# General Synod 34




*"Forget the former things;*
*do not dwell on the past.*
*See, I am doing a new thing!*
*Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*
*I am making a way in the wilderness*
*and streams in the wasteland.* (Isaiah 43:18-19)

From June 30th to July 4th, 2023, I attended the United Church of Christ General Synod in Indianapolis, Indiana. This was a national gathering of the UCC that currently occurs every two years but a bylaw change was passed to move it to every three years starting in 2025.
This was the 34th General Synod of the UCC and the theme was "Making All Things New". General Synod was 5 days of worship, resolutions, UCC business, and a chance to make new friends from all over our country. There were 736 delegates and about 2000 others including visitors and guests. We had the opportunity to meet our incoming and outgoing UCC leaders and enjoyed wonderful speakers and worship leaders and had plenty of time for theological reflection.

There were 17 Resolution to wrestle with and vote on – 15 of them required a 2/3rd majority vote to pass. All but one resolution passed.

The first day included education around the resolutions - I was assigned to the committee called “Guns to Gardens”. My first thoughts, having been assigned this resolution about guns was that it would be a political “hot potato” and that our church might be put “in harm’s way” if we took any actions regarding guns. My expectations couldn’t have been further from the truth. This resolution was mostly about disposing of unwanted firearms literally turning them into garden tools rather than returning them to the gun market.



The gardening tool and necklace were made from melted down guns.

The Guns to Garden program is an opportunity to collaborate with community partners. Acting will connect us with others who want change. Possible partners include but aren’t limited to: Other faith communities, elected officials, local public safety officials, community foundations, denominational resources, hospitals, veteran’s groups, public health officials and more.

In addition to business sessions, voting, meeting/getting to know people and worshiping, we were presented with many personal challenges, questions, and concepts to ponder.

One handout was a bookmark that said:
Join the Conversation:

Tell a story that has shaped who you are.
Describe a place where you feel you belong.
What's your favorite film/album/song/book/video game/etc., & why?
Tell a story of a missed opportunity or challenge that shaped who you are.
How would you like to be remembered?
How have your religious beliefs & practice changed over time?

I think these questions and conversations can be answered and had in adult study classes, small groups, and maybe Bible & Beer sessions.

The Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson was elected General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ and is now the first woman to hold this position.

Rev. John Dorhauer, outgoing President of the United Church of Christ reflected on his time in office (8 years) and had powerful stories to share. Here are some of his words that make me proud to be part of the UCC:

Dear Friends,

I have had the pleasure of witnessing the difference the United Church of Christ makes in the world. Your articulation of a love that knows no limits of boundaries is changing the world and changing lives every day. Everywhere I go, someone pulls me aside and tells me their 'the UCC saved my life' story.

Because of you and your call to build a just world for all, the United Church of Christ has been recognized as a leader in climate justice around the world.

Because of you and your insistence that no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, all are welcome here. Also, the United Church of Christ continues to engage in the daily struggle for racial equity, for LGBTQ justice and for women' rights everywhere as we also widen the welcome to all who live with disabilities.

Our churches hold steadfast in their belief that God's love matters in the world-a love we have come to know fully in Jesus. I give God thanks every day for the way your love shows up and the lives that are changed because of that."

The Rev. Nadia Bolz Weber gave the keynote address. She is an ordained Evangelical Lutheran pastor. She describes herself as a public theologian, and is the author of *Shame-less, A Sexual Reformation,* and *Accidental Saints, finding God in All the Wrong People*. Nadia used to be a stand-up comedian (experience that came through as she spoke to us) and is a recovering alcoholic. She is covered with tattoos. She describes herself as someone who "always sits in the corner with the other weirdos."

During our time in Indianapolis, we celebrated the 60th Anniversary of Honoring Jackie Robinson in 1963. Baseball great Jackie Robinson was a member of the United Church of Christ. In 1962 he was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame. The Council of Christian Action of the United Church of Christ presented Robinson the Churchmanship Award at the 1963 General Synod.

