

United Church of Christ (UCC)

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Statistics 2003

Source: *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches* 2005

In the United States:

1,296,652 Members
5738 Congregations
203 Associations
39 Conferences

Ministry

10,323 Clergy
4,219 Serving Parishes

Financial Data

Total Contributions
\$ 878,974,911
Benevolences
\$76,647,374

Women in Ministry

Throughout its history, women have been active in the ministry of the UCC. In 1853, the Congregational Church became the first church in the U.S. to ordain a woman, the Rev. Antoinette Brown. Presently, approximately 25% of all UCC clergy are women.

Brief History

The United Church of Christ (UCC) has a complex history. It was created in 1957 with the merger of the **Evangelical and Reformed Church** and the **General Council of the Congregational and Christian Churches**. Its roots therefore grow out of German Lutheranism, German and Swiss Reformed Tradition, Anabaptist Christian Churches, and English Congregationalism. The UCC also expresses its Reformed heritage in the presence of the non-geographic Calvin Synod from the Hungarian Reformed tradition.

The earliest churches in America were those of the Plymouth Pilgrims and the Massachusetts Bay Puritans (who were all Congregationalists) during the 1620s. The Christian Churches were born on American soil during the 1830s, some of which went on to found the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The German founded Evangelical churches arrived in America during the 1840s and 1850s, while the Reformed branch churches arrived in the 1860s.

Organization

The UCC has a decentralized structure bound together by covenantal relationships. Authority rests in the individual **congregation**. Local churches are autonomous, own their own property, and call their own ministers. Congregations are grouped geographically into 203 **Associations**, which have the authority to ordain **ministers**, and to accept or withdraw individual congregations. Associations are in turn grouped into 39 **Conferences**. The **General Synod**, which meets biennially, is the chief policymaking body. It consists of delegates elected by the Conferences, and is headed by elected **Moderators**. Decisions by the General Synod are not binding on individuals, churches, Associations, or Conferences. The head of the communion is the **General Minister and President**.

Congregational Roots

1620 Pilgrims arrive in Plymouth.

1628 Puritans arrive in Massachusetts Bay.

1801-1852 Works with the Presbyterian Church on mission activities under a "Plan of Union".

1871 Consolidated into the **National Council of Congregational Churches**.

Reformed Roots

1720 A branch from the Swiss-German Reform Movement called the **Palatines** arrives in the U.S.

By 1861 it develops into the **General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the U.S.**

Christian Roots

1819 Portsmouth conference held by churches in America who have left other denominations and call themselves "Christians". They have no formal creeds, stress the authority of the Bible, and salvation by grace.

1833 form the **General Convention of Christian Church**.

1812 Reformed Churches remaining in Germany become part of the **Evangelical United Churches in Germany**.

Major Doctrines/Theology

The diversity of the many roots of the UCC makes it difficult to summarize a single theology of the United Church of Christ. From the Congregationalists, the UCC inherited an emphasis on religious freedom and autonomous structure. From its Reformed and Evangelical roots, the UCC inherited an emphasis on the Bible as the authentic witness to the word of God over church authority, and salvation by grace alone from a loving God. Its Evangelical roots contributed a strong credal background based on the Augsburg Confession, Luther's Catechism, and the Heidelberg Catechism, while its Christian roots rejected the use of creeds. Today the UCC celebrates its credal heritage, regarding creeds as a testimony to faith rather than a test of faith.

The UCC *Statement of Faith*, adopted in 1959, affirms belief in the Trinitarian God, who created the world, and who seeks through love to save all people. Through Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, God has reconciled the world. Through the Holy Spirit, all are bound together in faithful covenant. Christians are called to be disciples, to serve others, to proclaim the gospel, to resist evil, to share in Christ's baptism, eat at Christ's table, and join him in his passion and victory. God promises to those who trust God the forgiveness of sins, courage and presence in the midst of trials and struggles, and eternal life.

Worship and Sacrament

Individual congregations are free to determine the style and shape of worship. Guidelines and liturgies for worship can be found in *Book of Common Worship*. An increasing number of congregations follow the **Revised Common Lectionary** to determine the weekly Scripture lessons, but this is not universal practice.

Baptism and **Communion** are the two Sacraments celebrated by the UCC. Baptism of infants and adults usually occurs during the worship service. Communion, also called the Lord's Supper, is celebrated quarterly, although many congregations celebrate monthly, and some weekly. Whether children participate in Communion depends on the congregation and individual parents.

Ecumenical Involvement

The very existence of the UCC is an ecumenical enterprise. The UCC is presently an active member of the **National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC)**, the **World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC)**, and the **World Council of Churches (WCC)**.

Since 1981, the UCC has forged ties to some of its historic roots through formal relationships with the **Evangelical Church of the Union (EKU)** in Germany.

In 1989 the UCC and the **Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)** declared a relationship of "full communion".

In 1997, the UCC, together with the **Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.(PC(USA))** and the **Reformed Church of America (RCA)** entered into an agreement of full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA).

Important Resources

Book of Worship: United Church of Christ. (New York: UCC Office for Church Life and Leadership, 1986).

The New Century Hymnal. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1995).

The United Church of Christ Yearbook 2005. (Cleveland: UCC, 2005).

