

United Methodist Church General Conference

Resolution Regarding Use of Fair Trade Coffee

Approved at the United Methodist General Conference, May 4, 2004, Pittsburgh, PA

WHEREAS, coffee is one of the world's most heavily traded commodities; it originates from either large plantations that are traditionally run and owned by wealthy landowners or small operations that are primarily owned by impoverished farmers. These small farmers frequently live in isolated communities relying on middlemen to buy their coffee invariably at the lowest price possible. The way the system is set up, the farmers' inability to get a just return for their labor is essentially guaranteed and they are condemned to a life of extreme poverty; and,

WHEREAS, biblical justice brings all into the economic community, with a share in productive power as seen in the provision of land to every family unit (Numbers 26; Leviticus 25); and,

WHEREAS, our Social Principles state that "we support measures that would reduce the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few," that "we advocate for the rights of people to possess property and to earn a living by tilling the soil"; and that "we call upon our churches to do all in their power to speak prophetically to the matters of food supply and the people who grow the food for the world" (§163); and,

WHEREAS, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) partnered in April 2002 with Equal Exchange to launch a denomination-wide coffee program and through the partnership, any United Methodist church or individual buying coffee through Equal Exchange's Interfaith Program can now order coffee through UMCOR (at the Equal Exchange Web site), and who, for every case of coffee ordered, receives approximately 5 percent of purchase price from Equal Exchange to be used in UMCOR's small farmer economic development programs; and,

WHEREAS, the annual conferences of New England, East Ohio, and Nebraska have resolutions and programs to foster purchase of fair trade coffee by their member churches to support impoverished family farmers in the developing world provide for their families; and

WHEREAS, many of our agencies and congregations, their administrations and their committee organizations serve coffee at meetings, programs, and fund-raising events; and,

WHEREAS, purchasing domestic coffee brands at the least expensive price makes us unintentional participants in an exploitative system that has trapped thousands of developing world farmers, their families and children in an inescapable cycle of poverty; and,

WHEREAS, economic justice can be fostered by consumers exercising their economic power to avoid purchasing products in conditions where workers are being exploited; and,



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1-800-554-8583
<http://gbgm-umc.org/umcor>

Equal Exchange's Interfaith Program works in partnership with communities of faith and faith-based relief, development and human rights organizations to make a difference in the lives of small farmers and their families through Fair Trade.



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WHEREAS, the International Standards of Fair Trade focus on ensuring that small farmers are compensated with a fair and true living wage, working with democratically run farming cooperatives that are owned and governed by and for the farmers themselves, buying directly from the co-ops so that the benefits and profits from the trade actually reach the farmers and their communities, providing vital advance credit to farmers and encouraging sustainable farming practices; and,

WHEREAS, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church seeks to address the underlying systemic justice issues throughout the world and to provide opportunities for supporting systems based on the values of justice, cooperation, sustainability, and the common good, we therefore create a partnership with a key U.S. Fair Trade organization, Equal Exchange, and join over 5,000 places of worship and faith-based organizations who support small coffee farmers in developing nations.

THEREFORE, be it resolved that, in seeking an authentic Christian response to the plight of developing world small individual coffee farmers, their families, and their communities, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church urges all agencies of the church, local congregations and their affiliated organizations that use coffee to purchase coffee for corporate and personal use through the fair trade partner, Equal Exchange or through another fair trade organization.

Submitted By Kenneth M. Kreutziger, New England Annual Conference Committee on Church and Society, and Gary R. Henderson, East Ohio Annual Conference.



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