I would like to thank the Mercersburg Association and Penn Central Conference for the opportunity to attend this General Synod. I also want to thank Pastor Caroline for her presence there as she was a source of friendship, fun and wisdom, and made me proud to be one of her parishioners.

May our St. John's welcoming journey and outreach to the community continue for a long time to come,

Jerry Thomason

The other important thing about the second plenary was the address by Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, the (at that time) nominee to be the General Minister and President of the UCC. I was impressed. She talked about the UCC "norm" and the need to begin to check ourselves on what that means. She said we are missing opportunities to do mission at home - we need to connect our love of neighbor with the love of ALL, and we must give up our NIMBY (Not In MY Backyard) mentality. She expressed her desire to decolonize the church on ALL levels, and to confront a past that hasn't always been about the love of God. I heard her say that she wants the UCC to become a more missional church, and that mission begins in our own neighborhoods and communities. I agree with her! She said she looks forward to leading the UCC through the next phase of being a "prophetic voice and a courageous presence."

That was the end of the first day and, while I wanted to reflect a little, I was very tired and day 2 would start bright and early with a PA caucus at 6:30. I am NEVER up at 6:30, let alone ready to talk to anyone.

Rev. Thompson came to talk with us and entertained questions. I heard her say that the UCC needs to have a bigger table, which I understood to mean that we need to welcome people as Jesus did, and set a bigger table. Others from the PA conferences (there are 4 conferences) felt that by expanding the table we are just moving the tent from left to even further left, and aren't including conservatives. It hadn't occurred to me that conservative voices are not being heard in the UCC, but they are correct. As one of the pastors with us said, "We don't need another Unitarian Universalist church. They do that well already!" This topic was further discussed at the Monday morning caucus with just the Penn Central Caucus and raises one of the questions I will ponder in the days, weeks, and months to come: How can we be socially progressive and theologically conservative? Because I believe that people of all races, abilities, genders, queer people, progressive people and conservative people deserve a place at the table, and deserve to be heard. But I fear that as we become more "progressive," the UCC is losing the "Christ" part of its name - a fear that started as I worshipped at the church to which I belong, and that I cannot accept. I don't believe that accepting Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior is required to get into heaven, but I do believe in the divinity of Jesus and in the Holy Trinity - perhaps each of us understands a different facet of Jesus/God/Holy Spirit, and while we as people don't recognize God by another name, I fully believe God does. I want to go to church to find Jesus because that is the way I believe, and if I can't find Jesus there, why go? That is not to say that YOU have to believe the same way - but if you don't want to worship at the United Church **of Christ**, there are other places for you to worship, and I would be happy to help you find them and even visit with you.

There was a prayer service after the caucus meeting. and then Plenary 3. More business and recognition of important people. The resolution, "Living into God's Economy: Celebrating the 170th anniversary of the United Church of Christ Church Building and Loan Fund" passed unanimously. Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, the exiting General Minister and President, gave what amounted to a farewell address.

Then it was time for the keynote address - a definite highlight! The Rev. Nadia Bolz Weber. is ordained Evangelical Lutheran. She describes herself as a a public theologian, and is the author of *Shame-less, A Sexual Reformation,* and *Accidental Saints, finding God in All the Wrong People*. I had already been to the bookstore to buy one of her books as I was afraid they would sell out. Nadia used to be a stand-up comedian (experience that came through as she spoke to us), and is a recovering alcoholic. She is covered with tattoos. She describes herself as someone who "always sits in the corner with the other weirdos" (Holznagel, 2022)

