RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ, and the New Jersey Association of the Central Atlantic Conference

SUMMARY

This resolution invites United Church of Christ settings to discern and implement appropriate measures to protect their employees, and to be attentive to the ways that religious freedom, including the ministerial exception defense to legal claims of discrimination, gives churches and religious institutions wide latitude in decisions impacting their employees.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL RATIONALE

God calls us into the church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be God’s servants to our neighbors, and to proclaim good news, dwelling in the promises of forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, and taking courage in striving for justice and peace.1 In response to our common calling, United Church of Christ members have supported the expansion of rights and recognition for historically marginalized communities in our society. At the national level, these efforts include advocacy for the Civil Rights Act,2 for immigrant farmworkers,3 for redress and reparations for Japanese-Americans interned during World War Two,4 for communities fighting environmental racism,5 for the Americans with Disabilities Act,6 and for the Family and Medical Leave Act,7 among many others.8

Freedom of religion is a cornerstone of American society, and United Church of Christ members and institutions are mindful that our voice in advocating for change is “one among many”;9 we communicate our witness in the spirit of offering, aware that our advocacy is empowered by our ability to live into the values we promote. Because of the separation of church and state, the United States has become a religious pluralism and the United Church of Christ rejoices in the religious diversity of our neighbors.10

The First Amendment celebrates individual conscience by guaranteeing the free exercise of religion.11 In accordance with the First Amendment, the Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld expansive protections for the free exercise of religion.12 Under the rubric of limiting...
government involvement with religious organizations, the Supreme Court has also held that
religious institutions have broad authority to manage their own internal affairs.¹³

With such freedom comes great responsibility.¹⁴ “For, dear brethren, you have been given
freedom: not freedom to do wrong, but freedom to love and serve each other.”¹⁵ The United
Church of Christ values religious freedom, and recognizes the moral responsibility that
comes with it. Seeking to create justice and peace within our own institutions, our faith calls
us to great care in the exercise of our freedom of conscience.¹⁶

**HISTORICAL GROUNDING**

The treatment of employees is a critical area of church autonomy. In 2012 the Supreme
Court, following lower courts, recognized the ministerial exception which exempts religious
institutions from legal liability for many if not all discrimination claims filed by ministers.¹⁷
This exception applies to the Civil Rights Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Age
Discrimination in Employment Act, and the Family and Medical Leave Act, and state-law
equivalents. These laws generally protect employees from being fired, from being paid less
for the same work,¹⁸ and from being sexually harassed or harassed on the basis of any other
protected category. These laws also protect those who advocate against discrimination in the
workplace from retaliation.

When a church or other religious institution faces a discrimination lawsuit by a ministerial
employee, it may invoke the ministerial exception to dismiss the lawsuit.¹⁹ Thus, the
ministerial exception is primarily a legal defense.²⁰ Using the ministerial exception as a
defense is also an ethical decision with moral implications, especially for a church tradition
that fights for inclusion and civil rights. Churches and religious institutions can promote
diversity by specifically seeking candidates of particular underrepresented backgrounds for
ministerial positions, because if these practices are challenged as discriminatory, they may
use the ministerial exception in their defense.

In 2020, the Supreme Court expanded the scope of the ministerial exception to include
employees with duties that can be considered religious and in furtherance of the institution’s
religious mission, even if they do not exercise positions of leadership or have special training
or credentials: the exception now applies to “any employee who leads a religious
organization, conducts worship services or important religious ceremonies or rituals, or
serves as a messenger or teacher of its faith.”²¹ The religious institution’s own definitions of
its religious purposes will be accorded considerable deference by the courts.²² This applies to
all religious and religious-affiliated institutions including nursing homes, hospitals,²³ and
schools.²⁴ For example, secular teachers at a religious-affiliated school can be considered
ministers if they open the day with required prayers, attend school-wide worship, and
occasionally prepare students for other religious activities;²⁵ and therefore they do not have
legal protections against discrimination.²⁶

This dissenting opinion of Justice Sonia Sotomayor, joined by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg,
highlights the vast ethical implications behind this freedom and responsibility that has been
given to religious institutions:
Two employers fired their employees allegedly because one had breast cancer and the other was elderly. Purporting to rely on this Court’s decision in *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC*, the majority shields those employers from disability and age-discrimination claims. In the Court’s view, because the employees taught short religion modules at Catholic elementary schools, they were “ministers” of the Catholic faith and thus could be fired for any reason, whether religious or nonreligious, benign or bigoted, without legal recourse. The Court reaches this result even though the teachers taught primarily secular subjects, lacked substantial religious titles and training, and were not even required to be Catholic.  

At churches and religious institutions throughout the country, more than one hundred thousand people who have been hired into non-clergy positions with the understanding that anti-discrimination legal protections would apply, may learn that they are “ministers” for purposes of the ministerial exception, and therefore legally subject to discrimination.

**TEXT OF THE MOTION**

WHEREAS the exercise of religious freedom that churches have in charting their own employment practices calls for great intentionality in protecting workers;

WHEREAS speaking in the context of religious employment, St. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians: “we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ;”

WHEREAS religious freedom allows churches wide latitude in managing policies and staff, yet the ethical commitments to love our neighbors and serve the most vulnerable, require us to inhabit the world of the marginalized and understand how the law speaks differently to those who have the law enacted upon them;

WHEREAS given that the law of religious freedom opens a broad gateway for religious institutions to choose their own policies, churches must strive to follow the high standard of righteousness that is our calling;

WHEREAS protecting employees can come in many forms, and churches and religious organizations can identify the forms of discrimination that their faith prohibits and, in consultation with experts, develop anti-discrimination policies that flow from that process;

WHEREAS churches can develop personnel policies that meaningfully protect workers and implement alternative resolution processes;

WHEREAS having the legal power to utilize the ministerial exception to preclude the discrimination claims of those who work in our institutions does not always mean that churches must use it, for example, churches may be able to clarify before hiring or before a lawsuit arises which positions do not advance core religious functions and are thus not ministerial for purposes of the ministerial exception;
NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages each Conference, each Association, each Local Church, each Affiliated and Associated Ministry, and each affiliated and historically affiliated organization, to study the privileges afforded to churches and religious institutions through the First Amendment including the ministerial exception;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Third General Synod invites all settings of the church and affiliated ministries to discern the extent and nature of ethical protections for their employees consistent with their understanding of Christian faith and teaching and to implement those measures that they deem appropriate;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the national setting of the United Church of Christ send the text of this Resolution to Local Churches, Associations and Conferences.

FUNDING: The 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.

1 United Church of Christ Statement of Faith
5 General Synod Resolution on Environmental Racism in East St. Louis, Illinois (GS19 1993), https://www.ucc.org/a_movement_is_born_environmental_justice_and_the_ucc.
8 The U.C.C. Office of Communications, “OC Inc.”, fought for the rights of individuals to have a say in Federal Communications Commission proceedings. The legal right of all citizens to participate in FCC proceedings was the result of advocacy by Rev. Parker and OC Inc.
9 “E pluribus unum”
10 https://www.ucc.org/ecumenical_interfaith-relations.
15 Gal. 5:13.
16 General Synod Resolution Affirming and Supporting the Authorized Ministries of Under-represented Clergy in Local Congregations: A Call for Greater Representation and Economic Justice (GS31 2017); General Synod Resolution Calling the United Church of Christ to be an Anti-racist Church (GS24 2003); see also Auburn

17 Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 565 U.S. 171 (2012). The lower courts are divided on whether hostile work environment claims are also excluded through the ministerial exception, and the Supreme Court has not yet addressed this question.

18 Deuteronomy 24:15: “You shall pay them their wages daily, before sunset…”; Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 (which amended the Civil Rights Act to strengthen enforcement of the equal pay for equal work provision).

19 The church’s basis for discriminating does not need to have any relationship with its religious beliefs. The discrimination can be motivated purely by sexism, racism, ageism or homophobia – or it can be motivated by a desire to save money, by discharging sick employees.

20 There are also some courts that decline to hear discrimination claims on the basis that the court does not have jurisdiction.


22 Our Lady of Guadalupe, p. 2066; as stated by Justice Sonia Sotomayor in her dissenting opinion: “In foreclosing the teachers’ claims, the Court…collapses [the determination of who is a minister] into a single consideration: whether a church thinks its employees play an important religious role. Because that simplistic approach has no basis in law and strips thousands of schoolteachers of their legal protections, I respectfully dissent.” (p. 2072).

23 The ministerial exception might even apply for institutions that used to have a religious affiliation that has since been severed (Penn v. New York Methodist Hospital, 884 F.3d 416 (2d Cir. 2018)).

24 Justice Sotomayor’s dissent cautioned the new definition may encompass all “coaches, camp counselors, nurses, social-service workers, in- house lawyers, and media-relations personnel” in churches and other religious institutions. P. 2082.


26 In Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Supreme Court held there is no legal recourse for Catholic school teachers fired on account of their age or because of having cancer (or any other legally protected category), so long as their employers show that the teachers had religious responsibilities and that these responsibilities were important to the religious mission of the school. A “friend-of-the-court” brief in support of the teachers, arguing that the ministerial exception should not apply to them, was submitted by 70 civil rights organizations including the American Association of People with Disabilities, the American Federation of Teachers, the Center for Constitutional Rights, the Human Rights Campaign, and the National Organization for Women Foundation. https://civilrights.org/edfund/2020/03/11/70-civil-rights-groups-urge-supreme-court-to-protect-rights-of-workers-at-risk-of-discrimination/.

27 Dissent of Justice Sotomayor, p. 2071-2072.

28 See Dissent of Justice Sotomayor, p. 2082.

29 1 Cor. 9:12.


31 “To whomever much is given, will much be required; and to whom much was entrusted, more will be asked.” – Luke 12:48. “With great power there must also come -- great responsibility.” See also Marvel Comics, Amazing Fantasy #15 (1962).
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**Becoming a Church of Contemplatives in Action**

**A Resolution of Witness**

Submitted by

Agape Spiritual Community, Waltham, MA  
Canaan Congregational Church, Canaan, MA  
First Church Williamstown, Williamstown, MA  
Sheffield United Church of Christ, Old Parish Church, Sheffield MA  
Park Congregational United Church of Christ, Toledo, OH  
Immanuel United Church of Christ of Catonsville, MD  
The First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, IL  
South Congregational Church, Pittsfield, MA  
Christ Church United, Lowell, MA  
First Church Cambridge, Cambridge, MA  
Keene Valley Congregational Church, Keene, NY  
First Church Pittsfield, UCC, MA  
Vergennes Congregational Church, Vergennes, VT

**SUMMARY**

This Resolution calls for the United Church of Christ to be a church of “contemplatives in action”. The United Church of Christ is known historically as a denomination for its bold leadership on social justice, peace, and environmental concerns. This resolution seeks the church’s integration of action for justice alongside intentional commitment to the life of prayer. Through fostering spiritual practices that deepen us in love for God, neighbors, ourselves, and all creation, this Resolution would empower the UCC to more fully root its collective life of activism for justice in the prayerful life of contemplation. By declaring its support for this resolution, the General Synod will emphasize the necessity of experiential grounding in the love of God alongside our common witness for justice and peace, while resourcing the wider church in the diversity of spiritual disciplines.

**BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL RATIONALE**
The church’s great commandment from Jesus is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Jesus rooted his ministry of teaching, healing, and solidarity with the marginalized through a life of prayer, solitude, silence, and intimate relationship with God. The three synoptic gospels tell how his ministry begins with a transformational time of solitary testing in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13). Periodically Jesus can be found stealing away from the busyness of the crowds to pray (Luke 5:16). Jesus’s public witness of creating inclusive community, exemplifying self-giving love and service, forming disciples, making peace and engaging in nonviolent resistance to the powers—that-be is all made possible because of his prayerful “union with the Father” (John 10:30). His life of integrated contemplation and action touches all aspects of Christian life individually and communally.

Jesus said that we are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14), sent to bear lasting spiritual fruit (John 15:16), and that “the things that I do, you also will do, and even greater than these.” (John 14:12). Just as Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15) made visible in the world, the church’s vocation is to incarnate Christ, in order that God’s love, justice, and peace be made manifest. Thus, as Franciscan teacher Richard Rohr writes, “like Christ, you are an incarnation of matter and spirit operating as one. This… is how all of us continue the mystery of incarnation in space and time.”

The United Church of Christ, as a denomination, has been a courageous leader in actions for social justice, peacemaking, environmental stewardship, and solidarity with those most marginalized. At the same time, the UCC has not historically emphasized to the greatest extent possible the fostering of spiritual, contemplative practices to love God and ourselves, and to see God in all things, all people, and creation.

The UCC affirms that “God is still speaking.” To hear God’s still-speaking voice, the church must follow the contemplative exemplars of our Christian tradition in ceasing from endless activity and stilling our individual and collective bodies so that we are willing and ready to listen. As Thomas Merton wrote, “God is present and . . . alive and awake in the fullness and depth and breadth of all the silences of the world.” Jesus and the Scriptures teach that the Divine is heard first in the stillness of the soul. Jesus said that the kin-dom of God is within us (Luke 17:21). The Psalmist implored us to remember to “be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10) Jesus retreated from the crowds, listening to the “still, small voice” (1 Kings 19:12) to escape the temptations of ego, power, and acclaim. The single-minded vision of Jesus, grounded in prayer and divine relationship, modeled putting God first above earthly concerns and riches (Matthew 6:25-34).

A contemplative consciousness changes us to become more aware of ourselves, the interdependent nature of all life, and the presence of the Divine in our lives and world. Such a grounding in the love of God allows us to “[receive and be] present to the moment and to the now . . . without your ego deciding whether you like it or not. Reality does not need you to like it in order to be reality.” This consciousness is what the broader Christian tradition affirms as “mysticism.” “Mysticism… refers to a universal and unifying view of the world. One of the quintessential insights of the mystics through the centuries is that the entire cosmos is … embedded in webs of relationship that are interconnected, interdependent, and constantly being
co-created and reinvented.” It is just this type of unifying perspective that is needed in our time of crisis and division.

Contemplation without action fuels narcissism, and action without contemplation is a recipe for bitterness and spiritual depletion. As Rev. Traci Blackmon said at her talk at the Thirty Second UCC General Synod. "The reason we're having so much trouble with the work out there is because we haven't done the work in here… Jesus is not just asking us to be courageous. Jesus has a bigger ask. Jesus is asking us to be transformed… and be changed from the inside out.”

Christian mystics throughout the ages report that contemplative encounters with God are restful and rejuvenating to our souls or inspiring us towards creative action. “Those caught up in the intimacy with God explain that the experience expands their knowledge, awakens palpable and actionable love, and is either a profoundly restorative resting in divine presence or a "fire shut up in the bones" that inspires action. The action can be restorative of personal relationships or proactive for the needs of the community.”

Contemplation is a holistic commitment to spiritual awakening. “Contemplation,” Joan Chittister says,… “brings us to see the big picture. It brings us to see beyond our own boundaries, beyond our own denominations, beyond even our own doctrines and dogmas and institutional self-interest, straight into the face of a mothering God from whose womb has come all the life that is… We become connected to everything, to everyone…. Zeal for justice consumes us. Then, action and prayer are one.”

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS the 21st century has seen a resurgence of Christian spiritual and contemplative practices, yet many churchgoers have not heard of or engaged in these practices in church;

WHEREAS people who leave church often find a scarcity of spiritual food there to nourish their souls, and are frequently unfamiliar with practices that cultivate self-care and love of God; and have turned to other spiritual and secular communities and organizations to fulfill this need;

WHEREAS there is a wide diversity of spiritual practices in the Christian tradition, and we aim to honor the diversity of each of these practices as they serve to build up the body of Christ;

WHEREAS with the crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic racism, and the financial fallout causing greater need than ever for work for social justice, the church is called to model and share expressions of activism modeled in the contemplative spirit of Jesus;

WHEREAS Jesus said “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit” (John 15: 5), and Christian contemplative practices hold the goal of abiding more deeply in Christ;

WHEREAS if we look at the “Tree of Contemplative Practices” as but one example of this diversity, we see that the myriad of spiritual disciplines far surpasses what the Church universal and the UCC in particular have offered to church members. As Barbara Holmes says,
"Contemplative practices can be silent or evocative, still or embodied in dance or shout. Always, contemplation requires attentiveness to the Spirit of God."\(^9\);

**WHEREAS** being “transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Romans 12: 2) begins with honest self-examination, reflective introspection and dialogue, and intentions and commitments to change, through God’s grace;

**WHEREAS** the UCC is rooted in the “Three Great Loves” of neighbor, children, and creation, and authentic contemplative practices expand our capacity and commitment to love and justice, so that we might be clearer channels for God’s love to shine through and might more fully “come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” (Ephesians 4: 13)

**WHEREAS** the UCC is often identified as a progressive church for activists, whereas what makes the church unique is its spiritual grounding in the love and wholeness of God,

**WHEREAS** the church’s foundation of divine love grounds and informs communal life in the body of Christ, as well as provides the reason for why the church expresses its witness in active forms of justice, peace, and service in the world;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages local churches to become churches of “contemplatives in action,” remembering the essential disciplines modeled by Jesus of silent prayer, meditation, and practices to commune with the Divine Mother-Father, and letting contemplative depth inspire our forming and sustaining of life-giving, spiritually-generative community and our church’s action in the world through works of charity, social justice, peacemaking, earth-stewardship, and making disciples on the path of God’s unconditional, agape love;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** the that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages training of future clergy and lay leaders in the ways of contemplation, spiritual practice, and Christian mysticism, providing experiential grounding for the sustained life of faith; living into our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ and as children of God to see the Divine in everyone and everything in all creation, beginning with ourselves and expanding our love into ever-widening circles;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Third General Synod invites local churches to commit to being a “both/and” rather than an “either/or” church— a church that prioritizes contemplation, spending time communing with God in various forms of prayer; and a church of activism that seeks to make God’s love and justice real in the world; thus a church of both contemplation and action—a church of “contemplatives in action” where our love of God through contemplative practices informs how we live and act in the world, and where our interior and exterior spiritual practices complement, ground, and inspire one another.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Third General Synod calls upon all settings of the United Church of Christ to invest in curriculum and resources to support Conferences, Associations, local churches, clergy, lay leaders, General Synod and seminaries in practicing and
teaching a foundational life of spiritual practices, as modeled in the life of Jesus. In this
resourcing, all settings are called to remain committed to the UCC’s diversity as a Multicultural,
Multiracial, and Anti-racist church, thus honoring the diversity of spiritual and contemplative
practices and teachers from many and varied cultures through whom the spirit works in different
ways;

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Third General Synod encourages all settings of
the UCC seek to live out the foundation of contemplative practices in the ministry of God’s work
in the world—making inclusive, participatory spiritual practices and teachings that cultivate
being, introspection, reflection and growth an integral part of National gatherings, including
committee work, children’s, youth and adult ministries, ecumenical partnerships, and General
Synod;

**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 Collegium of Officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries
of other entities with the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

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5 Traci Blackmon, UCC General Synod 32 Community Worship June 23 2019, found at 1 hour 47 minutes and 1
   hour 51 minutes at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqgPgjIBT6U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqgPgjIBT6U)
6 Barbara Holmes: *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis,
   2017), 5.
7 Joan Chittister, *Prophets Then, Prophets Now*, disc 1 (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2006), MP3
   download, from RR Daily Meditation July 5, 2019)
8 [http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree](http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree)
9 Barbara Holmes: *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis,
   2017), 5.
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A RESOLUTION TO BAN THE PRACTICE OF CONVERSION THERAPY

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by the Open and Affirming Coalition and the Mental Health Network

SUMMARY

This Resolution urges congregations and other settings in the United Church of Christ to advocate for a ban on “conversion” or “reparative” therapy—a medical practice legal in all 50 states that attempts to change or “repair” the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ+ persons in the belief that their orientation or identity is a mental illness. The Resolution further urges congregations and other settings to strengthen their efforts to reach their LGBTQ+ neighbors, especially youth, with the Good News that their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression are gifts from God.

BACKGROUND

Conversion therapy has existed in one form or another since the late 19th century. While the practice has caused demonstrable harm to the mental and physical health of LGBTQ+ persons, conversion therapy continues to be legal throughout the United States.

According to practitioners of conversion therapy, the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ+ persons is a disease, defect or developmental disorder. This claim has been repudiated by every professional association in the field of health care, many of which have advocated for a ban on the discredited practice.

According to a report published the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law (June 2019), 698,000 adults in the United States have experienced conversion therapy, and 20,000 LGBTQ+ youth will be subjected to conversion therapy if state legislatures refuse to act.

Also according to the Williams Institute (June 15, 2020), LGBTQ+ people who were subjected to conversion therapy have shown a greater risk of suicidal thoughts and attempted suicide than LGBTQ+ people who had never experienced this therapy, including

- 92% greater odds of lifetime suicidal ideation,
• 88% greater odds of attempting suicide,
• 75% greater odds of planning to attempt suicide.\(^7\)

The consensus of the mental health care profession was summed up in the “Position Statement on Attempts to Change Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, or Gender Expression” released by the American Psychoanalytic Association in 2012. They found:

“Psychoanalytic technique does not encompass purposeful attempts to “convert,” “repair,” change or shift an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such directed efforts are against fundamental principles of psychoanalytic treatment and often result in substantial psychological pain by reinforcing damaging internalized attitudes.”\(^8\)

**BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE**

The biblical tradition affirms that all human beings are made “in the image of God.” (Gen. 1:27) The church’s witness affirms that “in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith” and that “all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 26-28) We are therefore to “love our neighbor as ourselves” (Lev. 19:9-18 and Matt. 22:40) and act with empathy towards all others (cf. the “Golden Rule” in Lev. 19:18 and Matt. 7:12).

