

Ministering to Those Struggling and Suffering in the Troubled Economy  
(A Prudential Resolution)

A resolution presented to the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ by the Prophetic Integrity Mission Area Team for approval and to be forwarded to the General Synod.

Summary:

Our Christian faith compels us to be good neighbors to those in need. Today, especially in response to the problems issuing from the national and global recession, the church is called on to reach out to those who have been adversely affected in the troubled economy. As the 27<sup>th</sup> General Synod of the United Church of Christ convenes in Grand Rapids, Michigan in June/July of 2009, the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ calls on the General Synod to be in prayer with all those who are suffering in these times, and in particular in recognition of the fact that the people of Michigan are among those who have been severely affected by the crisis. Furthermore, this resolution asks the 27<sup>th</sup> General Synod to call on the national bodies of the United Church of Christ and its Conferences, Associations and local churches to envision, encourage, support and strengthen outreach ministries that serve those in distress due to issues such as unemployment, bankruptcy, dislocation, hunger, illness and financial problems.

Biblical and Theological Foundation

As people of the Book, Christians have always understood that concern for the well-being of others is fundamental to the nature of God and the moral character to be nourished in God's people. Biblical examples can be found in every saga of salvation history. It was God who testified to Moses, "I have observed the misery of my people... Indeed, I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them..." (Exodus 3:7, 8). During the exodus sojourn, God instructed the Hebrews to designate six cities as "cities of refuge" where the refugee could find safe haven (Numbers 35:9-15). The ideal practice of designating every 50<sup>th</sup> year a time of jubilee, as expressed in the Leviticus codes, mandated that debt be cancelled and land released and returned to the original owners (Leviticus 25).

Psalms 146:9 declared that "God watches over the strangers and upholds the orphan and the widow." The prophets applied this covenant of care to all of Israel calling for distributive justice and demonstrated equity from the greatest to the least. Jeremiah was ashamed that so many of the people "from the least to the greatest of them... is greedy for unjust gain; from prophet to priest everyone deals falsely." (Jeremiah 6:13). Amos spoke of establishing justice in the gates of the cities (5:15) and declared that justice must roll down like waters (5:24). Isaiah was inspired to call for the renewal of Israel's faithfulness after its captivity, based on the rules of justice and mercy.

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness... Your ancient ruins will be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. (Isaiah 58:9b-12)

Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) was one of Christ's most memorable examples of a great reversal in consciousness. Debating who was or who was not a neighbor had no merit. Instead the work of the faithful one is to be the caring one who comes to the aid of anyone on one's path. Jesus path was the way of love as the good neighbor for all whether friend or enemy. In one of his final teachings, the story of the final judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), Jesus made these teachings tangible in equating eternal blessings with direct care and concern for the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick and imprisoned.

This good news was practiced in the early church even as the Acts of the Apostles described the community as having one heart and mind so that no one was in need (Acts 4:32-35). In the letter of James this apostle of the early church declared that faith without works is dead and wrote of caring for the poor, homeless, and hungry as the real work of the church (James 2:14-18). Paul, in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Corinthians suggested that those who would not share their bread with the needy in the community of faith were not worthy to receive the Lord's Supper themselves (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:17-22).

In the history of the church and the heritage of the United Church of Christ concern for the health, welfare, and safety of others has been great. Schools, hospitals, homes for the aged, human service agencies, orphanages, day care centers, pre-schools, community development organizations, shelters, food banks and many additional ministries have helped define the way of faithfulness and make Christ's spirit known generation after generation. The pursuit of social justice, political action and advocacy have likewise brought Christ's voice into the public arena to shape a more just society.

However, today there are economic and human welfare problems facing people that are among the greatest in many years. These issues are among the worst since the great depression. The church is called to respond in prayer, spiritual and congregational refreshment, in human service and in social action. Even as social justice is pursued, because the problems are unprecedented in these days the church is compelled to reach out to those in need with equally compelling urgency.

## Resolution

01 Whereas, the nation is facing economic problems of crisis proportions;  
02 Whereas, the General Synod is meeting in Michigan, whose citizens are among those  
03 adversely affected, with the loss of 700,000 jobs in the last seven years, with the highest  
04 unemployment rate in the nation and with the metropolitan areas among the most distressed in  
05 the nation; Whereas, people everywhere are losing jobs, being forced into foreclosure on  
06 homes, carrying heavy debts, going without health insurance, seeing retirement savings  
07 disappear, and facing poverty, dislocation and hunger.

**08 THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Michigan Conference of the United Church of  
09 Christ calls on the 27<sup>th</sup> General Synod to be in prayer and solidarity with those who struggle  
10 and are suffering due to the nation's economic crisis.

**11 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Synod recognizes it is meeting in the State of  
12 Michigan among those who are bearing especially heavy burdens in the economic crisis, and  
13 pledges to hold these people, and all those adversely affected in prayers.

**14 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Synod asks the national bodies of the United  
15 Church of Christ and its Conferences, Associations and local churches to undertake renewed  
16 efforts to envision, encourage, support and strengthen spiritual refreshment and outreach  
17 ministries that serve those in distress due to issues such as unemployment, bankruptcy,  
18 dislocation, hunger, illness, and financial problems. To the end the following actions are  
19 encouraged:

20 1. That the United Church of Christ at the national setting develop a web-based  
21 clearing house describing a full spectrum of human service and outreach  
22 ministries and programs that are being and may be pursued or duplicated  
23 throughout the Conferences, Associations and local churches of our United  
24 Church of Christ in order to help and serve people who are suffering in the  
25 economic crisis.

26 2. That each congregation in the United Church of Christ be urged to respond  
27 to the economic crisis by implementing additional ministries and programs for the  
28 unemployed, dislocated, indebted, hungry and distressed in their churches and  
29 communities.

30 3. That each congregation in the United Church of Christ be urged to undertake  
31 teaching ministries that encourage the adoption of simpler, just, debt-free and  
32 sustainable lifestyles for those in the churches and communities.

**33 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that this prudential resolution, calling for an increase in  
34 direct and charitable actions to serve those who are struggling and suffering in the current  
35 economic crises, also recognizes and supports the mandate of the national bodies of the  
36 United Church of Christ and its Conferences, Associations and local churches to seek social  
37 justice through political action and advocacy to likewise bring Christ's voice into the public  
38 arena to shape a more just society.

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

**IMPLEMENTATION:** The Proclamation, Identity, and Communication Ministry of the Office of General Ministries and Justice and Witness Ministries are requested to collaborate and implement this resolution.

This resolution is co-sponsored by the Reverend David Wheeler, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Rochester, MI and General Synod delegates of the Michigan Conference United Church of Christ; The Reverends Julie Jenuwine-Otto, Roger Pancost, Mary Alice Purcell, and Kurt Stutz.