

What We Believe

We can tell you more about the United Church of Christ with the help of seven phrases from Scripture and Tradition which express our commitments.

■ *That they may all be one.* [John 17:21] This motto of the United Church of Christ reflects the spirit of unity on which it is based and points toward future efforts to heal the divisions in the body of Christ. We are a uniting church as well as a united church.

■ *In essentials unity, in non-essentials diversity, in all things charity.* The unity that we seek requires neither an uncritical acceptance of any point of view, nor rigid formulation of doctrine. It does require mutual understanding and agreement as to which aspects of the Christian faith and life are essential.

■ *The unity of the church is not of its own making.* It is a gift of God. But expressions of that unity are as diverse as there are individuals. The common thread that runs through all is love.

■ *Testimonies of faith rather than tests of faith.* Because faith can be expressed in many different ways, the United Church of Christ has no formula that is a *test* of faith. Down through the centuries, however, Christians have shared their faith with one another through creeds, confessions, catechisms and other statements of faith. Historic statements such as the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Evangelical Catechism, the Augsburg Confession, the Cambridge Platform and the Kansas City Statement of Faith are valued in our church as authentic *testimonies* of faith. In 1959, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted a **Statement of Faith** prepared especially for congregations of the United Church. Many of us use this statement as a common affirmation of faith in worship and as a basis for study.

■ *There is yet more light and truth to break forth from God's holy word.* This affirmation by one of the founders of the Congregational tradition assumes the primacy of the Bible as a source for understanding the Good News and as a foundation for all statements of faith. It recognizes that the Bible, though written in specific historical times and places, still speaks to us in our present condition. It declares that the study of the scriptures is not limited by past interpretations, but it is pursued with the expectation of new insights and God's help for living today.

■ *The Priesthood of All Believers.* All members of the United Church of Christ are called to minister to others and to participate as equals in the common worship of God, each with direct access to the mercies of God through personal prayer and devotion.

Recognition is given to those among us who have received special training in pastoral, priestly, educational and administrative functions, but these persons are regarded as *servants*—rather than as persons in authority. Their task is to guide, to instruct, to enable the ministry of all Christians rather than to do the work of ministry for us.

■ *Responsible Freedom.* As individual members of the Body of Christ, we are free to believe and act in accordance with our perception of God's will for our lives. But we are called to live in a loving, covenantal relationship with one another—gathering in communities of faith, congregations of believers, local churches.

Each congregation or local church is free to act in accordance with the collective decision of its members, guided by the working of the Spirit in the light of the scriptures. But it also is called to live in a covenantal relationship with other congregations for the sharing of insights and for cooperative action under the authority of Christ.

Likewise, associations of churches, conferences, the General Synod and the church-wide "covenanted ministries" of the United Church of Christ are free to act in their particular spheres of responsibility. Yet all are constrained by love to live in a covenantal relationship with one another and with the local churches in order to make manifest the unity of the body of Christ and thus to carry out God's mission in the world more effectively.

The members, congregations, associations, conferences, General Synod, and covenanted ministries are free in relation to the world. We affirm that the authority of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and interpreted with the aid of the Holy Spirit stands above and judges all human culture, institutions and laws. But we recognize our calling both as individuals and as the church to live in the world:

- To proclaim in word and action the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- To work for reconciliation and the unity of the broken Body of Christ.
- To seek justice and liberation for all.

This is the challenge of the United Church of Christ.