

**RESOLUTION URGING DIVESTMENT – ALONG WITH OTHER STRATEGIES --  
FROM FOSSIL FUEL COMPANIES**  
**Submitted by the Massachusetts Conference, the Southwest Conference,  
the New York Conference and the Central Atlantic Conference UCC**

**A Resolution of Witness**

9 **SUMMARY**

10 The realities of climate change require prophetic and strategic action by people of faith seeking to be  
11 faithful to the everlasting covenant God has made with us, with every living creature and with all future  
12 generations. If fossil fuel companies simply fulfill their purpose the earth will become inhospitable to life  
13 as we know it. This resolution urges all entities of the UCC along with individual members and those  
14 affiliated with the UCC to divest from fossil fuel companies. Enacting this resolution is part of a world-  
15 wide movement. Along with additional strategies, this resolution seeks to inspire and accelerate an  
16 unswerving commitment – as stated in the UCC’s Core Purpose – to “the co-creation of a just and  
17 sustainable world as made manifest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

18 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE**

19 The actions this resolution recommends are rooted in and an expression of several of our most  
20 foundational theological and biblical principles.

21 In Genesis 9, God makes a covenant not only with Noah, but with all of humanity; a covenant not only  
22 with all of humanity, but with every living creature; a covenant not only with all creatures alive today, but  
23 with all future generations. In addition to the breadth of God’s inclusive love, God extends that love to  
24 future generations. As covenant partners, God calls us to do likewise. It is now clear that the past few  
25 generations of humans have burned so much of the earth’s energy reserves that we are on the verge of  
26 rendering the earth inhospitable for life as we have known it for all of recorded history. By any measure,  
27 this is a violation of covenant.

28 We live out God’s inclusive love by following the most basic moral instruction of both the New  
29 Testament and Hebrew scriptures (Mark 12:31; Matthew 22:39; Luke 10:27; Leviticus 19:18) – a moral  
30 instruction found at the core of every world religion: We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves. In  
31 keeping with God’s covenant, and because our actions will have significant consequences for future  
32 generations, we must recognize that future generations are no less our neighbors than those who live next  
33 door to us today. You might think of this as “Golden Rule 2.0.”<sup>1</sup>

34 Few take issue with Paul’s advice to the Christians in Corinth when he declares that *love* is the greatest  
35 gift (I Cor. 13:13). And the most quoted verse in scripture, John 3:16, reminds us that God loves the  
36 *world!* Let us remember, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” (Gen.  
37 1:31)

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<sup>1</sup> In his blog, Andrew Revkin quotes novelist Jostein Gaarder, using this phrase in speaking about intergenerational responsibility <http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/25/do-humans-need-a-golden-rule-2-0/?partner=rss&emc=rss>

38 In his letter to the Christians in Colossae, Paul states that through Christ, God was pleased to reconcile all  
39 things to God's self. (Colossians 1:20) Nothing is left out. Desmond Tutu refers to the act of reconciling  
40 us to all of God's creation as "Christ's supreme work."<sup>2</sup> To put it in economic terms, with God, there are  
41 no externalities. All things must be reconciled – the entirety of our activity must be accounted for.

42 We have a long way to go before the promise of reconciliation is realized. Through many resolutions  
43 over decades, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ has recognized what Ecumenical  
44 Patriarch Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians, declares boldly: that  
45 wrecking creation is a sin.<sup>3</sup> Many of these resolutions also decry the unjust, disproportionate impact  
46 climate change is already having on those living in poverty and in the least developed countries, the  
47 elderly and children and those least responsible for the emissions of greenhouse gases.<sup>4</sup> For these and  
48 other reasons, the United Church of Christ is ever more committed to care for God's creation. This can be  
49 seen in the recently (2012) articulated Core Purpose of the United Church of Christ: "... we serve God in  
50 the co-creation of a just and sustainable world as made manifest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

## 51 **BACKGROUND**

### 52 **WHAT IS THE SCIENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE?**<sup>5</sup>

53 Since the beginning of human civilization up until about 200 years ago, our atmosphere contained about  
54 275 parts per million of carbon dioxide. The discovery of oil, the beginning of the industrial age, and  
55 rapidly increasing population growth brought increased energy demands and improved techniques to tap  
56 into the earth's carbon reserves (oil, coal, gas), reserves which took nature hundreds of millions of years  
57 to create. These are the major factors causing the amount of carbon in the atmosphere to rise to its current  
58 level (2012) of 392ppm of CO<sub>2</sub>. Climate scientists agree that 350ppm of CO<sub>2</sub> is the safe upper limit for  
59 CO<sub>2</sub> in earth's atmosphere.