The capacity to love and seek love is God’s gift to all human beings. Love is a reflection God’s inner life as Trinity—the three divine persons whose love cannot be contained but is poured out in God’s acts of creation and redemption. Human love in its many expressions is therefore God’s design for humanity, and is offered to all without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity. The psychological and spiritual damage inflicted by “conversion therapy” on LGBTQ+ people, especially youth, violates the image of God that is embodied in every human being, harms our neighbor, and denies to others the grace we claim for ourselves.

**HISTORICAL GROUNDING**

For nearly five decades, General Synods of the United Church of Christ have repeatedly affirmed the dignity, humanity and rights of LGBTQ+ persons. This Resolution follows the trajectory set by a number of resolutions and pronouncements adopted by previous General Synods since 1975, including “Resolution Deploring the Violation of Civil Rights of Gay and Bisexual Persons” (11th General Synod 1977), “Resolution Calling on United Church of Christ Congregations to Declare Themselves Open and Affirming” (15th General Synod 1985), “Resolution Deploring Violence against Lesbian and Gay People” (17th General Synod 1989), “Prevention of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth Suicide” (22nd General Synod 1999), “Affirming the Participation and Ministry of Transgender People within the United Church of Christ and Supporting their Civil and Human Rights” (24th General Synod 2003) and “Equal Marriage Rights for All” (25th General Synod 2005). Common to all of these actions is the belief, grounded in our faith, that LGBTQ+ persons share in the image of the Creator, and like all other persons deserve protection from violence, deprivation of rights, and any other violation of their dignity as human beings.
TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS the medical practice known as “conversion therapy” or “reparative therapy” regards LGBTQ+1 persons as abnormal or defective, and attempts to change or “repair” non-conforming sexual orientation or gender identity through widely-discredited therapeutic practices,9 and

WHEREAS conversion therapy for adults is legal in 50 states and all U.S. territories, while conversion therapy for youth and children is still legal in 30 states,10 and

WHEREAS many studies have shown that attempts to change or “repair” sexual orientation or gender identity are associated with compromised mental health including, among other harms, lifelong suffering as the result of internalized shame, increased risk of suicide, and difficulty in forming stable and lasting relationships,11 and

WHEREAS a survey of at-risk LGBTQ+ youth published by the Trevor Project in 2020 showed that 42 percent who were subjected to conversion therapy had attempted suicide, while the attempted suicide rate of transgender and non-binary youth during or after conversion therapy was even higher at 57 percent,12 and

WHEREAS virtually every professional association in the health care industry has declared that conversion therapy is ineffective, unethical or harmful, including the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychoanalytic Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association, and the National Association of Social Workers,13 and

WHEREAS in December 2020 UCC denominational leaders joined Archbishop Desmond Tutu and more than 400 other Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu faith leaders as signatories of the statement “Declaring the Sanctity of life and the Dignity of All” which called “for all attempts to change, suppress or erase a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression—commonly known as ‘conversion therapy’—to end, and for these harmful practices to be banned.”14

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that The Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ, affirming the dignity and worth of all people, deplores the practice of “conversion therapy” or “reparative therapy” that denies LGBTQ+1 youth and adults the opportunity to experience the blessings of love and human integrity, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that The Thirty-Third General Synod urges parents, authorized ministers and care-givers in the United Church of Christ to protect those in their care from any practice or program that purports to “cure” their sexual orientation or gender identity, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that The Thirty-Third General Synod urges congregations and all other settings of the church to advocate for state and federal laws protecting adults, youth and children from “conversion therapy” by banning the practice, and

UCCB-21-03-SoD-01e Conversion Therapy
BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that The Thirty-Third General Synod urges congregations and other settings to strengthen their efforts to reach their LGBTQ+ neighbors, especially youth, with the Good News that their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression are gifts from God.

FUNDING: The 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.

1 "LGBTQ+" is a common abbreviation for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer." The plus sign indicates that no acronym can fully express the rich diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities in the human family. Another common abbreviation is “LGBTQIA+,” which includes the intersex and asexual communities.


3 Human Rights Campaign. The Lies and Dangers of Efforts to Change Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity. www.hrc.org/resources/the-lies-and-dangers-of-reparative-therapy


5 Human Rights Campaign. See original citation.

6 Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. Conversion Therapy and LGBT Youth. http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/conversion-therapy-and-lgbt-youth

7 Williams Institute. See citation above.


9 Human Rights Campaign. See original citation.

10 Movement Advancement Project. See original citation.

11 American Psychoanalytic Association. See original citation.


13 Human Rights Campaign. See original citation.

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**A COMMITMENT TO GENDER SAFETY & EQUITY IN MINISTRY SETTINGS**

**A Resolution of Witness**

Submitted by the Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ

**SUMMARY**

This resolution calls us to renewed accountability for the theology of equality that we have long professed as the United Church of Christ. In a climate of increased violence and hatred, where women in public leadership are targeted with intimidation by the highest office of government, women and non-binary clergy are uniquely vulnerable as they stand in the pulpit. Clergy have begun to share their #metoo #churchtoo stories of discrimination, sexual harassment and abuse in the congregations where they serve. This resolution confesses our complicity with systems of sexist oppression, and asks the Church to explore ways to promote gender safety. It asks the Church to empower women and non-binary persons, both lay and ordained, to raise issues regarding sexism and discrimination, free of censure or threat of retaliation. This resolution expresses a commitment to the physical and sexual autonomy of women and non-binary persons. It urges congregations to address inequities (in pay, benefits, senior leadership, etc.) for clergy and lay women and non-binary persons who serve within the Church. Finally, it resolves that the Church do this work with intentionality and awareness of the added threats and realities of violence experienced by women and non-binary persons holding multiple marginalized identities.

**BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Our scriptural tradition has a complicated relationship with women. While women are counted in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17), their agency is mitigated by sexual exploitation (Tamar, Dinah, Bathsheba and many nameless others), objectification for barter or conquest (Ruth, Leah and Rachel), or as a buffer to protect men from violence (daughters of Lot). Patriarchal and misogynistic interpretations of scripture have only served to perpetuate and amplify the patriarchal culture and bias of those who wrote scripture.

Although women hold important roles in the stories of our faith, by the account of Carol Meyers, of the 1,426 names which appear in the Hebrew Testament, 1,315 are specified or presumed to
be male. Of those women who are named, few of their stories appear in the lectionary or traditional Sunday School curriculum. Yet those women received an inheritance from YHWH (Hagar), saved the life of Moses (Shiprah and Puah, Miriam), protected the people of God during war (Yael, Rahab), served as prophets (Deborah, Huldah), changed the *torah* so that women could inherit property (Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milkah and Noah), and advocated for their murdered children (Rizpah).

In the Christian Testament, Jesus shared a table with women and gave them a place, defending them against the judgment and accusations of others. Women were the first witnesses of the resurrection (Mary Magdalene, Mary, mother of James, Salome, Joanna, and others). Women were funders and foundational members of the earliest Christian congregations. Our scriptures tell us that women served as leaders and teachers (Priscilla), disciples (Tabitha), apostles (Junia), deacons (Phoebe) and patrons (Lydia) in the early church. Although their stories have been largely ignored and are only now being reclaimed, these texts provide an important affirmation of the importance of women’s leadership.

Biblically and theologically, the United Church of Christ affirms that women can and should serve and lead within the Church. The denomination has worked to adopt inclusive language, affirming that humankind, in all of our gender expressions, is created in the image of God. The United Church of Christ is proud to celebrate that a Congregationalist church ordained the first woman minister in the United States, Antoinette Brown, in 1853. (It is worth noting, however, that Brown left that church after only two years to become Unitarian.) Previous General Synods have affirmed the value and dignity of women, and called on us to recognize and address gender inequality and discrimination where they exist within the Church itself. As women began entering ordained ministry in great numbers, from the 1970s onward, the work of Marie Fortune and what is now the FaithTrust Institute helped committees on ministry develop processes to address ministerial sexual misconduct, as well as examine the ways women clergy were being harassed. Only recently has the United Church of Christ reached a point where more than 50% of active clergy are women.

In a climate of increased violence and hatred, where women in public leadership are targeted with intimidation by the highest office of government, women and non-binary clergy are uniquely vulnerable as they stand in the pulpit. Clergy across the United Church of Christ have begun to share their #metoo #churchtoo stories of discrimination, sexual harassment and abuse in the congregations where they serve. Stories of women’s leadership in scripture may seem to be the exception rather than the rule, and sexist assumptions and attitudes remain.

We are called to stand in solidarity with women and non-binary persons who, for the sake of their calling, risk their bodies and their lives to be faithful to the gospel. We are called to hold all clergy, regardless of age, gender, or active status, to the code of ethics that requires us to treat one another as equal partners in the ministry of Jesus Christ. This resolution calls us to accountability for the theology of equality that we profess as the United Church of Christ.
WHEREAS: The General Synod of the United Church of Christ has taken a firm, unyielding
stance for the human rights and safety of women, refuses to condone any form of violence
against vulnerable people, and strongly encourages clergy and laity to support survivors of
sexual violence; and

WHEREAS: The majority of women, both cisgender and transgender, whether they identify as
women or as non-binary, are objectified and subjected to the violence and degradation of sexual
assault and unwanted sexual advance; and

WHEREAS: Sexual harassment and gender discrimination, including attacking, undermining
and dismissing women and non-binary persons’ leadership, is a form of violence; and occurs
within a national context of escalating violence against women in positions of public leadership;
and

WHEREAS: Women and non-binary persons risk further discrimination, violence, loss of
employment, ostracism or death in daring to say no or confront the harasser, and penalty of being
silenced or not believed when they dare to report; and

WHEREAS: Gender expression continues to be a minefield for women and non-binary persons,
who are pressured to exude the amount of femininity that makes others comfortable – “too
feminine” is seen as helpless or intentionally seductive, but “too masculine” is considered
confrontational and disrespectful - and women are still judged on their appearance, rather than on
their skills, ideas, achievements, or other non sexual/non-gendered attributes; and

WHEREAS: Women are still subject to economic violence, primarily in that they are paid less
than men for the same or similar work, and this lower pay in turn reduces their pension,
retirement benefits and Social Security payments; they are overcharged for “women’s products”
and penalized for carrying out the responsibilities of home and family; and

WHEREAS: These experiences of bias, discrimination and violence occur in ministry settings,
and are experienced by clergy and lay women and non-binary persons holding positions of
leadership within the Church; and

