

1 The Business Committee of the Thirty-first General Synod has recommended this proposed
2 resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

3
4
5 **A More Just Economy: Living Wages and Job Creation**

6
7 **A Resolution of Witness**

8
9 **Submitted by the following General Synod delegates: Kay Ahaus, Illinois South**
10 **Conference; Martin L. Buck, Ohio Conference; Ryan Taylor-Byers, Ohio Conference;**
11 **Marjorie DiSalvio, Massachusetts Conference; Richard Edens, Southern Conference; Janis**
12 **Edwards, Pennsylvania Southeast Conference; Ann-Marie Illsley, Massachusetts**
13 **Conference; Davena L. Jones, Northern California Nevada Conference; Rev. Damien J.**
14 **Lake, Ohio Conference; Jackie Manley, Northern California Nevada Conference; Naomi**
15 **Schultz, Ohio Conference; Gabe McKelvey, Wisconsin Conference; Zillah Frances Wesley**
16 **II, United Black Christians; Zillah Jackson Wesley, United Black Christians; Terry**
17 **Williams, Ohio Conference; and Jeanne Zammataro, Vermont Conference.**

18
19 **Summary**

20
21 Recognizing our nation’s rising economic inequality and growing shortage of jobs, the General
22 Synod calls for all jobs to pay living wages and for policy makers to create jobs by enacting
23 programs to address unmet needs. In addition, the General Synod calls on all settings of the
24 United Church of Christ to support workers’ and community efforts to create a more just
25 economy.

26
27 **Biblical and Theological Rationale**

28
29 God’s concern for the poor and for all who fail to live in the fullness of life is at the heart of our
30 Christian faith, at the core of our ethic of economic justice. We are called to be servants in
31 service to God’s vision and to seek a just society where all people and creation live out God’s
32 intention for them. We are called to ensure that God’s abundance, given to us all, is equitably
33 shared so everyone lives in the fullness of life. We express our commitment to God’s vision and
34 to our neighbors when we actively work toward an economy in which all jobs pay living wages,
35 a wage that allows all workers and their families to thrive, and where everyone who wants a job
36 has one.

37
38 The Bible calls us to treat workers with fairness and dignity, directing:

- 39 • "You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or
40 aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns" (Deuteronomy 24:14-15);
41 • "Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud,
42 cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (James
43 5:4); and
44 • "I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against ...those who
45 oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust
46 aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 3:5).

48 In Matthew’s gospel we find a story Jesus told about a vineyard owner who, during the time of
49 the harvest, goes to the marketplace early in the morning and hires workers (20:1-16). He
50 happens to go to the marketplace four more times during the day and each time he finds workers
51 standing about, waiting to be hired. They need work. He hires them. At the end of the day, the
52 owner pays all the workers – even those who worked just part of the day – the same amount , a
53 denarius, the money a worker needed to earn each day to support a family. This story, which
54 Jesus said described the reign of God, appears to call for a job for everyone who wants to work
55 and living wages for all workers. Everything belongs to God (Ps. 24:1) – who is represented in
56 this parable by the vineyard owner -- and God chooses to share God’s resources equally among
57 us all.

58
59 We know that God envisions a world where all people may thrive and have the opportunity to be
60 the people they were created to be. This is a society where everyone is paid a living wage,
61 everyone who wants a job has one, and all workers are treated with dignity. To make God’s
62 vision a reality, God calls the Church to action, to “loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the
63 thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke” (Isaiah 58:6). We are
64 called to answer God’s call to be co-creators with God of a world “where justice rolls down like
65 waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).

