



SHINE, GOD'S PEOPLE OF ALL RACES, CULTURES, AND NATIONS

We are a multiracial and multicultural church

LIGHT A CANDLE

God of all peoples,

You are our aloha, our wholeness, our love,
our peace.

You call us into your Church to speak many languages
in one voice:

Adentro de tú Spiritu Santo nos juntamos.

(Through your Holy Spirit we are gathered.)

Wir sind gesegnet durch den Heiligen Geist.

(Through your Holy Spirit we are blessed.)

Ua tasi i tatou e ala i Lou Agaga Paia.

(Through your Holy Spirit we become one.)



Hear our praise to you — united in the one language of the heart.

Lift our hearts into your shining love.

Release our fears. Transform our timidity.

Make us into people of your extravagant hospitality.

Open our arms.

Expand our hopes toward your vision for tomorrow.

God of all peoples,

You are our aloha, our wholeness, our love, our peace.

In Christ, we are sisters and brothers.

Gloria a Dios!

Ho'omaikalia hoi ke Akua!

Salamat sa Diyos!

Thanks be to God! Amen.

DURING A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENCE, prayerfully consider the following questions. If possible, share responses with others.

- » What do you know about your ancestors' homeland?
- » Were they immigrants? Were they forced to come here against their will? Have they lived in this country longer than anyone can recall?
- » What languages did they speak and which do they currently speak?
- » What do you know about their religious tradition? Were they Christians or from another faith?

Reflect on your experiences in the United Church of Christ when you encountered UCC members from different racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds.

- » What did you discover about your own faith through these encounters?
- » What values and beliefs do you share in common?
- » What values and beliefs have been challenged or have changed?
- » How have you grown spiritually?

A SHINING MOMENT

Imagine yourself in a room filled with people of different races and cultures. Imagine those gathered filled with God's Spirit — ready to worship, ready to celebrate. In May 1998, in Rosemont, Illinois, at an event called "Pentecost '98," the UCC celebrated a national *encuentro* (encounter) on becoming a multiracial and multicultural church. Representative leaders from local UCC churches, associations, conferences, seminaries, and national agencies came together. They shared stories and gifts; developed and supported leadership; and discerned future directions for the multiracial and multicultural church in the twenty-first century. It was an extraordinary gathering of God's people, rich in worship and witness. We gathered to discover one another anew in Jesus Christ!



Members of United Church of Chapel Hill (N.C.)

The most memorable moment happened in worship. Together, all participants prayed the prayer of Jesus, the Lord's Prayer, in their own native language and tradition. As each prayed, hearts filled with awe. The gathering experienced Pentecost, a UCC Pentecost, happening right in their midst. All felt the power of the Holy Spirit descending. As Pentecost is described in Acts 2:1, those present were not only "in one place," but "of one accord" (Philippians 2:1, 2). Tongues were uttered, understanding deepened, and commitment crystallized.

Pentecost '98 remains a wonderful model for all local churches, associations, and conferences — indeed, for the whole of the United Church of Christ. From its inception, through its planning and implementation, Pentecost '98 embodied the Spirit and Scripture. We lived who we are: the Church of Jesus Christ in its fullness and brilliance, a church of the extravagant welcome.

OUR TRAVEL IN THE LIGHT

When the founding General Synod of the United Church of Christ met fifty years ago, the overwhelming majority of those present were men from a European heritage. While it did not look diverse, there was a rich diversity of worship

and theological traditions in that merger of the Congregational Christian and Evangelical and Reformed churches. Yet the Synod reflected little racial or even gender diversity. A handful of the voting delegates might have been African American or Native Hawaiʻian or from another racial or ethnic community. A few were women, also from the European heritage. Yet since then, God has been working consistently with the UCC.

Today, a rich fabric of diversity has been added to our common life which can be seen, as well as felt and heard. Many more worship and theological traditions have enriched those of European heritage. Congregations have formed and joined the UCC among Filipino, Samoan, Indian, Hispanic and new immigrant communities. Each offer vital and distinctive ministries of worship, prayer, and justice.

On any given Sunday morning, more than two dozen languages are used to worship God in our churches. Hymns from the Pacific Rim and Africa are enthusiastically sung. Church potluck meals feature chicken pot pies, tortillas, curries, fried chicken, and tempura set around a welcome table, which is expanding every day. Add a new leaf to the table—more guests are here!

