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OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

A Paper in Submission of the Requirements for Ordination

“In the Garden: A Journey of Faith and Ministry”

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I. Spiritual Journey and Call to Ministry

A garden is a mystery. It requires tender care and cultivation, and yet ultimately its growth comes through grace and mercy. It takes a community to raise a garden, a community of encouragement, support, and love. I see my faith journey as a garden, never the same two days in a row, with growth coming through the blessings of faith community and the unexpected grace of God.

As a small child, my first experience of God was in the comfort and peace of my mother's Indiana garden and in the wonder and majesty of the seashore on Long Island, New York. Also on Long Island, living in the international community of Brookhaven National Laboratory for a year during my father's sabbatical, I developed a love for diversity and the gifts that it brings to life. I played with other children from all over the world and still remember those friendships, as well as the wonderful food we enjoyed! My family did not attend church until I was six years old and we returned to Indiana, when my mother brought my sister and me to The Federated Church of West Lafayette, which was a combination of American Baptist and Disciples of Christ. I have always heard God speaking through the music of the church, and among my earliest memories are those of sitting in worship with my mother and grandmother and hearing the hymns of the faith sung around me. Later, when I learned those hymns and could join in myself, I loved the feeling of being joined together in worship with others.

The early gardeners of my faith taught me about God's love and the importance of living in loving relationships with my neighbors. My pastor, the Rev. Dr. Gary Reif, as well as my Sunday school teachers, not only talked about this love but modeled it.

When I was twelve, with the rest of my Sunday school class I went through discipleship class, where we learned even more about what it meant to follow Jesus and to live in a Christlike manner. I knew that was how I wanted to be. When the opportunity came for baptism, I felt God's call, but also a sense of fear. Could God really be speaking to me? My fears were put to rest when I was baptized by immersion and came up out of the water, knowing that I was born into a new life in Jesus Christ.

My faith continued to grow through my church youth group. The two youth pastors, Blake Blakesley and David Grieger, helped me understand that faith could be a real, living, vital part of a person's life rather than just an intellectual dialogue with what the pastor and the Bible said. The opportunity to go on a work trip to Appalachia when I was in high school and then to a ranch for persons with disabilities when I was in college opened my eyes to the needs of people in other types of communities beyond my very privileged college town experience. Still something was gnawing at the roots of the faith I was putting down. There was a disconnect between the faith I learned at church and the scorn for religion I heard at home from my atheist father. I had questions which could not be answered, or worse still, even asked. Could science and faith both be true? Did the will of God cause evil? Did God make Jesus die such a cruel and horrible death on the cross? Why were some people not welcome at church? My mother helped me with some of these questions by giving me the book, When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Rabbi Harold Kushner. I began to develop a new understanding of God as One who suffers with us, not as a judge who metes out suffering as punishment or "character development."

My college church, University Baptist at the University of Illinois, provided many new gardeners who helped cultivate my faith. I was asked to serve as chair of the Missions and Social Concerns Committee and also taught Sunday school. I also served as a Summer Missionary in an inner-city church in Chicago through the Southern Baptist campus ministry. Twice, I served as the co-chaplain for my American Baptist co-operative house. The second time I tried to get out of it so that someone else could have the opportunity, but the other students insisted I run, and I was re-elected. In college I met my best friend and my husband Eric, who has always been supportive of me wherever my path led. I am so grateful that he has always viewed our marriage as a partnership, because he came from a background in which the man was always the head of the household. Eric has been my loving partner through the ups and downs of my journey, encouraging me and affirming my call. During all of this, I was drawn closer and closer into a relationship with the living God. I began to understand that God loved me for who I was.

When a representative from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary came to visit the church, I felt strangely drawn. I would have phrased it then as a call to seminary rather than a call to ministry, because I had never known a woman pastor, and I was confused about what the Bible seemed to be saying about the role of women in the church. In addition, one of my college church pastors was not supportive of women in ministry. But encouraged by the other pastor, Rev. Dr. Wayne Rogers, I decided to enroll. Still, I was full of doubts about whether I was really called to ministry. Just as I

worried before my baptism about whether God could work through me, now I worried about whether I had the right gifts and personality for ministry.

