



## AFFIRMING DIVERSITY/MULTI-CULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Adopted by the 27 General Synod of the United Church of Christ

June 30, 2009

**Summary**—This proposed resolution seeks to create a progressive Christian witness in support of organizations which provide diversity/multi-cultural education that builds tolerance for “all the people” including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals and families, and people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, abilities, and faiths. In particular, this proposed resolution addresses concerns that public school systems are being openly challenged by national and local religious groups who seek to limit exposure to diversity/multi-cultural education, and in some cases even to prohibit diversity/multi-cultural education in public schools.

**Background**—Recently in California, both the Castro Valley Unified School District’s “Days of Diversity,” and plans by the Alameda Unified School District to institute in its schools a K-5 diversity/multi-cultural curriculum, which includes an LGBT unit, have come under fire by religious groups from within and outside the community who are working in tandem to stop efforts by local school districts to implement diversity/multi-cultural enrichment programs and develop safe schools curricula that seek to foster respect for “all the people in our neighborhood.” There is particular opposition to the component of the programs designed to give visibility to same-gender parented families and people and reduce anti-gay slurs and bullying, which are rampant within our public schools.

While those who oppose diversity/multi-cultural education declare it a threat to “family values” and the “nuclear family,” study of the Bible reveals that there are numerous types of families described – none of which includes the so-called “nuclear family.” In fact, today, the so-called ‘traditional nuclear family’ (husband working outside the home, wife working inside the home and 2.2 children) represents less than 5% of the population in the US.<sup>1</sup>

School districts have a mandate to keep all their children safe from emotional and physical harm by providing lessons to address the ways in which words like “gay” are misused by children as early as kindergarten to tease, humiliate and bully fellow students. Developing diversity/multi-cultural curricula and encouraging “days of diversity” are essential to creating an environment where all children can learn and play in safety, as well as reach their full potential, without fear or intimidation.

**Biblical, Theological, and Ethical Rationale**—In the First Letter of John we are reminded that “there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). The love of God that we experience through Jesus dispels our fear of “the other,” whoever they may be, and allows us to see and appreciate their full humanity as creations of God.

As the Northern California Nevada Conference gathered on Pentecost weekend, we remembered that the most important requirement of discipleship is inclusiveness, born through the ministry of Jesus who instructs us, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22: 39, Mark 12: 31). There are no exceptions, no foot-notes or qualifiers. Many of the recent lections for the Season of Easter have

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<sup>1</sup> James B. Nelson’s article in the UCC Marriage Curriculum <http://www.ucc.org/justice/pdfs/mdgr.pdf>

reminded us of how the earliest apostles came to realize that God accepts “all the people” [*cf.* Acts 8:26-40 and Acts 10:34].

The community Jesus gathered around him challenged the conventional wisdom of his day that defined who was worthy of inclusion and who was not. In the first century CE where eating together was “symbolic of friendship, intimacy and social unity,”<sup>2</sup> Jesus broke bread with the marginalized, 50 thereby discrediting himself in the eyes of the religious authorities. As we today confront the same kind of marginalization of people because of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, or gender identity, we as Christ’s body on earth would do well to follow his lead.

### **Expected Outcomes:**

1. Increased awareness among members of Local Churches in the United Church of Christ regarding the well funded and well-organized national and local opposition to diversity/multi-cultural education in our public schools.
2. Increased resources for and capacity among United Church of Christ pastors and Local Church members to support local school leaders in offering high-quality diversity/multi-cultural education programs in our public schools.
3. Increased support for public school teachers, administrators, and school board members who seek, through responsible programs of diversity/multi-cultural education, to ensure the safety and acceptance of all students in their care, and to create and sustain a healthy learning environment.
4. Increased acceptance of “all the people” as children of God.
5. Reduced violence, derogatory speech, and bullying of school children.

### **Resolution:**

*WHEREAS*, There are no exceptions, no foot-notes, no qualifiers to Jesus’ commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22: 39, Mark 12: 31, Galatians 5:14, Romans 13: 9, James 2: 8);

*WHEREAS*, The love of God that we experience through Jesus Christ dispels our fears of those who are in any way “different” from ourselves; [1 John 4: 18]

*WHEREAS*, God accepts “all the people” as evidenced by Jesus’ breaking bread with the marginalized, to the dismay of the religious authorities of his day; [ Matthew 9: 10-11, Mark 2: 16, Luke 5: 30]

*WHEREAS*, We confront in our own times the marginalization of people because of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity;

*WHEREAS*, Children who are marginalized, or whose families are marginalized, are the targets of derision, bullying, and violence in schools and communities;

*WHEREAS*, Public schools’ programs of diversity/multi-cultural education have been aimed at keeping all children safe from such emotional and physical intimidation and harm, and have met with national and local efforts to undermine diversity/multi-cultural education as a threat to “family values;”

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<sup>2</sup> Marcus Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*, © 2006 Marcus Borg, Harper San Francisco, pp. 157-160.

***THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT GENERAL SYNOD 27:***

- Supports the efforts of organizations, especially public school districts, to develop programs that promote anti-bullying, safe schools, age and family structure acceptance of wide-ranging diversity;
- Affirms that diversity/multi-cultural education should embrace people of all races, ethnic origins, genders, faiths, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, socio-economic classes, countries of origin, and their families;
- Decries organized and systematic efforts to cast diversity/multi-cultural education in negative terms using fear and intimidation;
- Affirms and supports congregations, church leaders, and public school districts that are playing a prophetic role in the encouragement of diversity/multi-cultural education in their communities;

***AND CALLS UPON—***

**Local Churches and Conferences to:**

- Be aware of and keep alert to national and local efforts to undermine diversity/multi-cultural education in their public school districts;
- Call for processes and protocols for public discourse on diversity/multi-cultural education that ensure the inclusion of viewpoints representative of the whole community;
- Speak up in support of diversity/multi-cultural education from the perspective of their faith commitment and informed by the Bible's overwhelming mandate to defend the cause of justice;
- Continue to address topics of race, ethnicity, gender, faith, abilities, sexual orientation, and gender identity within their congregations age and family structure race, ethnic origin, gender, faith, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, socio-economic class, and country of origin within their congregations;
- Engage in public witness to affirm diversity/multi-cultural and to support those who are engaged faithfully in acts of inclusion;
- Develop and participate in broad-based ecumenical and interfaith coalitions that will advocate for anti-bullying, safe schools, and diversity/multi-cultural education in our public schools;
- Celebrate the diversity of individuals and families as a gift of God.

**The Collegium to:**

- Be aware of and keep alert to national and local efforts to undermine diversity/multi-cultural education in public school districts;
- Speak up in support of and diversity/multi-cultural education from the perspective of their faith commitment and informed by the Bible's overwhelming mandate to defend the cause of justice;
- Develop awareness among ecumenical and interfaith partners about the importance of multi-cultural and diversity/multi-cultural education that includes LGBT experience the experience of LGBT individuals and families in public schools in the United States.

**The Office of General Ministries to:**

- Develop awareness among ecumenical and interfaith partners about the importance of diversity/multi-cultural education that includes LGBT experience the experience of LGBT individuals and families in public schools in the United States;
- Collaborate with local UCC church leaders, Conferences, and other faith groups and secular advocacy organizations to develop and implement a national media strategy that affirms the value of diversity/multi-cultural programs in our public schools, and that supports the introduction and continuation of these vital programs.

**Justice & Witness Ministries to:**

- Alert Local Churches and Conferences to national and local efforts to undermine diversity/multi-cultural education in public school districts;
- Consult with and support faith leaders and public school leaders who have been besieged by opponents of diversity/multi-cultural education, to compile lists of resources and to document accounts of successful plans to promote diversity/multi-cultural education in our public schools, and of successful responses to groups that might otherwise undermine these efforts;
- Help Local Church and Conference leaders develop strategies that promote and sustain high-quality diversity/multi-cultural education programs so that Local Churches and Conferences may successfully advocate for and support the inclusion of these programs in local schools;
- Develop awareness among ecumenical and interfaith partners about the importance of diversity/multi-cultural education that includes LGBT experience the experience of LGBT individuals and families in public schools in the United States.
- Express the need for diversity/multi-cultural education that ensures more successful integration of refugees and immigrants into our public schools and communities, and reduces their experience of isolation and bullying.

**Local Church Ministries to:**

- Assemble resources and promote the use of diversity/multi-cultural education programs for Local Churches, Associations, Conferences and the national setting of the church which build on the United Church of Christ's capacity to practice what we are preaching about the importance of diversity/multi-cultural education in our public schools;
- Actively promote curriculum and resources that uphold anti-bullying, safe schools, and diversity/multi-cultural education programs in our public schools;
- Develop awareness among ecumenical and interfaith partners about the importance of diversity/multi-cultural education that includes LGBT experience the experience of LGBT individuals and families in public schools in the United States.

**Wider Church Ministries to:**

- Develop awareness among ecumenical and interfaith partners about the importance of diversity/multi-cultural education that includes LGBT experience the experience of LGBT individuals and families, in public schools in the United States and within mission partner schools around the world;
- Continue to help Local Church, Association, and Conference leaders develop a coalition of faith-based and secular non-profit organizations that will help local leaders introduce and advocate for diversity/multicultural education in their public schools that includes the experience of LGBT families and individuals individuals and families;
- Express the need for diversity/multi-cultural education that ensures more successful integration of refugees and immigrants into our public schools and communities, and reduces their experience of isolation and bullying.

**Funding**—Funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made available in accordance with the overall mandates of the Covenanted Ministries called upon and the funds available.

**Implementation**—Justice & Witness Ministries, Local Church Ministries, Wider Church Ministries, and the Office of General Ministries will be responsible for developing the strategies, programs, and resources to implement the Resolution.