

1 A Resolution on Governance of the
2 National Setting of the United Church of Christ

3
4 (A Prudential Resolution)
5

6 SUBMITTED BY:
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8 The Potomac Association of the Central Atlantic Conference
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10 BRIEF SUMMARY
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12 In light of the actions taken at the March 2009 meetings of the Board of Directors of Justice and
13 Witness Ministries and the Executive Council of the United Church of Christ, this resolution
14 affirms a “pause” in the deliberations around the issues related to the Single Governance model
15 and any proposals until after the Twenty-Seventh General Synod of the United Church of Christ
16 that address matters related to the Single Governance issue.
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18 After the “pause,” all parties engaged in the deliberations and discussions on the Single
19 Governance model should consider how 1) the church takes into account the racial/ethnic health
20 and the inclusion of racial/ethnic constituencies into the whole church and at all levels of
21 deliberation and decision-making; and 2) the church understands the relationship of the
22 historically under-represented groups to the model of representation in the forthcoming
23 governance.
24

25 Also, this resolution affirms that when discussions are resumed in order to complete the Single
26 Governance model that: a.) the discussions will look at other governance models; b.) the
27 recognized racial/ethnic constituency groups will be in those discussions from the beginning; and
28 c.) those representatives will be named by the racial/ethnic constituency groups.
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30 Finally, this resolution calls upon the Collegium of Officers of the United Church of Christ to
31 assess the racial/ethnic health and cohesion of the United Church of Christ and provide further
32 leadership in the UCC's commitment to becoming an Anti-Racist Multiracial and Multicultural
33 Church.
34

35 BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE
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37 In 1993, the 19th General Synod of the United Church of Christ voted to support a
38 Pronouncement and Call for Action called “Becoming a Multiracial and Multicultural Church.”
39 The purpose of this pronouncement was to call upon the UCC in all its settings to be a true
40 multiracial and multicultural church; to encourage the ongoing inclusiveness of our entire faith

41 community; to declare racial, ethnic and cultural diversities as gifts from the God of creation
42 who through Jesus Christ demands love and justice for all peoples; and to become a church that
43 embodies these diversities as gifts to the human family, rejoicing in the variety of God's grace.
44

45 In the book of Genesis (1:27) we are called to recognize the oneness of all humanity created
46 equally in the image of God. In the Gospel of John (17:21) Jesus Christ prayed "that all may be
47 one." Paul reminds us in I Corinthians 12 that we are Christ's body. Each part brings different
48 gifts and is valued and important to the whole. All people of faith with all varieties and
49 diversities of the divine gifts are valued and given weight in decision making.
50

51 In 2003 the 24th General Synod of the UCC voted to support the calling of the UCC to be "an
52 Antiracist Church." Rationale for the call included the recognition that Racism is not something
53 that ends merely with an individual's decision to be nice to all people, trust them without
54 prejudice. Racism is an ongoing institutionalized evil, and as the church, we are called to
55 dismantle this evil and 'establish justice in the gate' (Amos 5:15). If the Church Universal, and
56 the UCC particularly, does not actively work to dismantle racism, then we will be treating the
57 wounds of God's people carelessly, crying "... 'peace, peace' where there is no peace!"
58 (Jeremiah 6:14).
59

60 An Antiracist Multiracial and Multicultural Church sets the "Welcome Table" for all God's
61 daughters and sons...so "that they may all be one". God is Still Speaking in many languages
62 addressing the sin of Racism that continues in justice, isolation and separation, as well as
63 patterns of oppression such as: invalidation, demeaning attitudes, blaming of victims, and
64 silencing voices.
65

66 The prophet Micah is an important guide in becoming an Anti-Racist Multiracial and
67 Multicultural Church. "But God has already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is
68 looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be
69 compassionate and loyal in your love, and don't take yourself too seriously – take God
70 seriously". (Micah 6:8, *The Message*).
71

72 The United Church of Christ's "Call for Sacred Conversations on Race" is a step in the right
73 direction. But these conversations only begin to scratch the surface of the deep hurt, pain and
74 distrust that exists in the structure and life of the UCC. It appears that some amongst us believe
75 that the election of a person of color as President in the United States has ushered us into a post-
76 racial era. We are told that there is the "old way" of doing things which includes organizing and
77 making our voices heard, and the "new way" which is to act as if issues of racism and inclusion
78 are past and done. Some suggest that historic groups and structures, such as COREM (Council
79 for Racial and Ethnic Ministries), may have had their day and that we are in a new era. This
80 appears to be inconsistent with Micah's call to continue the work for justice for our neighbors.

