

1 **RESOLUTION FOR UCC GENERAL SYNOD 2015**  
2 **TRANSITION FROM FOSSIL FUELS TO RENEWABLE ENERGY**

3  
4 **BRIEF SUMMARY**

5 Dependence upon fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas) by the United States and the other  
6 nations has fostered continuous dangerous conflicts throughout recent history and now threatens  
7 the existence of modern civilization and most of life by driving accelerating climate change. The  
8 science is clear and irrefutable that unless we immediately begin the long journey toward a  
9 sustainable clean fossil fuel free energy future, we will within a generation move beyond any  
10 chance of achieving levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide that will insure the preservation of life  
11 as we know it on our magnificent God given planet Earth. This resolution calls our United  
12 Church of Christ to decisive prophetic action which will help us join others in enabling our  
13 technologically innovative nation to work cooperatively with the global community in  
14 addressing this problem.

15  
16 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING**

17 Whereas we are magnificently stranded between creation (Genesis 1-3) and redemption (John  
18 14:6), alpha and omega (Rev. 21:5-7), and cannot fathom our beginnings or our endings;  
19 Whereas we are a people of Jesus, who bridges creation and redemption (John 3:16); Whereas  
20 we know that we are to have dominion (Genesis 1:26-28) without domination (Genesis 2:7-8,  
21 15) and to steward the sacred (Luke 16:1-13; 1 Cor. 4:1-2) with the golden rule of love for  
22 neighbor (Luke 10:25-38; 1 John 4:15-21; Eph. 5:1-2), even our neighbor Earth; whereas the  
23 Spirit leads us to not just be against fossil fuels or to demonize them but instead to be for them a  
24 renewing and refreshing energy (Matthew 5:3-16, 43-48; Luke 25:31-46), we cannot help but  
25 think lovingly, hopefully and long about the end time, for ourselves and the generations of  
26 humans, animals and seeds to come (Rev. 21:1-5a; Luke 13:18-19).  
27 Therefore we ....don't want to just ban fossil fuels or divest from them...but add all our moral  
28 and spiritual energies to the development of renewables (Matthew 6:25-33).

29  
30 This resolution is the organic progression extending and following from previous UCC  
31 environmental resolutions dating back to General Synod 2 in 1959. This resolution follows in  
32 the direction of resolutions presented at GS 29 on divestment from and shareholder activism with  
33 fossil fuel companies, an end to mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia, and carbon-  
34 neutral congregations. In addition to previous GS resolutions on environmental issues, the UCC  
35 has created reports and pastoral letters regarding environmental contamination and specifically  
36 addressing climate change.<sup>1</sup> This resolution follows in the long UCC tradition of speaking out on  
37 environmental issues with a strong prophetic voice. We join our own UCC ancestors as well as  
38 people of other faiths in the call to create more sustainable ways for our species to coexist on this  
39 planet with the rest of creation.<sup>2</sup>

40  
41 **SCIENTIFIC GROUNDING**

42 Because we embrace and do not disown scientific discovery, and because science and our faith  
43 are compatible, we harken to the scientific voices that increasingly sound the alarm about the  
44 health of the planet. The science is clear. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate  
45 Change (IPCC), as of 2011 humans had emitted about 531 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>. In order to keep  
46 climate change under 2 degrees C, the most that humans can burn is 469 gigatons more, which,

47 at the current rate, will happen in less than 30 years. Meanwhile, the IPCC reports that fossil fuel  
48 companies have reserves in the ground of around 3,000 gigatons, or more than six times the  
49 amount that can be burned if the temperature increase is to stay under 2 degrees C. Fossil fuel  
50 companies, therefore, must leave close to 85% of these assets in the ground.<sup>3</sup> The UCC must, in  
51 partnership with other people of faith, provide the moral, ethical, spiritual, and prophetic voice  
52 calling on fossil fuel companies to abandon assets at the same time that we as individuals,  
53 congregations, and nations transition toward cleaner and more sustainable energy sources.<sup>4</sup>  
54

#### 55 **MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

56 The 30th General Synod will propose through this resolution necessary steps towards a world  
57 with a stable climate supporting existing ecosystems where fossil fuels are no longer extracted  
58 for energy and renewable energy sources are fully developed and available for use. The  
59 resolution includes several well-defined action steps toward this end. Because every human  
60 citizen and life form in our world is affected by accelerating climate, the resolution proposes task  
61 forces on the GS and conference levels charged with 1) listening to the stories and concerns of  
62 our members and communities affected by climate change; 2) educating them on the problem  
63 and solutions, 3) setting well defined goals; 4) advocating for appropriate and timely action, 5)  
64 monitoring and reporting back and 6) evaluating progress on both Conference and GS levels.  
65