60 Because CO<sub>2</sub> traps heat in our atmosphere, this rise in CO<sub>2</sub> has resulted in a global temperature rise of 0.8  
61 degrees Celsius causing far more damage than most scientists expected. (A third of summer sea ice in the  
62 Arctic is gone, the oceans are 30 percent more acidic, and since warm air holds more water vapor than  
63 cold, the atmosphere over the oceans is a shocking five percent wetter, loading the dice for devastating  
64 floods.) May 2012 was the 327<sup>th</sup> consecutive month in which the temperature of the entire globe  
65 exceeded the 20th-century average.

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<sup>2</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his "Forward" to *The Green Bible NRSV* (Harper Collins, New York; 2008), p. I-14.

<sup>3</sup> Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, "To Commit a Crime Against the Natural World is a Sin" in *Moral Ground – Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril* (Trinity University Press, San Antonio, TX; 2010), pp. 135-136.

<sup>4</sup> The recent DARA [report](#) links climate change to 5 million deaths/yr (400,000 due to hunger & disease; 4.5 million to (air) pollution from the carbon economy), and 1.6% of global GDP (1.2 trillion dollars). Unjustly and unethically, the very poor of the world are suffering by far the most from our excesses.

<sup>5</sup> The most useful source for learning about climate science and issues related to this resolution is Joe Romm's website: <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/issue/> .

66 What must also be taken into consideration is that previously released carbon continues to overheat the  
67 atmosphere. Thus, climate models calculate that even if we stopped increasing CO<sub>2</sub> now, the temperature  
68 would likely still rise another 0.8 degrees Celsius.

69 In 2009, world leaders and climate scientists gathered in Copenhagen. 167 countries (including the  
70 United States) responsible for more than 87 percent of the world's carbon emissions signed on to the  
71 Copenhagen Accord, which declared: "We agree that deep cuts in global emissions are required... so as to  
72 hold the increase in global temperature below 2° Celsius." While this global consensus is remarkable,  
73 many scientists have come to think that 2° Celsius is far too lenient a target. For example, NASA scientist  
74 James Hansen, the planet's most prominent climatologist, says, "The target that has been talked about in  
75 international negotiations for 2°C of warming is actually a prescription for long-term disaster."

76 Having raised the global thermometer almost 1° Celsius, we've experienced the worst drought since the  
77 dust bowl, \$40-\$60 billion of damages from hurricane Sandy, Arctic sea ice is disappearing much faster  
78 than any scientific model has predicted, and Munich Re, the world's largest reinsurance company, has  
79 released a report based on its natural catastrophe database — the most comprehensive of its kind in the  
80 world — that concludes: a) global warming is driving an increase in weather-related disasters; and b)  
81 "North America is the continent with the largest increases in disasters."<sup>6</sup>

82 If an increase of less than 1° Celsius has resulted in these (and other) devastations, it's hard to  
83 comprehend what life will be like when we reach 2° Celsius. And yet, over the past several years, as  
84 climate models improve, the predictions developed by climate scientists have become more and more  
85 dire.<sup>7</sup> Many scientists now believe that before the end of the century, CO<sub>2</sub> will reach 866ppm, and global  
86 temperature will rise over 5° Celsius.<sup>8</sup>

87 One thing is for sure: it is critically important for humanity to leave as much of the earth's carbon reserves  
88 as possible in the ground. The math is simple.<sup>9</sup> We can release up to 565 more gigatons of carbon  
89 dioxide by burning fossil fuels and stay below 2°C of warming. If we burn more than that, we risk  
90 catastrophe for life on earth. The problem is that fossil fuel corporations now have 2,795 gigatons in their  
91 reserves – five times the safe amount.<sup>10</sup> If fossil fuel companies simply carry out their stated missions by

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2012/10/10/weather-disasters-climate-change-munich-re-report/1622845/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2009/05/20/204131/mit-doubles-global-warming-projections-2/> .  
<http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/sustainability/publications/low-carbon-economy-index/index.ihtml> . And the World Bank  
released a report in late Nov. 2012 entitled: "[Tu rn D o w n t h e H e a t : W h y a 4 ° C W a r m e r W o r l d M u s t B e A v  
o i d e d , "](http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/sustainability/publications/low-carbon-economy-index/index.ihtml)" .

