

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.

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6 **Affirming the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Boycott of Wendy's**

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8 **A Resolution of Witness**

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10 **Submitted by the United Church of Christ Board of Directors**

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13 **Summary**

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15 For ten years the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a farmworker organization based in
16 Immokalee, FL, has been asking fast-food chain Wendy's to join the [Fair Food Program](#)¹. This
17 partnership among growers, farm workers, and retailers is a worker-designed program governed
18 by a Code of Conduct with a zero-tolerance policy for slavery and sexual harassment, a
19 grievance procedure, and a pay raise. But for ten years, Wendy's has refused to join the Fair
20 Food Program. So in March, 2016, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers called a consumer
21 boycott of Wendy's. The United Church of Christ Board of Directors endorsed the boycott of
22 Wendy's in May 2016.

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24 **Biblical and Theological Rationale**

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26 God's concern for the poor is at the heart of our Christian ethic of economic justice. Our biblical
27 heritage teaches us that caring for the poor, the least among us, and the stranger are central to our
28 understanding of God's mercy and our willingness to welcome Christ among us. As people who
29 follow the example of Jesus by lifting up the image of table as a primary understanding of
30 Christian life, fellowship, and stewardship, we must humbly acknowledge and confess that those
31 who harvest the food for our dining tables are unable to feed their own families due to unjust
32 wage structures.

33
34 There are thousands of farm workers in the state of Florida who labor under difficult and harsh
35 conditions to provide us with food. These workers suffer injustice from discrimination, sexual
36 harassment, poverty wages, dangerous working conditions, and deplorable housing. Our sacred
37 scripture expressly forbids such treatment, saying: "You shall not withhold the wages of the poor
38 and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your
39 towns" (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). James wrote, "Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed
40 your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached
41 the ears of the Lord of hosts" (James 5:4). We are called to ensure that God's abundance, given
42 to us all, is equitably shared so everyone lives in the fullness of life. Within a capitalist system of
43 wage labor, this means that everyone must be paid a living wage and be treated with dignity on
44 the job.

45

46 God envisions a world where all God’s people have everything they need to thrive, live lives of
47 wholeness, and have the opportunity to be the people they were created to be. To make God’s
48 vision a reality, God calls the Church to action, to “loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the
49 thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke” (Isaiah 58:6). We are
50 called to answer God’s call to be co-creators with God of a world “where justice rolls down like
51 waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).

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53 **Background**

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55 The Coalition of Immokalee Workers is a 23-year-old organization of farmworkers based in
56 Immokalee, FL., who primarily harvest tomatoes. Farmworkers endure difficult and dangerous
57 conditions in the fields, very low pay, and few benefits, and must deal with sexual harassment,
58 racial discrimination and even slavery. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers has had remarkable
59 success in combating these ills. Today, 14 major food retailers participate in the [Fair Food](#)
60 [Program](#) which has eliminated modern-day slavery and sexual violence in the Florida tomato
61 fields, improved farmworker wages for the first time in decades, and guaranteed basic
62 protections for workers. Participating retailers agree to purchase exclusively from suppliers
63 (growers) who meet a worker-designed Code of Conduct which includes a grievance procedure
64 and a zero-tolerance policy for slavery and sexual harassment. Retailers also pay a “penny-per-
65 pound” premium which is passed down through the supply chain and paid directly to farm
66 workers by their employers.

67
68 For over 10 years, the CIW has been asking Wendy’s to join the Fair Food Program. Wendy’s
69 major competitors including McDonalds, Burger King, Subway, and Taco Bell all participate.
70 Since 2013, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers has had a special focus on Wendy’s with
71 rallies, marches, letters, and other efforts. But Wendy’s has resisted joining. Moreover, starting
72 last year, the firm halted all tomato purchases in Florida and instead is buying from growers in
73 Mexico where, according to an in-depth [investigation](#)² by the *LA Times*, “many farm laborers are
74 essentially trapped for months at a time in rat-infested camps, often without beds and sometimes
75 without functioning toilets or a reliable water supply, ... [where]some camp bosses illegally
76 withhold wages to prevent workers from leaving during peak harvest periods, [and] it's common
77 for laborers to head home penniless at the end of a harvest.” In short, Wendy’s has turned its
78 back on successful efforts in Florida to protect workers’ basic human rights and has moved its
79 supply chain to Mexico where human rights abuses are rampant.