#### 66 **INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY**

67 The 30th General Synod requests that Justice and Witness Ministries employ a full time  
68 equivalent Environmental Justice staff person who, among other duties, would work with  
69 conference ministers to oversee the creation of a national task force and would be available as a  
70 resource person to any conference-level task forces created to oversee the implementation of the  
71 resolution.  
72

#### 73 **PROBABILITY OF INFLUENCING SOCIAL CHANGE**

74 With the adoption of this resolution, the 30<sup>th</sup> General Synod of the United Church of Christ will  
75 be taking another definitive and prophetic step towards the biblically mandated theologically  
76 justified goal of motivating individual members, churches and our nation away from a hopelessly  
77 unsustainable fossil fuel energy based economy, to a hopeful sustainable renewable energy based  
78 economy which will insure the preservation and protection of our fragile and vulnerable  
79 planetary ecosystem for the sake of ourselves, our future generations and all life on our God  
80 given Earth home.  
81

#### 82 **TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION**

83 WHEREAS, the use of any fossil fuel, including coal, natural gas and oil, results in an increase  
84 of carbon dioxide and other dangerous greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere, which causes global  
85 warming and climate change, such that if we do not immediately decrease our use of these fuels,  
86 and completely eliminate them by the year 2080,<sup>5</sup> all life on earth will likely experience  
87 previously unknown devastating results including drought, wildfires, extreme precipitation and  
88 cyclones, drinking water scarcity, diminished food production, population migrations, human  
89 mortality, violent conflicts, and species extinction, thereby upsetting the whole ecology of  
90 Earth;<sup>6</sup> and  
91

92 WHEREAS feasibility studies indicate that transitioning to all renewable energy like wind, solar,  
93 and hydro, is not only possible but economically desirable;<sup>7</sup> and  
94

95 WHEREAS, nonrenewable fossil fuel extraction continues to be subsidized by our government,  
96 while at the same time, renewable energy sources are significantly under-supported, resulting in  
97 the de-emphasis of critical renewable energy development;<sup>8</sup> and  
98

99 WHEREAS, investment in extensive infrastructures supporting the fossil fuel industries and  
100 especially the fracking (horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing) industry precludes  
101 investment, invention, introduction, development and employment opportunities essential for  
102 building a renewable energy future;<sup>9</sup> and  
103

104 WHEREAS, the United States contains large subterranean supplies of natural gas and oil in  
105 underground rock formations far beneath the earth's surface in which natural gas and oil  
106 extraction is being considered or in which natural gas and oil extraction is already occurring by  
107 the process known as fracking;<sup>10</sup> which uses millions of gallons of water, often mixed with sand  
108 and toxic chemicals, some of which returns to the surface contaminated and sometimes  
109 radioactive and has led to contamination of air, surface and other underground water resources,  
110 and has also caused earthquakes;<sup>11</sup> and  
111

112 WHEREAS, hydraulic fracturing has an impact on individuals and communities, including such  
113 justice issues as the use of "forced pooling," private vs public practices of eminent domain,  
114 concerns about worker safety, illegal dumping, and environmental racism issues including siting  
115 of waste disposal facilities in or near low-income communities of color;<sup>12</sup> and  
116

117 WHEREAS, the 30th General Synod of the United Church of Christ, recognizing that there is a  
118 wide range of stances on the issues of climate change, fossil fuels, hydraulic fracturing and  
119 renewable energy among its members and that these issues have the potential to be divisive  
120 within the body of Christ, still and all understands that the gospel is the permission and the  
121 commandment to enter difficulty with hope; and  
122

123 WHEREAS, although we understand the pull of immediate, short-term, economic and political  
124 necessities, as people of faith we answer a higher call, which is to have a deep moral obligation  
125 to be good stewards of God's creation so that all humans, other creatures and future generations  
126 may thrive on clean air, clean water, and clean soil.  
127

128 THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the 30th General Synod of the United Church of Christ  
129 place itself on moral record and encourage its pastors, conferences and members to urge federal  
130 and state lawmakers to enact or extend incentives that will lead to the rapid transition to  
131 renewable energy sources, energy conservation and energy efficiency measures throughout  
132 American society, with total transition by 2080; eliminate immediately all fossil fuel subsidies;  
133 enact some form of a carbon tax; enact legislation that will eliminate as quickly as possible any  
134 further extraction of coal, oil and gas nationally or internationally, particularly by corporations  
135 chartered in the United States; and be it further  
136

