

1 The Executive Council has recommended this resolution be sent to a committee of the General Synod.
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3

4 AN ECONOMIC JUSTICE COVENANT

5
6 (A Resolution of Witness)

7 **APPROVED**
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10 **Submitted by:** The Southern Conference
11

12 **Summary:** The Christian faith makes economic justice a priority for the Christian community.
13 The United Church of Christ has long been an advocate for the poor and a witness for justice in
14 all areas of life. This resolution asks that the Twenty-seventh General Synod, the national bodies
15 of the United Church of Christ and its Conferences, Associations and Local Churches to commit
16 to a covenant of study, witness and action in pursuit of economic justice in our world.
17

18 **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION**

19 The Holy Scriptures, from the Pentateuch through the Prophets, and from Jesus to St. Paul
20 impress upon the people of God's Covenant that they are responsible to God for the well being
21 of the last and the least in the human community. Israel and the Church are to feed the hungry,
22 clothe the naked, house the homeless, welcome the stranger and ensure justice for the poor.
23 Amos warned against the excesses of power and wealth:
24

25 *“Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin*
26 *the poor of the land, saying, . . . we will make the ephah small*
27 *and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances,*
28 *buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals,*
29 *and selling the sweepings of the wheat.” (Amos 8:4-6)*
30

31 Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed, taught and inaugurated the Realm of God, a vision of human life
32 and society as God intends it, where all people live in unity and peace because they share in the
33 earth's abundance and treat each other justly. That is the Good News which he preached to the
34 poor who were suffering under the yoke of Roman oppression. It was a society where peace and
35 prosperity for a few were purchased on the backs of the last and the least.
36

37 We are baptized into Jesus Christ and are bound together in covenant to Him, to each other and
38 to His vision of a just society. As baptized Christians living in wealthy, prosperous America, we
39 find ourselves in a very ambiguous situation. While many of us enjoy the fruits of our labor and
40 participate in the astonishing economic success of our nation, we are also painfully aware that a
41 substantial portion of our national wealth is gained through a global economic dominance and in
42 domestic economic policies that disadvantage and, in some cases, impoverish others. It is a
43 global economy with national and local components that privileges the wealthy at the expense of
44 people of underdeveloped nations and the poor in our own country, and that exploits the earth's
45 resources in ways that are not long sustainable.
46

1 As Christians we sing the hymns of justice, equality and unity, we pray for the well being of all
2 God's children, and we continue our activities to feed the hungry and house the homeless. But
3 all the while we watch the gap between rich and poor in our own nation and in the world become
4 ever wider, with many millions left in poverty. Some of the causes are benign, the result of
5 differing natural resources and patterns of cultural development. Some of the causes are the
6 result of the global economy and the incessant desire for corporate profits. Some of the
7 inequities are the result of longstanding and systemic racism, sexism, and xenophobic fear of the
8 stranger. Others are simply rapacious, not unlike Amos' searing prophesy: unconscionably low
9 wages, exploitation of workers with no recourse, unfair pricing of many necessities, the luring of
10 the poor into unbearable debt, and the pillaging of the earth's resources.

11
12 The United Church of Christ and its predecessor church bodies, along with many Christians
13 around the world, have received Christ's summons to call our churches and our societies toward
14 the blessed vision of God's Realm, including justice in our economic life. Too often Christians
15 and congregations engage only in works of charity (direct action) without moving into the works
16 of justice that could reduce the need for charity. Alternately, Christians and congregations focus
17 solely on justice in the form of advocacy without engaging directly with people in works of
18 charity. Justice and love cannot be divorced from one another. There cannot be "justice only" or
19 "charity only" solutions without both suffering. Christians and congregations are called to be
20 involved in a full spectrum of actions from acts of love to acts of justice.

