

The Business Committee of the Thirty-Second General Synod has recommended this proposed resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

**A RESOLUTION ON ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND
THE IGLESIA EVANGELICA UNIDA DE PUERTO RICO
A Prudential Resolution
Submitted by the United Church of Christ Board**

SUMMARY

This resolution recognizes and celebrates a new ecumenical relationship between the United Church of Christ and the *Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico* (United Evangelical Church in Puerto Rico) and creates a committee that will collaboratively explore the direction and plan to move this relationship toward a deeper commitment that reflects visible unity in the life of the church. This commitment will offer the closest possible relationship while each church retains its autonomy.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL and ETHICAL RATIONALE

In his last prayer with his disciples, Jesus prayed, “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21, NRSV). The desire for unity and visible unity in the church is at the heart and commitment of the ecumenical movement. The unity of the church is shared in baptism, eucharist and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The United Church of Christ and Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico (IEUPR) affirm this biblical understanding of unity which guides the ecumenical commitment and engagement with other communions. The church continues to seek meaningful ways to attend to the call in the gospel and to overcome the separations that stand in the way of the unity of the church that Jesus prayed for. As Christians, there is an imperative to find ways to live in unity and to create visible unity for the life of the church. This call is the essence of the ecumenical movement which seeks to find unity-in-diversity, creating the space to engage divergences and convergences through on-going dialogue and engagement.

BACKGROUND

The Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico has Reformed and Congregational heritage. The church was formed January 28, 1931 with the union of the Congregational Church, the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and the Christian Church, making it one of the earliest united and uniting churches, formed from the union of other denominations. There are currently over sixty united and uniting denominations globally, denominations formed as commitment and expression of the ecumenical movement.

In January 1990, the church voted to join the United Church of Christ, becoming the Puerto Conference of the United Church of Christ. In 2006, IEUPR voted to once again become an autonomous church, leaving the UCC to do so. The split between IEUPR and the UCC came in the aftermath of the UCC vote in 2005 to support marriage equality. This was assumed to be the

primary motivation for IEUPR leaving the UCC. However, this was one of many factors since the political climate in Puerto Rico and the desire for independence from United States colonialism was also a factor.

In 2012, The-the United Church of Christ made its first visit to Puerto Rico since the separation in 2012. At that time, a high-level delegation visited to begin conversations about the relationship between the UCC and the IEUPR. The UCC delegation heard the concerns that were present for IEUPR that went unheard in 2005, in the absence of adequate conversation before or after the two churches separated. During that visit, the UCC delegation visited Ryder Hospital and met with IEUPR leadership. The delegation also had the opportunity to worship with IEUPR congregations. The visit left room for more conversation and the desire to determine a way forward together.

Since becoming an independent church, the IEUPR has maintained ties with the UCC, primarily through Global Ministries and Ryder Hospital. Ryder Hospital is a missional partner with the Central Atlantic Conference and a participant in the UCC Pension Boards. Congregations in the UCC also have relationships with IEUPR and have taken mission teams to support the camping ministry and other projects within IEUPR.

Since hurricane Maria, the UCC has provided support to Puerto Rico through the IEUPR. Funds and volunteers for assisting with the recovery effort are being provided by the UCC's Disaster Ministries which is working closely with the IEUPR. Included in the effort is assistance in restoring Ryder Hospital to full working condition. The hospital holds a seat on its Board of Directors for a UCC representative.

A second delegation met with Pastors and leaders of IEUPR in September, 2018. During the visit, the delegation visited IEUPR congregations and Ryder Hospital to see and hear about the recovery efforts. While there was acknowledgement of a shared history and interests, there was also conversation, lament and apology for the 2006 separation by both churches. Many who were strong advocates for leaving the UCC expressed their regret for the way in which the separation happened. For its part, members of the UCC named their lament and apology as well for the lack of adequate communication and the length of time that transpired before overtures were made to hear the concerns of the IEUPR. In this second set of meetings, both sides determined it was time for intention in mending the breach of relationship and for pursuing the closest possible relationship possible while remaining autonomous churches.

WHEREAS, the gospel of Jesus Christ unites the followers of Christ in a single community of faith and compels us to make our unity visible so "that the world may believe..." John 17:21;

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ and the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico are both united and uniting churches with multiple denominational streams which identify them and shape their Christian self-understanding;

WHEREAS, the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico and the United Church of Christ have common commitment to the visible unity of the church of Jesus Christ and to the one ecumenical movement;

90
91 WHEREAS, the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico and the United Church of Christ have
92 common Congregational and Reformed heritage and sit in common witness to mission, worship,
93 theological conversation and commitment to justice;

94
95 WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ and the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico have
96 engaged in dialogue and have identified similarities and differences that can commonly
97 strengthen who they are and their witness in North America as united and ~~united~~-uniting
98 churches;

99
100 WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ and the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico were
101 one church for fifteen years, sharing ministry to the world together and united in Christ's love;

102
103 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Thirty Second General Synod of the United Church of
104 Christ recognizes the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico as an ecumenical partner;

105
106 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, ~~the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico and that~~ the Thirty
107 Second General Synod of the United Church of Christ ~~mutually~~ commits to forming an
108 ecumenical partnership committee with the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico;

109
110 BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the ecumenical partnership committee brings back to the
111 Thirty Third General Synod recommendations for further steps and activities to bring the two
112 communions to the closest possible relationship while remaining independent churches.

113 114 **FUNDING**

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

117 118 **IMPLEMENTATION**

119 The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within
120 the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.