



# Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Disciples Center  
130 E. Washington Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46206-1986  
(317) 635-3100  
Website: [www.disciples.org](http://www.disciples.org)

## Statistics 2003

Source: *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches 2005*.

**In the USA and Canada:**  
770,793 Members  
3717 Congregations  
35 Geographical Regions

## Ministry

7197 Clergy  
3412 Serving Parishes

## Finances

Total Contributions  
503,410,382.00  
Benevolences  
45,491,828.00

## Women in Ministry

Women are active in the ordained ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). At present, approximately 22% of clergy are women.

## Brief History

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) began as two similar movements, committed to seeking Christian unity, which came together in 1832. Barton W. Stone, a Presbyterian minister in Kentucky, called his movement the "Christians". Thomas and Alexander Campbell (father and son), began the "Disciples of Christ" movement among Presbyterians in Western Pennsylvania. In 1832 the two movements merged, never intending to become a denomination. From the 1830s to the 1890s, Disciples were the most rapidly growing church in the United States. In 1968, after a decade of study, Disciples voted to restructure its life in approving the *Provisional Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States in Canada*.

## Organization

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is structured into three **manifestations** (congregational, regional and general) with strong but voluntary ties. These three manifestations operate as equals and manage their own finances, property and programs. The primary unit is the **congregation**. Congregations are organized into 35 geographical **regions** in the U.S. and Canada. Regions provide support to congregations, and are responsible, along with them, for ordaining and licensing ministers. At the national/international level, the church's main representative body is the **General Assembly**. This body meets every two years and consists of both lay and ordained voting delegates from each congregation as well as all ordained ministers. The chief executive is called the **General Minister and President**, who is elected by the General Assembly. In addition, a General Board of 160-voting members, at least half of whom must be lay persons, meets annually, and a 44-member Administrative Committee, similarly lay-oriented, meets more frequently. These groups are presided over by an elected **moderator**.

1801 Barton Stone and others found the *Springfield Presbytery*, denouncing all human creeds and appealing to the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice. They soon renounce denominational ties and call themselves, simply, "Christians".

1808 Thomas Campbell and others found the *Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania*. They adopt the motto, "Where the scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." They call themselves "Reformers" and become associated with a Baptist Association.

1830 Campbell and followers sever ties to Baptists and call themselves "Disciples of Christ."

1832 "Christians" and "Disciples" unite and grow as a "movement," often called the "Stone-Campbell Movement."

1906 "Churches of Christ" group separates over instrumental music and organized missionary activity.

1926 Conservative "Independent Christian Churches" begin to separate over liberal policies in the mission field.

1968 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination officially created in Kansas City.

## Major Doctrines/Theology

*"In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity."*

The Disciples historical tradition and basis lies in promoting Christian unity. Disciples tend to view creeds as divisive when used as tests of fellowship, but the **Preamble to the Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**, adopted in 1968, summarizes its basic theology. It affirms belief in the Trinitarian God who created the world and who binds Christians in a covenant of love to Godself and to one another. Through baptism into Christ and communion of the Holy Spirit, all are called together to discipleship, witness, and service.

Other distinctive marks include: lay leadership, congregational government, ecumenical involvement, the centrality of the authority of Scripture, doctrinal freedom, believer's baptism by immersion, and weekly communion.

## Worship and Sacrament

The beliefs and worship practices of the Disciples are similar to those in a number of other denominations. This is summarized by Rev. Kenneth Teegarden, General Minister and President Emeritus:

*We Disciples have beliefs and practices in common with all sorts of Christians. These apparent similarities sometimes are superficial, sometimes fundamental. We baptize by immersion, so we look like Baptists. We have Communion every Sunday, so we look a bit like Roman Catholics. We stress the ministry of the laity, so we look a little like Quakers. Our congregations call their pastors rather than accepting assigned ministers, so in that respect we look like Presbyterians. We rely heavily on preaching and teaching, so we look somewhat like Methodists. We have congregational government, so we look a lot like the United Church of Christ.*

Disciples worship is often marked by strong involvement of the laity. Individual congregations are free to determine the format and style of worship, liturgy, and the Sacrament of Baptism and the Sacrament of Communion. The sacrament of **Baptism** by immersion is given to youth or adult believers. Since infants are not baptized, they are often welcomed into the life of the congregation through a ritual known as dedication.

Most congregations celebrate the sacrament of **Communion** (also called the Lord's Supper) on a weekly basis. Lay elders often preside at the Lord's Table, which is open to all the baptized. In the case of baptized children (who have been baptized as infants in other denominations), the decision of whether a child should participate in communion is left to the parents, though a congregation may provide guidelines.

To become a member of the Disciples, one is asked to affirm the **Good Confession**: "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16).

## Ecumenical Involvement

The DOC began as an ecumenical movement. Its **Council on Christian Unity (CCU)** developed within the church to promote ecumenical dialogue and relationships. A retired president of the CCU, The Rev. Paul A. Crow, Jr., was the first General Secretary of the **Consultation on Church Union (COCU)**.

Disciples helped to organize the **National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC)** and contributed its first lay president, J. Irwin Miller (1960-63). They were founding members of the **World Council of Churches (WCC)**.

In 1989, the Disciples and the **United Church of Christ (UCC)** declared a relationship of **full communion**, and in 1993 and 2001 Disciples held their General Assembly jointly with the UCC General Synod.

Disciples are also engaged in ongoing theological dialogue internationally with the **Roman Catholic Church** (since 1967), and have a special partner relationship with the **World Alliance of Reformed Churches**. In 1999, Disciples launched a dialogue with the other churches of the Stone-Campbell family.

## Important Resources

*Chalice Hymnal* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1995).

*Year Book & Directory 2005* Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 2005.