THE SMALL TOWN AND RURAL COALITION OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST REQUESTS TO BE RECOGNIZED AS A FORMAL GROUP

A Prudential Resolution

Submitted by:

Kansas-Oklahoma Board of Directors

SUMMARY:

The Small Town and Rural (STAR) coalition seeks to be recognized as a Self-Created Group according to the United Church of Christ By-Laws, Article VI., existing to be a supportive expression of the Living Christ, in relationship with one another and with the Body of Christ, in all its forms. As defined by the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ "the basic unit of organization and life within the United Church of Christ is the local church." (Shears, 1990) Local churches may self-identify as a "small town and rural church," meaning they are geographically separated from metropolitan and suburban communities. The STAR coalition serves to support STAR churches in various ministry functions. This action requires a Bylaws amendment at the Thirty-Fifth General Synod.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING:

The fundamental biblical grounding for the proposed recognition of the Small Town and Rural coalition is found in Christ's farewell discourse in the Gospel according to John, "...that they may all be one." John 17:21 (NRSV). This scripture has served the basis for uniting Christians throughout the world.

The United Church of Christ is known for responding to the needs of the overlooked and marginalized. Because of this prophetic compassion, significant ministries developed that address the needs and presence of our often-overlooked siblings, neighbors, and communities. In the context of challenges Small Town and Rural churches face, we identify with Paul's letter to the Corinthians, "The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work." 1 Corinthians 3:8 (NLT). This means that we are called to become stronger and more supportive for these STAR ministries by building a stronger and larger network of covenants serving as the body of Christ across the breadth of the United Church of Christ. STAR congregations can bind together and be strong and vital presences in their immediate and global communities, offering spiritual, missional, and relational sources of hope, reflecting the love and light of Jesus Christ, who spent most of his

ministry reaching out to those who are tied to the land and community. This means building and maintaining a covenantal and collaborative relationship with all United Church of Christ STAR churches through the existence and support of the STAR coalition.

The STAR Coalition seeks to live out its purpose of:

- Planting and maintaining a covenantal and communal relationship with all United Church of Christ STAR ministries.
- Growing and nurturing a covenantal and communal relationship with the United Church of Christ Council of Conference Ministers, officers of the Church, UCC Covenantal partners, UCC Board of Directors, and Alliance of Associate Conference Ministers.
- Being a resource to share information and best practices to promote excellence in our various ministries.
- Being a collective voice of advocacy for concerns important to the role and work of STAR ministries as they relate to the life of the United Church of Christ.

In the past, the United Churchof Christ was asked to be aware of the predicament of the small rural congregation, its members and pastors. Individuals from small congregations across the United Church of Christ have come together and met monthly sharing ideas and resources. We have intentionally discerned a call to unite for the intention of being a resource to share support, information and best practices to promote excellence in our various ministries.

<u>TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION;</u>

Whereas, 64% of the churches in the United Church of Christ are located in small towns and rural areas.

Whereas the vitality, relationality, and ecological aspects of our STAR congregations with their important presence within the body of the United Church of Christ, is as essential and important to the health of the entire Church as any other group of people (Ephesians 4:4).

Whereas the United Church of Christ seriously holds the call to be an open and welcoming faith community, accepting into the church body and leadership all facets of expression found in God’s people, creating a rich diversity of expression, background, culture, sexual and gender identity and expression.

Whereas STAR congregations frequently find their needs and unique lived experiences underrepresented on a Conference and National level.

Therefore be it resolved that the Small Town and Rural Coalition be granted official status in the United Church of Christ Bylaws, Article VI, Self-Determining Groups.

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.

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.

Bibliography

Shears, R.A. (1990) A Covenant Polity. In D.L. Johnson and C. Hambrick-Stowe *Theology and Identity: Traditions, Movements, and Polity in the United Church of Christ* (pp. 67-78). Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press.