

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

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3 **RESOLUTION URGING DIVESTMENT FROM FOSSIL FUEL COMPANIES**
4 **Submitted by the Massachusetts Conference, the Southwest Conference,**
5 **the New York Conference and the Central Atlantic Conference UCC**

6
7 **A Resolution of Witness**
8

9 **SUMMARY**

10 The realities of climate change require prophetic and strategic action by people of faith seeking to be
11 faithful to the everlasting covenant God has made with us, with every living creature and with all future
12 generations. If fossil fuel companies simply fulfill their purpose the earth will become inhospitable to life
13 as we know it. This resolution urges all entities of the UCC along with individual members and those
14 affiliated with the UCC to divest from fossil fuel companies. Enacting this resolution is part of a world-
15 wide movement. Along with additional strategies, this resolution seeks to inspire and accelerate an
16 unswerving commitment – as stated in the UCC’s Core Purpose – to “the co-creation of a just and
17 sustainable world as made manifest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

18 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE**

19 The actions this resolution recommends are rooted in and an expression of several of our most
20 foundational theological and biblical principles.

21 In Genesis 9, God makes a covenant not only with Noah, but with all of humanity; a covenant not only
22 with all of humanity, but with every living creature; a covenant not only with all creatures alive today, but
23 with all future generations. In addition to the breadth of God’s inclusive love, God extends that love to
24 future generations. As covenant partners, God calls us to do likewise. It is now clear that the past few
25 generations of humans have burned so much of the earth’s energy reserves that we are on the verge of
26 rendering the earth inhospitable for life as we have known it for all of recorded history. By any measure,
27 this is a violation of covenant.

28 We live out God’s inclusive love by following the most basic moral instruction of both the New
29 Testament and Hebrew scriptures (Mark 12:31; Matthew 22:39; Luke 10:27; Leviticus 19:18) – a moral
30 instruction found at the core of every world religion: We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves. In
31 keeping with God’s covenant, and because our actions will have significant consequences for future
32 generations, we must recognize that future generations are no less our neighbors than those who live next
33 door to us today. You might think of this as “Golden Rule 2.0.”¹

34 Few take issue with Paul’s advice to the Christians in Corinth when he declares that *love* is the greatest
35 gift (I Cor. 13:13). And the most quoted verse in scripture, John 3:16, reminds us that God loves the
36 *world!* Let us remember, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” (Gen.
37 1:31)

¹ In his blog, Andrew Revkin quotes novelist Jostein Gaarder, using this phrase in speaking about intergenerational responsibility <http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/25/do-humans-need-a-golden-rule-2-0/?partner=rss&emc=rss>

38 In his letter to the Christians in Colossae, Paul states that through Christ, God was pleased to reconcile all
39 things to God's self. (Colossians 1:20) Nothing is left out. Desmond Tutu refers to the act of reconciling
40 us to all of God's creation as "Christ's supreme work."² To put it in economic terms, with God, there are
41 no externalities. All things must be reconciled – the entirety of our activity must be accounted for.

42 We have a long way to go before the promise of reconciliation is realized. Through many resolutions
43 over decades, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ has recognized what Ecumenical
44 Patriarch Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians, declares boldly: that
45 wrecking creation is a sin.³ Many of these resolutions also decry the unjust, disproportionate impact
46 climate change is already having on those living in poverty and in the least developed countries, the
47 elderly and children and those least responsible for the emissions of greenhouse gases.⁴ For these and
48 other reasons, the United Church of Christ is ever more committed to care for God's creation. This can be
49 seen in the recently (2012) articulated Core Purpose of the United Church of Christ: "... we serve God in
50 the co-creation of a just and sustainable world as made manifest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

51 **BACKGROUND**

52 **WHAT IS THE SCIENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE?**⁵

53 Since the beginning of human civilization up until about 200 years ago, our atmosphere contained about
54 275 parts per million of carbon dioxide. The discovery of oil, the beginning of the industrial age, and
55 rapidly increasing population growth brought increased energy demands and improved techniques to tap
56 into the earth's carbon reserves (oil, coal, gas), reserves which took nature hundreds of millions of years
57 to create. These are the major factors causing the amount of carbon in the atmosphere to rise to its current
58 level (2012) of 392ppm of CO₂. Climate scientists agree that 350ppm of CO₂ is the safe upper limit for
59 CO₂ in earth's atmosphere.

