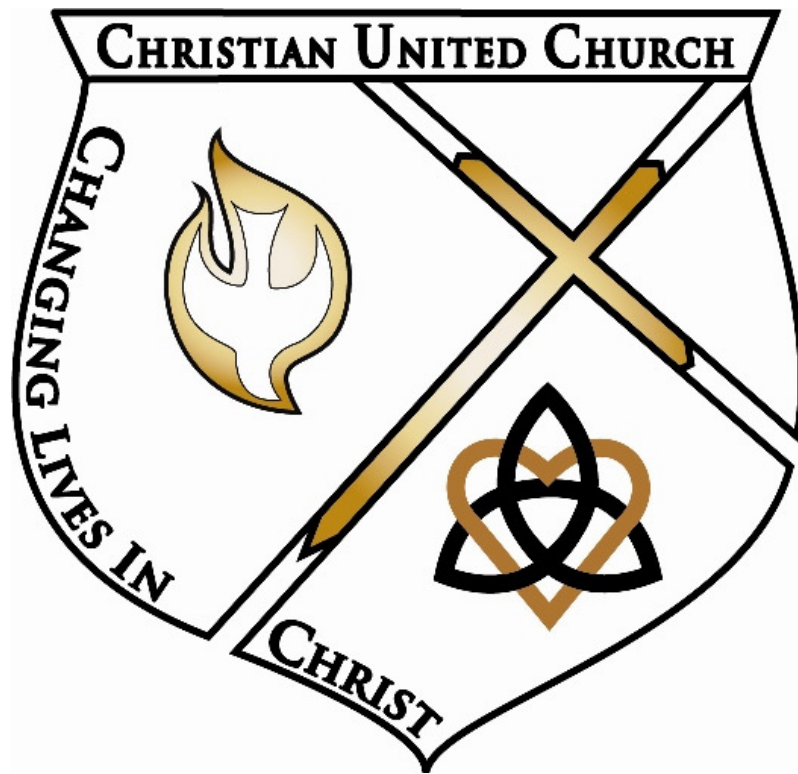


An Introduction to The Christian United Church



Written and Compiled by
The Right Reverend David Strong,
Presiding Bishop of The Christian United Church
and
The Reverend Michael Beckett,
Grace Christian United Church,
Charleston, WV

An Introduction to
The Christian United Church

Written and Compiled by
The Right Reverend David Strong,
Presiding Bishop of The Christian United Church
and
The Reverend Michael Beckett,
Grace Christian United Church,
Charleston, WV

2011

Contents

Preface
Our History
Our Beliefs
The Sacraments
Symbolism
Symbolism in Worship
The Liturgy and Services of the Church
The Liturgical Year
Connectionalism
The Clergy
Government of the Church
How Does Our Garden Grow?: New Churches
Becoming a Church Member
The Great Commission
Covenant Prayer
References and Bibliography
A Final Note

Preface

There is a need for a simple, not-too-detailed account of the facts about The Christian United Church. This is what, God willing, this book is intended to be. We are a new denomination, still growing and evolving, and it is with great excitement that we would like to introduce you to who we are and what we're about.

Introduction

The Christian United Church is an inclusive church that welcomes people from all walks of life. While we have a special concern that members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community are welcomed into our churches, we are not a gay church. We seek to be a church where members of the straight community and LGBT community are equally valued in the Community of the Christian United Church. We believe in the equality before God of all people.

Given the nature of our church, you will find that our churches consist of people from many diverse backgrounds. The doors of the church are open in the Christian United Church. "There are no outcasts in the Body of Christ," said Bishop Edmond Browning. Since a majority of our clergy are members of the LGBT community, our congregations may reflect that in their membership. However, our worship should first call **all** people to Christ.

We are a Christian movement for changing our community by the witness of our lives in Jesus Christ. We want to show the world that progressive people who have a love for Christ and for worship and service to the community, are seeking to be a presence in the world today.

Our History and Beliefs

History

The Christian United Church was founded by the Right Reverend Bishop David Strong and several other clergy in 2009. This newly formed church draws its charism* from the missionary spirit of John Wesley and Richard Allen, founders of Methodism and African Methodism with a commitment to a sacramental life and social justice. **Need more here!!!!!!**

While the Christian United Church was founded in the United States of America, its mission is to go into the whole world and make disciples of Christ. The Church is committed to building a global church, which will make a difference in the world. We currently have churches in Honduras, the Philippines, and Mexico, as well as several in the United States.

*In general "charism" denotes any good gift that flows from God's love to man. The word can also mean any of the spiritual graces and qualifications granted to every Christian to perform his or her task in the Church. In the narrowest sense, it is a theological term for the extraordinary graces given to individual Christians for the good of others.

What We Believe

Christianity is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is proclaimed as the Savior by the Christian Church.

The Christian United Church is founded in the interest of offering a church home to all who confess and believe. The Christian United Church is an inclusive, missionary, connectional church called to make disciples of Christ for the world. We are a Christ-Centered church rooted in Spirit-filled worship and commitment to social justice and radical hospitality. Our beliefs are expressed through the Apostles and Nicene Creeds.

What did that mean, you ask? Let's break that paragraph down into digestible bites:

When we say 'inclusive' we mean just that. All are welcome in Christian United Churches, regardless of race, color, sex, gender identity, socio-economic status, sexual preference, ability, intelligence, or any other reason for which a person might be discriminated against. If one has a thirst for Christ, let us fill your cup. You will be welcomed here!

The word 'connectional' means just what it sounds like. We are 'connected' with each other in Christian United Churches. No one church

stands alone, as more important or less important. We are all of us, part of ONE denomination, ONE Church, ONE body of Christ, and it takes the efforts of us all to make a difference in the world.

Similarly, as a connectional church the membership of Christian United Churches are 'connected' with each other. We believe that we are, indeed, a part of the Family of God, and we strive to remain in contact with each other to support, pray with and for, laugh with, cry with, and cherish each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

What do we mean by 'social justice'? According to Wikipedia, Social justice generally refers to the idea of creating a society or institution that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognizes the dignity of every human being. The term and modern concept of "social justice" was coined by the Jesuit Luigi Taparelli in 1840 and based on the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas. In short, this means that along with being an 'inclusive' church, we believe that everyone should have just what is promised in The Pledge of Allegiance to the U.S. flag: liberty and justice for ALL, regardless of those very same things we talked about in the paragraph about being inclusive!

Now, about those Creeds.....

A creed is a formal statement of something in which one believes strongly. We believe in the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds, and accept them as the very foundations of our beliefs. We'll examine the Apostles Creed first:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the
dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

The Apostles' Creed was based on Christian theological understanding of the Canonical gospels, (Mathew, Mark, and Luke), the letters of the New Testament, and to a lesser extent the Old Testament. Because of its early origin, it does not address some Christological (having to do with Christ) issues defined in the later Nicene Creed. It says nothing explicitly about the divinity of either Jesus or of the Holy Spirit.

The Nicene Creed is a bit longer, and a bit more explicit:

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius
Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the
living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the
giver of Life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped
and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and
apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the
forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.