<sup>8</sup> See 2009 MIT report: <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2009/05/20/204131/mit-doubles-global-warming-projections-2/>  
and 2012 Price Waterhouse Coopers report: [http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2012/11/06/1144431/study-were-headed-to-  
11f-warming-and-even-7f-requires-nearly-quadrupling-the-current-rate-of-decarbonisation/](http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2012/11/06/1144431/study-were-headed-to-11f-warming-and-even-7f-requires-nearly-quadrupling-the-current-rate-of-decarbonisation/)

<sup>9</sup> See Bill McKibben's August 2012 article: [http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-  
math-20120719](http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719)

<sup>10</sup> [The Carbon Tracker Initiative](http://www.carbontracker.com/), a team of London financial analysts and environmentalists, estimates that proven  
coal, oil, and gas reserves of the fossil-fuel companies, and the countries (think Venezuela or Kuwait) that act like  
fossil-fuel companies, equals about 2,795 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>, or five times the amount we can release to maintain 2  
degrees of warming.

92 utilizing the known reserves they currently own or have rights to, the earth will become inhospitable to  
93 life as we know it.

#### 94 WHAT TO DO?

95 The enormity of this challenge demands that the human community engage numerous strategies. For  
96 example, we must encourage political leaders to enact laws that will lead to a sustainable planet. In April  
97 2012, the UCC's Mission 4/1 Earth's 100,000 advocacy letters are doing just that. We can also encourage  
98 political leaders to take a stand on behalf of a sustainable planet. The massive civil disobedience in  
99 August 2011 that resulted in President Obama halting – at least temporarily – the Keystone XL pipeline  
100 did just that.

101 This resolution is part of a worldwide movement which focuses on leaving as much of the earth's carbon  
102 reserves as possible in the ground. As part of that worldwide campaign, this resolution proposes that all  
103 UCC entities, along with individuals affiliated with the UCC, divest from fossil fuel companies.

#### 104 WHY DIVESTMENT?

105 In 1983-1989 General Synod passed numerous resolutions<sup>11</sup> committing the various corporate expressions  
106 of the UCC to divest from companies doing business with South Africa. Their action began as a  
107 prophetic witness. But once thousands of institutions and individuals joined together to divest from  
108 companies doing business in South Africa, Apartheid came to an end.

109 Following that path, what begins as a prophetic act of divestment from fossil fuel companies will:

- 110 a) drive public awareness of the incalculable damage being done by the fossil fuel industry as it generates  
111 huge immediate profits in exchange for an uninhabitable future;
- 112 b) build public recognition of the urgent need to drastically and rapidly reduce humanity's dependence on  
113 fossil fuels;
- 114 c) call widespread attention to the consequences of continuing a "business as usual" approach to  
115 extracting, marketing and burning fossil fuel;
- 116 d) lead to inspiring an urgent, accelerated and popular commitment to leave untapped 80% of the known  
117 carbon reserves,<sup>12</sup> while developing renewable energy resources capable of meeting humanity's needs –  
118 thus making it possible that life as we have known it might continue on God's good earth.

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The International Energy Agency released its annual flagship publication the [World Energy Outlook](#) on Nov. 12, 2012. In the executive summary, the IEA roughly concurred, saying, "No more than one-third of proven reserves of fossil fuels can be consumed prior to 2050 if the world is to achieve the 2 °C goal."

<sup>11</sup> 1983: The Fourteenth General Synod adopts as amended the Resolution on Investment and Corporate Responsibility with Regards to South Africa.

1985: The Fifteenth General Synod adopts the Proposal for Action "UCC Full Divestment of All Financial Resources from All Corporations Doing Business with South Africa."

1987: The Sixteenth General Synod adopts "Expanded Criteria for Divestment and Advocacy Related to South Africa" as amended.

1989: The Seventeenth General Synod adopts the Resolution "Boycott of Royal Dutch/Shell Oil," as amended.

<sup>12</sup> The total known reserves are worth about [\\$27 trillion](#). If we need to keep 80 percent of those reserves in the ground, that's a \$20 trillion write off for the industry.

119 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

120 WHEREAS, the leaders of 167 countries (including the United States) have agreed that any warming of  
121 the planet above a 2°C (3.6°F) rise would be unsafe, and we have already (as of 2012) raised the  
122 temperature 0.8°C, causing far more damage than most scientists expected; and

123 WHEREAS, computer models show that even if we stopped increasing CO<sub>2</sub> levels now, the temperature  
124 would continue to rise another 0.8°C, bringing the planet over three-quarters of the way to the 2°C limit;  
125 and

126 WHEREAS, scientists estimate that humans can pour roughly 565 more gigatons of carbon dioxide into  
127 the atmosphere and still have some reasonable hope of staying below 2°C; and

128 WHEREAS the proven coal, oil, and gas reserves of the fossil-fuel companies, and the countries (e.g.  
129 Venezuela or Kuwait) which act like fossil-fuel companies equals about 2,795 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>, or five  
130 times the amount we can release to maintain a 2°C limit of planetary warming; and