60 Because CO₂ traps heat in our atmosphere, this rise in CO₂ has resulted in a global temperature rise of 0.8
61 degrees Celsius causing far more damage than most scientists expected. (A third of summer sea ice in the
62 Arctic is gone, the oceans are 30 percent more acidic, and since warm air holds more water vapor than
63 cold, the atmosphere over the oceans is a shocking five percent wetter, loading the dice for devastating
64 floods.) May 2012 was the 327th consecutive month in which the temperature of the entire globe
65 exceeded the 20th-century average.

² Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his "Forward" to *The Green Bible NRSV* (Harper Collins, New York; 2008), p. I-14.

³ Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, "To Commit a Crime Against the Natural World is a Sin" in *Moral Ground – Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril* (Trinity University Press, San Antonio, TX; 2010), pp. 135-136.

⁴ The recent DARA [report](#) links climate change to 5 million deaths/yr (400,000 due to hunger & disease; 4.5 million to (air) pollution from the carbon economy), and 1.6% of global GDP (1.2 trillion dollars). Unjustly and unethically, the very poor of the world are suffering by far the most from our excesses.

⁵ The most useful source for learning about climate science and issues related to this resolution is Joe Romm's website: <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/issue/> .

66 What must also be taken into consideration is that previously released carbon continues to overheat the
67 atmosphere. Thus, climate models calculate that even if we stopped increasing CO₂ now, the temperature
68 would likely still rise another 0.8 degrees Celsius.

69 In 2009, world leaders and climate scientists gathered in Copenhagen. 167 countries (including the
70 United States) responsible for more than 87 percent of the world's carbon emissions signed on to the
71 Copenhagen Accord, which declared: "We agree that deep cuts in global emissions are required... so as to
72 hold the increase in global temperature below 2° Celsius." While this global consensus is remarkable,
73 many scientists have come to think that 2° Celsius is far too lenient a target. For example, NASA scientist
74 James Hansen, the planet's most prominent climatologist, says, "The target that has been talked about in
75 international negotiations for 2°C of warming is actually a prescription for long-term disaster."

76 Having raised the global thermometer almost 1° Celsius, we've experienced the worst drought since the
77 dust bowl, \$40-\$60 billion of damages from hurricane Sandy, Arctic sea ice is disappearing much faster
78 than any scientific model has predicted, and Munich Re, the world's largest reinsurance company, has
79 released a report based on its natural catastrophe database — the most comprehensive of its kind in the
80 world — that concludes: a) global warming is driving an increase in weather-related disasters; and b)
81 "North America is the continent with the largest increases in disasters."⁶

82 If an increase of less than 1° Celsius has resulted in these (and other) devastations, it's hard to
83 comprehend what life will be like when we reach 2° Celsius. And yet, over the past several years, as
84 climate models improve, the predictions developed by climate scientists have become more and more
85 dire.⁷ Many scientists now believe that before the end of the century, CO₂ will reach 866ppm, and global
86 temperature will rise over 5° Celsius.⁸

87 One thing is for sure: it is critically important for humanity to leave as much of the earth's carbon reserves
88 as possible in the ground. The math is simple.⁹ We can release up to 565 more gigatons of carbon
89 dioxide by burning fossil fuels and stay below 2°C of warming. If we burn more than that, we risk
90 catastrophe for life on earth. The problem is that fossil fuel corporations now have 2,795 gigatons in their
91 reserves – five times the safe amount.¹⁰ If fossil fuel companies simply carry out their stated missions by

⁶ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2012/10/10/weather-disasters-climate-change-munich-re-report/1622845/>

⁷ <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2009/05/20/204131/mit-doubles-global-warming-projections-2/> .
<http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/sustainability/publications/low-carbon-economy-index/index.jhtml> . And the World Bank
released a report in late Nov. 2012 entitled: "[Turn Down the Heat: Why a 4°C Warmer World Must Be Avoided](#)," .

