



NEW BEGINNINGS E-BLAST



August 2021 - General Synod Special Edition

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SPECIAL EDITION
2021 GENERAL SYNOD

The 2021 United Church of Christ General Synod took place from Sunday, July 11 through Sunday, July 18th. The 33rd biennial meeting of the denomination was held virtually for the first time in history. The event was packed full of wonderful activities, powerful worship, educational workshops, optional events and celebrations, and engaging key note speakers! There were a total of 715 delegates and nearly 2,000 visitors to General Synod.



This will be our **first Special Edition E-Blast about General Synod** - because there are simply too many wonderful things to share for just one! You will find reflections and overviews from some of our Illinois Conference Delegates, information about the keynote speakers, links to watch the three virtual worships, results from the plenary floor about the proposed resolutions, updates from the National Setting, and more!

The Illinois Delegation included our Ministry Leadership Team and 55 delegates (clergy and lay, adults and youth) from all five associations!

WHAT IS GENERAL SYNOD

According to Article X of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ:

“The General Synod is the gathering of a faith community representative of the wider church to listen for and discern the call of God to the United Church of Christ. The General Synod deliberates, discerns, and identifies the mission of the wider church of the United Church of Christ in God’s world and receives and offers suggestions, invitations, challenges, and assistance in covenant with Local Churches, Conferences, and other settings as they engage in mission together. The General Synod is the representative body of the United Church of Christ and is composed of voting delegates, as described in the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.”

As a first time General Synod delegate, I saw the ways in which the General Synod arises from the local churches and **speaks to our local churches (not at or for our local churches)**. Resolutions of witness such as those approved at our recent GS originate in local churches, are shaped and discussed by laity and clergy from local churches, and are then voted upon for **consideration** and **implementation** in local churches. As a life-long UCC member, I see the ways we sometimes struggle with our “bottom up” or better, “**rippling wave**” kind of **polity**. But I have a renewed appreciation for the covenant and collaborative processes of our denomination.

Rev. Stephanie Perdew,
First Congregational UCC, Wilmette

GENERAL SYNOD WORSHIP

Much like our local churches have done since March of 2020, this years General Synod experimented in interactive, online worship with three incredible services that are now available for anyone to view! **Click on the images below** to view any and all of the General Synod virtual worships. Each service is also available in Spanish.



During Opening Worship, Rev. Dr. Benjamin Chavis preached about how Faith, Justice, and Love Matter. Worshippers were invited to "enter with holy curiosity" as we explored the themes of "rootedness," "soil," and "rural and environmental issues" through music, prayers, and scripture.



During Wednesday Worship, Rev. Michelle Higgins drew deeply from Psalm 1, reminding listeners that the law of the Lord is abundance and resilience: "unity without uniformity" and "liberation without domination." Worshippers were inspired and energized by spoken word and music & blessed through a water ritual.



During Closing Worship, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson focused on the importance of breath and air, especially in light of the murder of George Floyd and others who have died in police custody, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, asking, "What will it take for us to breathe again?"

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

During Synod there were ten "Witness" Resolutions and one "Prudential" resolution proposed to the Synod. Every resolution that was brought to the Synod floor passed. Learn more about the resolutions by clicking on the links and images below.

A Resolution Encouraging to End 128 Years of War Between the USA and the Hawaiian Kingdom



Submitted by the Association of Hawaiian Evangelical Churches of the Hawai'i Conference, UCC

This Resolution calls the United Church to actualize its historical commitment to justice and peace with the friendly Christian Hawaiian Kingdom nation whose constitutions are founded upon Christian values.