81

82 Micah suggests “Don’t take yourself too seriously”. That does not mean that we do not take
83 others seriously, but rather that we give honor to their witness of their own racial/ethnic
84 experience within our culture, and within our church. We can take God seriously by listening to
85 the Still Speaking God in the voices and experiences of a diverse community of folk in the
86 church. All warrant faithful and serious attention. In the UCC various and diverse groups of
87 faith-filled people speak from their own life experiences and contribute to our understanding of
88 God’s will for the United Church of Christ.

89

90 The “pause” that was agreed to in the national setting of the UCC in its deliberations regarding
91 the future vision, mission and structure is a valuable contribution to doing the important work of
92 listening to all the voices and the healing of the body of Christ.

93

94 In our deliberations and discernment, if we only listen to those who will agree with us, that is
95 clearly dealing from the base of Politics. Theology is trying to hear the voice of God through the
96 diverse and perhaps differing view of all voices, not just ours. Politics seeks to silence the voices
97 of others, whereas theology values the “other” as another expression of the Still Speaking God.

98

99 The UCC has historically sought to be a United and Uniting Church. To the extent that one part
100 of the body is shut down or ignored or demeaned, the whole body becomes unhealthy and
101 disconnected with its capacity and capabilities diminished. Ultimately, limiting one part to bring
102 glory to another part is like muzzling the voice of God. When we close our ears and heart to
103 “others” we close off space for the voice of the Still Speaking God.

104

105 Current attempts by to “bypass” the agreement to “pause,” or to decide on a path without
106 honoring the purpose for the “pause,” ignores the voice of others. Pushing the governance
107 process may cause us to miss the still small voice of the Still-Speaking God who welcomes all.
108 We have said as the United Church of Christ that God is calling us to prepare the Welcome Table
109 of Safe Space, and Sacred Space for Conversations on Race and Racism, where all are welcome
110 regardless of where they are on life’s journey. As Paul says, “The way God designed our bodies
111 is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other
112 part...If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part
113 flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance. You are Christ’s Body –that’s who you
114 are!” (I Cor. 12)

115

116 We are being called to take the time and make the commitment: to do the work of justice, to take
117 all the voices seriously, to listen for the Still-Speaking God, and as the “Pastoral Letter calling
118 for Sacred Conversations on Race reminds us, to “trust in the Spirit of God to do a new thing in
119 our midst.”

120

121 BACKGROUND

122 The deliberations surrounding the proposal for a single governance board within the
123 United Church of Christ have caused some deep divisions, particularly where the racial/ethnic
124 constituency groups have been systemically denied voice and respect for their perspective. If the
125 proposal had passed it would have weakened the Council of Racial Ethnic Ministries (COREM)
126 bodies in their participation in the governance of the church, and by doing so, more than 40 years
127 of a history of inclusion would have been negated. As it stands now the racial/ethnic
128 constituency groups are a part of the United Church of Christ's Constitution and By-Laws and
129 are entrusted with representing the interests of their respective constituencies within the church.
130 Constitutionally these bodies (Ministers for Racial, Social and Economic Justice, the Council on
131 American Indian Ministries; Council of Hispanic Ministries; Pacific Islander and Asian
132 American Ministries; and United Black Christians) are the constitutionally sanctioned and
133 recognized people-of-color organizations within the United Church of Christ.

134 In the debates surrounding single board governance the COREM bodies have consistently
135 and continually raised the issues of credible representation to the Governance Follow-Up Teams
136 I and II (GFT I and GFT II, respectively), but witnessed that those concerns were not being taken
137 into consideration in the construction of a governance proposal.