⁸ See 2009 MIT report: <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2009/05/20/204131/mit-doubles-global-warming-projections-2/>
and 2012 Price Waterhouse Coopers report: <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2012/11/06/1144431/study-were-headed-to-11f-warming-and-even-7f-requires-nearly-quadrupling-the-current-rate-of-decarbonisation/>

⁹ See Bill McKibben's August 2012 article: <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719>

¹⁰ [The Carbon Tracker Initiative](#), a team of London financial analysts and environmentalists, estimates that proven coal, oil, and gas reserves of the fossil-fuel companies, and the countries (think Venezuela or Kuwait) that act like fossil-fuel companies, equals about 2,795 gigatons of CO₂, or five times the amount we can release to maintain 2 degrees of warming.

92 utilizing the known reserves they currently own or have rights to, the earth will become inhospitable to
93 life as we know it.

94 WHAT TO DO?

95 The enormity of this challenge demands that the human community engage numerous strategies. For
96 example, we must encourage political leaders to enact laws that will lead to a sustainable planet. In April
97 2012, the UCC's Mission 4/1 Earth's 100,000 advocacy letters are doing just that. We can also encourage
98 political leaders to take a stand on behalf of a sustainable planet. The massive civil disobedience in
99 August 2011 that resulted in President Obama halting – at least temporarily – the Keystone XL pipeline
100 did just that.

101 This resolution is part of a worldwide movement which focuses on leaving as much of the earth's carbon
102 reserves as possible in the ground. As part of that worldwide campaign, this resolution proposes that all
103 UCC entities, along with individuals affiliated with the UCC, divest from fossil fuel companies.

104 WHY DIVESTMENT?

105 In 1983-1989 General Synod passed numerous resolutions¹¹ committing the various corporate expressions
106 of the UCC to divest from companies doing business with South Africa. Their action began as a
107 prophetic witness. But once thousands of institutions and individuals joined together to divest from
108 companies doing business in South Africa, Apartheid came to an end.

109 Following that path, what begins as a prophetic act of divestment from fossil fuel companies will:
110 a) drive public awareness of the incalculable damage being done by the fossil fuel industry as it generates
111 huge immediate profits in exchange for an uninhabitable future;
112 b) build public recognition of the urgent need to drastically and rapidly reduce humanity's dependence on
113 fossil fuels;
114 c) call widespread attention to the consequences of continuing a "business as usual" approach to
115 extracting, marketing and burning fossil fuel;
116 d) lead to inspiring an urgent, accelerated and popular commitment to leave untapped 80% of the known
117 carbon reserves,¹² while developing renewable energy resources capable of meeting humanity's needs –
118 thus making it possible that life as we have known it might continue on God's good earth.

The International Energy Agency released its annual flagship publication the [World Energy Outlook](#) on Nov. 12, 2012. In the executive summary, the IEA roughly concurred, saying, "No more than one-third of proven reserves of fossil fuels can be consumed prior to 2050 if the world is to achieve the 2 °C goal."

¹¹ 1983: The Fourteenth General Synod adopts as amended the Resolution on Investment and Corporate Responsibility with Regards to South Africa.

1985: The Fifteenth General Synod adopts the Proposal for Action "UCC Full Divestment of All Financial Resources from All Corporations Doing Business with South Africa."

1987: The Sixteenth General Synod adopts "Expanded Criteria for Divestment and Advocacy Related to South Africa" as amended.

1989: The Seventeenth General Synod adopts the Resolution "Boycott of Royal Dutch/Shell Oil," as amended.