WHEREAS: Such discrimination is founded in misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and racism,
which are antithetical to the way of Jesus; and

WHEREAS: Our society is in the midst of a cultural transformation, with the #metoo movement
empowering survivors to break the silence and share their stories of rape, abuse, and sexual
harassment, and women and non-binary persons have begun sharing their #churchtoo stories of
how this occurs within the Church; and

WHEREAS: Clergy, chaplains and faith leaders are called upon to provide pastoral care to those
navigating gender discrimination, sexual harassment and violence, some of which occurs within
our ministry settings; and
WHEREAS: The United Church of Christ Ministerial Code of Ethics requires ministers to “not use my position, power, or authority to exploit any person”; ix

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ, confesses its complicity with systems of sexist oppression that inhibit and limit leadership, and asks all settings of the United Church of Christ, including (but not limited to) Committees on Ministry, Local Church Ministries and Justice & Witness Ministries Teams, to explore ways to promote gender safety, to empower women and non-binary persons, both lay and ordained, to raise issues regarding sexism and discrimination, reinforcing the covenants and standards of behavior which bind us together as conference, clergy, and lay leaders and members; and

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that the Thirty Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ affirms the physical and sexual autonomy of women and non-binary persons: the right not to have any other person invade her/their personal space without permission; the right not to be touched, or abused, either emotionally or physically, in any way by another person; the right to express gender in the ways she/they choose; the right to communicate autonomously, without reproach or censure based in sexism and misogyny; the right to expect that any such action will in no way be held against her/them for any reason in the workplace, including ministry settings, or in any social situation; and

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that the Thirty Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages all settings of the UCC to commit to gender equity in staff compensation, and urges all settings to address inequities (in pay, benefits, senior leadership, etc.) for clergy and lay women and non-binary persons who serve within the Church; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Thirty Third General Synod asserts that this work must simultaneously address the threats and realities of violence that racism, transphobia, heterosexism, classism, and ableism impose on the daily life and leadership of women and non-binary persons in the Church.

FUNDING

The 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.

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https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/training

https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/churchtoo


https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence

United Church of Christ Ordained Minister’s Code, https://www.ucc.org/ministers_ordained-ministers-code
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A RESOLUTION ENCOURAGING TO END 128 YEARS OF WAR BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE HAWAIIAN KINGDOM

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by the Association of Hawaiian Evangelical Churches of the Hawai‘i Conference United Church of Christ

SUMMARY

This Resolution calls the United Church to actualize its historical commitment to justice and peace with the friendly Christian Hawaiian Kingdom nation whose constitutions are founded upon Christian values.

BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

In the beginning humans were created in the image of God and were called “good”. Thus, all humans were created equal. The call to justice by the prophets is God’s commandment to treat everyone justly by acting righteously. God’s moral law, enshrined in the Ten Commandments, is eternal and unchanging. Our bible is built on it. These laws are God’s stated will, the way he wants his kingdom and his universe to operate. In order, for justice to prevail, human laws must mirror God’s law. Justice is to prescribe the right way, to do things in an appropriate way. Moses demonstrated this concept when he said, “You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God’s.” (Deuteronomy 1:17). Justice has to do with equity in judgment without regard for a person’s status. It is an equitable application of God’s moral law to all people without partiality. (Numbers 15:16). When we do not operate according to biblical standards, we have abandoned God’s moral law, so every man does what is right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).

Jesus came to proclaim liberty and freedom to announce God’s justice being satisfied through what he called, “the favorable year of the Lord”, Old Testament Year of Jubilee. It was when God set society back in order. According to Leviticus 25:8-9, Israel could not have Jubilee until the people first observed the Day of Atonement. They could not have true justice on the human level until they got right with God on the vertical level. Social justice will not be complete until
the people in a society, even the Church, get right with God. It is bringing the presence, precepts, and power of God to bear on society, pulling society back in an upright position.

HISTORICAL GROUNDING

Responding to the wish of Henry Opukahaia ¹, ², but burdened with the false ideology of White Supremacy, missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM) were sent to Hawaii arriving in 1820 (201 years ago).

Rev. Rufus Anderson Ⅷ attempted to correct the evils of White Supremacy and advocated for a Hawaiian-led and Hawaiian-run church during his visit to the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1863.

In 1893, descendants of missionaries led the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

President Paul Sherry traveled to Hawaii and on January 17, 1993, the 100th anniversary of the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom government, apologized to the Hawaiian people at Kaumakapili Church Ⅻ. This apology was cited in Public Law 103-150 signed by President William Clinton on November 23, 1993 ⅪⅢ.

Given the present COVID-19 pandemic and the institutional racism seen recently, the “God is Still Speaking” church, the United Church of Christ, is challenged to actualize its struggle to fulfill the principle of justice and reconciliation within the United Church of Christ. 128 years of war crimes continues to target and violate Christian Hawaiian citizens in Hawaiian Kingdom territory and abroad which amount to a colossal scale of humanitarian and human rights violations daily.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS, Henry Opukahaia is known as the missionary from the Hawaiian Kingdom that encouraged American missionaries to arrive in Hawaii ¹, ², and

WHEREAS, the first Christian nation in the pacific, the Hawaiian Kingdom constitution in 1840 began with a quote from the bible “God hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on the face of the earth in unity and blessedness.” Ⅲ, Ⅳ, Ⅴ, and

WHEREAS, on December 19, 1842, United States President John Tyler agreed to recognize the independence of the Hawaiian Kingdom Ⅵ; and

WHEREAS, the Christian Hawaiian Kingdom through treaties with friendly nations around the world, successfully modernized Hawaiian self-governance at the time to prosper in peace, trade and friendship through treaties with friendly nations around the world for fifty years Ⅶ; and

WHEREAS, Rev. Rufus Anderson, the author of the three-self method (self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating) and the long-term secretary of the ABCFM (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission) arrived in Hawaii in 1863 to tell the missionaries to create
self-reliant, self-governing churches and "to devolve upon it (the Hawaiian churches) the responsibilities of self-government in ecclesiastical matters." viii, and

WHEREAS, Rev. Anderson's advice was not followed and the government of the Hawaiian Kingdom was overthrown on January 17, 1893 ix, and

WHEREAS, on December 18, 1893, President Grover Cleveland's executive agreement to restore the Christian Hawaiian Kingdom was signed by Liliuokalani and received by U.S. ambassador Albert Willis x, and

WHEREAS, in 1991, the Eighteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ directed President Paul Sherry to issue an apology on the 100th anniversary of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy for the complicity of the church in the overthrow xi, xii, and

WHEREAS, in 1993 President Clinton, with senators and representatives from Hawaii, signed Public law 103-150 apologizing for the United States role in the illegal occupation xiii, and

WHEREAS the National Lawyers Guild recommended to the Governor of the State of Hawaii “to begin to comply with international humanitarian law in its prolonged and illegal occupation of the Hawaiian Islands.” xiv

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ has historically stressed the importance of Justice as a key faith component for the Church, and

WHEREAS, the correction of injustices depends upon correct history based upon factual matters, and history is often based upon who writes the history and factual information available, and

WHEREAS, the information included in this resolution will be available at https://ahecchurch.weebly.com/ about the founding of the Hawaiian Kingdom to correct false history about the Christian Hawaiian Kingdom, and

WHEREAS, various General Synods of the United Church of Christ have taken proactive stands on Justice; and

WHEREAS justice depends upon action, not just stating what is true and just and right (pono in Hawaiian),

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ strongly urges the Mayors for the counties of the State of Hawaii “to begin to comply with international humanitarian law in its prolonged and illegal occupation of the Hawaiian Islands.”

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ strongly urges the Governor for the State of Hawaii “to begin to comply with international humanitarian law in its prolonged and illegal occupation of the Hawaiian Islands.”
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ strongly urges the U.S. Congress “to begin to comply with international humanitarian law in its prolonged and illegal occupation of the Hawaiian Islands.”

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ strongly urges the U.S. President “to begin to comply with international humanitarian law in its prolonged and illegal occupation of the Hawaiian Islands.”

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ strongly urges all United Nation member States and non-member States to cooperate to ensure the United States complies with international humanitarian law and bring an end to the unlawful occupation of the Hawaiian Islands.

FUNDING: The 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.

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i Papa Makua Wendell Davis 5th generation lineal descendant of Henry Opukahaia


iv https://www.hawaii-nation.org/constitution-1840.html

v http://hooilina.org/cgi-bin/journal?e=d-0journal--00-0-0-004-Document---0-1--1en-50---20-frameset-search-issue--001-0110escapewin&a=p&p=frameset&d=HASH0166acfd8ec6df2fa38fd161.5.2.3


xii http://rescarta.ucc.org/sp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp?doc_id=8abec2f6-352d-48f9-958b-49a311bc4489/ucoc0000/UD000001/00000019


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DECLARATION FOR A JUST PEACE BETWEEN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by

Shalom United Church of Christ, New Haven, Connecticut

With the concurrence of:

First Church, United Church of Christ, Guilford, Connecticut
First Congregational Church, UCC, Old Lyme, Connecticut
Meriden Congregational Church, UCC, Meriden, New Hampshire
Union Congregational Church, UCC, Angels Camp, California
Pilgrim United Church of Christ, Carlsbad, California

SUMMARY

The resolution calls on the General Synod to adopt a Declaration on the Requirements for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel articulating the principles that must be in place and honored in any future just and peaceful relationship between Israel and Palestine. The Declaration affirms that justice, understood both as adherence to the message of the Hebrew prophets and the life and teachings of Jesus, as well as to applicable international laws, is the fundamental and requisite principle which must guide a peaceful future for Israel and Palestine. It rejects a future imposed by military power, illegal occupation and dispossession, or unilateral annexation of land and the use of an imperialistic theology as justification. The Declaration pronounces Israel’s continued oppression of the Palestinian people a sin, incompatible with the Gospel. It further calls upon Local Churches, Conferences, and Associations to adopt this Declaration as their plumbline to guide their support for the aspirations of our partners in the region and their advocacy with the United States’ government for policies consistent with these principles.

The resolution draws on over fifty years of General Synod actions, statements by UCC officers, and actions by Global Ministries and its historic component bodies. It is informed by the witness of ecumenical partners, including the National Council of Churches, USA, and the World Council of Churches, and it responds to the witness of our Palestinian Christian partners, and in

The *Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ* reminds us that “God calls the church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship. . . and resist the powers of evil.” The *Declaration* calls on the United Church of Christ to engage in a costly act of solidarity and accompaniment with the Palestinian people and to resist the oppressive dispossession, occupation, and economic and military oppression of Palestine.

**BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL, THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING**

In *Kairos Palestine: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love From the Heart of Palestinian Suffering* (2009), Palestinian Christians assert that our land has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land. In light of the teachings of the Holy Bible, the promise of the land has never been a political programme, but rather the prelude to complete universal salvation. It was the initiation of the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth” (*Kairos Palestine* par. 2.3).

The promise of God regarding land and blessing in Genesis was ultimately not about possession of land, but about the role of the people of Israel as a blessing that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12.3).

United Church of Christ biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann writes that “the Torah and the world it evokes are beyond a possessed land, and this notion links to ‘a true community of all’ that transcends any tribalism” (*Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* 2015, p. 37). He goes on to quote Jewish philosopher Martin Buber: “This entire history of the road from Ur of the Chaldees to Sinai is a consequence of choices and partings, events of history – tribal history and national history. But above them stands revelation [which] gives them their meaning, points out to them their goal. For the end of all these partings is a true community of all men.”

In 1987 the General Synod affirmed its recognition that God's covenant with the Jewish people has not been rescinded or abrogated by God, but remains in full force, inasmuch as “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29) – a clear rejection of Christian supersessionist theology. Along with this, however, the General Synod in 2003 rejected the theological claims of Christian Zionism which seek to privilege Jews in the modern State of Israel over others who share the land, and instead, while recognizing “the diversity of biblical perspectives on the question of a Jewish homeland,” also “affirms that all such perspectives should be grounded in the message of justice and peace taught by Jesus and the biblical prophets.” That message is summarized in the passage from Isaiah that Jesus quotes in Nazareth to inaugurate his ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Isaiah 61.1-2; Luke 4.18-19).
Isaiah reminds us that the mere accumulation of property at the expense of justice and righteousness offers only a barren future: “Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land” (Isaiah 5.8).

The United Church of Christ, through its mission agencies, has maintained a close relationship with the Palestinian Christian community, as well as the wider Arab population of Palestine. For decades it has supported churches and church-related agencies, as well as human rights, humanitarian, and social justice organizations in Palestine and Israel to the end that God’s blessings might be shared by all in the land and that the violence and oppression that have afflicted the region for over seventy years may end.

Consistent with these understandings, the General Synod has repeatedly called for the implementation of a vision of the future for Israel and Palestine based on justice and security for all and the principle of self-determination. In 1973 the General Synod affirmed that “peace and security can be attained only through a just and stable political settlement that takes into account the legitimate aspirations of all the peoples in the area and, particularly, the right to existence of the State of Israel and the rights of the Palestinian Arabs.” In 1997 the General Synod called for a negotiated agreement on the status of Jerusalem “that respects the human and political rights of both Palestinians and Israelis, as well as the rights of the three religious communities.”

In 2005 the General Synod called upon United Church of Christ settings and members “to use economic leverage, including, but not limited to: advocating the reallocation of US foreign aid so that the militarization of the Middle East is constrained; making positive contributions to groups and partners committed to the non-violent resolution of the conflict; challenging the practices of corporations that gain from the continuation of the conflict; and divesting from those companies that refuse to change their practices of gain from the perpetuation of violence, including the Occupation.” Further, the same Synod in a resolution on Israel’s construction of the separation barrier, called upon the Israeli government “to cease the project to construct the barrier, tear down the segments that have already been constructed, and make reparations to those who have lost homes, fields, property, and/or lives and health due to the barrier and its effects.”

In 2015 the General Synod called on United Church of Christ settings “to divest any direct or substantive indirect holdings in companies profiting from or complicit in human rights violations arising from the occupation of the Palestinian Territories by the state of Israel” and to “boycott goods identified as produced in or using the facilities of illegal settlements located in the occupied Palestinian territories.” In 2017 the General Synod called on Israel to honor the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, calling attention to the practice of military detention for Palestinian children, denial of access to legal assistance, and the use of physical and emotional abuse. Most recently, in 2019 the General Synod called for advocacy for Palestinian refugees specifically as stipulated in UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (1948), and for continued US funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

TEXT OF THE MOTION
WHEREAS for over seventy years Palestinian people have faced dispossession of their land, displacement from their homes, a harsh military occupation, severe restrictions on travel, the military detention of their children, home demolitions – over 120,000 to date and the constant threat of more – and vast inequities in access to natural, economic, and medical resources when compared to that enjoyed by Israeli citizens living in illegal West Bank settlements, and also on a daily basis face severe restrictions on access to their olive groves, farms, and holy sites; and

WHEREAS there are more than 5.6 million Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Administration representing a global displacement of Palestinian people dating back to 1948 whose future status remains unresolved; and

WHEREAS the Israeli government has maintained an illegal military occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967 that includes the establishment of illegal Jewish-only settlements throughout the West Bank and more recently has enacted formal discrimination against its Arab citizens through the passage of the Nation State Law in 2018; and

WHEREAS provocative actions under the Trump administration, including moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, the suspension of humanitarian aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Administration, and support for Israel’s proposed illegal annexation of land in the occupied West Bank have further injured the Palestinian community and imposed serious roadblocks to peace; and

WHEREAS the Trump Administration’s Department of Education has issued a rule labeling any criticism of the State of Israel as an antisemitic act in order to suppress advocacy for Palestinian rights on university campuses, and has joined many state governments in further suppressing freedom of speech in support of Palestinian civil society’s call for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions; and

WHEREAS actions by Israel, with tacit and overt support from the United States government, have established conditions comparable to those in force under Jim Crow in the United States south between Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement, with segregation laws that enshrined systematic domination and oppression by whites over blacks. Israel’s acts of domination and oppression include, but are not limited to adoption of the Nation State Law in 2018, the building of the separation barrier, implementation of a restrictive pass system for Palestinians, the creation of Israeli-only highways through the West Bank, and imposed military detention of Palestinian children accused of crimes; and

WHEREAS the General Synod of the United Church of Christ and its officers have for over fifty years advocated for a negotiated process leading to a just peace between Israel and Palestine marked by adherence to international law and international standards of human rights and honoring the principle of self-determination and the rights of Palestinian refugees; and

WHEREAS, reminiscent of historical examples such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and Southern Africa, Israel exhibits a current-day form of settler colonialism, actively engaged in the removal and erasure of the indigenous Palestinian population, through a matrix of control that includes: the imposition of a harsh military occupation; the de facto annexation of
Palestinian lands and threats of further annexation; the expansion of illegal Jewish only settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank; the contraction of Palestinian-controlled land; and the restriction of travel for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

**WHEREAS** Cry for Hope: A Call for Decisive Action issued by Palestinian Christian leaders and theologians in July, 2020⁸, states that “the very being of the church, the integrity of the Christian faith, and the credibility of the Gospel is at stake. We declare that support for the oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word or deed, is a sin. We assert that Christian support for Zionism as a theology and an ideology that legitimize the right of one people to deny the human rights of another is incompatible with the Christian faith and a grave misuse of the Bible”;

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopts the following Declaration:

1. *We affirm* that the continued oppression of the Palestinian people remains, after more than five decades of oppression of the Palestinian people, a matter of theological urgency and represents a sin in violation of the message of the biblical prophets and the Gospel, and that all efforts to defend or legitimize the oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word, or deed by the Christian community, represent a fundamental denial of the Gospel.

   *Therefore, we reject* the notion that Israel’s occupation of Palestine is a purely political problem outside the concern of the church or that the oppression of the Palestinian people is an inevitable consequence of global or regional geopolitical interests.

2. *We affirm* that the biblical narrative beginning with creation and extending through the calling of the Israelites, the corrective admonitions of the prophets, the incarnation and ministry of Jesus and the witness of the apostles to the “ends of the earth” . . . speaks of God’s blessing extending to “all the families of the earth.” (Genesis 12.3)

   *Therefore, we reject* any theology or ideology including Christian Zionism, Supercessionism, antisemitism or anti-Islam bias that would privilege or exclude any one nation, race, culture, or religion within God’s universal economy of grace.

3. *We affirm* that all people living in Palestine and Israel are created in the image of God and that this bestows ultimate dignity and sacredness to all;

   *Therefore, we reject* any laws and legal procedures which are used by one race or religion to enshrine one people in a privileged legal position at the expense of another, including Israel’s apartheid system of laws and legal procedures.

4. *We affirm* that all peoples have the right to self-determination and to their aspirations for sovereignty and statehood in the shaping of their corporate religious, cultural, and political life, free from manipulation or pressure from outside powers, and that a just resolution of conflicting claims is only achieved through peaceful negotiation based on
international law and UN resolutions, the equal protection of civil rights, and the fair and just sharing of land and resources.

Therefore, we reject the use of Scripture to claim a divine right to the land as the rationale for Israel’s illegal seizure and annexation of Palestinian land as well as the imposition of so-called peace agreements by Israel or the United States through the exercise of political and military domination that leaves Palestinians without equal rights, full citizenship, and the opportunity to thrive religiously, culturally, politically, and economically.

5. **We affirm** the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes if they so choose or to be compensated for their loss of property, consistent with UN General Assembly resolution 194 (1948).

Therefore, we reject the denial of this right, just as we reject efforts to manipulate internationally-agreed upon definitions of refugees to attempt to erase this right which extends across generations.

6. **We affirm** the First Amendment constitutional right to freedom of speech and assembly to protest the actions of the State of Israel and to uphold the rights of Palestinians, including the use of economic measures to support justice as a First Amendment right and joining the international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement by individuals, institutions, corporations, and religious bodies that advocate peace with justice or participate in any aspect of the use of economic measures to support justice.

Therefore, we reject the idea that any criticism of policies of the State of Israel is inherently antisemitic, and we oppose the efforts of U.S. federal and state governments to limit free speech on university campuses and to restrict or ban support of the international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that national setting of the United Church of Christ send the text of this Declaration to Local Churches, Associations and Conferences; and

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that all settings of the United Church of Christ be encouraged to receive this Declaration as a prophetic call for renewed and continued advocacy for a just peace in Palestine and Israel and use it as a plumbline for taking action, including:

a. Committing to hearing the voices of Palestinians regarding their situation, including the voices of Palestinian Christians through the study of Palestine Liberation Theology, attention to statements and appeals such as *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth* (2009) and *A Cry for Hope* (2020), participation in travel seminars that expose visitors to the Palestinian community, and use of resources from Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

b. Implementing the calls of prior General Synod resolutions, including the 2015 Resolution, “A Call for the United Church of Christ to Take Actions Toward a Just Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” and the 2017 Resolution, “A Call for the United
Church of Christ to Advocate for the Rights of Children Living Under Israeli Military Occupation.”

c. Examining critically our use and interpretations of Scripture as well as liturgies and hymns that equate ancient Biblical Israel with the modern state in ways that promote settler colonialism and the dispossession of Palestinian land, rights, and cultural expressions.

d. Offering support and encouragement to college students and faculty members as well the human rights groups (including Students for Justice in Palestine, Jewish Voice for Peace, American Muslims for Palestine, and many other allied groups), whose freedom to speak, witness and advocate on university campuses is threatened in any way by state or local governments, or by college administrators.

e. Advocating for the cessation of U.S. aid to Israel until such time that Palestinian human rights, civil rights, and self-determination are fully realized and protected in compliance with international law, US laws on foreign military assistance, and the principles of human rights.

f. Supporting the full restoration of US funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency which carries out critical services by and for Palestinian refugees, and encouraging continued support for UCC partners which serve Palestinian refugees.

g. Demanding that the plight of Palestinian refugees be addressed by Israel and the international community based on United Nations Resolution 194 guaranteeing that “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.”

