

PART ONE

Unity

Chapter 1

THE UNION CHURCH: A CASE OF LUTHERAN AND REFORMED COOPERATION

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REPRESENTATIVES OF THE nine participating denominations involved in the Consultation on Church Union stated in 1985: “Christians must find a way of being together in such a way that the very form of the Church in the world will communicate its message to the world, and still make room, within consensus, for a great range of theological points of view, practices in worship, and forms of organization.”(1) Such a need has always been present in the church, but it becomes imperative in a pluralistic world to achieve this new form with strength enough to influence world society with the message of Christ. Churches need to reexamine their own theological histories, their structures, their strengths, their weaknesses, and be willing to open their thinking to more creative possibilities for inclusive action.

Within the Lutheran and Reformed traditions there is a bit of history that, although localized, is not far removed from the kind of church witness projected by the Consultation on Church Union. This history began when immigrants arrived on American soil from the war-torn and poverty-stricken countryside of the German Rhine valley, called the Palatinate. It is a history of a proud people who sought to escape many years of war in their native land, a people with determined faith who were not afraid of hard work or easily discouraged. It is the history of the *Union Church*, a unique form of church cooperation in eighteenth-century America that started 250 years ago.

EUROPEAN BEGINNINGS

The Reformation was strongly supported by peasants in Germany and Switzerland. The people were glad to break away from the Roman Catholic hierarchy and follow men like Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, and other workers for religious freedom. Martin Luther led the way with his writings on the Doctrine of Grace and the Doctrine of the Sacraments. Luther convinced many people to open their minds to new possibilities in their relationship with God as revealed in scripture. His confessional statements maintain a prominent place within all Protestant groups today.

Ulrich Zwingli, sometimes called the “Father of the Reformed Church,” worked diligently for church reform in Switzerland. If Luther and Zwingli could have agreed on the divine aspects of Holy Communion, separate church bodies would not have developed around their teachings. Luther maintained that Christ’s body and blood existed in, with, and under the elements of the bread and wine. Zwingli and others taught the symbolic presence in these elements. At a conference in Marburg in 1529, fifteen articles were discussed and Luther and Zwingli agreed on fourteen and a half of them. They differed only on the part of the fifteenth article concerning the real presence: “And although at present we can not agree whether the true body and the true blood of Christ be corporeally present in the bread and wine, yet each party is to show to the other Christian love, as far as conscience permits, and both parties should fervently pray to Almighty God that by his Spirit he may strengthen us in the true understanding. Amen.”(2) Zwingli was prepared to accept this statement and extended his hand to Luther as evidence of his willingness to be in fellowship. Luther, however, refused to acknowledge the gesture.

A calming and mediating influence on both Luther and Zwingli came through Philip Melancthon, renowned Greek scholar, native of the Palatinate, counselor in reorganizing the University at Heidelberg, and good friend of Luther. Melancthon worked to achieve church union. Although Luther did not always agree with Melancthon’s theology, the two men remained fast friends and defended each other’s positions. Melancthon, more than any other, opened the way for Reformed believers to be respected in Germany. Melancthon was consulted by Frederick III when he became Elector of the Palatinate in 1559. Melancthon counseled peace, moderation, and biblical simplicity.

Eventually Frederick aligned himself with the Reformed movement and called Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus to Heidelberg to prepare an evangelical catechism. The Heidelberg Catechism, which became the primary confession of the Reformed Church, was the result of their work.

Frederick III died in 1576 and was succeeded by Louis VI, who introduced the Lutheran Creed to the Palatinate. Ursinus and 600 Reformed ministers and teachers were deposed and exiled from Heidelberg. In the year that Ursinus died, 1583, John Casimir, brother of Louis VI, second son of Frederick III, succeeded to the Electorate. He was in agreement with the tenets of the Reformed Church and recalled the exiled ministers to reestablish the Reformed Church in the Palatinate.(3)

During the Thirty Years’ War, however, the district was taken over by Roman Catholics from Spain and Bavaria. Protestants suffered greatly. Although the Reformed faith was again established when the war ended, the people were so impoverished that they were unable to keep up their church and school properties. The properties fell into the hands of Jesuits who had been sent to the Palatinate to regain control for the Church in Rome. When the last Electorate favorable to the Reformed Church died in 1685, the Palatinate fell into the hands of the Roman Catholics of the House of Neuburg.

