

1 The Executive Council has recommended this resolution be sent to a committee of the General Synod.

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3 **CALLING FOR COMPREHENSIVE HIV PREVENTION IN CHURCH**  
4 **AND COMMUNITY**

5  
6 **A Prudential Resolution**

7 **APPROVED**

8 **Submitted by:** Wider Church Ministries  
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11 **Background Statement:**

12  
13 **Summary**

14 HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. HIV is a virus that infects cells of the human immune  
15 system and destroys or impairs their function. HIV is transmitted through:

- 16 • Unprotected penetrative sex with someone who is infected;
- 17 • Sharing unsterilized injection equipment (e.g. needles) that has previously been used by someone  
18 who is infected,
- 19 • From a mother who is infected to her baby; this can occur during pregnancy, at birth and through  
20 breastfeeding; and
- 21 • Injection or transfusion of contaminated blood or blood products, donations of semen (artificial  
22 insemination), skin grafts or organ transplants taken from someone who is infected.

23  
24 Infection with HIV results in the progressive deterioration of the immune system, leading to immune  
25 deficiency, which may include the development of AIDS, acquired immune deficiency syndrome.  
26 Although there have been unprecedented achievements in medical science, treatment and care, the HIV  
27 pandemic is still very much in a dynamic phase and is on the rise. As trends in HIV infections, research,  
28 treatment and care have continued to evolve, HIV has proven to be one of the most daunting microbes the  
29 world has ever faced.

30  
31 Efforts to stop HIV and AIDS and provide treatment and care to all who are living with and affected by  
32 HIV continue to be outpaced by the incidence of new HIV infections. For every 2 people who go on  
33 treatment there are 5 new infections (UNAIDS 2008). Even by doubling the number of people receiving  
34 treatment we will continue to lose ground. To turn the tide on this pandemic, we must continue to rapidly  
35 increase our capacities to reach universal access to treatment and care and, at the same time, we must  
36 radically reduce the number of new infections. Thus, best practice comprehensive HIV prevention must  
37 be an integral part of the response in all settings of the church and community.

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39 **Biblical, Theological and Ethical Rational**

40 “Where the Church is involved in healing ministries in the name of Jesus Christ, it is engaged in the work  
41 of reconciliation and liberation.” (UCC Mission Statement on Health and Human Service, (15<sup>th</sup> General  
42 Synod, 1985)

43  
44 As Christians, we are called to follow the teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ. The gospel narratives are  
45 full of stories about the life and ministry of Jesus and the many ways Jesus reached out with compassion  
46 and healing to those who were sick and marginalized. Jesus sent his disciples out to heal the sick (Luke  
47 9:1-2).

48  
49 Jesus also encouraged people of faith to be ready and alert, saying, “But know this: if the owner of the  
50 house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.”  
51 Luke 12:39. In terms of HIV, we know how it breaks into the body and robs the immune system of its

52 capacity to respond to disease but too many people, young and old, are not effectively prepared with the  
53 information and tools they need to prevent infection.

54  
55 Our Christian tradition speaks of the already and not yet character of our faith in a way that brings hope in  
56 the midst of difficulty. We know that we all are God's beloved children, worthy of love, dignity and  
57 respect, but that we have not yet fully realized God's realm in our midst. Even when we find ourselves in  
58 the pit of life, as the Psalmist laments, we know that the pit is not the place God intends us to be (Psalm  
59 40:2). Our resurrection faith inspires us to trust the power of God to make a way out of no way.

60  
61 Also from our biblical tradition, the apostle Paul challenged the early Christian communities to keep their  
62 eyes on the prize, run the race with perseverance and pursue their vision for mission and ministry until it  
63 was attained.

64  
65 The HIV and AIDS pandemic is one of the most serious health crises the world has ever faced. UNAIDS  
66 estimates there are 33 million people living with HIV worldwide and 5 million people die each year from  
67 AIDS (June 2008). The U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) issued a new report in August 2008  
68 revealing that for the past several years the annual number of new infections in the U.S. has been  
69 underreported by 40%. The CDC estimated that there are 56,300 new HIV infections in the U.S. per year,  
70 more than 1 million people living with HIV (about 0.5% of the total U.S. population) and 250,000 of  
71 them are not aware they are HIV positive.

72  
73 The international HIV and AIDS response organizations have called for the scaling up of prevention  
74 efforts. In 2001 the United Nations committed to stopping HIV and AIDS (Declaration of commitment  
75 on HIV/AIDS, June 2001) and strengthened their resolve in their political statement in June 2006. The  
76 latter statement called for "ambitious national targets, to be developed by countries by end 2006, as the  
77 world moves toward universal access to comprehensive prevention programmes, treatment, care and  
78 support by 2010." The World Health Organizations, along with several other UN agencies are working to  
79 realize these goals. The U.S. CDC and the U.S. National Institute of Health also are engaged in scaling  
80 up prevention efforts. UNAIDS has called for stronger participation from faith organizations in  
81 prevention work (<http://www.unaids.org/en/Partnerships/Civil+society/religionAndAids.asp>).