137 RESOLVED, that the 30th General Synod encourage its pastors, conferences and members to  
138 urge federal and state lawmakers to enact an immediate ban on all gas and oil well hydraulic  
139 fracturing; and be it further

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141 RESOLVED, that the 30<sup>th</sup> General Synod, through its General Minister and conference leaders,  
142 convey our concerns about fossil fuels and hydraulic fracturing in writing, including a copy of  
143 this resolution, to all governors, appropriate regulatory agencies, and state and federal elected  
144 officials in districts where there are UCC Churches, and to all appropriate denominational  
145 instrumentalities informing them of the UCC's position, and encourage its pastors and members  
146 to send this resolution to state and federal elected representatives; and be it further

147  
148 RESOLVED, that the 30<sup>th</sup> General Synod request that Justice and Witness Ministries create a full  
149 time equivalent staff position and establish a task force and encourage conferences to establish  
150 task forces, as appropriate, to study, monitor, and report to the churches on justice issues relating  
151 to fossil fuel use and hydraulic fracturing--including but not limited to climate change, ecological  
152 protections of our lands, air, and water, dangers to public health and welfare, impacts on  
153 communities such as crime and violence, housing, education, etc., and that these task forces be  
154 charged with educating and organizing congregants in their decision-making and actions around  
155 these issues, and that such task forces also listen to the people in the pews with deep intent to  
156 hear the moral dilemmas facing our members about the relationship between the short term and  
157 the longer term implications; and be it further

158  
159 RESOLVED, that the 30th General Synod of the United Church of Christ invite and encourage  
160 its members to inform and educate themselves about the issues pertaining to fossil fuel use,  
161 hydraulic fracturing, climate change and renewable energy by engaging in humble and open  
162 grassroots conversation, with particular sensitivity to energy consumption patterns and to our  
163 most vulnerable citizens, those without sufficient income to meet daily needs, as well as the  
164 long-term needs for energy that all face; in the sharing of pertinent stories that understand the  
165 impasse that our dependency on non-renewable energy resources discloses; and in workshops  
166 and study groups that discern and express the theological, moral, economic and personal facets  
167 of the enterprises of fossil fuel use and hydraulic fracturing, with the above conversations  
168 designed to yield a renewable form of spiritual and moral energy to resolve our physical energy  
169 needs.

170  
171 **FUNDING**

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

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175 **IMPLEMENTATION**

176 The Collegium of Officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries, conferences and other  
177 entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

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179 **FOOTNOTES**

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184 UCC Environmental and Energy Task Force, 2007,  
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195 <http://www.interfaithclimate.org/the-statement>.

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197 <sup>3</sup> Miller, RL, “Climate Change Report Supports Bill McKibben's 'Terrifying New Math,’”  
198 [http://www.takepart.com/article/2013/09/27/ipcc-report-climate-change-bill-mckibben-new-](http://www.takepart.com/article/2013/09/27/ipcc-report-climate-change-bill-mckibben-new-math)  
199 [math](http://www.takepart.com/article/2013/09/27/ipcc-report-climate-change-bill-mckibben-new-math).

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201 <sup>4</sup> For statements on climate change from religious voices, see the Forum on Religion and  
202 Ecology At Yale, <http://fore.research.yale.edu/climate-change/statements-from-world-religions/>;  
203 for actions that people of faith are taking regarding divestment from fossil fuel companies and  
204 reinvestment in sustainable energy sources, see GreenFaith,  
205 [http://greenfaith.org/programs/divest-and-reinvest/religious-resources-on-divestment-and-](http://greenfaith.org/programs/divest-and-reinvest/religious-resources-on-divestment-and-reinvestment)  
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217 *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Field, C.B. et al]. Cambridge University Press,  
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226 [http://citizensclimatelobby.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/The-Economic-Climate-Fiscal-](http://citizensclimatelobby.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/The-Economic-Climate-Fiscal-Power-and-Demographic-Impact-of-a-National-Fee-and-Dividend-Carbon-Tax-6.9.14.pdf)  
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228 also see summary, [http://citizensclimatelobby.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/REMI-National-](http://citizensclimatelobby.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/REMI-National-SUMMARY.pdf)  
229 [SUMMARY.pdf](http://citizensclimatelobby.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/REMI-National-SUMMARY.pdf); and see, [http://www.cccep.ac.uk/Publications/Working-papers/Papers/180-](http://www.cccep.ac.uk/Publications/Working-papers/Papers/180-189/WP180-Dietz-and-Stern-2014.pdf)  
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248 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technological\\_momentum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technological_momentum).

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