The years that followed were difficult for both Lutheran and Reformed people. In some cases the loss of buildings to the Roman Catholics made it necessary for Lutheran congregations and Reformed congregations to share facilities. These were the first union churches, although in most cases no formal written agreements were executed. Such arrangements were called *Simultankirchen*, and they opened the way for further development in America.(4)

THE EXODUS

By the early 1700s the people of the Palatinate were ready for a change. There was no stability in the economy, in the rulers, in the religion, or even in the weather. The winter of 1708-9 was so severe it was reported that when birds landed, their feet froze to the ground. Many people suffered. Wars continued to rage. The Rhine valley was a major thoroughfare for armies moving to and from battle. The people began to leave the Palatinate at an overwhelming rate to escape from war, poverty, and religious persecution.

The Palatinate was near enough to France to be easily overrun and yet too far from Vienna, the capital of Germany, to receive aid quickly. The war of 1688-89 left the region a wasteland. King Louis XIV of France instructed his forces to “ravage the Palatinate.” His orders were effectively obeyed. Twelve hundred towns and villages went up in smoke. In 1693 he sent his army in again to complete the desolation.

Wars did not cease. Between 1701 and 1713 European powers united against France and the Palatinate became the scene of marching armies going to or from battles in Bavaria, Italy, and the Netherlands. The catechism of the Palatines, published in London in 1709, reported that Marshal Villars, who led a French army through the region in 1707, “reduced the Palatinate to a perfect wilderness, not leaving the poor Reformed so much as a house to hide their heads in or hardly clothes to cover their nakedness.”(5) War became a powerful inducement for the people to leave their homeland.

War also led to poverty. The wars fought in the early 1700s caused great poverty because the armies had to live off the country through which they passed. The failure of crops and the harshness of the winter, plus destruction by soldiers, left the people very poor. When they appealed to the Electorate, there was little relief. The people could not go on, so they chose to leave and seek a new life in the New World.

Finally, people left because of religion. Because each Elector had the power to decree what confession would become that of the population, the religion of the region changed four times in as many changes of Electorates. The people were expected to accept the religion of the prince. Those who refused could either leave their native land or conform to the decrees of the state. French rulers, being Catholic, oppressed Protestants as heretics and took away their churches. Such persecution contributed greatly to the dissatisfaction of the people.

TO AMERICA

When people left the region of the Rhine, they went first to Holland and then to England. They began moving into London in early May 1709, and by the end of June many thousands were crowding limited facilities. They were without funds or personal belongings, beyond what they could wear or carry. At first they were encouraged by reports that an earlier group of Palatines, led by the Rev. Joshua Kocherthal, a Lutheran minister, had been aided by the queen in obtaining transportation to New York for 41 persons-26 Reformed and 15 Lutheran. But the people arrived in London in such great numbers soon thereafter that the city could scarcely handle them. A committee was set up to try to care for the needs of these people and help determine what to do with them. Collections were taken, but the funds were insufficient to cover the cost of care. The committee decided that the people had to be resettled, some to Ireland, others to the New World. Three thousand were sent to New York, where they were expected to produce naval stores for

the government. They landed in the summer of 1710.

In New York, far removed from their homeland, Lutheran and Reformed Christians found that there were so few in number of either religious persuasion that there was no need for separate church buildings. One building would suffice. Besides, they had been sharing worship facilities in the Palatinate since the Roman Catholics took away some of their buildings.