Over the years, changes took place within the UCC that paralleled changes in society. Such change was empowered by the civil rights movement, the emergence of liberation theologies from developing countries, the feminist movement, and the gay and lesbian movement. God worked among us through these voices.

Many members from distinct communities and congregations found solidarity, identity, and power within a predominantly European American denomination. Some of those same members challenged the church to make good on its ministry of justice and love. Significant voices were heard throughout the UCC in the creation of organizations as the United Black Christians; Ministers for Racial, Social and Economic Justice; the Council for Hispanic Ministries; the Council for American Indian Ministries; the Pacific Islander and Asian American Ministries; and the

Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries.

In 1993, the nineteenth General Synod adopted the pronouncement titled “Becoming a Multiracial and Multicultural Church.” The pronouncement called on the UCC “in all its settings to be a true multiracial and multicultural church.” It reminds us of our vision as a denomination, “that they may all be one,” and names some of the im-

**“I will pour out my Spirit
upon all flesh.”**

— Acts 2:17

pediments to reaching that vision. The pronouncement identifies the sins of racism, discrimination, and bigotry. It also acknowledges changing economic, cultural, and social realities that impact the church as well as the world. The mission stated in the pronouncement reflects the challenge: “A multiracial and multicultural church is called to participate in God’s mission of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God through Christ in all communities with all peoples in all places.”¹

Most importantly, what compels us to be multiracial and multicultural in the United Church of Christ is not changing population demographics, but rather biblical and theological imperatives. It is a faithful response to God, Creator of all people. The Spirit and the Word of God — breath and text — call us to be wholly who we are and who we need to be.

SHINE INTO THE FUTURE

The question most commonly asked about being a multiracial and multicultural church is, “How can we be multiracial and multicultural if we are all white and the community around us is all white?” Or, “How can we be





“FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE UCC UNTIL NOW, we have welcomed the gifts of new immigrants and people of many cultures and languages. We are blessed by new members and new congregations from countries and churches where we have partnerships around the world. We are eager to become an even more multiracial and multicultural church!”

— *Cally Rogers-Witte, executive minister, UCC Wider Church Ministries*

multiracial and multicultural if we are all Hispanic?” How can we become multiracial or multicultural if we and our community are primarily of one racial or ethnic community?

Being committed to being a multiracial and multicultural church is a journey of ongoing witness and faith. We don't invent being diverse; we are already diverse, global, beautiful, and manifold. We expand our minds, hearts, and experiences by seeking to be in solidarity with all God's people. We desire a holy *encuentro* (encounter) with others. This is our true calling as a people, a world, and a church. But we have to be bold to become multiracial and multicultural. We have to “welcome the world.” Such a welcome is the work of worshiping, the work of learning, the work of trusting, the work of trying, and the work of removing obstacles.

Prayerfully reflect on these questions:

- » What kinds of diversity are present within your own congregation? In what way does your congregation represent many races, many cultures?

- » What are specific ways your congregation works toward overcoming racism within your community?
- » What ways does your congregation nurture a multiracial and multicultural church and world within the hearts of your children, youth, and young adults?
- » Through prayer, what is God saying to you about being a multiracial and multicultural church?

Not only is God calling your local congregation to a renewed commitment to be a multiracial and multicultural church. God is calling the United Church of Christ to deeper and deeper commitment. Let others know what you discern for our future together. Please respond to these questions at <www.ucc.org/50/questions> :

- » What are the ways that your local congregation has lived out the commitment to be a multiracial and multicultural church within your own community?
- » What hope does your congregation have for the wider UCC's future as a multiracial and multicultural church?

¹ See the pronouncement “Calling upon the United Church of Christ to Be a Multiracial and Multicultural Church” online: <www.ucc.org/justice/mrmc/synod.htm>.

This chapter was prepared by the Reverend Felix Carrion, senior pastor at Euclid Avenue Congregational United Church of Christ, Cleveland, Ohio, and the Reverend Loey Powell, minister and team leader, Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ, Cleveland. For more resources about the UCC commitment to be a multiracial and multicultural church, see <www.ucc.org/justice/mrmc> and “What Matters” at <www.uccvitality.org>.