

The Business Committee of the Thirty-Fifth General Synod recommends this proposed resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

RESOLUTION ON FULL COMMUNION RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND EVANGELISCHE KIRCHE IN DEUTSCHLAND

A Prudential Resolution

Submitted by the United Church of Christ Board

SUMMARY

The United Church of Christ and Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) share a rich and storied history as “united and uniting” churches. The United Church of Christ includes among its historical streams the German Reformed Church. The United Church of Christ, since 2003, has been in church communion (*Kirchengemeinschaft*) with the Union Evangelischer Kirchen (UEK). The United Church of Christ affirms that long-standing relationship with the Protestant churches in Germany, marked by more than 40 years of *Kirchengemeinschaft* (church communion) since *Kirchengemeinschaft* was affirmed at General Synod (1981)¹ and the Evangelical Church of the Union in Germany (1980). In May 2024, leaders of the United Church of Christ and Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland affirmed the relationship between the denominations, and committed to seek full communion.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

In the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus offers a prayer for his disciples as he approaches the end of his ministry. In this prayer, Jesus prays for the unity of his followers:

“I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, 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. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:20-23)

In this passage, and the call to unity therein, the United Church of Christ found its motivating call to union. And today, after almost 70 years, these words continue to motivate the UCC’s pursuit of greater unity in the Body of Christ.

“...there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6)

In the years since the 1957 union that brought the United Church of Christ into being, the UCC has established full communion agreements with several sister denominations and continues to seek out new avenues for formal relationships with other partners. This work is grounded in the ideal of oneness found in Scripture. Further, the relationships between denominations, each one

38 gifted by God with unique charisms and distinct perspectives, moves us toward a more complete
39 expression of Church.

40
41 *“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body,*
42 *though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized*
43 *into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one*
44 *Spirit... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all*
45 *rejoice together with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 26)*

46
47 Ecumenism remains at the heart of the United Church of Christ. The relationships we establish
48 and share with our ecumenical partners around the globe are life-giving for our denomination, as
49 they allow us to more deeply live into our call to seek unity in the Body of Christ.

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51 The World Council of Churches’ Faith and Order Commission meeting in Bangalore, India, in
52 1978 offered the following vision of full communion agreements:

53
54 They will then recognize each other’s ministries; they will share the bread and the cup of
55 their Lord; they will acknowledge each other as belonging to the body of Christ in all
56 places and at all times; they will proclaim together the Gospel to the world; they will
57 serve the needs of humankind in mutual trust and dedication; and for these ends they will
58 plan and take decisions together in assemblies constituted by authorized representatives
59 wherever this is required.²

60
61 “Full Communion” has been identified historically by five marks:

- 62 • common confession of Christ
- 63 • mutual recognition of members
- 64 • common celebration of the Lord’s Supper/Holy Communion
- 65 • mutual recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministries
- 66 • common commitment to mission.³

67
68 *Kirchengemeinschaft*, established between the Evangelische Kirche der Union (EKU) and the
69 United Church of Christ (UCC) at respective General Synods in 1980 and 1981, was born in the
70 era of the Cold War with a divided Germany and world, but the churches sought to overcome
71 those divisions. In 2003, the United Church of Christ reaffirmed *Kirchengemeinschaft* with the
72 newly formed Union Evangelischer Kirchen (UEK) with the churches that had historically been
73 a part of the EKU.

74
75 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

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77 **WHEREAS** the Evangelische Kirche der Union (EKU) was a historic union of the Lutheran and
78 Reformed traditions in Germany and was the ancestral church of many German-American
79 pioneers who founded the Evangelical Synod of North America⁴ – one of the UCC’s antecedent
80 traditions; and

