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

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4 **Resolution on the Roles of Church and Government**  
5 **in Addressing Global Food Crisis**

6  
7 (A Resolution of Witness)

8  
9 **Submitted by:** Justice and Witness Ministries and Wider Church Ministries

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12 *I was hungry and you gave me food. . .just as you did it to one of the least of these who*  
13 *are members of my family, you did it to me. Jesus*

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15 *Politics without principles; commerce without morality.* Two of the Seven Deadly Social  
16 Sins, Mohandas Gandhi

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18 **Summary**

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20 This resolution calls for the Twenty-seventh General Synod to recognize the global food  
21 crisis in which we currently find ourselves as a global community, its root causes, and the  
22 vocations of Church, governments, and global organizations in addressing systemically  
23 its causes. It further calls for the Twenty-seventh General Synod to reaffirm healthy,  
24 nutritional food as a human right and to address the unique dynamics of the present  
25 global food crisis in prophetic witness, advocacy for more just food policy, food  
26 sovereignty and food security, and to collaborate with like minded partners in effective  
27 actions.

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29 **Background**

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31 The global community finds itself in 2008 in the midst of an acute food crisis. Riots in  
32 some of the most affected poor countries have broken out as widespread panic set in.  
33 Haiti and India provide two examples. In a world of six billion people, one billion suffer  
34 from chronic hunger. This number does not take into account those suffering from  
35 vitamin and nutrient deficiencies, and other forms of malnutrition.<sup>1</sup> One especially  
36 poignant example is of the extremely poor in Haiti eating a concoction made of animal  
37 oil and a unique yellow dirt.

38  
39 This crisis did not appear *ex nihilo*, but results from a confluence of factors. It was  
40 predictable, inevitable, and largely ignored by those who could have prevented, or at least  
41 ameliorated, its devastating effects.

42  
43 One cannot point to lack of production as the reason people go hungry. The United  
44 States, for example, produces ample food to feed its population. And yet, in 2006, the  
45 Department of Agriculture estimated that over 35 million people lived in food-insecure

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Magdoff, *The World Food Crisis: Sources and Solutions (Monthly Review, May 2008)*, p.1.

46 households, including 13 million children. Even in poorer countries, large supplies of  
47 wasted and misallocated food exist side by side with pernicious and prevalent hunger. In  
48 India in 2004, for example, wheat reserves rotted as poor people suffering from hunger  
49 rioted.

50  
51 In 2008, agricultural commodity prices on world markets reached their highest level since  
52 the 1970s (adjusted for inflation). Supplies were relatively high, and consumers, mostly  
53 in developed countries, demanded low-cost food.<sup>2</sup> Global markets, controlled in large  
54 part by a few mega-conglomerates, were only too happy to comply. In order to meet this  
55 demand profitably, these corporations with monopolies on the market, paid producers  
56 marginal prices. Farmers, in turn, with such a small profit margin, often exploited farm  
57 workers, many of whom were migrant laborers.

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60 Higher prices *per se* are not the problem. It is the combination of higher prices and the  
61 demand for cheap food, unaccompanied with short term help for the most vulnerable to  
62 price spikes that worked to create the food crisis. If higher prices mean a fairer  
63 distribution of money between producers and markets, then this addresses a long overdue  
64 injustice in the way food comes to our tables. But presently, the gigantic market  
65 monopolies are making record profits while small- and medium-sized farmers barely  
66 make a living, if at all.<sup>3</sup>

67  
68 A series of factors came together in a predictable combination that caused this perfect  
69 storm. Among the most critical are:

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- 71 • A dramatic increase of the use of grains and feedstock for biofuels.
  - 72
  - 73 • Less availability of feedstock for consumption by animals grown for meat and  
74 milk.
  - 75
  - 76 • An increased demand for meat among the middle class in Latin America and  
77 Asia, especially China, as their diets becomes increasingly similar to North  
78 America and Europe.<sup>4</sup>
  - 79
  - 80 • As developing countries were pressured into becoming export-based in their  
81 agriculture, they became more vulnerable to the fluctuations of the global  
82 economy. Formerly food secure, albeit at a subsistence level, hunger reached  
83 critical proportions as food reserves dried up.
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<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, see Daniel De La Torre and Sophia Murphy, *The Global Food Crisis: Creating an Opportunity for Fairer and More Sustainable Food and Agriculture Systems Worldwide* (EcoFair Trade Dialogue Discussion Paper, October 2008), pp.4-7.

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the fiscal year 2007-2008, Cargill made profits of \$3.64 billion, a 55% increase from the previous year; Bunge's net income rose 471% in the first half of 2008; Monsanto's net income was up 83% for the first 9 months of 2008. figures taken from Ugarte and Murphy, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37

<sup>4</sup> Magdoff, *op.cit.*, p.3.

- 85       • Speculation in the futures market.  
86  
87       • Overfishing has led to dwindling supplies and higher prices for ocean foods.  
88

89 The global food system comes with extreme environmental costs as well. The present  
90 export-based food system means that food travels thousands of miles to reach consumers’  
91 tables. The practice of monocultural corporate farming has led to soil depletion,  
92 overconsumption of water, and the use of chemicals as fertilizers, pesticides, and  
93 herbicides, all of which adds to environmental degradation.

