

1 The Executive Council recommends this resolution be sent to a committee of the General Synod

2
3 **Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining in Appalachia**
4 **Submitted by the Central Atlantic Conference**

5
6 **A Resolution of Witness**

7 **SUMMARY**

8 Mountaintop removal coal mining devastates communities and the environment. We urge the
9 United Church of Christ to work to bring it to an end and encourage the use of clean, renewable
10 energy. Power can be generated in ways that are sustainable and beneficial to the health of
11 Appalachia's mountains and eco-systems, and the people who live there. For example, in West
12 Virginia's Coal River Valley, the mountains can sustain wind farms that lead to power
13 generation, local jobs, and a sustainable eco-system. We cannot move from one destructive
14 source of energy to another for this region. Clean energy is the answer for Appalachia.

15 **BACKGROUND**

16 Mountaintop removal coal mining has a devastating impact on the economy, ecology, and
17 communities of Appalachia. Mining companies use heavy explosives to blow the tops off
18 mountains in order to reach a thin seam of coal. The companies then dump this "overburden" -
19 millions of tons of rubble and toxic waste - into the streams and valleys below the mining sites.

20 This destructive practice has damaged or destroyed nearly 2,000 miles of streams and threatens
21 to destroy 1.4 million acres of mountaintops and forests by 2020. The mining poisons drinking
22 water, destroys beautiful forests and wildlife habitat, increases the risk of flooding, and wipes out
23 entire communities.

24 Mountaintop removal pollutes waterways and allows toxic heavy metals such as cadmium,
25 selenium, and arsenic to leach into local water supplies -- the same water that Appalachia's
26 people rely on. But the danger is not limited to drinking water; mountaintop removal also causes
27 air pollution that affects communities for miles around. Many of the toxins that pollute
28 mountaintop-removal sites are carcinogens, and cancer rates are twice as high for people who
29 live near mountaintop-removal sites.

30 When mountains are demolished for coal mining, they are gone forever. They lose their topsoil
31 and forest, animal habitat and ability to filter water, and they become uninhabitable places for
32 humans and animals.

33 Mountaintop removal also destroys the valleys in Appalachia where people have lived for
34 centuries. It destroys their culture, their way of making a living, and their family structures. It
35 occurs in remote places where there is very little self-determining political organization and is a
36 colonization and exploitation of the land by outside interests. If it were a profitable enterprise for
37 the people of Appalachia, then they would at least benefit economically. The opposite is true,

38 however, as the Appalachian counties are consistently among the economically poorest in the
39 United States.

40 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE**

41 Mountaintop removal is a permanent desecration of the gift of creation by a benevolent and
42 gracious Creator. God created the earth and everything in it, and God calls upon humans
43 numerous times in the Bible to be a steward of the divine creation - to protect, care for, and learn
44 from it:

45 “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; and the world and they that dwell
46 therein.” - Psalm 24:1

47 "You shall not pollute the land in which you live... you shall not defile the land in which
48 you live, in which I also dwell." - Numbers 35: 33-34

49
50 “But ask the animals, and they will teach you; or birds of the air and they will tell you; or
51 speak to the earth and it will teach you; or let the fish of the sea inform you...In God’s
52 hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.” - Job 12:7-10

53
54 The Bible further calls for justice for the poor and oppressed:

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56 “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before
57 my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the
58 orphan, plead for the widow.” – Isaiah 1:16-17

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60 “What does the Lord require of thee but to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly
61 with your God?” – Micah 6:8

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63 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

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65 WHEREAS mountaintop removal coal mining destroys God’s creation by blowing up mountains
66 and burying streams throughout Appalachia; and

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68 WHEREAS mountaintop removal coal mining harms Appalachian communities; and

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70 WHEREAS mountaintop removal coal mining causes the displacement of entire Appalachian
71 communities and their culture; and

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73 WHEREAS as people of faith, we look to the scriptures for guidance for the choices we make in
74 our lives; and

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76 WHEREAS we understand scriptures compel us to act on our faith grounded in wonder,
77 reverence, love, and respect for all of God’s creation; and

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79 WHEREAS we are called to spiritual and lifestyle transformation based on justice and reverence
80 for all of God’s creatures and creation...

81
82 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United
83 Church of Christ express its opposition to mountaintop removal coal mining and its support for
84 clean, renewable sources of energy;

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86 Be it further resolved, that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
87 requests the Office of Justice and Witness Ministries share these concerns about mountaintop
88 removal coal mining by giving a copy of this resolution to the United States Department of
89 Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency, as well as appropriate congressional
90 committees;

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92 Be it further resolved, that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls
93 upon the Office of Justice and Witness Ministries, to provide associations, conferences, and
94 congregations with information and timely direction for needed action that can help end
95 mountaintop removal coal mining;

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97 Be it further resolved, the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
98 encourage its member congregations to determine where their electricity comes from and, if it is
99 coal sourced from mountaintop removal coal mining and encourages its member congregations
100 to urge likewise, to work to find another source (with guidance from the national office);

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102 Be it further resolved, that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ urges
103 the Environmental Protection Agency and the Obama Administration to end the devastating
104 practice of mountaintop removal coal mining and encourages its member congregations to urge
105 likewise;

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107 Be it further resolved, that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
108 advocates for renewable energy to replace mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia in
109 order to create jobs and boost local economies and encourages its member congregations to do
110 likewise.

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112 **FUNDING**

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114 Funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall
115 mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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117 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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119 The Collegium of Officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the
120 United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body

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122 **RESOURCES:**

123 Christians for the Mountains: www.christiansforthemountains.org
124 Sierra Club Beyond Coal Campaign: www.beyondcoal.org
125 Appalachian Voices: www.appvoices.org
126 I Love Mountains: www.ilovemountains.org

- 127 Appalachian Mountain Advocates: www.appalmad.org
- 128 “The Last Mountain” documentary: www.thelastmountainmovie.com
- 129 “Deep Down” documentary: www.deepdownfilm.org
- 130 “Coal Country” documentary: www.coalcountrythemovie.com