

## Short Course in the History of the United Church of Christ



A Short Course in the History of the United Church of Christ tells our story beginning with our origins in the small community who followed Jesus 20 centuries ago and continuing to the present. Learn about the Reformation—a protest movement against the abuse of authority by church leaders; the rediscovery by Luther and Calvin of the Bible's teaching that salvation is not earned, but is a gift; the epic journey of the Pilgrims from England to the shores of North America; the waves of emigration by German and Hungarian Protestants seeking spiritual and political freedom; the beginning of the first Christian anti-slavery movement in history; the 20th-century movement to reunite the divided branches of Christ's church, and, as a result of that movement, the union of several traditions of Protestant Christianity into the United Church of Christ in 1957.

We invite you to use the Short Course for your personal study or as a resource for confirmation and new-member classes in your congregation. On every page, you'll find links to related resources on this website, links to other resources on the Internet, and ideas about books for further study. Also recommended: [Hidden Histories of the United Church of Christ](#).

### The Early Church

*Excerpted from "A History of the United Church of Christ" by Margaret Rowland Post*

All Christians are related in faith to Judaism and are faith descendants of the first apostles of Jesus who roamed the world with the good news of God's love. Within five centuries, Christianity dominated the Roman Empire. Until A.D. 1054 when the church split, it remained essentially one. At that point, the Eastern Orthodox Church established its center at Constantinople (Istanbul), the Roman Catholic Church at Rome.

During the 16th century, when Christians found the church corrupt and hopelessly involved in economic and political interests, leaders arose to bring about reform from within. The unintended by-product of their efforts at reform was schism in the Roman Church. Their differences over the authority and practices of Rome became irreconcilable.

Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin held that the Bible, not the Pope, was sufficient authority as the word of God. Paramount was the message of Paul that persons are justified by the grace of God through faith alone. Such faith did not lead to rank individualism or moral indifference, but to good works out of love for God.

Protestantism spread throughout Europe. Lutheran churches were planted in Germany and throughout Scandinavia; the Reformed churches, originating in Switzerland, spread into Germany, France, Transylvania, Hungary, Holland, England, and Scotland. The United Church of Christ traces its roots back to those movements to proclaim the good news based on biblical truths led by the Spirit of God. It presently binds in covenant nearly 6,500 congregations with approximately 1,800,000 members. One of the youngest American denominations, its background also makes it one of the oldest in Protestantism.

The United Church of Christ, a united and uniting church, was born on June 25, 1957 out of a combination of four groups. Two of these were the Congregational Churches of the English Reformation with Puritan New England roots in America, and the Christian Church with American frontier beginnings. These two denominations were concerned for freedom of religious expression and local autonomy and united on June 17, 1931 to become the Congregational Christian Churches.

The other two denominations were the Evangelical Synod of North America, a 19th-century German-American church of the frontier Mississippi Valley, and the Reformed Church in the United States, initially composed of early 18th-century churches in Pennsylvania and neighboring colonies, unified in a Coetus in 1793 to become a Synod. The parent churches were of German and Swiss heritage, conscientious carriers of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions of the Reformation, and united to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church on June 26, 1934.

The Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches shared a strong commitment under Christ to the freedom of religious expression. They combined strong European ties, early colonial roots, and the vitality of the American frontier church. Their union forced accommodation between congregational and presbyterial forms of church government. Both denominations found their authority in the Bible and were more concerned with what unites Christians than with what divides them. In their marriage, a church that valued the free congregational tradition was strengthened by one that remained faithful to the liturgical tradition of Reformed church worship and to catechetical teaching. A tradition that maintained important aspects of European Protestantism was broadened by one that, in mutual covenant with Christ, embraced diversity and freedom.

## **Our Reformation Roots**

There were harbingers of the Reformation before the 15th century. In England, John Wyclif translated the Bible into English in 1382 so that all people could have

access to it. John Hus encountered Wyclif's translation and writings when returning Oxford students brought them to the University of Prague from which he was graduated in 1394. After furthering the cause of biblical access and authority and opposing the Catholic sale of indulgences, Hus was burned in 1415. He claimed that Christ, not the Pope, was the head of the church; the New Testament, not the church, was the final authority; the Christian life was to be lived in poverty, not opulence.

In 1517, the German monk, university teacher, and preacher, Martin Luther nailed 95 theses of protest against certain doctrines and practices (such as the sale of indulgences) of the Roman Church to the door of the Wittenberg cathedral. His subsequent teaching, preaching, and writing spread Lutheran reform throughout northern Europe.

Almost simultaneously, Reformation winds blew to France and Switzerland. In Zurich, Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) and in Geneva, John Calvin (1509-64) took up the banner of reform. Their powerful ministries impressed leaders from Europe and Britain seeking a better way. From these churches of Switzerland, the German Reformed movement and the English Congregationalists would breathe deeply.

The Reformed churches differed from the Lutheran churches in avoiding the "Catholic use" of imagery and instrumental music. They differed in their interpretation of the Lord's Supper; rather than being the body and blood of Christ, Reformed faith held that the bread and wine were "seals" or remembrances of Christ's spiritual presence.

Luther and Zwingli had other differences besides their interpretations of the elements of Communion. Zwingli was more of a humanist and Luther considered his political activism dangerously radical and theologically unsound. French refugee John Calvin arrived in Geneva, crossroads for exiles and expatriots, in 1536. He rapidly became more influential than Zwingli, second only to Luther. He wrote a popular, systematic presentation of Christian doctrine and life, *The Institutes* (1536, final edition in 1559). Most important of Calvin's *Institutes* was obedience to God's will as defined in the scriptures. Salvation, he wrote, came by faith in God's grace, mediated through word and sacrament by the power of the Holy Spirit. Good works were consequences of union with Christ in faith, not the means of salvation. Calvin considered the law an indispensable guide and spur to the Christian life; prayer provided nourishment for faith. He argued that faith was a divine gift resulting from God's unconditional decree of election.

Further, Christian life was maintained by the institutions of the church, the sacraments of Holy Communion and baptism, and discipline. Calvin followed the biblical model in providing pastoral care and church discipline through pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons.

The Reformed faith eventually reached the German Palatinate around Heidelberg. Elector Frederick III (1515-76) was forced to mediate between his own warring Zwinglian and Lutheran chaplains; he dismissed them both. Sympathetic to Calvinism, Frederick entrusted the writing of a new confession to

two young protégés of Calvin and Melancthon, Casper Olevianus (1536-87) and Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83). The result was the remarkable Heidelberg Catechism, adopted in 1563, that unified the German Reformed Church and became a treasured resource for instructing the young, for preaching, and for theological teaching.

There also was wider social unrest in Europe. From 1618 to 1648, the Thirty Years War ravaged the continent. Before the fighting ceased, most of Germany, and especially the Palatinate where the Reformed Church had been influential, was reduced to a wilderness. Churches were closed; many pastors and people starved or were massacred. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 divided the spoils. The Roman, Lutheran, and Reformed churches were allowed to reclaim territories that had been theirs in 1624. Calvinist Reformed churches, for a time unrecognized, were honored along with Lutheran churches.

Protestantism in Germany had lost all its eastern territory.

When two thirds of Hungary was regained for Catholicism, Hungarian Reformed Church Christians suffered intolerance. Their descendants immigrated to America and in 1890 began the first Hungarian Reformed Church in Cleveland. As the Magyar Synod, Hungarian churches united with the Reformed Church in the United States in 1921. Forty Hungarian congregations continue in the United Church of Christ as the Calvin Synod.

## **The German Evangelical Movement**

No one liked the Westphalian settlement, but the lines were drawn, the Reformation over. Germany lay devastated, plundered by lawless armies, much of its population decimated. Commerce and industry had disappeared; moral, intellectual, and spiritual life had stagnated. Religion was dispirited and leaderless. A time for mystics and poets, much of German hymnody comes from this early 17th century.

Out of such sensitivities, a new Protestant movement, Pietism, arose. Pietism became the heart of a number of Lutheran-Reformed unions. In 1817, the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union, by order of Frederick William III (1797-1840) of Prussia, united the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of his kingdom, giving birth to the ancestral church of the Evangelical Synod of North America, a grandparent of the United Church of Christ. The Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union became a model in other German kingdoms for Lutheran and Reformed unions. In 1981, the United Church of Christ recovered these roots when a Kirchengemeinschaft (church communion) with representative leaders of that church from the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany acknowledged with joyous celebration full communion with the United Church of Christ at the 13th General Synod.

The pathetic human condition in war-torn 17th century Germany awakened Pietism, a theology of the heart, balanced by moral stringencies for self-discipline. The Pietist movement was initiated by Philip Jacob Spener (1635-

1705), a Lutheran pastor sensitive to the needs of his congregation demoralized by war. Drunkenness and immorality were rife, church services sterile. Spener inspired a moral and spiritual reformation, emphasizing personal warmth, Christian experience of everyday living, and the building up of Christian virtues. His "little churches" within the church successfully taught self-discipline, including abstinence from card playing, dancing, the theatre. Similar proscriptions found their ways into Puritan churches of the British Isles.

Despite charges of heresy, Pietism held fast, and the University of Halle became its chief center. The warm heart and social concern of Pietism at Halle inspired the commission of missionaries to India, and at least one, a Lutheran, Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, to Germans in the American colonies.

Although the churches had been protected by the Treaties of Westphalia, they were isolated from one another in a divided Germany. Neither peace treaties nor the warming of hearts to social concern could erase the ravages of war. The population of Germany had been reduced from 16 million to six million. For lack of manpower, a third of German land still lay fallow between 1648 and 1680. Peasants existed on linseed and oilcakes or bread of bran and moss.

The 17th century was marked by greedy rulers bent on a lifestyle of opulent ease and aggressive attacks on neighboring states. German princes coined money and levied taxes on impoverished people to support it all. In small bands, thousands of German Reformed people, free in their faith in God, quietly slipped away in 1709, to find a haven in London. From there, most sought a permanent home among the American colonists in the New World. Having endured such pain and hardship, many found great promise in the ideal of brotherly love and joined William Penn's Pennsylvania Colony. Others, many of them indentured servants, went to New York, Virginia, and the colonies of North and South Carolina.

## **The Reformation in England**

Reformation ferment crossed the English Channel within 15 years of its outbreak in Europe. In 1534, King Henry VIII (1491-1547) of England, for personal reasons, broke with the Church of Rome and established the Church of England, with himself as its secular head. He appointed an Archbishop of Canterbury as its spiritual leader. England moved beyond permanent Catholic control, although much of the Catholic liturgy and governance by bishops was adopted into the tradition of the Anglican Church (Episcopal, in America). Nevertheless, Lutheran and Reformed theology invaded Anglicanism during the short reign of Henry's son, Edward VI (1547-53), through Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer.

Catholic Mary Tudor (1553-58) on becoming Queen of England, persecuted those who refused to abandon Protestantism and burned Anglican bishops, including Cranmer. Over 800 dissenters fled to the Continent and came under the tutelage of more radical reformers, especially John Calvin. Mary's half sister, Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) succeeded Mary and reestablished a more inclusive and

tolerant Anglican Church. She warily welcomed from Europe the dissenters, who had become steeped in Reformed theology.

On their return, they joined others who felt that Elizabeth's reformation had not gone far enough. They sought to purify the church. The Puritans, so named in 1563, criticized Anglican liturgy, ceremonies, and lack of discipline, especially of the clergy. Their thrust toward independent thought and church autonomy laid the foundations for Congregationalism. Nevertheless, they remained members of the Church of England.

