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

STEWARDSHIP OF EXHIBIT SPACE AS A RESOURCE FOR A MISSION OF JUSTICE

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted By Michigan Conference

SUMMARY
The General Synod of the United Church of Christ gathers every biennium to “Be the Church”: protecting the environment, caring for the poor, forgiving often, rejecting racism, fighting for the powerless, embracing diversity, loving God.

The Exhibit Hall and display spaces at General Synod are an important part of the Church’s witness, reflecting our denominational values and offering ways to further the Church’s mission of justice. Stewardship of such exhibit space should be promoted fully and practiced faithfully.

What happens, however, when displays are not in keeping with actions of the church, in particular regarding LGBTQ members? This resolution seeks to ensure displays consistent with denominational declarations, and would define Exhibit Hall practices in alignment with the core values and past resolutions of the United Church of Christ.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE:
The 14th General Synod of the United Church of Christ called for dismantling the “Institutionalized Homophobia within the United Church of Christ.”

The 18th General Synod adopted the “Resolution Affirming Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Persons and their Ministries.”

The 19th General Synod adopted the “Resolution Calling on the Church for Greater Leadership to End Discrimination against Gays and Lesbians.”

The 24th General Synod adopted a resolution “Affirming the Participation and Ministry of Transgender People within the United Church of Christ and Supporting Civil and Human Rights” and a 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.”

The 25th General Synod passed the resolution, “Equal Marriage Rights for All,” which included this broad affirmation: “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.”

Marriage rights are now the law, but under attack; other civil rights are still tenuous or non-
existent. The political and religious right continues to work to circumvent existing law, to deny
and delimit the rights and privileges of LGBTQ people. Transgender persons, especially, face
escalating violence in America. The Rev. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President of
the United Church of Christ, has said, “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. Discrimination in any form violates our values as followers of Jesus Christ and
as Americans who believe in liberty and justice for all.”

The United Church of Christ, in its Synod Resolutions and public witness over many years, has
affirmed life, celebrated welcome, and expressed solidarity.

Yet, with all of those affirmations behind us, the delegates and visitors of the 31st General Synod
entered the Exhibit Hall in Baltimore two years ago greeted by an organization that opposes civil
rights and full ecclesiastical inclusion for LGBTQ members. It was a painful time, an affront to
all for which we have worked, fought and died through the years. It was an attack on all LGBTQ
members, visitors, guests, loved ones, friends and supporters.

This resolution seeks to take the next bold and logical step: a call to stewardship.

When we have defined our mission, as the United Church of Christ has in these many resolutions
and affirmations, we must ask ourselves how we will align our behaviors with our mission. That
is “to what degree we will dedicate our resources to meaning it?” This resolution is about clarity
of mission, about devoting our resources to that which we believe.

In the United Church of Christ, as other denominations, we teach stewardship as a faithful
consideration of how we devote our entire lives to the way of Jesus as we understand and express
it. We, the United Church of Christ, have articulated our belief that the way of Jesus includes
welcome of LGBTQ members, worshippers and leaders. Our stewardship must reflect that.

Stewardship, in the language of scripture and the church, is about faithful allocation and use of
all that is available to us, the presumption that everything we have belongs to God and is offered
back to God for the righteous and prophetic work of welcoming the in-breaking reign of God,
building the kin-dom among us. If our primary work of faith is community building, we cannot
allow bullies and naysayers to crowd out the marginalized.

Eugene Grimm wrote of stewardship and the oikonomos, the economy, of God, “While that
management has a financial dimension, it also includes responsibility for everything in the
household. A manager cares for, protects, conducts, and administers. Christian stewards … are
the trustees of an enormous God-given estate.” He defines stewardship as “the way we use
resources God has entrusted to us for the purposes to which God has called us.” Grimm cites 1
Peter 4:10: “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” Stewards of the grace of God, we are responsible for living that grace by faithful use of all the gifts at our hands. (Generous People, 1992.)

John Reumann’s survey of the concept of stewardship over the ages likewise “denotes responsibility for resources and a sense of well-being about what was entrusted to them” (Stewardship and the Economy of God, 1992).

He found it is “not merely a scheme to raise money for the church, but a means of actively entering into partnership with God… the noblest expression of the Christian ideal.” The word ‘stewardship’ also is applied to ethics and how one arranges conduct, and specifically used in cases when someone appeared to be doing one thing but intended something else. Reumann further notes that Douglas John Hall has described stewardship as a means of commitment to the care of the world, with the first priority getting rid of ambiguity.

