



General Synod Prophetic Actions and Social Policy Statements 2001-2011 Evaluation Process

Background:

The United Church of Christ seeks to be a bold, widely-known and respected public voice of Christianity in service of God's ever-unfolding mission. (UCC Vision Plan, Big Inspirational Goal, Appendix)

The UCC was formed in 1957 out of the rich heritage of four denominations that were at the forefront of social issues for more than 200 years. In response to our call to discipleship, various bodies of the UCC have adopted resolutions and pronouncements directly speaking to our responsibility to be engaged in social change.

Other settings of the UCC might be involved in implementation but when resolutions, pronouncements or statements are approved or affirmed by the General Synod, they become a policy base which informs future actions of the national setting in particular. Where can we be a real embodiment of engagement on an issue, moving beyond passing resolutions to commitment in terms of concrete financial and human resources?

The Board of Directors of Justice and Witness Ministries concluded that JWM must determine its capacity to respond to all the resolutions that are adopted by the General Synod and assigned to JWM. The Board suggests that the historic data contained in the *Prophetic Actions and Social Policy Statements Report* (The Report) be used to recommend procedures for resolutions and pronouncements that will increase mutual accountability and help shape the future responsibility across all settings of the church. The intent is to provide guidance regarding UCC justice work and our unique and distinct leadership role within the movement.

A bold public and prophetic voice requires that tangible and reliable financial support is behind these resolutions and pronouncements. General Synod Standing Rules currently do not require the submitter to provide an estimated cost for implementation. While all resolutions submitted to General Synod do require a statement indicating that implementation is subject to availability of funds, there is an assumption and expectation that the action prescribed will be carried out by the assigned body.

There have been well over 1,000 resolutions and pronouncements adopted by the General Synod (GS), Executive Council (EC), and predecessor bodies of Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM). Since an action taken by any one of the above could have been based upon the recommendation of another, the *Prophetic Actions and Social Policy Statements Report* does not include the possible duplications of the same action. It would have required far deeper analysis of the archives to determine an exact number prior to the year 2000. Since 2000, JWM has been assigned 62 General Synod resolutions and/or pronouncements as primary or secondary implementer: 19 in 2001, 4 in 2003, 12 in 2005, 6 in 2007, 15 in 2009, and 6 in 2011.

As is apparent, when resolutions and pronouncements were passed in the years between 1957 and 2000, there were many more UCC agencies and instrumentalities to carry out the work. However, these actions continue to provide an important historic policy base for our current work. Furthermore, the social context changes over time so it requires that specific strategies for engagement must also change.

The *Prophetic Actions and Social Policy Statements Report* is a general and comprehensive collection of information regarding General Synod actions assigned to JWM and predecessor bodies. It was presented to the Board of Directors of Justice and Witness Ministries at their request. It is especially important during this time when the national setting of the UCC in the midst of a structural transition. Furthermore, it is vital today because we in the United Church of Christ are discerning and envisioning our missional call.

This rich history of the UCC's bold public and prophetic voice is the spring board for embracing God's mission in the world and the church's place in it. We move boldly forward confident that God will shed more light on the Scriptural imperative before us -- To Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly with our God.

PROPOSAL

The Prophetic Vision Working Group, made up of members of national governing bodies, was charged (by the JWM Board and the Evaluation, Program, and Planning Committee of the Executive Council) with evaluating our prophetic actions and social policy statements from two perspectives:

- Phase 1: Statements that are already in existence as a basis for implementation and/or response;
- Phase 2: Explore guidelines to evaluate future resolutions and pronouncements submitted to the General Synod.

The following three areas are recommended as the basis for engaging in this assessment process.

- ✓ Guiding Principles
- ✓ JWM Mission Statement
- ✓ Set of four measurements

Guiding Principles

- ❖ We are the **Church** and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Sole head of the Church (UCC Constitution Preamble, Appendix). As Christians, our prophetic social justice actions are grounded in Jesus' teachings made known to us through the Gospels.
- ❖ **Promoting justice** must build community, both in the ongoing work and the goals achieved. As we do this work, seeking social change is a major part of what we do, however, fostering personal growth and building relationships are also critically important.
- ❖ An **inclusive and healthy process** must include diverse perspectives, be culturally competent, and exercise patience.
- ❖ Openness to **personal transformation** is fundamental to the possibility of social change.

- ❖ **Reflection on the action** (praxis) and its transformative impact is as important as the action itself. (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Frère).
- ❖ **Strong relationships** are key to faithfully approaching social justice issues in our communities; therefore, we value partnerships with faith-based and secular social justice organizations.

Mission Statement of Justice and Witness Ministries

To speak and act prophetically through community mobilization, leadership training, issues education, public witness, and public policy advocacy.

The statement of expected action is found in the “Therefore, be it resolved” section of resolutions and pronouncements. When reviewing current actions, please note which of JWM’s five directional statements is requested (community mobilization, leadership training, issues education, public witness, or public policy advocacy).

