

1 **RENEWING THE COVENANT WITH THE RURAL CHURCH**

2 (Resolution of Witness)

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4 **RESOLUTION**

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6 Throughout its history, the United Church of Christ has faithfully lifted up our call to respond to  
7 the needs of the poor and the marginalized. Because of this faithful awareness, significant  
8 ministries developed responding to the needs of brothers and sisters who have been overlooked  
9 because of cultural, ethnic, orientation or racial reasons. There is, however, a growing distress in  
10 Rural America, with its small towns and small congregations, as its communities fade from the  
11 landscape. This diminishing of the rural population and with it the very sense of community that  
12 has been a source of strength leaves those who remain spiritually, physically and emotionally  
13 vulnerable. Inherent with our faith is a belief that God is the source of our hope. We in the  
14 United Church of Christ acknowledge that God is experienced most fully when we are in  
15 community. Nevertheless, when that sense of community is threatened by forces beyond the  
16 reach of the residents, then the experience of God and the hope which God enables for us all is  
17 also threatened. While the United Church of Christ has sought in the past to address the  
18 predicament of the small rural congregation, its members and pastors, today there is a vast gulf  
19 between the needs of rural America and the ability of the United Church of Christ in all its  
20 settings to respond. Therefore the following resolution is offered:

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22 **WHEREAS**, over 60% of the Churches in the United Church of Christ are located in rural areas  
23 of our country, and

24 **WHEREAS**, many of these congregations have memberships that are near or below 50, with an  
25 average attendance of less than 35, and

26 **WHEREAS**, Rural America is central in our basic faith about God's economy which recognizes  
27 that through the cycle of planting and harvesting, God's rich and abundant Spirit is  
28 manifested, and

29 **WHEREAS**, the health and vitality of the rural congregations, with their historic, covenantal  
30 presence, within the body of the United Church of Christ, is as vital to the health of the entire  
31 church as any other group of congregations, (Ephesians 4:5), and

32 **WHEREAS**, many of these small rural congregations are in communities that suffer from out-  
33 migration with declining populations that offer little or no prospect at present for numerical  
34 growth, though there are signs of a rural renaissance to which these congregations are  
35 similarly ill equipped to respond, and

36 **WHEREAS**, many of these congregations have few young folk who can help to carry the  
37 financial or duty burden, and

38 **WHEREAS**, these congregations frequently find themselves unable to support the usual patterns  
39 of worship, Christian Education and other activities so necessary for healthy church life, and

40 **WHEREAS**, these congregations struggle to secure pastoral leadership, and

41 **WHEREAS**, many of these rural congregations are located in areas so isolated they provide  
42 little or no opportunity for yoking with other congregations, and

43 **WHEREAS**, these rural congregations struggle to provide the basic components of church life,  
44 and

45 **WHEREAS**, having received, as fully as any other, the call to discipleship and the vision of  
46 faith filled church life, many rural congregations face their inability to fulfill their call to  
47 discipleship, because of lack of resources:

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49 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Twenty-sixth General Synod recognizes the critical  
50 importance of rural ministry within the United Church of Christ.

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52 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the General Synod recognizes the special needs of the  
53 significant number of churches in the United Church of Christ that are rural including the need  
54 for resources for Christian Education, small membership Sunday Schools, meaningful worship  
55 even when the numbers are very small, outreach in the midst of isolation, networking to build  
56 support, attracting pastoral leadership, and developing a vision that will guide congregations into  
57 the future; and therefore:

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59 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the General Synod recognizes the need to provide  
60 leadership that will empower small membership rural congregations to address the justice  
61 issues that often go unnoticed such as rural poverty, human rights, domestic violence, youth  
62 guidance and development, economic injustice and drug and alcohol abuse; and therefore:

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64 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Collegium of Officers will organize a task force with  
65 representation including national staff, conferences, seminaries, other educational institutions  
66 and rural churches; and therefore:

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68 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Task Force will establish goals and strategies to  
69 address the needs and challenges of rural churches and to identify and develop a strategy for  
70 disseminating existing resources for rural churches; and therefore:

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72 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Task Force report to the Executive Council at each of  
73 its meetings and that the Task Force will present its recommendations for implementation  
74 including staffing resources at the Fall 2008 Executive Council; and therefore:

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76 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Collegium will report to the Twenty-seventh General  
77 Synod on how the Collegium is responding to the needs and challenges of the Rural  
78 Churches; and therefore:

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80 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that through these programmatic and resource avenues the  
81 United Church of Christ will become a center for information sharing, support, and guidance  
82 for the rural congregations and the small isolated communities they serve.

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84 **FUNDING**

85 Funding and implementation of this resolution is to be made in accordance with the mandates  
86 and available funding of the affected agencies.