Stewardship cannot mean simply offering 10 percent as a tithe, but then failing to account for the other 90 percent. Stewardship is about realizing that 100 percent of what we have is to reflect what we believe. This is why we believe and teach that how we vote, what we buy or boycott, what we eat or refuse to eat, where we live, what jobs we take or forego, how we devote our time, what relationships we enter or avoid – all is to reflect a life of faith. To be sure, there is a great deal of leeway in a life of faith, as well as a great deal of not living up to the highest ideals, but we subjects of the Most High God are likewise subject to a high call to reflect on the consistency of witness, and we face a high bar of accountability for the ways we devote our resources. We cannot speak of one high ideal while simultaneously spending our money undermining that same ideal. This is the very definition of integrity: what we say we believe reflected in what we do.

So then, if we the Church say, for example, that black lives matter, you would not expect to find us speaking in racist language, holding gatherings in ‘whites only’ venues, elevating only white people to positions of authority, inviting avowed racists into our pulpits or applauding secular systems that demean or debilitate People of Color. Nor would you expect to find a table in the exhibit hall here that proliferates anti-black materials. Such a table would be anathema to our mission, and would undermine the integrity of our welcome. We simply would not allow it.

Some will say no doubt that ‘welcoming all people’ must include welcoming those whose opinions vary. Yes. They are welcome to be in community. But hospitality does not require that we allow any person or group to use our space to undermine our mission, to recruit for their own discriminatory purposes. When we dedicate our resources, we do so single-mindedly. We do not turn on the winter heat then leave open a window to undo the work of heating. Such behavior would be irresponsible and counterproductive. Rather, we seek integrity, focus, clarity of purpose.

Walter Brueggemann quotes Isaiah 11:5 (“Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist and faithfulness the belt around his loins”) as a stewardship passage. “This messiah dresses for his work… puts on the clothes that announce the program for (growing) the shoot from the stump:
a belt marked righteousness… a second, lower belt marked faithfulness. Honoring his new dress
code, all will know that resources can indeed be redeployed in genuinely covenantal ways.” iii

We are covenantal people desiring to use our resources in covenantal ways.

This resolution asks us to consider, among our resources, the space in our exhibit hall during this
Synod and other gatherings as an extension of our public witness, to declare that our exhibit hall
shall be safe space unavailable to any group that has a mission opposed to the affirmations of the
United Church of Christ. We will require in this space the unified voice of welcome that we
cherish; no mixed messages and no means for harm: “The noblest expression of the Christian
ideal.”

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS: The United Church of Christ is a denomination that welcomes and accepts
everyone as they are, where our minds are nourished as much as our souls;

AND WHEREAS: The United Church of Christ believes in extravagant welcome and
advocates justice for all;

AND WHEREAS: The United Church of Christ affirms that churches must be places of vitality
in worship, learning and advocacy;

AND WHEREAS: The United Church of Christ believes God calls the church to speak truth to
power, liberate the oppressed, care for the poor and comfort the afflicted;

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

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

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

AND WHEREAS: the organizers and representatives of those who call themselves the Faithful
and Welcoming Churches (FWC) continue to categorize sexual orientation and gender identity as
issues of unholy choice rather than reflections of the image of God, as expressed in these notes
and objectives from its own promotional materials at FWC Synod display table and the website

www.faithfulandwelcoming.org:

- The declaration: “We call the church to prayer for the purity, preservation of the family, and to the practice and proclamation of human sexuality as God’s gift for marriage between a man and a woman;”
- Its stated objective: “Form networks of churches, laity, and clergy committed to the vision of FWC;”
- Counsel to congregations “Change your church’s by-laws to disallow avowed practicing homosexuals as clergy and disallow same sex marriages and civil unions in the church;” and “Consider redirecting or designating funds marked for the UCC;”
- A recommended litmus test for Congregations interviewing clergy candidates: “Would you consent to officiate at same sex civil unions or same sex marriage ceremonies?”;


i General Synod Minutes 2005 Twenty Fifth General Synod of the UCC, Pages 30-31
ii https://openandaffirming.org/joint-coalition-ucc-statement-on-trans-military-ban/