

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

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3 **CALLING FOR COMPREHENSIVE HIV PREVENTION IN CHURCH**
4 **AND COMMUNITY**

5
6 **A Prudential Resolution**
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8 **Submitted by:** Wider Church Ministries
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11 **Background Statement:**
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13 **Summary**
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15 This resolution builds on previous actions of the General Synod calling for health and wholeness, care
16 and compassion in response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The ultimate goal of this resolution is to
17 stop the spread of HIV by scaling-up best practice comprehensive HIV prevention in church and
18 community. This resolution calls church and community to new and increased levels of attention and
19 commitment to achieving this goal.
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21 **Biblical, Theological and Ethical Rational**
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23 “Where the Church is involved in healing ministries in the name of Jesus Christ, it is engaged in the work
24 of reconciliation and liberation.” (UCC Mission Statement on Health and Human Service, (15th General
25 Synod, 1985)
26

27 As Christians, we are called to follow the teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ. The gospel narratives are
28 full of stories about the life and ministry of Jesus and the many ways Jesus reached out with compassion
29 and healing to those who were sick and marginalized. Jesus sent his disciples out to heal the sick (Luke
30 9:1-2).
31

32 Jesus also encouraged people of faith to be ready and alert, saying, “But know this: if the owner of the
33 house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.”
34 Luke 12:39. In terms of HIV, we know how it breaks into the body and robs the immune system of its
35 capacity to respond to disease but too many people, young and old, are not effectively prepared with the
36 information and tools they need to prevent infection.
37

38 Our Christian tradition speaks of the already and not yet character of our faith in a way that brings hope in
39 the midst of difficulty. We know that we all are God's beloved children, worthy of love, dignity and
40 respect, but that we have not yet fully realized God's realm in our midst. Even when we find ourselves in
41 the pit of life, as the Psalmist laments, we know that the pit is not the place God intends us to be (Psalm
42 40:2). Our resurrection faith inspires us to trust the power of God to make a way out of no way.
43

44 Also from our biblical tradition, the apostle Paul challenged the early Christian communities to keep their
45 eyes on the prize, run the race with perseverance and pursue their vision for mission and ministry until it
46 was attained.
47

48 The HIV and AIDS pandemic is one of the most serious health crises the world has ever faced. UNAIDS
49 estimates there are 33 million people living with HIV worldwide and 5 million people die each year from
50 AIDS (June 2008). The U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) issued a new report in August 2008
51 revealing that for the past several years the annual number of new infections in the U.S. has been

52 underreported by 40%. The CDC estimated that there are 56,300 new HIV infections in the U.S. per year,
53 more than 1 million people living with HIV (about 0.5% of the total U.S. population) and 250,000 of
54 them are not aware they are HIV positive.

55
56 The international HIV and AIDS response organizations have called for the scaling up of prevention
57 efforts. In 2001 the United Nations committed to stopping HIV and AIDS (Declaration of commitment
58 on HIV/AIDS, June 2001) and strengthened their resolve in their political statement in June 2006. The
59 latter statement called for “ambitious national targets, to be developed by countries by end 2006, as the
60 world moves toward universal access to comprehensive prevention programmes, treatment, care and
61 support by 2010.” The World Health Organizations, along with several other UN agencies are working to
62 realize these goals. The U.S. CDC and the U.S. National Institute of Health also are engaged in scaling
63 up prevention efforts. UNAIDS has called for stronger participation from faith organizations in
64 prevention work (<http://www.unaids.org/en/Partnerships/Civil+society/religionAndAids.asp>).

65
66 The United Church of Christ has been part of this struggle. From the local church to the General Synod,
67 from World AIDS Day observances to comprehensive HIV and AIDS outreach programs, there have been
68 and continue to be important and significant responses from a variety of settings of the UCC. However,
69 the scale of these responses has not yet reached a level equal to the need, particularly with comprehensive
70 HIV prevention and also in terms of reaching vulnerable groups and higher risk populations.

