

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

1 **A RESOLUTION ON ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN**
2 **THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND**
3 **THE IGLESIA EVANGELICA UNIDA DE PUERTO RICO**
4 **A Prudential Resolution**
5 **Submitted by the United Church of Christ Board**
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8 **SUMMARY**

9 This resolution recognizes and celebrates a new ecumenical relationship between the United
10 Church of Christ and the *Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico* (United Evangelical Church
11 in Puerto Rico) and creates a committee that will collaboratively explore the direction and plan
12 to move this relationship toward a deeper commitment that reflects visible unity in the life of the
13 church. This commitment will offer the closest possible relationship while each church retains its
14 autonomy.
15

16 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL and ETHICAL RATIONALE**

17 In his last prayer with his disciples, Jesus prayed, “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are
18 in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent
19 me” (John 17:21, NRSV). The desire for unity and visible unity in the church is at the heart and
20 commitment of the ecumenical movement. The unity of the church is shared in baptism,
21 eucharist and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
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23 The United Church of Christ and Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico (IEUPR) affirm this
24 biblical understanding of unity which guides the ecumenical commitment and engagement with
25 other communions. The church continues to seek meaningful ways to attend to the call in the
26 gospel and to overcome the separations that stand in the way of the unity of the church that Jesus
27 prayed for. As Christians, there is an imperative to find ways to live in unity and to create
28 visible unity for the life of the church. This call is the essence of the ecumenical movement
29 which seeks to find unity-in-diversity, creating the space to engage divergences and
30 convergences through on-going dialogue and engagement.
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32 **BACKGROUND**

33 The Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico has Reformed and Congregational heritage. The
34 church was formed January 28, 1931 with the union of the Congregational Church,
35 the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and the Christian Church, making it one of the earliest
36 united and uniting churches, formed from the union of other denominations. There are currently
37 over sixty united and uniting denominations globally, denominations formed as commitment and
38 expression of the ecumenical movement.
39

40 In January 1990, the church voted to join the United Church of Christ, becoming the Puerto
41 Conference of the United Church of Christ. In 2006, IEUPR voted to once again become an
42 autonomous church, leaving the UCC to do so. The split between IEUPR and the UCC came in
43 the aftermath of the UCC vote in 2005 to support marriage equality. This was assumed to be the

44 primary motivation for IEUPR leaving the UCC. However, this was one of many factors since
45 the political climate in Puerto Rico and the desire for independence from United States
46 colonialism was also a factor.

47
48 The United Church of Christ made its first visit to Puerto Rico in 2012. At that time, a high-
49 level delegation visited to begin conversations about the relationship between the UCC and the
50 IEUPR. The UCC delegation heard the concerns that were present for IEUPR that went unheard
51 in 2005, in the absence of adequate conversation before or after the two churches separated.
52 During that visit, the UCC delegation visited Ryder Hospital and met with IEUPR leadership.
53 The delegation also had the opportunity to worship with IEUPR congregations. The visit left
54 room for more conversation and the desire to determine a way forward together.

55
56 Since becoming an independent church, the IEUPR has maintained ties with the UCC, primarily
57 through Global Ministries and Ryder Hospital. Ryder Hospital is a missional partner with the
58 Central Atlantic Conference and a participant in the UCC Pension Boards. Congregations in the
59 UCC also have relationships with IEUPR and have taken mission teams to support the camping
60 ministry and other projects within IEUPR.

61
62 Since hurricane Maria, the UCC has provided support to Puerto Rico through the IEUPR. Funds
63 and volunteers for assisting with the recovery effort are being provided by the UCC's Disaster
64 Ministries which is working closely with the IEUPR. Included in the effort is assistance in
65 restoring Ryder Hospital to full working condition. The hospital holds a seat on its Board of
66 Directors for a UCC representative.

67
68 A second delegation met with Pastors and leaders of IEUPR in September, 2018. During the
69 visit, the delegation visited IEUPR congregations and Ryder Hospital to see and hear about the
70 recovery efforts. While there was acknowledgement of a shared history and interests, there was
71 also conversation, lament and apology for the 2006 separation by both churches. Many who
72 were strong advocates for leaving the UCC expressed their regret for the way in which the
73 separation happened. For its part, members of the UCC named their lament and apology as well
74 for the lack of adequate communication and the length of time that transpired before overtures
75 were made to hear the concerns of the IEUPR. In this second set of meetings, both sides
76 determined it was time for intention in mending the breach of relationship and for pursuing the
77 closest possible relationship possible while remaining autonomous churches.

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79 WHEREAS, the gospel of Jesus Christ unites the followers of Christ in a single community of
80 faith and compels us to make our unity visible so "that the world may believe..." John 17:21;

81
82 WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ and the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico are
83 both united and uniting churches with multiple denominational streams which identify them and
84 shape their Christian self-understanding;

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86 WHEREAS, the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico and the United Church of Christ have
87 common commitment to the visible unity of the church of Jesus Christ and to the one ecumenical
88 movement;

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90 WHEREAS, the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico and the United Church of Christ have
91 common Congregational and Reformed heritage and sit in common witness to mission, worship,
92 theological conversation and commitment to justice;

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94 WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ and the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico have
95 engaged in dialogue and have identified similarities and differences that can commonly
96 strengthen who they are and their witness in North America as united and united churches;

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98 WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ and the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico were
99 one church for fifteen years, sharing ministry to the world together and united in Christ's love;

100
101 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Thirty Second General Synod of the United Church of
102 Christ recognizes the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico as an ecumenical partner;

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104 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico and the Thirty
105 Second General Synod of the United Church of Christ mutually commit to forming an
106 ecumenical partnership committee;

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108 BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the ecumenical partnership committee brings back to the
109 Thirty Third General Synod recommendations for further steps and activities to bring the two
110 communions to the closest possible relationship while remaining independent churches.

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112 **FUNDING**

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

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116 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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