

## ELECTRIFICATION RESOLUTION

1 **Title:** Protecting God’s Earth and Its People with Electrification

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3 **Date Submitted:** March 3, 2022

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5 **Submitted by:** Creation Justice Team of the Minnesota Conference United Church  
6 of Christ and Mayflower United Church of Christ, Minneapolis

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10 **Summary of Intent:** This resolution declares that the 2022 Annual Meeting of the  
11 Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ encourages member congregations  
12 to actively plan for and promote electrifying appliances and machines when old  
13 ones fail or become outdated as one of the ways to protect God’s earth and its  
14 people from climate change emissions, and to become role models for just and  
15 equitable electrification for individual members and the broader community.

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18 **Background and Supporting Statement:**

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20 WHEREAS a major 2018 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change  
21 told us that we must reduce carbon emissions 50% by 2030 in order to avoid the  
22 most catastrophic effects of climate change; and

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24 WHEREAS scientists are talking about effects on God’s earth, that God’s creation 25 could  
be catastrophically impacted by the climate change we are causing; and

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27 WHEREAS protecting God’s creation also protects all God’s people by reducing air  
28 pollutants and sickness; and

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30 WHEREAS, because air pollutants from burning fossil fuels are especially harmful 31 for  
children, the elderly, rural and under-resourced communities, and people of  
32 color, protection measures must be just and equitably available; and

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34 WHEREAS God’s word as set out in Leviticus leaves no doubt about what is  
35 required of a steward, to care for God’s land while in our temporary tenancy; and

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37 WHEREAS about 40% of the United States’ emissions causing climate change  
38 come from the places we live and the vehicles we drive and those emissions are  
39 increasing; and

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41 WHEREAS our electricity is getting cleaner with the addition of very inexpensive

42 wind- and solar-generated electricity and electricity will continue to get even  
43 cleaner as expensive coal-fired electric generation is quickly retired; and  
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45 WHEREAS switching to new efficient appliances powered by electricity will go a  
46 long way toward lowering our emissions, and reducing the impact of climate  
47 change and poor air quality.

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49 **RESOLUTION:**

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51 NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Minnesota Conference United  
52 Church of Christ encourage member congregations to actively plan for and  
53 promote electrifying appliances and machines when old ones fail or become  
54 outdated as one of the ways to protect God’s earth and its people from climate  
55 change emissions; and to become role models for electrification for individual  
56 members and the broader community; and

57  
58 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED each member congregation of the Minnesota  
59 Conference of the United Church of Christ create a plan to convert its natural gas  
60 appliances and other fossil fuel appliances, including machines like lawn mowers,  
61 to electric ones when it is time to replace those outdated or failing appliances; and  
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63 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that member congregations actively promote  
64 electrification as one of the ways to protect God’s earth and its people and, with  
65 environmental justice in mind, help our members and neighbors electrify; and  
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67 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Conference gather and distribute information  
68 and guidance for member congregations and individual members to implement  
69 electrification, thereby becoming role models for the broader community.

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71 **FUNDING:** Funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in  
72 accordance with the overall mandates of the affected entities and the funds  
73 available. The Creation Justice Team anticipates only minimal costs to the Team or  
74 other entities of the Conference.

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76 **IMPLEMENTATION:** The Conference Minister, in consultation with appropriate  
77 ministries or other entities within the Minnesota Conference UCC, will determine  
78 the implementing body.

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80 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

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82 In a major 2018 report the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded  
83 that we must reduce carbon emissions 50% by 2030 in order to avoid the most  
84 catastrophic effects of climate change.<sup>1</sup> This is a widely accepted benchmark. <sup>2</sup>  
85 And it is a huge lift.

86

87 When we fully ground ourselves in God’s word, we understand that this is God’s  
88 earth that scientists are talking about—God’s earth that could be catastrophically  
89 impacted by the climate change we are causing.

90

91 Genesis tells the origin story and we know the story well: God separating light from  
92 dark within the formless void through calling forth all manner of vegetation, fish and  
93 birds and onto the creation of humankind. At each step God stepped back,  
94 reviewed what God had created and assessed it as good.

95

96 Some have said that the creation of humanity in God’s image with a commission to  
97 rule over the animal kingdom carries a license for ecological irresponsibility. But the  
98 Bible portrays humanity not as the owner of nature but as its steward, strictly  
99 accountable to its true owner. Leviticus 25: 23-24 makes the point clearly. In God’s  
100 words, “the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you  
101 are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for  
102 the redemption of the land.”

103

104 Some have said that redemption referred only to a claim from prior owners. But in  
105 its discussion of sabbatical years and the every-fifty-year jubilee year, Leviticus  
106 makes it clear that the jubilee year is the year in which the land is redeemable by  
107 God, the true owner. The phrase, “you are but aliens and tenants” emphasizes the  
108 transitory nature of human land ownership. We humans occupy the earth only for  
109 our lifetime. God remains. God’s word as set out in Leviticus leaves no doubt  
110 about what is required of a steward, to care for God’s land while in our temporary  
111 tenancy.

