



The Humane Society of the United States Religious Statements on Animals: United Church of Christ

Official Statements on Animals:

The General Synod has sole authority to issue official statements on behalf of the entire UCC. Despite this authority, local churches are free to diverge from the General Synod on any non-constitutional matter. Nevertheless, General Synod statements are issued only after they have received consideration by Congregations, Associations, and Conferences and have received approval by two-thirds of elected Synod delegates. Official statements by the General Synod, therefore, can be considered normative for the majority of UCC members.

In 1993, the General Synod passed a resolution entitled "Respect for Animals." The resolution reminds members that God has given humanity responsibility for the care and protection of all living creatures. Members are invited to educate themselves about the modern plight of wild and domestic animals and to evaluate whether or not humanity is providing adequate care and compassion for animals.

"WHEREAS, the biblical faith sees human beings as creatures of God, tenants in God's earth (Leviticus 25:23) and stewards of creation;

"WHEREAS, the biblical charge to 'have dominion over every living thing' (Genesis 1:28) has often been understood as placing human beings above creation instead of a part of it, while the scriptures teach that we are creatures and that we are to tend the earth for its creatures (Genesis 2:15);

"WHEREAS, the rainbow story of the covenant declares four times (Genesis 9:8-17) that God's covenant is 'with every living creature;'

"WHEREAS, the scriptures teach that our lives are to be filled with compassion, not cruelty, toward animals (Proverbs 12:10);

"WHEREAS, it is being urged by an increasing number of concerned and thoughtful Christians as well as others that all living creatures deserve humane and respectful treatment because, as living creatures, it is their right in the eyes of God;

"WHEREAS, human compassion and decency require not only that we care for our fellow human beings, but that we treat no creature with cruelty or carelessness; and

"WHEREAS, a growing awareness of our environmental responsibility has led to a concern for the preservation and protection of animals, both in their wild and tame states, and the use of animals in the laboratory and commercially;

"THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Nineteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ commends to its members and congregations the consideration of our place among all living creatures as God's creatures, and invites them to evaluate human use of animals and resulting effects on the animals with questions such as these:

1. Are these animals treated justly, mercifully and with compassion and care?
2. Do these animals suffer unnecessary pain either in life or in death?
3. As a result of modern technology and advances, is there another, more humane way to supply our needs?
4. Does the benefit gained from the use of these animals outweigh the cost to them?
5. How does our current treatment of animals affect our spiritual development and welfare?
6. How does treatment of animals affect the diverse richness of God's creation?

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Nineteenth General Synod invites the Conferences, Associations, and congregations of the United Church of Christ to gather educational and theological material on the place of animals and to share this information among these entities with the assistance of the Office for Church in Society so that our Church may study the relationships.

Subject to the availability of funds."

--from "Resolution #4: Respect for Animals," in *Minutes, Nineteenth General Synod*, ed. A. Guffey, Theodora Denk, Joseph Sullivan (Cleveland: United Church of Christ, 1993), 54.

In 2003, the General Synod passed a resolution entitled "To Explore the Implications of our Dietary Choices." This resolution asks members to contemplate the impact of meat production and consumption on human health, world hunger, environmental sustainability, worker safety, and animal suffering. It also asks members to contemplate whether or not meat consumption reflects God's ideal for creation.

"WHEREAS, our bodies are God-given gifts that should be directed at glorifying and magnifying God, and Paul said, 'Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?' (1 Corinthians 6:19, NRSV), unhealthy diets predispose to a wide range of diseases; for example, diets heavily laden with meat and other animal products are associated with substantially higher risks of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, arthritis, and certain cancers (*Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 97 (1997), 1317-21)....

