

A resolution of Witness: Stewardship of Exhibit Space as a Resource for a Mission of Justice

1 **WHEREAS:** We are a denomination that welcomes and accepts everyone as they are, where your mind is
2 nourished as much as your soul;

3 **AND WHEREAS:** we believe in extravagant welcome and advocate justice for all;

4 **AND WHEREAS:** we insist that churches must be places of vitality in worship, learning and advocacy;

5 **AND WHEREAS;** we believe God calls the church to speak truth to power, liberate the oppressed, care for
6 the poor and comfort the afflicted;

7 **AND WHEREAS:** “Every two years, General Synod brings together thousands of faithful members of the
8 United Church of Christ for formal church witness, inspirational worship, and fellowship with friends (new
9 and old), and at each gathering, we pledge to ‘discern resolutions of witness, church structure, and
10 function . . . stand up for issues that demand a faithful witness;” (taken from the UCC website);

11 **AND WHEREAS:** all places, events and arenas of the General Synod are expressions of the church and fall
12 within the theological scope of our dual responsibilities of prophetic integrity and wise stewardship, to
13 ensure all available resources are rightly directed to the declaration and furtherance of our mission;

14 **AND WHEREAS:** the LGBT community is a constituency integral to the United church of Christ, named in
15 the United Church of Christ by-laws as “historically under represented” for purposes of the General Synod
16 delegation, and targeted for intentional consideration for its Board of Directors & Nominating committee;

17 **AND WHEREAS:** the organizers and representatives of those who call themselves the Faithful and
18 Welcoming Churches (FWC) continue to categorize sexual orientation and gender identity as issues of
19 unholy choice rather than reflections of the image of God, (with these notes and objectives from its own
20 promotional materials at FWC Synod display table and the website www.faithfulandwelcoming.org : “We call the
21 church to prayer for the purity, preservation of the family, and to
22 the practice and proclamation of human sexuality as God’s gift for marriage between a man and a woman,” and
23 offers a stated objective to “Form networks of churches, laity, and clergy committed to the vision of FWC”. Advises
24 congregations to, “Change your church’s by-laws to disallow avowed practicing homosexuals as clergy and
25 disallow same sex marriages and civil unions in the church.” And “Consider redirecting or designating

26 funds marked for the UCC,” and recommends as a litmus test for Congregations interviewing clergy
27 candidates: “Would you consent to officiate at same sex civil unions or same sex marriage ceremonies?);
28 **AND WHEREAS:** The FWC uses UCC exhibit space at General Synod and events to help connect like-
29 minded congregations and members who oppose civil rights and full ecclesiastical inclusion for LGBT members;
30 **AND WHEREAS:** The presence of FWC activity and displays are demeaning of and emotionally and
31 spiritually hurtful to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender-queer UCC members, visitors and
32 delegates, and undermines the extravagant welcome stated by the UCC as its foundational identity;
33 **AND WHEREAS:** Jesus prayer, “that they all maybe one”, was a prayer for his disciples to have strength to
34 stand together to continue his work of justice and world healing;
35 **AND WHEREAS:** No similar group is afforded display space for organizing against racial justice, disability justice,
36 justice for women, or the advancement of human rights;
37 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:** that the Michigan Conference of the UCC, express to all officials of our
38 Conference and the General Synod that no group organizing in a way that demeans any part of the body of Christ or
39 working against civil and human rights for LGBTQ people shall be afforded space in the Michigan Conference
40 displays and the General Synod exhibit hall;
41 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:** that the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ denounce the specific
42 work of Faithful and Welcoming Churches as it relates to denying the full civil rights and ecclesiastical standing of
43 LGBT persons, and declare that the United Church of Christ motto , “That they may all be one”, does not require
44 giving voice to bigotry.
45 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:** that the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ decry all
46 Manifestations of hate, violence, racism, nationalism, and white supremacy.
47 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED:** that this resolution, if affirmed, be put into proper form for submission to the General
48 Synod. Submitted by Woodside Church 1509 East Court Street, Flint, MI; Rev. Dr. Deborah D.
49 Conrad.