Eric and I graduated from the University of Illinois in May of 1989, were married in June, and moved to the seminary campus in August. My starting seminary as half of a newly-married couple was a challenge for both of us, but we struggled through it, committed to each other. My faith flourished and grew under the cultivation of both my friends and professors at seminary. I learned that it was not only acceptable but even good to ask the questions that had been nagging at me for so many years and to search for answers. One of my professors told me, "It's okay to believe what you want to believe as long as you can back it up," which was a new revelation for me. Classes on the New Testament and on women in the Bible opened my eyes to a different view of women in ministry, one which had room for me. I learned more about who Jesus was and the importance of his life and ministry here on earth and grew to love him more than ever. I also was blessed by friendships with several very gifted women in ministry, all of whom affirmed my own gifts. These friends upheld and supported me during a difficult and confusing time when my parents divorced. Meanwhile, I served as a student chaplain for two years, ministering to the needs of the seminary community in various ways. I loved seminary and the opportunity to get to know people from vastly different backgrounds.

Following seminary, I did two years of residency in Chicago-area hospitals. Here I explored my call to chaplaincy as I developed my ministry of presence--learning that I was powerless to fix the very real suffering I encountered but that I could provide a safe

place for people to express it. I tried to incarnate the presence of God as I listened and prayed with them. I was still plagued by the old doubts about whether I was really called, but I was encouraged in this ministry by supervisors and peers who affirmed my gifts. I loved listening to the stories of the people I met and learning how to walk with them through their struggles.

New growth sprang up in my garden with the birth of our first son, Gareth. My call at that time became to spend as much time at home with him as possible so that I could nurture him to the best of my ability. I sensed that God would provide an opportunity for me in ministry if and when the time was right. So instead of professional ministry, I continued working in my church on a volunteer basis, and later as interim secretary. My church was most supportive of my journey, providing me with many opportunities to serve as chair of Missions and Social Concerns, preach, and teach Sunday School for all ages. Yet I began to feel that part of my garden was not receiving the water and fertilizer it needed to thrive. I was frustrated by the lack of attention to social justice issues and the growing tension in the denomination over issues of inclusivity. There were still churches and pastors who did not accept women in ministry. I also struggled with being part of a denomination which did not accept the ministry of the gay and lesbian friends I had met in seminary and my first year of residency. It was a difficult time when it became clear to me that the denomination which nurtured me and provided my seminary education would not support the type of inclusive ministry to which I felt called or in which I wanted to raise my children. When we moved, we were blessed to find a new home at First Congregational United Church

of Christ in Naperville, Illinois. My first Sunday there I felt at home in this church and this denomination, which combines radical hospitality and celebration of diversity with willingness to dialogue with Scripture and tradition(s). I greatly value the UCC's responsiveness to new ideas and situations and commitment to its united heritage and uniting future.

In our new church, I was blessed with opportunities again to chair the Missions and Social Action committee, preach, teach, and serve on a committee which drafted a resolution, later adopted by the 2003 General Synod, putting forth "An Alternative Voice to Christian Zionism". It was a joy to feel that I was not spending all my energy fighting for what I believed in but was freed to work for it, surrounded by others who shared the same beliefs.

In 2012, my husband took a job with Health and Human Services, and our family moved to Frederick, Maryland. Once again I was blessed to find a nurturing church which shared my commitment to justice and peace in Evangelical Reformed United Church of Christ. Although I was not actively seeking a ministerial position at the time, my pastor, Rev. Dr. Barbara Kershner-Daniel, informed me of an open position as Assistant Chaplain at Homewood of Crumland Farms (now Homewood of Frederick) and suggested I apply. While I felt honored by her suggestion, my old doubts about my call began to resurface. Could God really use me to touch the lives of others with grace and love through professional ministry? After much prayer I sensed that this was the opportunity that I had believed would present itself when the time was right. The timing seemed perfect, with my younger son Trevor now ten years old and my husband

working from home two days a week. I decided to apply. It has been a joy to serve in that capacity for two years now, ministering with seniors in their graciousness, patience, and wisdom. I am privileged to hear their stories and to learn from their great faith and their own questions.

