

1 **Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining in Appalachia**
2 **Submitted by the Central Atlantic Conference**

3
4 **A Resolution of Witness**

5 **SUMMARY:** Mountaintop removal coal mining devastates communities and the environment.
6 We urge the United Church of Christ to work to bring it to an end and encourage the use of
7 clean, renewable energy.

8 **BACKGROUND:** Mountaintop removal coal mining has a devastating impact on the economy,
9 ecology, and communities of Appalachia. Mining companies use heavy explosives to blow the
10 tops off mountains in order to reach a thin seam of coal. The companies then dump this
11 “overburden” - millions of tons of rubble and toxic waste - into the streams and valleys below
12 the mining sites.

13 This destructive practice has damaged or destroyed nearly 2,000 miles of streams and threatens
14 to destroy 1.4 million acres of mountaintops and forests by 2020. The mining poisons drinking
15 water, destroys beautiful forests and wildlife habitat, increases the risk of flooding, and wipes out
16 entire communities.

17 Mountaintop removal pollutes waterways and allows toxic heavy metals such as cadmium,
18 selenium, and arsenic to leach into local water supplies -- the same water that Appalachia's
19 people rely on. But the danger is not limited to drinking water; mountaintop removal also causes
20 air pollution that affects communities for miles around. Many of the toxins that pollute
21 mountaintop-removal sites are carcinogens, and cancer rates are twice as high for people who
22 live near mountaintop-removal sites.

23 When mountains are demolished for coal mining, they are gone forever. They lose their topsoil
24 and forest, animal habitat and ability to filter water, and they become uninhabitable places for
25 humans and animals.

26 Mountaintop removal also destroys the valleys in Appalachia where people have lived for
27 centuries. It destroys their culture, their way of making a living, and their family structures. It
28 occurs in remote places where there is very little self-determining political organization and is a
29 colonization and exploitation of the land by outside interests. If it were a profitable enterprise for
30 the people of Appalachia, then they would at least benefit economically. The opposite is true,
31 however, as the Appalachian counties are consistently among the economically poorest in the
32 United States.

33 **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE:** Mountaintop removal is a permanent
34 desecration of the gift of creation by a benevolent and gracious Creator. God created the earth
35 and everything in it, and God calls upon humans numerous times in the Bible to be a steward of
36 the divine creation - to protect, care for, and learn from it:

37 “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; and the world and they that dwell
38 therein.” - Psalm 24:1

39 "You shall not pollute the land in which you live... you shall not defile the land in which
40 you live, in which I also dwell." - Numbers 35: 33-34

41 "But ask the animals, and they will teach you; or birds of the air and they will tell you; or
42 speak to the earth and it will teach you; or let the fish of the sea inform you...In God's
43 hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind." - Job 12:7-10

44 The Bible further calls for justice for the poor and oppressed:

45 "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before
46 my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the
47 orphan, plead for the widow." – Isaiah 1:16-17

48 "What does the Lord require of thee but to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly
49 with your God?" – Micah 6:8

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51 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

52 WHEREAS mountaintop removal coal mining destroys God's creation by blowing up mountains
53 and burying streams throughout Appalachia; and

54 WHEREAS mountaintop removal coal mining harms Appalachian communities; and

55 WHEREAS mountaintop removal coal mining causes the displacement of entire Appalachian
56 communities and their culture; and

57 WHEREAS as people of faith, we look to the scriptures for guidance for the choices we make in
58 our lives; and

59 WHEREAS we understand scriptures compel us to act on our faith grounded in wonder,
60 reverence, love, and respect for all of God's creation; and

61 WHEREAS we are called to spiritual and lifestyle transformation based on justice and reverence
62 for all of God's creatures and creation...

63 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United
64 Church of Christ express its opposition to mountaintop removal coal mining and its support for
65 clean, renewable sources of energy;

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67 Be it further resolved, that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
68 requests that Justice and Witness Ministries to these concerns about mountaintop removal coal
69 mining by presenting a copy of this resolution to all appropriate federal and state agencies,
70 congressional committees, and elected officials;

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72 Be it further resolved that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ urges
73 the legislative and executive branches of the federal government to pass legislation and enforce
74 environmental safeguards to end the devastating practice of mountaintop removal coal mining;

75 Be it further resolved that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls
76 upon Justice and Witness Ministries, to provide associations, conferences, and congregations
77 with information and timely direction for needed action that can help end mountaintop removal
78 coal mining;

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80 Be it further resolved that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
81 encourages United Church of Christ congregations and all other settings of the church to identify
82 their sources of electricity and, if sourced from mountaintop removal coal mining, encourages
83 them to change to renewable sources of energy;

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85 Be it further resolved that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
86 encourages United Church of Christ congregations to educate themselves and their communities
87 about the effects of mountaintop removal coal mining and economic options available to
88 Appalachian communities, by intentionally engaging in advocacy and action against
89 mountaintop removal coal mining and for continued care of creation;

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91 Be it further resolved that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
92 advocates for renewable sources of energy and sustainable sources of income to replace
93 mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia in order to create jobs and boost local
94 economies and encourages United Church of Christ congregations to do likewise;

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96 Be it further resolved that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ asks
97 the leadership of the United Church of Christ to continue efforts to end mountaintop removal
98 coal mining and engage leaders of other religious traditions and relevant organizations to
99 implement efforts to stop mountaintop removal coal mining.

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101 RESOURCES:

102 Christians for the Mountains: www.christiansforthemountains.org

103 Sierra Club Beyond Coal Campaign: www.beyondcoal.org

104 Appalachian Voices: www.appvoices.org

105 I Love Mountains: www.ilovemountains.org

106 Appalachian Mountain Advocates: www.appalmad.org

107 “The Last Mountain” documentary: www.thelastmountainmovie.com

108 “Deep Down” documentary: www.deepdownfilm.org

109 “Coal Country” documentary: www.coalcountrythemovie.com