The first Union Church was located in what was called Rhinebeck, Dutchess County. The pastor who had led them from England, the Rev. Joshua Kocherthal, ministered to the Lutheran people and the Rev. John Frederick Hager (of whom little is known) cared for the Reformed group, which later affiliated with the Dutch Reformed Church. A church building was erected and was owned and maintained jointly by the two groups. In 1729 the Lutheran congregation sold their interest in this property to the Reformed congregation in amicable fashion.

Although the church at Rhinebeck is the first Union Church for which definite records have been maintained, it is possible that an earlier church may have been established by these same two pastors at West Camp or Newtown, in Catskill County. William Hill and Frank Blanchard, writing in the *Tercentenary Studies*, 1928, *Reformed Church in America* (pp.336ff.), state that the people arrived at West Camp in October 1710 and

here they built log houses for protection from the winter's cold. They had come from a land of school houses and churches; to them these were necessities, and in three months a school house and a log church had been built.... Newtown was what is now West Camp. It was here the church was built and for eight years Rev. Joshua von Kocherthal, a Lutheran, and Rev. John Frederick Hager, a Reformed (at East Camp), worked together in harmony.

Those who settled in New York were soon discouraged. A dispute arose over land rights, and although the people contested the claims of the government to lands that had been purchased from the Indians, they eventually had to relinquish possession. There appeared to be no other choice but to move to Pennsylvania. William Penn had received from Charles II of England territory in the New World that extended west of the Delaware River between New York and Maryland. This territory was given in payment of a debt that Charles II owed to Penn's father. The territory was known as Pennsylvania (Penn's Woods), and it became a haven for thousands who sought to begin a new life in the New World. Soon a group consisting of thirty-three families left New York, in the spring of 1723. In care of an Indian guide they came to the headwaters of the north branch of the Susquehanna River. They traveled down the Susquehanna to the mouth of the Swatara Creek and up the creek until they reached Tulpehocken, near Lebanon. They wrote to their friends who remained in New York about their journey and the place they had found. Others followed soon after.(6)

Before the people who first went to New York reached Pennsylvania, others from the Palatinate had already started homes and churches there. They arrived in Philadelphia and moved into the surrounding communities to begin their new life. The majority of Pennsylvania immigrants had not come to carry out a religious life according to peculiar tenets or to organize themselves into separatistic religious communities. Rather, they merged themselves into the common life of the province and retained their old membership in Lutheran and Reformed churches.(7) They had a need, however, to be together. This need grew out of loneliness, poverty, language, and protection. Consequently, these German immigrants formed German communities wherever they settled. And wherever there was a community, there was also a church.

Not all churches were established as *Union Churches*. The first Reformed Church officially organized came into being when Holy Communion was celebrated on October 15, 1725, at Falkner Swamp in the Perkiomen valley. A congregation had gathered there before this date, but there was no ordained pastor available for the conduct of the sacrament. John Philip Boehm, a schoolmaster employed by the families to teach the children, agreed to act as Reader in leading religious services. He was so well liked that the leaders prevailed on him to administer the sacrament. Reluctantly, realizing his unordained status, he agreed. He was later ordained and became effective as a church organizer for German Reformed people throughout the territory.

WHAT IS THE UNION CHURCH?

Simply stated, a Union Church occurs when two or more congregations of differing denominations agree to use the same facilities. The statement, however, is the only simple thing about such an organization. In some communities as many as four congregations use the same facilities according to some formal schedule. Most Union Churches, however, have been (and are now) Lutheran and Reformed (United Church of Christ).

In the early pioneer days of settling on the land, the number of Lutheran or Reformed people in any given community was not large. There was a tremendous reliance on neighbors. People helped one another to build houses, clear land, plant crops, harvest, mend, repair, and start schools and churches. German people placed a high priority on education. Usually the first community structure erected in a new settlement was a school building, which could also be used for worship. Lutheran and Reformed people gave time and energy to the construction. The buildings were simple, usually made of logs, with a dirt floor. In some cases a structure was primarily built as a church and secondarily used as a school. Cooperation was a pattern of life and did not end when the building was finished.