[Read the full resolution.](#)

A Resolution to Declare and Respond to Racism as a Public Health Crisis



Submitted by the Council for Health & Human Services and the Council on Racial and Ethnic Minorities

This Resolution calls the United Church of Christ to declare and respond to racism as a public health crisis and for the National Setting to empower, equip and encourage local churches and conferences in their efforts for advocacy,

A Commitment to Gender Safety & Equity in Ministry Settings



Submitted by the Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ

This Resolution confesses our complicity with systems of sexist oppression, and asks the Church to explore ways to promote gender safety. It asks the Church to empower women & non-binary persons to raise issues regarding sexism and discrimination.

education and awareness.
[Read the full resolution.](#)

[Read the full resolution.](#)

A Resolution to Recognize the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024)



Submitted by the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ

The resolution calls on the United Church of Christ to:

- 1) acknowledge this Decade;
- 2) adopt its frameworks for addressing the issues affecting African descendant people; and
- 3) promote the Decade and resulting outcomes for advocating for the rights of African descendant people.

[Read the full resolution.](#)

**"Who will speak for the trees?"
A Resolution on the Rights of Nature**



Submitted by the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ

This resolution on the Rights of Nature calls for a change of human relationship to nature from apartheid with nature, views nature as "object" and a "commodity" for our benefit, profit, and exploitation to recognition that we are citizens of the Earth, interconnected to the web of life.

[Read the full resolution.](#)

Declaration for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel



Submitted by the Shalom United Church of Christ, New Haven, Connecticut

The resolution calls on the General Synod to adopt a Declaration on the Requirements for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel articulating the principles that must be in place and honored in any future just and peaceful relationship between Israel and Palestine.

[Read the full resolution.](#)
[UCC Officers Speak to Just Peace Declaration](#)

A Resolution to Ban the Practice of Conversion Therapy



Submitted by the Open and Affirming Coalition and the Mental Health Network

This Resolution urges congregations & other settings in the United Church of Christ to advocate for a ban on "conversion" or "reparative" therapy—a medical practice legal in all 50 states that attempts to change or "repair" the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ+ persons.

[Read the full resolution.](#)

A Resolution to Advocate and Act to Change the Cash Bail Bond System



Submitted by the Southern Conference, United Church of Christ

This Resolution calls on the United Church of Christ to advocate and act to change the Cash Bail Bond System in the individual states and United States of America to be more just to the economically disadvantaged.

[Read the full resolution.](#)

Other Resolutions

[Becoming a Church of Contemplatives in Action](#)

[A Resolution on Protecting Workers at Churches and other Religious Institutions](#)

[The Alliance of Associate Conference Ministers of the UCC Request to become Recognized as a Formal Group](#)

Bylaws/Reports

[Synod approves non-binary bylaw language](#)

[Read the reports to the General Synod](#)

Reflections from the Illinois Conference Delegates

"Until I served on Resolution Committee #5 of UCC General Synod 33, I was not familiar with the tragic history of how [Hawai'i] became a part

"I only briefly stopped by [the] committee ... addressing the resolution concerning Just Peace in Palestine/Israel. It was quite interesting to see

of the United States."
Rev. Gwendolyn Kirkland, Covenant UCC,
South Holland

how in the plenary session the language that the
committee had "softened" was restored to the
wording of the original proposal."
Dan Jares, First Church of Lombard

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Valarie Kaur
General Synod Keynote Speaker
Social Activist & Film Maker

In her keynote address to the 33rd General Synod July 12, social justice activist Valarie Kaur provided the United Church of Christ with a "compass" that she urged every one of its congregations to use to become a "pocket of revolutionary love." Kaur described the 10 practices of her [Revolutionary Love](#) vision as points on a compass that can be directed to anyone - others, opponents, or ourselves - who is in need of love.



Rev. Adam Russell Taylor
President, Sojourners

Christians should enter a David-and-Goliath battle with two viruses right now - besides COVID-19. Their names are "systemic racism" and "toxic polarization." Their antidote is "beloved community." Inspired by the simple weapons David uses against Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, Taylor listed "five smooth stones" that could build the beloved community. That was a key message in the Rev. Adam Russell Taylor's July 16 General Synod keynote speech.

Reflections from the Illinois Conference Delegates

"I found [Valarie's] address to be personal and heartfelt, and it generated great emotion in me as I consider the challenges and the blessings inherent in learning to love those whom I do not know."