112

113 Around 40% of the United States’ emissions causing climate change come from  
114 residences and the vehicles we drive.<sup>3</sup> Greenhouse gas emissions from residential  
115 buildings in Minnesota have increased 32% since 2005. Emissions from  
116 commercial buildings increased by 15% and these emissions continue to grow  
117 each year.<sup>4</sup>

118

119 Structural change is now creating a path forward. Electricity is now getting cleaner  
120 with the addition of very inexpensive wind- and solar-generated electricity. And  
121 electricity will continue to get even cleaner as expensive coal-fired electric  
122 generation is retired.<sup>5</sup>

123

124 But that structural change is not enough. We must use the cleaner electricity. Our  
125 individual actions matter. Switching everything in our lives to be powered by  
126 electricity will go a long way toward lowering our emissions and reducing the  
127 impact of climate change.<sup>6</sup>

128

129 Electrifying everything for individuals means replacing any appliances/machines in

130 our homes and garages that currently burn fossil fuels. And it might also mean  
131 installing new electric machines, like solar panels and home storage batteries. This  
132 doesn't have to be done all at once. Congregations and individuals can make  
133 plans to replace fossil fuel appliances and machines when they become outdated  
134 or fail.

135

136 Modern appliances and machines are so much more efficient they'll immediately  
137 have lower total carbon emissions than burning fossil fuel directly.<sup>7</sup> Plus, as the  
138 electric grid switches to renewable sources, emissions will continue to drop.

139

140 Protecting God's earth also protects God's people. Natural gas, a fossil fuel,  
141 burned inside a church or residence has more pollutants than just carbon dioxide.  
142 Burning natural gas also emits nitric oxide (NOx), sulfur oxides (SOx), particulate  
143 matter (PM), and formaldehyde (CH<sub>2</sub>O).<sup>8</sup>

144

145 Multiple peer-reviewed studies tell us that when natural gas is burned without  
146 proper ventilation, gas cooking can generate levels of carbon monoxide and  
147 nitrogen dioxide inside homes that exceed federal and state standards for air  
148 quality.<sup>9</sup>

149

150 EPA recently concluded that long-term exposure to Nitrogen dioxide is linked to  
151 the onset of asthma in children.<sup>10</sup> Asthma is a leading cause of children missing  
152 school.<sup>11</sup> There is also a growing body of evidence which suggests that indoor air  
153 pollution from burning natural gas negatively impacts cognitive development of  
154 children. Range hoods may remove the pollutants from burning natural gas. But  
155 children in older and poorer homes may not live in homes with range hoods, a  
156 clear environmental justice issue.<sup>12</sup>

157

158 Unburned natural gas is mostly methane.<sup>13</sup> Methane is the second-largest  
159 contributor to climate change among greenhouse gases and is more than 80 times  
160 more powerful at trapping heat in earth's atmosphere than carbon dioxide in the  
161 first 20 years after it is released into the atmosphere.<sup>14</sup>

162

163 In a recent peer-reviewed study, Stanford University scientists found that stoves  
164 release far more of the potent planet-warming gas methane than the  
165 Environmental Protection Agency estimates and that more than three-quarters of  
166 the methane emissions occurred when the gas stoves were turned off, suggesting  
167 that leaks persist even when the appliances are not being used.<sup>15</sup>

168

169 Fresh Energy highlights the environmental justice issue imbedded in our reliance  
170 on natural gas: "(w)hile the burning of fossil gas is detrimental to the health of all  
171 Minnesotans, it is especially harmful for children, the elderly, rural and under-  
172 resourced communities, and people of color in Minnesota."<sup>16</sup>

173

174 The American Gas Association reports that natural gas meets more than thirty percent of the United States' energy needs.<sup>17</sup>

175

176 God calls on each of us and all of us together in community to act prophetically, to be role  
177 models, to be the Moses of our time. Our church communities must lead the way to protect  
178 God's earth and its people—leading by electrifying and helping our members and neighbors  
179 electrify.

180 May it be so.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanford Earth Matters. "A roadmap to reducing greenhouse gas emissions 50 percent by 2030." September 20, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> FACT SHEET: President Biden Sets 2030 Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Target Aimed at Creating Good-Paying Union Jobs and Securing U.S. Leadership on Clean Energy Technologies. April 22, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Electrify Everything in Your Home. Joel Rosenberg. Rewiring America, 2.; Fresh Energy. "Buildings for a healthy future." December 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Fresh Energy. "Fresh Energy launches groundbreaking gas decarbonization program." August 9, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Fresh Energy. "Our accomplishments of 2021 and what we are looking forward to in 2022: Further changes to coal plant operations secured & Otter Tail Power begins to exit coal and increase renewables." January 24, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Electrify Everything in Your Home. Joel Rosenberg, Rewiring America, page 2.; Fresh Energy. "Buildings for a healthy future." December 16, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Electrify Everything in Your Home. Joel Rosenberg. Rewiring America, 4.

<sup>8</sup> "Existing Buildings Electrification Strategy," City of Berkeley, California, 4, 2021, page 6; Fresh Energy, "What's Up With Natural Gas in My Home," February 24, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> "Existing Buildings Electrification Strategy," City of Berkeley, California, 4, 2021, pages 6 & 7; Fresh Energy, "What's Up With Natural Gas in My Home," February 24, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> "Existing Buildings Electrification Strategy," City of Berkeley, California, pages 7 & 8, 4, 2021; "Clean energy brief: natural gas in Minnesota," prepared by Melissa R. Parton on behalf of Fresh Energy, February 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Children's Minnesota, "Managing asthma for students."

<sup>12</sup> "Existing Buildings Electrification Strategy," City of Berkeley, California, page 7, April 20, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> "Clean energy brief: natural gas in Minnesota," prepared by Melissa R. Parton on behalf of Fresh Energy, February 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Fresh Energy, "What's Up With Natural Gas in My Home," February 24, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Washington Post, January 27, 2022. "Gas stoves in kitchens pose a risk to public health and the planet, research finds."

<sup>16</sup> Fresh Energy, "What's Up With Natural Gas in My Home," February 24, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> American Gas Association, News Release, February 8, 2022.