The Nicene Creed was written in about 325 CE to clarify the church's beliefs and to settle some arguments between churches as to who was correct. Church leaders met at the first Council of Nicaea (hence its name) and adopted this creed as a statement of faith. One

of the main differences in the two creeds above is that The Nicene Creed of 325 explicitly affirms the divinity of Jesus, applying to him the term "God". The 381 version speaks of the Holy Spirit as worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son. Both Creeds are accepted today as a universal proclamation of what Christians believe.

Further, we believe in one God, of one substance and of three persons: God, our Creator and Parent; Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, God in flesh and human form; and the Holy Spirit, God as our Sustainer. (This is the doctrine of the Trinity. More on that in a paragraph or two.) Jesus, the Christ, is historically recorded as living at the beginning of this Common Era, and is God Incarnate, of human birth, fully God and fully human, and that by being one with God, Jesus has demonstrated once and forever that all people are likewise Children of God, being spiritually made in God's image. You remember those words from the Creeds discussed before, don't you?

We believe that the Holy Spirit is God and continues to make known God's love and interest to all people. The Holy Spirit is available to, will, and is, working through all who are willing to place their welfare in God's keeping.

This belief in One God in Three Persons is

called the Holy Trinity, trinity meaning three. While we would very much like to be able to explain just how this 'One in Three' works, we cannot, and accept it as a matter of faith. Wars have been fought over this belief, churches split, and people burned at the stake because of this belief, or lack of belief in this belief. We accept it as it is stated in the Bible, and in the creeds, as real and true. How, you ask, can we accept something as true that cannot be seen, or proved? The answer to that is rather simple: much the same way that we are convinced that gravity and Abraham Lincoln exist or existed. We've not seen them 'up close and personal,' but we see their effects every day of our lives. So it is with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

We believe that the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, showing God to every person through the law and the prophets, and finally, showing God to every person completely and ultimately in the being of Jesus Christ. However, the Bible is not a history book, a psychology text, or a scientific journal. The Bible is the description God gave us about who He is, and His desires and plans for humanity. The most significant component of this revelation is the story of our separation from God by sin and God's provision for restoration of fellowship

through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. Our need for redemption does not change. Neither does God's desire to reconcile us to Himself.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." While the Bible was completed approximately 1900 years ago, its accuracy and relevance for today remain unchanged. The Bible is the sole objective source of all the revelation God has given us about Himself and His plan for humanity.

The Bible contains a great deal of information about the natural world that has been confirmed by scientific observations and research. Some of these passages include Leviticus 17:11; Ecclesiastes 1:6-7; Job 36:27-29; Psalm 102:25-27 and Colossians 1:16-17. (Look these passages up!) As the Bible's story of God's redemptive plan for humanity unfolds, many different characters are vividly described. In those descriptions, the Bible provides a great deal of information about human behavior and tendencies. Our own day-to-day experience shows us that this information is more accurate and descriptive of the human condition than any psychology textbook. Many historical facts

recorded in the Bible have been confirmed by extra-biblical sources. Historical research often shows a great deal of agreement between biblical accounts and extra-biblical accounts of the same events.

The Bible's most important message—redemption—is universally and perpetually applicable to humanity. God's Word will never be outdated, superseded, or improved upon. Cultures change, laws change, generations come and go, but the Word of God is as relevant today as it was when it was first written. Not all of Scripture necessarily applies explicitly to us today, but all Scriptures contain truths and examples that we can, and should, apply to our lives today.

We believe that every person is justified by grace (forgiveness and love) to God through faith in Jesus Christ. This means that we believe, with our hearts, minds, and spirits, that Jesus died for us, and made Himself a sacrifice in order that our sins may be forgiven. We only need to accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and ask forgiveness of our sins and believe in Him. As John 3:16 says: For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (This means you!) We believe that we are saved, not only from loneliness,

despair, and degradation, but also into fullness of life through God's gift of grace. This gift is not earned, but is a pure gift from a God of pure love.

We further commend the community of the faithful to a life of prayer; to seek genuine forgiveness for unkind, thoughtless, and unloving acts; and to a committed life of Christian service.

We believe that the local church serves to bring all people to God through proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. This is why we gather in worship through word and sacrament weekly, as the center of our lives as Christians. The local church is where the mission and ministry of the church meet the world in community.

And then there's that word "catholic." We are not part of the Roman Catholic Church, but use the word 'catholic' in its literal sense. The word catholic (derived via Late Latin *catholicus*, from the Greek adjective (*katholikos*), meaning "universal" comes from the Greek phrase (*kath'holou*), meaning "on the whole," "according to the whole" or "in general", and is a combination of the Greek words *κατά* meaning "about" and *όλος* meaning "whole". The word in English can mean either "including a wide variety of things; all-embracing" or as "relating to the historic doctrine and practice of the Western Church."

It was first used to describe the Christian Church in the early 2nd century to emphasize its universal scope. In the context of Christian ecclesiology (the study of the church, a church's character or beliefs), it has a rich history and several usages. In non-ecclesiastical use, it derives its English meaning directly from its root, and is currently used to mean

- universal or of general interest; or
- liberal, having broad interests, or wide sympathies.
- inclusive, inviting and containing strong evangelism.

Now what does "apostolic" mean? Simply put, it means one sent on a mission. It is our mission to spread the Good News of Jesus and to tell others of God's abiding grace, love, forgiveness, and salvation.

Beyond these basics however, we leave it to each individual to work out the details of his or her faith in accordance with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures, Tradition, Reason and Experience. As the Apostle Paul said in his letter to the church at Philippi:

- "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now

much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. " Philippians 2:12-13 (KJV)

Unlike many churches, we do not feel it is healthy or wise to try to compel each individual to believe exactly the same things or to adhere to a strict set of rules and beliefs. We respect our congregants (members) and treat them as adults who have both the responsibility and capacity to discern God's will.

THE SACRAMENTS

First, what is a sacrament? According to This Holy Mystery, written by The United Methodist Church, the Greek word used in the New Testament for sacrament is *mysterion*, usually translated mystery. It indicates that through sacraments, God discloses things that are beyond human capacity to know through reason alone. In Latin the word used is *sacramentum*, which means a vow or promise. The sacraments were instituted by Christ and given to the church. Jesus Christ is himself the ultimate manifestation of a sacrament. In the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, God's nature and purpose were revealed and active through a human body. The Christian church is also sacramental. It was instituted to continue the work of Christ in redeeming the world. The church is Christ's body—the visible, material instrument through which Christ continues to be made known and the divine plan is fulfilled. Holy Baptism and Holy Communion have been chosen and designated by God as special means through which divine grace comes to us. Sacraments are sign-acts, which include words, actions, and physical elements. They both express and convey the gracious love of God. They make God's love both visible and effective.

We might even say that sacraments are God's "show and tell," communicating with us in a way that we, in all our brokenness and limitations, can receive and experience God's grace.