66 67 **Background**

68
69 ***Living Wages:*** As is well known and repeatedly confirmed: the rich are getting richer, the poor
70 are getting poorer, and the middle is shrinking. Inequality is getting worse in the United States
71 and in most countries around the world.¹

72 But our economy has not always produced this outcome. In first decades after WWII average
73 incomes across the economic ladder – from top to bottom – all rose, all approximately doubling
74 between 1949 and 1973. But since then most of the economic gains in the United States have
75 flowed to the wealthiest families. For the 99 percent, incomes have largely stagnated or even
76 declined. There are occasional fluctuations in this pattern. For example, many households saw
77 rising incomes during the second half of the 1990s and the most recent data show gains between
78 2013 and 2014. But too often the increases are not sustained or even reversed. In 2014, income
79 for the median family – the one in the middle of the income ladder, higher than the lower half of
80 all families but lower than the upper half – was higher than in 2013 (a good thing) but still below
81 its 1999 level (not a good thing).² This long-term trend of rising inequality and stagnant or even
82 falling incomes is creating grave problems for families, communities, the economy and our
83 democracy. For people of faith, this is also a moral problem. All we have comes from God.
84 God’s abundance is to be shared among all God’s people.

85
86 One way to begin to reverse these harmful trends is to raise wages, particularly in jobs at the low
87 end of the pay scale. In the U.S. over one-quarter of all jobs pay poverty-level wages, so low a
88 full-time worker does not earn enough to keep a family of four out of poverty. According to the
89 highly regarded, nonpartisan Economic Policy Institute, “progress in reversing inequality,
90 boosting living standards, and alleviating poverty will be extraordinarily difficult without
91 addressing [the lack of] wage growth,” especially among workers on the lower rungs on the
92 income ladder.³

93
94 Wage stagnation and low wages are not inevitable. Quite the opposite is true. According to the
95 Economic Policy Institute, “wage stagnation is largely the result of policy choices that boosted
96 the bargaining power of those with the most wealth and power. ... Better policy choices, made

97 with low- and moderate-wage earners in mind, can lead to more widespread wage growth and
98 strengthen and expand the middle class.”⁴ All jobs must pay a living wage, one that permits a
99 worker and his or her family to meet their needs and enjoy a standard of living that allows them
100 to be the people God created them to be.

101
102 **Create Jobs:** In addition to raising wages in low paying jobs, we need to create more jobs. The
103 economy has a huge job shortage, leaving millions unemployed and millions more working part
104 time while wanting full-time jobs. In addition, there are millions more who are jobless and
105 discouraged about their prospects for finding work. They stop looking and, consequently, are no
106 longer included in the official count of the unemployed.

107
108 There are always too few jobs. (There is no reason to expect the number of jobs to match the
109 number of people who want to work.) But since 2000, joblessness has risen to higher than usual
110 levels. Consider the case of 25- to 54-year- olds, people who are least likely to be jobless by
111 choice. In 2000, 81.9% of all people in this age group had a job (and even then, millions were
112 still looking for work). In September 2016 (when this is being written) the share of 25- to 54-
113 years-olds who is working was 78.0%, down 3.9 percentage points compared with 2000, or 4.9
114 million jobs. This job shortage is not fully reflected in the unemployment rate. So even when the
115 unemployment rate is fairly low (as it is now at 5%) there are still millions of people who want a
116 job.

117
118 A job is more than just a way to earn a living, even though having an income is critically
119 important. A job also allows each of us to contribute to society. Every human being, made in the
120 image of God, has gifts. We each have a responsibility to share our gifts *with* society, just as we
121 are also blessed and strengthened by what we receive *from* society, whether it is food, a book or
122 piece of music we enjoy, or the comfort of knowing our child is well cared for in our absence.
123 We also have a psychological need to contribute our gifts. If we cannot, due to a lack of jobs, we
124 may come to view ourselves as people who – apparently – are so devoid of gifts as to be unable
125 to make a contribution as others do. This is why having a job (not just an income) is considered a
126 human right, essential to our wellbeing. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
127 which the United States has signed, asserts: “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of
128 employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.”⁵
129 This is why Jesus’ story about the vineyard owner who hired every idle laborer he encountered is
130 a description of God’s reign (Matt. 20:1-16).

