CALL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND ACTION

(Prudential Resolution: Requires majority vote for passage.)

Submitted by: Northern California Nevada Conference, Rocky Mountain Conference, Connecticut Conference, Central Pacific Conference

SUMMARY
This Resolution calls on all expressions of the United Church of Christ to implement programs for education and action to address issues of environmental protection, environmental justice and sustainable development. It establishes an Environmental Steering Committee to implement this Resolution in close coordination with Justice and Witness Ministries.

BACKGROUND
Planet Earth and its natural systems have experienced unprecedented negative changes. The most grievous symptoms include global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, water scarcity, air-and water pollution, eroding soils, collapsing fisheries, shrinking forests, extinction of species, resource depletion and urban sprawl. While the awareness of these and other issues as well as the possible solutions is growing we are still far from a broad-based understanding, public support and sense of urgency to stop and reverse this crisis.

Therefore we can and must encourage, support and coordinate efforts to assist Churches, Conferences and other entities of the UCC to develop environmental initiatives as defined below. Considering the spiritual and practical imperative of responsible stewardship of the natural systems that nurture us and God's other creatures, it is recommended that the twenty-fifth General Synod of the UCC approve this Resolution.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE
Each day of Creation, as recorded in Genesis, is followed by the affirmation, “God saw that it was good.” (Gen.: 1). The sweep of God’s blessing includes the earth itself, plants, sea creatures, reptiles, animals, the sun, moon and the stars. When humankind is created on the sixth day, all creation is pronounced “very good” and humans given the care/stewardship of this creation. The concept of stewardship is further elaborated in Gen. 2:15 (the second story of creation) which states that God took the first human into the garden with the instruction to “til it and care for it”.

Some have assumed permission to disregard and abuse creation, citing God’s instruction “to multiply and subdue the earth.” This injunction meant one thing to agricultural people in Old Testament times, faced with the need to grow their livelihood from the earth. It has limited relevance today and does not give permission to destroy rainforests at the rate of 214,000 acres per day, disregard the extinction of species (the estimate is between 11 and 137 per day), pollute air and water, use our natural resources at an unsustainable rate, poison the earth with pesticides and industrial emissions. Would such behavior also receive the affirmation, “God saw that it was good”?

A number of Psalms proclaim the glory of God’s handiwork (8: 1-9, 19: 1-6, 65: 9-13), Jesus looked to the lilies of the field and the sparrows for natural wisdom, St. Paul proclaimed that all creation yearns for deliverance (Romans 8: 18-23.) This Resolution asserts the integrity and goodness of creation, a creation which acknowledges the absolute interdependence of the natural world and humankind. As stewards/caretakers of the
natural world, we are called to reassert the integrity of all creation and do our utmost to preserve and sustain its life giving force.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS it is recognized that each of us has the responsibility of caring for God’s Earth, individually and collectively and that it is our responsibility to protect, preserve and, to the extent possible, restore the natural systems worldwide for the benefit of current and future generations of all living species, and

WHEREAS humankind’s unsustainable practices and ongoing destruction of God’s Creation are contrary to our deepest values and are spiritually, ethically and pragmatically unacceptable, and

WHEREAS it is essential that individually and collectively we become aware of and take action with respect to the many viable solutions which exist or are in the process of being developed to protect, preserve and restore the natural systems that nurture us and God’s other creatures, and

WHEREAS many faith-based organizations are taking action on these environmental issues and are actively articulating their environmental positions and it is important that the UCC denomination projects an equally well coordinated and articulated approach to our common concerns about the environment and environmental justice, and

WHEREAS the UCC has by Resolutions, Pronouncements and Proposals for Action over many years proven itself to be concerned with issues of the environment, including but not limited to, issues of eco-justice, environmental racism, air and water quality, sustainable growth and matters of national and international environmental policy, and

WHEREAS many different environmentally focused and faith-based organizations, including entities belonging to the UCC, have resources available to assist Congregations and Conferences with information and materials for environmental worship, education, youth programs and action, and

WHEREAS all Congregations and Conferences would benefit if these resources and suggested programs would be shared for use in their churches as well as in church-initiated or sponsored ecumenical and community environmental events, and

WHEREAS it would be most efficient for Congregations and Conferences to establish a central venue to provide information, resources and support as well as a to identify, share and exchange information on what the different Congregations are doing about environmental stewardship;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the twenty-fifth General Synod urges congregations and conferences to agree to initiate programs to:

1. increase awareness and change public consciousness about our interaction with the natural world, indigenous communities, eco-justice and environmental racism and its consequences;
2. promote the study of our Biblical and historical heritage of caring about the environment;
3. create regular congregational and/or community venues for discussions about environmental issues, solutions, and alternatives; and why we believe God wants us to be good stewards of all creation:
(4) focus collective and individual action to transform our society's unsustainable practices and policies for the long-term benefit and survival of all life on earth,

(5) work vigorously as advocates and activists for the protection and restoration of our local and global environment.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the twenty-fifth General Synod directs the Executive Council to request that Justice and Witness Ministries establish and empower a UCC Environmental Steering Committee responsible for the execution of this resolution and to assign to this Committee the following tasks and responsibilities, which are to be executed in close coordination with Justice and Witness Ministries:

- to develop policies and procedures to identify, prioritize and take action on the environmental subjects covered in this Resolution and to define and suggest actions to be taken by the UCC denomination and/or its Congregations or Conferences;
- to develop a strategic plan by December 31, 2005 to implement such policies and procedures;
- to develop procedures to appoint members to the Environmental Steering Committee, set term limits and cover any other matters considered useful in the efficient and effective functioning of this Committee;
- to report periodically, but at least annually, on its work, activities and achievements to Justice and Witness Ministries.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the twenty-fifth General Synod directs the Executive Council to request that Justice and Witness Ministries assist and support the UCC Environmental Steering Committee in the efforts required to achieve the objectives of this Resolution and for this purpose to assign the responsibility for implementation as appropriate;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the twenty-fifth General Synod directs the Executive Council to request that Justice and Witness Ministries establish this UCC Environmental Steering Committee by initially appointing 12 volunteers representing interested Conferences;

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

The Executive Council recommends that the resolution entitled "Call for Environmental Education and Action" be referred directly to an implementing body.