The Christian United Church recognizes two Sacraments as established by Jesus Christ:

1. Baptism – Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God. We believe in baptism by water. Not only does this represent the washing away of our sins, but it also represents our death and burial as sinners and our resurrection as living members of Christ. According to the Gospels, Jesus Himself was baptized by John the Baptist prior to His beginning his ministry on Earth. According, again, to This Holy Mystery, Holy Baptism is the sacrament that initiates us into the body of Christ "through water and the Spirit" ("The Baptismal Covenant I," *United Methodist Hymnal*; page 37). In baptism we receive our identity and mission as Christians.

2. Holy Eucharist - (or Holy Communion, or The Lord's Supper) The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament which commemorates the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, making his eternal

sacrifice present within the limits of time and space and uniting us with his self-offering. Jesus instituted the celebration of The Eucharist during the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed by Judas.

During the celebration of the Eucharist, the elements (bread and wine,) are consecrated (blessed or made holy). The Roman Catholic Church believes that during consecration, the bread becomes the body of Christ, and the wine His blood. This is known as "The Real Presence" or Transubstantiation. Anglican Churches believe that after consecration the bread and the wine aren't *exactly* the body and blood of Our Lord, but have become holy in their representation of Christ. This is known as consubstantiation. The United Christian Church, along with other Christian traditions, have tried to provide clear and faithful interpretations of Christ's presence in the Holy Meal. Our tradition asserts the real, personal, living presence of Jesus Christ. For us, the Lord's Supper is anchored in the life of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, but is not primarily a remembrance or memorial. We do not embrace the medieval doctrine of transubstantiation, though we do believe that the elements are essential, tangible means through which God works. Because the Bread and Wine have become, to us, symbolically and in a very real

and special - though unexplainable, way the Body and Blood of Christ, Holy Communion is known as a Holy Mystery. (Again this is one of those things we believe in faith. Remember our discussing the Trinity, Abraham Lincoln, and gravity?????)

Holy Communion is the sacrament that sustains and nourishes us in our journey of salvation. In a sacrament, God uses tangible, material things as vehicles or instruments of grace. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, defines a sacrament, in accord with his Anglican tradition, as “an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same”.

Holy Communion is the communion of the church—the gathered community of the faithful, both local and universal. While deeply meaningful to the individuals participating, the sacrament is much more than a personal event. The first person pronouns throughout the ritual are consistently plural—*we, us, our*. First Corinthians 10:17 explains that “because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

The Christian United Church has an "Open Communion" Policy. This means that a person does not have to be a member of our church in order to take communion, and that the

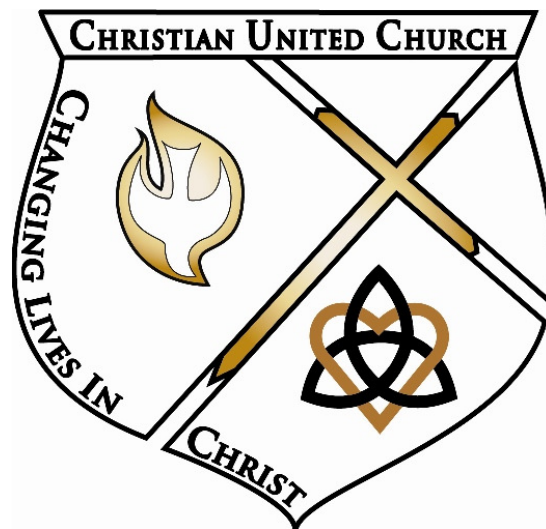
table of the Lord is open to all who wish a closer walk with God. Non-baptized people who respond in faith to the invitation in our liturgy will be welcomed to the Table. They should receive teaching about Holy Baptism as the sacrament of entrance into the community of faith—needed only once by each individual—and Holy Communion as the sacrament of sustenance for the journey of faith and growth in holiness—needed and received frequently. Unbaptized persons who receive communion should be counseled and nurtured toward baptism as soon as possible.

Children of all ages are welcome to the Table and are to be taught and led to interpret, appreciate, and participate in Holy Communion. Adults need training to help them explain the sacrament to children.

Symbolism

Symbols are signs that stand for words, phrases, or concepts. We see signs every day of our lives. For example, when we see a triangular yellow road sign, we know we need to use caution, or to yield the right of way. In the same way the Church uses signs and symbols to remind us of great Christian truths. They are used to decorate and beautify our churches, and on our ministers' and bishop's vestments.

One of the symbols that all United Christian Churches use is our coat of arms.



On the Christian United Church Coat of Arms, there is a representation of a dove in a tongue of fire. The dove is a symbol of

peace, and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove after his baptism (Mark 1:10). The flame represents, again, the Holy Spirit, Who descended on the Disciples in the Upper Room at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-31.)

The cross, the most important symbol of all, is in the center of our coat of arms, because it is central to our beliefs and very lives. (The cross will be discussed in the very next section!)

The next symbol on our coat of arms is a trefoil, which is representative of the Holy Trinity. (See the next section for more information!)

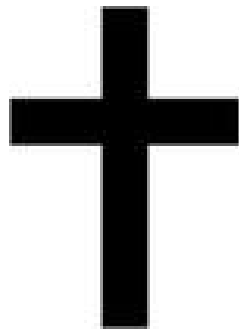
These are some of the other most important and most common symbols you will see in The United Christian Church, as well as many other churches:

The Cross – The single most important of all Christian symbols is the cross that reminds us of Our Lord's death on Calvary. It is traced on our heads at baptism, during Ash Wednesday services, and when we are anointed with oil, in token that we are "sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as

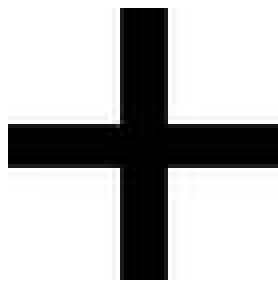
Christ's own forever." To sign one's self with the cross* is both an act of devotion and a profession of faith. (*sign one's self, with the right hand, forehead, chest, shoulders left to right)

There are many forms of the cross that you will see. These are a few:

The Latin Cross – This is the cross that is most common in western Christendom.



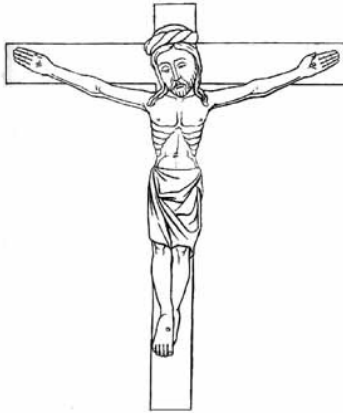
The Greek Cross – The four equal arms of this cross suggest our Church's mission to the four corners of the world to every race, nation, and class of people.



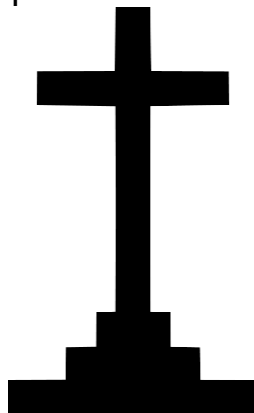
St. Andrew's Cross – St. Andrew is said to have died on this kind of cross.



