

1 The Executive Council has recommended this resolution be sent directly to a plenary session of the General
2 Synod with the recommendation that it be approved.

3 4 **On the Situation of Iraqi Refugees and Internally Displaced**

5 6 **A Resolution of Witness**

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9 **Submitted By:** The Central Atlantic Conference and the Southern Conference

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11 **Summary:** This resolution draws attention to the continuing humanitarian crisis faced by
12 Iraqis—both internally displaced and refugees—caused by the 2003 invasion and
13 subsequent occupation, and calls upon the United Church of Christ to respond.

14 15 **Biblical, Theological, and Ethical Rationale:**

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17 “Who is my neighbor?” In answering this question, Jesus responded with the parable of
18 the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-27). With it, Jesus demonstrates that however foreign
19 or alien, his followers have a responsibility—and an incentive—to recognize the
20 neighborhood of all people. In times of war, we often forget the humanity of people
21 whose identity is wrapped up with negative connotations, like the Samaritan. Focusing
22 on the harm that has been caused, and tending to it with a sense of care, restores that
23 humanity.

24 25 **Background:**

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27 Since the US-led invasion of Iraq, which began in March 2003, and during the continuing
28 occupation of the country, Iraq’s population has witnessed an unprecedented level of
29 instability and insecurity. The pre-war population of Iraq, roughly 25 million, has
30 experienced forced shifts as a result, including more than 4.5 million Iraqis (almost one-
31 fifth of the population) forced from their homes. The pre-war population figure includes
32 between 650,000 and 1 million Christians—a significant proportion of the population.
33 According to all accounts, Iraqis were leaving at the rate of 10,000 per month during
34 some of the heaviest periods of emigration and uprooting. Loss of livelihood, inability to
35 pay those who demand ransom against the threat on people’s lives, and hopelessness in
36 the face of imminent death threats are some of the reasons that Christians and Muslims
37 have left their homes—often times too quickly to put their homes in order or pack
38 anything—in hope for a safer life somewhere else. Attacks on Christians have been
39 covered by US media; these are horrendous, and symptomatic of prevailing violence and
40 danger. Many countries around the world have taken in Iraqi refugees, including Syria,
41 Jordan, Lebanon, and Sweden, in numbers beyond their capacity and despite sharing no
42 responsibility for the cause of the crisis. The United States has admitted no more than
43 25,000 in the course of 5 years.

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45 The United Church of Christ, through the Collegium’s Pastoral Letter on the Iraq War,
46 the 100,000 for Peace Campaign, and national programs of the church in Wider Church

47 Ministries/Global Ministries, has been active in voicing opposition to the war in Iraq, and
48 in caring for our troops, as well as their families, their congregations, and their military
49 chaplains—including advocacy for the needs of returning veterans. The UCC has also
50 voiced its critique of the exorbitant cost of this war, and the impact such spending has
51 had on education and health care, and other necessary programs. The UCC has supported
52 the efforts of partners in the Middle East to respond to the humanitarian refugee crisis
53 that is ongoing and three Conference Ministers (Rev. James Antal [Massachusetts], Rev.
54 Roddy Dunkerson [Nebraska], and Rev. John Deckenback [Central Atlantic] had the
55 opportunity to visit some of the relief work they are doing in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan,
56 last summer (2008).

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58 **Resolution:**

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60 **Whereas**, the United Church of Christ and its predecessor bodies, and in ecumenical
61 cooperation with the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Reformed Church in America
62 (and their predecessor bodies) have engaged in Iraq through the United Mission to Iraq,
63 establishing schools and hospitals, and developing relationships with the Iraqi people;

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65 **Whereas**, the invasion and continuing occupation of Iraq have unleashed indescribable
66 instability and insecurity in Iraq, including increased sectarian tensions between Muslims
67 and Christians;

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69 **Whereas**, the United Church of Christ's Collegium, issued its *Pastoral Letter on the Iraq*
70 *War* at the Twenty-sixth General Synod (2007), signed by Conference Ministers,
71 Seminary Presidents, and the General Synod itself, a letter that

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➤ Lamented the “thousands of precious American lives that have been lost” and
73 altered by injury;

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➤ Grieved the tens of thousands of lost Iraqi lives

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➤ Critiqued the high cost of the war and the impact on “education, health care, and
76 the needs of the poor in this land and around the world”

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➤ Confessed the silence of the church

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➤ Gave thanks for those who have spoken against the violence, for military
79 personnel who have served with honor, for military chaplains who have cared for
80 them, and for churches and organizations that have provided humanitarian relief

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➤ Called for an end to the war and to violence, to acknowledge failure, error, and
82 responsibility, and to seek repentance and peace;

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84 **Whereas**, one of the most significant impacts of the invasion and occupation—and
85 perhaps one of the least reported in the US—is the staggering number of refugees and
86 internally displaced Iraqis, estimated conservatively at 4.5 million (more than 2 million
87 refugees and more than 2 million internally displaced);

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89 **Whereas**, Syria has absorbed more than 1.5 million Iraqi refugees, Jordan, nearly a half a
90 million, and Lebanon between 80,000-100,000, but fewer than 25,000 had been referred
91 for admission to the United States through September 2008, and only approximately
92 7,000 had been admitted, according to the Department of Homeland Security;

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94 **Whereas** the “100,000 for Peace” campaign in the United Church of Christ offered
95 prayers for military personnel, petitioned elected representatives with more than 67,000
96 signatures to end the war and change policies, and raised more than \$140,000 to provide
97 humanitarian relief for Iraqi refugees through partner churches and organizations in the
98 Middle East;

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100 **Therefore be it resolved** that the Twenty-seventh General Synod of the United Church
101 of Christ calls upon national ministries, conferences, associations and local churches to
102 continue to raise awareness of the impact of the Iraq war, especially on Iraqis who have
103 been forced from their homes and are living with much uncertainty and hopelessness,
104 either as internally displaced or as refugees;

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106 **And be it further resolved** that the Twenty-seventh General Synod calls upon all
107 settings of the United Church of Christ to advocate for a clearer US recognition of our
108 country’s responsibility for the humanitarian crisis the war has caused, and for significant
109 increases and expedited processing to offer resettlement of refugees to the United States;

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111 **And be it further resolved** that United Church of Christ members be encouraged to
112 support the humanitarian relief efforts of its international partners to offer care for Iraqis
113 forced from their homes, now living in other parts of Iraq, and in Syria, Lebanon, and
114 Jordan,

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116 **And be it finally resolved** that the United Church of Christ affirm its commitment to
117 refugee resettlement, and its support for the rights of refugees scattered throughout the
118 Middle East and all over the world to safe repatriation or resettlement with compensation
119 for their losses.

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121 **FUNDING**

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

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127 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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129 Wider Church Ministries is asked to implement this resolution.

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