The Puritans held to Reformed belief in the sovereignty of God, the authority of scripture as the revelation of God's will, and the necessity to bend to the will of God. The Puritans regarded human rituals and institutions as idolatrous impositions upon the word of God. They wanted to rid the church of old remnants of papism. Puritan zeal in spreading their belief about God's confrontation with humanity conflicted sharply with the established church. Nevertheless, the Puritans thought of themselves as members of the church, not founders of new churches.

Elizabeth had no heir, and James I ruled England next (1603-25) and commissioned a new translation of the Bible, known as the King James Version. James's Church of England did not satisfy the Puritans. Yet, they could not agree among themselves about their differences with the church. They were called variously, Dissenters, Independents, Non-Conformists or Separatists. By this time, many Puritans were unwilling to wait for Parliament to institute ecclesiastical reform and separated themselves from the Church of England. Among them were groups that later were called Quakers, Baptists, and Congregationalists.

A civil war during the reign of Charles I (1625-49) was led by English and Scottish Puritans who beheaded the king and, under Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector, seized English government (1649-60). For 11 years, Puritan radicals ruled England with excessive zeal and the monarchy was restored in 1660. The "Congregational Way" probably was born in 1567 when a group of Separatists, calling themselves "The Privye Church," worshiped in London's Plumbers' Hall. They were persecuted severely and their leader killed. Clandestine meetings of Congregationalists continued for simple worship in fields and unexpected rooms, dangerously subject to surveillance by spies for the government, who brought persecution upon the worshipers.

Robert Browne, an Anglican priest, was the first conspicuous advocate of Congregationalism in England. By gathering, in 1581, a congregation in Norwich, Brown expressed his conviction that the only true church was a local body of believers who experienced together the Christian life, united to Christ and to one another by a voluntary covenant. Christ, not the king or queen, was the head of such a church; the people were its governors, and would elect a pastor, teacher, elders, and deacons, according to the authority of the New Testament. Furthermore, each autonomous church owed communal helpfulness to every other church. Browne was imprisoned 32 times and fled to the Netherlands. Browne retained his beliefs but did not remain a Congregationalist; he returned

from exile in Holland to pastor a small Anglican parish in England.

Among the early Separatists were John Smyth, founder of the Baptist Church, and John Robinson (1573-1625). The lives of both men became entangled with that of William Brewster, who became a leader of the Plymouth Colony in America. Brewster lent his home at Scrooby Manor as a Separatist meeting place. Richard Clyfton became pastor and John Robinson, teacher. Brewster was ruling elder. In 1607 the Separatist Church was discovered and its members imprisoned, placed under surveillance, or forced to flee. They went first to Amsterdam and then to Leyden, Holland.

Concerned in Leyden that their children were losing touch with English language and culture, and beset by economic problems and threats of war, 102 of the Holland exiles became the Pilgrims who, under John Carver and William Brewster, migrated to the New World, arriving aboard the Mayflower in 1620. As the company left, John Robinson, beloved pastor and teacher who stayed with a majority in Holland, warned the adventurers not to stick fast where Luther and Calvin left them, for he was confident "the Lord has more truth and light yet to break forth out of his Holy Word." Arriving at Plymouth, their leaders realized that the Pilgrims' survival in an unknown, primitive wilderness rested on their remaining loyally together. The Pilgrims drew up and signed the Association and Agreement, the Mayflower Compact, thereby forming of the small colony a "Civil Body Politic" for laws and regulations.

In 1630, John Cotton, a brilliant young minister of Boston, Lincolnshire, England, preached a farewell sermon to John Winthrop and his Puritan followers. Cotton reassured them of their clear call from God to follow Congregational principles, but insisted that they need not separate themselves from the Anglican Church. These Puritan emigrants set sail for Massachusetts Bay. At about the same time, a covenanting Puritan colony arrived in America from England under John Endecott to establish its church in Salem, across Massachusetts Bay, north of Boston. They sent a letter to the Separatist Church at Plymouth to ask for guidance. Commissioned delegates from Plymouth extended to the Salem Church "the right hand of fellowship" and so added fellowship in Christ to English Congregationalism's freedom in Christ.

Concerned that there be educated leaders, the Massachusetts Bay Colony voted in 1636 to give £400 to establish a college in Newtowne (Cambridge). Colonist John Harvard contributed his library and two years later left the institution half his fortune. The college was, and is, called by his name.

## **Congregationalism**

Congregations determined the politics and social organization of communities. Only church members could vote at town meetings, and until 1630, one could become a church member only by the minister's endorsement. Most colonists were not church members. The majority of immigrants came for social, political, and economic reasons, not to found a more perfect Christian society. Nevertheless, Puritanism was dominant. Biblical injunctions were specific guides for spiritual life and church organization; biblical law was common law. Puritans

undertook a holy mission to demonstrate the "right way" to order church and society.

John Cotton (1584-1652), considered the leading Puritan pastor in England, joined the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1633. His True Constitution of a Particular Visible Church, describing Congregational life and polity (organization and government), was read widely in England and influenced John Owen, chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, to embrace Congregationalism. As a result of reading Cotton's work, five members of the Presbyterian Westminster Assembly, "the Dissenting Brethren," would sign, in 1643, what was to become the manifesto of all Congregationalism, An Apologeticall Narration. Thus, through Cotton's writing, New England affected the growth of Congregationalism in England. Quite the opposite of the vigorous and variable Puritans of England, many of the American Puritans become intolerant of alien ideas.

In 1634, Anne Hutchinson, daughter of a nonconformist minister from north of London, arrived. Described by critics as a "woman of haughty and fierce carriage ... of voluble tongue," she would influence Congregational practice and theological thought, such that the rigidly righteous shell of Massachusetts Puritanism, already damaged by Roger Williams (soon banished to Rhode Island), would be irreparably cracked. Opposing a doctrine of the elect, she held that anyone might receive the truth by direct revelation from God, and that the Bible was not its sole source. These ideas were greatly feared by the church because they easily could lead to irresponsible excesses. This "woman of ready wit and bold spirit," wife of gentle William Hutchinson, the mother of fifteen children, interrupted preachers with whom she disagreed. She gathered women regularly in her own home, where she preached to as many as 50 people at a time, often including men.

Hutchinson's criticism of Puritan sermons stirred up a frenzy of concern in Massachusetts Bay Colony. John Cotton, sent to stop her, merely warned her; but by that time, men of stature had taken her side, and the town of Boston was divided. John Winthrop believed that if Anne Hutchinson could not be reformed, she must be exiled.

Winthrop called a Synod of the Bay Colony churches in 1637, that once and for all "the breeder and nourisher of all these distempers, one Mistress Hutchinson," be silenced. She was charged with joining a seditious faction, holding conspiracies in her house, seducing honest people from their work and families and, worst of all, breaking the fifth commandment. Hutchinson exclaimed that Winthrop was neither her father nor her mother, to which Winthrop replied that "father and mother" meant anyone in authority. In the spring, John Cotton betrayed her trust by banishing her from the Colony. Mary Dyer was a friend who walked beside her through it all. She was later hanged for her Quaker faith on Boston Common. Anne Hutchinson settled with her children and husband in the Rhode Island Colony of Roger Williams, where laws were passed to ensure jury trials, to end class discrimination, and to extend universal suffrage and religious tolerance. This democracy was short lived, for Rhode Island was soon annexed to the Bay Colony.



The colonists displaced Native Americans and invaded their ancestral territories. At first, because of their nature and because land was abundant, many Indians received the newcomers with charity and shared with them land and survival skills. Later, the proprietary aggression of some settlers kindled fear in the hearts of Indians.

The colonists brought not only their religion, government, and social patterns, but also diseases against which Indians had little or no immunity. During the 17th century, New England Indians were plagued by a smallpox epidemic. There followed further decimation of their numbers in wars and skirmishes for possession of land. Distressed by wanton disregard for human beings, convinced that their mission was peacefully to carry the good news of Christ to their Indian neighbors, there were others like John Eliot, who was ordained as a pastor so that he might pastor and teach Indians. His concern for Indian neighbors was not only for their conversion to Christianity, but to raise their standard of living to a level enjoyed by the settlers. For 30 years, Job Nesutan, a Massachusetts Indian, was employed by Eliot as a language tutor and chief assistant in the ministry to Indians. With his help, the Bible was translated into the Indian language and Indians were taught to read.

By 1646, John Eliot drew increasingly large congregations each time he spoke. Churches in the colony were encouraged to support Eliot's work and Oliver Cromwell urged Parliament to help the movement financially. The "Corporation for the Promoting and Propagating of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in New England" was the result. A sum of £5,000 was sent to the colonies, much of this given to John Eliot for his work. Many Indian converts returned to the practices of their indigenous faiths, but others were filled with Christian missionary zeal and prepared the way for Eliot with the New England tribes. The chiefs and councils tried to discourage the spread of the gospel, and his aides used underhanded tactics to retain "converts." As a result, Eliot's work suffered. Finally, the Massachusetts General Court passed a law prohibiting the use of threats or force to ensure Indians' conversion to Christianity, but at the same time, required all Indians living within the colony to refrain from worshiping "false gods" and from conducting native religious services. Roger Williams became the advocate of Indian freedom to worship as they saw fit.

Thomas Mayhew and his clergyman son, Thomas, Jr., were instrumental in leading the eastern Cape Cod Indians to Christianity. By 1652, Mayhew had opened a school for Indian children.

Christian theology induced ferment and continued to challenge the essentially closed social patterns and purposes of the Puritans. There were blacks in Boston as soon as there were whites, and slavery was legal in New England until after the Revolutionary War. A certain number of blacks were admitted to membership in the churches when they were able to meet all the conditions for full communion, tests which did not include skin color, wealth, or social status. While slavery in New England had been dying out in the years prior to the Revolution, blacks felt keenly the reservations to their acceptance in the churches by the Puritans, who treated them as slaves outside the church, while within, members were called upon to regard one another as equal under the covenant of grace

and united by God to one another. Under such ambivalence, many blacks withdrew from the churches in the late 18th century to form their own congregations for separate worship.

By 1789, the Boston selectmen allowed blacks to use a school for public worship on Sunday afternoons. Eventually, the black congregation built its own church, called the African Church, on the back slope of Beacon Hill and worshiped there from 1806 until mid-century when it became a center for abolitionist meetings for blacks and whites. Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth were among the speakers at the church.

Religious exclusion was not confined to blacks or Catholics; Presbyterians had felt unwelcome as well. The Westminster Confession of 1646, the design for Presbyterian church government and an expression of Reformed faith and doctrine, was revised for church polity and discipline at the Cambridge Synod of 1648. Called the Cambridge Platform, it enabled a reconciliation between Presbyterians and Congregationalists and was highly venerated into the 19th century.

The Platform interpreted the church catholic as all those who are elected and called to salvation. A "militant visible church on earth" was understood to exist in particular congregations as "a company of saints by calling, united into one body, by a holy covenant for the public worship of God and the mutual edification of one another." Christ was head of the church; the congregation, independent of outside interference, had the right to choose its own officials. The office of the civil magistrate was subject to recognition by the church. Churches were to preserve communion with one another in mutual covenant with Christ. Such covenants stabilized churches establishing themselves under disparate leadership.

A remarkable succession of educated clergy provided strong leadership. Despite the circumstances that cast him in the role of villain in the excommunication and banishment of Anne Hutchinson, no Puritan teacher was more respected in England and in America than the gentle intellectual, John Cotton, minister of First Church, Boston. His colleague from days in England was the plainspoken master of rhythmic rhetoric and the effective metaphor, Thomas Hooker (1586-1647). Hooker, committed to democracy and constitutional free government, was minister across the Charles River at Newtowne (Cambridge).

