A CALL FOR TRUTH-TELLING AND STANDARDS OF ETHICS IN PUBLIC LIFE

WHEREAS the Holy Scriptures of the Judaeo-Christian tradition proclaim that God is a God of truth, who abhors falsehood and deceit (Psalms 5:51-52; Isaiah 45:18-19; Jeremiah 9:2-6; Zechariah 8:16-19; Romans 1:18) and the Holy Spirit is characterized as “the spirit of truth” (1John 4:6); and

WHEREAS the Scriptures counsel that truth is a foundational ingredient of public life, that without truth there is no justice and without justice there is no peace (Isaiah 59:12-15; Jeremiah 5:1-3; Micah 7:1-6); that the credibility and trustworthiness of leaders is directly related to their honesty and believability; and that it is the trust which sets folk free (John 8:32); and

WHEREAS the Gospel calls Christian people and churches to seek truth together; it envisions the healthy community of humanity as one in which what is spoken to one another – in love – is the truth (Ephesians 4:15, 25; Zechariah 8:16), and in which love is not an empty word, but demonstrated to be true by action (! John 3:18); and

WHEREAS the ninth of the Ten Commandments, “You shall not bear false witness,” is directed to courts of justice and the realm of public life as well as interpersonal relationships; and

WHEREAS the Hebrew prophets specifically call religious, civic, and business leaders to account for withholding and distorting truth and intentionally deceiving their people (as in Ezekiel 13 and 35; Amos 5; Micah 7); “for truth stumbles in the public square” (Isaiah 59:14); and

WHEREAS the speech and conduct of civic as well as religious leaders model the behavioral expectations of a society to the young who grow up in their midst to be their successors; and

WHEREAS the houses of Congress of these United States of America have, in their wisdom, enacted legislation which upholds truth in advertising and trust in lending and have established standards of ethics for the conduct of their own members and their own affairs; and ON THE OTHER HAND,

WHEREAS in February 2005, the House of Representatives retreated from the enforcement of its own standards of ethics, replacing the leadership of its Ethics Committee in an apparent act of punishment for upholding those standards; and

WHEREAS many persons believe that the President and Vice-President of the USA and other government leaders have repeatedly twisted and covered up trust and fabricated falsehood in such matters as Iraq’s possession of weapons of mass destruction, the cost of the war in Iraq, the magnitude of the public debt, the impact of cuts and increases in federal taxes and budgets, and the financial state and future of the Social Security system; and

WHEREAS the news media aid and abet the distortion of truth by their manipulative practices of selective reporting and sensationalizing in broadcasting and print; and

WHEREAS the Church itself has not been exempt from the sins of deception, cover-up and falsification, even of the truth of the Gospel;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ declares its abhorrence of government by deceit and falsehood and the violation and relaxation of standards of ethics for Congressional and other public leaders, and confesses its too often complicity in such deception and unethical behavior through its own indifference and silence; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon its leaders and its local churches to

- devote time to study and discuss and pray over the issues of truth-telling and ethical behavior in public life as well as the life of the church itself, recognizing that many matters are very complex and that truth is often not easy to discern;
- uphold truth-telling and stated standards of ethics in the conduct of their own affairs and to acknowledge their own sins of commission and omission in the telling of the truth and upholding of ministerial and congregational ethics;
- examine routinely the statements and publications of elected and appointed officials and offices in all areas of government, and the ethics of their behavior, and communicate to said officials and offices questions of apparent deception, challenges of outright distortion and falsification, and perceptions of the violation of stated standards of ethics in the conduct of their affairs (“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient.” (Ephesians 5:6); and
- hold the media accountable for manipulations, distortions and omissions of the truth by sending letters to editors and station managers.
- Communicate to the FCC and appointed and elected officials the importance of diverse sources of news rather than increased concentration of the media because truth is best protected when multiple avenues of investigation and expression are available.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ requests that its officers communicate this Call to Truth-Telling and standards of Ethics in Public Life to:

- the local churches, Associations, Conferences and clergy of the United Church of Christ
- the President of these United States of America
- the Senators and Representatives who make up the Congress of the United States
- the editors of the major newspapers and managers of the major television and radio stations in our nation.

Funding for this action will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.