Measures

In addition to considering the following four measures, two fundamental questions should be explored as we engage in this assessment process:

- 1) Is a General Synod resolution or pronouncement the most effective strategy to achieve the desired outcome or would other message options be more effective? (i.e. Church-wide media campaign on a particular justice issue)
- 2) If a resolution or pronouncement responds to a key contemporary issue -- one that is specifically related to a certain time frame, are there circumstances in which we claim that the resolution or pronouncement has accomplished its intended purpose? (i.e. The statement on South African divestment in 1983 or contributing to the bail fund for The Wilmington 10 in 1973).

1. Theological and Historical Grounding: (Foundation/Basis)

As people of faith, we can hear the echoes of prophets and believers who throughout history lifted up a vision of right relationship with God and the human community. God’s vision of the wholeness of creation has always challenged the human limits of our thoughts, imaginations, and hopes.

We are grounded in biblical and theological understandings of God’s mission in the world. We draw inspiration and truth from the scriptures and experiencing each other and the world around us. We are called to social justice work through study and contextual immersion and engagement which leads to personal and communal transformation. Because we are rooted in the conviction that all forms of oppression and injustice can be overcome, we witness both the beauty and brokenness of our world.

The United Church of Christ continues to speak out and act upon important social justice issues in our world today. Events of recent times remind us that we cannot ignore economic, social, and

ecological realities that have led to greater abundance for some and scarcity for others. None of us remains untouched because when one part of the body suffers, the whole body is injured.

- Describe how this action reflects the historical roots of United Church of Christ?
- Connect this action to the current identity and justice based theology of the United Church of Christ?
- How does this action support the prophetic vision and voice of the United Church of Christ?
- What is the current engagement of various UCC settings in this action?
- Is this action a broad based theme in the public arena?

2. Mutual Accountability: (Responsibility/Authority)

We are a Church of diverse individuals, congregations, backgrounds, races, orientations, abilities, cultures, ethnicities, and thoughts. The call to be accountable to one another affords us the freedom to be ourselves while sharing our lives in deep and meaningful ways with others. Our common vision of oneness requires us to acknowledge our kinship within the Body of Christ; and compels us to be accountable to one another to do our part and to help others do theirs.

The concept of accountability enables us to engage one another as we create and implement Prophetic Actions and Social Policy Statements for the United Church of Christ. Accountability in social justice work hinges on an understanding of trust in God, in ourselves, and in others. Trust also includes establishing an appropriate system of checks and balances to ensure shared responsibility.

- How will our response to injustice provide guidance to others as they seek to serve God by living out their personal faith?
- Do those most affected by our actions and statements indicate that this is their most pressing concern? How do we know that?
 - Are those affected leading the thrust in developing the actions and statements?
 - Are those affected an integral part of the conversation? If not, why not?
 - Who will articulate the information to the affected communities on behalf of their own interest in order to eliminate fear and mistrust amongst the community?
 - Are we open to allow alternative models of leadership to emerge?
 - Do our processes facilitate ongoing authentic storytelling by the affected individuals, communities, organizations, and people?
- Is cultural competency and effective communication that respects diversity built into the plan for action?
- Are our UCC covenantal partners including institutions of higher learning involved in developing prophetic justice actions and social policy statements?
- Does the process include appropriate outcomes, well-defined action steps, a realistic timetable for the strategic actions, a feasible evaluation plan, stakeholders, and an efficient reporting system?
- How will we know if this prophetic action made any difference? What is the impact?

3. Institutional Capacity: (Human/Financial Resources)

Considering the capacity of the institutional setting(s) to effectively implement a resolution or pronouncement that addresses prophetic social action is an essential component of evaluation and/or consideration. If the author(s) of the resolution or pronouncement continue engagement and multiple church settings are involved in the implementation, the expanded capacity for effective action is more likely, depending upon what is called for in the resolution and its proposals for action. This collaboration strengthens our mutual accountability as outlined in measure #2.

Capacity is not just about pragmatic needs; however, it is more than the bottom line or the availability of staff. Capacity touches upon the whole of the body to responsibly be engaged in the work and witness of the General Synod.

- Describe the **institutional leadership** capacity to implement and/or address the issue effectively and identify where it is located
 - National setting – what persons and/or offices are most appropriate?
 - Conference setting – what is the leadership capacity here? Are there Conference already engaged in addressing this issue?
 - Local Church setting – does the issue have implications for the local church and how would they respond? Who would need to be involved? Are there congregations already engaged in addressing this issue?
 - Educational institutions – does the curricula include opportunities for administration, faculty, and students to be involved in the creation and implementation of these actions.
 - If leadership in multiple settings are appropriately identified and involved, who holds the collaboration together? Who should take the lead?
 - What are the backup plans if staff leadership changes?

- Describe the **institutional resources** needed to be effective
 - What are the financial resources needed to implement? Where are they located? Does this require external fundraising? What are potential sources of fundraising (foundations, individuals, local churches, etc.)? Who would be responsible for doing this fundraising?
 - What are the human resources needed to implement? Are the leaders, who have been identified and empowered, motivated to effectively implement?
 - What infrastructure exists to effectively implement (communications, networks, expertise on the issue, etc.)? Where are these located?
 - Is this still an issue that is current, viable, or relevant today? If so, what changes are emerging in the social, political or cultural landscape that suggest a shift is needed in the strategy outlined for implementation? Do we have the capacity to adapt in a changing landscape?