131
132 Our contributions to society are not made solely through paid employment. Some of the most
133 important work in society – raising children and caring for elders – is largely unpaid. Volunteer
134 work also makes a critical contribution. But most adults need to earn a living so paid
135 employment for everyone who wants it is necessary.

136
137 We have a serious job shortage and there is much work that needs to be done, everything from
138 repairing and replacing our crumbling infrastructure to providing universal childcare and
139 preschool education. Congress must create jobs and invest in our people and our nation’s future.

140 141 **What to Do**

142 Low wages, poverty, joblessness and the growth in inequality are not just economic problems;
143 they are moral issues, concerns that are directly relevant to our faith. If God’s intention is for
144 everyone to live in the fullness of life, then all people need an income that allows them to thrive
145 and all people who want to work must have a job. Our faith calls us to seek this vision, to be

146 witnesses to God's intentions. Economists offer guidance about the policy changes needed to
147 boost wages and create jobs. Our task as people of faith is to convince our lawmakers to enact
148 them.

149
150 • **Raise the minimum wage.** The federal minimum wage is set at \$7.25, unchanged since 2009
151 and 30% below the minimum wage in 1968, adjusted for inflation. A full-time minimum wage
152 worker is paid just \$15,000 a year (slightly over \$1,200 a month), far too little to live on.
153 Congress needs to increase the minimum wage and ensure it continues to rise each year so that
154 all jobs pay a living wage. In some 30 states, 24 cities and counties, and the District of Columbia,
155 state and local officials have already raised their minimum wages above the federal (or state)
156 level.⁶

157
158 There is a separate federal minimum wage for tipped workers, defined as any worker who earns
159 at least \$30 a month in tips. The tipped minimum wage is \$2.13 an hour and has not been
160 increased since 1991. It allows employers of tipped workers to legally pay them far less than the
161 already low minimum wage of \$7.25. By law, if the tipped minimum wage plus tips does not add
162 up to at least \$7.25 an hour, the employer must pay the tipped worker the difference. But this is
163 difficult to monitor for employers who want to comply and largely unenforceable among
164 employers who don't. The separate federal minimum wage for tipped workers must be
165 eliminated as a number of states have done already.

166
167 Much research has shown that a moderate increase in the minimum wage does not cause job loss
168 while workers, families, and communities benefit from the increased spending power.⁷

169
170 We must also realize that encouraging low-wage workers to get more education will not improve
171 low-wage jobs. Even if everyone had a college degree we would still need people to work in
172 retail (for example, McDonalds and Walmart), clean buildings, care for elders, and do all the
173 other jobs that are important to our society but which pay poorly. The only way to improve these
174 jobs is to raise the minimum wage and support other efforts to ensure basic rights and fair
175 treatment for all workers.

176
177 • **Support worker-led efforts for higher wages and better working conditions.** Workers in a
178 number of industries are pushing back against low pay and other working conditions that make
179 their lives very difficult including last minute and irregular scheduling, too few hours of work
180 per week, lack of paid sick leave, illegal (but common) retaliation by employers against efforts to
181 form a union, and the lack of health insurance or pensions. These worker-created and worker-led
182 efforts welcome support from allies in the faith community. Investigate activities near your
183 location by the Fight for 15 workers (fast food, retail), domestic workers, farm workers, Walmart
184 workers, day laborers, restaurant workers, and others.⁸

185
186 There are also a growing number of community coalitions that engage in multi-issue campaigns
187 including job creation and wage increases. Let us be repairers of the economic and social
188 breaches (Isaiah 58:12) that divide us by participating in these efforts to reach the higher moral
189 ground of a just economy.