"WHEREAS, Jesus said 'For I was hungry and you gave me food...as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:35, 40, NRSV), yet 1.1 billion people are underfed and malnourished and tens of millions (mostly children) die of malnutrition-related diseases annually (*Worldwatch* Paper 150 [Worldwatch Institute, 2000]). While world hunger is a complex economic, social, and political problem that our dietary choices alone will not eradicate and while grazing in some lands unsuitable for growing crops can increase food production, contemporary production of animal foods aggravates world hunger because crop lands dedicated to animal grains could readily produce food for human consumption. Converting grains to meat wastes the majority of

grains' proteins and calories and all of grains' carbohydrates and fiber. In 1998, thirty-seven percent of the world's grain harvest was fed to animals for human consumption, and in the United States this figure was sixty-six percent (World Resources Institutes...); and

"WHEREAS, God gave Adam the special task to 'till' and 'keep' the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15), which suggests that humankind has a sacred task to be good stewards to God's creation, since 'all things were created through him [Christ-God] and for [Christ-God]' (Colossians 1:16, NRSV), yet many contemporary agriculture practices harm the environment; for example, intensive agricultural methods have often included heavy pesticide use that has been harmful to ecosystems. The inefficiency of converting grains into animal flesh means that meat production generally depletes far more of the dwindling water, energy, and topsoil resources than plant food production. Deciduous and tropical forests have been cleared for cattle grazing and other agricultural uses, contributing to global warming, deadly mud slides, permanent soil damage, and species extinctions. It is widely agreed that contemporary resource use (including resources dedicated to food production) is not environmentally sustainable and threatens great hardships for humankind this century; and

"WHEREAS, while highly mechanized, high-speed, intensive farming technologies have often increased food production efficiency and reduced prices for consumers, they have also had undesirable consequence for workers and many farmers, including the high injury rate among slaughter-house workers (Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* [2001]) and the waning viability of smaller, farmer-owned farms that cannot afford the large capital investments. The loss of farmer-owned farms has had profound effects on rural life, culture, and community; and

"WHEREAS, Genesis 1:29-30 relates that Adam, Eve, and all animals in the Garden of Eden ate only plant foods, and Isaiah envisioned a return to plant-based diets at the end of time, and he prophesied a messianic age in which 'the wolf shall live with the lamb,' 'the lion shall eat straw like the ox,' and 'they will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord' (Isaiah 11:6-9, NRSV). The Bible teaches that God cares about all creatures; for example, the psalmist wrote, 'The Lord is good to all, and [God's] compassion is over all [God] has made' (Psalms 145:9, NRSV). Jesus said that God feeds the birds of the air (Matthew, 6:26) and does not forget sparrows (Luke 12:6), but Jesus concurrently reminded listeners that they are of greater value than sparrows. Although Genesis 2:18-19 describes animals as put on earth as Adams' companions and helpers, several biblical teachings indicate that, after the Fall, eating meat was not inherently sinful.... These diverse teachings suggest that God-centered eating calls for study, reflection, and prayer; and

"WHEREAS, the Hebrew Scriptures oppose cruelty to animals, for example, prohibiting yoking the ox with the much weaker donkey (Deuteronomy 22:10) and muzzling the ox as he plows the fields (Deuteronomy 25:4), and Proverbs 12:10 relates that 'The righteous know the needs of their animals, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel' (NRSV). Jewish tradition, derived from rabbinic interpretation of the Bible, forbids cruel slaughter by rendering inedible any animal who is not killed with a single cut or who is killed with a nicked blade, yet animal welfare laws exempt 'standard agricultural practices' in nearly every state. The federal Humane Slaughter Act, which requires that animals be rendered unconscious prior to slaughter, is poorly enforced (Washington Post [June 13, 2001]) and excludes

poultry. Consequently, modern slaughter often causes animals terror and pain (Gail Eisnitz, Slaughterhouse [1997]). Jesus said, 'Blessed are the merciful' (Matthew 5:7), yet several widely used techniques designed to increase productivity cause animal suffering, including painful procedures without anesthesia, highly stressful crowding, frustration of animals' basic behavioral needs, and miserable conditions en route to slaughter, but we should also acknowledge that animal husbandry practices vary widely, and members of some species of farmed animals tend to be treated much better than others.

"THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED; that the Twenty-fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages pastors and congregations of every local church to explore the ways in which one's dietary choices can be valid and meaningful expressions of Christian witness, particularly on Ecojustice Sabbath (early April); and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls on Local Church Ministries to develop educational curricula for Sunday school, adult education, and institutions of higher learning that

1. explore the relationship between dietary choices and our health, world hunger, the environment, the welfare of those working in animal agriculture, and animal well-being;
2. encourage reflection on how people can promote reforms in animal husbandry, such as identifying farmers who abide by more humane animal husbandry standards; and
3. provide responsible nutritional advice ..."

--from "To Explore the Implications of Our Dietary Choices," Twenty-fourth General Synod
<http://www.ucc.org/synod/resolutions/TO-EXPLORE-THE-IMPLICATIONS-OF-OUR-DIETARY-CHOICES.pdf>

Contemporary References on Animals:

The United Church of Christ's division of Environmental Ministries provides a summary of biblical passages related to creation- and animal-care. From the story of Noah to the Ten Commandments to the Book of Job to the book of Psalms, the Bible repeatedly speaks of God's love for all creatures and humanity's responsibility to follow God's loving example.

"That God's concern is with the entirety of creation is reinforced by the story of Noah. At the end of the story God enters a covenant with 'every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, with every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark'... (Genesis 9:10 and 16)....The ark was God's 'endangered species act.'

"God's concern for creation is even reflected in the Ten Commandments. The Sabbath was intended to be a time of rest for oxen, donkeys, and livestock, as well as for the people of Israel. (Deuteronomy 5:14) As Sabbath regulations were elaborated in Exodus and Leviticus, the scope of divine concern expanded to include the land. Every seven years there was to be 'a Sabbath of complete rest for the land' and the wild animals were to be welcome to use the produce of the land in the Sabbath for food. (Leviticus 25:4 and 7)

"Chapters 28 through 41 of the Book of Job are also fertile sources for these spiritual resources. There God recounts the acts of creation and expresses on-going concern for the welfare of all creatures. ...Several of the Psalms also provide rich resources for spiritual reflection. I want to highlight Psalm 104 which reminds us that the world is full of God's creations and that those creations serve purposes that have nothing to do with human beings.

"These texts remind us that when we were given dominion over creation we were not given license to abuse and destroy. Rather, we were authorized to be servants, to be the 'image of God' in a world that God loves and cherishes....God cares about all creation. So should we."

--from United Church of Christ, "Summary of Biblical Warrants for Environmental Stewardship," by Rev. Steven D. Johnson, PhD, <http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/summary-of-biblical-warrants.html>.

Since the 1980's, when research uncovered a link between racism and environmental degradation, the UCC has been deeply committed to fighting the twin evils of social- and ecological-injustice. Evidence that these two problems are interrelated can be seen in issues impacting animal welfare. For instance, industrial hog farms, which inflict suffering on warehoused pigs, are predominantly located in or near communities of color. The untreated waste from these industrialized farms pollutes the surrounding ground water, sickening both wildlife and human communities. Another example of the connection between ecological- and social-injustice can be seen in the problem of global climate change, which, among its other problems, disrupts both arctic wildlife and the indigenous people who depend upon wildlife for their survival and cultural identity.

"Many ...corporate [animal] farms are located in or near communities of color. Corporate hog farms are some of the most egregious perpetrators of environmental racism. These hog farms create tremendous amounts of animal wastes. Factory-farm operations throughout North America have millions of gallons of liquefied animal feces stored in open lagoons that emit more than 400 different volatile, dangerous compounds into the atmosphere. These 'sewerless cities' generate so much surplus manure that it cannot be stored or disposed of safely. Some large hog farms produce volumes of untreated hog manure equivalent to the human waste of a city of 360,000 people. One hog farming operation in North Carolina carelessly allowed tons of untreated wastes to leach into groundwater sources. During a severe storm, the wastes ran off into rivers and killed wildlife and contaminated drinking water sources. The community affected was predominantly African American."

