

**Proposal:** One  
**Title:** The UCC and Global Warming-The Unavoidable Challenge  
**Origin:** Church in Society Committee of Ottawa Presbytery  
(Original version from Glebe-St. James United Church)  
**Ottawa Presbytery Action:** Transmit with concurrence

WHEREAS the United Church of Canada is determined to build on decisions and policies on the environment and climate change adopted in recent years<sup>1</sup>; to act on fresh insights on environmental theology and new information on the implications of climate change<sup>2</sup>, and to play its full and proper role in meeting the challenge of global warming on the basis of the operative principles of “justice, equity, solidarity, human development and care for the environment”<sup>3</sup>;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 40<sup>th</sup> General Council 2009:

1. Recognises that global warming is unequivocal, threatens the world as we know it, is largely and increasingly caused by human agency, requires a paradigm change, and must be tackled on a priority basis, with special attention to the poor and most vulnerable everywhere;
2. Acknowledges the particular responsibility of Christians to take up the Noah-like challenge in our time of adapting to and mitigating global warming, drawing on First Nations’ teachings on right relations with the natural environment, working with other denominations, faiths, and persons and institutions of like mind in this regard whether governmental or non-governmental—a grand coalition to support this Earth and all its citizens, utilising a mix of mandatory economic and other measures;
3. Asserts the firm intention of the United Church of Canada to contribute fully to society’s understanding of the issues, and readiness to respond to the threat and the opportunity; and to this end, to stimulate and foster a program of actions throughout the United Church *inter alia* modeled as appropriate on the attached Appendix One;
4. Accordingly, invites the Moderator, the General Secretary, the General Council Executive, and the Courts, bodies and congregants of the United Church to renewed and urgent reflection on the steps incumbent upon them in their places, including but not limited to development of worship and study tools and education workshops and outreach, or networking, advocacy, decisions and action in their neighbourhoods and with their cohorts and their interlocutors, taking costs and benefits into account as appropriate in their areas;
5. Requests General Council Executive to provide a UCC progress report to the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council, and the whole United Church, with further recommendations as needed.

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### **1 Appendix One: Sample Statements and Decisions Within the United Church**

The following represent some options available to church courts, bodies and individuals.

*[The General Council/XXX Conference/YYY Presbytery/ZZZ Congregation]*

1. Affirms its confidence that, with the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit and with the necessary and timely human decisions at local, national and global levels, practical and effective action to deal with climate change and global warming, involving both adaptation and mitigation, can be taken on a broadly acceptable basis<sup>4</sup>;
2. Decides to: respond to global warming as a cross-cutting issue to be considered in every area of the Church's work; facilitate education and dialogue on climate change both within its membership and among the broader Canadian and international communities; contribute to a positive vision of a world where all God's creation can find a viable and satisfying home; and work with all to achieve that objective in a context of sustainability and justice;
3. Accordingly invites [*Courts and bodies of the Church, within their areas of responsibility and taking their financial and other resources into account*] working both alone and in cooperation with other churches and faith groups, partners, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, and government:
  - a) to develop strengthened programs within the United Church of Canada to meet its responsibilities in regard to the care of creation, building upon past work and insights and on the basis of renewed theological and scriptural reflection,
  - b) to make active use of existing material from United Church headquarters, including *Greening the Church*, as well as other sources<sup>5</sup>, in order to reduce to the maximum their ecological "footprint" over the next six years (GC 42);
  - c) to take responsibility for reasoned, non-partisan discussion and advocacy of the issues, including as appropriate in the public domain;
4. Invites individual members and adherents of the United Church to consider how they, through their commitments including at work, recreation and leisure, in their homes and in their use of resources, can play their full role with others to lead and support steps both large and small to hasten the coming of a sustainable neighbourhood, business or city;
5. Also invites other Churches, other faith groups and partners in Canada and abroad to join in bringing about climate stabilisation and sustainability within their purview and in contributing to broader efforts to achieve that goal wherever they are active;

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6. Calls upon the federal government, provincial and territorial governments and municipal authorities, to enforce a coordinated network of responsibility principles, including “polluter

pays”, “precautionary principle”, “maximum risk reduction”, “common but differentiated responsibilities”, and in their areas of responsibility to develop policies and programs, including research and development, with vigorous timetables, monitoring and enforcement using economic and tax incentives and penalties, in order to halt the increase in human “footprint” and reduce it to permanently sustainable levels; and, further, tangibly to encourage individuals, businesses and others who wish to take measures in the same direction. In particular, steps should be taken urgently to keep global average warming well below 2 degrees C; accordingly, developed countries should cut GHG emissions by 40% by 2020, and 90% by 2050 against 1990 levels;

7. Further calls upon the Government of Canada to join with other nations under the United Nations umbrella to negotiate binding international agreements with the same objectives as in paragraph 6 and effective economic and other mechanisms, incentives and penalties, including binding steps and procedures for implementation, monitoring and accountability;

8. Calls upon all sectors of Canadian Business and Industry to support and promote solid and practical steps to achieve the goal of climate stabilization and sustainability by mid-century, in cooperation with governments and other actors, on the basis of binding commitments to specific goals, and in accordance with Canadian and international standards and agreements;