21
22 **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that each **setting of the** United Church of Christ--
23 National **Ministry**, Conference, Association and Local Church-- is encouraged to become an
24 Economic Justice **Church setting** that:

- 25
26 1) Engages in focused studies of the economic injustices that prevail in our society and our
27 world; and the ways in which God's abundance is distributed so inequitably;
28
29 2) Creates a program of study that may lead that body to draft and adopt an "Economic Justice
30 Covenant" that reflects the context, experience, study, discernment, and commitment to
31 action of that body **(a sample for a Local Church is attached)**;
32
33 3) Develops a range of programs and activities with the goals of inspiring members and
34 organizing them to engage in actions that promote economic justice. Such programs
35 encourage members to:
36
37 a) work as partners with people in need through service, **and** outreach ministries **and**
38 **community organizing**;
39
40 b) adopt sustainable personal and family lifestyles;
41
42 c) help all **families-people** to become economically secure through joint endeavors **such as**
43 **sponsorship of micro-loans, building of homes with Habitat for Humanity with social justice**
44 **organizations** and other programs that empower people;
45

1 d) reflect justice in the National Church, Conference, Association or Local Church's all
2 settings of the United Church of Christ's economic life by offering fair wages and
3 benefits, adopting sustainable practices with its facilities, and transacting business in a
4 socially just manner;

5
6 e) advocate for the formation of public policies that move our society toward economic
7 justice, the well being of all people, and the care of creation;

8
9 f) unite utilize avenues of networking and communication to collaborate with other
10 United Church of Christ entities, as well as other Christian and non-Christian faith
11 communities, to create and promote throughout our nation and the world an ethic that values
12 economic justice for all and the sharing of resources to promote a sustainable common good.
13

14 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Twenty-seventh General Synod establish a national
15 Task Force staffed by Justice and Witness Ministries to develop an Economic Justice Covenant
16 program that fulfills these goals.

17
18 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Task Force provide a list of specific examples of**
19 **sustainable living and programs that empower people that is accessible to all settings of the**
20 **United Church of Christ.**

21
22 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that Justice and Witness Ministries will be responsible for
23 developing the strategy strategies and program designed resources to implement this resolution.
24 The funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the
25 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.
26

27 **FUNDING**

28
29 Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall
30 mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

31 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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34 Justice and Witness Ministries is requested to implement this resolution.
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38 39 **ADDENDUM A:**

40 41 *A SAMPLE ECONOMIC JUSTICE COVENANT*

42 *God blesses the world with abundance, yet so many continue to live in poverty and*
43 *suffering. We confess that we are participants in this injustice, whether through our actions, or*
44 *through our complacency. We ask God's forgiveness for our negligence and self-centeredness.*

45 *As witnesses to the grace of God in all of creation, we strive to answer Jesus' call to*
46 *work for a world where both mercy and justice prevail, and all share in God's abundance.*

1 *Therefore, we, the congregation (Ministry, Conference, Association) of _____,*
2 *covenant with God and with one another to:*

- 3 • *Provide service and care for brothers and sisters in need;*
- 4 • *Educate ourselves on the root causes of poverty;*
- 5 • *Seek long-term ways of empowering the powerless in our community;*
- 6 • *Stand against injustices that cause and perpetuate need;*
- 7 • *Strive for economic justice in all policies and activities associated with our church*
8 *(Ministry, Conference, Association);*
- 9 • *Encourage and support one another in our own stewardship of God's earth and its*
10 *bounty;*
- 11 • *Unite with other organizations to address poverty and injustice in the world.*

12
13 *Recognizing that without God's help we are inadequate to these tasks, we pray for strength,*
14 *courage, humility, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the work ahead.*

15
16 This sample Economic Justice Covenant was adopted by the United Church of Chapel Hill in its
17 Congregational Meeting on May 20, 2007, following an extensive process of study and
18 discussion with all the boards, committees and program groups of the church. Guest speakers
19 and experts in related areas such as housing, health care, education, direct service, living wage
20 and environmental concerns shared their knowledge and perspectives. The congregation has
21 subsequently organized itself to pursue the requirements of this covenant.

22
23 **ADDENDUM B:**

24 Activities initiated in response to this process of study and covenanting, in addition to the many
25 direct service efforts in which our congregation has been engaged for decades, include:
26 organized support for a Living Wage Bill in the NC Legislature; the development of an Interfaith
27 Action Network to join with other churches in public policy advocacy; a family oriented Simple
28 Living support group; the development of adult education resources for dissemination; a seminar
29 on effective lobbying and political involvement; participation in protest actions in support of
30 meat packing workers; a commitment to "go green" in the construction of our new church
31 facilities and in refitting our present facilities.

32
33 *For additional information, contact:*

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35 United Church of Chapel Hill
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37 Chapel Hill, NC 27514