Concerned for human rights, Hooker became disenchanted with the elitism of the Boston hierarchy. He led over 100 followers to migrate on foot to Hartford in 1636. There, buoyed by his Christian conviction and liberating ideas of democracy, he established a colony. Conservative puritan minister, John Davenport, founder of the New Haven Colony, was so offended by Hooker's willingness to secularize, even to a limited extent, civil government, that he went to Boston when New Haven was gathered into the Connecticut Colony.

All these men were well educated, had high standards for church membership, and were clergy of the English establishment. Except for Cotton, their Reformed covenant theology had been nurtured on the continent. Hooker, who had been

with the dissenters in Holland, diverged from the orthodox Puritan view that voting rights should be conferred only with church membership. He saw no justice in disenfranchising nine-tenths of the population, a proportion that included women, children, servants and apprentices, the unchurched who had migrated from England as non-land owners, as well as the sons of "the elect" who could not pretend to such a claim.

Under Hooker's leadership, the Connecticut Colony gave up the religious qualification for the franchise. New requirements were still restrictive. They gave the town meeting vote to "admitted inhabitants," "men" who could prove capable of "an honest conversation" and could swear that they were not "a Jew, a Quaker or an Atheist," and to "free men who were Trinitarians, land owners and of godly deportment." Nevertheless, Hooker is regarded by many as the father of democracy in America, for many of his ideas were embodied in the United States Constitution.

Later, Massachusetts adopted the controversial Half-Way Covenant of 1662, permitting children to be baptized whose grandparents had been members of the church, but whose parents were not. Males baptized under the Covenant could vote at town meeting when they came of age, but were not admitted to the Lord's Supper or allowed to vote for a pastor. Full church membership came with confession of faith. Its requirement to sit in judgment upon a person's Christian credentials would go to the extreme of the witchcraft delusion in Salem Village b) 1692.

Later, Cotton Mather (1663-1728), John Cotton's grandson sought to bring some authority to bear upon the waywardness of Congregational independence. He proposed that minister in association with one another examine and license candidate for the ministry, and that a consociation of ministers and la) men have judicatory standing over the churches. A minister unpopular among his peers, Mather's proposal was at first unacceptable. In 1705-6, Massachusetts finally adopted his plan for the examination of ministers. Connecticut issued the Saybrook Platform in 1708, making both of Mather's proposals binding colonywide. The establishment in 1701 of Yale College assured high educational standards for ministers and leaders alike.

Until the Saybrook Platform of 1708, upheld by the Connecticut General Court, imposed upon the independent, voluntary fellowship of the churches an obligation of "consociation," the Congregationalists drifted toward spiritual decline and anomaly. The consociation provided mutual aid and outside assistance in handling disputes. A penalty was provided for churches or pastors refusing consociation, a "sentence of non-communion," with less intent to control than to provide orderly procedures and mutual support. The new shape would enable Congregationalism as a denomination in the centuries to come, to maintain its integrity in the face of the American Revolution, religious revivals, the scandal of slavery, the challenge of cultural pluralism, and a call to mission that would carry the faith westward and world-wide.

The morality of Pietism, and the warm heart of England's Wesleyan revival that gave birth to the Methodist Church, helped to energize the American Great

Awakening. Itinerant preachers of various denominations swept across religious America during the mid-18th century, winning Christian converts and planting hundreds of new churches. While the Coetus of Pennsylvania was giving nurture and support to a continuing influx of German settlers, over 150 new Congregational churches were formed from 1740 to 1760.

Yale-educated Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) of Northampton, Massachusetts, Congregational minister of keen philosophical intellect, believed that the Awakening was breathing new life into the churches. It replaced a view of the church as a group of people who covenanted together to lead a Christian life, with one that insisted upon individual conversion as the accepted way to the kingdom of God. Emotions ran high, and the spiritual climates, that had in many communities fallen into despair, were transformed.

In 1750, Edwards was dismissed from the Northampton church. He tangled with the congregation on issues of church discipline and tact. For example, he read the names of both the convicted and merely indicted ("bad book controversy") aloud in church as a single list. The final issue surrounded a difference in his interpretation of the Half-Way Covenant (he rejected it as too lax a standard of church membership) from that of his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, whose associate Edwards had first been at Northampton. Edwards was convinced that admission to communion should include the requirement of a conversion experience. Although a strict Calvinist, Jonathan Edwards had become a "New Light" revivalist puritan sympathizer. He disagreed with the narrow conservatism of the "Old Light" ministers such as Increase Mather and his son, Cotton, and stood firmly against liberal "Arminians," whose moral righteousness he saw as dangerously smug. Nevertheless, he believed that turning to God required a decision, a disavowal of selfishness and the adoption of the life of "disinterested benevolence." Edwards was joined in his position by a large group of New England clergy who supported the Awakening and opposed the more staid, rational, liberal movement in eastern Massachusetts. A group of moderates stood between both extremes. The Boston advocates of free will against Calvinism opposed the revivals, and the path they took would lead in the next century to the Unitarian separation from Congregationalism.

Jonathan Edwards, foremost of American philosophers, was responsible for a far broader synthesis of science, philosophy, and religion in Congregational and Presbyterian theology and practice than had been present in "Old Light" Puritanism. He integrated with Reformed theology the worldview of Isaac Newton, John Locke's emphasis upon human experience, and Augustine's spiritual enlightenment, as well as Plato's idealism and the Neo-Platonic idea of emanation from the Divine Intellect to the soul. His ideas would cohere in his followers to give life to a "New England Theology." They would check the anti-intellectual tendencies of the revivalists and the decline of religious vitality during the Revolutionary period. They would give a theological framework to the recovery of intellectual leadership and a new morality in post-Revolutionary America. Edwards' writings inspired and informed the missionary movement of the 19th century as America expanded westward and looked once again to the lands across the sea. His influence rivaled Hooker's in developing the separation of church and state.

## The German Reformed Church

While the independent Congregationalists had been struggling in New England to recover and maintain biblical faithfulness, a stream of German and German-Swiss settlers—farmers, laborers, trade and craftpersons, many "redemptioners" who had sold their future time and services to pay for passage, flowed into Pennsylvania and the Middle Atlantic region. Refugees from the waste of European wars, their concerns were pragmatic. They did not bring pastors with them. People of Reformed biblical faith, at first sustained only by family worship at home, they were informed by the Bible and the Heidelberg Catechism.

Strong relationships developed between Lutheran and Reformed congregations; many union churches shared buildings. At first, there were no buildings and laymen often led worship. In 1710, a Dutch Reformed minister, Paul Van Vlecq, assisted a German congregation gathered at Skippack, Pennsylvania. At nearby White Marsh, Van Vlecq established a congregation in the house of elder William Dewees, who held the congregation together until the church was reestablished in 1725.

Another layman, tailor Conrad Templeman, conducted services in Lancaster county, ministering to seven congregations during the 1720s. Schoolmaster John Philip Boehm had maintained a ministry for five years without compensation. Responsible for the regular organization of 12 German Reformed congregations in Pennsylvania, although not regularly ordained, he reluctantly was persuaded to celebrate the sacraments for the first time on October 15, 1725, at Falkner Swamp, with 40 members present. Boehm -- orderly, well educated, devout -- spent the ensuing years traveling the country on horseback, 25,000 miles in all, preparing Reformed Church constitutions.

Meanwhile, the Heidelberg-educated and regularly ordained pastor George Michael Weiss arrived from Germany in 1727 to minister to the Philadelphia church founded by Boehm. He carried the Word and the Lord's Supper to communities surrounding Philadelphia. Weiss' strong objections to Boehm's irregular ministry caused Boehm to seek and receive ordination by the Dutch Reformed Church by 1729. Funds for American churches were still coming from Europe, and Weiss went abroad to Holland in pursuit of support for his congregations. Successful, he returned in 1731 to minister among German Reformed people in New York. Before 1746, when Michael Schlatter, a Swiss-born and Dutch-educated young pastor from Heidelberg, arrived in America, congregations of German settlers were scattered throughout Pennsylvania and New York. German immigrants had followed natural routes along rivers and mountain valleys, and Reformed congregations had emerged in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. The spiritual and financial health of these 40 congregations were watched over by the Dutch Reformed Church in Holland, assisted by the German Reformed center at Heidelberg, Germany.

Support came from the Classis ("association") of Amsterdam that sent Michael Schlatter to America to "organize the ministers and congregations into a Coetus (synod)." Schlatter did this within a year of his arrival in Pennsylvania. With the

cooperation of Boehm, Weiss, John Bartholomew Rieger, and 28 elders, the Coetus of the Reformed Ministerium of the Congregations in Pennsylvania came to life on September 24, 1747 and the Coetus adopted in 1748 the Kirchen-Ordnung that Boehm had prepared in 1725. The Kirchen-Ordnung placed discipline and care of the local church in the hands of a consistory of elders, deacons, and the minister, elected by the congregation. Members were charged with "fraternal correction and mutual edification." The minister was to preach "the pure doctrine of the Reformed Church according to the Word of God and to administer the holy seals of the Covenant ... : always to adhere to the Heidelberg Catechism ... to hold catechetical instruction ... [and] give special attention to church discipline, together with those who have oversight of the congregation."

In light of the multiplicity of German sects, such as Moravians, Mennonites and Dunkards, who competed for the attention and allegiance of German immigrants, the authority of the Coetus, organized according to the same structure and discipline as the local church, was welcome. The German Reformed Churches felt protected from "unscrupulous proselytizers. They achieved a mutual identity and respect, and established authority for faith and practice. Among pastor and people, shared responsibility was carried out within a community faith, under the Lordship of Christ. The leadership of Micha Schlatter and his colleagues prepared the congregations to endure the upheaval of the American Revolution and to maintain their identity in the ethnic and religious pluralism that characterized William Penn's colony.

Many German Reformed settlers served in the Revolutionary armies, 20 percent of Reformed pastors as chaplains, though Continental Congress Chaplain John Joachim Zuber was labeled a Tory for his anti-war stand. During the British siege of Philadelphia in 1777, farmers wrapped the Liberty Bell and the bells of Christ Church in potato sacks and hauled them to Allentown, Pennsylvania, where pastor Abraham Blumer hid them under the floor of Zion Reformed Church for safekeeping. Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, a Reformed layman, disciplined Washington's troops during the bitter Valley Forge winter.

The Coetus strengthened the churches and prepared them for self-government in the early years of the United States 1793, European ties were broken. A Reformed Church Constitution was adopted, a Synodal Ordnung; an official name taken, The Synod of the German Reformed Church in United States of America, and a hymnbook committee appointed. There were in that year, 178 German-speaking congregations and 15,000 communicant members.

Revival theology was antithetical to the German Reformed tradition. However, pietistic influences within the German Reformed Church responded to the warm-hearted moral virtue of the revival. On the frontier, people found its emphasis on the individual compatible with their needs. The newly independent German Reformed Church, short of pastors and threatened by a revivalist gospel, established a seminary in 1825, at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, that moved in 1829 to York, in 1837 to Mercersburg and finally to Lancaster in 1871, where it became Lancaster Theological Seminary. Franklin College (1787) of Lancaster, jointly supported by the Lutherans and the Reformed, in 1853 merged with German

Reformed Marshall College to form Franklin and Marshall College.