FUNDING

The 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.

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1 Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions: [https://icahd.org/](https://icahd.org/)
2 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East: [https://www.unrwa.org/](https://www.unrwa.org/)
4 [https://www.globalministries.org/ecumenical_statement_on_current_u_s_policy_and_israel_palestine](https://www.globalministries.org/ecumenical_statement_on_current_u_s_policy_and_israel_palestine)
5 [https://www.globalministries.org/not_peace_but_apartheid_b_tselem_s_brief_response_to_the_trump_plan](https://www.globalministries.org/not_peace_but_apartheid_b_tselem_s_brief_response_to_the_trump_plan)
6 [https://www.globalministries.org/ucc_disciples_leaders_issue_joint_statement_in_response_to_the_peace_and_prosperity_proposal](https://www.globalministries.org/ucc_disciples_leaders_issue_joint_statement_in_response_to_the_peace_and_prosperity_proposal)
7 [https://www.globalministries.org/ucc_disciples_leaders_issue_statement_on_israeli_settlements](https://www.globalministries.org/ucc_disciples_leaders_issue_statement_on_israeli_settlements)
6 https://www.globalministries.org/mee_resolutions
8 Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice: https://www.cryforhope.org/
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**A RESOLUTION TO DECLARE AND RESPOND TO RACISM AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS**

**A Resolution of Witness**

Submitted by The Council for Health and Human Service Ministries (CHHSM), UCC, and the Council on Racial and Ethnic Ministries (COREM), UCC

**SUMMARY**

This Resolution calls the United Church of Christ to declare and respond to racism as a public health crisis.

**BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE**

As followers of Christ, we are called to be co-builders of the City of God, who dismantle all preventable suffering and oppression, are present to the pain that remains, and release the life-force of the resurrection in our collective story and action.

As such, God calls us to repair our world to one of health equity, where everyone has the opportunity—free from barriers—for a life of health and wellbeing. As expressed in Isaiah:

> For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth!...no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it or the cry of distress. No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or old people who do not live out their days...at last they will live in the houses they build, and eat the fruit of the vineyard they plant.”

Health equity is holy, in how it is an expression of liberation and a path towards shared abundant life together. As a movement towards wholeness, achieving health equity is the work of the Spirit and reflective of the healing ministry of Christ.

Moreover, its response does not isolate an understanding of care to the compassion of the Good Samaritan, but rather addresses why the road to Jericho was so dangerous to begin with. Most poignantly, the public health concept of health equity names racism as a longstanding and present danger on that road, which has led to avoidable health disparities for People of African Descent, Indigenous Peoples, and other People of Color. Caused by racist policies and power,
People of Color experience poorer health outcomes and lower life expectancy at disproportionate rates.

And while God calls each individual person to work for an equitable society, scripture also articulates the charge to change systems and those who influence and condone them:

Woe to you who make unjust policies and draft oppressive legislation, who deprive the powerless of justice and rob poor people—my people—their rights, who prey upon the widowed and rob orphans.

Thus, we are called not only to tend to the travelers in front of us who are “beaten, stripped naked, and left half-dead,” but to transform the road to Jericho itself.

Such transformational work is shared, communal, and inherently interdependent. It also requires answers that reflect the reality of diverse needs—and not standards of sameness that do not acknowledge how different, and additional, resources are necessary to achieve equity. This vision lies at the heart of our tradition, as the Book of Acts illustrates:

The community of believers was one mind and one heart. None of them claimed anything as their own; rather, everything was held in common...nor was anyone needy among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them and give money to the apostles. It was then distributed to any members who might be in need.

The time is far past due for this vision to remain only a glimmer of what is possible. Further, this delay is not merely an intellectual or theological exercise for People of Color or others impacted by health disparities. It speaks to lived reality and to the cry of generations wailing, “our bones are dry, our hope is gone, and we are doomed.”

While systemic racism seeks to maintain the mountaintop for a select few and a valley of dry bones for the global majority, God says to us, “Prophesy to the wind; prophesy mere mortal, and say to it...breathe on these slain, that they may live.” Such prophecy has been spoken by communities who—in spite of persistent structural failings—provide safety, security, and support for themselves and in collaboration with others. Know that we are all called to extend this great exhale of the Spirit, to restore hope and life, and to learn from the rescue breathers among us.

Finally, as Christians we follow a messiah who preached a message of interconnectedness and died by state-sanctioned violence for doing so. However, Christ shows us that violence does not have the final say, and that the way forward is through healing that is justice—through restoring right relationships with humanity and all creation. So, let us recommit ourselves to the call of the beloved community, where barriers to wellbeing are broken down and systems are reimagined to make it so.

**HISTORICAL GROUNDING**

Since its inception, the United Church of Christ has been committed to social justice and has dedicated efforts towards racial justice and health justice, specifically. It has advocated for health
care as a human right that is inclusive, accessible, and affordable for everyone and has called for
a commitment to be an antiracist church by examining both historic and contemporary forms of
racism. This is evidenced by numerous ministries of the UCC on the national, congregational,
and affiliated organizational levels, and by multiple General Synod resolutions such as, Calling
the United Church of Christ to be an Anti-racist Church, An Urgent Call for Advocacy in
Support of Health Care for All, Dismantling the New Jim Crow, A Call for Study on
Reparations for Slavery, Reclaiming the Church’s Ministry of Health and Healing, and
Affirming Government’s Role to Protect the Common Good among many others.

This resolution proposal is consistent with the professed and lived ministry of the UCC and seeks
to be another expression of God’s still speaking voice through proclamation and tools for
change, such as education, training, and advocacy. As articulated by the COREM’s Racial and
Ethnic Health Disparities Task Force, “We are tired of a health system that does not see health
care as a basic right and a priority for all people. We are tired of a justice system that seems to
condone police brutality with no consequences for their actions. To this end, we call upon our
churches and conferences to new and increased levels of attention, commitment and action by
intentionally resolving to work on the elimination of racial and ethnic disparities as resolved and
pronounced in General Synod 27.” Addressing this injustice is imperative and its immediacy
cannot be overstated.

**TEXT OF THE MOTION**

**WHEREAS** “racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and
normalizes racial inequities,” in the words of Ibram X. Kendi.

**WHEREAS** without exception and across generations, racial inequities persist in every system
of society—as evidenced through health care access, education, criminal justice, employment,
housing, access to food and clean water, services to youth, older adults, and persons with
disabilities, organizational leadership, governmental office, voting, and immigration, among
many others—and thus a specific anti-racist lens is required for health equity and broader
systemic change.

**WHEREAS** inequities based on race also intersect with other dimensions of identity—such as
income, sex, gender, sexuality, citizenship and incarceration status, geographic location and
housing status, ability, education, language proficiency, etc.—and thus racial justice is a
necessary method from which to respond to other intersecting oppressions impacting health and
equity overall.

**WHEREAS** public health promotes and protects the health of people and the communities and
environments in which they live, learn, work and play.

**WHEREAS** the word *crisis*, comes from the ancient Greek word that means “turning point,” and
comes from the verb meaning “to decide”—thus connoting a call to change and action.
WHEREAS framing racism as an issue of public health rallies and compels faith communities, organizations, and the government to address the crisis through systemic change, in the same way other threats to public health have been addressed, such as through policies, practices, enforcement, education, and support services.

WHEREAS for over thirty-five years, research has shown how racism undermines the physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational health and wellbeing of People of African Descent, Indigenous Peoples, and other People of Color, as evidenced by The Report of the Secretary’s Task Force on Black and Minority Health (Heckler Report).

WHEREAS Healthy People 2020, the federal government’s prevention agenda for building a healthier nation continues to name the achievement of health equity, the elimination of disparities, and the improvement the health of all groups as the nation’s overarching goal.

WHEREAS social determinants of health—the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age—have a profound impact on the health of People of African Descent, Indigenous Peoples, and other People of Color; as the effects of trauma, poverty, and environmental devastation due to structural racism cannot be overstated in this regard; as the majority of changeable contributors to healthy outcomes are found in these social determinants; as these inequities are avoidable and able to be changed through policy and the redistribution of money, power, and resources; and as this is evident nationally and globally.

WHEREAS research shows that racial discrimination and the impact of implicit bias continue to persist in medicine and remains a fundamental cause of health disparities, which can also be remedied through changes in policy and education.

WHEREAS health disparities for People of African Descent, Indigenous Peoples, and other People of Color remain at unacceptable rates and breadth—as evidenced by lower life expectancy, higher infant and maternal mortality, poorer treatment for pain, cancer, cardiovascular conditions, mental health and end-of-life care, and inadequate access to and quality of health care, among many others.

WHEREAS the joint forces of racism and ableism have constructed an inaccessible society and an understanding of disability as an inherently undesirable, devalued, and diminished life experience, which has resulted in abuse, neglect, incarceration, institutionalization, and social exclusion across generations of disabled People of Color, in particular.

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the devasting reality of these racial health disparities and the social and political conditions that created them; as structural racism has been proven to be a barrier to COVID-19 treatment and prevention; as Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities have a COVID-19 mortality rate of more than 2.7 times the rate of People of European Decent; as the Navajo Nation’s infection rate has been the highest in the country; as disparities in economic stability and health care access have been linked to infection rates and death; as Communities of Color are more likely to live in multigenerational homes; as workers of African Descent are more likely to be in jobs deemed essential; and as one in five state and federal prisoners had COVID-19.
WHEREAS police violence, state-sanctioned terror, and the systems that uphold and condone them are an integral part of this public health crisis; as People of African Descent are three times more likely to be killed by police (and are nearly one and a half times more likely to be unarmed in those killings) than those of European Descent; as research shows that the presence of high use of force by police in Communities of Color is associated with an increased risk in poorer health, high blood pressure, and diabetes, among other health concerns; as 98.3 percent of killings by police from 2013-2020 have not resulted in officers being charged with a crime; as poor data collection by law enforcement has contributed to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women; and as People of African Descent are overrepresented on death row and are more likely to die by state execution.