138 Though there had been telephone conference calls with the COREM constituency groups
139 purporting to take into consideration the concerns and issues of the COREM bodies, it was
140 generally felt that those "conversations" were perfunctory in nature in that a reflection of the
141 issues raised were not seen in the final proposal that went to the Executive Council and the
142 Covenanted Ministry Boards.

143 The COREM bodies attempted to present through the Executive Council, GFT II, and the
144 Board of Directors of Justice and Witness Ministries a proposal that would have allayed some of
145 the concerns felt by the COREM bodies but that proposal was rebuffed. In an Executive Council
146 meeting a council member stood and declared, "What we want are people-of-color who are loyal
147 to the United Church of Christ and not their racial/ethnic group!" This statement summed up
148 some of the concerns the COREM bodies had.

149
150 WHEREAS: Council of Racial Ethnic Ministries (COREM) bodies each come out of a history of
151 increasing their racial/ethnic constituency group's representation in the whole United Church of
152 Christ, representing issues and concerns that are of important value to the respective constituency
153 groups, and advocating those perspectives to the whole church.

154
155 WHEREAS: To be loyal to one's racial/ethnic constituency group does not limit one's loyalty to
156 the whole church. The perspective of racial/ethnic constituency groups are shaped and shaded
157 by culture, history and experiences within the larger society and within the United Church of
158 Christ. The role of the racial/ethnic constituency groups is to make a place for these varied
159 racial/ethnic constituencies and then protecting while expanding their presence and participation

160 within the church. Thereby these ministries and diverse theological, social, and practical
161 expressions of faith are valuable contributions which enhance the whole body of Christ.

162
163 WHEREAS: COREM bodies are part of the current United Church of Christ Constitution and
164 By-Laws, and as such are viewed as legitimate representatives of racial/ethnic issues within the
165 United Church of Christ.

166
167 WHEREAS: The failed single governance proposal claimed that 50% of the seats would be
168 allotted to people-of-color, yet only 10 seats out of approximately 38-39 would have been
169 afforded to the COREM bodies. This pattern is destructive to accountable representation of the
170 racial/ethnic constituencies.

171
172 WHEREAS: The COREM bodies were not just concerned about representation but also about
173 the centralization of power that the single governance system would have advanced. Indeed, a
174 former Executive Minister of Justice and Witness, Bernice Powell Jackson made the same
175 statement in a recent letter released to the Joint Boards and Executive Council Meeting. Also
176 former Executive of the Board for Homeland Ministries, Thomas Dipko, raised the question,
177 “Why should our church, which contributed directly to the shaping of our civil federal
178 government, abandon any differentiation of powers in the national setting of its own life?”

179
180 WHEREAS: GFT I and II claimed they had spoken with former Executives of the church, but in
181 her letter to the joint boards gathered in Cleveland, Bernice Powell Jackson felt that the
182 conversation was perfunctory and the discussion on the proposals completed.

183
184 WHEREAS: Constitution and By-Law changes were proposed to the Joint bodies meeting in
185 Cleveland, Ohio (March 19-21, 2009) and during consideration of those Constitution and By-
186 Law changes, the Board of Directors of Justice and Witness Ministries not only chose to reject
187 the constitution and by-law changes but also did not affirm the single governance proposal being
188 put forward. This action by the Board of Directors of Justice and Witness Ministries was after
189 they had provisionally affirmed the work of the GFT while not endorsing the proposal itself in
190 their meeting on October 25-27, 2007 in Whitakers, North Carolina. In a later Board meeting in
191 New Orleans on October 23-26, 2008, this group voted to affirm the proposal by a narrow vote,
192 and then in the joint meetings (March 19-21, 2009), rejected the proposal by a narrow vote.

193
194 WHEREAS: In the aftermath of the vote by the Board of Directors of Justice and Witness
195 Ministries, the leadership of the church called for a “pause” to the process. Because each board
196 was required to affirm the proposal, this “no” vote should bring a halt further deliberations
197 surrounding the proposal. It is, therefore, important to “pause” and take account of our
198 racial/ethnic health in the United Church of Christ.