As ministers arrived in America from the pietist centers in Europe, pietistic rather than confessional patterns appeared in Reformed congregations, and the guiding light of the catechism was dimmed. Missionary zeal abounded. People were highly susceptible to the leadership of charismatic frontier preachers. Church leaders were concerned that young and old be instructed in Reformed Christian doctrine. In 1806, the first German Reformed Sunday schools appeared. In the midst of it all, and in reaction to revivalist sectarianism, a controversial movement at the seminary at Mercersburg set off a re-examination of the doctrines of Christ and of the church -- not just in the German Reformed Church, but among all American Protestants.

First, however, there would be years of ferment when the Synod would endure turmoil and defection that would test and eventually strengthen its essential stability. Pietist minister Philip William Otterbein, a Reformed Church pastor, later founded the United Brethren Church, today a part of the United Methodist Church. Harrisburg's pastor, John Winebrenner, locked out of his church by the consistory, met with his followers in private homes to form a new denomination, The Churches of God.

As the Reformed Church grew, continuing use of the German language became an issue. Although German congregations were divided between the use of German or English, the Synod itself conducted meetings and issued minutes in German until 1825. By 1824, the Ohio Synod separated from the parent synod in order to ordain its own ministers and in 1850 organized Heidelberg College and Seminary in Tiffin.

The controversial Mercersburg movement would shake the church. With the arrival at the Mercersburg seminary of John W. Nevin and Swiss-German professor of historical and exegetical theology, Philip Schaff, Mercersburg became a center of concern that the revivalism of the Awakening was inauthentic. Schaff was the most outstanding church historian in 19th century America and the primary mediator of German theology to America.

The Mercersburg movement, counter to the sectarian trend of the time, called for a "true revival" centered in the life of the church, guided by the catechetical system, and in particular, the Heidelberg Catechism. The movement's leaders called for a recognition of the church as one, catholic, and holy. They acknowledged the error to which the church in all ages had been subject, urged an end to sectarianism and pretensions to the one true church and called for cessation of anti-Catholicism which had been pervasive for some time. Schaff's charitable attitude was seen by some in the Philadelphia Classis, the "Old Reformed" and loyal to Zwingli's Reformation, as heresy. Nevin, Schaff, and their followers sought to go back to the creeds and to make the mystical presence of Christ, mediated by word and sacrament, the essence of the church. Reverence for the creeds, catechism, and liturgy, they believed, would unify the church and combat sectarianism. In liturgy, the Mercersburg people favored an altar as the center for worship with formal litanies, chants, prayers and clerical garb, while "Old Reformed" pastors preferred a central pulpit, free prayer and informal

worship.

The "Old Reformed" were caught up in the American revival and clung to their German sectarian identities. Schaff maintained that Reformed theology's contribution to the New World lay in the supremacy of the scriptures, absolute sovereignty of divine grace, and radical moral reform on the basis of both. A former member of The Evangelical Church of The Prussian Union, Schaff later cultivated warm relationships with Evangelicals in the West.

The Mercersburg Review, the movement's chief literary medium, which began publication at Marshall College in 1848, was greatly responsible for effecting changed attitudes. Its challenge would call other denominations to self-examination as well. It was the German Reformed Church's initial contribution to the movement toward unity and ecumenism that would take shape in the next century.

The low church "Old Reformed" minority in the East, after a long struggle against a revised liturgy, called a convention in Myerstown, Pennsylvania, in 1867 to prevent its use. In January 1868, the Reformed Church Quarterly began and in 1870, Ursinus College opened its doors, supported by the "Old Reformed."

## **Education and Mission**

The rise of denominationalism in the 19th century was a phenomenon for which Congregational churches, independent although loosely associated, were ill prepared. Rejecting anything that smacked of centralized authority, the churches contained no efficient mechanism for corporate action or cohesive principle around which to organize corporately. They were churches, not Church.

No single event was responsible for the movement toward state and national levels of organization and communion. Rather, a positive and vigorous reappraisal of Congregational history provided a powerful emotional undergirding for a newly articulated American denomination. In the democratic tendencies of their polity, Congregationalists discovered a remarkable affinity with the emergent American nationalism. The polity that allowed for diversity appeared to be an ecclesiastical counterpart to the democratic polity of the nation itself. They rediscovered Cotton Mather's unity in diversity and by 1871 a new, corporate identity was asserted. Their unity lay in a commitment to the diversity produced and embraced by the polity itself—a commitment continued in the United Church of Christ.

An atmosphere of political and religious liberty spawned American denominationalism. Each denomination began new educational institutions. Before William Ellery Channing, Congregational minister in Boston, had proclaimed his leadership of the Unitarian movement by preaching in 1819 his famous sermon, "Unitarian Christianity," the liberal professor of divinity at Harvard, Henry Ware, set off a controversy that sparked the establishment of the Congregational Andover Theological Seminary in 1808, a bulwark of Calvinist orthodoxy.



Andover was instrumental in preparing the first Congregational missionaries for overseas mission. The churches already had sent missionaries to frontier America. The American overseas missionary movement had its informal beginning in 1806 when Samuel J. Mills met with four fellow students at Williams College in Massachusetts for a Sunday afternoon prayer meeting in a maple grove. A sudden thunderstorm drove them to the shelter of a haystack where amidst the thunderclaps and flashes of lightning, Mills proposed sending the gospel to Asia. His zeal ignited the four others with the intent "to evangelize the world," and they went on to study theology at Andover Seminary. Together, they confirmed their purpose and maintained their association throughout their theological studies.

One of them, Adoniram Judson, who later became a Baptist, had appealed to the London Missionary Society for support and had been rejected. Feeling that it was time for American Congregationalism to support its own missionaries, the Andover faculty and leaders of the Massachusetts General Association authorized a joint missionary venture by the churches of Massachusetts and Connecticut. On September 5, 1810, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was born. On February 8, 1812, at a moving service of worship in a crowded Salem Tabernacle Church, the Haystack "Brethren" were ordained. Within two weeks, they set sail for India.

In the same year, New England Congregational clergy brought nearly unanimous condemnation on the War of 1812 as "unnecessary, unjust, and inexpedient." Their regular antiwar sermons and constituency organizing in opposition to government policy were unprecedented as a united ministerial action. Nevertheless, on June 20, 1812, a charter was granted the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to serve the Congregational churches as their agent for foreign mission, the first foreign missionary society in America.

The German Reformed Church Synod in 1826 voted to establish an American Missionary Society of the Reformed Church "to promote the interests of the church within the United States and elsewhere." The German Reformed Church recognized that a single board could best serve all abroad, and John W. Nevin was appointed to represent the church on the American Board. By 1866, when the German Reformed Church withdrew to manage its own mission, all other denominations represented on the board had done the same.

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions had intended to establish missions not only in the Orient and Burma, but also "in the West among the Iroquois." Subsequently, throughout the 1820s and 1830s missions were established among the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee, Osage, Maumee and Iroquois. In an interdenominational effort, members of the American Board supported and aided Indian resistance to government removal from their lands.

In a celebrated case, the American Board backed Samuel A. Worcester, missionary to the Cherokee, in his United States Supreme Court suit against the state of Georgia in 1830, to sustain Cherokee sovereignty over their land.

Although the court ruled that the Cherokee nation was under United States protection and could not be removed by Georgia, President Andrew Jackson had the tribes removed anyway. Outrage at injustice toward Native Americans called out and dispersed many missionaries to tribes throughout the United States.

Later in the 19th century, the German Reformed Church initiated missions to new German settlers and nearby Indian settlements. More than 300 churches were constructed.

Swiss and German students at Mercersburg Theological Seminary aided Germans on the western frontier. With the initial purpose of training local men as ministers and teachers, the Sheboygan Classis of the Wisconsin Synod established Mission House in 1862. Started as an academy, it soon became a college (1879) and seminary (1880). In 1957, Mission House College became Lakeland College and Mission House Seminary merged with the Congregational Christian Yankton School of Theology in 1962 to become the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities at New Brighton, Minnesota.

Mission House initiated an Indian ministry in the 1870s by an act of providence. Professor H. Kurtz, overtaken by a snowstorm, succumbed to fatigue on a 12-mile return walk from a Sunday preaching mission. Some Winnebagos, finding him asleep and in danger of freezing, took him home to Mission House. Naturally, Kurtz promoted help for Indians of the area, and in 1876, the Class is declared, "As soon as we have the money to find a missionary, we will send him to the Indians who live nearest us." Jacob Hauser was sent in 1878 and was warily received, but concern for their children's education and the basic affirmation that all shared one God, the Earthmaker, allowed the Winnebago to accept the basic ministry of the Hausers. Twenty years later a church was started. In 1917, a boarding school opened that became the Winnebago Indian School at Neillsville, Wisconsin. The school provided Christian ministers, teachers, nurses, and leaders for the tribe, among them Mitchell Whiterabbit, a pastor who became a national leader in the United Church of Christ.

The 18th-century Great Awakening had been unconcerned with sectarian labels. Under the Plan of Union (1801) and the Accommodation Plan (1808), the theologically compatible Congregational and Presbyterian churches cooperated in their missionary efforts in the West. A minister of either denomination might be chosen by a congregation that was functioning under the polity of its founding denomination. Under the Accommodation Plan, Congregational Associations were received by Presbyterian Synods until 1837, when self-conscious denominationalism caused Presbyterians to withdraw. Congregationalists followed suit in 1852 when the Congregational churches were united into a national organization for the first time.

The first New England Congregational colony in the Northwest Territory was established at Marietta, Ohio, in 1788. Education a primary value, Muskingum Academy was soon opened and in 1835 became Marietta College. Congregationalists and Presbyterians planted colleges along the way. Most of the early colleges, including Harvard, Yale, and Princeton long ago declared independence of a denominational connection. Thirteen frontier colleges have

affirmed their diverse historical denominational ties with the United Church of Christ. Beloit (1846) received its roots from the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. The others are Illinois (1829), Olivet (1844), Grinnell (1846), Pacific (1849), Ripon (1851), Carleton (1866), Doane (1872), Drury (1873), Westminster (1875), Yankton (1881), Rocky Mountain (1883) and Northland (1892). Those with Evangelical, Reformed, and Christian roots that continue to relate through the Board for Homeland Ministries to the United Church of Christ are Franklin and Marshall (1787), Heidelberg (1850), Defiance (1850), Cedar Crest (1867), Ursinus (1869), Elmhurst (1871), Elon (1889), Hood (1893), Lakeland (1893), Hawaii Loa College (1963), and six colleges established in the South after the Civil War, mentioned later in more detail.

The need to train ministers called forth, in addition to Andover, the Congregational seminaries at Bangor (1814), Hartford (1834), Chicago (1855) and the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley (1866). United Church of Christ seminaries, each of whose roots rests in one of the parent denominations, are Harvard Divinity School (1811), Lancaster (1825), Andover Newton Theological School, Eden (1850), Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta (1958) and United Theological Seminary (1962).

In a more open society, women emerged in greater numbers, often at great risk, from the confines of their homes and families to respond to a Christian calling. Congregational educators such as Emma Willard, Catherine Beecher, Sarah Porter, and Mary Lyon, and a writer appalled by the injustice of slavery, Harriet Beecher Stowe, were characterized by persistence. Betsy Stockton, a freed slave, sailed in 1822 from Connecticut with 13 others to aid the first contingent of missionaries to Hawaii, sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the Congregational forerunner of the United Church Board for World Ministries. A gifted and versatile Christian woman, Betsy Stockton taught school, lent her homemaking skills for the use of all, nursed and cared for the Islands' sick.

