



**A Message from Our
General Minister and President
Rev. John H. Thomas**

From the time of our founding, the United Church of Christ has struggled to articulate its identity. The names of predecessor denominations identify important elements: Evangelical suggests a piety shaped by personal encounter with the Gospel. Congregational reminds us of the centrality of the local church for discipleship and mission. Reformed teaches us that church and society are subject to sin and must therefore be reshaped by the prophetic word. Christian connects us to those who cherish the simplicity of a commitment to Jesus who invites all to the Table.

Since 1957 other phrases have helped us articulate our distinctive vocation: We are a "united and uniting" church seeking renewal through the vision of Christ's prayer "that they may all be one that the world might believe." We are a "just peace" church committed to overcoming violence and oppression. We are a "multi-racial, multi-cultural church" yearning for the day when our congregations more fully reflect the vision of Pentecost. We are an "open and affirming" church where no one's baptismal identity can be denied because of his or her sexual identity. We are an "accessible" church cherishing the gifts of all regardless of physical or mental abilities. More recently we have been thinking about what it means to call ourselves "the church of the still speaking God," a church that believes God has yet more light and truth to break forth from the Word.

Each of these phrases captures an important dimension of our life together. But Paul also tells that our core identity transcends human categories. In Christ we are all children of God through faith, heirs according to God's promise. In the end identity is about belonging, and it is to Christ that we belong before any party or agenda. As we celebrate the birthday of the United Church of Christ this week, we give thanks for those distinctive gifts that mark our unique contribution to the Christian witness in the world. But even more, we give thanks that through this church we have received our inheritance with all others who are one in Jesus Christ.



GOD IS STILL SPEAKING

Welcome to the United Church of Christ

Intelligent dialogue and a strong independent streak sometimes cause the United Church of Christ (UCC) and its 1.4 million members to be called a "heady and exasperating mix." The UCC tends to be a mostly progressive denomination that unabashedly engages heart and mind. And yet, the UCC somehow manages to balance congregational autonomy with a strong commitment to unity among its 6,000 congregations—despite wide differences among many local congregations on a variety of issues.

While preserving relevant portions of heritage and history dating back to the 16th century, the UCC and its forebears have proven themselves capable of moving forward, tying faith to social justice and shaping cutting edge theology and service in an ever-changing world.

The UCC affirms the responsibility of the church in each generation and community to make faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God. It looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world. One of the UCC's distinguishing characteristics is its penchant to believe that ... God is still speaking, ... even when it puts us out there alone. History has shown that, most often, we're only alone for a while. Besides, we receive so many gifts from our ecumenical partners, being "early" seems to be one of ours.

The UCC recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.



United Church of Christ What We Believe

We believe in the triune God: Creator, resurrected Christ, the sole Head of the church, and the Holy Spirit, who guides and brings about the creative and redemptive work of God in the world.

We believe that each person is unique and valuable. It is the will of God that every person belong to a family of faith where they have a strong sense of being valued and loved.

We believe that each person is on a spiritual journey and that each of us is at a different stage of that journey.

We believe that the persistent search for God produces an authentic relationship with God, engendering love, strengthening faith, dissolving guilt, and giving life purpose and direction.

We believe that all of the baptized ‘belong body and soul to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.’ No matter who – no matter what – no matter where we are on life’s journey – notwithstanding race, gender, sexual orientation, class or creed – we all belong to God and to one worldwide community of faith. All persons baptized – past, present and future – are connected to each other and to God through the sacrament of baptism. We baptize during worship when the community is present because baptism includes the community’s promise of ‘love, support and care’ for the baptized – and we promise that we won’t take it back – no matter where your journey leads you.

We believe that all people of faith are invited to join Christ at Christ’s table for the sacrament of Communion. Just as

many grains of wheat are gathered to make one loaf of bread and many grapes are gathered to make one cup of wine, we, the many people of God, are made one in the body of Christ, the church. The breaking of bread and the pouring of wine reminds us of the costliness of Christ’s sacrifice and the discipleship to which we are all called. In the breaking of bread, we remember and celebrate Christ’s presence among us along with a ‘cloud of witnesses’ – our ancestors, family and friends who have gone before us. It is a great mystery; we claim it by faith.

We believe the UCC is called to be a united and uniting church. “That they may all be one.” (John 17:21) “In essentials–unity, in nonessentials–diversity, in all things–charity,” These UCC mottos survive because they touch core values deep within us. The UCC has no rigid formulation of doctrine or attachment to creeds or structures. Its overarching creed is love. UCC pastors and teachers are known for their commitment to excellence in theological preparation, interpretation of the scripture and justice advocacy. Even so, love and unity in the midst of our diversity are our greatest assets.

We believe that God calls us to be servants in the service of others and to be good stewards of the earth’s resources. ‘To believe is to care; to care is to do.’

We believe that the UCC is called to be a prophetic church. As in the tradition of the prophets and apostles, God calls the church to speak truth to power, liberate the oppressed, care for the poor and comfort the afflicted.

We believe in the power of peace, and work for nonviolent solutions to local, national, and international problems.

We are a people of possibility. In the UCC, members, congregations and structures have the breathing room to explore and to hear ... for after all, God is still speaking, ...