190
191 • **Strengthen and protect workers' right to form a labor union.** One of the most important
192 ways workers can improve their jobs is by forming a labor union, coming together to bargain
193 with their employer over pay, benefits, and working conditions.⁹ The right to organize a union is

194 a fundamental human right and employers may not interfere with this process. But in the U.S.,
195 this right is only weakly protected. Labor laws are frequently violated by employers and poorly
196 enforced by authorities. Penalties are tiny and do not deter violations. Unions were essential to
197 the creation of the middle class in the 20th century and the decline of unions over recent decades
198 has been accompanied by the decline of the middle class. They are not outdated institutions but
199 vitally important for economic justice. Congress must strengthen and protect the right of workers
200 to form unions.

201

202 • **Enact “fair” not “free” trade agreements.** Over the past 20 to 25 years, starting with the
203 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the United States has enacted a number of
204 “free” trade and investment agreements. In fall, 2016, Congress is considering two additional
205 treaties: the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP) between the U.S. and 11 other Pacific-rim nations
206 and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Agreement between the U.S., Canada, and
207 European Union.

208

209 All these agreements follow the same pattern, one that preferentially benefits multinational
210 corporations to the detriment of workers, consumers, small firms, the environment, democratic
211 processes and national sovereignty in all the nations that sign the treaties. These agreements have
212 contributed to record-high corporate profits and rising inequality in many countries around the
213 globe. The problem is not inherent to globalization and increased trade. Rather the problem is the
214 laws, policies, regulations, and rules – established by these treaties – that skew globalization and
215 international trade to benefit corporations.

216

217 In 2004, our ecumenical partners from the global South called on the global church to challenge
218 the current globalization regime. The Accra Confession,¹⁰ which was subsequently affirmed¹¹
219 by the Twenty Seventh General Synod, stated our belief that “the integrity of our faith is at stake
220 if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic
221 globalization... We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and wellbeing of people in
222 community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation. We believe that human beings are
223 called to choose God over Mammon.” Congress must oppose all trade agreements that follow
224 this failed pattern.

225

226 • **Create Jobs.** There is much that could be done to strengthen our society, address unmet
227 needs, help the environment, and boost economic productivity. At the same time, millions of
228 people need jobs. Jobless people need to be employed to do the work that needs to be done.

229

230 Our nation needs to replace and repair our crumbling roads and bridges, rehabilitate our aging
231 housing stock to make it more energy efficient and free of lead, provide universal pre-
232 kindergarten education and affordable childcare, clean up brownfields, create and produce the
233 next generation of green energy technology, replace our ancient water pipes so they don’t leak or
234 poison us, construct new schools, and fix up parks. The list is endless. Governments at all levels
235 are neglecting to make the investments that will improve our lives, create jobs, and (research
236 shows) boost private firms’ productivity and profits as well.¹² Policymakers must enact programs
237 to do this work, creating jobs and addressing our unmet needs.