Although her family discouraged her and Oberlin Theological School denied her the degree she had earned, Antoinette Brown sought for three years a call to pastor a church. A call finally came from the Congregational Church in Butler, New York. There she was ordained in 1853, an ordination recognized only by the local church. Her pastorate was short, for she would soon marry Samuel Blackwell and later give birth to seven daughters. Antoinette Brown's activist stand persisted for the abolition of slavery, for the promotion of temperance, and for the establishment of biblical support for equality between women and men. She wrote nine books and in 1920, at age 95, cast her first vote. By 1921, the year of her death, there were 3,000 women ministers in the United States. Her ordination itself had major implications. Her life and ministry are memorialized at each General Synod of the United Church of Christ when the Antoinette Brown Award is presented to two ordained women whose ministries exemplify her dedication and leadership.

Elvira Yockey, a German Reformed pastor's wife in 1887 founded and became the first president of the Women's Missionary Society of the General Synod. She wrote of her experience at Xenia, Ohio: "Here, as all over the Reformed Church,

the women were expected to 'keep silence in the churches.' Their voices were never heard even in public prayer, and to this day, in most of the prayer meetings of the church the number of audible prayers is limited to the number of men present. How much the church owes to the number of silent prayers that ascend heavenward from feminine hearts can never be known" (E.S. Yockey, Historical Sketch of the Origin and Growth of the Woman's Missionary Societies of the Reformed Church, Alliance, OH: The Woman's Journal, 1898, p. 7).

Few women could at first take advantage of higher education, but during the 19th century evangelical reform movement, missionary societies became ways for more women to relate to the public sphere. Still demeaned by female role enforcement, women were permitted only to form auxiliary fundraising units, well out of range of policy making. The Female Cent Society, New England forerunner of the Woman's Society of the Congregational Christian Churches, was such an organization. The Evangelical Synod's deaconess movement provided an acceptable vehicle for women's active involvement in evangelism and social service. Through periodicals, study circles, and organizations, women shared moral issues of the time. Countless volunteer hours were given by women to the alleviation of social ills as the earliest Sunday school teachers, as abolitionists, preachers, teachers, nurses, missionaries, and activists for their own liberation as children of God.

The end of the Civil War freed the hearts and imaginations of Protestants to again envision a Christian America. Congregational minister Horace Bushnell led with a vision of a virtuous, joyous, worshiping Christian America that would set the pace for others in the world. Other Congregationalists also were prominent. Bushnell's disciple Josiah Strong sought to rally concerned social action for the urban blight of growing industrialization. Columbus, Ohio minister Washington Gladden, father of the social gospel, defended the right of labor to organize. Jane Addams saw the urgency of the urban poor and began Hull House, the Chicago settlement house, in 1889.

The many voluntary church societies responded to humanitarian concerns aroused by the religious awakenings. The American Home Missionary Society (1826) touched fingertips with the German churches by providing funds for the religious and educational needs of settlers in the West. In 1927, the Iowa-born General Conference of German Congregational Churches was recognized by the General Council along with other Congregational Churches.

The American Missionary Association believed in the transforming power of the gospel to right social evils, particularly inhumanity to other races and the injustice of slavery. The AMA was, by charter, committed to "an elimination of caste." Black and white Americans were active supporters and workers. Engaged from its inception in abolitionist activity, the affirmation of Indian rights, and work among the Eskimo, the AMA responded immediately following the Civil War to the educational and religious needs of freed blacks in the South and of Native Americans. A shortage of educators turned the Association to the education of teachers, and the black colleges were born. A relationship with the United Church of Christ would continue to be maintained by Fisk (1866), Talladega (1867), LeMoyne-Owen (1871), Huston-Tillotson (1876), Dillard (1869) and Tougaloo

(1869).

The legal autonomy of the voluntary missionary societies left the Congregational churches and the legislative General Council without administrative authority over the direction of their own mission. The relationship bred long periods of unease. A partial solution came in 1917 when representative voting members of the Council were made voting members of the societies. Corporate law gave final control to boards and directors. Gradually, the home mission and education societies found it expedient to unite under the Board of Home Missions.

The Synod of the German Reformed Church had responded to needs of the people on the frontier by establishing, in 1819, a missionary committee that in 1865 became the Board of Home Missions. In 1866, the German Reformed Church decided not to unite with the Dutch Reformed Church. Dropping the "German" from its name, the church became in 1867, the Reformed Church in the United States.

Responsibility for home mission in the Reformed Church fell to the regional Synods. They were reluctant to comply when the 1878 General Synod resolved that "all home missions of the church should be brought under direct control of the General Synod's board as speedily as possible." When synods finally relinquished control of their mission programs, centralization allowed for productive overall planning and projects such as homes for children and the aged, assistance to Hungarian congregations, new church development, and (after the merger with the Evangelical Synod) work during World War II among Japanese-Americans placed in American concentration camps. Henry Tani, first director of youth ministry in the United Church of Christ, was a layman reached by the last ministry.

## **The Christian Churches**

Of all the United Church of Christ traditions, the Christian Churches were most uniquely American in origin and character. In Virginia, Vermont, and Kentucky, the Second Great Awakening in the early 1800s stirred the hearts of quite disparate leaders and their followers with the impulse to return to the simplicity of early Christianity. The first group was gathered in 1794 in Virginia by a Revolutionary soldier, James O'Kelley. He, with many other Methodists left the church over their objection to bishops. Methodism, they felt, was too autocratical. They wanted the frontier churches to be freed to deal with the needs and concerns that were different from those of the more established churches. They declared that the Bible was their only guide and adopted as their new name, the Christian Church.

A few years later, at Lyndon, Vermont, Abner Jones and his followers objected to Calvinist Baptist views. In 1801, they organized the First Free Christian Church, in which Christian character would be the only requirement for membership, and in which all who could do so in faith, were welcome to partake of the Lord's Supper. Christ was seen to be more generous than to withhold Communion from all but those who had been baptized by immersion. Jones was later joined by

Baptist Elias Smith, who helped to organize a Christian church in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and began publishing, in 1808, the Herald of Gospel Liberty. Smith's paper became a means of drawing the separate Christian movements together.

With a minimum of organization, other churches of like mind were established and the movement became known as the "Christian Connection." The "Connection" had been organized in 1820 at the first United General Conference of Christians, during which six principles were unanimously affirmed:

- Christ, the only head of the Church.
- The Bible, sufficient rule of faith and practice.
- Christian character, the only measurement for membership.
- The right of private judgment, interpretation of scripture, and liberty of conscience.
- The name "Christian," worthy for Christ's followers.
- Unity of all Christ's followers in behalf of the world.

By 1845, a regional New England Convention began.

A third group, under Barton W. Stone, withdrew in 1803 from the Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky in opposition to Calvinist theology. Stone's followers eventually numbered 8,000 and they, too, took the name Christian. Followers of Stone spread into Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Some of this group united with followers of Alexander Campbell at Lexington, Kentucky, in 1832 to found the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), which became the largest indigenous body of Protestants in America. (In the 1970s, the Christian Church [Disciples of Christ] and the United Church of Christ began conversations to consider possible union.) Christians who refused to follow Stone and unite with the Disciples, gradually identified with the Christian Churches led by O'Kelley in Virginia and by Jones and Smith in New England.

From 1844, when the New England Convention passed a strong resolution condemning slavery, until long after the Civil War was over, the Christian Churches of the North and the South suspended fellowship with each other. As a result, whites controlled the newly-formed Southern Christian Association. In the North, the first Christian General Convention was held in 1850, and for the first time, Christians began to behave as a denomination.

Christians valued education since their first leaders came from well-educated New England families that had exhibited a humanitarian spirit. In 1844, Christians helped to establish Meadville Seminary with the Unitarians. In 1850, Defiance College in Ohio was born and two years later the coeducational Antioch College, Horace Mann its president, came into being in Ohio. Elon College was founded in North Carolina in 1889, and a year later, the suspended fellowship between northern and southern churches was restored. Christian colleges were recognized as holding the key to an educated clergy and an enlightened church membership.

There was a leveling influence in the frontier church that promoted a democratic

spirit. The Great Awakening on the frontier promoted an anti-creedal religion, independent personal judgment, and freedom of conscience. Quite different from the rough nature of frontier life itself, educated leadership brought refined sensibilities, compassion, and concern for humanitarian causes to the churches.

James O'Kelley's denunciation of slavery in 1789 had attracted many blacks to join Christian churches in the South. They were further attracted by the revival style and the zeal for humanitarian reform. Neither race nor gender was a stumbling block to Christian fellowship in the South. Black churches were not organized before the Civil War and in 1852, Isaac Scott, a black man from North Carolina, was ordained by the Christian Church and sent to Liberia as the first overseas missionary from that denomination. The democratic social structure in the Christian Church proved more hospitable to women's sense of "calling" than had been true in Puritan New England churches. In 1839, the Virginia Christian Conference recognized an Ohio minister's wife, the former Rebecca L. Chaney, as her husband's official associate in preaching. The Christian Church exercised its independence under God when it became the first denomination to recognize the ordination of a woman. In 1867, at Ebenezer Church in Clark County, Ohio, Melissa Terrel was ordained to the Christian ministry. Following the Civil War, black members of the Christian Church tended to cut themselves off from whites to form churches of their own. The black church became the only social structure totally supported by the black community. Elevated to a high status in a climate that denigrated black males, black ministers were close to a peer relationship with white community leaders. Black church ministers were not only pastors and preachers to their congregations, but were social workers and organizers for human rights as well. Black ministers and their churches were often targets of reaction, sometimes violent, during repeated periods of local political battle over issues such as freedom from oppression, the achievement of voting rights, opportunity for land ownership, equality of educational and vocational opportunity, the right to participate in the same amenities offered others in American communities.

Women in many black Christian churches became, to an even greater degree than in white churches, the backbone of church life; many became preachers. Black women so reared, upon joining integrated churches, found it difficult to accept less crucial tasks where men dominated.

The Reconstruction Era after the Civil War was slow and painful. During the time of estrangement, Christian churches of both North and South had increasingly assumed characteristics of a denomination. During the first post-war decade, the Southern Convention adopted a manual for standardized worship and Christian Church rites, as well as for defining "Principles" for Christians. During this period, a group of freed slaves established, in 1866-67, the North Carolina Colored Christian Conference. This group maintained close ties with white Christians and shared in the General Convention of the Christian Church. In 1874, the Eastern Atlantic Colored Christian Conference was formed and in 1873, the Virginia Colored Christian Conference. As numbers of black Christian churches increased, the churches organized themselves further into conferences. In 1892, the Afro-American Convention met for the first time representing five conferences with a total membership of 6,000.

The General Convention of 1874 adopted a Manifesto, defining for the Christian Church movement true unity as based not on doctrine or polity, but on Christian spirit and character. The Manifesto stated: "We are ready to form a corporate union with any body of Christians upon the basis of those great doctrines which underlie the religion of Christ ... We are ready to submit all minor matters to ... the individual conscience."

Not until 1890 was the division between the North and the South sufficiently overcome to adopt a Plan of Union that formed a new General Convention.

## **The German Evangelical Synod**

Different from their compatriots who had arrived in America a century earlier, German immigrants between 1830 and 1845 were likely to have lived through the strife inflicted by the Napoleonic wars and a long history of religious coercion by the state. Yet, many Germans were enlightened by rationalist doctrine, art, music, and science. Frederick William III had united the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in 1817 into the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union. Objections from both church groups would not be countenanced.

Suppression and persecution caused some Lutherans to leave Germany. Traveling by ship and covered wagon, they arrived in Missouri to become the nucleus of the Missouri Synod Lutheran denomination. These conservative people remain "separatist" until the present, still wary of the forced compromises of a coerced union.