These Christians who had suffered so much in the homeland and who looked to the future in this new place with much confidence believed that they could live together in harmony, not only as neighbors, but also as companions in worship. The use of the same facilities was not a new experience for them. They had accomplished this, in some cases, in Germany in the *Simultankirchen*. In America the need and the opportunity again opened the way for them to live a faith embracing visual cooperation.

Land on which church structures were erected was usually either given by one of the member families or purchased through the contributions of all members. In most circumstances the deed would be recorded in the name of both (sometimes more) congregations. Some records, however, indicate that only one congregation owned the property and permitted the other congregation to have equal use. Early deeds often describe the Reformed congregation as part of the "German Presbyterian Church." This referred to the form of government rather than to their confession of faith.

Although a deed was important as a legal instrument denoting ownership, the most important agreement had to do with the care, maintenance, and use of the facilities. Sometimes there was nothing more than a handshake on a verbal agreement reached by leading laypersons from each congregation. As time went on, however, those involved in Union Churches learned the value of written Articles of Agreement that detailed schedules of use by various organizations, as well as the congregations, assigned oversight responsibilities, described times and methods of payment

of utilities and maintenance costs, and established procedures for dealing with other practical matters. Occasionally the Articles of Agreement translated into a Union Constitution requiring joint congregational meetings to decide such matters as giving the pastor an increase in salary. This meant that, in such churches, if the Lutheran congregation wanted to give its pastor an increase in salary, the Reformed congregation had to vote on the matter as well, even though it made no contribution to the payment of that salary.

The care, maintenance, and use of facilities in a church are generally entrusted to a group of trustees. In a Union Church this group comprises an equal number of persons elected by the respective congregations (usually three each). The trustees are responsible for inspecting the facilities, recommending maintenance care or repairs, and, when approved, overseeing their accomplishment. Recommendations are made to the Joint Council and Consistory for approval. The Council is the official board of the Lutheran congregations. The Consistory serves the same function in the United Church of Christ in Pennsylvania. If the recommendation is of major significance with a high price tag, the Joint Council and Consistory must bring it to the respective congregations for approval and funding.

Generally speaking, Union Churches did not jointly own parsonages (these were provided by each congregation or denominational parish); however, they did own the homes for the sextons. Such facilities were usually located near the Union Church and the sexton had free use of a home as compensation for keeping the church and grounds clean. More often than not, the grounds included the Union Cemetery, an important facility for the early churches. Until recently those who wanted to bury a loved one in a church cemetery were not charged. The care of such places was considered part of a church's ministry. As the cemeteries grew larger and care and maintenance became costlier, charges for burial plots or annual maintenance fees were instituted.

Union Churches were prominent in Pennsylvania and nearby states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They responded to housing patterns, the language spoken by the residents, the dominant confessions of faith, and the mode of transportation. Although the locations of some churches appear to us today as haphazard, unplanned, and ineffectual, it was not so for the settlers. The church needed to be close enough to the homes of the parishioners so that it would not take all day to get there by horse and buggy or by walking. The church was the major place for social gathering, as well as for worship. People came early and visited before and after the worship experience. Location was an important consideration.

At one time there were more than 500 Union Churches in existence. Most of these were in Pennsylvania, but there were also Union Churches in New York, Ohio, West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. Wherever the German Lutheran and Reformed people migrated, they founded Union Churches. In the mid-1980s Union Churches still numbered 103; however, there is no record of any Union Church being established after 1913.

REASONS FOR ESTABLISHING UNION CHURCHES

Although there is no single reason for the establishment of Union Churches, certain definite factors prevail. For instance, both the Lutheran and the Reformed settlers placed great emphasis on an educated ministry. They also maintained high regard for the ecclesiastical process leading to ordination. Because few missionary pastors accompanied the early settlers, those who did divided their time among churches in several communities. Marriages were performed, Holy

Communion administered, and baptisms accomplished only when the pastor could make the circuit of the congregations for which responsibility was carried. Sometimes months passed before an ordained person was available. Because both the Lutheran and the Reformed congregations faced this difficulty, they saw no need for having two separate buildings. By sharing facilities they could also share pastors. If the Lutheran pastor could be there once each month and the Reformed pastor once each month, the people could take advantage of two worship experiences in the month. This would not have been so easy if they had been separate.

