

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

2 **RESOLUTION CALLING FOR AN ALL CHURCH OFFERING FOR SUPPORTING**
3 **THE EDUCATIONAL EXPENSES OF MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT PREPARING**
4 **FOR AUTHORIZED MINISTRY OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

5 **Submitted by the Ohio Conference and the Nebraska Conference**

6 **A Prudential Resolution**

7 **SUMMARY**

8 The purpose of this resolution is to develop a special offering to support students seeking the
9 seminary education to prepare for ministry.

10 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE**

11 While the personal experience of call is a significant part of the Christian experience that leads a
12 person into ministry, there has also been within the church a providential affirmation of that call
13 that is equally important. This may be in part the recognition by a congregation of that call
14 which is made manifest by the invitation to become the pastor of that congregation. We, the
15 community of faith, have also maintained that the collective wisdom of the wider gathering of
16 congregations be part of that process of discernment.

17 Part of that process of discernment has been directing the person in discernment through a path
18 of preparation that involves deepening the understanding of scripture, history, tradition, human
19 nature and theology. The development of a learned community where persons in discernment
20 can gather with scholars and veterans of the life of faith has been a precious part of our shared
21 life. (It is a living out of Proverbs 27:17 “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of
22 another.”)

23 Equally we are a people of justice. We do not maintain that only those born into wealth and
24 privilege can come into leadership in the community. The commitments to a community where
25 no one will forever be burdened by the debts of the past is wonderfully woven into our language
26 and our common heritage in the concept of jubilee. The Hebrew base of the word and the joyful
27 sense of release and new beginning contained in Leviticus 25 calls us to be a people who
28 remember that the poor are our kin, children with us of the One who brings us out of slavery.

29 The realities of debt for students are a mark of shame upon the community. We who know of
30 jubilee cannot, must not countenance the closing of the door to ordained ministry because the
31 person in discernment is not personally blessed with the financial resources to pursue the
32 education that will enable ministry. We have sufficient resources to train up the future leaders
33 God is calling to serve among us. We read God’s call to the church in Rome (Romans 12), a call
34 to holy living which includes “Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to

35 strangers.” For those of us privileged to experience the call and journey of those who came to us
36 as strangers, but whose faith has warmed our hearts, we must open a path for them to become
37 leaders in our midst.

38 **BACKGROUND**

39 General Synod, Conferences, Associations, Seminaries and individuals have been struggling
40 valiantly since the formation of the United Church of Christ to develop ways to underwrite the
41 cost of seminary education for persons in discernment. The task has proven to be beyond the
42 ability of these entities working separately to accomplish. However, the creation of a church-
43 wide special offering allows all the partners in the process to pull together and help us move
44 beyond the barrier of cost.

45 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

46 WHEREAS, God provides for God’s church by calling and gifting persons for ministry in a
47 variety of ways, including pastoral leadership for the church itself;

48 WHEREAS, the church participates in this providence of God by equipping and authorizing the
49 ministries of some of its called and gifted members through theological education and ordination
50 or commissioning;

51 WHEREAS, the well-being of the church of Jesus Christ, and particularly of each local church,
52 is enhanced by calling faithful, educated and competent pastors, teachers and other leaders, and
53 is jeopardized by the unavailability of such leadership;

54 WHEREAS, the church has historically provided for its leadership needs through institutions of
55 theological-pastoral education;

56 WHEREAS, General Synod III phased out national, direct support to seminaries and called upon
57 Conferences and local churches to assume this responsibility; and General Synod X urged each
58 local church to support the seven closely related (now the seven seminaries of the United Church
59 of Christ) seminary or seminaries in its region at a level equivalent to two percent of its operating
60 budget, but few local churches have done so;

61 WHEREAS, the cost of educating persons for ministerial leadership has gradually shifted from
62 the church itself to the persons themselves, and, inclusive of living expenses, has increased to
63 \$24,000 per year and more to many seminarians;

64 WHEREAS, many of the current generation of seminary graduates have borrowed large sums of
65 money—often \$30,000 to \$50,000 in addition to any undergraduate student loans still being
66 carried—to complete their theological education and one seminary’s average student loan for the
67 year 1996-97 alone was \$10,200;

68 WHEREAS, indebted seminary graduates must seek starting salaries sufficient to enable debt
69 repayment on top of costs of living, while the salaries offered by many local churches are
70 marginal at best and inadequate to do so, and these local churches are increasingly hard-pressed
71 to finance even marginally-paid leadership;

72 WHEREAS, these trends point toward a dearth of church leadership, with only wealthy persons
73 being able to afford to answer God’s call to full-time leadership and only wealthy churches being
74 able to call them;

75 WHEREAS, the fund-raising efforts of the seminaries of the United Church of Christ and of the
76 Make A Difference Campaign, although providing some increase in scholarship resources, have
77 not been sufficient to stave off these trends;

78 WHEREAS, all the previous whereas clauses were taken directly from the action of the Twenty-
79 first General Synod “Prevention and Reduction of Seminarians’ Educational Debt” (97GS40)
80 and have not been sufficiently addressed;

81 WHEREAS, the multiple paths of ministry provide for greater diversity of educational
82 preparation but do not eliminate the need for financial support for members in discernment;

83 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church
84 of Christ requests the Collegium of Officers of the United Church of Christ to develop a plan
85 and an implementation schedule for an annual all- church offering to provide tuition assistance
86 for theological education for members in discernment with associations of the United Church of
87 Christ. Be it further resolved that the Collegium be requested to present an actionable plan to the
88 30th General Synod in 2015.

89 **FUNDING**

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

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94 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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