81

82 **WHEREAS** the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, meeting in 1981, declared a
83 relationship of “church communion” (Kirchengemeinschaft) with the Evangelische Kirche der
84 Union (EKU)⁵, following the ECU’s similar recognition of the UCC in 1980; and
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86 **WHEREAS** the ECU disbanded in 2003 and joined with other “United” and Reformed churches
87 in Germany to unite in the Union Evangelischer Kirchen (UEK)⁶; and
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89 **WHEREAS** the United Church of Christ reaffirmed Kirchengemeinschaft with the newly
90 formed Union Evangelischer Kirchen (UEK) in 2003⁷, as the commitments of the 1981
91 declaration of Kirchengemeinschaft were affirmed by the action of both churches to the new
92 UEK; and
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94 **WHEREAS** Kirchengemeinschaft is lived out through active partnerships involving
95 congregations, conferences, and denominational expressions from the two denominations; and
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97 **WHEREAS** the UEK voted in 2023 to officially become a part of the larger Evangelical Church
98 in Germany (EKD)⁸; and
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100 **WHEREAS** both the United Church of Christ (USA) and the Evangelical Church in Germany
101 remain among the active united and uniting denominations around the world, and have a
102 demonstrated commitment to the work of Christian Unity; and
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104 **WHEREAS** in 2024, building on existing ecumenical commitments to advance an ethos of
105 church unity as set forth in the Agreement between Reformation Churches in Europe – namely,
106 the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Europe along with the Union Churches which grew out
107 of them, and the related pre-Reformation Churches, the Waldensian Church and the Church of
108 the Czech Brethren, called the Leuenberg Agreement [1973] - and the Formula of Agreement
109 between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the
110 Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ [1997], leaders from the United
111 Church of Christ (USA) and the Evangelical Church in Germany met to affirm a mutual
112 commitment to extend Kirchengemeinschaft⁹ between the two churches; and
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114 **WHEREAS** the United Church of Christ (USA) and the Evangelical Church in Germany in our
115 local churches, Conferences, and in national and international settings, share a deep commitment
116 to mission and ministry that seek a just world for all; and
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118 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church
119 of Christ, meeting in Kansas City, MO (11-15 July 2025), with the encouragement of the
120 leadership of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, makes the following declarations:
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122 The Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ celebrates before God that
123 the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland is an authentic, faithful part of the one, universal
124 body of Christ.
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126 The Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ declares and celebrates that a
127 relationship of full communion now exists between the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland

128 and the United Church of Christ, meaning that both churches pursue with intention ways of
129 expressing the unity of the Church. This includes a mutual commitment to recognizing that
130 ordained ministers of each partner church are truly ministers of word and sacrament and to
131 seeking ways of manifesting the common mission of witness and service.

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133 The Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ commits itself to work, with
134 God's help and together with its partner churches, to effect greater unity in the whole church
135 of Jesus Christ.

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137 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church of
138 Christ (USA) encourages all settings of the Church to study the biblical, theological, and
139 practical implications of full communion with the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland.

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141 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church of
142 Christ commends the collaborative efforts of the General Minister and President of the United
143 Church of Christ working with the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland
144 as they continue to give guidance for living into the possibilities of this full communion
145 relationship through shared mission and ministry.

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147 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the full communion partnership between the United Church
148 of Christ (USA) and the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland commence with the signing of the
149 common agreement by the two Heads of Communion at a joint service of celebration following
150 ratification of this agreement at the Synod of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland that will
151 include opportunities for local congregations and conferences across the two churches to
152 celebrate in meaningful ways.

153 154 **FUNDING**

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156 Funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall
157 mandates of the affected ministries and the funds available.

158 159 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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

¹ <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/81-GS-49.pdf>

² Sharing in One Hope. Reports and Documents from the Meeting of the Faith and Order Commission, August 1978, Bangalore, India, WCC : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive

³ ManualonMinistry-2018.pdf (pg. 36)

⁴ https://www.ucc.org/about-us_short-course_the-german-evangelical-synod/

⁵ <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/81-GS-49.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.uek-online.de/>; see also <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/03-GS-10.pdf>

⁷ <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/03-GS-10.pdf>

⁸ https://www.globalministries.org/partner/union_of_evangelical_churches/

⁹ <https://www.ucc.org/u-s-and-german-church-leaders-gather-to-strengthen-their-ecumenical-witness/>