She asked the question, "what temples am I so reliant upon still standing?" Interesting, given the sermon by Rev. Doyle the night before. What if those temples we depend upon (i.e. church as we know it) no longer exist? What dominant powers do we worship, and can we remember that dominant powers are not ultimate powers? (Again - church?) Jesus certainly proves that - the Roman Empire exists only in history books, but Jesus lives on in the minds and hearts of millions of people. Rev. Weber exhorted us to hold fast - "unthinkable things will happen, but God goes on." She talked about three things: regret, worry, and hope. Regrets require a message with the specificity of Jesus Christ (there He is!) because that is what will hold up after it has been dragged through the dirt. What if, she asked, we have already been forgiven for all the things we regret? She said that we cannot allow people who have weaponized sin to lay claim to something so gorgeous - that is close to her words but I don't think is a direct quote. She appealed to us to stop beating ourselves up for things that happened in the past, because Jesus was pretty insistent on forgiveness. Worry gives nothing but takes something away, because when we are busy worrying, we miss the birds and the lilies. She said that she no longer reads Luke 12 as a directive to compare ourselves to birds and lilies, but as an invitation to joy and silence.

*Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. 24 Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! 25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? 26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?*
*27 “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 28 If that is how God clothes the*

*grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith!* (Luke 12:22-28)

Consider the birds. Consider the flowers, and the grass. Take some time to enjoy God's good gifts! And that will help to restore hope. Maybe, she said, we can pray for a conversion out of anxiety, because when it is converted, anxiety becomes hope. We are a very small part of a very big story, which is big and OLD. Our hope is not in our ability to be hopeful - it is when we stand with one hand reaching back to the hope of the prophets and the other hand reaching forward to the promises of God that we can stand in the reality of the present and not be consumed.

I left her keynote address wondering, does acceptance of forgiveness open me up to atonement and restoration so that I can begin to repair the harm I have done? If I know I am forgiven, does that enable me to forgive myself and then others?

I held that question as I went to the seminar on Joining the Movement of Racial Justice. Find more information about joining the movement here: jointhemovementucc.org. I am still thinking about it. If I accept that I am forgiven, and I can forgive others, does it make it possible for me to admit wrongdoing - whether committed by myself or others - and work toward atonement?

Sunday morning was a day not of rest but of committee meetings. As I mentioned, I was assigned to the committee looking at the resolution, "Closing the Digital Divide: Calling on the United Church of Christ to Seek Digital Justice and Inclusion." I didn't think there would be much discussion - who would have a problem with closing the digital divide? But some people were unsure of what the resolution was asking for. They wanted more clarity, stronger language and to add some statements. It was a very interesting process, because ultimately, we decided that the wordsmithing we had done didn't really add anything, or change the strength of the original document, and approved it as it was written. Those that weren't sure it was clear enough, or strong enough, now said that they understood what the resolution was trying to say, and they believed it was well stated. They expressed appreciation for the process and the conversation. We recommended that the resolution be approved by the delegates of Synod. Takeaway for Kathy: even if something seems eye-rollingly obvious to me but not the other party, or to the other party but not me, there is a lot of value in talking it out. No eye-rolling.
That was a long meeting, but it was followed by worship and communion - something I have missed. This time the message was brought by The Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne, the moderator of the United Church of Canada. She is the first indigenous woman to lead a religious denomination in Canada - I'm not sure if the US has had an indigenous person lead a denomination yet or not. I'm guessing not. Dr. Lansdowne continued with the theme of forgiveness. She said that we have to live in forgiveness and love today because these are the antidote of fear. If we accept forgiveness we don't have to live in fear, but accepting

forgiveness also means we need to do better. We can't just rest on our laurels of forgiveness and think there is not work of atonement and repentance to be done. We can't, however, give in to the fear of what we are losing. We need to listen and believe those on the margins. When corrective behavior is offered in love, when we resist the status quo (as Jesus did) we are acting in love.

How have we domesticated Jesus' love? I would say that we have domesticated Jesus' love, and Jesus himself, by insisting that WE are the right people, THEY are the sinners, WE have the answers, THEY are condemned. God is OUR God. What if, Dr. Lansdowne asked, making things new really is the lion lying down with the lamb?

