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

RESOLUTION Calling for the United States to pull “Back From The Brink” and Prevent Nuclear War

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by: First Churches of Northampton, UCC&ABC, Northampton, MA; West Cummington Congregational Church, UCC, West Cummington MA; First Congregational Church, UCC, Ashfield, MA; Haydenville Congregational Church, UCC, Haydenville, MA; Christ Congregational Church, UCC, Princeton, NJ; and Saint Andrew Church, UCC, Sarasota, FL.

SUMMARY This resolution is offered in response to increasing international concern over the threat of nuclear war and the moral threat inherent in the existence of nuclear weapons. The expiration of nuclear treaties between the U.S. and Russia, as well as studies into the grave humanitarian impact of even a limited nuclear strike contribute to a growing urgency to address the crisis of nuclear weapons. This resolution calls on the United Church of Christ to strengthen its historic work for a world free of nuclear weapons by endorsing the Back from the Brink Campaign (BFTB) and its five principles, and issue a call for United States to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons called for in the campaign.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE As Christians, we are followers of Jesus who taught that the two greatest commandments are to love God with our heart, soul, strength and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:27). In the biblical narrative, Jesus called his followers to show kindness and care to the “least of these” for in doing so, we care for him (Matthew 25:35-36). God’s shalom, God’s peace, is a gift given to humanity (John 14:27) to be lived out in friendship and covenant with all God’s people. The use of nuclear weapons is the ultimate refusal to embrace and follow these foundational commandments and teachings of our faith.

MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY The United Church of Christ has spoken throughout its history against the production, testing, sale, and use of nuclear weapons. In 1959, the General Synod addressed nuclear weapons by calling on churches and their members to work “For effective international control and reduction of all national armaments, including the testing of nuclear weapons.” (A Call to Christian Action in Society). In 1985, the United Church of Christ’s Pronouncement on Affirming the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace Church declared its “opposition to all weapons of mass destruction” and called all nations to: “(1) declare that they will never use such weapons; (2) cease immediately the testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons; (3) begin dismantling these arsenals, and; (4) while the process of dismantling is going on, negotiate comprehensive treaties banning all such future weapons by any nation.” The 32nd General Synod will renew our commitment to arms control and the vision of a world without nuclear weapons.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY The 32nd General Synod of the United Church of Christ will request that all churches, associations, conferences, and associated bodies of the United Church of Christ consider how to implement this resolution with the support and encouragement of the
Covenanted Ministries.

PROBABILITY OF INFLUENCING SOCIAL CHANGE On July 7th 2017, the United Nations (UN) Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was adopted by 122 member states, and was opened for signature. This treaty was brought in response to growing awareness among UN member states of the dire humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. The TPNW treaty creates a legally binding mechanism to prohibit nuclear weapons or any nuclear weapon activities including the development, testing, purchasing, possession, use, or threatening of their use. It will enter into force when 50 nations ratify it. As of November 2018, the treaty has 69 signatories and 19 states parties that have ratified it.

In 2018, the “Back from the Brink: The Call to Prevent Nuclear War” national grassroots movement issued a call to faith communities and civil society groups to work together toward a fundamental change in U.S. nuclear weapons policy. This movement, initiated by Physicians for Social Responsibility, has the endorsement of many national faith groups, non-governmental organizations, and a growing number of state and local governments that have passed statements of support, including the State of California and the cities of Baltimore, Los Angeles and others. The goal is to create political will for the U.S. to ratify the TPNW treaty, and endorse five common-sense steps:

1. Renounce the option of using nuclear weapons first.
2. End the sole, unchecked authority of any U.S. president to launch a nuclear attack.
3. Take U.S. nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert.
4. Cancel plans to replace the entire nuclear arsenal with enhanced weapons.
5. Actively pursue a verifiable agreement among nuclear-armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

Now is the time to stand up, join with other people of conscience and faith in our nation and around the world to take action to abolish all nuclear weapons.