¹² The total known reserves are worth about [\\$27 trillion](#). If we need to keep 80 percent of those reserves in the ground, that's a \$20 trillion write off for the industry.

119 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

120 WHEREAS, the leaders of 167 countries (including the United States) have agreed that any warming of
121 the planet above a 2°C (3.6°F) rise would be unsafe, and we have already (as of 2012) raised the
122 temperature 0.8°C, causing far more damage than most scientists expected; and

123 WHEREAS, computer models show that even if we stopped increasing CO₂ levels now, the temperature
124 would continue to rise another 0.8°C, bringing the planet over three-quarters of the way to the 2°C limit;
125 and

126 WHEREAS, scientists estimate that humans can pour roughly 565 more gigatons of carbon dioxide into
127 the atmosphere and still have some reasonable hope of staying below 2°C; and

128 WHEREAS the proven coal, oil, and gas reserves of the fossil-fuel companies, and the countries (e.g.
129 Venezuela or Kuwait) which act like fossil-fuel companies equals about 2,795 gigatons of CO₂, or five
130 times the amount we can release to maintain a 2°C limit of planetary warming; and

131 WHEREAS the purpose of fossil fuel companies is to make money for their shareholders by providing for
132 the energy needs of the world using the resources they currently own or have rights to tap – and if they
133 simply continue to carry out this purpose, they will raise the temperature of the earth far beyond what is
134 hospitable for life as we know it; and

135 WHEREAS, because we are a covenant people and affirm Jesus’ call to love our neighbors as ourselves,
136 we join God in recognizing our moral obligation to take into account how our decisions and activities
137 affect all of creation now and into the future; and

138 WHEREAS even though God loved the world and called it very good, humanity’s normal, everyday
139 activity is putting God’s world in jeopardy; and

140 WHEREAS over the past five or more decades, many bodies of the United Church of Christ, including
141 the General Synod on numerous occasions, have recognized our moral obligation to be faithful stewards
142 of God’s creation as well as acknowledging, in one way or another, that wrecking creation is a sin; and

143 WHEREAS the Core Purpose of the United Church of Christ states (in part): “... we serve God in the co-
144 creation of a just and sustainable world as made manifest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ,”

145 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
146 calls upon all Covenanted, Affiliated, and Associated Ministries (and their successor bodies), Agencies,
147 Conferences, Associations, Local Churches and members of the United Church of Christ to:

- 148 a) Immediately stop any new investment in fossil fuel companies and instruct asset managers who work
149 for those entities to do the same; and
150 b) Ensure that within 5 years none of its directly held or commingled assets include holdings of either
151 public equities or corporate bonds in fossil fuel companies as determined by the Carbon Tracker list¹³; and
152 c) Release quarterly updates, available to the public, detailing progress made towards full divestment.

¹³ The current list of 200 coal, oil and gas companies can be found here:

<http://www.carbontracker.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/08/Unburnable-Carbon-Full1.pdf>

153 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls
154 upon the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ to inform those fossil fuel
155 companies of the passage and implementation of this resolution.

156 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ asks the
157 General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ to engage leaders of other religious
158 traditions and relevant organizations to explore ways that they and their constituents might join the UCC
159 in this action.

160 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
161 encourages all Covenanted, Affiliated, and Associated Ministries (and their successor bodies), Agencies,
162 Conferences, Associations, Local Churches and members of the United Church of Christ to engage
163 additional strategies – including public witness, advocacy for the creation of and enforcement of laws,
164 education campaigns and lifestyle changes – that will reduce the use of fossil fuels and our carbon
165 footprint;

166 BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ remains
167 profoundly concerned about the disproportionate impact climate change is already having on those living
168 in poverty and in the least developed countries, the elderly and children and those least responsible for the
169 emissions of greenhouse gases, and recognizes the moral mandate for humanity to shift to a sustainable
170 energy plan in a way that is both just and compassionate.

171

172 **FUNDING**

173 Funding for the implementation of this Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates
174 of the affected agencies and the funds available.

175 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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