WHEREAS mass incarceration and the inherently racist war on people who use drugs have targeted and ravaged Communities of Color through every measure and expression of health; as 60 percent of the 2.2 million Americans incarcerated are of African Descent or Latinx; as People of African Descent are nearly six times more likely to be incarcerated for drug-related offenses than their counterparts of European Descent, despite equal substance usage rates; as 72,000 people died from drug overdoses in 2019; as the opioid overdose crisis is fueled by socioeconomic inequities, trauma, and hopelessness, in addition to harmful prescribing practices; and as numerous governmental laws and organizational policies refuse to adopt life-saving harm reduction strategies.

WHEREAS immigration status directly influences health outcomes; as migrant detention centers have a long history of medical neglect and abuse, including preventable deaths of children, and as family separation has long-term damaging psychological and health consequences for children, families, and communities.

WHEREAS a tool of white supremacy and capitalism is to inflame and sustain racial tension and hatred in order to prevent People of European Descent, particularly those who are low-income, and People of Color from uniting as a collective force to dismantle these oppressive systems, and is also wielded in such a way, where upholding racist beliefs becomes more important than—and at the expense of—the health of European Americans that would also be improved, if not saved, by anti-racist policies.

WHEREAS the answers, strategies, and practices that have come from many People of African Descent, Indigenous Peoples, and other People of Color use public health perspectives to guide their life-saving work.

WHEREAS voting and protecting voting rights are essential for advancing health equity; as there exists a correlation between voting behaviors and poor health; and as voting establishes the policy makers who will make decisions on a systemic level.

WHEREAS there is reason to have hope; where although the magnitude and overwhelming reality of racism can evoke a sense of powerlessness, addressing social determinants of health is a practical way to move forward together on the path to justice. The church, in all of its expressions, can be a vessel for that hope to come alive. The church can be a place of trust,
connection, and collaboration with the wisdom already present in communities working for
transformation; as Christ modeled that the work of the Good News is shared and can start today;
and as each member of the Body has their own unique role to play, gift to give, and worth to
claim.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United
Church of Christ declares racism a public health crisis.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of
Christ calls upon the national setting of the United Church of Christ to enable and encourage
local churches, conferences, and organizations to develop methods to:

a. Raise the church's consciousness of racism as a public health crisis from theological,
   bioethical, and public health perspectives.

b. Monitor and advocate for public policies that work towards health equity by addressing
   social determinants of health and divest in those that cause harm, violence, and death.

c. Discover ways in which current ministries and mission connect with and can address
   racism as a public health crisis and explore new ways of incorporating this lens into the
   life of the church.

d. Examine, in radical honesty, past and current organizational policies and practices in
   how they contribute or create barriers to health equity and racial justice.

e. Identify current and potential relationships with members of CHHSM, COREM, other
   health and human service organizations, advocacy groups, faith and community-based
   organizations, and academic institutions to collaborate on responding to racism as a
   public health crisis.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of
Christ calls upon the U. S. Congress and state legislatures to pass legislation that would address
social determinants of health, such as The Anti-Racism in Public Health Act, which would create
a “Center on Anti-Racism in Health” at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),
and to establish a “Law Enforcement Violence Prevention Program” at the CDC.

FUNDING: The 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.

1 Isaiah 65:17-21
2 Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam -- A Time to Break Silence" (sermon, Riverside Church, New York
   City, April 4, 1967).
3 Matthew 25:31-46
   See also James 5:1-4: “Now an answer for the rich: weep and howl for the miseries that are coming to you...Laborers mowed your fields, and you cheated them! Listen to the wages that you kept back: they call out against you; realize that the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of our God Most High.”
6 Acts 4:32-34.
7 Ezekiel 37:11.
8 Ezekiel 37:9.
10 General Synod 27, 2009.
11 General Synod 30, 2015.
14 Ibid.
18 We heed the wisdom of the Combahee River Collective, which teaches, “If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression,” and name the inclusion of trans and gender-diverse folx into our understanding of this principle.
30 Timothy Cunningham et al., "Vital Signs: Racial Disparities in Age-Specific Mortality Among ..," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last modified April 8, 2019, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6617e1.htm.
46 "Black Workers Face Two of the Most Lethal Preexisting Conditions for Coronavirus—racism and Economic Inequality."
50 "National Police Violence Map."
The following resolution has been received by the Office of the General Minister and President prior to the deadline established by the Standing Rules of the Thirty-third General Synod.

Receipt and release of this resolution for pre-Synod consideration by delegates and other interested parties should not be considered an indication it will come before the General Synod. This resolution is now being researched by the Board of Director’s Subcommittee on Disposition and its staff, before consideration by the full Board of Directors in March 2021. Any resolution must meet all of the requirements of the General Synod Standing Rules (see Standing Rule 11). The Board of Directors will decide in March whether this resolution meets those requirements and make a determination as to its disposition.

“Who will speak for the Trees?”

A Resolution on the Rights of Nature

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ

“We abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

Aldo Leopold

SUMMARY

The manifestations of climate change have radically escalated with increased severity, and it is more than likely we have ten years to dramatically change our relationship to nature. This resolution on the Rights of Nature calls for a change of human relationship to nature from apartheid with nature, views nature as “object” and a “commodity” for our benefit, profit, and exploitation to recognition that we are citizens of the Earth, interconnected to the web of life. Indigenous peoples as well movements in the Southern Hemisphere have pioneered the rights of nature, connecting human and environmental rights. More recently, the environmental rights have appeared as justice movements internationally to defend Nature. It has evolved to defend and restore damaged bio-regions and preserve biodiversity and prevent increasing rapid species extinction. In the US, the Rights of Nature has countered the legal granting of corporation the rights of a person.

The UCC has long history in the defense of human and environmental rights since a group of Black women placed their bodies to block trucks with toxic PCBs being dumped in their locale. This led to UCC development of environmental racism and two historical studies. The UCC has opportunity to address our need as a church and humanity’s need to change our relationship of relating to Nature as an “it” to a “thou.”

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

Our biblical traditions share the notion of the land as divine gift. Leviticus 25:23 and Psalm 24:1 make clear that God owns the land. The phrase “the land of God” (‘erets Yhwh) in the Hebrew scriptures assumes God’s ownership. There was tension between the perspective that “the Earth is the Lord’s” (Ps. 24:1) and the appropriation of the land or the Earth as “theirs.”
Genesis 1:2 “the earth was formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a
wind (ruach) swept over the face of the waters.” God’s Spirit is involved in, abides, and sustains
creation. As humans wound the Earth through ecocide, we are wounding the Spirit.

Genesis 2:2-3 “On the seventh day, God finished the work that God completed, and God rested
on the seventh day from all work God had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it,
because of it, God rested from all the work that God had done.” God delights in creation. When
we see Nature from the eyes of God, we see Nature as beloved.

In the Hebrew scriptures, there is a developed creation-centered spirituality, an on-going
relationship with God as Creator and Spirit who abide in the natural world, sustain the world, and
developed in actions defending divine distributive justice and recognition when sharing (in the
wilderness), there was abundance. The stories of Jesus feeding of the multitude embodies the
notion of abundance in creation when we share resources.

Matthew 5:5 “Blessed are the meek (praus), for they will inherit the earth.” The Earth-loving
Jesus speaks of the meek. The meek understand the Earth as a divine gift to be used with
reverence and gratitude. Embedded in this eco-beatitude is the inverse: Non-meek (apraus) is
construed as the violent, who will not inherit the Earth.

Matthew 22:37, 39 The Earth-loving Jesus annoyingly reminds God inclusive insistence on
loving our neighbor. That inclusiveness included beyond family and tribe to include outsiders,
Samaritans and Gentiles, enemies, and our contemporary construal of Nature/Earth as
commodity to be recklessly exploited and abused by humanity. Love Nature is consistent with
the inclusiveness of Jesus’s creation-centered spirituality that would include wildlife and habitats
(Nature) as we love ourselves.

How This Resolution Differs

Though this resolution depends upon the past history of UCC environmental resolutions and
makes explicit what these resolutions intend is human change with Nature. The 17 resolution
“The Earth is the Lord’s, Not Ours to Wreck: Imperative for New Moral Era” (2017) recognizes
the Earth belongs to Earth, that it is a divine gift to us. We are called to co-live with the Earth
with respect and nature. This resolution “Who will Speak for the Trees?” invites us to makes a
spiritual/human to change our human relationship to Nature, not as an “it” but as a “thou,” alive
with the presence of God’s Spirit and part of God’s beloved community. We are all members of
the community of the Earth; we are co-participants in Nature and are called to respond
compassionately to the cries of Nature.

The resolution recognizes an important reality for living on Earth claimed by the deceased the
eco-theologian Thomas Berry, “The universe is not a collection of objects, but a communion of
subjects.” Nature needs to be recovered as primordial “thou.” This becomes a forceful and
antidote to making Nature an object to be used without respect and reverence.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS all rights, human and the more than human lives, depend on the flourishing and
vital natural cycles of life, and healthy Earth living systems. We are all interconnected to all
living beings, and when we diminish or fail to recognize the rights of the natural world, we
diminish our own life. Humanity and nature are interconnected, The Rights of Nature recognizes a reciprocal and responsible human relationship with Nature.\textsuperscript{6}

WHEREAS The UCC has a long history of creation-care, starting with the recognition of environmental racism in the 1980s, its studies on toxic pollution (1987, 2007, 2020), responsibly and the campaign of the Three Great Loves: Neighbor, Children, and Creation (2017), programs on Green and Creation Justice Churches, and the formation of Environmental Justice Teams. The United Church of Christ Synod has passed resolutions that directly express concerns for Earthcare.\textsuperscript{7}.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ declares that

- humans need a dramatic shift from the point of view that the Earth and all her resources are available to our sole benefit.
- Nature is not there for enslavement, and it is wrong for people of faith to view nature as property that we own and may abuse.
- We proclaim publicly, “The Earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it (PS. 24:1).”
- The Earth is an original gift to sustain all life.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls for prophetic action by listening to the cries of the Earth and by adopting this “Rights of Nature” declaration. We boldly proclaim the following principles in the public square:

- Promote compassionate care, foster love, and co-live responsibly with the Earth Community of Life.\textsuperscript{8} Safeguard the common goods, space and shared resources of the Earth, for humanity and biokind; uphold the rights of ecological integrity, biodiversity, and healthy bioregions. Advocate intergenerational responsibility for the biotic community of the Earth and gratitude of the natural world as divine gift. The interdependence of humans and Nature is fundamental to sustainable life on Earth. Co-living with Nature involves distributive justice, a fair sharing and responsible participation of natural resources.

- Uphold ecological principle that the Rights of Nature supersedes harmful and destructive property rights, for the balanced cycles of the natural world must be protected as a common good for the present and future generations of human life and biokind. The Rights of Nature counters corporate rights to exploit and violate Nature. Restore the repealed EPA regulations and protections. Promote economies of life rather than unregulated extractive economies that exploit resources. Seek financial reparations and restoration to the habitats when corporations and/or government projects harm and damage habitats.

