

1 NO. 0921

2  
3 (SENSE-OF-THE-ASSEMBLY)

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5 STATEMENT ON GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

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8 WHEREAS, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change defines climate change as follows:  
9 “Climate change refers to a statistically significant variation in either the mean state of the  
10 *climate* or in its variability, persisting for an extended period (typically decades or longer).  
11 Climate change may be due to natural internal processes or *external forcings*, or to persistent  
12 *anthropogenic* changes in the composition of the *atmosphere* or in *land use*. Note that the  
13 *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC), in its Article 1, defines  
14 “climate change” as: “a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human  
15 activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural  
16 climate variability observed over comparable time periods.” The UNFCCC thus makes a  
17 distinction between “climate change” attributable to human activities altering the atmospheric  
18 composition, and “climate variability” attributable to natural causes.”<sup>1</sup>; and

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20 WHEREAS, as people of faith, we strive for justice and acknowledge that climate change’s  
21 societal impact already falls, and will continue to fall, most heavily on the people around the  
22 world who are least able to mitigate the impacts – poor and vulnerable populations in the  
23 United States, Canada and in developing countries; and

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25 WHEREAS, as people of faith, we heed the call to be faithful stewards and caretakers of God’s  
26 creation by limiting future impacts of climate change on God’s Earth; and

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28 WHEREAS, as people of faith, we want to ensure that efforts to curb climate change prevent  
29 further environmental and societal tragedies; and

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31 WHEREAS, in a world of finite resources, for all to have enough requires that those among us  
32 who have more than enough will need to address our patterns of acquisition and consumption;  
33 and

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35 WHEREAS, we are called by Scripture to acknowledge our place within God’s creation and our  
36 responsibility to creation:

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38 *The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it ...*  
39 Psalm 24:1

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<sup>1</sup> “Climate Change.” Glossary of Terms used in the IPCC Third Assessment Report. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, <http://www.ipcc.ch/glossary/index.htm>.

41 ... you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.

42 Psalm 36:6;

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44 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of  
45 Christ) in the United States and Canada, meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana July 29, 2009 – August  
46 2, 2009, encourages all expressions of the church to educate themselves, their communities  
47 and their locally and nationally elected officials on the consequences of climate change; and

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49 FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that we Disciples begin to look at our own actions to determine if they  
50 are contributing or mitigating factors to climate change and faithfully and conscientiously to act  
51 accordingly.

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St. Andrew Christian Church, Olathe, Kansas, United States  
Church of the Covenant (Disciples-UCC), Lynchburg, Virginia, United States  
Summerville Christian Church, Summerville, Nova Scotia, Canada  
Milton Christian Church, Milton, Nova Scotia, Canada

## Background

The resolution text is based on the set of principles developed by the National Council of Churches in 2008 to outline those elements we need to address if we are to mitigate the worst-case scenarios of global climate change.

The authors of the original principles refer to global warming. In this set of principles, we have opted for the more comprehensive term, climate change. According to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), global warming refers to “the increase in Earth’s average surface temperature due to rising levels of greenhouse gases,” while climate change refers to “a long –term change in the Earth’s climate, or of a region on Earth” and “scientific research on climate change encompasses far more than surface temperature change.”<sup>2</sup>

## Statement of Principles

**Justice:** As people of faith, we strive for justice and acknowledge that climate change’s societal impact already falls, and will continue to fall, most heavily on the people around the world who are least able to mitigate the impacts—poor and vulnerable populations in Canada, the United States, and in developing countries. As a leading industrialized nation that has disproportionately contributed to greenhouse gas emissions, it is incumbent upon us in the United States and Canada to rectify this injustice. To reach our goal of justice, we are called to:

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<sup>2</sup> “What’s in a Name? Global Warming vs. Climate Change” Erik Conway, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, [http://www.nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/climate\\_by\\_any\\_other\\_name.html](http://www.nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/climate_by_any_other_name.html).