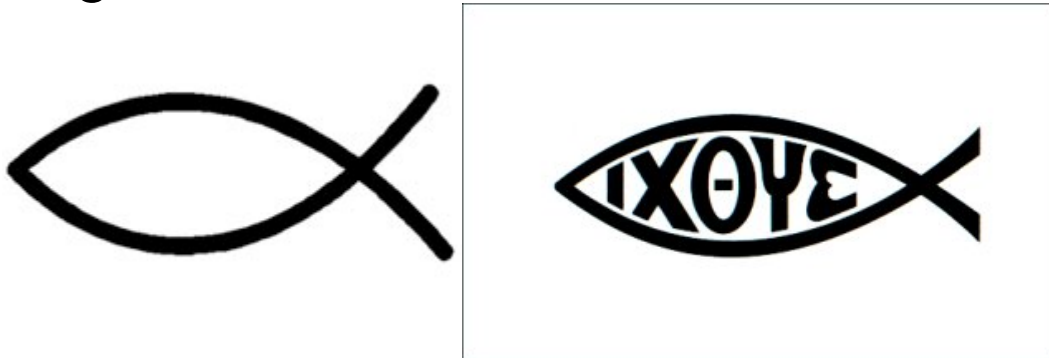
The Crucifix – A representation of Our Lord hanging on the cross is called a crucifix.



The Calvary or Graded Cross – It is supposed that this is the cross on which Our Lord was crucified. The base represents the hill of Calvary on which the crucifixion took place.



A Fish – The fish is one of the oldest Christian symbols. Jesus used the fish in his parable of the net to represent those who were gathered into his kingdom. In another sense it represents Christ himself because the initials of the words which compose the Greek phrase, "Jesus Christ Son of God, Savior" spell the Greek word for fish, which is ICTHUS. In ancient times of persecution, this anagram or the figure of a fish became a sort of password or sign by which Christians recognized one another.



A Dove – As in our coat of arms, the Holy Spirit is most commonly represented by a dove. This symbol comes from the gospel account of Jesus' baptism. "When Jesus came up out of the water, immediately He saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove..." Mark

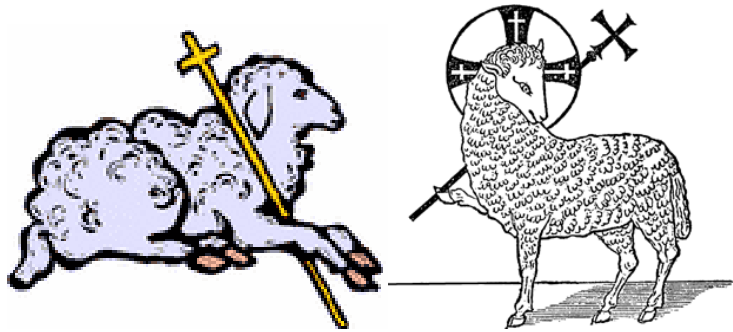
1:10. The dove is also used as a symbol of peace, and was the first sign to Noah that the floodwaters were beginning to recede. (Genesis 6-9, look this up!!!)



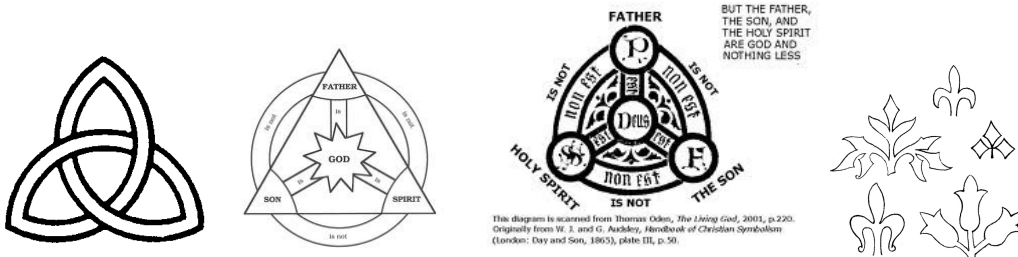
Tongues of Fire – Also in our coat of arms, tongues of fire represent the Holy Spirit.



A Lamb – A lamb represents Christ, and is often described with the Latin words, "agnus dei," which means "Lamb of God," referring to Jesus. "The next day John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.'" John 1:29



Signs of the Trinity – The triangle, the three-leafed clover, the fleur-de-lis, three interlocking circles, the trefoil, and other three-fold designs all symbolize the three persons of the Trinity: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



IHS – the first three letters of the word Jesus, in Greek.

XP – These are the first three letters of the Greek word for Christ. The Greek X (chi) is the same as the English CH; the Greek P (rho) is the same as the English R.

Symbolism in Worship

Water – Water in worship reminds us of many things: washing, refreshment, even life. Among the many references to water in the Bible there are (Look these up!!!):

The Creation story: Genesis 1:2

The Flight of the Children of Israel:
Exodus 15:22-27

Jesus was baptized with water: Mark 1:9-
11

Water is used also by Christians as a symbol for cleansing, to typify the purification of persons or objects that are blessed by the Church. The use of blessed or consecrated water, holy water, is an old and widespread Christian custom.

Laying on of Hands – In Christian worship, the laying on of hands is recognized as a way to transmit power or blessing. The context and the accompanying words interpret the act. The bishop or minister lays a hand on the person's head and may mark his forehead with the sign of the cross. So

also in all four orders of the ordained ministry: ministers, deacons, elders, and bishops, hands are laid on the candidate's head. The minister lays a hand on a sick person's head. The laying on of hands is a time-honored symbol of transmitting spiritual power which is repeatedly mentioned in the Old and New Testaments. Here are a few of them (look this up!!!):

Mark 5:23, Acts 6:6; 8:17f; 9:17; 13:3; 19:6; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6; Hebrews 6:2

Colors – The traditional liturgical colors have this symbolism: white for rejoicing, red for fire and for the blood of the martyrs; violet or purple for penitence; green for the color of nature; and black for mourning. These colors are used to convey the feeling or mood of the days, and seasons, of the Church Year, and of special occasions and in the celebration of certain rites and sacraments. The usual occasions for their use are:

White: On the great festivals of Christmas and Easter, on the feasts of our Lord, All Saints' Day, and saints' days which do not commemorate martyrs, and weddings.

Red: On Pentecost and on the days commemorating martyrs, and also at ordinations. Red is also the color that Cardinals in the Roman Catholic Church wear.

Violet or Purple*: In Advent and Lent. Bishops traditionally wear purple.

Black*: On Good Friday

Green: All Sundays after Epiphany and on the Sundays of Pentecost following Trinity Sunday.

*Violet or sometimes even black may be used for funerals and burials, but white is more appropriate because of the resurrection theme of the service.