Others, both Lutheran and Reformed, embodied the inward and irenic spirit of Pietism as well as its moral missionary zeal. While their leaders were well educated and biblically grounded, they were not attuned to rationalist doctrine or ecclesiastical organization. Enlightened evangelical societies from Basel and Barmen, caring little for confessional distinctions, cooperated with the London Missionary Society and the Church of England to send missionaries abroad.

Between 1830 and 1845, 40,000 people left Germany annually for America where they joined the westward movement. Most settled in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Iowa and Wisconsin. The German Evangelical Church Society of the West (Der Deutsche Evangelische Kirchenverein des Westens), founded in 1840 at Gravois Settlement, St. Louis, Missouri, was a transplanted Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union.

As with the early Reformed congregations, the Evangelical immigrants were at first pastored by lay people. Although Presbyterians and Congregationalists had tried to welcome them, language was a problem. One of the first lay pastors, Hermann Garlichs, later returned to Germany for ordination after gathering the first Missouri Evangelical congregations at Femme Osage and St. Charles in 1833. Basel and Barmen missionary societies responded quickly to the need for missionaries to serve the congregations as ministers. They were unconcerned about differing confessional affiliations. Cooperation with the Congregational



Home Missionary Society and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was initiated in 1836 after Basel pastors George W. Wall and Joseph A. Rieger had spent several months among Congregationalists in Hartford, Connecticut. Traveling to New York, Philadelphia, and points west, their plea for aid yielded funds for Evangelical missions. The pietistic Wall served the incompatible rationalistic Holy Ghost Church, the first German Church in St. Louis. Abolitionist sympathizer Rieger lived with abolition martyr Elijah Lovejoy in Alton, Illinois and, in 1837, became the first secretary of the Illinois Anti-Slavery Society, while teaching school and serving as an itinerant preacher.

In 1840 the fellowship of pastors and people was organized.

In 1849, the first church, St. Paul's in St. Louis, joined the pastoral conference, the Kirchenverein. In 1847, the Kirchenverein produced its own Evangelical Catechism, abbreviated in 1862 by Andreas Irion. In 1848, a common confession to the Holy Scriptures as the basis of faith and life, and harmony with the Augsburg Confession, Luther's Small Catechism and the Heidelberg Confession were acknowledged. The intent was not to coerce Christian conscience at points of disagreement, but to provide symbols for the word of God, behind which was the reality of God's redeeming love through Jesus Christ. By 1857, an Agenda (Worship Order) was adopted and in 1862, an Evangelical Hymnal.

Among the German immigrants were free-thinking rationalists, who placed their hope in science, education, and culture. Many of them Deists, they clung to their emancipation from the church and, feeling enlightened, instead joined lodges, clubs, and singing societies. Many were disdainful of pastors and churches, contributing needlessly to hardship on the frontier. They were unimpressed by the occasional revivalist who visited their frontier communities. However, when their own children showed signs of illiteracy and irreligion, many were sufficiently disturbed to extend hospitality to a well-trained pastor of true faith, who often had to serve several communities at once.

Parochial schools were for a time more prevalent than Sunday schools, until concern for children's segregation from the community would cause many to close. During the Civil War years, to provide curriculum materials for the parochial schools and Sunday schools, the General Conference authorized the publication of readers, textbooks, a Christian Children's Paper and many books, among them, *Biblische Geschichten* (Bible Stories) and a Sunday School Hymnal full of chorales, folk melodies and spiritual lieder.

Social and political instability of the 19th-century American frontier aborted several starts to colleges and seminaries needed to train ministers and teachers for the Synods of the West. A college at Washington, Missouri, begun by the Society (Kirchenverein) in 1854, opened in 1858 and died during the Civil War (along with 26 others in the United States), when parents refused to allow their sons to go to the "guerilla-infested" region along the Missouri. Eden Theological Seminary (1850) and Elmhurst College (1871) have endured with distinction.

To assure authenticity and high standards of ministry on the frontier, pastors not yet ordained who sought admission to membership in the Kirchenverein were

examined as to their character and their affirmation of the writings of "our Evangelical mother Church in Germany." By 1850, total dependence upon men of German theological training had been relieved by the establishment of a seminary in Marthasville, Missouri, later to become Eden Theological Seminary, a school of distinctive Lutheran and Reformed union-oriented piety. The seminary received financial support from other denominations, from Germany and from friendly benefactors. The new journal, *Der Friedensbote* (Messenger of Peace) helped to unify the church.

Naturally harsh frontier conditions, remnants of Lutheran-Reformed controversies, the arrogance (often cruelty) of the rationalists, and geographical isolation made communications, association, and mutual support urgent. Such difficulties also contributed to the establishment of free, unassociated churches and to the defection of some pastors to join established American denominations. Pietistic Evangelicals, facing some of the same conditions that New England settlers experienced and sharing with the Puritans an ascetic tendency, felt drawn to the Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Congregational leaders such as Horace Bushnell were instrumental in aiding establishment of German Evangelical churches in the West and providing them with ministers from Basel and Barmen. Presbyterians sent teachers and preachers as well.

The primary thrust of Evangelical mission was to establish churches in countryside and city and to serve the needs of the German population in areas west of Ohio. The Board of Home Missions, created in 1870, was called on to assist German-Russian immigrants to Colorado, descendants of Germans who had been asked by the Empress Catherine (the Great) to settle the lower Volga area. They had been promised that their language and culture would be respected and preserved. Abridgement of agreed-upon rights under Nicholas II sent the German-Russian settlers in search of freedom. They came in such numbers that the Board of Home Missions, in 1914, established an academy at Fort Collins to train German-Russian ministers and lay workers. It was closed when World War I cut off the flow of immigrants.

Evangelical churches were grateful recipients of mission society aid. Between 1840 and 1860 they responded with funds, gifts out of proportion to the church population, for the societies at Barmen and Basel that had provided pastors. At home, Evangelical Society missions would focus on needs arising among the German settlements on the frontier. Led by Louis Nollau, an Evangelical hospital was established in St. Louis, and in 1858 200 patients were rejected for lack of space. With community support, the Good Samaritan Hospital opened in 1861. Nollau also reached out to the plight of orphaned and victimized children by taking many into his own home until a proper shelter was provided for their growing number. Parochial school children would contribute pennies to their support through "orphan societies." Nollau and others went on to enlarge the mission to the young, the sick, and the aged.

A General Conference was held at Indianapolis in 1866, at which the name Evangelical Synod of the West replaced the term *Kirchenverein*. A disciplined and committed natural church leader, Adolph Baltzer, was elected its first president. Two years later, instead of a meeting of the full membership, as in the Old

Kirchenverein, a system of delegates, elected by district, was instituted.

As stated by Baltzer, faithfulness, obedience, discipline, and the affirmation, "Christ alone! Faith alone! The Bible alone!" would be the guiding principles and articles of faith of the Evangelical Synod. Baltzer would recognize the ephemeral nature of organizations and institutions, even denominations, but emphasized the enduring and fruitful nature of "work done in the name of the Lord and in his spirit." Baltzer traveled thousands of miles by railroad, steamboat, horse and foot, to visit all the churches and would report, after two years, a 20 percent increase in churches and pastors, an incredible transformation in the land from frontier conditions to prosperous farms abundant with fruit and grain, and an increasing need to attend to the education of children. In 1884, the Evangelical Synod began its foreign missions in India.

Between 1857 and 1872, four unions took place between the Missouri Evangelicals and other church associations. In 1872, the major Synod of the West, the Synod of the East (western New York and Ohio), and the Synod of the Northwest (Illinois, Michigan and Indiana) united. By 1877 the denomination included 324 pastors and became the German Evangelical Synod of North America. By 1934, when the Synod merged with the Reformed Church in the United States, Evangelicals totaled 281,598, pastored by 1,227 clergy.

Two theologians of the 20th century of great influence and acclaim throughout Protestant America were nurtured in the Evangelical Church. Helmut Richard Niebuhr, called a "theologian's theologian," wrote and taught Christian ethics at Yale Divinity School. Educated at Elmhurst College and Eden Seminary as well as Yale Divinity School, his older brother Reinhold Niebuhr became the most influential American theologian since Jonathan Edwards. Pastor of a Detroit church during the difficult anti-German years of World War I, he guided the Evangelical War Welfare Commission to support 25,000 young people from Evangelical churches serving in the American armed forces. While a Union Theological Seminary professor, he wrote books of ethics and theology, among them *Moral Man and Immoral Society* and *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. He became the American exponent of neoorthodoxy, a theology that attempted amidst the declining morality of the 20th century, to reapply biblical teachings and truths to areas of contemporary social and political concern. The Niebuhrs helped to determine the theological orientation of thousands of religious and secular leaders and thereby to help crumble the sectarian walls of division of the Christian world.

By 1929, deep in negotiations on union with the Reformed Church, the German Evangelical Synod dropped from its name, if not its consciousness, the national designation and became the Evangelical Synod of North America.

## **An Ecumenical Age**

God has moved throughout the 20th century to impel a worldwide movement toward Christian unity, of which the United Church of Christ is but a part. Understood deeply as obedience, the movement is seen more expediently as an

antidote to the rising forces of paganism. The ecumenical movement calls the churches to restore their oneness in Christ by union. A divided church is unlikely to convince the world.

Two world wars and religious sectarianism had made clear a need for the church to take seriously its responsibility as agents of God's healing, and in repentance, to acknowledge in its divisions a mutual need for Christ's redemption. The World Council of Churches, Protestant and Orthodox, met at Amsterdam in 1948 under the theme "Man's Disorder and God's Design." In 1961, it merged with the International Missionary Council. The Second Vatican Council at Rome, called by Pope John XXIII, met between 1962 and 1965, with a primary purpose of "peace and unity." Ending with a reemphasis on ecumenicity, the Pope participated in a joint religious service with non-Catholic Christian observers, and resolved to "remove from memory" the events of A.D. 1054 that first split the Christian church "in two great halves," Catholic and Orthodox.

The United Church movement overseas had an early beginning in the South Indian United Church (1908), later to be the Church of South India and the Church of North India. The Church of Christ in China (1927) followed and, much later, in Japan the Kyodan (1941), The United Church of Christ of the Philippines (1948) and the National Christian Council of Indonesia (1950). Common historic missionary roots were celebrated during a 1976 ecumenical visit to four of the United Churches by a delegation from the United Church of Christ, U.S.A., led by its distinguished ecumenist president, Robert V. Moss, recognized as a world church leader.

Between 1900 and 1950, Congregational churches of ten nations united with other denominations, many losing the name "Congregational." Others followed as the United Church movement proliferated. In the United States, the Congregational Churches had, since 1890, been making overtures of unity toward other church bodies. German "union" (Lutheran Reformed) churches in western Pennsylvania and in Iowa, recognized and received as German Congregational Churches in 1927, were absorbed and integrated.

Congregational associations during and following World War I received into fellowship Armenian Evangelicals, a refugee remnant of the 19th-century reform movement in the Armenian Apostolic Church in Turkey. During a period of Turkish genocidal persecution of Armenians, thousands escaped to America, many Evangelicals. In the 1980s there are 16 Armenian Evangelical churches holding membership in the United Church of Christ. Locally, the association relationship among churches made it easy to extend congregational fellowship across denominational lines.

Although it frequently stated convictions of unity, the Christian Church (perhaps because of its long travail over its own North-South division and its disinterest in organizational structure) had remained separatist. Correspondence with the Congregationalists led to a meeting in 1926, when a decision to pursue union was taken. On June 27, 1931, at Seattle, Washington, the Christian Church, with a membership of 100,000, including 30,000 members of the 65 churches in its Afro-American Convention, joined with the Congregational Churches of nearly a

million members. They saw their temporal organization of Christian believers as one manifestation of the church universal, a denomination that they intended would remain adaptable, so as to enable a faithful response to the biblical Word of God in any time, in any place, among any people.