During this time of discernment, I feel there has been much new growth in my garden of faith. The residents at Homewood have partnered with me in learning to lead worship and preach on a consistent basis. I have had many opportunities to improve my skills in pastoral care, particularly in the area of prayer, where I am often told I have a gift. I have learned a great deal about ministry with persons with memory impairment and their need to be affirmed and loved just as they are. I especially appreciate the opportunity to share the joy of music with them and to see the difference it makes in their lives. I love the way in which God seems to speak to them as they sing the old hymns of the faith and how they find a voice through music which they do not seem to have in other ways. I am grateful for my supervisor who provides me with excellent guidance and for the care plan team with whom I work.

One of my greatest challenges in returning to active ministry after such a long hiatus has been reacquainting myself with the resources needed to preach effectively. It has been a long journey, in years and in theology, since my preaching class of twenty-five years ago! As I continue to practice this craft, I trust by God's grace I will continue to improve.

As a chaplain, I seek to represent not only the love of God in Christ, but the local church. Many residents have lost touch with their local churches and feel forgotten or

abandoned. As many churches chase after young people and families, sometimes neglecting the elderly who are shut in, chaplains can be an important bridge between the local church and those who can no longer attend. Part of my ministry is to encourage an understanding that because I represent the local church and am nurtured and supported by my own, residents are not alone or forgotten. This can be a challenge in a diverse setting where residents' beliefs vary widely, but good pastoral care focuses on the love of God for all people rather than on theological differences. Chaplains must keep their own faith strong because they represent the Universal Church of God as well as the local church.

I don't know who could possibly have imagined that the shy, quiet little girl who was awed by pastors and everything about the church would ever have dared to stand in a pulpit herself and preach the Word one day. When I struggle to find words to describe my call, the Lukan story of Jesus' healing the woman with the bent spine speaks for me as Jesus called the woman to him and freed her to sing the praises of the living God.

In this gospel story Jesus also lives out the five aspects of ministry for which I best find myself equipped. He **observes** the woman, bound by shame, isolation and injustice, and **companions** her as he calls her to him and brings her into the community. He **en-courages** her as he lays his hands on her and frees her from her ailment so that she is liberated to stand straight and praise God. He then **challenges** the powers that are threatened by his healing work, appealing to the tradition of the Sabbath he honors and upholds while **proclaiming** the Realm of God.

Jesus observes everyone around him, the silent and the outspoken, the poor and the wealthy, women and men, children and adults. He notices people and situations others pass by or deem unimportant. As a child, I watched, felt, and wept for the suffering I saw around me but felt powerless to address. This isolation was breached by the companionship of Christ and finally of friends who were able to accept me as I was and to help me to accept myself. As I grew, I realized that this encouraging ministry was a gift I could share with others. I learned further that healing and empowerment are often impossible without challenging whatever first created the suffering. The more the eyes of my heart were opened in observation, the more clearly I could see the powers and principalities and the structures of sin which led to so much brokenness. I began to understand Dietrich Bonhoeffer's exhortation, "We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself." And so the urge for proclamation, whether through preaching, writing, or trying to live more simply, began to grow in me as well. Regarding "call," sometimes that shy child within me still has to remind herself to "name it and claim it", in good old Baptist language, but I know that when I stand in the pulpit and feel the joy of the Gospel within me, or when I experience the grace of walking with another on his or her own pilgrimage, I am blessed to be home.

II. Theological Perspective

United Church of Christ Statement of Faith in the form of a doxology

*We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God,
and to your deeds we testify:*

I believe that faith is corporate as well as personal, so to me the use of “we” rather than “I” is a powerful statement of the unity that the UCC stands for. God is made known through the blessings we as people of faith share with one another and with the world as we offer strength and healing to one another in the name of Jesus Christ. The Trinity models this community for us as each member uses his or her own gifts in the service of the whole. God the Creator, Christ the Savior, and the Holy Spirit the Sustainer each possess unique gifts and functions, but together they are the Giver of Love that is their very being. They are made known through what we do as Christ’s hands and feet, through the beauty and awe of nature, and through personal relationship with God. For me, it is all about relationship.

You call the worlds into being, create persons in your own image, and set before each one the ways of life and death.