[*General Council Executive and General Secretariat*]

9. Decides, taking appropriate account of budgetary considerations:

a) to develop accessible material in a variety of formats, e.g. the internet, to promote public understanding of the issues; as well as preparation of additional material for worship and study;

b) to examine ways for the UCC to become by [2015?] a net contributor to overall Canadian sustainability, e.g. by ensuring that all new construction or major upgrading of plant and equipment by the United Church of Canada, whether directly or with partners, be done on a fully sustainable basis;

c) to consider naming one of its principal officials as Chief Sustainability Officer of the United Church of Canada, with a mandate which would *inter alia* include responsibility for ensuring that the UCC’s policies, programs, practices and relationships actively support sustainability.

### **Background Note on Climate Change for General Council<sup>6</sup>**

There is a consensus among knowledgeable climate scientists that global warming is underway, is increasingly due to human activity, and requires early and sustained action. This is clearly a general issue for humanity. But it is a very particular issue for Christians. We follow a faith that begins with the news that God created this Earth and finds it “very good”. We are called to “live with respect in Creation”, to be “a blessing to the earth”, good tenants of this our home, good stewards (“care-takers”) of what God has

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entrusted to us, not mortgaging the future at the expense of posterity. Collectively we are beginning to appreciate more fully, encouraged by what we learn from our Aboriginal brothers and sisters, what it means to have an “integral connection to the earth”, not rulers but fellow citizens, so that we may (indeed

must) “participate in God’s work of healing and mending creation”. We are enjoined to “do justice, and love mercy”—and we know that it is the most vulnerable already who are most affected by this crisis. Our faith speaks to truly global crises (cf. the Noah story)—and this is indeed a crisis challenging the Earth. Our faith also talks about how God acts in times of testing. Of the miracles that can occur even today.

We sing: “*Divine creation does not cease until all things have found wholeness,.... In the meantime, we embrace the present ... caring for the Earth, choosing life.*” (A Song of Faith—GC 39)

The United Church of Canada has taken a lead role among churches in addressing environmental problems including Global Warming, e.g. the Energy policy statement of 2000 and the Water policy decisions of 2006. It has published a guide to greening church buildings and other facilities (*Greening the Church*—see United Church website). It is active in interchurch, interfaith and other non-governmental bodies and groups, including the preparations for the 2009 Copenhagen conference among Governments to negotiate the follow-up to the Kyoto Protocol. The Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit of the General Secretariat is being realigned to reflect among other important matters a focus on working for “a more just, sustainable ... Earth community” in order to promote “... care of creation...”.

***Given the increasing incidence of global warming and its ever more evident impact, however, it is timely to renew consideration at General Council level of a holistic UCC approach to Climate Change, in light of ongoing theological reflection and a concern for this Earth and all its inhabitants.*** Such reconsideration must reflect the seriousness and long term nature of the issues, and at the same time respect the responsibilities and mandates of the Church’s structures and bodies, especially the four Courts and the General Secretariat—and also the call to each individual to live out their faith in their work and play, in their families, in their other relationships. No one is without a field of influence and action.

On this basis, a number of potential actions by the Church, its courts, officials and congregants are suggested in Appendix One, as examples, without attempting to state in any definitive or exclusive fashion which Court or other church body should carry them out. It is for each body to assume its responsibilities. And other possibilities for action will undoubtedly be initiated and carried through by particular Courts and bodies, and by individual congregations, small groups and individuals.

Together these decisions could prompt a cascade of further significant actions by the United Church, thus helping to fulfill the promise of “...a new heaven and a new earth...” (Revelation, 21:1), where justice, equity, solidarity, peace and love prevail. ***Hope IS an Option.***

End Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See in particular “ENERGY IN THE ONE EARTH COMMUNITY, Current Challenges and Future Options for Energy Use In the Canadian and Global Contexts”, policy statement adopted by the 37<sup>th</sup> General Council in August 2000; and policy decisions on Water Issues at the 39<sup>th</sup> General Council in August 2006 (notably, Water: Life Before Profit).

<sup>2</sup> Reports of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007 (*Synthesis Assessment Report Four* of November 17, 2007; based on the 2007 Reports of the three Working Groups: WG I Report “*The Physical Science Basis*”; WG II Report “*Impacts, Adaptability and Vulnerability*”; WG III Report “*Mitigation of Climate Change*”. [www.ipcc.ch/](http://www.ipcc.ch/)

<sup>3</sup> Statement from the World Council of Churches to the Poznan Session of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, Poland December 12, 2008 (negotiations on the successor agreement to Kyoto): “*Faith and Feasibility – Responsibly Searching for a ‘new heaven and a new earth’*”.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Chris Turner: “*The Geography of Hope—A Tour of the World We Need*” Random House Canada, 2007

<sup>5</sup> See Faith and the Common Good: “*Greening Sacred Spaces*” [www.faith-commongood.net](http://www.faith-commongood.net).

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller background note see {Glebe-St. James U.C. website--[www.glebestjames.ca/](http://www.glebestjames.ca/)}.