

# **Resolution on Acknowledging and Compensating the Black Musical Community for the Under- and Unacknowledged Musical Works of Black People, especially "Negro Spirituals"**

Submitted by the Justice and Witness Ministries Committee of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ as a Class I – Social Action Resolution. The Vote to recommend the resolution to the Conference was completed on 5/02/25 and was unanimous.

**Whereas**, Proverbs 3:27 reminds us, "Don't withhold good from someone entitled to it when you have in hand the power to do it;"

**Whereas**, James 5:4 declares, "The pay you did not give the workers who mowed your fields cries out against you, and the cries of the workers have been heard by the Lord All-Powerful;"

**Whereas**, a growing movement within the Church in America seeks to address the historical injustice of unpaid royalties for the use of "Negro Spirituals" in worship;

**Whereas**, the term "Negro Spirituals," while potentially sensitive, is the classification most widely used by Black American scholars;

**Whereas**, "Negro Spirituals" encapsulate the breadth of the Black experience, from the profound pain of enslavement to the fervent hope of liberation found in God's promise;

**Whereas**, incorporating "Negro Spirituals" and contemporary Black music into worship enriches the Church's liturgical and musical life;

**Whereas**, the composers and lyricists of "Negro Spirituals" were historically denied credit and recognition for their enduring works of faith;

**Whereas,** the original creators of "Negro Spirituals" were never compensated for the use of their songs, which continue to inspire and resonate with congregations today;

**Whereas,** the Church acknowledges a moral and spiritual debt owed to the Black musical community;

**Therefore, be it resolved,** that the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ encourages all congregations to initiate a process of reparations by providing fair compensation for the use of "Negro Spirituals" and contemporary Black music during worship and other church or conference events;

**Therefore, be it further resolved,** that each church within the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ be encouraged to donate \$10 per "Negro Spiritual" performed, or to allocate special offering collections as determined by the local church body or conference leadership;

**Therefore, be it further resolved,** that all funds collected for the use of "Negro Spirituals" be designated to support living Black composers, lyricists, and musicians, or to benefit institutions and organizations within the State of Vermont that champion the experiences of Black artists, such as the Clemmons Family Farm;

**Finally, and therefore, be it resolved,** that the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ encourages all its churches to embrace the "Negro Spirituals" and contemporary Black music with gratitude, joy, and a commitment to just and fair compensation, honoring both the ancestors in faith and the contemporary Black artistic community.

*The Justice and Witness Ministries Committee of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ will be responsible for seeing that the resolution is implemented, with assistance from the Administrator of the Conference office. The financial implications of the resolution to the Conference are negligible, as they will be carried out by unpaid volunteers with assistance from paid staff as a part of their regular course of duties.*