God, as loving Creator, is ever-present and still creating in all that is good. Although we are created in the image of God, we have the ability to choose whether or not to follow in God’s ways. We can choose to live for ourselves or to live as the household of God. We can choose to participate in structures that oppress and bind God’s people and the creation, or we can choose to break our ties with such structures and speak out for peace and justice. We are not given dominion over the earth, but stewardship over all creation. This is why I have chosen a vegetarian lifestyle, because I believe that all God’s creatures are precious in God’s sight. Coming from a family that often

emphasized guilt and shame, the reminder that we are created in God's own image is comforting to me.

You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

Sin separates us from God, one another, and the creation. It exploits and destroys for self-gain at the expense of others. God seeks always to live in relationship with God's people in ways that acknowledge the full humanity of each of us. When we live in right relationship with each other and with God, we experience the rich and full life God has meant for us to live. God in great mercy never ceases to call us to repent and to turn around, healing and strengthening us to understand our place in the universe in new ways so that we can live out of generosity, open-handedness and open-heartedness.

You judge people and nations by your righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.

Scripture is the story of the people of Israel and the early church as they struggle to understand the ways of God in a broken and hurting world. Through Scripture, though interpreted through the lenses of particular times and cultures, we hear God speaking in the words of the prophets and apostles. Yet the meaning of Scripture always has fresh interpretation; as John Robinson said, "God hath yet more light and truth to break forth out of His Holy Word." And God's light and truth continue to break forth through the words of modern-day prophets and apostles such as Gandhi, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Eleanor Roosevelt. God's light and truth can break forth through any one

of us if we are so open to it as we too seek to be God's prophets and apostles. Light and truth are found as we listen to and dialogue with one another.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, you have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.

Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh and the sole Head of the Church. For me, Jesus is the One who is the most perfect earthly manifestation of God who endured the cross out of love as he brought God's word of justice and peace to a hostile world. He listened, healed, taught, and lived among ordinary people, setting aside all worldly ambitions for the sake of the Realm of God. His death was inevitable because he challenged the oppressive ruling powers. He rose again, proclaiming that death and sin do not have the final word but that God triumphs over them, offering hope, love, and life that can never be ultimately stilled. His example inspires us; his living presence empowers us to speak and live for love, peace and justice in his name. In his compassionate, inclusive life he modeled for us the life that God would have us live. His living presence guides and infuses each of us as we seek to follow him and continually be restored to right relationship with God.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

At the first Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, empowering them to touch the hearts and minds of people from all walks of life. Today the Spirit is the Breath of God in the church and the world. We are marked with the seal of the Spirit as sisters and brothers in Christ. Our adoption into the family of God creates a covenant with one another in which none of us are more worthy or important but all of us share a commitment to love and honor each other.

You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, 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.

Together as the church we unite, remember, and re-member to celebrate the two sacraments of baptism and communion, visible signs of invisible reality. In both we acknowledge the reality of Christ's death and resurrection, of the difficult road we are called to travel and the knowledge that we are never asked to travel it alone. While the language of "servanthood" can be difficult for women and people of color, we speak it in trust that acts of service in the church are given in a spirit of mutuality and not of power and powerlessness. In covenant the United Church of Christ seeks to "further the work of Christ in this world" (Randi Jones Walker), in mutual support for one another.

Compared to the fractious and bitter divisiveness going on in other places, this irenic, united and uniting covenant gives the members of the body of Christ the freedom to

obey Christ. We are empowered, not to do as we wish individually, but to carry out the mission of the church in Christ.

You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, your presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in your realm which has no end.

God's grace and mercy are endless. Though we fall far short of perfection, we are continually renewed and strengthened to rise again each new day in our efforts to further the Realm of God. God has promised to bring all things together in heaven and on earth on that day of rejoicing which will know no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen.

May our hearts never cease in praising God and rejoicing in all that God through Jesus Christ has done for us. May it be so for us all.

III. The United Church of Christ

Article III of the Constitution of the UCC sets forth four characteristics of covenant: rights and responsibilities, collaborative decision-making, mutual honor and respect, and listening, hearing, and careful consideration. The story of the UCC is rich in covenant as well as autonomy and the interaction of these two concepts.

Considering the historical strands that make up the UCC in light of covenant and autonomy sheds a great deal of light on how the UCC came to be the diverse yet unified-in-Christ denomination it is today.

