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

TRANSITION FROM FOSSIL FUELS TO RENEWABLE ENERGY

Submitted by Central Pacific Conference, Massachusetts Conference, Michigan Conference, New York Conference, Southwest Conference, and the Wisconsin Conference

A Resolution of Witness

SUMMARY

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

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

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

This resolution is the organic progression extending and following from previous United Church of Christ environmental resolutions dating back to General Synod 2 in 1959. This resolution follows in the direction of resolutions presented at GS 29 on divestment from and shareholder activism with fossil fuel companies, an end to mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia, and carbon-neutral congregations. In addition to previous GS resolutions on environmental issues, the United Church of Christ has created reports and pastoral letters regarding environmental contamination and specifically addressing climate change. This resolution follows in the long United Church of Christ tradition of speaking out on environmental issues with a strong prophetic voice. We join our own United Church of Christ ancestors as well as...
people of other faiths in the call to create more sustainable ways for our species to coexist on this planet with the rest of creation.2

SCIENTIFIC GROUNDING

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

MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

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

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

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

PROBABILITY OF INFLUENCING SOCIAL CHANGE

With the adoption of this resolution, the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ will be taking another definitive and prophetic step towards the biblically mandated theologically justified goal of motivating individual members, churches and our nation away from a hopelessly unsustainable fossil fuel energy based economy, to a hopeful sustainable renewable energy based economy which will insure the preservation and protection of our fragile
and vulnerable planetary ecosystem for the sake of ourselves, our future generations and all life on our God given Earth home.

TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ, recognizing that there is a wide range of stances on the issues of climate change, fossil fuels, hydraulic fracturing and renewable energy among its members and that these issues have the potential to be divisive within the body of Christ, still and all understands that the gospel is the permission and the commandment to enter difficulty with hope; and
WHEREAS, although we understand the pull of immediate, short-term, economic and political necessities, as people of faith we answer a higher call, which is to have a deep moral obligation to be good stewards of God’s creation so that all humans, other creatures and future generations may thrive on clean air, clean water, and clean soil.

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

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

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

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

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

FUNDING

The funding for the implementation of this 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, conferences and other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

FOOTNOTES


4 For statements on climate change from religious voices, see the Forum on Religion and Ecology At Yale, http://fore.research.yale.edu/climate-change/statements-from-world-religions/; for actions that people of faith are taking regarding divestment from fossil fuel companies and reinvestment in sustainable energy sources, see GreenFaith, http://greenfaith.org/programs/divest-and-reinvest/religious-resources-on-divestment-and-reinvestment.

5 "The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change" IPCC, 2014, Summary for policymakers. In: Climate Change 2014, Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the
"Earthquakes Induced By Fluid Injection FAQs," The United States Geological Survey.

For possibility see, The Stanford study on how New York State can be renewable by 2030.


http://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/12701.html; for economic studies see


Naomi Oreskes “A 'Green’ Bridge to Hell” section on Exports and Infrastructure,

http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175873/tomgram%3A_naomi_oreskes,_a_%22green%22_bri


"Earthquakes Induced By Fluid Injection FAQs," The United States Geological Survey,

Environmental justice: [http://ejfood.blogspot.com/2013/01/fracking-water-and-environmental_3645.html](http://ejfood.blogspot.com/2013/01/fracking-water-and-environmental_3645.html);