- 81 1. Include mechanisms in governmental legislation that mitigate the impacts of  
82 climate change particularly for vulnerable populations in Canada, the United States, and  
83 abroad.
- 84 2. Prevent further harm to human health and all of God’s creation by utilizing clean  
85 energy sources when addressing climate change and carbon pollution.
- 86 3. Focus on a fair and equitable distribution of total benefits and costs among  
87 people, communities, and nations, and in particular rectify the disproportionate impact  
88 that low-income communities have and will experience as the climate continues to  
89 change.
- 90 4. Enable our brothers and sisters now living in poverty to have both economic  
91 independence and stability and to eliminate the devastating impacts that climate  
92 change has and will continue to have on those people in the United States, Canada, and  
93 around the world living in poverty. (According to the United Nations High Commissioner  
94 for Refugees, climate change is a major contributor to forced displacement.)
- 95 5. Take action now to avoid placing the burden of carbon reduction unduly on our  
96 children’s children.
- 97 6. Endorse policies that place a high priority on allowing all people to live in God’s  
98 abundance and with dignity by ensuring that basic human needs and worker justice are  
99 not adversely impacted by the effects of climate change or future efforts to address  
100 climate change.

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102 **Stewardship:** As people of faith, we heed the call to be faithful stewards and caretakers of  
103 God’s creation by limiting the future impacts of climate change on God’s Earth. Already,  
104 climate change has damaged the precious balance of God’s creation, including increasing the  
105 number of threatened species, causing long-term drought, and melting Arctic ice. To reach our  
106 goal of stewardship, we are called to:

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108 1. Follow recognized scientific guidelines and recommendations in order to protect all of  
109 God’s creation and prevent catastrophic damage to God’s Earth and God’s people.  
110 Following their recommendations, our governmental legislation and our actions should  
111 include comprehensive and aggressive emission reductions that aim to limit the increase  
112 in Earth’s temperature to 2 degrees Celsius or less. Legislation should focus on the short  
113 term goal of reducing U.S. and Canadian carbon emissions to reach a 15 to 20 percent  
114 reduction in carbon by 2020 with a long-term vision to achieve carbon emissions that  
115 are 80 percent of 2000 levels by the year 2050.
- 116 2. Avoid catastrophic climate change, which would devastate God’s creation, make  
117 disaster and relief responses more difficult, and endanger the future of the planet.  
118 Although climate change impacts are already being felt, we must ensure that God’s  
119 people and planet are protected from the catastrophic effects that may occur if we fail  
120 to significantly curb our carbon emissions.
- 121 3. Hold major emitters responsible for their actions and work to significantly reduce  
122 their carbon emissions.
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124 **Sustainability:** As people of faith, we want to ensure that efforts to curb climate change  
125 prevent further environmental and societal tragedies. Sustainability requires that we prevent  
126 biological and social systems that nurture and support life from being depleted or poisoned. To  
127 reach our goal of sustainability, we are called to:

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- 129 1. Maintain God’s creation by creating governmental policies that sustain and  
130 restore vibrant eco-systems with economic justice so that communities of life can  
131 flourish for generations to come and abolishing those governmental policies that  
132 compromise the integrity of creation.
  - 133 2. Respond to climate change in a way that reflects the interdependence of all of  
134 God’s creation.
  - 135 3. Support energy sources that are renewable, clean, and not destructive of God’s  
136 creation.

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138 **Sufficiency:** In a world of finite resources, for all to have enough requires that those  
139 among us who have more than enough will need to address our patterns of acquisition  
140 and consumption. As people of faith, we cannot achieve significant reductions in climate  
141 change emissions unless we make significant changes in our lifestyles (see the Alverna  
142 Covenant at end), particularly in energy consumption. To support the goal of sufficiency,  
143 we are called to:

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- 145 1. Conserve energy in our homes, our communities, and our places of worship.
  - 146 2. Conserve energy in national transportation and distribution systems and  
147 commercial enterprises.
  - 148 3. Encourage governments to lead through research and example in the practice and  
149 implementation of energy conservation.

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## 151 **The Alverna Covenant**

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153 **Whereas:**

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- 155 \* God has created the world with finite resources;
  - 156 \* God has given to us the stewardship of the earth;
  - 157 \* God has established order through many natural cycles.

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159 **And it is evident that:**

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- 161 \* We are consuming resources at a rate that cannot be maintained;
  - 162 \* We are interrupting many natural cycles;
  - 163 \* We are irresponsibly modifying the environment through consumption and  
164 pollution;
  - 165 \* We are populating the earth at a rate that cannot be maintained;
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167 As a member of the human family and a follower of Jesus Christ, I hereby covenant that:

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169 \* I will change my lifestyle to reduce my contribution to pollution;

170 \* I will support recycling efforts;

171 \* I will search for sustainable lifestyles;

172 \* I will work for public policies which lead to a just and sustainable society;

173 \* I will share these concerns with others and urge them to make this Covenant.

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176 The General Board recommends that the General Assembly

177 ADOPT Business Item No. 0921. (Debate time: 12 minutes)