

The following resolution was approved by the delegates at a plenary of the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ, held in Indianapolis June 30-July 4, 2023.

**Closing the Digital Divide: Calling on the United Church of Christ
to Seek Digital Justice and Inclusion**

A Resolution of Witness

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS few areas of life are not impacted by digital access and use and there is a growing correlation between quality digital access and use and increased economic, educational,¹ health,² labor,³ and social opportunities and mobility;⁴ and

WHEREAS thirty percent of school-age children in the United States⁵ (two-thirds of those whose family income is below the federal poverty level⁶) and two-thirds of students globally⁷ do not have adequate, reliable internet access at home; and

WHEREAS the COVID pandemic laid bare the injustice of the digital divide, further widening educational,⁸ economic,⁹ and opportunities¹⁰ gaps¹¹ between those who have high quality digital access and those who do not; and

WHEREAS the United Church of Christ has long recognized the unique power of media to give meaningful voice to diverse peoples, cultures, and ideas and in so doing to shape society; and,

WHEREAS the ability to use new and evolving technologies is essential for strengthening relationships and building peaceful communities, and especially for the hearing, centering, and amplifying of voices of those on the margins;¹² and

WHEREAS disparities in digital access reflect gender,¹³ race,¹⁴ geographic,¹⁵ ability,¹⁶ and economic¹⁷ privilege, systemically entrenching existing¹⁸ inequalities¹⁹ in the United States; and,

WHEREAS this divide is similarly²⁰ experienced²¹ globally,²² further exacerbating²³ inequalities²⁴ especially for previously colonized nations while also impeding²⁵ progress toward global commitments to the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals; and,

WHEREAS the work of justice and ministry in the church is critically tied to sustainable development,²⁶ intersecting with the broad work of the global Sustainable Development Goals²⁷ and with specific actions including eliminating poverty, embracing sustainability, and empowering others for progress; and,

WHEREAS the United Church of Christ has consistently and repeatedly taken a stand for justice for all God's children including for racial, social, disability, economic, and digital justice;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ identifies the globally widening digital divide and lack of digital inclusion as a

39 justice issue, and invites all settings of the United Church of Christ to do likewise while working
40 with, among other organizations, United Church of Christ Media Justice Ministry, raising
41 awareness among constituents, and joining faith-based and other coalitions pressing for digital
42 justice including through increased affordability, accessibility, training, and support; and
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44 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of
45 Christ encourages the National Setting, Conferences, and Associations to develop digital-
46 inclusion activities and policies with attention to advocacy, access to internet-enabled devices,
47 skills training, digital programming support, and online content designed to enable and promote
48 self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration; and
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50 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of
51 Christ encourages the National Setting, Conferences, and Associations to support rural
52 congregations, and other congregations challenged by the current lack of digital infrastructure, in
53 assessing local internet availability and affordability, networking them for collaborative action;
54 and,
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56 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of
57 Christ urges all settings of the United Church of Christ to advocate for digital justice and
58 affordable, quality digital access for all, especially those who are left out or held back by
59 systemic inequalities within the United States and around the world.
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61 **FUNDING**

62 The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the
63 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.
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65 **IMPLEMENTATION**

66 The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within
67 the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.
68

¹ Joseph, Patrick and Irene Lew. “Disconnected: The Digital Divide & Disrupted Schooling in NYC.” Community Service Society, 1 Sept. 2022, <https://www.cssny.org/news/entry/disconnected-the-digital-divide-disrupted-schooling-in-nyc>.

² Holpuch, Amanda. “US's digital divide 'is going to kill people' as Covid-19 exposes inequalities.” *The Guardian*, 13 April 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/13/coronavirus-covid-19-exposes-cracks-us-digital-divide>.

³ Townsend, Phela. “Disconnected: How the Digital Divide Harms Workers and What We Can Do about It.” *The Century Foundation*, 22 Oct. 2020, <https://tcf.org/content/report/disconnected-digital-divide-harms-workers-can/>.

⁴ See, e.g., Sanders, C. K. and Edward Scanlon. “The Digital Divide Is a Human Rights Issue: Advancing Social Inclusion Through Social Work Advocacy.” *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2021, pp. 130-143, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7973804/>; “The Lewis Latimer Plan for Digital Equity and Inclusion.” National Urban League, 21 April 2021, https://nul.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NUL%20LL%20DEIA%20041421%20Latimer%20Plan_vFINAL_1136AM.pdf; “The Benefits of Broadband Expansion to America’s Economy, Education, and Health: A Policy Brief.” Common Sense Kids Action, 2015, <https://www.common Sense Media.org/sites/default/files/featured->

[content/files/benefits_of_broadband_expansion_to_americas_economy_education_and_health-cska-2015_1.pdf](#).