Another reason for the Union Church was economic. German immigrants were poor. They had given up home, property, and family to come to the New World. Many of them had indentured themselves to sea captains, landowners, business concerns, for passage to America. For many it took two, four, or even six years to repay the debt. There was little left to provide a home and support a church. One building housing two congregations was cheaper than one congregation having to bear the full cost.

A third reason for the Union Church was language and socialization. Having come from the same regions in Germany and settled in the same regions in America, there was a closeness among these people that went beyond religion. Differences that are prominent among many religious groups today were not so important to the early settlers. The German language contributed to their community spirit and aided in their socialization. Church was the gathering place for many social events. Inter-marriage was common between the two groups. Occasionally a Reformed person who married a Lutheran changed denominational affiliation, but usually the uniting couple felt no need for such a change. Traditions started quickly and endured a long time in Union Churches. For example, a girl who was born to a mixed marriage usually became a member of the congregation to which her mother belonged. Likewise, boys followed in the footsteps of their fathers.

In the eighteenth century, denominational consciousness was the exception rather than the rule in many places. In 1752 there was one Lutheran church and one Reformed church in Reading, Pennsylvania, but in the remainder of Berks County there were fifteen Union Churches and no separate Lutheran or Reformed churches.(8) Most congregations found it necessary to share a pastor with another congregation. The shortage of pastors and the poverty of the people meant that Lutheran and Reformed pastors served the same circuit of Union congregations consisting of from two to eight churches.

Furthermore, the church provided important opportunities to gather the community. Sunday was a day to rest from one's labors. It was a time to meet friends, discuss the events of the past week, and plan new events or solve problems that might arise in the future. People arrived at the church long before the time for services and stayed long after the services were over. Young boys and girls met and established relationships that sometimes resulted in marriage. The business of the community was conducted and decisions of charity as well as business were made. The Union Church was not only a place for worship, but also a forum for community decision making.

REASONS WHY UNION CHURCHES DID NOT LAST

The oldest continuing Union Church in existence today is the Old Goshenhoppen Church in Woxall, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Early records indicate that the Reformed congregation came into being in 1727, and a Lutheran congregation started three years later. The first

house of worship was a log structure completed in 1732. It was a Gemeinhaus, used as a schoolhouse, a place of worship, and quarters for the schoolmaster. The records state that in 1737 thirty-eight and one quarter acres of church land were purchased in the name of both congregations. The deed was recorded on January 12, 1738. A large stone church building was erected in 1744. The present church was built in 1858. When the church was built it had two front doors, and by tradition, one door was used by the Lutherans to enter the sanctuary and the other was used by the Reformed congregation. This was not an unusual arrangement in Union Churches.

Even though there was (and still is in some places) a great affinity for the Union Church, the Union relationship did not always work. In some cases the creation of the Union relationship was convenient for a while but ended when expansion became necessary. Expansion was difficult in the Union relationship. Furthermore, other factors brought about dissolution of Union Churches: for example, community growth, the availability of more pastors, better economic conditions, greater emphasis on theology, Christian education expectations, dissatisfaction with lack of control of facility use, and confused identity in the community.

At the beginning, German communities were small and congregations had few members. No strain or demand was placed by the population on the Union Church to effect a change in the relationship. As the population grew, however, Union Churches discovered that their buildings were no longer adequate. Some churches evaluated their situation and ended the Union relationship, deciding to have two church buildings instead of one. In such cases one congregation usually purchased the equity in the Union property owned by the other congregation. The selling congregation erected a new church building. Often that congregation located the new church adjacent to, across the road from, or near the old Union Church building. Frequently the architecture of the new structure resembled the old building.