*The wolf shall live with the lamb;*
*the leopard shall lie down with the kid;*
*the calf and the lion will feed[a] together,*
*and a little child shall lead them.*
*7 The cow and the bear shall graze;*
*their young shall lie down together;*
*and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.* (Isaiah 11:6-7)

Monday morning started with the Penn Central Conference Caucus - discussion about what the highlights were so far, and who was moved by what - one of our delegates was there with her wife, and she spoke through tears of how much it meant to her to be able to be open about who she was ,and they were together, after a 27 year relationship. Even those, including me, who raised the question about where Jesus is in our denomination welcomed and affirmed this same-sex relationship. As we talked about the need to include conservative voices at our bigger table, I began to wonder: can't we be socially progressive, thus affirming God's love of and welcome for those who are LGBTQ+ yet theologically conservative, and keep Christ in the United Church of Christ? I asked our conference minister, who didn't hesitate to say yes. Because we live in an area of the country that is very conservative, it is easy to get caught up in the "sinfulness" of the world. I am guessing it is easy for those who live in more progressive areas to forget about scripture and to reject the presence of God. Something to think about.

The 4th plenary opened at 8:00 - you wouldn't believe how much coffee I was drinking, and in the Indianapolis Convention Center it was ridiculously expensive. This plenary was when the real fun began - voting! The first vote was on Karen Georgia Thompson's nomination to be the General Minister and President - she was handily elected, and is now the first woman and first African American to hold this position. I think she will do a good job.

Rather than list all of the resolutions and the result of voting chronologically, I am going to move them to the end of this post. That way if you aren't interested, you won't quit reading.

If you are interested (and if you are a member of the UCC, you should be!), just keep reading when you get to the end.

One of the highlights of Synod for me was when John Dorhauer, the outgoing General Minister and President of the UCC, took the podium and apologized for the omission of the contributions of the 5th stream of the UCC. The UCC was formed in 1957 by the convergence of four "streams," which were all from European-based denominations: the Congregationalists, The Christian Church, the Evangelical Church, and the Reformed Church. Omitted from the narrative that was written and repeated for decades: the contributions of the Afro-Christian Convention, which was a church convention that served African Americans in the Tidewater area of Virginia and North Carolina, primarily (Speller, 2023). When Rev. Dr. Dorhauer took the stage he offered his sincere apology to the Afro-Christian Convention and to the African Americans present, and vowed to correct the omissions in UCC documents, pamphlets, liturgy, and so on. The book, *Afro-Christian Convention*, sold out before it's author, Yvonne V. Delk was recognized as a UCC Movement Maker. I was moved not only by the correction to history and the long-overdue inclusion of the contributions of African Americans, but by the modelling of a sacred apology. What do humility and the desire to correct the wrongs of the past do to bring us further into the kin-dom of God? A lot more than refusing to correct the revisionist history that already excludes the contributions of many of our brothers and sisters, I can tell you that.

There was a tribute to Jackie Robinson - quite meaningful to baseball fans in the crowd, I am sure! Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier to become the first African-American to play Major League Baseball (is that supposed to be capitalized?). I didn't know that he also was an early member of the United Church of Christ, and an activist for equal rights until his death at the age of 53. I looked up his biography and found a list of really inspiring quotes. This is my favorite, though it took a while to choose: *I'm grateful for all the breaks and honors and opportunities I've had, but I always believe I won't have it made until the humblest Black kid in the most remote backwoods of America has it made.*

A bylaws amendment to change Synod from every 2 years to every 3 years came to a vote. This was by far the most contentious discussion. The rationale for the change is justice for the national office staff who spend an inordinate amount of time planning and implementing Synod, environmental justice as the footprint to get delegates to Synod and feed and house them while there is huge, and economic justice, as the expense of travel, lodging and meals is enormous. Some people are ok with the change (in the United Methodist Church, General Conference is held every 4 years), and some people were very emotional about being connected to each other and the national board. The vote was taken and the amendment passed, but then it came to light that some of the technology wasn't working and some people didn't get to vote. After much discussion, hard work by the technology folks, and the decision to implement paper ballots for those whose technology wasn't working, we re-voted. The amendment passed by a hair. The next Synod will be in 2025, as planning is already well underway, but after that it will be every 3 years. A

resolution of the minority was written and passed by those who voted against the amendment so that their voices and concerns are on the record.