238

239 **Text of the Motion**

240

241 Whereas the United States, like all nations, is blessed with an abundance of God’s resources,
242 more than enough for all;
243
244 Whereas the United States is an extremely wealthy country;
245
246 Whereas God’s resources are not being equitably shared;
247
248 Whereas God’s call to love our neighbors compels us to work for an economy where all jobs pay
249 a living wage and everyone who wants a job has one;
250
251 Whereas, the federal minimum wage is set at \$7.25 an hour, unchanged since 2009, and the
252 tipped minimum wage is \$2.13 an hour;
253
254 Whereas our neighbors who work in low-wage jobs would welcome our support for their
255 struggles for fair wages and better working conditions;
256
257 Whereas, we believe every worker’s right to form and join a labor union must be protected;
258
259 Whereas, our international trade and investment laws must be fair;
260
261 Whereas millions of people want and need a job but cannot find one; and
262
263 Whereas in 2005 General Synod XXV approved a resolution calling all settings of the United
264 Church of Christ to “do justice and promote the common good by working actively to ensure full
265 employment, dignity on the job, living wages, and sufficient income for everyone.”¹³
266
267 Whereas General Synods have repeatedly called for full employment including in 1977 with the
268 affirmation of “the God-given right of all persons to useful and remunerative work” and called
269 on “federal, state, and local governments together with industry, business, labor and the
270 unemployed to formulate and implement policies and programs to achieve full employment”;¹⁴
271
272 Therefore be it resolved that the Thirty-first General Synod of the United Church of Christ seeks
273 a just economy where all jobs pay a living wage and calls on all settings of the United Church of
274 Christ to advocate with Congress, and as appropriate, with state legislators and policymakers in
275 other localities to ensure living wages for all workers by:
276
277 • raising the minimum wage, eliminating the separate tipped minimum wage and ensuring the
278 minimum wage continues to rise each year so that all jobs pay a living wage;
279 • strengthening the right of workers to form and join labor unions, protecting these rights more
280 vigorously, and increasing penalties for violations; and
281 • enacting fair international trade and investment agreements that will protect workers,
282 consumers, small firms, the environment, democratic processes, and national sovereignty in
283 the U.S. and in our trading-partner nations.
284
285 Be it further resolved the Thirty-first General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls on all
286 settings of the United Church of Christ to support workers’ efforts for better wages and working
287 conditions and to participate in community efforts that seek to repair our economic and social
288 divisions and build a moral economy;

289
290 Be it further resolved that the Thirty-first General Synod of the United Church of Christ,
291 recognizing that everyone who wants a job should have one, calls on all settings of the United
292 Church of Christ to advocate with Congress and policymakers at all levels to create jobs and
293 address our society's unmet needs by, for example, repairing and replacing our crumbling
294 infrastructure and providing affordable childcare and early-childhood education.

295
296 **Funding**

297 The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the
298 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

299
300 **Implementation**

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

¹ See the resources on the UCC Economic Inequality page http://www.ucc.org/justice_economic-justice_inequality1

² All income and wage figures are adjusted for inflation. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Historical Income Tables: Households, Table H-6. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-households.html> 10/13/16.

³ Raising America's Pay: Why It's Our Central Economic Policy Challenge by Josh Bivens, Elise Gould, Lawrence Mishel, and Heidi Shierholz, June 4, 2014. <http://www.epi.org/publication/raising-americas-pay/>

⁴ Understanding the Historic Divergence between Productivity and a Typical Worker's Pay by Josh Bivens and Lawrence Mishel. Economic Policy Institute Briefing Paper #406, 2015. p 1

⁵ Article 23 (1), Universal Declaration of Human Right <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>
The United States has signed this Declaration but it has no binding authority. The U.S. has not signed the 1966 United Nation's International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights which would bind the nation to recognize, honor, and protect the right to employment for everyone seeking a job.
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>

⁶ [Check out your state. http://www.epi.org/minimum-wage-tracker/](http://www.epi.org/minimum-wage-tracker/)

⁷ See the Minimum Wage Mythbusters from the U.S. Department of Labor <https://www.dol.gov/featured/minimum-wage/mythbuster> and "Research Shows Minimum Wage Increases Do Not Cause Job Loss" from Business for a Fair Minimum Wage <http://www.businessforafairminimumwage.org/news/00135/research-shows-minimum-wage-increases-do-not-cause-job-loss>

⁸ More. http://www.ucc.org/justice_worker-justice_stand-with-workers

⁹ More. http://www.ucc.org/justice_worker-justice_unions

¹⁰ http://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/1772/Accra-new-final-REVISED-March-2014.pdf?1418425281

¹¹ <http://uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/Affirming-the-Accra-Confession.pdf>

¹² Public investment: The next 'new thing' for powering economic growth by Josh Bivens, April 18, 2012.

Economic Policy Institute Briefing Paper #338. <http://www.epi.org/publication/bp338-public-investments/>

¹³ http://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/1572/Resolution-for-the-Common-Good.pdf?1418425054

¹⁴ http://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/6059/THE-RIGHT-TO-EARN-A-LIVING.pdf?1418430434