

1 The Board of Directors recommends this resolution be sent to a Committee of the General
2 Synod.

3 4 **TRANSITION FROM FOSSIL FUELS TO RENEWABLE ENERGY**

5
6 **Submitted by Central Pacific Conference, Massachusetts Conference, Michigan**
7 **Conference, New York Conference, Southwest Conference, and the Wisconsin Conference**
8 **A Resolution of Witness**
9

10 **SUMMARY**

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12 Dependence upon fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas) by the United States and the other
13 nations has fostered continuous dangerous conflicts throughout recent history and now threatens
14 the existence of modern civilization and most of life by driving accelerating climate change. The
15 science is clear and irrefutable that unless we immediately begin the long journey toward a
16 sustainable clean fossil fuel free energy future, we will within a generation move beyond any
17 chance of achieving levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide that will insure the preservation of life
18 as we know it on our magnificent God given planet Earth. This resolution calls our United
19 Church of Christ to decisive prophetic action which will help us join others in enabling our
20 technologically innovative nation to work cooperatively with the global community in
21 addressing this problem.
22

23 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING**

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25 Whereas we are magnificently stranded between creation (Genesis 1-3) and redemption (John
26 14:6), alpha and omega (Rev. 21:5-7), and cannot fathom our beginnings or our endings;
27 Whereas we are a people of Jesus, who bridges creation and redemption (John 3:16); Whereas
28 we know that we are to have dominion (Genesis 1:26-28) without domination (Genesis 2:7-8,
29 15) and to steward the sacred (Luke 16:1-13; 1 Cor. 4:1-2) with the golden rule of love for
30 neighbor (Luke 10:25-38; 1 John 4:15-21; Eph. 5:1-2), even our neighbor Earth; whereas the
31 Spirit leads us to not just be against fossil fuels or to demonize them but instead to be for them a
32 renewing and refreshing energy (Matthew 5:3-16, 43-48; Luke 25:31-46), we cannot help but
33 think lovingly, hopefully and long about the end time, for ourselves and the generations of
34 humans, animals and seeds to come (Rev. 21:1-5a; Luke 13:18-19).
35 Therefore we ...don't want to just ban fossil fuels or divest from them...but add all our moral
36 and spiritual energies to the development of renewables (Matthew 6:25-33).
37

38 This resolution is the organic progression extending and following from previous United Church
39 of Christ environmental resolutions dating back to General Synod 2 in 1959. This resolution
40 follows in the direction of resolutions presented at GS 29 on divestment from and shareholder
41 activism with fossil fuel companies, an end to mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia,
42 and carbon-neutral congregations. In addition to previous GS resolutions on environmental
43 issues, the United Church of Christ has created reports and pastoral letters regarding
44 environmental contamination and specifically addressing climate change.¹ This resolution
45 follows in the long United Church of Christ tradition of speaking out on environmental issues
46 with a strong prophetic voice. We join our own United Church of Christ ancestors as well as

47 people of other faiths in the call to create more sustainable ways for our species to coexist on this
48 planet with the rest of creation.²

49

50 **SCIENTIFIC FOUNDING**

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52 Because we embrace and do not disown scientific discovery, and because science and our faith
53 are compatible, we harken to the scientific voices that increasingly sound the alarm about the
54 health of the planet. The science is clear. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate
55 Change (IPCC), as of 2011 humans had emitted about 531 gigatons of CO₂. In order to keep
56 climate change under 2 degrees C, the most that humans can burn is 469 gigatons more, which,
57 at the current rate, will happen in less than 30 years. Meanwhile, the IPCC reports that fossil fuel
58 companies have reserves in the ground of around 3,000 gigatons, or more than six times the
59 amount that can be burned if the temperature increase is to stay under 2 degrees C. Fossil fuel
60 companies, therefore, must leave close to 85% of these assets in the ground.³ The United Church
61 of Christ must, in partnership with other people of faith, provide the moral, ethical, spiritual, and
62 prophetic voice calling on fossil fuel companies to abandon assets at the same time that we as
63 individuals, congregations, and nations transition toward cleaner and more sustainable energy
64 sources.⁴

65

66 **MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

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68 The Thirtieth General Synod will propose through this resolution necessary steps towards a
69 world with a stable climate supporting existing ecosystems where fossil fuels are no longer
70 extracted for energy and renewable energy sources are fully developed and available for use.
71 The resolution includes several well-defined action steps toward this end. Because every human
72 citizen and life form in our world is affected by accelerating climate, the resolution proposes task
73 forces on the GS and conference levels charged with 1) listening to the stories and concerns of
74 our members and communities affected by climate change; 2) educating them on the problem
75 and solutions, 3) setting well defined goals; 4) advocating for appropriate and timely action, 5)
76 monitoring and reporting back and 6) evaluating progress on both Conference and GS levels.

77

78 **INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY**

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80 The Thirtieth General Synod requests that Justice and Witness Ministries employ a full time
81 equivalent Environmental Justice staff person who, among other duties, would work with
82 conference ministers to oversee the creation of a national task force and would be available as a
83 resource person to any conference-level task forces created to oversee the implementation of the
84 resolution.

85

86 **PROBABILITY OF INFLUENCING SOCIAL CHANGE**

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88 With the adoption of this resolution, the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
89 will be taking another definitive and prophetic step towards the biblically mandated
90 theologically justified goal of motivating individual members, churches and our nation away
91 from a hopelessly unsustainable fossil fuel energy based economy, to a hopeful sustainable
92 renewable energy based economy which will insure the preservation and protection of our fragile

93 and vulnerable planetary ecosystem for the sake of ourselves, our future generations and all life
94 on our God given Earth home.