Such an understanding of the church had also matured in the Evangelical and the Reformed churches from seeds planted centuries before in Switzerland and Germany and replanted in America by the Mercersburg movement. With resolve strengthened by the great ecumenical assemblies, the Reformed Church in the United States, led by George W. Richards, in 1918, produced a Plan of Federal Union in hope of uniting churches of the Reformed heritage. Similarly inspired, Samuel Press, supported by the local churches represented at the 1925 General Conference, led the Evangelical Synod of North America to undertake negotiations looking toward organic union. While other communions of shared tradition had become involved, by 1930, only the Reformed Church and the Evangelical Synod pursued their long-hoped-for union.

After six years of negotiation, a Plan of Union evolved, approved in 1932 by the General Synod of the Reformed Church, ratified by the Evangelical Synod at its General Convention of 1933. Significant and unprecedented was the decision to unite and then to work out a constitution and other structures for implementation, surely an act of Christian obedience and faith in the power of the Holy Spirit to sustain trust in one another. On June 26, 1934, the Evangelical and Reformed Church was born at Cleveland, Ohio.

## **The Evangelical and Reformed Church**

A blend of autonomy and authority, the Evangelical and Reformed Church retained a Calvinist doctrine of the church as "the reality of a kingdom of grace," and the importance of order and discipline in its witness to the reign of God in the world. The Heidelberg Catechism still at its heart, the new church would embody -a synthesis of Calvin's inward sense of God's "calling" and Luther's experiential approach to faith. George W. Richards, ecumenist first president, had expressed the insights of all Reformation streams by saying, "Without the Christlike spirit, no constitution will ever be effective; with the spirit, one will need only a minimum of law for the administration of the affairs of the fellowship of men and women." In such a spirit the union proceeded without a constitution until one was adopted in 1938, implemented in 1940.

The second president, Louis W. Goebel, a trusted Christian statesman and exponent of the church's freedom in Christ, guided the organization and ecumenical relationships of the 655,000-member Evangelical and Reformed Church for 15 years. Its membership was mainly in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Texas, Kentucky, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri. James E. Wagner, true to the Reformed tradition, yet responsive to the rapid changes of an era, as third president, led the church into a further fulfillment of its unitive intention.

Meanwhile, the practical act of consolidating Reformed and Evangelical programs, boards, organizations, and publications and coordinating the multiple institutions went forward. The church addressed worldwide suffering during World War II with the War Emergency Relief Commission. The Hymnal (1941) and Book of Worship (1942) were published. Reformed missions in Japan, China, and Iraq were united under the Evangelical and Reformed Church Board of International Missions. New missions were undertaken through cooperative efforts in Ecuador, Ghana, and western Africa. The Messenger became the church publication. Christian education resources soon followed. Organizations united. The Woman's Missionary Society united with the Evangelical Women's Union to become the Women's Guild.

A 1937 study group of St. Louis Evangelical and Reformed and Congregational Christian clergy, led by Samuel J. Press, president of Eden, and Truman Douglass, pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church, had revealed among the participants a sense of "family." Dr. Press acted on the discovery with a June 1938 telegram to the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches, "What about a rapprochement between our communions looking forward to union?" The affirmative response of Douglas Horton, minister and executive secretary of the General Council, was followed by four years of private conversations before a public proposal in 1942 would be endorsed by the General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches. After ten drafts of a Basis of Union were prepared between 1943 and 1949, a special General Synod was called in 1949 to approve the Interpretations of the Basis. Approval (249-41) was followed by successful ratification by the 34 synods, by vote of 33-1. A uniting General Synod for the United Church, first set for June 26, 1950, was postponed for seven more years. Under Congregational Christian Church autonomy, some local churches brought a legal injunction, challenging the right of the General Council to participate in a union of the whole church with another. President Richards made clear the Evangelical and Reformed Church's commitment to total unity and wholeness.

## The Congregational Christian Churches



The union by the Congregational and Christian churches seemed the most natural in the world, yet most of their life together from 1931-57 concerned the General Council with matters surrounding church union, first its own and then with the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

Yet the work of the church continued. In 1934, the General Council at Oberlin, "stirred by the deep need of humanity for justice, security, and spiritual freedom and growth, aware of the urgent demand within our churches for action to match our gospel, and clearly persuaded that the gospel of Jesus can be the solvent of social as of all other problems," voted to create the Council for Social Action. The Council reflected the focus of continuing Christian concern for service,

international relations, citizenship, Japanese-Americans, rural life, and legislative, industrial and cultural relations. The General Council had acted to simplify and economize at a national level the prolific and redundant independent actions by churches and conferences, while maintaining the inherent liberties of the local churches.

State Conferences, led by Superintendents or Conference Ministers, responded to local church requests for pastors, resources in Christian education, youth and adult conferences, and speakers on mission and social concerns. They received funds for mission, helped new church starts, and maintained ecumenical contacts.

Printed literature and communication continued to be essential. In 1930, the Christian Church's *The Herald of Gospel Liberty* merged with *The Congregationalist*, to become *Advance*. The Pilgrim Press, a division of the Board of Home Missions, continued to publish and distribute books, Christian education curriculum materials, monthly magazines and newspapers, hymnals, worship and devotional material, and resources for education and evangelism. Nationally, the Women's Fellowship connected the work initiated by women in the churches; the Pilgrim Fellowship provided a network of Christian youth. The Laymen's Fellowship enabled men to carry forward a cooperative ministry.

Congregational Christian and Evangelical and Reformed Church leaders already had begun private conversations about union when German Evangelical Church pastor, Martin Niemoeller was incarcerated in Nazi Germany for preaching the Christian gospel from his prominent Berlin pulpit. He boldly opposed the persecution of Jews. On Christmas Eve, 1938, United States Catholics and Protestants, including Congregational Christian and Evangelical and Reformed leaders, sent a message to the German people. A subtle shift in emphasis had gradually crept among the churches from a desire to evangelize the world to a concern for the needs of human society.

The proposed United Church of Christ tried patience and tested persistence. By far the rockier road to union confronted the Congregational Christian Churches. From before the postponed Uniting General Synod of 1950 until 1957, thousands of hours and dollars were spent on court litigation of suits brought against the General Council by autonomous bodies and individuals of the Congregational Christian Churches. Sustained by a court ruling in 1949, the litigants, defining the General Council as "a representative body" accountable to the churches, maintained that the Council had no power to undertake a union involving the churches. Merger leadership defined the General Council as accountable to itself, "a gathering of Christians under the Lordship of Christ." That interpretation persuaded the court to reverse the ruling on appeal, sustained in 1953.

Truman B. Douglass, who would become general secretary of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, pointed to the theological principles of the "Headship of Christ" and the Reformed "priesthood of all believers," that sustained autonomy and fellowship, as basic to the Congregational Christian polity. Therefore it was applicable to the "agencies of fellowship." General Council minister Douglas Horton suggested that the General Council was "a kind

of Congregation," and that neither it nor the local church was subordinate to the other.

The most celebrated suit was brought by The Cadman Memorial Congregational Church in Brooklyn on behalf of itself and other Congregational Christian churches against Helen Kenyon, moderator of the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches. Helen Kenyon bore the weight of these litigations with strength, patience and valor. Justice Archie O. Dawson, of the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York opined, "It is unfortunate that ministers and church members, who purport to abide by Christian principles should engage in this long, expensive litigation. ... " Then speaking as a "Christian layman ... in all humility" he urged the parties to the controversy to "give prayerful consideration to 1 Corinthians [6: 1,5-7] when similar controversies arose to trouble the early Christians" (Fred Hoskins, *Congregationalism Betrayed or Fulfilled*, Newton, MA: Andover Newton Theological School, 1962. Southworth Lecture [paper], pp. 7-8).

Louis W. Goebel at the 1950 Evangelical and Reformed General Synod had with patience and grace stated, "so long as they continue to extend to us the hand of friendship and fellowship ... we members of a church committed to ... the reunion of Christ's church, are bound to accept that hand" (Louis H. Gunnemann, *The Shaping of the United Church of Christ: An Essay in the History of American Christianity*, New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1977, p.41).

Ruling against those who would block it, the Court of Appeals issued the assurance that the union "would in no way change the historical and traditional patterns of individual Congregational Christian churches" and that none would be coerced into union. Each member was assured of continuing freedom of faith and manner of worship and no abridgement of congregational usage and practice. The ruling assured the churches that the union would depend on voluntary action taken by independent, autonomous churches (Hoskins, *op. cit.*, p. 41).

In the United Church of Christ, the separate denominational ancestral stories are preserved at the Congregational Library in Boston, Lancaster Theological Seminary, Eden Theological Seminary, and Elon College.

Legally free to proceed with union, uneasiness remained.

Congregational Christians needed to clarify the difference between authority and power; while all autonomous units - individuals, churches, and agencies-were endowed with temporal power, none wielded authority over another except through the biblical authority of God in Jesus Christ. Evangelical and Reformed Christians needed reassurance that there would be one body and not just one head, trusting that the Holy Spirit would make of the Covenant, owned by the parts of the body-individuals, churches, and agencies-a whole United Church of Christ. In trust, a joint 1954 meeting of the Congregational Christian Executive Committee and the Evangelical and Reformed General Council (ad interim for the General Synod) affirmed *The Basis of Union with the Interpretations* as a foundation for the merger and sufficient for the drafting of a Constitution.



Both communions approached the 1957 Uniting General Synod with fresh leadership. James E. Wagner had succeeded Richards as president of the General Synod in 1953, and on Douglas Horton's resignation in 1955, Fred Hoskins was elected Minister and General Secretary of the General Council. Eight theologians from each uniting communion met to study basic Christian doctrine, theological presuppositions, and doctrinal positions in preparation for the writing of a Statement of Faith.

All of the Evangelical and Reformed churches, responding to a responsibility laid upon them by their church tradition, and those Congregational Christian churches that understood the church as a people gathered by Christ moved a step farther toward reunion of the Christian church on June 25, 1957 as, with faith in God and growing trust in one another, they became The United Church of Christ. Some 100,000 members, unable to accept the union, joined The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches or The Conservative Congregational Christian Conference.

## **The United Church of Christ**

On Tuesday, June 25, 1957, at Cleveland, Ohio, the Evangelical and Reformed Church, 23 years old, passionate in its impulse to unity, committed to "liberty of conscience inherent in the Gospel," and the Congregational Christian Churches, 26 years old, a fellowship of biblical people under a mutual covenant for responsible freedom in Christ, joined together as the United Church of Christ. The new church embodied the essence of both parents, a complement of freedom with order, of the English and European Reformations with the American Awakenings, of separatism with 20th-century ecumenism, of presbyterian with congregational polities, of neoorthodox with liberal theologies. Two million members joined hands.

The story of the United Church of Christ is the story of people serving God through the church. Co-President James E. Wagner, a graduate of Lancaster Seminary, parish minister, seminary professor, and instructor in Bible, brought intellectual and spiritual stature, wisdom and brotherly warmth to match the generous personality of Co-President Fred Hoskins, gifted Congregational Christian professor and pastor, of liberal theological orientation and consummate organizational ability.