I learned a couple of new terms while I was at Synod. Reproductive health is now for women and "people who give birth." This seemed odd to me, until I realized that the UCC table is now big enough to accommodate transgender men, who retain vaginas, uteruses, ovaries etc. Interesting - and think about what it would be like to be a man walking into an OB/GYN office or Labor and Delivery suite for care for himself - not just accompanying a woman. How dangerous would that be? And before you say he shouldn't have gotten pregnant, or should have thought of that before transitioning while pregnant - rape happens. Birth control fails. I know plenty of women who have experienced unplanned - not necessarily unwanted - pregnancies.

The other new term to me is "gender expansive." Someone who is gender expansive is someone whose gender identity and/or gender expression expands beyond, actively resists, and/or does not conform to the current cultural or social expectations of gender, particularly in relation to male or female (It Gets Better Project). Please see my notes on Resolution #13. Interestingly, there was another denomination whose convention started on Sunday night. This denomination is known to be much more conservative than the UCC - that is, actually, not saying much! On Tuesday morning, the Rev. Dr. Traci Blackmon, the associate general minister for Justice and Local Church Ministries, stood up and apologized to those who had been offended and threatened by the words of some members of the other convention. I heard two versions, both involving references to "f----ts." I had not heard the comments - in fact I hadn't said more than hello to the members of the other denomination - but I was offended on behalf of our gender expansive members. The UCC National Office was in conversation with the leadership of the other group, who did ultimately extend an apology, via Rev. Thompson. Unfortunate that it wasn't offered in person. But this raises the question to our more conservative members - is *that* who we in the UCC want to be?

The final plenary was on Tuesday morning. I was surprised that there wasn't more red, white and blue bling since it was the 4th of July. To be honest, I wasn't feeling very patriotic. I still don't - though the 4th of July used to be one of my favorite holidays. I feel like my country has betrayed me, as a woman. It has betrayed so many of us - the poor, the incarcerated, the immigrant, the black and brown people, educators, children, the elderly .... I thought of my friends who would be sitting with their terrified dogs behind the washing machine with thunder shirts on - as our dog Brownie used to do. I thought of my friends in the barns with their anxious horses. I hoped the alpacas wouldn't be upset (they weren't). I thought of the wildlife whose nests and lives are disrupted by our need to go boom-boom and see bright lights of fireworks. I thought of our heroes, the soldiers, who returned from the wars they fought on our behalf with PTSD. I was glad no one from the platform wished us a happy 4th. There were no patriotic songs and no Pledge of Allegiance. Not very many little flags waving - we'll leave that to the political conventions, I guess.

There were implementation conversations after the last plenary - conversations about how congregations could implement any of the resolutions. But we could only attend one and I was exhausted, so I'm sorry to say I didn't go. I look forward to brainstorming with some folks around a smaller table.

Finally it was time for closing worship. Rev. JJ Flag, a member of the UCC Disabilities Ministries and the associate minister for pastoral care and justice at Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte, NC, brought the message. He opened with this passage from the book of Revelation:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,*
*"See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and be their God; 4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." (*Revelation 21: 1-4)

He likened Revelation to a story of revolution. I looked up revolution, and I think this is the definition as Rev. Flagg was using it: a dramatic and wide-reaching change in the way something works or is organized or in people's ideas about it (Google). Revolution requires three things of us: repentance, recommitment, and reclaiming our theology of resurrection. We need to repent of the "sin of individualism," and get back to "we." Jesus is OUR Lord and Savior, so what does it mean when salvation is individual (mine) and not collective (ours)? We need to recommit ourselves to interdependence, because individualism makes us buy into the lie that we can do this by ourselves. We can't. We need to reclaim the resurrection of theology. Whether or not we believe in the mystical bodily resurrection of Jesus, we follow, Rev. Flagg said, a Christ who death could not defeat. That resurrection is a revolutionary act. So how do we partner with God to bring about resurrection in our communities? Look at the harm reduction resolution (#5). How can we preach life into a dead thing? Our churches need resurrection, which must be more than writing checks, marching, and making phone calls. It might include housing the homeless, hosting a book drive, giving meals to the food insecure, making our buildings accessible to the handicapped. Resurrection is bringing life to something that once was. The act of worship is in and of itself an act of revolution. How do we move it forward? We need revolution as a dramatic and wide-reaching change.

