

Mr. Chu noted that a year-long assessment has been done to shape a comprehensive plan for youth ministry. Youth and young adults placed a high value on justice work and inclusive congregations. Young adults yearn to network with the wider church for leadership training. The next step is to determine staffing for youth and young adult ministries. A complete report was given to each Conference Minister present at General Synod and a full report will be available on the United Church of Christ website.

Ms. Marilyn Pagan Banks spoke to the feeling that Latino and Asian faces were missing in the video, but Mr. Chu assured her there were both Latino and Asian youth in the video.

12. RESOLUTION: CALLING ON PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA TO REVISIT AND RE-NEGOTIATE A MORE HUMANE, DEMOCRATIC, AND ECOLOGICALLY SOUND VERSION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Assistant Moderator Jane Tedder called upon Mr. Jeremy Rich, Chair of Committee Nine to present the recommended action for that Committee.

Mr. Rich moved the adoption of the resolution “Calling on President Barack Obama to Revisit and Re-negotiate a More Humane, Democratic, and Ecologically Sound Version of the North American Free Trade Agreement.” He then spoke to the motion.

09-GS-28 VOTED: The Twenty-seventh General Synod adopts the resolution “Calling on President Barack Obama to Revisit and Re-negotiate a More Humane, Democratic, and Ecologically Sound Version of the North American Free Trade Agreement.”

CALLING ON PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA TO REVISIT AND RE-NEGOTIATE A MORE HUMANE, DEMOCRATIC, AND ECOLOGICALLY SOUND VERSION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

WHEREAS, numerous General Synod resolutions have sought to support a more just national and international economic system, including “Justice in the *Maquiladoras*” (Eighteenth General Synod, 1991), “In Support of International Fair Trade” (Nineteenth General Synod, 1993), “Affirming Democratic Principles in an Emerging Global Economy” (Twenty-first General Synod, 1997), “Ending the Stranglehold of Global Debt on Impoverished Nations” (Twenty-second General Synod, 1999); and “Resolution Calling For A More Just, Humane Direction For Economic Globalization” (Twenty-third General Synod, 2001); “For the Common Good” (Twenty-fifth General Synod, 2005), and

WHEREAS, numerous General Synod resolutions have called for a more democratic and humane relationship between the US and Mexico, including, “A Call for a More Humane U.S. Immigration Policy: End Migrant Deaths; Support Immigrant Communities” (Twenty-sixth General Synod, 2007); “Emergency Resolution to End the Death of Migrants on the United States-Mexico Border by Offering Water in Christ’s Name”(Twenty-third General Synod, 2001); and “Border Justice Issues: A Challenge for the 21st Century Church” (Twenty-second, 1999), and

WHEREAS, on January 1, 1994, amid major opposition and protests in Canada, the US, and Mexico, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came officially into effect for our three countries—and the next day the Zapatista rebel movement was launched to protest it, and

WHEREAS, the treaty was written ostensibly to lower trade barriers, subsidies, tariffs, and duties, and further integrate the economies of Canada, the US and Mexico in order to create a “level playing field” for trade and finance throughout the three countries, but in reality it contained many other provisions

which have damaged homes, families, jobs, livelihoods, the environment, and potentially even our democracy, and

WHEREAS, the treaty also set up a nontransparent judicial system that stands above our three democratically elected governments which has the power to override our individual laws and courts, and in which corporations (but not individuals) can sue countries if their legislatures pass laws which they perceive will cost them future profits, as for example when the Delaware firm, Metalclad was prevented by a vote of the town council of Guadalupe, Mexico, from building a toxic waste treatment center in their town, but Metalclad successfully sued the government of Mexico in the NAFTA tribunal, arguing that the democratically elected council did not have the authority to ban construction of the waste dump that could have made them a profit, and was paid by the Mexican government \$15.6 million in future damages, and

WHEREAS, the treaty was first proposed as something that would dramatically raise employment and living standards in all three countries, but in reality contributed to major job losses and either declines or flattened incomes in all three countries (in the US because workers couldn't compete with Mexico's lower worker incomes, and in Mexico because farmers couldn't compete with the US' subsidized agricultural products), and