Vestments- The first vestments in western Christendom were usually the formal secular dress of the Roman Empire of the early centuries of the Christian era. The alb, described below, is the only exception. In time there were garments specifically

designed for liturgical use as distinct from the reservation on one's "Best clothes" for such a purpose. One of the Roman emperors criticized the Christians of his day because they dressed up in special clothes to worship God. (The early Christians believed that they were to look and be their best as a sign of giving their best to God when they worshipped. This is why people usually "dress up" to go to church, and where the phrase "Sunday best" comes from.) As the use of vestments continued there was the tendency to try to find a Biblical rationale for everything connected with worship, (especially the Eucharist) in terms of details of the passion (arrest and death of Christ), and to interpret vestments in terms of a symbolism of virtues and grace.

We are thankful for this development in the long life of the Church because this special church clothing serves several useful purposes:

1. It must be beautiful, for it is the very essence of worship that it should reflect and acknowledge the beauty of God as revealed in His

mighty acts of creation and redemption.

2. It serves a historical and theological function. The vestments are ancient in origin and reflect the continuity of Christian Worship through the ages. In addition, their ornamentation has made them vehicles for proclaiming aspects of Christian belief.
3. Finally, vestments are functional. They enable people to be able to distinguish the roles and ranks of each participant. For these reasons they are an important part of the symbolism of worship.

The ministers' Eucharistic Vestments consist of the following:

Collar: A clerical collar is an item of Christian clerical clothing. It is a detachable collar that buttons onto a clergy shirt or rabbat (vest). The collar closes at the back of the neck, presenting a seamless front. It is almost always white; and was originally made with cotton or linen but is now frequently made with plastic. It is worn to symbolize the yoke of Christ, and to distinguish members of the clergy.

Cassock: This is a long black garment which reaches to the feet and symbolizes service. It is worn by all members of ordained clergy.

Alb: This is a long white garment. It is appropriate as a symbol of purity and wholeness acquired by the Christian in baptism.

Girdle or cincture: this is a rope or sash worn around the waist. It is sometimes said to symbolize temperance and chastity, and sometimes said to reflect 'being girded with the truth.)Ephesians 6:14 (Look this up!!!)

Stole: This is a long narrow scarf, which hangs about the shoulders and symbolizes the yoke of service. Its color is usually that of the church season and the ends may be embroidered with appropriate symbols. It is the insignia (sign) of priesthood.

Chasuble: This is a large garment which is put over the head, and hangs down before and behind. Both back and front may be marked with Y-Shaped crosses or orphreys (form of highly detailed embroidery, in which typically simple materials are made into exquisite patterns.) The orphrey in front is

sometimes a single strip or pillar and is said to represent the column or pillar to which our Lord was bound. This vestment maybe be white or the color of the season and is frequently ornamented with embroideries. It is said to represent the seamless coat with which our Lord was clothed and signifies love.

In some churches the minister wears a surplice and stole for celebrating the Holy Eucharist instead of Eucharistic vestments.

Surplice: This is a flowing vestment of white material which is worn over the cassock. It is a modified version of the alb, and like the alb, reminds us of the purity of life which should characterize those who minister in the sanctuary.

Tippet: At services when the stole is not used, this wide black scarf is worn around the neck with the ends hanging in front. Some form of it was originally an academic vestment, and it is sometimes called a 'prayer scarf', reminding us that we are to pray without ceasing. (1 Thessalonians 5:17 Look this up!!!)

The Liturgy and Services of the Church

Worship is often the first contact the unchurched and others have with our community. Will they find dead ritual or passionate worship that welcomes, restores and invites people to be in community with Christ and one another? We strive to offer our best in music, preaching, worship space, and hospitality to those who come through our doors.

The Basic Pattern of Worship (BPW) honors the fourfold pattern of the early church. The pattern consists of the following elements: Entrance and Gathering, Proclamation and Response, Thanksgiving and Communion, Sending Forth.

The Basic Pattern of Worship (BPW) offers structured flexibility for our congregations and community. This pattern provides the opportunity to reflect the diversity of our congregations and the local contexts in which our worship is celebrated. It represents the common faith that we share as a covenanted and connectional conference of communities throughout the world.

While we do not maintain the written liturgy of the historic churches, (Anglican, Lutheran, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic,) we do honor

patterns of that liturgy in our use of the Doxology, Apostle's Creed, Sursum Corda (Latin for "Lift up your Hearts), Eucharistic Prayer, the Lord's Prayer and Dismissal on Holy Days and Special occasions, and in the fourfold shape of our worship.

We have built a uniquely Christian United Church culture of worship in which we find gospel music, classical music, praise and worship music, traditional hymns, liturgical dance, traditions from African, African American, Asian, Polish, and Spanish speaking cultures. We honor the richness of historic western heritage of Christian liturgy.

We believe that God is calling us to a convergence of worship blending the sacramental and evangelical and being open to the movement of the Holy Spirit as represented from the charismatic/Pentecostal movements, and celebrating the liturgical year with color, art, and vestments. The richness of our structure and the openness of our flexibility bring together a beautiful tapestry.

Each of our congregations is encouraged to fully embrace the Basic Pattern of Worship (BPW) and allow it to be filled with the gifts of their community. Worship is never the work of the clergy alone; it is the mutual ministry of the clergy and laity. Every community should have a

worship planning committee that studies and prepares worship that uses the gifts and talents of the members of its congregation.

Let's examine one of our services more carefully.

ENTRANCE

The people come together in the Lord's name. There may be greetings, music and song, prayer and praise, or silent prayer.

PROCLAMATION AND RESPONSE

The Scriptures - The Scriptures for our services are organized in such a way that the entire Bible is read throughout the year. This is done by the use of the Revised Common Lectionary.

The Scriptures are opened to the people through the reading of lessons. The lessons are read (one each) from The Old Testament, The New Testament, and a Gospel reading. At times, a Psalm may be read between the Old and New Testament Readings and the Gospel reading.

Preaching - It is during the preaching, or the giving of a sermon that the Scriptures are explained, and made relevant for us today.

Witnessing – This is when individuals have the opportunity to tell others how God is working in their lives, and give testimony as to the power and love of God.

During this part of the service instrumental music, anthems, and hymns may be used. Responses to God's Word include acts of commitment and faith, the offering of concerns, prayers, gifts, monetary gifts, and service for the world and one another.

THANKSGIVING AND COMMUNION

The primary expression of worship in the Christian United Church is the Holy Eucharist, (Holy Communion or the Service of Table and Word. You will remember that this was discussed in a previous section!) These are the only authorized ways in which we describe our Sunday Worship in the Christian United Church.

Because we are a sacramental church, we share this ancient pattern of worship with the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist and Orthodox Churches. Our liturgy for the Eucharist is based on the idea for creating flexible worship tailored to the local community. The *exclusive* use of books of worship or missals from other denominations are not permitted. While we respect other liturgies greatly, the

exclusive use of other denominational liturgies is not acceptable because we are our own denomination. Liturgies from other denominations may be used, as well as prayers from books of worship that do not conflict with the theology of the Christian United Church, as long as they are not used exclusively.