I love Rev. Flagg's closing statement. He said his prayer is that after we leave and the tables are put away and the stage is cleaned up, people will say, "Those are the people who met in Indianapolis Indiana and left to turn the world upside down."

God is making all things new. God is making a way in the wasteland and streams in the wilderness. It will be hard, but the water will come! If we are standing with one hand reaching back to the prophets and one hand reaching forward to the promises of God we are on solid ground. The lion (wolf) will lie down with the lamb; the predator and prey will come together in peace, and what will it take, and what does it mean, for this prophetic voice to be among us? It means that we learn to forgive - ourselves and each other. The home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with us and we will be God's people. The first things have passed away. God is making all things new.

**Resolutions**

Resolution 1, Denouncing the Dobbs Decision and Proclaiming Abortion as Healthcare proclaims forced birth as an act of sexual violence, recognizes the decision to have and care for a child as a sacred decision which shouldn't be forced on anyone, reminds us that every person seeking abortion is a beloved child of God, acknowledges the morality of peaceful resistance, calls upon the National Setting of the UCC and all conferences to explore and pursue legal challenges to the abortion bans, directs the UCC Board to explore the creation of a bail fund for UCC members arrested for civil disobedience and to report progress to Synod 35 (Side note: Synod never directs anyone to do anything, so this language is pretty strong), calls on the UCC Pension Boards to ensure that parity exists for everyone receiving UCC Medical Coverage, to include travel costs and contraception in states where abortion and/or contraception are outlawed and calls on the United Church Board of Ministerial Assistance to provide emergency grants for out of pocket expenses, calls upon local churches to engage the *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality and Our Faith* curriculum to promote holistic sexuality education, and calls on local churches, associations, and conferences to physically, financially, and spiritually accompany people seeking and receiving abortions and other reproductive healthcare. Phew - one can tell there is a lot of anger about the Dobbs decision. Whether you think abortion is a good thing or not, whether you have had or would have an abortion or not, the UCC believes that the decision is not to be made for a woman - sorry, birthing person - by the government. This resolution passed.

Resolution #2, " A Resolution Calling for a New Study by our Church on our Relationship with the Indian Boarding Schools and the Boarding Schools in Hawaii passed. This resolution calls on the UCC to investigate its history with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission and to atone for and apologize for any moral and/or legal violations that are uncovered.

Resolution #3, Closing the Digital Divide: Calling on the United Church of Christ to Seek Digital Justice and Inclusion was described above, as this is the committee I served on. There wasn't any discussion on the plenary floor, and the resolution passed.

Resolution #4, A Resolution Urging Planning for and Implementing Electrification passed. There was some opposition, but in my opinion, since the resolution calls for churches and individuals to *plan for* electrifying gas heaters, air conditioners, and appliances and to replace them *when necessary* with electric ones, there was no reason not to vote in favor.

Resolution #5 called for Faithful Advocacy for Intersectional and transformational Healing in Harm Reduction. This resolution also passed. Harm reduction refers to measures to reduce drug overdose deaths, and the resolution calls on congregations to adopt covenants committed to harm reduction, to work to eradicate drug-related stigma and dehumanization of people with substance use issues and to advocate for more just access to harm reduction services and programming, that the UCC Board establish an annual Harm Reduction Justice Sunday to raise awareness. and encourages activism and advocacy by all church settings to develop and adopt harm reduction strategies.

