

1 **NO. 0923**

2
3 **(OPERATIONAL BUSINESS ITEM)**

4
5 **CALL FOR AN OPEN MEETING POLICY FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)**

6
7 WHEREAS, in recent years, the General Board, the General Assembly, and leaders of the
8 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) have heard from Disciples throughout the church about
9 the need for greater transparency and accountability and have acknowledged this need; and

10 WHEREAS, after the Chapter 11 bankruptcy of the National Benevolent Association — a general
11 ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) — the NBA Task Force appointed by the
12 denomination’s General Board to review the bankruptcy called for “More frequent open and
13 transparent communication among General Ministries, regions, and congregations” (NBA Task
14 Force Report, May 8, 2006, p. 9); and

15 WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a member of the National Council of
16 Churches of Christ (NCCC) USA, whose General Assembly adopted in 1990 an open meeting
17 policy for its General Assembly, committees, and subcommittees, and is in a process of revising
18 said policy; and

19 WHEREAS, mainline denominations and ecumenical partners including the Evangelical Lutheran
20 Church in America, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Episcopal Church in America, and the
21 United Methodist Church have similar open meeting policies; and

22 WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is organized on many democratic principles,
23 and democracy relies on free access to the workings of government and to information, so
24 much so that the federal government, as well as states and municipalities, have established
25 “Sunshine Laws” and open meeting legislation that entitles the public and the press to attend
26 government meetings and to obtain information about the operation of those entities; and

27 WHEREAS, the Disciples’ first moderator, Ronald E. Osborn, opposed the attempted closing of
28 the 1969 General Board meeting in the face of controversy, writing later in *The Disciple*, “The
29 ugly alternative to openness is getting our information from a grapevine of gossip that keeps a
30 favored few ‘in the know’ and the vast majority in the dark”; and

31 WHEREAS, open and transparent communication has been essential to the building of trust and
32 thereby essential to the health and faith of Christian communities for centuries, even as Jesus
33 said in Luke 12:3, “there is nothing secret that will not become known.”;

34 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of
35 Christ) meeting in Indianapolis in 2009 — in the spirit of openness and accountability — call for
36 the establishment and implementation of an Open Meeting Policy for the General Assembly,
37 including its General Board, Administrative Committee, and the task forces, advisory groups,
38 standing committees, councils, and working groups that these elected bodies may form; and

39 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly, in making that call, direct the Moderator
40 and the General Minister and President to work with the submitters of this resolution to
41 convene a task force that would be accountable to the General Board to develop said Open
42 Meeting Policy and return it to the General Assembly for approval in 2011; and

43 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that said task force develop and propose a policy according to the
44 principles outlined herein and recommend a process for establishing and implementing the
45 policy to the General Board in 2011, which would then forward the policy and
46 recommendations to the General Assembly for approval in 2011; and

47 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that such a policy should be informed by the principles of open
48 meeting policies established by other mainline denominations and the National Council of
49 Churches, and by the basic premises of an open and democratic society, such as:

50 - “Open to the public” means that business is conducted in open session in a location that
51 accommodates visitors and press, the location and date of meetings being made known
52 prior to meetings, and material pertinent to the meeting being made available to
53 visitors and press.

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55 - Closed sessions should be permitted only when certain criteria are met, such as 1) the
56 closed session is authorized by a vote of two-thirds of those present and eligible to vote;
57 2) the vote to authorize is taken during an open meeting and recorded in the minutes;
58 3) the reason for the closed session is stated publicly; 4) the closed session is limited to
59 matters permitted to be exempt from an open meeting (suggested below); and 5)
60 decisions made in closed session are publicly announced following the meeting.

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62 - Subjects that may be considered in closed session should be limited to real estate
63 matters; negotiations, when public announcements may be harmful to the negotiating
64 process; personnel matters; pending or potential litigation or collective bargaining;
65 deployment of security personnel or devices; presentations wherein real or apparent
66 danger may jeopardize the life or liberty of the presenter; and the evaluation of clergy
67 standing.

68 and;

69 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the policy that is established be interpreted liberally by the
70 General Assembly and its legislative bodies, i.e. restraint being used in closing meetings, closing
71 them as seldom as possible; and

72 FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the resulting policy be strongly recommended to all general and
73 regional ministries, congregations and higher education institutions of the Christian Church
74 (Disciples of Christ), and to recognized and “other” organizations that affiliate with the
75 denomination.

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77 Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) — Indianapolis, IN
78 First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) — Tucson, AZ
79 DisciplesWorld, Inc. — Indianapolis, IN

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82 The General Board recommends that the General Assembly
83 ADOPT Business Item No. 0923. (Debate time: 12 minutes)