71
72 The CDC reported that HIV prevalence among men and women in the African American/Black
73 community is a disproportionate 2%, which is 4 times the national prevalence. Women account for 25%
74 of all people living with HIV in the U.S. The prevalence of HIV among African American/Black women
75 is 18 times that of white women. In fact, the total number of infections in the African American/Black
76 community exceeds those in 7 of the 15 countries receiving funds from PEPFAR (the President's
77 Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief). Infections among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with
78 men (MSM) in all racial groups has continued to rise in the U.S. since the early 90's. There are
79 disproportionate infection rates among young (age 13-25), African American/Black and Latino MSM in
80 comparison with other age and racial/ethnic groups.

81
82 There is an already and not yet character to our response to HIV and AIDS.

- 83 • We already know how to prevent the spread of HIV, but we have not yet taken the action required to
84 do it;
- 85 • We already know that the African American community is seeing HIV infection rates
86 disproportionate to their population in the US but this country does not yet have a comprehensive
87 national plan for addressing the epidemic;
- 88 • We already know that women and girls in many parts of the world, including some places in the U.S.,
89 are vulnerable to gender based violence, creating significant risks for infection, but we have not yet
90 effectively addressed the predatory sexual practices of some men nor some of the cultural dynamics
91 that create a distorted and unhealthy masculinity which fails to respect and empower women and girls
92 to have control over their own bodies;
- 93 • We already know that stigma and discrimination creates an environment that fuels this disease but we
94 have not yet broken the silence in many places, including many church communities, providing
95 people with vital, age appropriate, comprehensive information to protect themselves and others
96 against infection;
- 97 • Moreover, we already know that treatment and care are an important aspect of effective HIV
98 prevention and we know how to effectively treat persons living with HIV, improving both the quality
99 and length of life, but we have not yet accessed our full capacity for universal treatment and care.

100
101 Most importantly, the truth is we already have the capacity to realize the vision of stopping AIDS, making
102 good on that promise. The question is whether we share this vision and will we do what it takes to

103 achieve it. The message of our faith is clear when it comes to compassion and care, and for being ready
104 and alert. Preventing disease is as important as caring for the sick. This resolution is calling the church
105 and community to task, to take seriously our role and responsibility to access our capacity for best
106 practice comprehensive HIV prevention. There is no question whether we, as people of faith, have an
107 important role to play. The question is whether we will fulfill it.
108

109 **Expected Outcomes**

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111 By pointing to opportunities for collaboration with the United Church of Christ HIV and AIDS Network
112 (UCAN, Inc.) and lifting up resources that already exist, the resolution provides guidance for working in
113 deliberate and strategic ways to reduce HIV infection, engaging and strengthening the existing capacities
114 of church and community to:

- 115 • Assess and increase their HIV and AIDS competencies, including the development of tools to assist
116 with this assessment;
- 117 • Develop and implement plans of action in all settings of the church and community which includes
118 the integration of comprehensive HIV prevention strategies in existing health related programs and
119 activities, and the initiation of new and innovative strategies, particularly with vulnerable groups and
120 higher risk populations. UCAN, Inc. is already prepared to provide technical assistance to all settings
121 of the church in this regard;
- 122 • Build and share models of best practice using the internet (ucc.org), UCC Resources and other
123 technologies and communication vehicles;
- 124 • Create new partnerships with and among churches and the community for collaboration, increased
125 effectiveness and accountability. Some efforts will need to bring together various settings with
126 capacities for reaching vulnerable groups and higher risk populations; and,
- 127 • Advocate for and support the development and implementation of a national HIV and AIDS plan that
128 includes a significant increase in programs and funding for comprehensive HIV prevention in the
129 United States.