131 WHEREAS the purpose of fossil fuel companies is to make money for their shareholders by providing for  
132 the energy needs of the world using the resources they currently own or have rights to tap – and if they  
133 simply continue to carry out this purpose, they will raise the temperature of the earth far beyond what is  
134 hospitable for life as we know it; and

135 WHEREAS, because we are a covenant people and affirm Jesus’ call to love our neighbors as ourselves,  
136 we join God in recognizing our moral obligation to take into account how our decisions and activities  
137 affect all of creation now and into the future; and

138 WHEREAS even though God loved the world and called it very good, humanity’s normal, everyday  
139 activity is putting God’s world in jeopardy; and

140 WHEREAS over the past five or more decades, many bodies of the United Church of Christ, including  
141 the General Synod on numerous occasions, have recognized our moral obligation to be faithful stewards  
142 of God’s creation as well as acknowledging, in one way or another, that wrecking creation is a sin; and

143 WHEREAS the Core Purpose of the United Church of Christ states (in part): “... we serve God in the co-  
144 creation of a just and sustainable world as made manifest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ,”

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<sup>13</sup> The current list of 200 coal, oil and gas companies can be found here:

<http://www.carbontracker.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/08/Unburnable-Carbon-Full1.pdf>

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ raises its prophetic voice regarding the urgency of healing the climate of the earth, our home and God's gift for the future of all life, both human and all other life,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon all Members, Local Churches, Associations, Conferences, Agencies, Associated, Affiliated and Covenanted Ministries (and their successor bodies) to —

- a) Commit to using a spectrum of strategies to reduce the use of fossil fuels, our carbon footprint, and our complicity with the fossil fuel industry
  - make lifestyle changes to reduce the use of fossil fuels in our lives, our homes, our businesses and our churches
  - demand action from legislators and advocate for the creation and enforcement of carbon-reducing laws
  - publicly witness to and create educational programs that highlight the dangers of climate change
  - engage in activities, boycotts, and shareholder actions with companies, up to and including divestment
- b) Make shareholder engagement on climate change an immediate, top priority for the next five years by:
  - demanding transparency regarding climate change legislation lobbying,
  - insisting that companies' operations and products conform to achieve the goal of scientifically understood safe levels of CO<sub>2</sub> and methane, and
  - requiring companies to examine and disclose their carbon assets that are at risk of being stranded in the event of a carbon tax or some other executive or legislative action.
- c) Seek out fossil-fuel free investment vehicles and call on both United Church Funds and the Pension Boards to create and promote an investment vehicle free of fossil fuel companies for qualified investors within 18 months.
- d) As a way to maintain the trajectory of accomplishments of the 4/1 Earth campaign, report updates on progress made and actions taken in the implementation of this resolution that will be sent to a national UCC database to be established immediately by the United Church of Christ Board.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon both United Church Funds and the Pension Boards to accomplish the following to the fullest extent allowable by applicable law –

- a) By Synod 2015, complete whatever research is necessary to identify "best in class" fossil fuel companies (if any); to report these findings to Synod in 2015, along with a plan whereby, by June 2018, none of either the Pension Boards nor UCF directly held assets will include holdings of either public equities or corporate bonds in fossil fuel companies except those either the Pension Boards or UCF identifies as "best in class." This research process should be conducted on a periodic basis and the research metrics used should continually reference the newest climate science as a permanent way to analyze fossil fuel companies. The Pension Boards and UCF should hold in their portfolios only those companies that they deem "best in class."
- b) Report actions taken as a result of this research to the United Church of Christ Board on an annual

basis to be shared with future General Synod delegates. These actions should always be compatible with a “just and sustainable world”, as identified by the Core Purpose of the United Church of Christ.

c) Provide quarterly updates, available to the public, detailing research undertaken, progress made and actions taken in the implementation of this resolution to the national database created by the United Church of Christ Board. Whenever possible, communicate these actions to the media to hasten the revocation of the social license which the fossil fuel companies depend on to stay in business.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ commits each of the next five General Synods to hold a hearing focusing on climate change; progress made by UCF, the Pension Boards, and other UCC entities to fulfill this resolution; and how the vocation of the church is and must change in the context of climate change.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ to inform those fossil fuel companies of the passage and implementation of this resolution.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ asks the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ to engage leaders of other religious traditions and relevant organizations to explore ways that they and their constituents might join the UCC in this action.

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ remains profoundly concerned about the disproportionate impact climate change is already having on those living in poverty and in the least developed countries, the elderly and children and those least responsible for the emissions of greenhouse gases, and recognizes the moral mandate for humanity to shift to a sustainable energy plan in a way that is both just and compassionate.

#### **FUNDING**

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

#### **IMPLEMENTATION**

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