199

200 WHEREAS: There were motions presented to the Executive Council (March 23, 2009 –
201 Cleveland, Ohio) that JWM be asked to go back and vote. At the same time there was another
202 proposal that was presented to the Executive Council to give authority to a sub-committee to
203 write the constitution and by-law changes and take them directly to the General Synod this
204 summer. In wisdom the Executive Council rejected these motions, and the Executive Council
205 itself voiced that it was time to take a “pause.”
206

207 WHEREAS: There are resolutions coming from various segments in the church asking the
208 Twenty Seventh General Synod to affirm a single governance structure and discuss proposals on
209 the Single Governance issue within the business of the meeting. This is not in the spirit of the
210 “pause” named by the Executive Council, and it challenges the General Synod to develop a
211 position on the question of governance when the Delegates have not yet been privy to all of the
212 discussions and nuances in these discussions. Such resolutions raise concerns that such
213 proposals have not been properly brought to the various settings of our church, or vetted by our
214 constituent groups, Associations, and Conferences. To place this before Synod at this time
215 widens the divisions and challenges the delegates to Synod to take a position on something that
216 has not been discussed fully at the local church setting.
217

218 WHEREAS: The UCC has historically made commitments through pronouncements and
219 programs to eliminate racism, and decisions made as recently as the 2003 General Synod, that
220 we are called “to become an Anti-Racist Multiracial and Multicultural Church.” The Single
221 Governance process and proposals have not been faithful to the commitments of past General
222 Synods or the public statements of the United Church of Christ .They are in fact a departure from
223 our commitment to be an Anti-Racist, Multiracial and Multicultural church.
224 Therefore, it is time to take seriously the divergent voices, and be one body with many
225 wonderfully unique members.
226

227 RESOLUTION:
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229 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: We, the delegates to the Spring Meeting of the Potomac
230 Association-Central Atlantic Conference, affirm the “pause” of the deliberations around the
231 Single Governance model until the completion of Twenty-Seventh General Synod, during which
232 time we can begin to take account of where we are in our racial/ethnic health and the inclusion of
233 racial/ethnic constituencies into the deliberation and decision-making necessary to the
234 restructuring of the National Setting of the United Church of Christ.
235

236 ALSO, be it resolved: We, the delegates to the Spring Meeting of the Potomac Association,
237 affirm the March 2009 action of the Board of Directors of Justice and Witness Ministries and
238 acknowledge that democracy is cumbersome at best, and yet its cumbersome nature is what we

239 hold dear so that voices can be heard and the minority is not subjected to the tyranny of the
240 majority.

241
242 ALSO, be it resolved: We, the delegates to the Spring Meeting of the Potomac Association
243 affirm that when further discussions take place around governance: a.) the discussions will look
244 at other governance models; b.) the recognized racial/ethnic constituency groups will be in those
245 discussions from the beginning; and c.) those representatives will be named by the racial/ethnic
246 constituency groups. We affirm the COREM bodies and acknowledge that they are the bodies
247 recognized in our church as representing the racial/ethnic constituencies within the United
248 Church of Christ and should be given great weight in decision-making within all settings of the
249 church. This is our commitment in the journey of becoming an Anti- Multiracial and
250 Multicultural Church.

251
252 FURTHER, be it resolved: that respecting that the Board of Directors of Justice and Witness
253 Ministries voted to reject the proposal developed by Governance Team II, and in its wisdom the
254 Executive Council called for a “pause” regarding consideration of further actions related to a
255 Single Governance for the United Church of Christ, the Potomac Association calls upon the
256 Twenty-Seventh General Synod of the United Church of Christ to honor this “pause,” by
257 refraining from any deliberations around the Single Governance model during the plenary
258 sessions of the Twenty-Seventh General Synod.

259
260 ALSO, be it resolved: that the Collegium of Officers of the United Church of Christ assess the
261 racial/ethnic health and cohesion of the United Church of Christ and provide further leadership in
262 the UCC's commitment to becoming an Anti-Racist Multiracial and Multicultural Church.

263
264 FUNDING:

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

268
269 IMPLEMENTATION:

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271 Executive Council and the Boards of the Covenanted Ministries are requested to implement this
272 resolution.