WHEREAS, the damage to Mexican farmers and low income workers contributed to a massive increase in immigration north to the US looking for work, which then led to US policies that expended millions of dollars in fences and surveillance along the border and thousands of tragic Mexican deaths in the deserts, and

WHEREAS, the treaty claimed to uphold labor rights and protect the environment through "side agreements" which established oversight panels, in reality they were poorly funded and had weak enforcement powers (and frequently weak desires by appointees to enforce what powers they had) and

WHEREAS, the scriptures are replete with stories of our ancestors immigrating to foreign countries looking for food and work during times of economic hardship (Ruth and Naomi, Abraham, Joseph's brothers, etc.), and of the Israelites themselves welcoming in the "resident aliens," "foreigners," and "sojourners and strangers" (Exodus 22:21, Leviticus 19:34, etc.), and

WHEREAS, the Hebrew scriptures abound with judgments on those who would oppress others through economic means and who had no compassion on the homeless, the indebted, the jobless, and the stranger (Exodus 23:6; Jeremiah 22:3, etc.), and

WHEREAS, in the Christian scriptures the Apostle Paul challenged those who were once "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise," but who now had found the oneness of God through Jesus Christ and were no longer "far off" but instead "brought near" because "in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us," and created "in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace...putting to death that hostility through it" making us all "citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God." (Eph 2:11-20), and

WHEREAS, during the 2008 presidential campaign, candidate Barack Obama (and others) came out strongly in support of the revisiting and revisioning of NAFTA, to bring it more into line with our proclaimed values of respect and concern for the rights and dignity of all human beings and of love and care in the stewardship of all the earth, as, for example, in a speech in February, 2008, when he said, "I will not sign any trade agreement as President that does not have protections for our environment and protections for American workers, and I'll pass the Patriot Employer Act that I've been fighting for ever

since I ran for the Senate so we can end tax breaks for companies that ship our jobs overseas, and give those breaks to companies that create good jobs with decent wages here in America,” or in an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* in September 2004, “As part of any current or future trade agreement negotiations, our nation must address the dislocations caused by expanded global trade by maintaining workers’ basic benefits and helping them retrain,” and

WHEREAS, economists, social justice organizations, churches, human rights groups, environmental groups, and labor unions have called for the leaders of the three nations to come together and re-envision the treaty, especially in the areas of labor, the environment, and protection of democratic principles, and

WHEREAS, numerous polls have shown that majorities of citizens of all three countries support some level of reopening and renegotiation of NAFTA,

WHEREAS, there are many powerful special interests and powerful individuals (both outside and inside of the President’s Administration) who are strongly against any conversation of any kind about any changes in NAFTA,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the members of the Twenty-seventh General Synod of the United Church of Christ voice their support for President Barack Obama’s commitment to work with the leaders of Mexico and Canada, to revisit and re-envision NAFTA in ways that would,

1. strengthen its labor and environmental side agreements with greater funding and language granting significant enforcement powers, revise its Chapter 11, “investor protection” provisions in order to shield the legislative and judicial decisions of our three countries and to allow individuals and communities who might be harmed by the effects of NAFTA (not just corporations) to participate in the tribunal process, and that the tribunal process be held to a broader and more transparent operation and mechanism of accountability, and
2. design a humane and coherent immigration policy, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ be requested to write a letter to the President expressing these concerns, concerns which are shared by the majorities of citizens in all three of our respective countries, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Justice and Witness Ministries and the Washington DC Program Team be encouraged to work toward the passage through Congress of a revisited and re-envisioned NAFTA, if and when that becomes appropriate legislatively, and to keep our various churches and instrumentalities apprised of its progress and where we might be helpful in its passage, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that our various churches be encouraged to, whenever possible, lift up in prayer, study, and worship the important issues of trade justice with countries such as Mexico, to join with delegations and immersion programs to Latin America through our own Centro Romero, or the Equal Exchange Interfaith Program, the Jubilee Justice Task Force, Border Links, or other organizations, and to be advocates for just, fair, equitable trade policies for poor and working class people in all three of our respective countries.

FUNDING

Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION

Justice and Witness Ministries is requested to implement this resolution.