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

JESUS SAID, “FOLLOW ME.”
A Resolution of Witness
Submitted by the Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ

SUMMARY
A resolution encouraging conversation within and among Local Churches on what it means to follow Jesus, with the intent of learning from one another and encouraging one another in faithful witness and extravagant welcome.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING
In an era when many publicly proclaim their Christian belief but appear to live with disregard of that belief, we are pressed to ask questions about the nature of church membership in the United States in the 21st Century. As leaders of the Reclaiming Jesus movement declared in their statement on Pentecost 2018,

“We are living through perilous and polarizing times as a nation, with a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and in our churches. We believe the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith are now at stake. It is time to be followers of Jesus before anything else . . .”

In the gospels, Jesus says it fifteen times, “Follow me.” Often the summons is accompanied by further instructions, “take up your cross” or “sell what you own and give it to the poor.” Our history as the United Church of Christ has been shaped by courageous people who followed Jesus, proclaiming good news to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, who contended with the evils of their age in the spirit of God’s grace. As each of us grapples today with the call to follow Jesus, we can be heartened and encouraged through the sharing of those stories from the past and our own stories of how we’ve overcome, and how we’ve sought clarity and understanding of Jesus’ call, “Follow me.” We can be challenged and inspired by hearing of each other’s sources of strength and support in deepening the commitment to follow Jesus—as individuals and as congregations.

Because each Local Church is autonomous, with “no shadow of outer coercion, but only the inner compulsion of love, in its relationship to the church of the ages, the whole ministering church of this age, and the needs of humanity ministered to,” there would be no expectation of a unanimous plan of action to result from these conversations. Rather we would seek to “provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together . . . but encouraging one another.” [Hebrews 10: 24-25a]

Consideration of Jesus’ call to “Follow me” may lead us to expand our extravagant welcome. It is noteworthy that when Jesus extended his call to “Follow me” he didn’t quiz his potential disciples about what they believed, but invited them to come and see, and to follow. As the United Church of Christ we resonate with that approach. We find in the UCC Constitution no test of faith to gain admittance or sustain membership or be considered kindred in Christ. There
is no exam on beliefs to be held, no creeds to which we must adhere. In practice we are a
“Follow me” kind of church, more relational than propositional, with our affirmation that “No
matter who you are, no matter where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.”

When those seventeen words broke into our UCC speech patterns in 2004, they greeted
newcomers to our church and delivered the simple and practical truth of God’s extravagant
welcome to people whose connections to any form of religious experience had been
devastatingly severed, as well as to those who had had no exposure to church life. In many of
our Local Churches we find people who want to follow Jesus and who may not have the words to
express their longing and their search in ways that are familiar to those of us who have long been
part of a church community; and there are those who are part of another religious tradition and
want to retain that identity along with being a member of the United Church of Christ. Among
our autonomous congregations there are diverse practices and traditions surrounding the
reception of new members. Conversations about those practices and traditions, in an attitude of
hospitality to one another, would expand appreciation for the diversity of our cultural and
theological heritages and cast light on the expectations we have for ourselves and for one another
as members of the United Church of Christ.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS, as the United Church of Christ we are a unity of multiple voices, each essential,
each congregation autonomous, uncoerced, and with its own integrity;

WHEREAS, as the United Church of Christ in these perilous times, we must heed Dr. Martin
Luther King’s directive to the church to be the “conscience of the state,”

WHEREAS, as the United Church of Christ, we have been blessed by God’s extravagant
welcome, and have sought to be agents of that graciousness,

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Thirty Second General Synod of the United Church of
Christ calls upon Local Churches to engage in reflection and conversation on what it means to
follow Jesus, with the intent of learning from one another and encouraging one another in
faithful witness and extravagant welcome.

These conversations within, between, and among Local Churches would focus on

- The significance of Jesus’ call, “Follow me” in this era, and the ways in
  which each congregation has responded to that call.
- The expectations we have of members of our congregation to be followers
  of Jesus, and the ways in which members are supported and challenged by
  their Local Churches in discernment and action as followers of Jesus.
- The ways in which each Local Church welcomes into membership those
  who want to follow Jesus as part of this UCC community of faith; whether
  those new to the congregation become members via one of the three routes
  noted in the UCC Constitution (baptism and either confirmation or
  reaffirmation or
  profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; reaffirmation or
  reprofession of faith; or letter of transfer or certification from other
Christian churches)—or whether there are other routes or requirements for Local Church membership.

Notes and learnings from the conversations would be sent in and compiled for distribution throughout the UCC.

Be it further resolved that the Thirty Second General Synod calls upon Conferences and Associations to provide settings for the conversations between and among Local Churches, and requests Conferences and Associations to distribute conversation guides to Local Churches and Authorized Ministers;

Be it finally resolved that the Thirty Second General Synod requests the implementing body for this resolution to develop a conversation guide and a system for receiving, compiling, and distributing the reports from the conversations on Jesus said, “Follow me.”

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

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


3 The Constitution of the United Church of Christ, paragraph 11.