82  
83 The United Church of Christ has been part of this struggle. From the local church to the General Synod,  
84 from World AIDS Day observances to comprehensive HIV and AIDS outreach programs, there have been  
85 and continue to be important and significant responses from a variety of settings of the UCC. However,  
86 the scale of these responses has not yet reached a level equal to the need, particularly with comprehensive  
87 HIV prevention and also in terms of reaching vulnerable groups and higher risk populations.

88  
89 The CDC reported that HIV prevalence among men and women in the African American/Black  
90 community is a disproportionate 2%, which is 4 times the national prevalence. Women account for 25%  
91 of all people living with HIV in the U.S. The prevalence of HIV among African American/Black women  
92 is 18 times that of white women. In fact, the total number of infections in the African American/Black  
93 community exceeds those in 7 of the 15 countries receiving funds from PEPFAR (the President's  
94 Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief). Infections among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with  
95 men (MSM) in all racial groups has continued to rise in the U.S. since the early 90's. There are  
96 disproportionate infection rates among young (age 13-25), African American/Black and Latino MSM in  
97 comparison with other age and racial/ethnic groups.

98  
99 There is an already and not yet character to our response to HIV and AIDS.

- 100 • We already know how to prevent the spread of HIV, but we have not yet taken the action required to  
101 do it;

- 102 • We already know that the African American community is seeing HIV infection rates  
103 disproportionate to their population in the US but this country does not yet have a comprehensive  
104 national plan for addressing the epidemic;
- 105 • We already know that women and girls in many parts of the world, including some places in the U.S.,  
106 are vulnerable to gender based violence, creating significant risks for infection, but we have not yet  
107 effectively addressed the predatory sexual practices of some men nor some of the cultural dynamics  
108 that create a distorted and unhealthy masculinity which fails to respect and empower women and girls  
109 to have control over their own bodies;
- 110 • We already know that stigma and discrimination creates an environment that fuels this disease but we  
111 have not yet broken the silence in many places, including many church communities, providing  
112 people with vital, age appropriate, comprehensive information to protect themselves and others  
113 against infection;
- 114 • Moreover, we already know that treatment and care are an important aspect of effective HIV  
115 prevention and we know how to effectively treat persons living with HIV, improving both the quality  
116 and length of life, but we have not yet accessed our full capacity for universal treatment and care.  
117

118 Most importantly, the truth is we already have the capacity to realize the vision of stopping AIDS, making  
119 good on that promise. The question is whether we share this vision and will we do what it takes to  
120 achieve it. The message of our faith is clear when it comes to compassion and care, and for being ready  
121 and alert. Preventing disease is as important as caring for the sick. This resolution is calling the church  
122 and community to task, to take seriously our role and responsibility to access our capacity for best  
123 practice comprehensive HIV prevention. There is no question whether we, as people of faith, have an  
124 important role to play. The question is whether we will fulfill it.  
125

### 126 **Expected Outcomes**

127 This resolution builds on previous actions of the General Synod calling for health and wholeness, care  
128 and compassion in response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The ultimate goal of this resolution is to  
129 stop the spread of HIV by scaling-up best practice comprehensive HIV prevention in church and  
130 community. This resolution calls church and community to new and increased levels of attention and  
131 commitment to achieving this goal.  
132

133 By pointing to opportunities for collaboration with the United Church of Christ HIV and AIDS Network  
134 (UCAN, Inc.) and lifting up resources that already exist, the resolution provides guidance for working in  
135 deliberate and strategic ways to reduce HIV infection, engaging and strengthening the existing capacities  
136 of church and community to:

- 137 • Assess and increase their HIV and AIDS competencies, including the development of tools to assist  
138 with this assessment;
- 139 • Develop and implement plans of action in all settings of the church and community which includes  
140 the integration of comprehensive HIV prevention strategies in existing health related programs and  
141 activities, and the initiation of new and innovative strategies, particularly with vulnerable groups and  
142 higher risk populations. UCAN, Inc. is already prepared to provide technical assistance to all settings  
143 of the church in this regard;
- 144 • Build and share models of best practice using the internet ([ucc.org](http://ucc.org)), UCC Resources and other  
145 technologies and communication vehicles;
- 146 • Create new partnerships with and among churches and the community for collaboration, increased  
147 effectiveness and accountability. Some efforts will need to bring together various settings with  
148 capacities for reaching vulnerable groups and higher risk populations; and,
- 149 • Advocate for and support the development and implementation of a national HIV and AIDS plan that  
150 includes a significant increase in programs and funding for comprehensive HIV prevention in the  
151 United States.  
152

