

1 The Executive Council recommends this resolution be sent directly to a plenary session of the General
2 Synod, with the recommendation it be approved.
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4 **A CALL TO REAFFIRM THE IMPORTANCE OF ECUMENICAL**
5 **COMMITMENTS AND INITIATIVES IN THE UNITED CHURCH**
6 **OF CHRIST**

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8 **A Resolution of Witness**

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10 **Submitted By:**

11
12 Heidelberg United Church of Christ, York, Pennsylvania (Penn Central Conference)

13 And also by:

14 First Congregational Church, West Boylston, Massachusetts

15 Saron United Church of Christ, Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin

16 Bethlehem United Church of Christ, Ann Arbor, Michigan

17 Union Congregational Church, Groton, Massachusetts

18 St. John's United Church of Christ, Phoenixville, Pennsylvania (Penn Southeast
19 Conference)

20 Trinity United Church of Christ, East Petersburg, Pennsylvania (Penn Central
21 Conference)

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24 **BRIEF SUMMARY:**

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26 This resolution requests that United Church of Christ's continuing commitment to be a
27 "united and uniting church" remain a high priority in our denomination's future. Existing
28 ecumenical relationships and new ecumenical initiatives must remain central in our
29 revisions and reconceptualizations of our church's policies, structures, and programs.
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32 **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE**

33 "That they all may be one" is the motto and enduring vision of the United Church of
34 Christ. From our origins we have been a denomination animated by the passion to be a
35 "united and uniting church." The United Church of Christ was founded as an innovative
36 experiment in making visible the unity of the body of Christ through a new strategy.
37 Unlike many other ecumenical initiatives, this wedding of traditions did not require prior
38 agreement on all points of doctrine. Rather, the dream was for the predecessor
39 denominations to embrace one another as brothers and sisters in Christ in an organic
40 union, and then to engage in a mutually affirming and admonishing conversation. The
41 union was based on the possibility that differences could actually be enriching rather than

42 alienating if they were brought into fruitful interaction with one another. From the
43 beginning the intention was to be not only a “united” church, but also a “uniting” church,
44 inspiring other denominations to grow toward a more adequate expression of the unity in
45 Christ that all believers enjoy.

46 This ecumenical impulse is rooted in the very nature of our faith. The God revealed
47 in Jesus Christ is a huge God, and this God’s revelation in Scripture is expansive and
48 inclusive. No single Christian faith tradition or community can ever hope to focus
49 adequately on all aspects of this vast panorama. Beholding the divine glory is like
50 viewing a sparkling gem. Different facets can only be seen from specific perspectives.
51 No single perspective can discern all the facets simultaneously. As a result, every
52 Christian tradition needs to be enriched by the witness of all the others in order to
53 encounter more deeply the inexhaustible fullness of God. For this reason the Bible itself
54 is a panoply of diverse perspectives and voices, ranging from the elusive mystery of the
55 wisdom literature to the stern admonitions of the prophets to the grace-filled words of
56 Paul. We Christians have four very different gospels, not one, and within those gospels a
57 plurality of perspectives on Jesus can be found. The canon requires all of these different
58 vantage points in order to present the breath, depth, and multi-dimensional nature of the
59 God whom we worship. Throughout history God has providentially led different
60 Christian communities to share the wisdom they have received from God with one
61 another in order to build up the entire church. Without the interaction of these many
62 perspectives under the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit, the revelation of God
63 would be impoverished.

64 So it is currently with the many different churches of Christ scattered throughout the
65 world. We all need the witness of each other in order to more fully experience the many
66 facets of God. Each tradition has precious gifts to offer the others. Paul emphasized this
67 reality in his Corinthians correspondence, insisting that the various members of the body
68 of Christ are interdependent (see 1 Cor. 12: 15-21). The hand needs the head and the head
69 needs the hand. The truth that Paul expressed must still guide our denominational life.
70 The United Church of Christ has invaluable gifts to share with other Christian traditions,
71 and it must be open to receive the wonderful gifts of our denominational sisters and
72 brothers in Christ. Only through such Spirit-led mutual sharing can the gospel be
73 appreciated in its multi-dimensional richness. To be a more adequate expression of the
74 body of Christ in the world and to participate more fully in God’s works of justice and
75 peace, the United Church of Christ must be in loving and faithful communion with other
76 denominations.

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79 **THE TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION**

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81 **WHEREAS** the Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ declares
82 that the new denomination was created “in order to express more fully the oneness in

83 Christ of all churches comprising it;” and

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85 **WHEREAS** that same Preamble announces that the United Church of Christ
86 “acknowledges as kindred in Christ all who share the confession” that “Jesus Christ is
87 sole head of the church);” and

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89 **WHEREAS** the Constitution of the United Church of Christ stipulates that a
90 responsibility of the General Synod is to “encourage connections with other communions
91 and when appropriate to authorize and guide negotiations with them, looking toward
92 formal union;” and

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94 **WHEREAS** the oneness of the church universal is a gift from God, grounded in the
95 common participation of all believers in Christ, and therefore also in one another (see 1
96 Cor. 12:27); and

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98 **WHEREAS** the church in every time and place is one by virtue of its communion with
99 Christ; and

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101 **WHEREAS** the unity of the Church in every time and place is made visible in baptismal
102 and Eucharistic communion and in common proclamation and service; and

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104 **WHEREAS** the individual faith traditions of Christians need the mutually affirming and
105 admonishing witness of one another in order for any of them to appreciate the richness
106 and fullness of God’s grace (see 1 Cor. 12:15-21); and

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108 **WHEREAS** the unity graciously established by God should be concretely manifested in
109 the interactions and interconnections of the particular historic faith traditions of
110 Christianity; and

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112 **WHEREAS** participation in God’s mission of establishing peace and justice on earth
113 requires ecumenical co-operation;

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115 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Twenty-Seventh General Synod of the
116 United Church of Christ reaffirms the centrality of its ecumenical mission to be a united
117 and uniting church.

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119 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the United Church of Christ shall continue and
120 strengthen the various ministries that make the pursuit of this ecumenical vision possible.

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122 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the United Church of Christ make its historic
123 commitment to be a united and uniting church a priority in all its decision-making.

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125 FUNDING:

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

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130 IMPLEMENTATION:

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132 The relevant ministries of the Office of General Ministries, particularly the Minister for
133 Ecumenical Relations, are requested to be the primary implementers of this resolution. In
134 addition, all members of the United Church of Christ are urged to live out this mandate.