94  
95 This calamity has long been foreseen by food activists and many economists. Many  
96 continue to call for alternatives that will lead to great food security and sovereignty.<sup>5</sup>  
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#### 98 Biblical and Theological Rationale 99

100 The biblical witness offers significant concern and compassion for people suffering from  
101 hunger and malnutrition. Examples include:  
102

- 103       • The biblical practice of gleaning. In the Hebrew Bible, farmers are exhorted to  
104       leave the outer boundaries of their crops unharvested. In turn, aliens and the poor  
105       were invited to partake of those crops. This practice recognized the obligation of  
106       those who have for those who don’t. (Lev. 19:9)
- 107       • When the crowds that followed Jesus were hungry, and the disciples wanted them  
108       to fend for themselves, Jesus commanded the disciples to feed them. (Mk. 6:30f.  
109       and parallels)
- 110       • The prophetic witness of the Hebrew Bible contains many condemnations to the  
111       nation, merchants, and the rich who profit at the expense of the most vulnerable in  
112       their midst. Isaiah proclaimed that acceptable worship of the Lord does not  
113       consist of performing right rituals while extorting the poor. Rather, he insists that  
114       true worship involves, letting the oppressed go free, housing the homeless poor,  
115       and “to share your bread with the hungry. . .” (Isa. 58:6-7)
- 116       • Jesus taught the disciples that the righteous will be distinguished by how they  
117       treat the most vulnerable, including providing food for them. (Mt. 25:31-46)

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<sup>5</sup> Food sovereignty is defined as: the right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users. Food sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoral-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations. (International Institute for Environment and Development)

- 118 • The early church took seriously the distribution of food to the most vulnerable.  
119 (Acts 6:1f.)  
120 • Mary’s vision of the coming of Jesus from her womb included the good news that  
121 the hungry will be “filled with good things.” (Lk. 1:53)  
122

123 Jesus understood his vocation to stand with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized in the  
124 world. (Lk. 4:18-21). He condemned the actions of the rich man who “feasted  
125 sumptuously” and disregarded the hungry beggar Lazarus, who ate the crumbs off the  
126 table. (Lk.16:19ff.) Jesus further taught his followers that if they truly wanted to be  
127 disciples of his, they needed to follow in his footsteps.  
128

129 Feeding the poor includes, but is not limited to, the actual feeding of those who are  
130 hungry. It means addressing the root causes of hunger. Today, as is pointed out above,  
131 the addressing of hunger’s root causes means addressing how the global food system  
132 operates.

133 The United Church of Christ has long stood in solidarity with the most vulnerable. No  
134 less than twenty-six pronouncements and resolutions have been passed by General Synod  
135 since its inception on hunger and hunger-related issues, including the pronouncement  
136 “The World Food Crisis.” (the Tenth General Synod, 1975).  
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### 138 **The Resolution**

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140 **Whereas**, our world presently suffers in a global food crisis, and

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142 **Whereas**, this food crisis has resulted in widespread and intractable hunger among the  
143 most vulnerable, the poor, children, elderly, sick and dispossessed, and  
144

145 **Whereas**, this crisis has as its causes factors not prevalent in previous times of hunger,  
146 and  
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148 **Whereas**, these causes of hunger are rooted in failed economic policies, often imposed  
149 upon producers by governments, institutions, and corporations, and  
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151 **Whereas**, these policies have also led to environmental degradation that imperils all life  
152 itself, and  
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154 **Whereas**, our faith compels us to act to relieve suffering and to stand in solidarity with  
155 the poor, and  
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157 **Whereas**, justice demands that we address root causes of injustice, as well as pour out  
158 compassion,  
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160 **Therefore let it be resolved** that Twenty-seventh General Synod of the United Church of  
161 Christ recognize the breadth and depth of the present global food crisis.  
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163 **Be it further resolved** that Wider Church Ministries and Justice and Witness Ministries  
164 are requested to produce resources to help United Church of Christ congregations  
165 understand this global food crisis.

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167 **Be it further resolved** that Wider Church Ministries and Justice and Witness Ministries  
168 are requested to find ways to help United Church of Christ congregations advocate for  
169 more just policies that will lead to food security and sovereignty.

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171 **Be it further resolved** that United Church of Christ congregations are called on to study  
172 ways in which our consumerism leads to food insecurity and how we can change our  
173 consumerist ways in order to create a more food secure world.

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175 **Be it further resolved** that we advocate for strengthening sustainable agriculture  
176 practices, such as biodiversity, drip irrigation, organic inputs and soil conservation  
177 practices

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179 **Be it further resolved** that we advocate on behalf of family farms.

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181 **Be it further resolved** that we advocate for stronger regulations on futures speculation.

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183 **FUNDING**

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

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189 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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191 Justice and Witness Ministries and Wider Church Ministries are requested to implement  
192 this resolution.

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