- Support the Indigenous peoples, the Earth Charter, and nature rights movement to grant legal standing as corporations have legal rights.\textsuperscript{9} Require all corporate and/or governmental land and water projects to perform environmental impact studies on minimizing damage to habitats (waterways, lands, and atmosphere) and wildlife. Local communities or environmental organizations have a right to represent the unheard voices cries of Nature.
• Foster respect and gratitude for Nature as divine gift. Combat attitudes of relegating Nature as mere capital for profit nor trashed as dumping ground for toxic waste.

• Promote the rights to Nature to be free from undue human harm, the right healthy inhabitants, the right to species flourishing, a right to a fair share of the bio-region and its goods, and the right to fulfil their ecological potential without undue human infringements.

• Prioritize renewable energies over fossil fuels; the economies of life such as the Green New Deal have over extractive and unbridled economies that pollute and damage the Earth. Encourage organic farming and regenerative agriculture; support family farming and local farmer markets; reduce usage of pesticides and insecticides negatively impacting the soil, aquifers, and other life. Work for food justice and security for all people.

• Respect all treaties with indigenous nations, that includes their lands and kinship natural relations. Ally and support indigenous peoples in their de-colonization of Nature, protect their kinship rights and access to sacred lands.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls on individual churches to respond to the Rights of Nature by taking the following actions:

• Participate in the Season of Creation for September Sundays. Include Creation care during each liturgical season (Earth-seders, Tenebrae, Easter sunrise service outdoors, and Earth Day. Preach every six weeks often on Earth Justice. Celebrate outdoors or bring the outdoors into the church.

• Ritualize environmental grief: Bio-Diversity Day (May 22), Remembrance for Lost Species (November 22). Start environmental grief support groups.

• Foster love of God’s creation, organize walks in botanical gardens and wilderness, plant trees, take nature hikes, and attend UCC summer camps.

• Study and implement Kairos Document, Call to Action, a 10-year Mobilization Plan on Climate Change and Inequality.11.

• Become a Creation Justice Church and Green Hub of God’s green grace, https://www.ucc.org/how_it_works_becoming_a_creation_justice_church

• Subscribe to the UCC Environmental Justice newsletters and environmental newsletters; share webinars, and read and study on creation care and climate change. These are spiritual practices to equip us for creation care.

• Work for the Green New Deal (the transition to renewable energies) Advocate for the Rights of Nature and take part in climate strikes and non-violent protests.

• Organize locally, partner and build local community networks with conservationist and environmental groups. Many folks in these organization have had spiritual experiences within nature, recognize and find common ground to restore damaged environments.

• Be creative and imaginative in our defense of the Rights of Nature.

FUNDING: The 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.
Dr. Seuss, The Lorax, New York, Random House, 1071. At the same year when Dr. Seuss published The Lorax with the haunting moral question, “Who will speak for the Trees?” a young law professor Christopher Stone, who was teaching property law published the article, “Should Trees Have Standing?” He argued that there was no legal barrier to granting rights to nature since rights were granted to ships and corporations. See the original and expanded rationale of the resolution. https://www.nhcucc.org/uploads/documents/conference-ministries/annual-meetings/Resolution%20of%20the%20Rights%20of%20Nature%20of%20the%20Year.pdf

Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac.


The word “nature” is a secular term used to describe the material world, both animate and inanimate. Nature is a term for what the Abrahamic religions interpreted as “creation” because of creation’s relationship to God. The word nature is less employed in other religious cultures. “Land” is the analogous linguistic category for nature, used in indigenous spiritualities and in the Hebrew scriptures. Nature is the more inclusive term.


Season of Creation, https://seasonofcreation.org/

UCC Kairos Document, https://www.ucc.org/a_kairos_call_to_action
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A RESOLUTION TO RECOGNIZE THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT (2015-2024)

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ and the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ

SUMMARY

This resolution calls on the United Church of Christ to recognize the United Nations declaration of an International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024). In declaring this decade, the United Nations acknowledges that African descendant people are a group whose rights must be protected and promoted. The United Nations accounts for over 200 million people who self-identify as African descent living in the Americas. The resolution calls on the United Church of Christ to: 1) acknowledge this Decade; 2) adopt its frameworks for addressing the issues affecting African descendant people; and 3) promote the Decade and resulting outcomes for advocating for the rights of African descendant people.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL RATIONALE

At the outset of the creation stories, God declared that all that was made was good. Included in the goodness of creation was the creation of persons in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). The Imago Dei is present across many traditions which note that the equality of human kind rests on the theological premise that all people reflect the Divine. The sin of racism and the disenfranchisement of individuals because of their race or skin color is antithetical to the Imago Dei.

The unity of the church continues to be threatened by racism and all forms of discrimination. The global racial divide is a threat to the unity of the church which looks to the accord that Jesus prayed for. “That they may all be one” (John 17:21) is a reminder of the oneness that is exemplified in God’s love for all God’s people. Racism is a challenge to the church and continues to be a dehumanizing force robbing communities of rights, freedom and dignity.

The unity of the church is reflected in the rich diversity that is present in all of God’s people – race, gender, ethnicity, theology, sexuality – all are created in the image of the Divine. It is a core value of the United Church of Christ to work towards equality and to ensure that an inclusive communication of the Gospel is present and accessible for all. The Gospel is a call to
action on behalf of the least of these. Jesus’ ministry was a message to the margins of his day
“to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18).

The call to the church is to bring the good news of the Gospel, and to ensure that the oppressed go free. The oppression of racial injustice must be addressed in all areas of society. The church has the opportunity and mandate to be present in addressing the challenges facing people of African descent globally.

HISTORICAL GROUNDING

The history of racial injustices in the United States and across the Americas includes the commodification of African lives through the Transatlantic Slave Trade. While records point to the earliest enslaved people being brought into the United States in 1619, the kidnapping and enslavement of African people date back to the early 15th century and the arrival of the Portuguese on the African continent. The ensuing centuries of the Transatlantic Slave Trade brought about the removal of 12-15 million Africans from their continent to, at first, provide essential labor for the system of exploitation and expropriation of economic and other resources in the European colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands in the Americas that built European mercantile empires, and subsequently, to meet the need for uncompensated labor during the era of the Industrial Revolution in European nations and their colonies. This bounty of uncompensated labor supported a plantation economy founded in imperialism and undergirded by the demonization of Africans and African-ness.

This arrival of African people in the Americas was undergirded by stereotypes of African people. These stereotypes were present in naming Africans as inferior to Europeans. This vilification and stereotyping of African peoples were supported by Christianity and Christian doctrine. By utilizing the Bible, theology, and the Church as instruments of oppression, white supremacy and white privilege became normative in the Americas. These instruments of racism are still present among us almost two hundred years after emancipation and over fifty years beyond the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

The United Nations stated: “In proclaiming this Decade, the international community is recognizing that people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected. Around 200 million people identifying themselves as being of African descent live in the Americas. Many millions more live in other parts of the world, outside of the African continent.” These 200 million people in the Americas identified by the UN are the descendants of Africans who were kidnapped from the African continent and enslaved in the Americas.

The United Church of Christ and its predecessor bodies have been strong advocates for Civil Rights for African descendant people in the United States. The General Synod has spoken on several occasions regarding racism. In 2003, the Twenty-Fourth General Synod adopted the resolution “Calling on the United Church of Christ to Renew Battle Against Racism in all its Guises.” The Twenty-Fourth General Synod also adopted a resolution “Calling the United Church of Christ to be an Anti-Racist Church.” Both of these resolutions informed a commitment to combat racism including racism directed toward people of African descent.
In its call for the church to be an anti-racist church in 2003, the UCC referenced the 2001 United Nations World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance\textsuperscript{11} in Durban, South Africa and its affirmation that “racism has historically through imperialism and colonization\textsuperscript{12} created an unequal world order and power balance with present global implications impacting governments, systems, and institutions.” The International Decade comes four years after the International Year for People of African Descendant (2011).

**TEXT OF THE MOTION**

**WHEREAS** the human rights of African descendant people globally and in the United States continue to be challenged by the presence of racism and the legacy of whiteness, and

**WHEREAS** a myriad of social issues are byproducts of the racial inequities stemming from prejudice, bigotry, White privilege, White fragility, and White supremacy,\textsuperscript{13} and

**WHEREAS** the numbers of incarcerated people of African descent in the Americas continues to grow,\textsuperscript{14} and

**WHEREAS** disparities in healthcare, housing, education, the plight of women and girls, and a myriad of interconnected issues point to the need for addressing racism and calling attention to the need to protect the human rights of African descendant people.\textsuperscript{15}

**WHEREAS** in many countries, while African descendant people attained civil rights, the human rights guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly\textsuperscript{16} continue to be elusive, and

**WHEREAS** data show that police have continued killing Black men and women at disproportionate rates,\textsuperscript{17, 18} even after the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor sparked international protests against racism and police brutality, with a total of 164 Black men and women who were killed by police from January 1 to August 31, 2020,\textsuperscript{19, 20} and

**WHEREAS** in June of 2020 four black men, Malcolm Harsch, Robert Fuller Dominique Alexander and an unidentified Black teenager were found hanged to death,\textsuperscript{21} all reported by authorities to have committed suicide, a claim disputed by their family members and many other people,\textsuperscript{22} and

**WHEREAS** the Bible and Christian theology affirm *imago dei* – that all people are created in the image of God; and

**WHEREAS** the United Church of Christ has consistently shown leadership in advocacy and for the rights of African descendant people in the United States and globally; and

**WHEREAS** the United Nations declaration of the Decade calls for the promotion and protection of the rights of people of African descent; and

**WHEREAS** the United Church of Christ passed several resolutions that address the unfair treatment of people of African descent, that call for legislation and action to address injustices perpetuated against African descendant people and continues to decry the systems that support and perpetuate white privilege and white supremacy as tools that produce racism and racial
inequality;

WHEREAS the United Church of Christ continues to advocate for the dismantling of racism and racist institutions through education and policy;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ recognizes the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015 - 2024);

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages all settings of the Church to increase awareness of the United Nations Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) and work ecumenically to promote the Decade;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages all settings of the Church to utilize this Decade to intentionally address the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages all settings of the Church to adopt the Decade themes of recognition, justice and development as frameworks for its advocacy, commitments and engagement in the fight for the rights of People of African Descent.

FUNDING: The 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.

13. https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=healthcare+disparities+and+racism&hl=en&as_sd=0%2C3&as_vis=1&q=disparities+and+racism&btnG=
https://couriernewsroom.com/2020/06/18/4-black-men-were-found-hanged-in-3-weeks-what-is-happening/  