

1 The Executive Council recommends this resolution be sent to a committee of the General Synod.
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4 **AXIS OF FRIENDSHIP WITH IRAN**

5 6 **(A Resolution of Witness)** 7

8 **Submitted by:** 9

10 The First Congregational Church of Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, Northern California/Nevada
11 Conference

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13 Shalom United Church of Christ, New Haven, CT; Connecticut Conference,
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15 Judson Memorial Church, New York, NY; New York Conference,
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17 First Congregational Church of Long Beach, Long Beach, CA; Southern California
18 Conference
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20 First Parish, United Church of Christ, Northville, NY; New York Conference
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22 First Congregational United Church of Christ, Memphis, TN; Missouri Mid-South
23 Conference
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25 Broadway United Church of Christ, New York, NY; New York Conference
26

27 The New York Conference
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29 **Summary** 30

31 Taking to heart Jesus' commandment to love our enemies and the United Church of
32 Christ's commitment to being a Just Peace Church, this resolution calls upon the United
33 Church of Christ and its congregations to work to break down the walls of hostility
34 between the United States and Iran by engaging in practices of citizen diplomacy and,
35 through the observance of an Axis of Friendship Day, creating and pursuing friendship.
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37 **Background** 38

39 On September 12, 2001, America's September 11th tragedy brought an outpouring of
40 sympathy from many unlikely places, even from far off Tehran, Iran. Thousands of
41 Iranians lit candles in solidarity with the people of the United States. This global
42 sympathy was spurned months later when the then President Bush included Iran in his
43 Axis of Evil and seized 9/11 as a pretext for war. Since then President Bush and members

44 of his administration have repeatedly alleged that Iran poses an imminent threat to the
45 United States, U.S. troops in the Middle East and U.S. allies.

46

47 The risks of war with Iran, as a result, have been heightened. The costs of such a war are
48 incalculable and would bring endless suffering to countless families, Iranian and
49 American. Few Americans or Iranians want to bury their children and loved ones as the
50 result of another war. Current political hostilities and diplomatic failures could not have
51 higher stakes, including a broader regional war or even a nuclear conflict.

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53 We reject the reality, or even the concept, of an “Axis of Evil.” We invite your support in
54 refusing to look at Iran through the lens of an Axis of Evil and affirming instead the Axis
55 of Friendship that unites our faiths and families as one. Indeed, over the years, the people
56 of the United States have welcomed thousands of Iranians to this country; they are
57 neighbors and friends.

58

59 To help cultivate friendship between the people of Iran and the United States of America,
60 on Sunday, September 13, 2009, we will ignite the embers of friendship and good will.

61

62 **Theological Rationale**

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64 The United Church of Christ declared itself to be a Just Peace Church at the Fifteenth
65 General Synod in 1985 and affirms non-violent approaches to international situations of
66 conflict. In a nuclear age, just wars are morally and practicably impossible. Hence, for
67 dangerous situations and hostilities we must instead find solutions that protect life,
68 generate mutual respect and accountability, and lead to genuine peace. Jesus called us to
69 be peacemakers and to love our enemies. When we love our enemies, we create the
70 possibility of their becoming our friends.

71

72 **The Resolution**

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74 **WHEREAS**, the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew scriptures tells of a God that
75 “.....shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall
76 beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift
77 up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:4); and

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79 **WHEREAS**, Paul teaches that we are to “...live peaceably with all...” (Romans 12:18)
80 and to “...be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good...” (Romans 12:21); and

81

82 **WHEREAS**, Pope Benedict XVI, in his Easter, 2006, message “Urbi et Orbi” (“To the
83 City and to the World”) speaking on the possibility of a pre-emptive attack against Iran,

84 expressed hope that “an honorable solution be found for all parties through serious and
85 honest negotiations,” and
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87 **WHEREAS**, Jesus called people to live in accordance with the Great Commandment to
88 love God and neighbor (Matt. 22:36-40), and exhorted his followers to love their enemies
89 (Matt. 5:44); and
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91 **WHEREAS**, a 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), representing the consensus
92 view of all 16 U.S. intelligence agencies, concluded that Iran froze its nuclear weapons
93 program in 2003, and an earlier NIE report concluded that Iran's involvement in Iraq "is
94 not likely to be a major driver of violence" there, and
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96 **WHEREAS**, Iran has not threatened to attack the United States, and no compelling
97 evidence has been presented to document that Iran poses a real and imminent threat to the
98 security and safety of the United States that would justify an unprovoked unilateral pre-
99 emptive military attack; and
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101 **WHEREAS**, the United Church of Christ is a Just Peace Church, we categorically reject
102 any policy of pre-emptive war by any nation; and
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104 **WHEREAS**, war with Iran would likely wreak untold suffering on the lives of Iranians
105 and Americans, would create a major disruption in the world oil market, would cost
106 perhaps three times the lives and dollars of the war with Iraq, and would stress an already
107 thinly stretched military, and
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109 **WHEREAS**, Iran is a country with an ancient history dating back to the third millennium
110 BCE and a venerable culture, and for centuries the government has not attacked another
111 country; and the people of Iran are not the enemies of the people of the United States, and
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113 **WHEREAS**, the people of the United States have welcomed Iranians to our shores and
114 become their friends, such that the largest concentration of Iranians outside Iran now
115 lives in the state of California,
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117 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that this Twenty-seventh General Synod of the
118 United Church of Christ asserts its opposition to war as a strategy and policy for
119 resolving conflicts with Iran, and urges the Obama administration to pursue as promised
120 the path of diplomacy and nonviolence;
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122 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this General Synod promote and work for an
123 Axis of Friendship between the people of Iran and the United States of America, in
124 specific creating opportunities through Global Ministries for citizen exchanges and
125 dialogue between religious partners; and
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127 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this Twenty-seventh General
128 Synod declare Sunday, September 13, 2009 (the Sunday following September 11) an
129 Axis of Friendship Day:

- 130 1. Encouraging all its members to light a candle for the Axis of Friendship in their
131 windows on the evening of September 12 every year.
132 2. Holding special services of candle-lighting and peace in local churches.
133 3. Helping congregations celebrate the Axis of Friendship with festivals in their
134 local areas, wherever Iranian Americans live.
135 4. Encouraging the Common Global Ministries staff to inform all our global partners
136 to pursue similar actions.

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138 **FUNDING**

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

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143 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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145 That the Twenty-seventh General Synod encourage the Justice and Witness Ministries of
146 the United Church of Christ to implement this resolution and in addition to identify
147 educational resources for congregations, to develop a network of interested persons that
148 will be encouraged to help congregations celebrate the Axis of Friendship within their
149 Conferences and the national United Church of Christ.