- What **collaboration** has been or needs to be in place with ecumenical, interfaith and/or community partners to effectively address this issue?
 - What ongoing collaborations have occurred in the implementation of the resolution? Has the collaboration enhanced the UCC's effectiveness in addressing the issue?
 - Are any other organizations (religious, community-based, non-profit, governmental) already effectively addressing this issue? Would this be a duplication or replication

- of those efforts? If so, what would be uniquely addressed that is not already being addressed?
- Would the UCC be taking initiative and lead on this issue and inviting other partners into the effort? Is the UCC joining or affirming an effort already underway?

4. Probability of Influencing Social Change: (Potential/Likelihood)

It is important to know who the key dialogue partners should be part of the discernment, drafting and implementing a General Synod resolution. Conversations, dialogue, and discernment partners could include staff from the covenanted ministries, conference ministers, representatives from the constituency groups that have the most at stake around a given resolution issue topic. Resolution implementing partners should be conversation partners from the very beginning.

It seems there is a necessity for at least two layers of conversation – an internal conversation among UCC leaders and constituencies and an external conversation with secular and faith-based partners.

As we consider points of possibility, it may be helpful to make a distinction between a media/communications strategy and a resolution strategy. Is a General Synod resolution the best way to achieve the desired outcome? This distinction may help shape how we perceive and respond to opportunities for witness and action. .

- Is the UCC in its multiple settings uniquely positioned to be a bold, widely-known, public, faith-based voice on this topic/issue? Why now?
- Attentive to God's creative movement in the world, is this a spirit-filled moment, where there is an opportunity for continuing testament?
- How will public action and witness make a difference on this issue – how will it change lives, individually, systemically and globally; how will it be transformative on an education, policy and/or public dialogue level?
- Are there multiple points of entry for engaging UCC members and congregations in ongoing work and witness on this issue?
- Who are the primary stakeholders?
- What are the obstacles in the dialogue around this issue? What are the dynamics in particular organizations at play? How is the UCC, in its multiple settings, particularly well-equipped to engage these dynamics?

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*".....To pursue the impossible dream is a cop-out. If I pursue an impossible dream, I get to look noble without ever having to risk anything. Glorious failure is guaranteed. What takes courage is to pursue a **possible dream**. A possible dream is doable; it is a reachable star. A possible dream stretches us; it calls for deep and enduring commitment. A possible dream exposes us to the real risk of failure – the failure to do what we might have done, could have done, and should have done.*

*Excerpt from sermon, "To Dream the Possible Dream"
The Rev. Peter Morales President of the Unitarian Universalist Association*

It is important to choose a goal that is both concrete and achievable. Set your sights high, but no so high that you cannot possibly accomplish the goal you've set. This is a risky thing to do, but much more effective systemically and in the long run.

Small easy goal Immediate, limited impact	Concrete, Achievable goal Systemic Impact	Huge goal Long term/may never happen
Low Risk Host a community dialogue on comprehensive sexuality education.	High Risk Influence your local school board to get comprehensive sex-education programs in your schools.	Low Risk Comprehensive sexuality education program in every school in America

Appendix

UCC Statement of Faith

We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit, who is made known to us in Jesus our brother, and to whose deeds we testify:

God calls the worlds into being, creates humankind in the divine image, and sets before us the ways of life and death. God seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin. God judges all humanity and all nations by that will of righteousness declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, God has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the whole creation to its Creator. God bestows upon us the Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

God calls us into the church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be servants in the service of the whole human family, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory.

God promises to all who trust in the gospel forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, the presence of the Holy Spirit in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in that kingdom which has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto God. Amen.

Adapted by Robert V. Moss

Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ

Section 2

The United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole Head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior. It acknowledges as kindred in Christ all who share in this confession. It looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world. It claims as its own the faith of the historic Church expressed in the ancient creeds and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers. It affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God. In accordance with the teaching of our Lord and the practice prevailing among evangelical Christians...

UCC VISION PLAN

CORE PURPOSE

Drawn together by the Holy Spirit, we are a distinct and diverse community of Christians that come together as one church, joining faith and action. In covenant with the church in all of its settings, we serve God in the co-creation of a just and sustainable world as made manifest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

CORE VALUES

Continuing Testament

Extravagant Welcome

Changing Lives

BOLD, INSPIRATIONAL GOALS (BIGS)

1. The UCC is a bold, widely-known and respected public voice of Christianity in service of God's ever-unfolding mission.
2. There is a welcoming UCC community of faith that is accessible to all — no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey.
3. Every UCC member is well-equipped to be growing in faith, be theologically conversant, and be active in the global mission of the church.
4. The UCC has a wealth of prepared, excellent leaders that reflect the diversity of God's beloved community.

CONTEXT

As leaders, we strive to promote a common purpose, describe what success looks like, and spell out compelling goals and strategies for achieving that success. Thus, we propose these bold, inspirational goals, each with strategies supported by robust funding for viable ministry and mission

Collegium of Officers -- Approved 2012