Along with community growth came population mobility. If a family moved from a home area that had no Union Church to an area in which there was a Union Church, they hesitated to join that kind of church, especially if the hour of worship changed weekly. However, when members of a Union Church moved to other communities, they had no difficulty uniting with a congregation that was unattached to another in a Union relationship.

Community growth and population mobility reached a high point after World War II. People who had gone to war or served the country in defense work began settling down in communities that were far removed from their hometowns. New churches were built in the new communities, and they were not Union. Union Churches, some of which were caught on the fringes of rapid population growth, found it necessary to make adjustments and even to dissolve the Union relationship altogether.

The shortage of pastors in the early years had helped to bring about the Union Church. When ecclesiastical bodies opened colleges and seminaries to train ministerial leaders, making more pastors available to congregations, Union Churches no longer seemed necessary. Change came slowly, however. Early missionary pastors founded and built many churches, including many Union Churches. With the increased number of pastors, existing pastors served fewer congregations and provided more worship experiences for each congregation. Yet as time went on, the availability of more pastors actually led to decisions to separate Union Churches.

The availability of more pastors also opened up theological questions that had been dormant in many Union Churches for years. The new pastors had never experienced a Union Church. They received no special training in their seminaries to help them understand the peculiarities of a Un-

ion Church. Some clergy began to stress denominational theology and compared one theology with the other, implying that one was more accurate or better. Laypersons who had been existing in harmony in Union Churches for years without fear of theological inappropriateness began thinking differently about their heritage and questioned the advisability of continuing in a Union relationship. Some pastors pressed hard for Union dissolution because they did not see any denominational advantage in the relationship. They were not enamored with ecumenical possibilities, although in some instances the pastors in Union Churches developed close working friendships that enhanced local ministries and became models of ecumenical accomplishment.

All this created confusion as to the true identity of Union congregations. What were these churches? Were they Lutheran? United Church of Christ? Were the loyalties of people situated in Union relationships sustained at the expense of denominational loyalties? Even denominational leaders raised questions and encouraged congregations to consider separation.

As mentioned earlier, German people placed great emphasis on education. The parochial school was as much a part of a pioneer settlement as the church. There, children were taught the basics in education: reading, writing, and arithmetic. They were also instructed in the Bible and the Confessions of Faith. The church and school were important and cared for in the community.

The Sunday school was born in the late eighteenth century when a greathearted printer in Gloucester, England, assembled a few poor children in the front room of a house for instruction on Sunday. No one could possibly have foreseen that from this friendly gesture would spring a worldwide Sunday school movement. However, Sunday schools were a mixed blessing in Union Churches. The people considered them competitive with parochial schools already in operation. Pastors were not wholeheartedly supportive of the Sunday school either, partly because it was basically a lay movement. Yet the Sunday school thrived and grew at a phenomenal pace. It eventually became part of every church's program. In Union Churches, however, the Sunday school created a problem.

It must be remembered that each congregation in the Union relationship conducted its own worship service, maintained its own pastor, and recruited its own members. This did not mean that the people ignored each other's worship experience. On the contrary, many Lutherans attended Reformed services and vice versa. When the Sunday school movement finally caught on in Union Churches, it became fully Union in every respect but functioned like a third congregation.

Sunday schools were lay oriented and lay operated. People from both congregations gladly participated. Teachers were selected on their teaching abilities, not on the basis of the congregation to which they belonged. The Sunday school was organized separate from either congregation. It elected its own officers and teachers, maintained its own records, collected and expended its own funds. In many Union Churches the Sunday school contributed as much as one third of the operating expenses for the facilities. There have been (and still are) occasions when the members of a Sunday school controlled votes about remodeling facilities or changing worship and education schedules.

SCHEDULING

The schedules required for efficient use of Union Church facilities were (and are) difficult to manage. Consider the schedules of three Union Churches located within ten miles of one another.