In Services with Communion, the actions of Jesus in the Upper Room during the Last Supper before His crucifixion are reenacted:

Taking the bread and cup
Giving thanks over the bread and cup
Breaking the bread
Giving the bread and cup (Sharing the Gifts of
God)

Occasionally, there will be services without Communion. In these services, thanks is given for God's mighty acts in Jesus.

SENDING FORTH – The people are sent into ministry with the Lord's blessing.

After the Communion service, after we have "been fed with the Spiritual food of the Body and Blood of Our Savior, Jesus Christ" (The Book of Common Prayer 'BCP'), is when our real work as Christians begins. We are sent forth "to do the

work Christ has given us to do, with gladness and singleness of heart" (BCP). It is this work, the winning of souls for Christ, which is, or should be, the main focus of our lives.

Other Rites and Services

Besides the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, there are other Rites and Services that we recognize as being very important to the life of our church, and to the lives of our church members. These include:

Marriage Ceremonies
Holy Union or Commitment Ceremonies
Anointing of the Sick
Funerals
Ordinations

The Liturgical Year

The Liturgical Year is like a separate year within a year. Christians are, after all, human, and human nature is such that we need variety in our lives to keep from being bored. Like a wise mother the church has provided us with the great cycle of the Liturgical Year with its different seasons and words and colors. These seasons are like a pageant that entertains and well as teaches us. Each season has its own story, and a different aspect, as to what we as Christians strive to learn, and learn to be.

In this section, we will discuss each season of the Liturgical Year.

Advent

From the Latin *adventus*, "arrival" or "coming", the first season of the liturgical year begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. Advent's purpose is to focus on preparation for the coming of Christ. Although often conceived as awaiting the coming of the Christ-child at Christmas, the modern Lectionary points the season more toward eschatological themes (eschatological means awaiting the final coming of Christ.)

Color: Violet, but on the third Sunday of Advent, rose may be used instead. Blue may also be used instead of violet.

Christmas

The Christmas season immediately follows Advent, and begins with the birth of the Christ Child. The traditional Twelve Days of Christmas begin with Christmas Eve on the evening of December 24 and continue until the feast of Epiphany. (Epiphany is celebrated on January 6, and is celebrated as the day when the Magi, or Wisemen came to see Jesus.) The actual Christmas season continues until the Feast of the Baptism of Christ, which is celebrated on the Sunday after 6 January.

Color: White

The Season after Epiphany

This is also known as Ordinary Time. "Ordinary" comes from the same root as our word "ordinal", and in this sense means "the counted weeks". These are the common weeks which do not belong to a proper season. In Latin, these seasons are called the weeks *per annum*, or "through the year".

Color: Green

Lent

Lent is a major penitential season of preparation for Easter. It begins on Ash Wednesday and, if the penitential days of Good Friday and Holy Saturday are included, lasts for forty days, since the six Sundays within the season are not counted. The week before Easter is called Holy Week.

Color: Purple for all days leading up to Good Friday. From Good Friday until Easter Sunday black is used.

Pentecost

Pentecost is the fiftieth and last day of the Easter season. It celebrates the sending of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, which traditionally marks the birth of the Church

Color: Red

Ordinary Time, Time after Pentecost

This season, under various names, follows the Easter season and the feasts of Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. Pentecost begins at Vespers on the Saturday after Pentecost. It ends on the Saturday before the First Sunday of Advent.

Color: Green

During the Liturgical or Church Year, there are many other Saint's Days, and Feast Days, (special holidays) that may be celebrated. There are universal saints such as Saints Francis, Dominic or Benedict who belong to all Christians. We recognize that there are certain holy people from all churches including the Roman Catholic church, and these universal saints may be mentioned during our services, but those saints should never take precedence for recognition in our Sunday liturgy. We must remember that our Sunday services are the primary focus of our worship and are centered on Jesus Christ, his death, burial and resurrection. Every Sunday is an Easter Sunday for sacramental Christians.

It is to be noted, however, that we do not in any way celebrate the feasts and saints of the Roman Catholic Church that are not recognized by the universal ecumenical church (meaning all Christian denominations world-wide), or which are in conflict with the Christian United Church's beliefs. For example The Feasts of the Sacred or Immaculate Hearts, Marian feasts such as the Assumption, Immaculate Conception, or the new feasts of the Roman Catholic Church such as the Divine Mercy/Pope John Paul II.

Connectionalism

The Christian United Church is first and foremost a church in the Wesleyan Tradition. This has major impact on our ministry. This means that we look to the theology and polity (organizational administration) of John Wesley who sought to change the world by calling people to spiritual and social holiness. Wesley was an Anglican priest who remained in that office until his death. He was a promoter of constant communion and the means of grace as expressed in works of mercy and works of piety. He was one who was willing to challenge the established church, including ordaining people to spread the gospel regardless of the teaching of his church on apostolic succession. Because of that action the Methodist Episcopal Church in American was established. So the call to reach the LGBT community and straight people who will live their vocation in an open and affirming denomination means that we will not allow the teaching of apostolic succession to stop us in spreading the gospel.

Principles of Wesleyan Polity in the Christian United Church

First Principle: The Connection

We are not congregational churches in which each local church operates independently of each other, and decides what it believes and does, without a commitment to the connection, which is the Christian United Church. In reality, we could almost use the term "The Connection" as a synonym for The Christian United Church, and in this section of this book, the name United Christian Church and "the connection" will be used interchangeably. We are connected by our life in Christ, our faith and common life as expressed by the Church and directed by the Book of Discipline. (The Book of Discipline is the book in which the Christian United Church's by-laws and rules of structure and organization are written; no, it doesn't mean that we have a set of punishments written in a book!) The Bishop is the sign of unity of this connection and serves as the pastor of all churches in the connection.

This connection is made visible when we gather as a body for worship, for conferences, and in our presence throughout the world. As was stated earlier in this book, and explained in

some depth, our churches do not 'stand alone.' We are all connected because we are members of the Christian United Church.

Second Principle: The Conference

The Christian United Church's connection is maintained through a series of conferences:

The Annual Conference is the conference in which the entire connection gathers each year for fellowship, education and discussion of the common life of the church. It is during the Annual Conference that decisions are made as necessary for the strengthening of the life of the connection (the Church.)

A District Conference is that area of the Connection in which churches in a general area of the country meet annually to learn more about their faith and each other, and to share ideas, support each other, and to encourage each other.

The Local Conference is the local church congregation which gathers in its own community to make decisions about its congregation while following the procedures set down in The Book of Discipline. Local Conferences also gather to recommend candidates for the ministry to the Annual

Conference.

Each local church should have a church council that meets regularly to ensure that the nurture, outreach and witness ministries (NOW) have the necessary resources to engage in mission and ministry in their local church. Spouses/Partners of pastors cannot serve on the Church Council as this is a conflict of interest. They may serve on committees and other ministries of the church.

Local Churches that are in close proximity to each other may organize their local congregations into circuits in order to organize their mission and ministry if they are being served by the same pastor or team with one of the Local Church Council members serving as the Circuit Elder/Moderator of the team ministry.

