

## **BECOMING A CHURCH OF CONTEMPLATIVES IN ACTION**

### **A Resolution of Witness**

#### **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

**WHEREAS** the 21st century has seen a resurgence of Christian spiritual and contemplative practices, yet many churchgoers have not heard of or engaged in these practices in church;

**WHEREAS** people who leave church often find a scarcity of spiritual food there to nourish their souls, and are frequently unfamiliar with practices that cultivate self-care and love of God; and have turned to other spiritual and secular communities and organizations to fulfill this need;

**WHEREAS** there is a wide diversity of spiritual practices in the Christian tradition, and we aim to honor the diversity of each of these practices as they serve to build up the body of Christ;

**WHEREAS** with the crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic racism, and the financial fallout causing greater need than ever for work for social justice, the church is called to model and share expressions of activism modeled in the contemplative spirit of Jesus;

**WHEREAS** Jesus said “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit” (John 15: 5), and Christian contemplative practices hold the goal of abiding more deeply in Christ;

**WHEREAS** if we look at the “Tree of Contemplative Practices”<sup>[1]</sup> as but one example of this diversity, we see that the myriad of spiritual disciplines far surpasses what the Church universal and the UCC in particular have offered to church members. As Barbara Holmes says, “Contemplative practices can be silent or evocative, still or embodied in dance or shout. Always, contemplation requires attentiveness to the Spirit of God.”<sup>[2]</sup>;

**WHEREAS** being “transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Romans 12: 2) begins with honest self-examination, reflective introspection and dialogue, and intentions and commitments to change, through God’s grace;

**WHEREAS** the UCC is rooted in the “Three Great Loves” of neighbor, children, and creation, and authentic contemplative practices expand our capacity and commitment to love and justice, so that we might be clearer channels for God’s love to shine through and might more fully “come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” (Ephesians 4: 13)

**WHEREAS** the UCC is often identified as a progressive church for activists, whereas what makes the church unique is its spiritual grounding in the love and wholeness of God,

**WHEREAS** the church's foundation of divine love grounds and informs communal life in the body of Christ, as well as provides the reason for why the church expresses its witness in active forms of justice, peace, and service in the world;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages local churches to become churches of “contemplatives in action,” remembering the essential disciplines modeled by Jesus of silent prayer, meditation, and practices to commune with the Divine Mother-Father, and letting contemplative depth inspire our forming and sustaining of life-giving, spiritually-generative community and our church's action in the world through works of charity, social justice, peacemaking, earth-stewardship, and making disciples on the path of God's unconditional, agape love;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages training of future clergy and lay leaders in the ways of contemplation, spiritual practice, and Christian mysticism, providing experiential grounding for the sustained life of faith; living into our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ and as children of God to see the Divine in everyone and everything in all creation, beginning with ourselves and expanding our love into ever-widening circles;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Third General Synod invites local churches to commit to being a “both/and” rather than an “either/or” church- a church that prioritizes contemplation, spending time communing with God in various forms of prayer; and a church of activism that seeks to make God's love and justice real in the world; thus a church of both contemplation and action—a church of “contemplatives in action” where our love of God through contemplative practices informs how we live and act in the world, and where our interior and exterior spiritual practices complement, ground, and inspire one another.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Third General Synod calls upon all settings of the United Church of Christ to invest in curriculum and resources to support Conferences, Associations, local churches, clergy, lay leaders, General Synod and seminaries in practicing and teaching a foundational life of spiritual practices, as modeled in the life of Jesus. In this resourcing, all settings are called to remain committed to the UCC's diversity as a Multicultural, Multiracial, and Anti-racist church, thus honoring the diversity of spiritual and contemplative practices and teachers from many and varied cultures through whom the spirit works in different ways;

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Third General Synod encourages all settings of the UCC seek to live out the foundation of contemplative practices in the ministry of God's work in the world—making inclusive, participatory spiritual practices and teachings that cultivate being, introspection, reflection and growth an integral part of National gatherings, including committee work, children's, youth and adult ministries, ecumenical partnerships, and General Synod;

**FUNDING:** 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 Collegium of Officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries of other entities with the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

[1] <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree>

[2] Barbara Holmes: Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2017),