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

AN ECONOMIC JUSTICE COVENANT

(A Resolution of Witness)

APPROVED

Submitted by: The Southern Conference

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

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

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

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

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

We are baptized into Jesus Christ and are bound together in covenant to Him, to each other and to His vision of a just society. As baptized Christians living in wealthy, prosperous America, we find ourselves in a very ambiguous situation. While many of us enjoy the fruits of our labor and participate in the astonishing economic success of our nation, we are also painfully aware that a substantial portion of our national wealth is gained through a global economic dominance and in domestic economic policies that disadvantage and, in some cases, impoverish others. It is a global economy with national and local components that privileges the wealthy at the expense of people of underdeveloped nations and the poor in our own country, and that exploits the earth’s resources in ways that are not long sustainable.
As Christians we sing the hymns of justice, equality and unity, we pray for the well being of all 
God’s children, and we continue our activities to feed the hungry and house the homeless. But 
all the while we watch the gap between rich and poor in our own nation and in the world become 
ever wider, with many millions left in poverty. Some of the causes are benign, the result of 
differing natural resources and patterns of cultural development. Some of the causes are the 
result of the global economy and the incessant desire for corporate profits. Some of the 
inequities are the result of longstanding and systemic racism, sexism, and xenophobic fear of the 
stranger. Others are simply rapacious, not unlike Amos’ searing prophesy: unconscionably low 
wages, exploitation of workers with no recourse, unfair pricing of many necessities, the luring of 
of the poor into unbearable debt, and the pillaging of the earth’s resources.

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

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

1) Engages in focused studies of the economic injustices that prevail in our society and our 
world and the ways in which God’s abundance is distributed so inequitably;

2) Creates a program of study that may lead that body to draft and adopt an “Economic Justice 
Covenant” that reflects the context, experience, study, discernment, and commitment to 
action of that body (a sample for a Local Church is attached);

3) Develops a range of programs and activities with the goals of inspiring members and 
organizing them to engage in actions that promote economic justice. Such programs 
encourage members to:

   a) work as partners with people in need through service, and outreach ministries and 
      community organizing;

   b) adopt sustainable personal and family lifestyles;

   c) help all families, people to become economically secure through joint endeavors such as 
      sponsorship of micro-loans, building of homes with Habitat for Humanity, with social justice 
      organizations and other programs that empower people;
d) reflect justice in the National Church, Conference, Association or Local Church’s all settings of the United Church of Christ’s economic life by offering fair wages and benefits, adopting sustainable practices with its facilities, and transacting business in a socially just manner;

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

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

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

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

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that Justice and Witness Ministries will be responsible for developing the strategy strategies and program designed resources to implement this resolution.

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

FUNDING

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

IMPLEMENTATION

Justice and Witness Ministries is requested to implement this resolution.

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ADDENDUM A:

A SAMPLE ECONOMIC JUSTICE COVENANT

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

As witnesses to the grace of God in all of creation, we strive to answer Jesus’ call to work for a world where both mercy and justice prevail, and all share in God’s abundance.
Therefore, we, the congregation (Ministry, Conference, Association) of ________________,
covenant with God and with one another to:

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

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

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

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

For additional information, contact:
The Economic Justice Coordinating Committee
United Church of Chapel Hill
1321 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
Chapel Hill, NC 27514