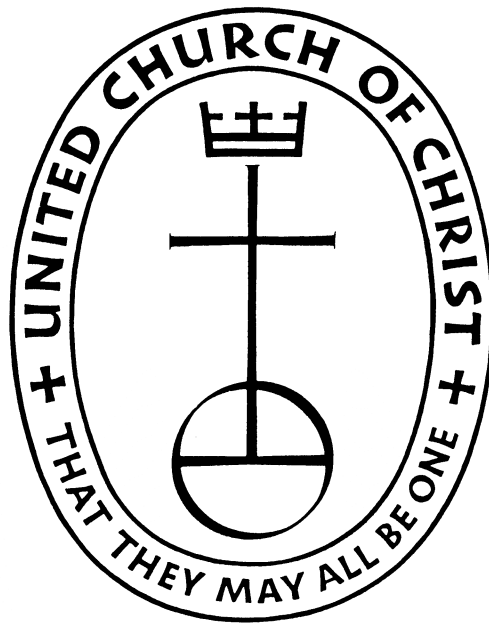


**Primer for Discernment Process  
2012**

**Connecticut Conference, UCC**

125 Sherman Street, Hartford, CT 06105



# Primer for Discernment Process 2012 Connecticut Conference, UCC

*Within the United Church of Christ, the various expressions of the church relate to each other in a covenantal manner. Each expression of the church has responsibilities and rights in relation to the others, to the end that the whole church will seek God's will and be faithful to God's mission. Decisions are made in consultation and collaboration among the various parts of the structure. As members of the body of Christ, each expression of the church is called to honor and respect the work and ministry of each other part. Each expression of the church listens, hears, and carefully considers the advice counsel and requests of others. In this covenant, the various expressions of the United Church of Christ seek to walk together in all God's ways.*

Article III, The Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.

With this article, the United Church has provided for mutual consultation by the various settings within the denomination. Congregations may speak to associations, conferences, or the national church. Those parts of the United Church may speak to congregations and to each other.

Often this consultation takes the form of resolutions, statements of conviction about moral imperatives, about expression of faith, about action to be taken in response to contemporary circumstances. In every instance, the dialogue is relational, not legislative. Our covenantal polity affirms our responsibility to speak *to* one another, never *for* one another.

The statements and convictions expressed through resolutions help define who we are as the United Church of Christ in the particular setting that adopts a resolution. The statements from any setting provide important challenges and opportunities for all of us to discern God's call and to follow it.

There is a long and rich tradition in the Connecticut Conference for such expression. Since the 1700s, resolutions have spoken to subjects as significant as slavery, violence, peacemaking, capital punishment, poverty, racism and economic disparity. It is intriguing to note that whether our Congregational forebears gathered at a minister's association (General Association), as an ecclesiastical society (The Missionary Society of Connecticut), or as a church (Connecticut Conference), they sought to address contemporary issues from a Christian perspective. Tracing the history of the passage of resolutions is to be in touch with the leading issues and concerns through decades of discernment. We are the heirs of this grand legacy.

The resolution process helps us shape our common faith through an articulation of principles that undergird our commitments. It furthers our understanding by describing the application of these principles. Finally, building on this foundational preparation, appropriate implementation can be proposed. Thus, we are invited to deepen our understanding while taking care to discern the direction we are called to follow.

Through this discernment process, we give expression of our common faith, in word and deed. We describe who we are and what we intend to do as a Christian body.

## **Guidelines for the Discernment Process**

This primer provides the information needed to participate in this dialogue within and beyond the Connecticut Conference. Please review the guidelines carefully; for assistance in preparing resolutions, contact the Resolutions Committee through the conference office.

In order to provide adequate opportunity for the churches of the conference to review the proposals sent to the Annual Meeting the following procedures have been adopted to encourage early submission of resolutions.

The Board of Directors of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ shall appoint a Resolutions Committee following the Fall Annual Meeting. The Committee shall consist of nine members, three to be appointed each year to serve a three year term.