The schedule of St. Paul (Dubs) Union Church (Hanover, Pennsylvania) is on an alternating basis week by week. The Lutheran congregation meets for worship at 8:00 a.m. on one Sunday. The Sunday school meets at 9:00 AM. The United Church of Christ congregation meets at 10:15 a.m.. The next Sunday the hours of worship are reversed; Sunday school does not change. Union services of worship are planned for midweek Lenten services, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter dawn, and Easter morning. The pastors take turns conducting these services on alternate weeks during Lent and on alternate years for the others.

The St. Jacobs Union Church (Broadbecks, Pennsylvania) follows another pattern. Both congregations had been yoked with other Lutheran and UCC congregations in other Union arrangements. When the congregations in that church decided to merge, the two St. Jacobs congregations called new pastors of their own. Each pastor is available to conduct a denominational worship service each Sunday, but the congregations have chosen to retain the every-other-Sunday schedule. Each congregation worships every other week at 10:15 a.m. whereas the Sunday school meets weekly at 9:00 a.m. On this schedule each pastor is responsible for preaching twenty-six Sundays a year, minus time away for vacation. Although few parishioners attend the services of the other denomination, there are Union services for World Day of Prayer, Lent, Holy Week, and Christmas Eve. The pastors alternate in leading such worship.

The Bethlehem (Steltz) Union Church (Glenn Rock, Pennsylvania) follows a still different arrangement. It is characterized by “shared ministry.” This means that both congregations are served by the same pastor and the congregations worship together as one. At present the pastor is affiliated with the Lutheran Church but has dual standing in the United Church of Christ. Worship services are conducted at 10:15 a.m. and the Sunday school, which is also Union, meets at 9:00 a.m.

In the shared ministry model (there are five examples of such models in Pennsylvania), congregations do not change every other week, nor do the pastors change every other week. However, they do change hymnbooks and the order of worship. The Lutherans have one kind of benevolence envelope and the UCCs have another. Benevolences are kept separate and the programs of each denomination are supported. Although each congregation has its own official board that meets monthly, there is a joint board that meets as required to make decisions about property and program.

It has been traditional in Union Churches to use nondenominational Christian education literature, such as David C. Cook publications. Other programs use UCC literature for some ages and Lutheran literature for other ages. Some schools alternate the use of denominational literature on a three-year cycle.

There are a wide variety of schedules among Union Churches and no congregation can completely control the use of the facilities. Churches usually settle on a plan that divides the time for meetings, special events, weddings, and so on as equally as possible. For example, both congregations use the facility on Sunday, giving the Lutherans exclusive use on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and the UCC congregation exclusive use on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Funerals take priority over other events. Frustration with schedules and the need on the part of some to control all activities have led to the dissolution of many Union Churches.

THE COMMISSION ON THE WELFARE OF THE UNION CHURCH

Most Union Churches that end their cooperative relationships do so without difficulty. Sometimes, however, there are problems. The people may have been able to agree that separate organizations and church facilities would be desirable, but they cannot agree on how this can be achieved. The story is told of a Union Church in 1858 that agreed to dissolution. The Council and Consistory could not agree on how much the church structure was worth. In the final analysis they demolished the building and the members gathered at the site to chip the mortar off the bricks and divide them between the two congregations. The Lutheran congregation used their bricks to rebuild on the old site. The Reformed (UCC) congregation took their bricks a mile down the road and built a new church.

Over the years pastors and denominational officials questioned the advisability of having Union Churches. In 1948 Dr. Paul J. Hoh, president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, charged a group of clergy to grapple with this situation. As a consequence, an open meeting of Lutheran and Reformed pastors and laypersons was held at Zion Union Church (The Red Church), near Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania, November 4, 1948. Some people felt that the Union Church was the best living example of local ecumenicity and others felt that what the Union Church needed most was to be “torn asunder regardless of consequences.” (9)

After the heat of the “battle of the Red Church” subsided, a meeting was held in Reading, Pennsylvania, on November 23, 1948, to evaluate what had happened. Out of the pros and cons, discouragements and promises, a new organization emerged: the Commission on the Welfare of the Union Church. Five representatives were appointed from among the Reformed (Evangelical and Reformed) synods in Eastern Pennsylvania and an equal number from the Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania. In 1950 the Central Pennsylvania Synod of the Lutheran Church entered the Commission.