Usually UCC histories begin with the largest two traditions, the Reformed and Evangelical. But because I love the emphasis in the UCC on diversity and on giving every voice equal importance, I will begin with the smallest and most diverse of the four main traditions, the Christian churches. This tradition arose in response to the uniquely American settings of westward expansion and revivalism as different groups of Christians sought to return to the simple ways of the New Testament church. In Virginia, James O'Kelley rejected his Methodist roots to uphold the Bible as the only guide to faith, freedom for believers from creeds and confessions, and freedom of conscience. His denunciation of slavery attracted many Southern African-Americans. In Vermont, Elias Smith and Abner Jones, coming from Baptist backgrounds, renounced Calvinist views to welcome everyone to communion and assert that Christian character should be the only requirement for church membership. Barton Stone, a former Presbyterian in Kentucky, led the Cane Ridge Revival. His movement spread into the Midwest and eventually became the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The Campbells, also of Kentucky, sought to return to New Testament roots and claimed Christian unity as their polar star. One might think such independent thinkers would be suspicious of covenant, as incredibly diverse as they were, but they united through the publication of the Herald of Gospel Liberty in 1808. In 1820 they formed the "Christian Connection" and affirmed 6 basic principles: Christ, the only head of the church; the

Holy Bible, sufficient rule of faith and practice; Christian character, the only measurement for membership; the right of private judgement, interpretation of scripture, and liberty of conscience, the name “Christian” worthy for Christ’s followers; unity for all Christ’s followers in behalf of the world. They valued education and an educated clergy. Division between the South and North during the Civil War and Reconstruction alienated churches from each other but empowered black Christians and women to create and take on leadership roles that had been denied them. The Christian churches merged with the Congregational churches in 1931 to become the General Council of Congregational Churches.

The Christian churches perhaps had the most experience of any of the four traditions in uniting diverse groups, and unity has always been a priority for them. Their affirmation as Christ as the only head of the church is reflected today in the UCC’s Statement of Faith. Their rejection of creedalism was another important piece of their ability to bring many types of people together.

Covenanting with these independent-minded yet union-hearted Christian churches were the Congregationalists. They originated as the Pilgrims and Puritans who left England in protest against the Church of England’s autocratic rule. They believed themselves to be God’s elect and, as such, responsible for government. There was always tension between local church autonomy and covenant, so they developed the idea of “consociation” under the Saybrook Platform to deal with conflict. Though the Congregationalists were intolerant of dissenters, they made some efforts at reconciliation. The Cambridge Platform was intended to build bridges with

Presbyterians, and the Halfway Covenant made allowances for those who had grown up in the church but had not experienced a personal conversion. In response to religious decline, preachers like George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards helped lead the First Great Awakening, promoting mysticism and spirituality and speaking out against laxity and indifference. Hundreds of new Congregational churches began.

In the mid-1800s the Second Great Awakening emphasized salvation, perfection, and the social gospel, promoting values such as literacy and the role of women in the churches through leaders such as Horace Bushnell and social worker Jane Addams. After 200 years of existence the Congregationalists held their first gathering, the Albany Convention of 1852. The Burial Hill Declaration of 1865 laid out roles for the churches in the elevation of society, regulation of education, reform of church and society, reform of law, and spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Congregational Churches united into a denomination in 1871, as such a covenant would equip and strengthen them for ministry on the frontier. The Kansas City statement of 1913 emphasized social justice, peace, and brotherhood. The Congregational Churches bring to the United Church of Christ a zeal for social concern, education, and lively intellectual thought and debate. Their insistence on the autonomy of the individual church, stemming from those earliest days of rebellion against the Church of England, has sometimes kept churches from entering as fully into denominational life as they could, but it does provide an important check in making sure that all voices are heard.

The final two traditions grew out of two separate waves of German immigration. The first, Reformed, was made up mainly of poor serfs and farmers fleeing the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War. They settled in and around Pennsylvania. They had no educated clergy or teachers, so pastors like John Phillip Boehm and Michael Schlatter helped organize them and strengthen them against revivalism, which they perceived as threatening to their heritage and culture. The first Coetus was organized in 1744, and in 1793 the Synod of the German Reformed Church in the United States of America was created. Educational institutions developed, including what became Lancaster Seminary, where the Mercersburg movement developed. This catechetical movement emphasized education, worship, nurture, and liturgy under the leadership of John Nevins and Phillip Schaff. In 1867, the "German" was dropped from the name in an effort to assimilate more fully into American culture, resulting in the Reformed Church in America.