An invitation shall be sent to all the churches of the conference in January, informing them of an opportunity to prepare resolutions for presentation at the Fall Annual Meeting. Resolutions shall be submitted to the Conference office on or before May 1.

### **Sources of resolutions**

A resolution may originate from one of four places:

1. A local church, having approved the submission at a congregational meeting or at its executive body, shall send the resolution to the Resolutions Committee for processing. The clergy person or a subcommittee of the church cannot submit a resolution.
2. An association of the Connecticut Conference, having approved the submission at a called meeting, shall send the resolution to the Resolutions Committee for processing. A clergy person or a subcommittee of the association cannot submit a resolution.
3. Fifteen delegates from three or more associations may submit a resolution to the Resolutions Committee for processing.
4. A Ministry Team of at least 10 persons from two or more associations may submit a resolution to the Resolutions Committee for processing.

Any body presenting a resolution shall submit only one resolution for consideration to an Annual Meeting.

### **Work of the Resolutions Committee**

A resolution becomes the responsibility of the Committee once it has been submitted; the committee will guide the resolution through the subsequent steps of the discernment process.

The Resolutions Committee may return to the proposing body any resolution that it considers repetitive of existing policy established by an Annual Meeting in the last ten years. In the event that the proposers feel this ruling is unfair, they may appeal to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the Conference.

### **Group A resolutions**

Resolutions submitted by May 1 shall be designated as Group A. Representatives from the proposing body shall be invited to meet with the Resolutions Committee to discuss and refine their work during the month of May. The Resolutions Committee may make editorial suggestions, remaining true to the intent of the presenting body.

In June, the Resolutions Committee shall send copies of the Group A resolutions which have been put in final form to all the churches of the Conference to be distributed to their delegates to the Annual Meeting. Text of proposed resolutions shall be posted on the Connecticut Conference website.

On the first day of the Annual Meeting, or as soon as possible thereafter, hearings shall be conducted by the committee to consider the resolutions in Group A. The delegates shall have an opportunity to discuss the issues with the proposers of the resolutions in order to discern and understand the appropriate action to be taken.

Representatives of the proposing body must report to the Resolutions Committee on the first day of Annual Meeting, must participate in the hearing, and must also be on the floor of the meeting when action on the resolution is being considered.

### **Group B resolutions**

Resolutions after May 2 and before October 1 shall be designated as Group B. These resolutions should be in response to a compelling or urgent event, issue or concern that could not be adequately addressed before the May 1 deadline or through the currently recommended processes. The decision to bring Group B issues before the Annual Meeting resides with the Resolutions Committee. On the first day of the Annual Meeting, proposers of Group B resolutions shall meet with the Resolutions Committee; the meeting shall be conducted by the committee as a public hearing, open to the delegates to the Annual Meeting. Copies of Group B resolutions shall be provided by the proposers and shall be distributed to all the delegates as they arrive.

The proposers of Group B must be present for the hearings to be convened and must be present when the resolution is being considered by the Annual Meeting.

### **Setting priorities**

If more than one resolution is proposed, the Resolutions Committee shall prepare a ballot for the delegates to prioritize the order of consideration of the resolutions, recognizing that *all Group A initiatives shall be considered before Group B*. The resolutions shall be heard at times designated in the agenda and in the order of priority established by the delegates.

### **Promotion of resolutions**

Distribution of material advocating support or defeat of an action may take place only outside of the assembly of delegates and away from the entrance to the assembly.

## **Implementation of resolutions**

The Board of Directors will direct voted resolutions to the program(s) or person(s) named in the resolution for implementation. Any resolutions not acted upon by the annual meeting shall be directed to the Conference Minister for consideration.

The outcome of the resolutions shall be communicated to all local churches in the Connecticut Conference in the following ways:

1. Those designated to implement the action shall submit an interim report to the Resolutions Committee.
2. A report on progress shall be included in the Annual Report.
3. The Chair of the Board of Directors shall report at the subsequent Annual Meeting.

