

1 The Board of Directors has recommended this resolution be sent directly to a Plenary Session of
2 the General Synod.

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4 **COMMEMORATING 100 YEARS SINCE THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE**

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6 **Submitted by Wider Church Ministries**
7 **(A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ)**
8 **A Resolution of Witness**
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10 **SUMMARY**

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12 2015 marks the 100-year anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in Anatolia (modern-day
13 Turkey). With this resolution, the United Church of Christ, which has active current
14 relationships with the Armenian community, seeks to mark this anniversary by reiterating its
15 acknowledgement of the events and reasserting its concern for people and communities that are
16 victims of violence, particularly when based on race, ethnicity, creed, or any other aspect of
17 identity.

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20 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING**

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22 Matthew 2:16-18 describes the massacre of all the first born males, ordered by Herod, after the
23 Magi ignored his direction to report to him about the place of Jesus' birth:

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25 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the
26 children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had
27 learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:
28 'A voice was heard in Ramah,
29 wailing and loud lamentation,
30 Rachel weeping for her children;
31 she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

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33 Rachel's weeping and lamentation was a recognition that her children had perished, and those
34 whom Herod ordered killed would never have the chance to thrive. Even so, Jesus "came that
35 they have life, and have it abundantly," with justice and with peace.

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37 The victimization of innocents by those in power was not new in the 20th century; indeed history
38 is replete with such tragedy. In the context of World War I, 1.5 million Armenians, and people
39 of other ethnic and religious backgrounds, were killed, and another million were displaced,
40 during the "deportations" that the Ottoman army carried out following arrests on April 24, 1915
41 of Armenian intellectual leaders in Constantinople. These deportations and massacres lasted
42 eight years, from 1915 to 1923. Raphael Lemkin, a Jewish man who introduced the term
43 "genocide" in his 1944 book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, had in mind the tragedy that befell
44 the Armenians in 1915 and following, as well as the Holocaust of Jews in Europe in the 1930s
45 and 1940s.

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47 Missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions—a predecessor
48 body of Wider Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ—already working primarily

49 among the Armenian community in Anatolia for a century, witnessed, documented, and
50 advocated for an end to the massacres with local and international officials. They also raised
51 funds for relief of those who were suffering, and who managed to resettle, many in northern
52 Syria.

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54 **MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

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56 Today, the United Church of Christ, with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) through
57 Global Ministries, continues to nurture relationships with Armenian Christians in the Middle
58 East, North America, and elsewhere. In 1997, the General Synod affirmed the Union of
59 Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East as “a partner in mission.” In addition, Wider
60 Church Ministries participates with members from the Armenian Missionary Association of
61 America in a Cooperative Committee on Armenian Missions, which was established in 1927.
62 Relationships exist and have been drawn upon for consultation in preparation for this resolution.
63 Recognition of the Genocide on this occasion is a significant affirmation of a shared history.
64 Adoption of this resolution would serve as a tangible expression of solidarity with our partners,
65 demonstrate our participation with them in the commemoration, and provide direction for
66 advocacy.

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68 **INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY**

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70 In 1983, the United Church of Christ’s Executive Council “extend[ed] to the Armenian people,
71 and in particular the Armenian congregations and members of the United Church of Christ, deep
72 sympathy and understanding in regard to the genocidal persecution experienced by this people in
73 the early decades of this century. And further, the Executive Council [sought] positive steps
74 towards justice in the historical account and towards peace and reconciliation in this matter.”
75 Such efforts will be bolstered by a Synod resolution.

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77 The implementation of this resolution will not require additional financial or staff support. The
78 resolution will, however, bolster work currently being done with Armenian partners.

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80 **PROBABILITY OF INFLUENCEING SOCIAL CHANGE**

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82 A Resolution of Witness by General Synod on this occasion will be a significant message of
83 support and solidarity to those who persevere in their quest for justice regarding the Armenian
84 Genocide. It will also provide a basis for advocacy with the US government to recognize the
85 Genocide.

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88 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

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90 WHEREAS, 2015 marks the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in Anatolia (modern-
91 day Turkey) in the Ottoman Empire, during which 1.5 million Armenians were killed and more
92 than 1 million displaced between 1915 and 1923;

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94 WHEREAS, surviving Armenians and their descendants who are still impacted by memory and
95 consequences of the events, and many others, continue to seek recognition of the Genocide by
96 Turkey, the US, and other governments of the world as a form of affirmation, of
97 acknowledgement of truth, and of historical justice, asserting that time alone is not a remedy;
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99 WHEREAS, missionaries of our church witnessed, documented, and advocated for an end to the
100 massacres with local and international officials, and the United Church of Christ continues to
101 maintain close relationships with Armenians ecumenically and globally, most particularly with
102 the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East and the Armenian Missionary
103 Association of America—relationships that have had mutual impact among Armenians and
104 among members of our church;
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106 THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of
107 Christ marks the occasion of the centennial commemoration of the Armenian Genocide with
108 lament for the lives that were lost, and for the lack of recognition by governments of the world,
109 most notably Turkey and the US, of the historical event of the Genocide;
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111 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
112 gives thanks for the faithful witness and presence of the Armenian Christian community, and
113 offers prayers for its continued strength particularly as it is affected by the ongoing crisis in
114 Syria, where many Genocide survivors resettled;
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116 FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
117 reiterates its abhorrence when peoples and communities are made victims of violence,
118 particularly when based on race, ethnicity, creed, or any other aspect of identity. Taken to the
119 ultimate manifestation, such victimization constitutes genocide, a crime that should be prevented,
120 halted, recognized, and acknowledged, in order to protect the communities, and offer recognition
121 of the injustice it represents.
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123 **FUNDING**
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125 The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the
126 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.
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128 **IMPLEMENTATION**
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130 The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within
131 the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.