TEXT OF MOTION

WHEREAS, in our scriptures we read that “where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18); and

WHEREAS, in 2018 the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists moved the Doomsday Clock ahead by 30 seconds — to 11:58 p.m. A symbolic gesture suggesting that civilization is two minutes away from destruction; and

WHEREAS, the 12th General Synod of the United Church of Christ passed a pronouncement “Reversing the Arms Race”; and

WHEREAS, the 15th General Synod passed a pronouncement declaring the United Church of Christ a “Just Peace Church” that declared opposition to all weapons of mass destruction, calling for the immediate cessation of testing, production, and deployment of such arsenals; and

WHEREAS, 95 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons are in the hands of the United State and Russia and the rest are held by seven other countries: China, France, Israel, India, North Korea, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom; and

WHEREAS, since the height of the Cold War, the United States and Russia have dismantled more
than 70,000 nuclear warheads, but 14,485 of these weapons still exist and pose an intolerable risk
to human survival; v and

WHEREAS, former U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry has said, “the risk of a nuclear
catastrophe today is greater than it was during the Cold War — and yet our public is blissfully
unaware of the new nuclear dangers they face,” vi and

WHEREAS, the use of even a tiny fraction of these weapons would cause worldwide climate
disruption and global famine; vii and

WHEREAS, a large scale nuclear war would kill hundreds of millions of people directly and cause
unimaginable environmental damage and catastrophic climate disruption; viii and

WHEREAS, as the effects of climate change place increased stress on communities around the
world and intensify the likelihood of conflict, the danger of nuclear war will grow; ix and

WHEREAS, despite assurances that these arsenals exist solely to guarantee that they are never used,
there have been many occasions when nuclear armed states have prepared to use these weapons, and
war has been averted only at the last minute; x and

WHEREAS, the planned expenditure of more than $1 trillion to enhance our nuclear arsenal will not
only increase the risk of nuclear disaster but fuel a global arms race and divert crucial resources needed
to assure the well-being of the American people and people all over the world; xi and

WHEREAS, there is an alternative to this march to nuclear war: in July 2017, 122 nations called for
the elimination of all nuclear weapons by adopting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear
Weapons. xii

WHEREAS, in 2018 the U.S. has expressed its intent to exit the Intermediate-Range Nuclear
Forces Treaty, a critical agreement to curtail nuclear weapons, xiii and

WHEREAS, living into the United Church of Christ’ current mission statement to “Build a just
world for all” will necessitate the elimination of nuclear weapons; xiv

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty-Second General Synod of the United Church of
Christ reaffirms its vision of a nuclear–weapon–free world and endorses the “Back from the Brink:
The Call to Prevent Nuclear War” campaign, xv calling upon policymakers to take common sense
policy measures to prevent nuclear war by:

• renouncing the option of using nuclear weapons first;
• ending any president’s sole, unchecked authority to launch a nuclear attack;
• taking US nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert;
• cancelling the plan to replace its entire arsenal with enhanced weapons; and
• actively pursuing a verifiable agreement among nuclear armed states to eliminate their
  nuclear arsenals. xvi

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Second General Synod of the United Church of Christ
calls on the U.S. President and Congress to take necessary steps to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and make nuclear disarmament the centerpiece of our national security policy; and urges the National setting, conferences, associations, and local churches to convey this message to policymakers.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Second General Synod of the United Church of Christ urges the National setting, conferences, associations, and local churches to advocate for policy makers to support the aforementioned resolutions.

FUNDING: The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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

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i http://uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/CALL-TO-CHRISTIAN-ACTION-IN-SOCIETY.pdf
iii https://thebulletin.org/2018-doomsday-clock-statement/
iv https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/
v https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/
x http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/USNuclearModernization
xi http://www.icanw.org/treaty-on-the-prohibition-of-nuclear-weapons/
xiv http://www.preventnuclearwar.org/about-us_purpose_vision_and_mission
xv https://www.preventnuclearwar.org/
xvi http://www.preventnuclearwar.org
xvii https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/
xviii www.nuclearban.us