Upon adoption of this primer, the Resolutions Committee shall review actions taken by the Annual Meetings of the Connecticut Conference, UCC over the last 20 years to designate appropriate resolutions already adopted

## **Types of resolutions**

The discernment process for adoption of an action resolution is a multi-step process. The first step is to establish a foundation for action via a **Resolution of Affirmation**. Following a time for education, discussion and reflection, **Resolution(s) of Implementation** may be proposed.

- A. To initiate a new proposal for policy or position for the Connecticut Conference, UCC, a **Resolution of Affirmation** that identifies, describes and lifts to awareness an issue that the proposers believe should be addressed by the conference shall be submitted for consideration. (See above for appropriate sources of proposal.) Such a resolution would be similar to what was formerly called an affirmation.<sup>1</sup> It shall include portions that set forth Biblical, theological and missional considerations.

### **1. Submission Process**

- a. A Resolution of Affirmation shall be submitted to the Resolutions Committee by May 1 preceding the October session of the Conference Annual Meeting.
- b. The Resolutions Committee shall meet with the proposers during the month of May to offer editorial suggestions or to refine the form of the resolution in preparation for its distribution to the churches in June.
- c. The Resolutions Committee shall determine whether the proposal is sufficiently different from previous Resolutions of Affirmation to warrant its consideration.

### **2. Educational Process**

- a. At the time of the resolution's submission, proposers shall be prepared to suggest members of a resource team who will be responsible for collecting and recommending suitable resources for study and discussion.
- b. Following the resolution's adoption, resources shall be accessible by posting on the conference website. Resources may include contact information for appropriate organizations as well as UCC contacts. The team shall complete their work no later than January 1 of the year following the October meeting when a Resolution of Affirmation has been adopted.

3. Discussion Process
    - a. In preparation for implementation, churches shall be encouraged to make use of the available resources and engage in their own discernment process for subsequent discussions at Annual Meetings.
  4. Only one Resolution of Affirmation shall be presented a year. Should more than one resolution be submitted, the Resolutions Committee shall determine which has priority. However, there may be multiple proposals of Resolutions of Implementation as well as a Resolution of Affirmation at any Annual Meeting.
- B. To recommend an action in response to a Resolution of Affirmation, a **Resolution of Implementation** may be submitted. In this resolution an action may be recommended to the members and churches of the Connecticut Conference, UCC or may be directed to the Board of Directors of the Conference.
1. Submission Process
    - a. A Resolution of Implementation must be preceded by the adoption of a Resolution of Affirmation on the issue and that resolution shall be cited in the Resolution of Implementation. Multiple resolutions may be offered to follow a single Resolution of Affirmation. Resolutions of Implementation may be initiated from any of the qualified proposers listed in this guide.
    - b. A Resolution of Implementation shall be submitted to the Resolutions Committee by May 1 preceding the October session of the Conference Annual Meeting.
    - c. The Resolutions Committee shall meet with the proposers during the month of May to offer editorial suggestions or to refine the form of the resolution in preparation for its distribution to the churches in June.
  2. Resolutions of Implementation may require the use of conference resources (finances, staff, etc.); those resources shall be identified in the resolution.
  3. Proposers of Resolutions of Implementation shall be responsible to provide current resources and information to the churches for continuing education and discussion of the issue.
- C. **Emergency Resolutions** may be brought to the floor of the Annual Meeting in the following ways:
1. The present procedure allows resolutions to be introduced as Group B resolutions, addressing those issues that emerge after the May 1 deadline that could not have been anticipated in advance.
  2. An emergency resolution may be considered by an Annual Meeting if the delegates vote to suspend the rules governing the proceedings.

<sup>1</sup>*An affirmation is a statement of our shared faith in regard to a particular topic or concern. It articulates a common perspective: "This is who we are and what we believe." By its nature, an affirmation is publicized in the ecclesiastical and secular realms as a faith-stance of the delegates to a particular Annual Meeting, with the hope that individuals through study and prayer will consider and adopt a similar perspective.*

Resolutions Primer, 2007