⁵ Chandra, S., et al. “Closing the K–12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning.” Common Sense Media (San Francisco, CA) and Boston Consulting Group (Boston, MA), 2020, https://8ce82b94a8c4fdc3ea6d-b1d233e3bc3cb10858bea65ff05e18f2.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/9c/0b/62d34d674c979876e9b13be353df/common-sense-media-report-final-6-26-7.38am_WEB.pdf

⁶ Katz, Vikki, and Victoria Rideout. “Learning at Home While under-Connected.” *New America*, Rutgers University, 24 June 2021, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/learning-at-home-while-underconnected/key-findings/>.

⁷ “How many children and young people have internet access at home? Estimating digital connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic.” United Nations Children’s Fund and International Telecommunication Union, UNICEF, New York, 2020. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-and-young-people-internet-access-at-home-during-covid19/>.

⁸ Dorn, E. et al. “Covid-19 and education: An emerging K-shaped recovery.” McKinsey & Company, December 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-an-emerging-k-shaped-recovery>; “The Lewis Latimer Plan for Digital Equity and Inclusion.” National Urban League, 21 April 2021, https://nul.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NUL%20LL%20DEIA%20041421%20Latimer%20Plan_vFINAL_1136AM.pdf.

⁹ Francis, Dania V., and Christian E. Weller. “Economic Inequality, the Digital Divide, and Remote Learning During COVID-19.” *The Review of Black Political Economy*, vol. 49, no. 1, March 2022, pp. 41-60, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8914302/>.

¹⁰ Reardon, M. “The digital divide has left millions of schoolkids behind.” CNET, 5 May 2021. <https://www.cnet.com/home/internet/the-digital-divide-has-left-millions-of-school-kids-behind/>.

¹¹ “Overview.” World Bank, 11 Oct. 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/overview>.

¹² *Expanding Shrinking Communication Spaces*. Lee, Philip and Lorenzo Vargas, eds, Southbound, 2020.

¹³ Fogel, Rebecca. “The Digital Divide: Gender and technology in an unequal world.” *Urban@UW*, University of Washington, 6 Nov. 2020. <https://urban.uw.edu/news/the-digital-divide-gender-and-technology-in-an-unequal-world/>.

¹⁴ Chakravorti, Bhaskar. “How to Close the Digital Divide in the U.S.” *Harvard Business Review*, 20 July 2021, <https://hbr.org/2021/07/how-to-close-the-digital-divide-in-the-u-s>.

¹⁵ Vogels, Emily A.

¹⁶ Perrin, Andrew, and Sara Atske. “How Can We Ensure That More People with Disabilities Have Access to Digital Devices?” *World Economic Forum*, 16 Sept. 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/09/disability-barrier-to-digital-device-ownership>.

¹⁷ Townsend, Phela.

¹⁸ Ferraro, Nicole. “Study highlights impact of ‘digital redlining.’” *Light Reading*, 25 Aug. 2022. <https://www.lightreading.com/digital-divide/study-highlights-impact-of-digital-redlining/d/d-id/779933>.

¹⁹ Le, Vinhcent and Gissela Moya. “On the Wrong Side of the Digital Divide.” Greenlighting Institute, 2 June 2020, <https://greenlining.org/publications/online-resources/2020/on-the-wrong-side-of-the-digital-divide/>.

²⁰ “With Almost Half of World's Population Still Offline, Digital Divide Risks Becoming 'New Face of Inequality', Deputy Secretary-General Warns General Assembly.” United Nations, Office of Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations Press, 27 Apr. 2021, <https://press.un.org/en/2021/dsgsm1579.doc.htm>.

²¹ “Digital Skills Critical for Jobs and Social Inclusion.” *UNESCO.org*, UNESCO, 21 Apr. 2022, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/digital-skills-critical-jobs-and-social-inclusion>.

²² “How many children and young people have internet access at home? Estimating digital connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

²³ O’Sullivan, Katriona, et al. “A Just Digital Framework to Ensure Equitable Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.” *Nature Communications*, vol. 12, article no. 6345, 3 Nov. 2021, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-26217-8>.

²⁴ *The Age of Digital Interdependence: Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation*. See especially chapter 2, "Leaving No One Behind."

²⁵ Sheppard, Bede. "Years Don't Wait for Them." Human Rights Watch, 17 May 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/05/17/years-dont-wait-them/increased-inequalities-childrens-right-education-due-covid>.

²⁶ "Towards a Sustainable Future." United Church of Christ, 1 Apr. 2021, <https://www.ucc.org/event/towards-a-sustainable-future/>.

²⁷ See, for example, "Worship Resources." One Great Hour of Sharing, United Church of Christ, 2018, https://www.ucc.org/oghs_february_4/ and https://www.ucc.org/oghs_march_4/.