Rev. Mark Jakobs, St. Peter's UCC, Champaign

*"From opening worship, through presentations by Valarie Kaur, Plenary sessions where we were encouraged not just to pass but **IMPLEMENT** resolutions of justice, ending with [Rev. Thompson's] message **"I can't breathe!"**, delegates and visitors were encouraged to demonstrate our Love by acting."*

David Holston, Conference Council President

"We seek to be an inclusive church.... It is hard sometimes when we feel so passionately about something to remember what the Rev. Adam Russell Taylor put so well...while answering the question: Does the image of radical welcome include welcoming those who believe differently from you? If so, where do you start? He responded: "...don't demonize, don't impugn the motives of those you disagree with... It starts with relationships."

Rev. Judy Kennedy, Congregational UCC, Pekin

OTHER NOTEWORTHY ITEMS

Join the Movement

Written by Rev. Jim Fisher

Join The Movement toward Racial Justice is the new campaign of the United Church of Christ introduced during General Synod by the Rev. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, and the Rev. Traci D. Blackmon, Associate

General Minister, Justice and Local Church Ministries. It traces its origins to the 2003 resolution calling on the UCC to be an antiracist church. The movement serves as an **invitation to examine ourselves** and how we may be complicit in upholding structures of racism. It is a **challenge to take meaningful steps** to root out racism for generations to come.

The symbol for the campaign is a tree that not only displays the visible branches and leaves but also exposes the hidden roots that reside underneath, roots that ask us to go deeper in our understanding of racism and its causes. The movement asks us to take practical steps to become more fully a church Rooted in Love, such as: having sacred conversations to end racism, engaging with biblical stories about equitable treatment for all people, and then developing strategies to move to advocacy and activism. **Let's root out racism for good.**



[Click to Learn More](#)



As the Rev. Traci Blackmon asked for the blessing and support of the General Synod to continue in her role as Associate General Minister, she spoke about the work of the "We." The "We" the church must be to effectively follow God's call. [Rev. Blackmon was later re-elected.](#)

FINAL RESULTS



4. Central Atlantic	51.9%
5. Southwest	51.1%
6. Southern California Nevada	45.0%
7. Northern California Nevada	41.4%
8. Illinois	40.1%
9. Rocky Mountain	38.0%
10. New York	37.5%

The Illinois Conference came in 8th place for the Congregational Challenge!! We had 40.1% of our 240 congregations represented!

[Click to see more celebrations and milestones.](#)

RESOURCES

Reason to Have Hope: A Public Health Response to Racism

Council for Health and Human Service Ministries, UCC

The "Racism as a Public Health Crisis" resolution calls on the church to go into a deeper examination of this crisis and of itself, to identify opportunities to collaborate, and to advocate for policy changes. One way folks can take action right now is to register for CHHSM's FREE online course: **Reason to Have Hope: A Public Health Response to Racism**, which provides education as well as discernment tools for your next steps.



"As people of faith, we know how Christ reveals to us that violence does not have the final say, and that the way forward is through healing that is justice - through restoring right relationships with humanity and all creation. So, let us recommit ourselves to the call of the beloved community, where barriers to wellbeing are broken down and systems are reimagined to make it so."

Rev. Elyse Berry, DMin, Associate for Advocacy and Leadership Development

The Council for Health & Human Service Ministries, UCC

Enroll for Free

Rooted in Love: 2021 Stewardship Theme Materials

United Church of Christ Resources



New stewardship materials available from UCC Resources use the same theme as General Synod - Rooted in Love, drawing inspiration from Psalm 1: "They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season." This means that all the inspiring worship resources created for General Synod can also be used in Stewardship campaigns this fall.

The materials include everything needed to run an effective campaign such as [bulletin inserts](#), pledge cards, graphics, and even [coloring pages](#)! A practical campaign guide provides support for leaders running their first campaign and offers suggestions for those looking to customize stewardship messages to their own setting.

[View Resources Here](#)

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