

United Church of Christ History

The United Church of Christ traces its roots back to the movements of European Reformed Protestantism to proclaim the good news based on biblical truths led by the Spirit of God. One of the youngest American denominations, its background ties it to some of the oldest heritages in Protestantism.

The United Church of Christ, a united and uniting church, was born on June 25, 1957 when the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Churches merged. Each of these branches was the product of a previous merger. The United Church of Christ is thus 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 in 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. 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 in 1934.

The Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches shared a strong commitment under Christ to the freedom of religious expression. They also shared strong European ties, early colonial roots, and the vitality of the American frontier church. Both denominations found their authority in the bible and were more concerned with what unites Christians than with what divides them. From these roots, the United Church of Christ was founded.

The UCC and its forebears have left many marks on U.S. religious and political history. Some of the highlights include:

- 1630s – Congregationalists in New England develop methods of participatory democracy
- ~1700 – Congregationalists are among the first to take a stand against slavery
- 1773 – First published African-American poet
- 1785 – First ordained African-American pastor
- 1810 – First foreign missionary society in America
- 1846 – First integrated anti-slavery society
- 1853 – First ordained woman pastor
- 1897 – Social Gospel movement denounces economic oppression
- 1972 – First ordination of an openly gay minister

In carrying on these traditions, the United Church of Christ today is democratically governed, welcoming diversity of viewpoints and a variety of backgrounds. People of all denominations are welcomed as we seek to grow through the constructive use of the best in each tradition.

ROOTS OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