Stewardship of Exhibit Space as a Resource for a Mission of Justice
Supportive Statement

“Throughout its history, the United Church of Christ has been at the forefront in the struggle for justice and equality. For more than 30 years, the General Synod of the UCC has adopted resolutions affirming lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons, consistently calling for an end to discrimination, equal protection under the law, deploring LGBT hate crimes and violence, supporting LGBT relationships and families, celebrating the gifts of LGBT persons for ministry and encouraging all settings of the church to be open and affirming of LGBT persons, welcoming them and encouraging their participation in every aspect of the mission and ministry of the church.”

(From the Resolution In Support of Equal Marriage Rights for All [Adopted at the Twenty-fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ on July 4, 2005]

It has been 45 years since Reverend William R. Johnson became the first openly gay minister to be ordained in the United Church of Christ.

It has been 34 years since the 14th General Synod of the UCC adopted a series of four resolutions on human sexuality, including one calling for dismantling the “Institutionalized Homophobia within the United Church of Christ.”

It has been 26 years since the 18th General Synod of the UCC adopted the “Resolution Affirming Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Persons and their Ministries.

It has been 24 years since the 19th General Synod adopted the “Resolution Calling on the Church for Greater Leadership to End Discrimination against Gays and Lesbians”

It has been 14 years since the 24th General Synod adopted the “Affirming the Participation and Ministry of Transgender People within the United Church of Christ and Supporting Civil and Human Rights” resolution. It also passed the resolution “Reaffirming the United Church of Christ’s Denouncement of Violence Against Lesbian and Gay People and Calling for the Inclusion of Transgender people within that Anti-Violence Statement resolution.

It has been 12 years since the 25th General Synod passed the resolution, “Equal Marriage Rights for All.”

With all of those affirmations behind us, the delegates and visitors of the 31st General Synod walked into the Exhibit Hall in Baltimore this year greeted by an organization who opposed civil rights and full ecclesiastical inclusion for LGBT members. It was an affront to all that we have worked, fought and bled for through the years. It was an attack on all LGBT members, visitors, guests, loved ones, friends and supporters. The Michigan Conferences Caucus of delegates spoke out to denounce this travesty. This resolution is needed to take a stand against it.

The need for our response is even more vital as we face enhanced attacks on transgendered persons in our nation now. As stated by The Rev. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, “Our transgender neighbors live in a climate of fear. Transgender women of color are dying on the streets of our cities, and 30 states fail to provide any legal protection for transgender citizens from discrimination in housing, employment or public services. The President has now banned transgender Americans from military service “in any capacity,” including more than 15,000 who are currently serving their country on active or

reserve duty. Discrimination in any form violates our values as followers of Jesus Christ and as Americans who believe in liberty and justice for all. Transgender citizens in uniform have proven time and again their dedication to this country. They deserve our support and respect.”

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

The foundation of human rights derives from the creation narratives of scripture in which human beings are created by God in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus’ public ministry begins with the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus teaches his disciples to hunger and thirst for justice, to be merciful, to be peacemakers, and to accept persecution for the sake of justice (Matt. 5: 6, 7, 9, 10); in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus calls on his disciples to follow the Golden Rule: “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” And, Jesus’ exhorts his disciples to address the needs of the “least” that are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, or in prison (Matthew 25:34-40). The Church acts faithfully when it regards all humans as equal in worth and dignity and when it seeks the just treatment of all in societies and by laws and public authorities.

The message of the Gospel is the lens through which the whole of scripture is to be interpreted. Love and compassion, justice and peace are at the very core of the life and ministry of Jesus. It is a message that always bends toward inclusion. The biblical story recounts the ways in which inclusion and welcome to God’s community is ever-expanding – from the story of Abraham and Sarah, to the inclusive ministry of Jesus, to the baptism of Cornelius, to the missionary journeys of Paul throughout the Greco Roman world. The liberating work of the Spirit as witnessed in the activities of Jesus’ ministry has been to address the situations and structures of exclusion, injustice and oppression that diminish God’s people and keep them from realizing the full gift of human personhood in the context of human communion.