Resolution #6, Affirming Guns to Gardens and Other Gun Violence Prevention Ministries calls on the UCC in all its settings to promote peace and engage in efforts to end gun violence, to pray for peace and let our prayers move us to meaningful action, to commend the congregations that are already participating in gun violence prevention programs, calls on the UCC in all settings to learn about the Guns to Gardens ministry and to prayerfully consider joining, to host safe surrender events for unwanted guns, and to host events to give away gun safes and/or locks. Passed. I don't remember anyone specifically speaking against the resolution, but there were many people who wanted to share their stories of how gun violence had impacted their lives. For further information about Guns to Gardens, click to watch the UCC Thursdays for the Soul Video - Shared Learning from Gun Violence Ministries. Rawtools.org is a national network of blacksmiths that forge gun parts into garden tools.

Resolution #7, A Resolution to Urge All Responsible Entities to Join in Reparations to Fund Christian Hawaiian Language Education Programs to Undo a Century of Extinction. Americanization and Indoctrination Policies Extinguished the Original Christian Hawaiian Alphabet. The resolution calls on the UCC to recognize the Christian Hawaiian language (21

letters as opposed to 26), increase awareness of the Americanization and indoctrination policies enforced by the colonizers of the Hawaiian Kingdom, and calls on all settings of the UCC to support efforts to revitalize the Christian Hawaiian language. This resolution passed, but not without a good deal of back and forth about the *Christian* Hawaiian language, vs the Hawaiian Language,

Resolution#8, Encouraging a Plant Based Life, was interesting. This one encourages each setting of the UCC to intentionally move toward including plant based meals and other sustainable plant based items, to create and provide multigenerational resources to help us move toward more earth-friendly practices, to recognize November 1 as World Vegan Day (I wondered if that is because Nov. 1 is the day after Trick-or-treat), to ensure that a variety of plant-based alternatives are offered any time there is a meal or snack provided, to advocate for responsible agricultural and environmental practices to reduce factory farming and to promote sustainable farming, humane animal practices and fair labor practices in their local communities. To me, this resolution only calls on the UCC to begin moving the needle, to ensure that plant-based alternatives are available, and that people are educated so that they can make informed decisions for themselves and their communities. There were delegates from around the country - including meat and dairy farmers - who saw this resolution as elitist and out of touch with the need to overcome food deserts and food apartheid - a system of segregation that divides those with access to an abundance of nutritious food and those who don't have access because of systemic injustice. This was the only resolution that was not passed, but I hope churches will look at it anyway and take steps to incorporate some of the suggestions. As for me, I'll be bringing a rice and beans dish to future potlucks.

Resolution #9, Free from Plastic Pollution, calls on the UCC to speak truth to power against plastic "de-creation," encourages all UCC settings to commit to changing from a disposable culture to a reusable, sustainable one, that churches provide education within congregations and communities to advocate for alternatives to single-use plastics, and recognizes that there are some groups that will be negatively impacted (i.e. those with certain disabilities and/or the unhoused) and exceptions should be made for those people. Sadly, this resolution was discussed just after I broke down and got an iced coffee from Starbucks in a single-use plastic cup. With a straw. There was discussion about how plastics are here to stay, and there was some pushback to a biochemist who said plastics aren't that bad - sorry I can't quote him directly - that modeled speaking truth to power. Someone pointed out that this resolution is one of Extended Producer Responsibility. I had to look that up - it makes producers responsible for the end-of-life of their product. By refusing to use some of these products, producers are incentivized to alter their practices. This resolution passed, despite my single-use cup. I was adequately shamed about that.

Resolution #10, A Resolution Supporting Public School Educators, Academic Freedom, and Equity Efforts in Schools declares that it is vital for every person to see them selves represented, to access truthful information, and to learn from the past so that students can

better advocate for themselves, that the UCC affirms its support of public education systems. that ongoing evaluation of teaching methods and content is necessary to strengthen curriculum but harassment of teachers, administrators and school boards is harmful, that the UCC stands against efforts to inflame the public with hateful rhetoric, and that the resolution should be used to develop talking points or presentation in public arenas. Most of the discussion around this resolution centered on whether or not to include the phrase, "as well as lay persons" after the phrase "all settings of the Church." Are not lay members included in the church as a whole? The resolution passed.