95

96 **TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION**

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98 WHEREAS, the use of any fossil fuel, including coal, natural gas and oil, results in an increase
99 of carbon dioxide and other dangerous greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere, which causes global
100 warming and climate change, such that if we do not immediately decrease our use of these fuels,
101 and completely eliminate them by the year 2080,⁵ all life on earth will likely experience
102 previously unknown devastating results including drought, wildfires, extreme precipitation and
103 cyclones, drinking water scarcity, diminished food production, population migrations, human
104 mortality, violent conflicts, and species extinction, thereby upsetting the whole ecology of
105 Earth;⁶ and

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107 WHEREAS, feasibility studies indicate that transitioning to all renewable energy like wind,
108 solar, and hydro, is not only possible but economically desirable;⁷ and

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110 WHEREAS, nonrenewable fossil fuel extraction continues to be subsidized by our government,
111 while at the same time, renewable energy sources are significantly under-supported, resulting in
112 the de-emphasis of critical renewable energy development;⁸ and

113

114 WHEREAS, investment in extensive infrastructures supporting the fossil fuel industries and
115 especially the fracking (horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing) industry precludes
116 investment, invention, introduction, development and employment opportunities essential for
117 building a renewable energy future;⁹ and

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119 WHEREAS, the United States contains large subterranean supplies of natural gas and oil in
120 underground rock formations far beneath the earth's surface in which natural gas and oil
121 extraction is being considered or in which natural gas and oil extraction is already occurring by
122 the process known as fracking;¹⁰ which uses millions of gallons of water, often mixed with sand
123 and toxic chemicals, some of which returns to the surface contaminated and sometimes
124 radioactive and has led to contamination of air, surface and other underground water resources,
125 and has also caused earthquakes;¹¹ and

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127 WHEREAS, hydraulic fracturing has an impact on individuals and communities, including such
128 justice issues as the use of "forced pooling," private vs public practices of eminent domain,
129 concerns about worker safety, illegal dumping, and environmental racism issues including siting
130 of waste disposal facilities in or near low-income communities of color;¹² and

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132 WHEREAS, the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ, recognizing that there
133 is a wide range of stances on the issues of climate change, fossil fuels, hydraulic fracturing and
134 renewable energy among its members and that these issues have the potential to be divisive
135 within the body of Christ, still and all understands that the gospel is the permission and the
136 commandment to enter difficulty with hope; and

137

138 WHEREAS, although we understand the pull of immediate, short-term, economic and political
139 necessities, as people of faith we answer a higher call, which is to have a deep moral obligation
140 to be good stewards of God’s creation so that all humans, other creatures and future generations
141 may thrive on clean air, clean water, and clean soil.

142
143 THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of
144 Christ place itself on moral record and encourage its pastors, conferences and members to urge
145 federal and state lawmakers to enact or extend incentives that will lead to the rapid transition to
146 renewable energy sources, energy conservation and energy efficiency measures throughout
147 American society, with total transition by 2080; eliminate immediately all fossil fuel subsidies;
148 enact some form of a carbon tax; enact legislation that will eliminate as quickly as possible any
149 further extraction of coal, oil and gas nationally or internationally, particularly by corporations
150 chartered in the United States; and be it further

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152 RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod encourage its pastors, conferences and members
153 to urge federal and state lawmakers to enact an immediate ban on all gas and oil well hydraulic
154 fracturing; and be it further

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156 RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod, through its General Minister and President
157 convey our concerns about fossil fuels and hydraulic fracturing in writing, including a copy of
158 this resolution, to all governors, appropriate regulatory agencies, and state and federal elected
159 officials in districts where there are United Church of Christ Churches, and to all appropriate
160 denominational instrumentalities informing them of the United Church of Christ’s position, and
161 encourage its pastors and members to send this resolution to state and federal elected
162 representatives; and be it further

163
164 RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod requests that Justice and Witness Ministries
165 create a full time equivalent staff position and establish a task force and encourage conferences
166 to establish task forces, as appropriate, to study, monitor, and report to the churches on justice
167 issues relating to fossil fuel use and hydraulic fracturing--including but not limited to climate
168 change, ecological protections of our lands, air, and water, dangers to public health and welfare,
169 impacts on communities such as crime and violence, housing, education, etc., and that these task
170 forces be charged with educating and organizing congregants in their decision-making and
171 actions around these issues, and that such task forces also listen to the people in the pews with
172 deep intent to hear the moral dilemmas facing our members about the relationship between the
173 short term and the longer term implications; and be it further

174
175 RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ invites and
176 encourages its members to inform and educate themselves about the issues pertaining to fossil
177 fuel use, hydraulic fracturing, climate change and renewable energy by engaging in humble and
178 open grassroots conversation, with particular sensitivity to energy consumption patterns and to
179 our most vulnerable citizens, those without sufficient income to meet daily needs, as well as the
180 long-term needs for energy that all face; in the sharing of pertinent stories that understand the
181 impasse that our dependency on non-renewable energy resources discloses; and in workshops
182 and study groups that discern and express the theological, moral, economic and personal facets
183 of the enterprises of fossil fuel use and hydraulic fracturing, with the above conversations

184 designed to yield a renewable form of spiritual and moral energy to resolve our physical energy
185 needs.

186
187 **FUNDING**

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189 The funding for the implementation of this Resolution will be made in accordance with the
190 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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192 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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194 The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries, conferences and other
195 entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

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198 **FOOTNOTES**

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