Although much of the tradition was a reaction against pietism and its emotional individualism, the Reformed tradition valued deep piety informed by education and the catechism. It stressed the reformation of believer, church and society; unity through history and liturgy; and the importance of being "always reformed, always reforming." Its practical and organizational approach can be seen through the proliferation of union churches in the 18th and 19th centuries. From all of this, the UCC has inherited a value of order and structure, and education of laity as well as clergy.

The Evangelical Churches grew out of the Prussian Union organized in 1817 by King Frederick Wilhelm III to forcibly unite the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in

eastern Germany. These people had endured the Napoleonic Wars as well, but were sustained by the peaceful spirit of pietism. They came mainly to the Midwest in the 1830s and 1840s, where their churches were nurtured by missionary pastors from the Basel and Barmen societies. In St. Louis in 1840 the German Evangelical Church Society of the West was founded. They covenanted in the form of the Kirchenverein, which was created to strengthen the churches against difficulties with neighboring rationalists, resulting in the Evangelical Catechism of 1847. Education became a priority with the development of institutions such as Elmhurst College and Eden Seminary. In 1866 the Kirchenverein became the Evangelical Synod of North America under the resounding motto “Christ alone! Faith alone! The Bible alone!” Scholarship, faith formation, global mission, lay leadership training, and conference meetings, became hallmarks of the synod.

With World War I, the Evangelical tradition moved away from its German roots to become more American. Having already worked with the Reformed churches in its frontier stage, it warmed to the ecumenical movement and its covenanting approach.

The Evangelical tradition, with its strong heritage of outreach to those on the margins through global and home missions like its Deaconess hospitals, has enriched the UCC’s justice ministries. It has also reinforced the ministry of women. From its beginning it has a long heritage of working with other traditions, which has helped it develop the peaceful reconciling spirit which helped it transition into the UCC. Its emphasis on piety and Scripture might be a resource we could recover today in the tradition of Brueggemann: “We take the Bible too seriously to take it literally.” The

Niebuhr brothers' theology of ethics and social concern continues to inform the UCC as well as ecumenical work today.

Many other traditions are also part of the UCC. Barbara Brown Zikmund's *Hidden Histories* tells the stories of these often-overlooked and diverse groups whose contributions are now beginning to be recognized, among them the Afro-Christian connection and the work of women as Evangelical Deaconesses. While sometimes these groups experienced paternalism and forced assimilation, they are in the process of reclaiming their voices in the UCC. It is part of covenant relationship that they are finally being heard.

Two main covenants resulted from the worldwide call for ecumenicism of the 20th century in response to two terrible world wars. In 1931 the Christian Church, with nearly one-third of its members coming from the Afro-Christian Convention, joined the Congregational Churches to form the Congregational Christian Churches. The Evangelical and Reformed Church was formed by the union of the Evangelical Synod of North America and the Reformed Church in America in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1934 after six years of negotiations.

Informal conversations about uniting the two denominations began in 1937, but it would be twenty years before union was achieved. The Basis of Union with Interpretations was approved in 1949, but a lawsuit held up the process by members of the Congregational Christian Churches who feared losing their autonomy as individual churches. Finally in 1957, the Uniting General Synod in Cleveland saw the creation of

the United Church of Christ. The Statement of Faith was approved in 1959. In 1961, the Constitution was approved.

Since its beginning in 1957, the United Church of Christ has sought to live out its call to bring God's justice and peace to a world desperately in need of them. It ordained the first openly gay minister in 1972 and worked for the freedom of the Wilmington Ten. Some of its key pioneering pronouncements include those on the status of women (1971), human sexuality (1977), the Just Peace church (1986), and becoming a multiracial, multicultural church (1993). All of these actions and pronouncements grow out of the UCC's determination to be a denomination of radical hospitality and a denomination which I love and am grateful to be a part of.