Third Principle: Itinerancy

One of the unique marks of the United Christian Church is that ministers are “sent” where the need of the church requires. This means that our clergy are itinerant, or may be moved from place to place as the need arises. The clergy accept appointment without reserve. When a clergyperson is accepted into the annual conference they become itinerant clergy who could be appointed by the bishop to serve in

another area than that which they were previously serving. This comes, of course, after consultation with the Bishop, and after a great deal of prayer and thought. While we want to provide stability to a congregation, a clergy person could be appointed to a term of only three years to a local church. In the Christian United Church every clergy person will have an appointment that will serve the entire connection.

Intinerancy is a mission strategy of ministry to go where sent to proclaim the gospel of Christ to all sorts and conditions of people. It means that we as clergy do not belong to one particular church. The clergy belong to the connection and must serve the connection over a commitment to one particular church. John Wesley taught the principle that the local congregation belongs to the connection, and local members of a congregation through trustees, keeps that pulpit or congregation in trust.

Fourth Principle: The Means of Grace

The means of grace are pathways to perfection and sanctification for all members of the Christian United Church. This is where our common ministry and life meet because of the baptismal covenant that we all share, whether we are laity or clergy. We tend to gather in small

groups, NOT CLIQUES, however, (classes as John Wesley called them), to look after one another in love and hold each other accountable in our journey of faith. Simply put, "means of grace" are ways and practices that we, as Christians, use to take care of each other, help each other, and share in each other's ministry, joys, and sorrows.

These "means of grace" are to be applied to each local community and must be present in the ministry of each congregation. Adapted to the context of that community.

These means of grace can include, but are not limited to:

Individual Works of Piety such as:

Prayer

Fasting

Searching the Scriptures

Healthy Living

Communal Works of Piety

Holy Communion

Baptism

Christian Conferencing (or "community")

Works of Mercy

Services focused toward individual needs

Visiting the Sick

Visiting the Imprisoned
Feeding & Clothing those in need
Earning, saving, & Giving all one can

Other Good Works

Services focused toward communal/societal
needs

The Seeking of Justice
Opposition to Slavery
Seeking an End to Discrimination
Simply loving your neighbor

Fifth Principle: Small Group (Classes); The School of Discipleship

John Wesley modeled small groups or classes on the small "collegial pietatis" or "groups of piety" that he had experienced with the German pietists and that had so changed his own life. These classes met regularly (often weekly) to discuss their experiences, encourage each other in progress toward a sinless life, and to hold each other accountable. Each class had a leader, often a lay leader, and not infrequently a woman. It is largely these classes that generated the intense and long-lived commitment and dedication that marked Methodism and its

missionary successes which we strive to emulate.

These classes are what contemporary churches call small groups and typically meet in homes. They are schools of discipleship for our members and clergy, and they exist to give lay people the opportunity to serve as lay leaders in their local community. Leaders of small groups are trained and led by the local pastor. The small groups should be between three to six people. Once a group grows larger than twelve, it should divide. These groups are meant to invite others from outside of the group to participate a small group setting so that they will feel more comfortable in the larger group setting of the church.

The small groups gather for a time of fellowship, prayer, sharing with one another how they are living out the means of grace, and their faith in general. We encourage offerings to be taken for the work of the church to serve the community.

Every Christian United Church should have a small group ministry for those members who want to gather beyond worship on Sundays. These small groups are also the primary place people might gather for Christian Education and Christian Service projects to the community.

The Clergy

The Body of Christ is one, yet many members with different functions join together in one body.
1 Corinthians 12: 28

ORDAINED CLERGY: Ordained clergy are called by God and affirmed by the Church to serve. These men and women are authorized and legally recognized by the Christian United Church as professional ministers of the Word and Sacraments. The Ordained Clergy of the Christian United Church are Deacons, Elders and Bishops.

Our churches are under the rule of the Presiding Bishop and denominational governing councils, both regionally and nationally. In this section, we will examine each of the roles of the clergy, and how the "chain of command" works. There are several levels of clergy. We hope that this section helps you to understand those levels a bit better! We're going to start at the top, with the Presiding Bishop, and work our way "down the ladder" so to speak.

PRESIDING BISHOP

The Presiding Bishop is an ordained Elder in Full Connection, elected to have pastoral

oversight among the local faith communities of the Christian United Church. He or she gives vision and direction to the growth, development, and maturing of the church and its leadership at denominational and local levels, and represents the Christian United Church to the wider community. The Presiding Bishop presides at the Annual Conference and Connectional Council business meetings. (The Connectional Council are those who are appointed by the Bishop and elected by the Annual Conference to serve in between conferences to observe and implement the BOD and serve as Council of Advice to the bishop.)

The Presiding Bishop may appoint Connectional Council members as General Offices as defined in the Book of Discipline. He or she may also develop additional offices for the better functioning of the denomination.

The ministry of The Presiding Bishop, and all Bishops, is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as Apostle, Chief Pastor of the denomination, to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry. The Presiding Bishop serves for life, or until his or her retirement or resignation.

BISHOPS

Bishops share in the full ministry as ordained elders. Bishops are elders in full connection who are elected from the elders and set apart for a ministry of general oversight and supervision. As followers of Jesus Christ called to leadership, a bishop is authorized to guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine and discipline of the church.

They are to seek and be a sign of unity of the faith, exercise the discipline of the whole church and to supervise and support the life and mission of the church throughout the world. They are to lead the people entrusted to their care in worship, celebration of the sacraments and as leaders in witness and service in the world. Bishops are the primary encouragers of the ministry of all Christians. Bishops are called to be a prophetic voice for justice. Bishops are also authorized to appoint ordained clergy to their responsibilities, consecrate, ordain, and commission persons in ministry to the church.

No other position in the Christian United Church has a role that gives them the authority to make any changes to the discipline and worship of the life the church unless they are authorized by the Bishop. Only the bishop is authorized to make appointments of clergy and laity to denominational, district, or local churches or ministries. This means on a practical level that

appointments are not made for life, but each year at the annual conference annual appointments are renewed or new appointments are given.

Bishops serve for life, or until they retire or resign.

The Bishop in the Liturgy

In our tradition, as in all churches coming from a liturgical tradition, the Bishop is Chief Presider/Preacher in the liturgy at the gathering of church or when he or she is present at the local church, unless they delegate that responsibility to another elder. The Bishop is the Pastor of every congregation in the connection and the appointed Pastor is a delegate of the Bishop. In any liturgical procession the Bishop is the last person in the procession as symbol that it is he or she who is watching over the church. Often the Bishop will carry a shepherd's crook as a symbol that he is watching over his flock. The Bishop is the ordinary celebrant of Chrism Liturgy at the Annual Conference when the elders and deacons renew their ordination vows.

ORDAINED ELDER IN FULL CONNECTION

The Order of Elder—An elder is an ordained minister who has met the requirements of, and therefore has full authority for, the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order; who has been received as a minister in full connection with the annual conference; and who has been ordained as an elder.

Ordained ministers of the following classes are eligible for the Order of Elder:

1. Clergy from other denominations, or graduates of theological schools, who have been elected to membership in full connection with the annual conference.
2. Deacons who have been probationary members of an annual conference and have served for two years.