80
81 **Text of the Motion**

82
83 WHEREAS, farmworkers are among the most oppressed workers in the United States;

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85 WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ has long supported farmworkers’ struggle for justice;

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87 WHEREAS, in 1973, General Synod IX suspended most of its work for 24 hours while nearly
88 100 pilgrims travelled from St. Louis to California’s Coachella Valley to stand with farmworkers
89 threatened with violence;

90

91 WHEREAS, in 2001, when the Coalition of Immokalee Workers called for a boycott of Taco
92 Bell (the company that would eventually become the first to sign on to the Fair Food Program),
93 | GS XXIII [endorsed](#)³ the boycott and the United Church of Christ became the first denomination
94 (of many, eventually) to support it;

95
96 | WHEREAS, in 2005, GS XXV passed a resolution that [celebrated](#)⁴ Taco Bell’s entry into the
97 Fair Food Program (then called the Fair Food Alliance) and encouraged the United Church of
98 Christ to “*support the CIW in its efforts to extend this new model of corporate social*
99 *responsibility throughout the fast food industry*” (italics added);

100
101 WHEREAS, in 2009, when GS XXVII met in Tampa, many United Church of Christ members
102 | devoted a portion of their lunch break to [march](#)⁵ to a nearby Publix grocery store to encourage
103 that supermarket chain to join the Fair Food Program;

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105 | WHEREAS, two years ago [a letter](#)⁶ ~~a~~ calling on Wendy’s to join the Fair Food Program, signed
106 by nearly two-dozen faith leaders including the United Church of Christ’s General Minister and
107 President Rev. Geoffrey Black, was presented to Wendy’s board of directors at the 2014
108 shareholder meeting;

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110 WHEREAS, numerous United Church of Christ congregations and members have marched,
111 hosted marchers, participated in rallies and other events, sent letters and postcards, held
112 workshops, and acted in a variety of ways to support the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and
113 pressure Wendy’s to join the Fair Food Program;

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115 WHEREAS, 10 years of activities and efforts to encourage Wendy’s to join the Fair Food
116 Program have been unsuccessful;

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118 WHEREAS, a boycott is a major undertaking and not to be embarked upon without great care, it
119 is now a necessary next step given the failure of the great many efforts made over the last ten
120 years to encourage Wendy’s to join the Fair Food Program;

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122 WHEREAS, the UCC Florida Conference at their Spring Gathering (April 29-30, 2016)
123 endorsed the boycott of Wendy’s as did the Central Atlantic Conference at their Annual Meeting
124 in June 2016; and

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126 WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ Board of Directors endorsed the boycott in May, 2016.

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128 THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Thirty-first General Synod endorses the Coalition of
129 Immokalee Workers’ boycott of Wendy’s and calls on all settings of the United Church of Christ
130 to become informed about farm workers’ lives and working conditions and to honor the boycott.

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132 **Funding:**
133 The funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the
134 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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136 **Implementation:**

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

¹ <http://www.fairfoodprogram.org/>

² <http://graphics.latimes.com/product-of-mexico-camps/>

³ <http://uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/IN-SUPPORT-OF-THE-COALITION-OF-IMMOKALEE-WORKERS-BOYCOTT-OF-TACO-BELL.pdf>

⁴ <http://uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/IN-SUPPORT-OF-MAKING-FAST-FOOD-FAIR-FOOD.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.ucc.org/synod-delegates-march-in-1>

⁶ <http://www.ucc.org/wendys-farm-workers-05292014>