

1 THE SMALL TOWN AND RURAL COALITION OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
2 REQUESTS TO BE RECOGNIZED AS A FORMAL GROUP  
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4 **A Prudential Resolution**  
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6 **Submitted by:**  
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8 **Kansas-Oklahoma Board of Directors**  
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11 **DRAFT**  
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14 SUMMARY:  
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16 The Small Town and Rural (STAR) coalition seeks to be recognized as a Self-Created Group  
17 according to the United Church of Christ By-Laws, Article VI., existing to be a supportive  
18 expression of the Living Christ, in relationship with one another and with the Body of Christ, in  
19 all its forms. As defined by the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ “the  
20 basic unit of organization and life within the United Church of Christ is the local church.”  
21 (Shears, 1990) Local churches may self-identify as a “small town and rural church,” meaning  
22 they are geographically separated from metropolitan and suburban communities. The STAR  
23 coalition serves to support STAR churches in various ministry functions. This action requires a  
24 Bylaws amendment at the Thirty-Fifth General Synod.  
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27 BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING:  
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29 The fundamental biblical grounding for the proposed recognition of the Small Town and Rural  
30 coalition is found in Christ’s farewell discourse in the Gospel according to John, “...that they may  
31 all be one.” John 17:21 (NRSV). This scripture has served the basis for uniting Christians  
32 throughout the world.  
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34 The United Church of Christ is known for responding to the needs of the overlooked and  
35 marginalized. Because of this prophetic compassion, significant ministries developed that  
36 address the needs and presence of our often-overlooked siblings, neighbors, and communities.  
37 In the context of challenges Small Town and Rural churches face, we identify with Paul’s letter  
38 to the Corinthians, “The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same  
39 purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work.” 1 Corinthians 3:8 (NLT). This  
40 means that we are called to become stronger and more supportive for these STAR ministries by  
41 building a stronger and larger network of covenants serving as the body of Christ across the  
42 breadth of the United Church of Christ. STAR congregations can bind together and be strong  
43 and vital presences in their immediate and global communities, offering spiritual, missional, and

44 relational sources of hope, reflecting the love and light of Jesus Christ, who spent most of his  
45 ministry reaching out to those who are tied to the land and community. This means building and  
46 maintaining a covenantal and collaborative relationship with all United Church of Christ STAR  
47 churches through the existence and support of the STAR coalition.

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49 The STAR Coalition seeks to live out its purpose of:

50 ● Planting and maintaining a covenantal and communal relationship with all United Church  
51 of Christ STAR ministries.

52 ● Growing and nurturing a covenantal and communal relationship with the United Church  
53 of Christ Council of Conference Ministers, officers of the Church, UCC Covenantal  
54 partners, UCC Board of Directors, and Alliance of Associate Conference Ministers.

55 ● Being a resource to share information and best practices to promote excellence in our  
56 various ministries.

57 ● Being a collective voice of advocacy for concerns important to the role and work of  
58 STAR ministries as they relate to the life of the United Church of Christ.

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60 In the past, the United Church of Christ was asked to be aware of the predicament of the small  
61 rural congregation, its members and pastors. Individuals from small congregations across the  
62 United Church of Christ have come together and met monthly sharing ideas and resources. We  
63 have intentionally discerned a call to unite for the intention of being a resource to share support,  
64 information and best practices to promote excellence in our various ministries.

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66 TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION:

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68 **Whereas**, 64% of the churches in the United Church of Christ are located in small towns and  
69 rural areas.

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71 **Whereas** the vitality, relationality, and ecological aspects of our STAR congregations with their  
72 important presence within the body of the United Church of Christ, is as essential and important  
73 to the health of the entire Church as any other group of people (Ephesians 4:4).

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75 **Whereas** the United Church of Christ seriously holds the call to be an open and welcoming faith  
76 community, accepting into the church body and leadership all facets of expression found in  
77 God's people, creating a rich diversity of expression, background, culture, sexual and gender  
78 identity and expression.

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80 **Whereas** STAR congregations frequently find their needs and unique lived experiences  
81 underrepresented on a Conference and National level.

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83 **Therefore be it resolved** that the Small Town and Rural Coalition be granted official status in  
84 the United Church of Christ Bylaws, Article VI, Self-Determining Groups.

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

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

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Bibliography

Shears, R.A. (1990) A Covenant Polity. In D.L. Johnson and C. Hambrick-Stowe *Theology and Identity: Traditions, Movements, and Polity in the United Church of Christ* (pp. 67-78).  
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