A message was sent to the churches from the Uniting General Synod, signed by its moderators, Louis W. Goebel and George B. Hastings, its co-presidents, and co-secretaries Sheldon E. Mackey and Fred S. Buschmeyer. After acknowledging the separate ancestries of the parties to the union and citing ecumenical "relatives" of both denominations, the message stated, "Differences in ecclesiastical procedure, which in sundry places and times have occasioned tensions and disorders, are appointed their secondary place and are divested of evil effect." The union, the message continued, was possible because the "two companies of Christians hold the same basic belief: that Christ and Christ alone is the head of the Church ... From him [we] derive the understanding of God, ... participation in the same spirit, the doctrines of faith, the influence toward

holiness, the duties of divine worship, the apprehension of the significance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the observance of church order, the mutual love of Christians and their dedication to the betterment of the world" ("Report on the Uniting General Synod:" Advance, July 12, 1957, p. 22).

A Joint Resolution, declaring the basis of union, adopted by both parties at the Uniting General Synod, said in part: "Delegates of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches, in joint session assembled this day in the city of Cleveland, Ohio, do hereby declare that The Basis of Union with the Interpretations has been legally adopted ... that the union ... is now effected under the name of 'The United Church of Christ' ... that the union be formally pronounced ... in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ... that until the adopting Constitution ... The Basis of Union shall regulate the business and affairs of the United Church of Christ .... "

The Second General Synod at Oberlin in 1959 received for study by the churches a first draft of a constitution and approved a Statement of Faith:

Statement of Faith We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, and to his deeds we testify: He calls the worlds into being, creates man in his own image, and sets before him the ways of life and death. He seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin. He judges men and nations by his righteous will declared through prophets and apostles. In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, he has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to himself. He bestows upon us his Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races. He calls us into his church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be his servants in the service of men, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory. He promises to all who trust him forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, his presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in his kingdom which has no end. Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto him. Amen.

Able administration by the co-presidents and intensive committee work by lay and clergypersons produced an orderly procedure for consolidation of boards and other program agencies. The Third General Synod at Philadelphia in 1961 adopted the Constitution and By-Laws and elected a devoted, hardworking pastor its first president. Ben Herbster, earnest supporter of educational and ecumenical Christian endeavors, always faithful to the needs and requests of local churches and pastors, would guide the "freedom and order" of the new church for eight years. Calling for unity, he would, in his own words, remain "experimental ... seeking new modes that speak to this day in inescapable terms."

The youthful years of the United Church of Christ called the church to ministry in a society barely recovered from a war in Korea, soon thrust with its burden of sorrow and guilt into another in Vietnam. Burgeoning and expensive technologies in a shrinking world seemed to offer the bright prospect of ever more familiar

human relationships, with fleeting promises of time to enjoy them, yet generating ominous clouds of increasing crime, violence and fear of nuclear annihilation. The first years of the church's life began during a period of unprecedented national economic prosperity and hope, when, during the preceding decades, new church buildings had abounded to accommodate worshipers disinclined to consider denomination important.

The constitution had provided for the General Synod to recognize the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries and the United Church Board for World Ministries as mission instrumentalities. Also recognized to do the work of the church were the Pension Boards and the United Church Foundation. Other program instrumentalities for the whole work of the church have been established, as needed, by the General Synod: Stewardship Council, Office of Communication, Office for Church in Society, and Office for Church Life and Leadership. The General Synod has also provided for such special bodies as Commission for Racial Justice, Commission on Development, Coordinating Center for Women in Church and Society, Historical Council, Council for Ecumenism, Council for Higher Education. A Council of Conference Executives includes the 39 conference ministers. A Council of Instrumentality Executives assists the president and Executive Council in planning implementation of General Synod and Executive Council (ad interim for General Synod) decisions. (See pages 32-33, 53-64.)

The priorities, pronouncements, and program recommendations of the General Synods throughout the 1960s and 1970s reflected a biblical sensitivity to God's care for a world that once led Jesus of Nazareth to weep over the city of Jerusalem. Peace, ecumenism, and human rights walked hand in hand in the United Church of Christ during the 1960s, continuing into the 1970s, the last with a louder and louder voice. At the grassroots, many people worked for black and other minority justice rights, for the elevation of women to equal regard and opportunity with men in society, for just treatment and consideration of all persons of whatever sexual affectional preference, for a more humane criminal justice system, and for the enablement of people with handicaps to lead a full life. Local churches were encouraged to support local councils of churches and the work of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States, that had in 1950 united many efforts of Protestant and Orthodox churches.

On the national level, a Consultation on Church Union (COCU) was initiated in 1960 to "form [together] a plan of church union both catholic and reformed," and to invite any other churches to join that could accept the principles of the plan. The United Church of Christ promptly joined the effort and COCU produced in 1966 a Plan of Church Union. By 1970, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the International Congregational Council had merged, and in 1976, COCU's *In Quest of a Church Uniting* was submitted to ten participating American churches for study and response; in 1977, a Plan of Union was published. The consultation would continue and the United Church of Christ often reiterated it "would not do anything alone that could be done as well or better with other churches."

In 1972 United Church Herald joined Presbyterian Life to become A.D. The same

inclusive spirit became prominent within the denomination as well. In an attempt to bring young people more fully into the life of the church, the two former national youth structures (Pilgrim Fellowship and Youth Fellowship) were abandoned. In 1969, the Seventh General Synod voted that a minimum of 20 percent of all future Synod delegates and members of national boards must be under 30 years of age. This action has led many conferences, associations, and churches to include youth in decision-making bodies.

Increasing numbers of young people attend General Synods as visitors as well as delegates. Delegates under 30 have strongly influenced decisions. Articulate, committed young people have inspired and given new life to the General Synods since 1969. A 1980 National Youth Event at Carleton College rallied youth leaders of the United Church of Christ. No longer are young people seen as "the church of tomorrow"; they are an integral part of the church today throughout the denomination.

During a period of student unrest, strong protest of America's involvement in the Vietnam War, continuing pressure for minority rights, the initial upheavals of the women's movement, and following national outrage and grief over assassinations of public leaders, North Carolinian Robert V. Moss, New Testament scholar and president of Lancaster Theological Seminary, was elected president of the United Church of Christ by the General Synod in 1969. Greatly loved, a gentle man with firm biblical conviction, he spoke with a loud anti-war voice and guided faithfully the church's peace and justice efforts. With General Synod mandate, he called for withdrawal from Vietnam and for support of United States policies that would lessen rivalries in the Middle East. An advocate of ecumenism, he served with distinction on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and supported its stands against apartheid in South Africa and for world peace.

General Synod VIII, concerned also with the faith crisis, racial justice, peace and United States power, and the local church, established a Task Force on Women in Church and Society, which pressed successfully for a General Synod mandate that 50 percent of delegates to national meetings and members on national boards and councils be women, and later for use of inclusive language in the church. The Council for American Indian Ministries (CAIM), Pacific and Asian American Ministries (P AAM), and the Council for Hispanic Ministries look after special needs and interests of their minority groups and offer their unique gifts of ministry to the rest of the church.

From the General Synod in 1973, a delegation of 95 flew from St. Louis to the Coachella Valley in California to stand with the United Farm Workers in their struggle against farm owners and a rival union. The General Synod responded to the financial crisis of six black American Missionary Association-founded colleges in the South, by raising \$17 million through the bicentennial 17176 Achievement Fund campaign between 1974 and 1976. The fund also aided overseas educational institutions. The same General Synod voted bail money for the "Wilmington 10," a group of eight young black men and one white woman who, involved in a North Carolina racial conflict, were imprisoned with a United Church of Christ worker, who was sent by the Commission for Racial Justice to help.

In the autumn of 1976, the church mourned the death from illness of its 54-year-old second president. Robert V. Moss died on October 25. Feeling keenly their loss, the churches received gladly his legacy of concern for justice, peace, and ecumenism.

Joseph H. Evans, secretary of the United Church of Christ, led the church as its third president for an interim period of 11 months. He repeatedly carried across America and overseas a message of unity and purpose to the grieving church and with pastoral skill brought comfort to many people.

Disintegration in the culture of traditional Christian mores surrounding sexual relationships and the institutions of marriage and family raised the need for a church study of human sexuality. Differing perspectives on biblical teaching rendered the study controversial. The General Synod in 1975 and 1977 sustained the conviction that sexual and affectional preference should not be a basis for denial of human rights enjoyed by others.

In 1977, the General Synod chose a vigorous former pastor and Massachusetts Conference minister, Avery D. Post, as president. A New Englander of poetic appreciations and ecumenical faith, grounded in a neoorthodox biblical theology, he was elected by acclamation.

The synod also called the church to responsible monitoring of exploitative broadcasting, public access and opportunity for handicapped persons, and the right to meaningful, remunerative work. World hunger and a threatened environment were commended to United Church Christians for attention and remediation, as was the social responsibility of multinational corporations.

A covenant with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to continue cooperative projects and theological and ecclesiological studies postponed a decision on formal union negotiations until 1985.

United Church Christians provided legal and moral support during the seven years that it took to win vindication for the "Wilmington 10." After a 1979 national women's meeting convened 2,000 women at Cincinnati, the Coordinating Center for Women in Church and Society was established and funded by General Synod XIII. By 1980, there were 485 United Church of Christ congregations of predominantly minority background, numbering 76, 634 persons of Afro, Asian and Pacific Island, Hispanic, and American Indian heritage. Between 1970 and 1979, each group showed net gains in membership. A decline in general United Church of Christ membership was believed to reflect demographic and migratory patterns in the United States.

Movements within the church such as the United Church People for Biblical Witness, the Fellowship of Charismatic Christians in the United Church of Christ, and United Church Christians for Justice Action help people of like perception and intention to find one another within the "beautiful, heady, exasperating mix" of the pluralistic church.

The church responded to these changes. Recognizing the urgency of Christian

renewal and mission, General Synod XIII adopted a four-year program to fund New Initiatives in Church Development. Synod delegates expressed their support for women's equality by participating in vigils to encourage ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Peace and Family Life, eloquently upheld by youth delegates, became priorities for the biennium.

General Synod XIV, meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, saw the election of the Rev. Carol Joyce Brun as the third Secretary of the United Church of Christ, succeeding Dr. Joseph H. Evans. At General Synod XIV the ministry sections of the Constitution and Bylaws were extensively amended, "Youth and Young Adults" was adopted as a priority, a new Council on Racial and Ethnic Ministries was authorized, a mission partnership with the Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea was voted, and such mission issues as the concern for persons with AIDS, justice and peace in Central America, and the evil of apartheid in South Africa received the careful attention of the delegates.

Delegates at General Synod XV, meeting in Ames, Iowa, expressed their concern about the farm crisis in the United States, declared the United Church of Christ a Just Peace Church, supported sanctuary for political refugees escaping from South Africa and Central America, and supported full divestment of all financial resources from all corporations doing business with South Africa. In a historic action, General Synod XV voted an ecumenical partnership with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and voted a relationship with the Pentecostal Church of Chile.

Succeeding A.D. in 1985 was a new tabloid, the United Church News.

The United Church of Christ, through the ecumenical Office of the President and the United Church Board for World Ministries, local churches and individual members, continues communication and visitation with Christian leaders, lay and ordained, throughout the world, including those in the Soviet bloc, the war-torn Middle East, developing countries, and especially in partnership with united and uniting churches of Christ. The church remains a member of the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

The United Church of Christ continues, a united and uniting church. God alone is its author, Christ alone its head. A biblical church, it continues to witness by the power of the Holy Spirit, remembering that "truths hitherto guarded in separateness become imperilled by their separateness, because they are in essence 'catholic' truths, not 'sectarian' (Norman Goodall quoted by Hoskins, op. cit., p. 33).