--from "Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty 1987-2007: A Report Prepared for the United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries," Justice & Witness Ministries (p. 118)
<http://www.ucc.org/assets/pdfs/toxic20.pdf>

"Global warming and climate change pose yet another serious threat. The land of the Indigenous people in the arctic region is literally melting under their feet, disrupting the lifecycles of the plants and animals they depend on, and forcing coastal and island communities to abandon their homes and traditional lands. What happens to a culture when the land and environment it stems from no longer exists? Even more frightening is that the proposed solutions to climate change, such as carbon trading, nuclear power, and 'clean' coal technologies, will only exacerbate the problems faced by Indigenous communities ."

--from "Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty 1987-2007: A Report Prepared for the United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries, Justice & Witness Ministries (p. 121)

<http://www.ucc.org/assets/pdfs/toxic20.pdf>

The UCC's commitment to creation-care and animal-protection is reflected in its liturgical materials. Prayers and confessions remind members that God speaks through all creatures, that humanity has been guilty of past abuses against creation, and that we are called by God to have compassion for all forms of life.

"Perhaps our doubting of God's presence in creation is what hinders our 'ecological outreach.' If we stopped to realize that God's presence is in every blade of grass, every cloud, then maybe we would do better at cherishing the gift we have been given. On Integrity of Creation Sunday and on Earth Day, the United Church of Christ expresses its commitment to ecological justice and the earth as teacher. In this simple prayer, we contemplate a classic Easter Bible story in a new way--listening to God's voice of peace in the world around us.

One: God speaks through rocks and trees and water.

People: And the words 'peace be with you' are heard.

One: God speaks through budding flowers and twinkling stars.

People: And surely 'peace be with you' is heard.

One: God speaks, and is still speaking, when every living creature on earth breathes.

People: 'Peace be with you. Peace be with you.' (pause)

One: But some do not hear the words.

People: Some do not hear God speaking through the land or the sea or the air.

One: They doubt.

People: God speaks, but they do not hear. (Pause)"

--from "God Speaks, Earth Speaks: A Contemplative Prayer Based on John 20:19-31," for Integrity of Creation Sunday, Second Sunday of Easter or Earth Day <http://www.ucc.org/assets/pdfs/07-God-Speak-nodate.pdf>

Reader 1: God you created our planet, the birds, fish and other animals and you saw that all created things were good.

Reader 2: God of life, You also created us, the human family to be your viceroys and to act compassionately and gently towards all forms of life.

People: Remind us, O God, and help us to change.

Reader 1: We confess that we often forget that we are utterly dependent upon you and interdependent with the rest of your creation.

Reader 2: God of creation, we confess that instead of acting compassionately and gently toward all forms of life, humanity had behaved wantonly and recklessly.

People: Forgive us, O God, and help us to change.

Reader 1: God of compassion, our land lies polluted under our feet, and we see members of the animal kingdom, on land and in sea, dying as a result of the contamination that we have created.

Reader 2: God of grace, we confess that we are damaging the earth, the home that you have given us through our consumerism and the use of products that are constantly polluting our air, land, and water, harming wildlife and endangering human health.

People: Forgive us, O God, and help us to change.

Reader 1: God of wisdom, help us understand that whatever we do to the web of life we do to ourselves.

Reader 2: God of power, help us acknowledge that we must act now and wake up to our moral obligations and that the future of our beautiful planet is in our hands.

People: Forgive us, O God, and help us to change."

--from "A Litany of an Environmental Confession," by Carols J. Correa Bernier, Minister for Environmental Justice, United Church of Christ http://www.ucc.org/earthcare/pdfs/a_litany_of.pdf

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