153 **Text of the Resolution**

154  
155 **Whereas,**

156 Our Christian faith calls upon the disciples of Jesus Christ to follow Jesus’ teachings and the  
157 examples of Jesus’ ministry; and,

158  
159 Jesus reached out with compassion and healing to those who were sick and marginalized, and called  
160 people of faith to be ready and alert, for example:

- 161 • Matthew 14:14. *When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them*  
162 *and cured their sick.*
- 163 • Mark 1:40-42. *A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you*  
164 *can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to*  
165 *him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.*
- 166 • Luke 12:39. *But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was*  
167 *coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.*
- 168 • Matthew 25:1-13. *Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*  
169 and,

170  
171 There are an estimated 33 million people living with HIV worldwide and that for every 5 new HIV  
172 infections there are only 2 people who receive medical treatment (UNAIDS, June 2008),  
173 demonstrating that the world is losing the fight against HIV and AIDS. Treatment alone cannot stop  
174 the HIV and AIDS pandemic; and,

175  
176 The United States Center for Disease Control (CDC) released new data revealing that HIV infections  
177 in the US are 40% higher than previously thought and reporting estimates that there are more than 1  
178 million persons living with HIV in the U.S. and 20% of them do not know they are HIV positive  
179 (August 3, 2008); and,

180  
181 The global health community, including UNAIDS, the World Health Organization, the U.S. CDC,  
182 and the U.S. National Institute for Health, has called for increased best practice, comprehensive HIV  
183 prevention efforts, especially with vulnerable groups and high risk populations; and,

184  
185 The CDC has encouraged everyone to know their HIV status; and,

186  
187 The international HIV and AIDS community has recognized the important role of faith communities  
188 like the United Church of Christ in HIV prevention and care, and the untapped capacity that exists in  
189 such communities for effective response; and,

190  
191 The Fourteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted the Resolution on Acquired  
192 Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and declared its “compassionate concern and support for all  
193 persons with AIDS, their lovers, spouses, families and friends” and the Sixteenth General Synod of  
194 the United Church of Christ adopted the pronouncement “Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a  
195 Pandemic” and called the United Church of Christ to leadership in response to AIDS.

196  
197 **Therefore let it be resolved** that the Twenty-Seventh General Synod of the United Church of Christ:  
198 Declares its compassionate concern about the growing human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)  
199 epidemic in the United States and throughout the world, and its support for all those living with and  
200 affected by HIV; and,

201  
202 Reaffirms the Pronouncement on Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a Pandemic adopted by the  
203 Sixteenth General Synod, the Resolution on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) adopted

204 by the Fourteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ and the Resolution, “Responding to  
205 AIDS: Endorsement and Enactment of the “Ten Principles for the Workplace” adopted by the  
206 Seventeenth General Synod; and,

207  
208 **Affirms current efforts to, and** calls on all clergy and lay persons in all settings of the United  
209 Church of Christ to:

- 210 • become knowledgeable about HIV and AIDS,
- 211 • understand how HIV is transmitted **and how it is prevented,**
- 212 • work to prevent its transmission,
- 213 • reduce stigma and discrimination, and
- 214 • help the whole church to increase its HIV competency; and,

215  
216 Strongly urges all clergy and lay persons in the United Church of Christ to know their HIV status;  
217 and,

218  
219 Calls on local churches and other settings of the church to develop and implement best practice  
220 comprehensive HIV prevention education, programs and strategies for church and community, with  
221 particular attention to vulnerable groups and at risk populations; and,

222  
223 Calls on the United Church of Christ HIV and AIDS Network (UCAN, Inc.) to work collaboratively  
224 within and beyond the United Church of Christ to provide technical assistance, training, education,  
225 and resources to help all settings of the church develop and implement comprehensive HIV  
226 prevention strategies and programs for church and community, and encourage the use of existing  
227 resources such as *Affirming Persons*, *Saving Lives* and the comprehensive sexuality education  
228 curriculum, *Our Whole Lives*; and,

229  
230 Calls on local, state and federal governments to work together to develop and implement a national  
231 HIV and AIDS strategy that includes increased funding for best practice comprehensive HIV  
232 prevention programs; and,

233  
234 Calls on Wider Church Ministries to report on the progress of the implementation of this resolution to  
235 the next three General Synods.

236  
237 **FUNDING**

238 The funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall  
239 mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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241 **IMPLEMENTATION**

242 In collaboration with Wider Church Ministries, UCAN, Inc. is responsible for developing the strategy and  
243 program designed to implement this resolution.