130 131 **Text of the Resolution**

132 133 **Whereas,**

134 *Our Christian faith calls upon the disciples of Jesus Christ to follow Jesus' teachings and the*
135 *examples of Jesus' ministry; and,*

136
137 *Jesus reached out with compassion and healing to those who were sick and marginalized, and called*
138 *people of faith to be ready and alert, for example:*

- 139 • *Matthew 14:14. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them*
140 *and cured their sick.*
- 141 • *Mark 1:40-42. A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose,*
142 *you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and*
143 *said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made*
144 *clean.*
- 145 • *Luke 12:39. But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was*
146 *coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.*
- 147 • *Matthew 25:1-13. Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*
148 *and,*

149
150 *There are an estimated 33 million people living with HIV worldwide and that for every 5 new HIV*
151 *infections there are only 2 people who receive medical treatment (UNAIDS, June 2008),*
152 *demonstrating that the world is losing the fight against HIV and AIDS. Treatment alone cannot stop*
153 *the HIV and AIDS pandemic; and,*

154
155 The United States Center for Disease Control (CDC) released new data revealing that HIV infections
156 in the US are 40% higher than previously thought and reporting estimates that there are more than 1
157 million persons living with HIV in the U.S. and 20% of them do not know they are HIV positive
158 (August 3, 2008); and,
159

160 The global health community, including UNAIDS, the World Health Organization, the U.S. CDC,
161 and the U.S. National Institute for Health, has called for increased best practice, comprehensive HIV
162 prevention efforts, especially with vulnerable groups and high risk populations; and,
163

164 The CDC has encouraged everyone to know their HIV status; and,
165

166 The international HIV and AIDS community has recognized the important role of faith communities
167 like the United Church of Christ in HIV prevention and care, and the untapped capacity that exists in
168 such communities for effective response; and,
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170 The Fourteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted the Resolution on Acquired
171 Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and declared its “compassionate concern and support for all
172 persons with AIDS, their lovers, spouses, families and friends” and the Sixteenth General Synod of
173 the United Church of Christ adopted the pronouncement “Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a
174 Pandemic” and called the United Church of Christ to leadership in response to AIDS.
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176

177 **Therefore let it be resolved** that the Twenty-Seventh General Synod of the United Church of Christ:
178

179 Declares its compassionate concern about the growing human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
180 epidemic in the United States and throughout the world, and its support for all those living with and
181 affected by HIV; and,
182

183 Reaffirms the Pronouncement on Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a Pandemic adopted by the
184 Sixteenth General Synod, the Resolution on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) adopted
185 by the Fourteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ and the Resolution, “Responding to
186 AIDS: Endorsement and Enactment of the “Ten Principles for the Workplace” adopted by the
187 Seventeenth General Synod; and,
188

189 Calls on all clergy and lay persons in all settings of the United Church of Christ to:

- 190 • become knowledgeable about HIV and AIDS,
- 191 • understand how HIV is transmitted,
- 192 • work to prevent its transmission,
- 193 • reduce stigma and discrimination, and
- 194 • help the whole church to increase its HIV competency; and,
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196 Strongly urges all clergy and lay persons in the United Church of Christ to know their HIV status;
197 and,
198

199 Calls on local churches and other settings of the church to develop and implement best practice
200 comprehensive HIV prevention education, programs and strategies for church and community, with
201 particular attention to vulnerable groups and at risk populations; and,
202

203 Calls on the United Church of Christ HIV and AIDS Network (UCAN, Inc.) to work collaboratively
204 within and beyond the United Church of Christ to provide technical assistance, training, education,

205 and resources to help all settings of the church develop and implement comprehensive HIV
206 prevention strategies and programs for church and community, and encourage the use of existing
207 resources such as *Affirming Persons, Saving Lives* and the comprehensive sexuality education
208 curriculum, *Our Whole Lives*; and,
209

210 Calls on local, state and federal governments to work together to develop and implement a national
211 HIV and AIDS strategy that includes increased funding for best practice comprehensive HIV
212 prevention programs; and,
213

214 Calls on Wider Church Ministries to report on the progress of the implementation of this resolution to
215 the next three General Synods.
216

217 **FUNDING**

218 The funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall
219 mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.
220

221 **IMPLEMENTATION**

222 In collaboration with Wider Church Ministries, UCAN, Inc. is responsible for developing the strategy and
223 program designed to implement this resolution.