Resolution #11, A Resolution to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans, calls on the UCC to study and develop reparation proposals and to advocate for similar legislation, that the UCC Board support new and ongoing commitments and actions to further the work of the Reparatory Justice and Reparations Ministry of the UCC, and that the board for a Reparations Legislative task Force to design and advocacy toolkit for all UCC settings, and calls on all UCC settings to monitor and communicate legislative actions. This resolution basically acknowledges that African Americans have been marginalized and exploited and that some form of reparations need to be made. It does not say what those reparations should be. The resolution passed.

Resolution #12, A Resolution Condemning Prolonged Solitary Confinement as a Form of Torture was eye-opening. The complaint about the resolution was that "prolonged" seems too vague, but the proponents of the resolution said that it was written exactly as defined by the "Nelson Mandela Rules" of the United Nations. The resolution calls on the UCC to recognize the potential for abuse with all forms of solitary confinement, condemns the use of solitary confinement in any municipality, calls on all members of the UCC to demand that the government ends any use of prolonged solitary confinement in prisons detention centers, and jails, and calls on the UCC to work with other faith and human rights partners to recognize solitary confinement as torture and to support humane and restorative alternatives. Many people spoke about their experiences with solitary confinement, either for themselves or loved ones. One man spoke about his "beautiful son" who was experiencing a mental health crisis. When he got to jail he refused mental health treatment and so was put in solitary confinement for 6 months. He was not allowed clothing - he had a poncho held together with Velcro that irritated his skin. He had a bucket for his waste - a bucket that was not often emptied so his cell smelled of urine. His own and previous tenants of his cell. He was allowed outside for one hour a day. There was more, and I was shocked to learn that our current system of incarceration is not really any better than the medieval dungeons. It struck me that if someone calls and wants to buy one alpaca, I won't sell to that person unless they already have other alpacas, because alpacas are herd animals and will not survive by themselves. Humans are social animals as well, and I treat the alpacas better than inmates are treated. This resolution passed.

Resolution #13, Actively Affirming the Human Dignity of Transgender and Nonbinary Persons passed overwhelmingly. I don't remember anyone speaking against this resolution,

but there were many people, especially youth, who wanted and needed to share their stories. Some spoke of suicidal ideations because they couldn't be themselves, or because of rejection by loved ones and friends. Some spoke of the impact that the struggle of a transgender loved one had on them. There were many gender expansive people at Synod. Some were obviously transgender. Some were not so obvious, but were willing to say. Some were gay and lesbian. I had lunch one day with a young person who had a feminine name but told me they woke up that morning preferring he/him pronouns. They indicated their preference fluctuated daily. This was a lovely young person who has a lot to offer the world. How can we deny them the ability to be who they understand themselves to be? How can we, as Christians, claim that they are condemned by a loving God? We can't.

Resolution 14, A Resolution Calling on United Church of Christ Local Churches to Witness "A White Supremacy Free Zone" and Confronting White Supremacy" passed. This resolution calls on all churches in the UCC to confront the idolatry of white supremacy, to embark on a journey of public commitment, study, and action to construct a white supremacy free zone, to implement "Journey towards Confronting White Supremacy and Creating a White Supremacy Free Zone Local Congregation: An Intentional Study and Action Guide to Challenge Racism and White Supremacy, that all churches start implementing this resolution, and finally that all UCC churches publicly express, "We are confronting white supremacy." I admit I considered voting against this resolution, not because I believe that white supremacy isn't a problem or doesn't exist, but because I'm not sure how you can "resolve" to eliminate it. When someone pointed out, however, that the resolution shifts the focus to the *source* of the idolatry, racism, etc., I felt more comfortable voting in favor of it.

General Synod 35 will be in Kansas City the summer of 2025.

A live stream of General Synod 34 may be accessed here.
Resolutions in their entirety may be accessed here.

Citations

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