

Resolution of the 49th Annual Celebration of the Rocky Mountain Conference of the United Church Of Christ

Eco-Justice Representation on the Board of Directors

WHEREAS, on April 13, 2023, the Mauna Loa observatory in Hawaii measured 422.28 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and it is expected that the May, 2023, average will be the highest level CO₂ recorded in human history (in 1988, CO₂ levels were at the relatively “safe” level of 350 ppm); and

WHEREAS, the implications of this measurement are profound, complex, and wide ranging, and there’s no way we can compress all the details into one resolution, so we’ll be (relatively) brief; and

WHEREAS, the rapidly rising levels of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere are driving well-known disruptions in the global climate system, including rising temperatures, severe storms, melting glaciers and ice sheets, rising sea levels and ocean acidification; and

WHEREAS, these physical impacts have enormous human impacts all around the planet, including droughts and floods (yes, both of them), changes in agriculture and economic systems, political turmoil and refugee surges; and

WHEREAS, the Rocky Mountain region is experiencing many direct effects of climate change, including long-term aridification (reduced precipitation, decreased snow pack, drier soils, and reduced stream flow), larger and more frequent fires in forests and prairies, distortions of wildlife migration, and shifts in water supplies and recreation industries; and

WHEREAS, steps being taken to address the climate crisis also impact individuals, churches and communities in our region, including – notably – those communities which have become dependent on fossil fuel-based industries and economies which are facing sudden and significant changes in their economies and cultures in the midst of a rapid transition to renewable energy sources; and

WHEREAS, all of this amounts to “bad news” which is deeply felt by people of conscience around the globe; and

WHEREAS, the Rocky Mountain Conference of the United Church of Christ will be failing to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in this challenging time if we are not addressing this profound crisis in our mission and ministry; and

WHEREAS, within the last 20 years the national United Church of Christ has emerged as the ecumenical leader on climate justice among U.S. churches, with a strong, faithful and effective message of transformative change; and

WHEREAS, four congregations in the Rocky Mountain Conference have been certified as “Creation Justice Congregations” by the national church, and many other congregations in our community have strong commitments for pastoral, prophetic and practical action on environmental concerns; and

WHEREAS the “Creation Justice League” has emerged as an ad-hoc group within the RMC seeking to improve connections among RMC churches, Conference staff, national UCC programs, other faith groups, and secular environmental advocates; and

WHEREAS, the February 2023 “Congregations Alive! 5” conference – an event within but not of the Conference – had a comprehensive focus on “Climate Justice” as an essential component of what it means to “be the church” in such a time, and which ended with a strong affirmation of the ways in which the RMC UCC could provide “just transition” leadership for faith communities within our conference; and

WHEREAS, the language about such things is fuzzy, between “Climate Justice” and “Creation Justice” and “Eco-Justice”, but they all point in similar directions of theological commitment to justice for all of God’s creation, now and into future generations; and

WHEREAS, Articles 6.1 and 8.8 of the RMC bylaws provide the opportunity to add members to the RMC board of directors with a specific portfolio and focus of interest; and

WHEREAS, having one person on the Board of Directors of the Rocky Mountain Conference of the UCC with a specific portfolio for “Eco-Justice Concerns” will provide a prophetic advocate within the Conference structure for these essential concerns, and will provide a point of contact for congregations, clergy and lay members of the Conference about ways to address this broad range of concerns, in coordination with the national UCC, ecumenical partners, and other concerned entities;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the delegates of the 49th Annual Meeting of the Rocky Mountain Conference of the United Church of Christ, hybrid meeting (in person and virtual video conferencing) under the non-profit meeting voting guidelines of the State of Colorado, on Saturday, June, 17, 2023, shall increase the size of the Board of Directors of the Rocky Mountain Conference by one, with that person given a portfolio of awareness and advocacy related to climate justice and eco-justice concerns, providing leadership on the Board about how the RMC UCC can most genuinely “be the church” in this time of great ecological and social justice crises.

In 2023, the nominating committee of the Board of Directors will appoint an individual to fill this position for a one year term. In 2024, delegates will vote on a nominee to a full two-year term (which shall be considered a second term if the same person continues in this role). It is expected that this will be an ongoing role in the Board of Directors.

Summary Information

supporting and explaining the resolution:

Persons bringing the resolution: RMC clergy delegates from 2 associations (Rev. Logan Bennett, Rev. Allyson Sawtell, Rev. Peter Sawtell – with more supporting clergy and delegates expected in the near future).

Its purpose: To create a position on the RMC Board of Directors related to climate/eco-justice concerns.

To whom it is addressed: Delegates of the 2023 Rocky Mountain Conference Annual Meeting, in its June 2023 session.

Expected results: That the Delegates of the 2023 Rocky Mountain Conference Annual Meeting will vote to increase the size of the RMC Board of Directors by one, with that person given a portfolio of awareness and advocacy related to climate justice and eco-justice concerns, with voice and vote.

Who will implement or follow up: At or immediately following the 2023 Annual Meeting, the Board will appoint the climate/eco-justice representative for a one year term. Then at the 2024 Annual Meeting, and all such meetings thereafter, the climate/eco-justice representative will be elected for a 2-year term, in the manner of other Board positions.

When and by whom is report-back expected: The person with this portfolio will report to the board at every regular and special meeting of the board, with details about initiatives that are underway within the UCC and other faith communities, areas of ethical and ecclesial concern from an eco-justice perspective, and input about such matters from members of the RMC UCC community.

Anticipated costs and source of funds: No costs are anticipated at this time beyond any Board expense involving its members.

How this resolution impacts the Conference's mission: On its website, the Rocky Mountain Conference states that it is "Inspiring, Challenging, and Empowering Faith and Justice Communities across the West." And, further, it "empowers our congregations to build new partnerships and ministries within their communities." Creating the climate/eco-justice Board position will help the Conference live out its calling for justice communities, as through this position, it assists and supports congregations in their work of environmental justice and healing. And as the climate/eco-justice rep also relates to the Creation Justice League, the Conference thus helping its churches build partnerships and ministries, making their work all the more effective and faithful.

How it promotes and preserves health ministry relationship in the Conference: This member of the RMC board has a portfolio of eco-justice/climate-justice awareness. Part of this person's responsibility will be to be in active communication with diverse constituencies within the conference, knowing that these matters are often points of conflict within churches and communities.