

1 The following resolution has been received by the Office of General Ministries under the June 7,  
2 2013 deadline of the “could not have been anticipated” clause of Rule 12-3 of the Standing Rules  
3 to the Twenty-ninth General Synod. Receipt of this resolution should not be considered an  
4 indication it will come before delegates to the General Synod. Any resolution must meet all of  
5 the requirements of the Standing Rules. It has been forwarded to the Executive Council’s  
6 Committee of Reference for a recommendation on its disposition. The Executive Council will  
7 consider its committee’s recommendation on June 27, 2013.

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9 **A Resolution on Ecumenical Relationship between**  
10 **the United Church of Christ and the United Church of Canada**

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12 **A Prudential Resolution**

13  
14 **Submitted by the Executive Council**

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16 **SUMMARY**

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18 This resolution recognizes the new ecumenical relationship between the United Church of Christ  
19 and the United Church of Canada and creates a committee that will explore the direction and  
20 plan to move this relationship toward a deeper commitment that reflects visible unity in the life  
21 of the church.

22  
23 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL and ETHICAL RATIONALE**

24  
25 In his last prayer with his disciples, Jesus prayed, “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are  
26 in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent  
27 me” (John 17:21, NRSV). The desire for unity and visible unity has been at the heart and  
28 commitment of the ecumenical movement.

29  
30 The United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ affirm this biblical understanding  
31 of unity which continues to guide the ecumenical commitment and engagement with other  
32 churches. The churches continue to seek meaningful ways to attend to the call in the gospel and  
33 to overcome the separations that stand in the way of the unity of the church that Jesus prayed for.  
34 As Christians there is an imperative to find ways to live in unity and to create visible unity for  
35 the life of the Church. The call is the essence of the ecumenical movement which seeks to find  
36 unity-in-diversity, creating the space to engage divergences and convergences through on-going  
37 dialogue and engagement.

38  
39 **BACKGROUND**

40  
41 The United Church of Canada is the largest Protestant denomination in Canada, ministering to  
42 close to 3 million people in over 3500 congregations across the country. The United Church was  
43 inaugurated on June 10, 1925 in Toronto, Ontario, when the Methodist Church, Canada, the  
44 Congregational Union of Canada, and 70 per cent of the Presbyterian Church of Canada entered  
45 into an organic union. Joining as well was the small General Council of Union Churches,  
46 centered largely in Western Canada.

47 The forming of the United Church of Canada was the first union of churches in the world to  
48 cross historical denominational lines and hence received international acclaim. Impetus for the  
49 union arose out of the concerns for serving the vast Canadian northwest and in the desire for  
50 better overseas mission. Each of the uniting churches, however, had a long history prior to  
51 1925.<sup>i</sup>

52  
53 The United Church of Christ and the United Church of Canada initiated formal dialogue in April  
54 2012. During the historical visit by the United Church of Christ to the United Church of Canada  
55 offices in Toronto, there was exploratory conversation to move the churches in the direction of  
56 getting to know each other better. This beginning conversation pointed to the need to have  
57 further conversation. At that time, no concrete decisions were made about the possibilities of  
58 relationship or formal ecumenical engagement.

59  
60 While there was acknowledgement of similar history and interests, the mutual knowledge that  
61 clergy were crossing the northern border to serve across these denominational lines, and the  
62 common heritage of being “united and uniting” churches the opportunity to meet for dialogue  
63 and to nurture this unique relationship was not previously explored. The implications of these  
64 commonalities and shared life together paved the way for the second meeting to look further at  
65 issues of history and polity as well as areas in which the two communions were already working  
66 together.

67  
68 The United Church of Canada is geographically the closest united and uniting church to the  
69 United Church of Christ. With similar history and common historical strands as well as a  
70 commitment to justice the two denominations easily identified common tables at which they sit,  
71 even though there has never been the occasion for gathering to talk about ways in which both  
72 UCCs can work together.

73  
74 Coming out of the meeting in April 2012, there was a commitment to continue the process of  
75 learning about each other, and a second meeting was scheduled to explore future direction for the  
76 dialogue. The second conversation occurred in April 2013 with representatives from the United  
77 Church of Canada visiting the Church House in Cleveland. There was the occasion to map the  
78 places where the United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ sat together at  
79 ecumenical tables and to examine places where staff was working together.

80  
81 This second meeting pointed the way to a mutual commitment to explore ways in which the  
82 ecumenical commitment to visible unity could be strengthen and lived out in the context of a  
83 shared border, shared history, shared clergy and shared resolve to live out the commitment to  
84 being followers of Christ.

85  
86 The primary outcome of the April 2013 meeting was to provide a mechanism for moving beyond  
87 dialogue to explore ecumenical relationship together.

93 **TEXT OF MOTION**

94  
95 WHEREAS, the gospel of Jesus Christ unites the followers of Christ in a single community of  
96 faith and compels us to make our unity visible so “that the world may believe...” John 17:21;  
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98 WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ and the United Church of Canada are united and  
99 uniting churches with multiple denominational streams which identify them and shape their  
100 Christian self-understanding;  
101

102 WHEREAS, the United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ have common  
103 commitment to the visible unity of the church of Jesus Christ and to the one ecumenical  
104 movement;  
105

106 WHEREAS, the United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ have common  
107 Congregational and Reformed heritage and sit in common witness to mission, worship,  
108 theological conversation and commitment to justice;  
109

110 WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ and the United Church of Canada have engaged in  
111 dialogue and have identified similarities and differences that can commonly strengthen who they  
112 are and their witness in North America as united and uniting churches;  
113

114 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the twenty-ninth General Synod United Church of Christ  
115 recognize the United Church of Canada as an ecumenical partner;  
116

117 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ  
118 mutually commit to forming the United Church Ecumenical Partnership Committee, an  
119 ecumenical partnership committee of ten (10) persons – five from each communion;  
120

121 BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the United Church Ecumenical Partnership Committee  
122 brings back to the thirtieth General Synod recommendations for further steps and activities to  
123 bring the two communions toward full communion and visible unity.  
124

125 **FUNDING**

126  
127 Funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall  
128 mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.  
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130 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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132 The Collegium of Officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the  
133 United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.  
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<sup>i</sup> United Church of Canada website (<http://www.united-church.ca/history/overview/brief>)