

The Business Committee of the Thirty-Second General Synod has recommended this proposed resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

1 **Discerning, Articulating, and Resourcing the Nature, Purpose, Composition, Covenantal**
2 **Autonomy and Definition of ‘the basic unit of life and organization of the United Church of**
3 **Christ’ for the Twenty-first Century**

4
5 **A Prudential Resolution**

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7 **Submitted by the Southwest Conference**
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9 Summary:

10 Based on the biblical pattern for the continuing growth of the Church as the Body of Christ, and
11 our history as a reformed and reforming Church, this resolution calls for a UCC-wide
12 discernment process regarding the nature, purpose, composition, covenantal autonomy, and
13 definition of “Local Church” as “the basic unit of life and organization of the United Church of
14 Christ.” The resolution also calls for articulation of revisions to the Constitution of the United
15 Church of Christ predicated on that discernment process’s outcome, and the production of a
16 resource to help the Local Churches live more fully into the obligations of covenantal autonomy
17 articulated in the Constitution of the United Church of Christ.
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19 Biblical, Theological and Historical Grounding:

20 The Book of Acts bears witness to the newly formed Church engaging self-defining questions
21 regarding its nature, purpose, composition, covenants, autonomy, from almost the very beginning
22 of its existence. In Acts 6 and 15, the early Church met to discuss and settle concerns about
23 covenantal relationships. In Acts 10-16 the earliest Christians wrestled with extravagant
24 welcome, redefining covenant, and holding one another accountable.
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26 Our ancestors in the Reformed tradition continued to discern God’s calling as Church, the history
27 of which need not be recited here. The United Church of Christ is itself a product of that
28 discernment.
29

30 The Twenty-Seventh General Synod of the United Church of Christ, meeting in Grand Rapids,
31 MI, adopted Article V of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ as it reads currently.
32 During the hearing regarding that action, process rules prohibited changes to the language of
33 Article V. This resolution continues the struggle to overcome systemic sexism and to adopt
34 language that is consistent with previous General Synod resolutions regarding inclusive
35 language.
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37 As a living Body, the Body of Christ, the Church is ever-growing and becoming new. It has been
38 said that we do not know what the Church of the future will be. Ongoing dialogue like the
39 conversation called for in this resolution will help us discern and shape our future Church.
40

41 Practices within the United Church of Christ related to admitting Local Churches into the UCC,
42 what constitutes a Local Church, and who, beyond Local Churches, may be members of

43 associations and conferences continue to evolve. This resolution will open conversation across
44 the denomination regarding those evolving practices.

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46 The Text of the Resolution:

47 WHEREAS Article V, paragraphs 10 and 11 of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ
48 employ sexist language; and

49
50 WHEREAS Article V of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ met with criticism
51 during the hearing preceding its adoption at the Twenty-Seventh General Synod, but rules
52 prevented changes in the language of the Article that delegates found objectionable; and

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54 WHEREAS the Bylaws adopted by the Thirty-First General Synod contain that same
55 objectionable language; and

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57 WHEREAS General Synods 9, 11, 12, 14, 16 and 17 have affirmed the use of inclusive
58 language; and

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60 WHEREAS Article III of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ describes the ideals of
61 covenantal relationships but does not describe or provide for the accountability necessary to live
62 into these covenantal relationships; and

63
64 WHEREAS Article V, paragraph 10, of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ limits to
65 three the purposes for which a Local Church may be organized: Christian worship, for the
66 furtherance of Christian fellowship, and for the ongoing work of Christian witness; and

67
68 WHEREAS Article V, paragraph 10 of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ omits as
69 a purpose for which a local church may be organized creating a just world for all;ⁱ and

70
71 WHEREAS Article V of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ does not include the
72 word “covenant;” and

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74 WHEREAS Article V, paragraph 17 of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ uses the
75 word “fellowship” instead of the word “covenant;” and

76
77 WHEREAS Article V, paragraph 16, of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ singles
78 out Congregational Christian local churches and prohibits them from a dual affiliation with the
79 UCC, calling into question the UCC value of extravagant welcome; and

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81 WHEREAS the current practice of conferences and associations is to “admit, or continue to
82 fellowship with” Local Churches from other denominationsⁱⁱ and affiliations as well as faith
83 communitiesⁱⁱⁱ that do not identify as a church in the spirit of the UCC value of extravagant
84 welcome; and

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86 WHEREAS the words “to formulate its own covenants and confessions of faith; to admit
87 members in its own way” in paragraph 18 seem to conflict with paragraph 11 which prescribes
88 three methods for being admitted to a Local Church belonging to the UCC;

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90 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls
91 on the United Church of Christ Board and the General Minister and President to convene a
92 working group representative of the whole of the United Church of Christ to:

- 93 1. lead the United Church of Christ in a process of discernment regarding Article V of the
94 Constitution of the United Church of Christ; and
- 95 2. recommend revisions to Article V in accordance with the working group's discernment
96 and conclusions including, but not limited to, equal clarity about Local Church covenant
97 and autonomy, parameters for local church accountability and the oversight of local
98 churches, a provision for releasing congregations from the United Church of Christ, and
99 amendments to Articles III and VIII and other sections of the Constitution of the United
100 Church of Christ so that the whole of the document is consistent; and
- 101 3. produce a *Manual on the Local Church* for use by all settings of the Church akin to the
102 Manual on Ministry, purposed to equip the Local Church to fully live into its covenantal
103 responsibilities and privileges under the Constitution of the United Church of Christ,
104 including but not limited to a Congregational Code, Marks of Faithful and Vital
105 Congregations, and processes and resources for birthing, admitting, strengthening,
106 revitalizing, and releasing congregations; and
- 107 4. report its progress along with its recommendations for revising Article V of the to the
108 next General Synod.

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110 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Synod of the United Church of Christ invites
111 and encourages all setting of the United Church of Christ to pray for and participate in this
112 discernment process locally.

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114 Funding: The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with
115 the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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117 Implementation: The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other
118 entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

ⁱ The words “Christian witness” and “creating a just world for all” are not synonymous.

ⁱⁱ Many conferences include member churches which maintain dual standing with other denominations.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, Southwest Conference admits “a network of people organized around the presence of Christ, which embraces a United Church of Christ identity and the values of the Southwest Conference, which exists within the geographical boundaries of the Conference” into the membership of the Conference with voice and vote. Numerous examples may be cited throughout the United Church of Christ including web-based communities.