The intent of the Commission was to search for better ways to negotiate Union Church difficulties, provide an arena for discussing Union Church problems between representatives of each communion, and offer guidance to Union Church pastors and congregations for the enhancement of local ministries. The Commission drafted Proposed Policy statements on the Union Church that were submitted to the respective denominational synods for consideration. Two drafts of such proposals were rejected by several of the synods. The third draft, completed in 1957, was accepted and recommended to the churches. This policy, although not enforceable in all congregations, proved invaluable among Union congregations. It also helped Union congregations gain a new appreciation of their history. It suggested, among other things, that before any Union Church undertook major construction programs, representatives of the denominational offices should be called into the discussion.

The Commission caused the Lutheran and the Reformed synods to appoint consultants for Union Church negotiations. Two persons from each communion were appointed.

Close working relationships developed between these individuals and lasting friendships were made. The consultants developed procedures for planned change that they recommended to each Union situation. The process worked well. In fact, the Commission on the Welfare of the Union Church proved to be so effective that consultants were used far more than originally expected.

During the 1960s and early in the 1970s churches felt pressure from rapidly changing population and rising economic standards. Union Churches made adjustments that brought forth new and stronger congregations, more effective programs, and greater harmony among members. Many Union Churches discontinued the shared use of property and now have their own church facili-

ties. Some Union Churches merged to form one congregation affiliated with one denomination. Still others agreed to share the services of one pastor and meet as one congregation. Many Union Churches, however, continue to share buildings, programs, and leadership, and they see no reason to stop. Not all these churches are small, weak congregations without potential for growth. In the largest Union Church, in Neffs, Pennsylvania, both the Lutheran and the UCC congregations have more than 1,200 members.

Although the Commission on the Welfare of the Union Church no longer meets, its influence is felt throughout the area where Union Churches are located. Consultants trained to guide the people through discussions to responsible decision making are still available.

AN ECUMENICAL LEGACY

The Union Church is a unique local expression of ecumenical cooperation in America. In a Union Church early pioneers saw no divided loyalties when they shared a church building with more than one congregation. They saw no disrespect for a particular denominational creed when they participated in worship conducted by a pastor of a denomination different from their own. They saw no confusion of theological thought when they attended church school classes in a Union Sunday school. These mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers knew how to make allowances and adjustments.

Those who began the Union Church felt that it was enough to agree on property, its ownership and its use. How different history might have been if they had considered agreements on the mission of the church. National denominational leaders who strive for greater ecumenical expression today would do well to reconsider history. This ecumenical movement at the grassroots level started with all the ingredients it takes to work together in harmony. The Union Church had the potential for more than it ever achieved; it was just ahead of its time.

Notes:

1. The COCU Consensus: In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting. (Princeton, NJ: COCU, 1985), p. 7.
2. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), vol. 1, p. 212.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 533ff.
4. Max Gobel, *Beschichte des Christlichen Lebens*, vol. 1, pp. 36ff.
5. James I. Good, *History of the Reformed Church in the United States, 1725-1792* (Reading, PA: Daniel Miller Pub., 1899), p. 32.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
7. Theodore E. Schmauk, *The Lutheran Church in Pennsylvania, (1638-1800): An Address*, Pennsylvania German Society Proceedings And Addresses, at Easton, PA, Oct. 26, 1900, vol. 11, p. 3.
8. Martin L. Montgomery, *School History of Berks County* (Philadelphia: J. B. Rodgers Printing, 1889), p. 63.

9. *A History of the Commission on the Welfare of the Union Church*, 1961, p. 4.