An elder is ordained by a bishop, employing the Order of Service for the Ordination of Elders. The bishops shall be assisted by other elders and may include laity designated by the bishop representing the Church community and representatives of other Christian communions.

Elders must receive a license to practice annually.

The bishop and the secretary of the annual conference provides credentials to all members in full connection, certifying the Elder's ministerial standing and their ordination as elders.

PROBATIONARY ELDER

Clergy from other denominations who have completed the candidacy process (applying to be considered clergy in the United Christian Church) may be received as a Probationary Elder with the same restrictions as those preparing for ordination.

ORDAINED DEACON

Deacon—A deacon is an ordained minister who has been received by an annual conference and has been ordained as a deacon. Deacons have authority to conduct divine worship, to preach the Word, to perform the marriage ceremony where the laws of the state or province permit, and to bury the dead. When invited to do so by an elder, they may assist in the administration of the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. In order for a Local Minister to become a Deacon he or she must serve for two years. The position of deacon may be permanent or transistional. Deacons may use the title Reverend.

Ordained persons are ordained for life.

LOCAL PASTORS

Local Pastors are candidates who are considering a call to ministry, or lay people who serve in their local church and are given a license to preach by the local church or the Bishop, often during a Church Conference. A candidate's license is renewed annually up to two years. Candidates will work toward meeting educational standards. One must serve as a local pastor for two years before ordination as a deacon.

Local Pastors may serve in three settings:

1. Local Pastors serve at a local church under the direction of the Pastor of their home church or teaching church.
2. Local Pastors may serve as a supply pastors for a church without a pastor.
3. Local Pastors who are planting a church and preparing for ordination.

Ministry of the Laity. The laity are those people who are not ordained. You've heard the term 'lay people' before. It's that simple. The ministry of the laity is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to Christ wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and

to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church. In other words, we are all of us as Christians, ministers. This is called **THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS**. All people are called by God to a personal ministry and authorized by Scripture to respond to the Word, serving as Christ served, to the end that the Church may be edified (built up) and the world transformed. The Christian United Church affirms that this is the ministry of every person in this denomination. All people have the responsibility to share in ministry, especially evangelism and Christian education.

The Government of the Church

Like any organized group, The Christian United Church must have rules and regulations to follow, and an administrative system in place to see that those rules and regulations are followed. In this section, we will examine how our church is run and governed.

The Christian United Church is governed by the Annual Conference. We can look at the Annual Conference and compare and contrast it to the Constitutional form of Government used in the United States or any country that is ruled by a constitutional monarchy. The Annual Conference is composed of the Bishop, all elders, deacons, and probationary elders, as well as lay delegates duly elected from the various churches within its bounds. The Annual Conference has the power to make laws for the operation of the Connection. It can make missionary conferences with limitations, examine the domestic affairs of its missions, hear complaints against any of its members and dispose of those members according to law. Support for the general church commitments comes from the Annual Conference.

Like many other government systems, both secular and religious, The Christian United

Church's government , or Annual Conference, is set up into three different groups. For simplicity of explanation, we are going to liken the church to the democratic form of government used in the United States or in some instances, to the constitutional monarchy of Great Britain.

These three groups are:

The Executive Branch

Like the President of the United States, the church has an Executive Officer. While in the US Government this would be the president, we recognize the *Presiding Bishop* as our leader and Chief Executive, and he or she is the presiding officer of the Annual Conference. The Presiding Bishop is an ordained elder in Full Connection elected to have pastoral oversight among the local faith communities of the Christian United Church. He or she gives vision and direction to the growth, development and maturing of the church and its leadership at denominational and local levels. The Presiding Bishop may appoint Connectional Council members as General Officers as defined in the Book of Discipline, and may also develop additional offices for the functioning of the denomination.

The Bishop may appoint a *Presiding Elder* from the Elders in full connection. The Presiding Elder is akin to the Vice President of the United States in that he works in consultation with the Presiding Bishop to work in focused areas with local churches as deemed necessary or requested by that church and the Connectional Council. He or she has oversight of local pastors appointed within the denomination and also works in other denominational areas in consultation with the Presiding Bishop. The Presiding Elder assumes the leadership of the denomination if the office of Presiding Bishop is vacated during a term, until the next Annual Conference when a new Presiding Bishop can be elected. The Presiding Elder is an ordained elder in full connection.

Just as the President of the United States has his or her Cabinet, so too, does the Presiding Bishop of the Christian United Church. This 'cabinet' is called The Connectional Council.

The *Connectional Council* is that body of persons who are the elected stewards of Christian United Church, and are accountable to the Annual Conference. The Connectional Council meets in formal session at least twice annually: usually one meeting taking place before and the other after, an Annual

Conference. The Connectional Council consists of the Officers appointed by the Bishop, District Ministers, and Members at Large.

Members-at-large are those persons elected by the Annual Conference and may be given specific tasks at the direction and request of the Connectional Council and the Presiding Bishop. Two (2) members shall serve as at large members on the Connectional Council; One (1) Lay and One (1) clergy.

The Legislative Branch

The Annual Conference consists of two voting houses. These are the House of Clergy and the House of Laity.

The House of Clergy consists of each ordained clergy person approved by the Board of Ordained Ministry to be an active and accountable minister. This means that clergy in full connection, which is to say clergy who have been ordained, and have become permanent clergy in the United Christian Church make up the House of Clergy.

The House of Laity consists of one lay (non-clergy person) delegate elected by their local faith community to represent their community at the Annual Conference. In order for a faith community or local church to be represented in the House of Laity, their minister must be in the

House of Clergy, thereby guaranteeing equal representation of the Clergy and Laity in both Houses.

Members of the Connectional Council (you remember them from a previous section; they are the Presiding Bishop's "cabinet" so to speak,) may serve in either House for which they qualify and are not prohibited from serving because they are part of the Connectional Council.

While the Annual Conference is in session, it is divided into a convenient number of District Conferences. It hears reports from the Connectional Council, District Ministers, Pastors, Delegates, and District Conference Committees. The Annual Conference admits new ministers and assigns them, according to law, to their respective churches. It has the power to remove ministers through a judicial process.

There are a few other official positions in the church that need to be mentioned. These positions are not part of the governing body of Christian United Church, but they are necessary and very important:

The General Secretary: The General Secretary is the person appointed to keep and publish accurate records of all meetings of the

Connectional Council, and the business deliberations of the Annual Conference. The General Secretary reports to the local churches and members of the Connectional Council within 30 days of any business meeting. The General Secretary may be either laity or clergy.

The Treasurer: The Treasurer is the person appointed to be a good steward of the finances of Christian United Church and who is responsible for reporting regularly on financial matters. It is his or her job to give an accurate accounting of all financial transactions. The Treasurer, with the Connectional Council, presents to the Annual Conference all financial reports and budgets for determination and vote by the Annual Conference Synod (voting houses). The Treasurer may be either a member of the laity or clergy.

Another group that needs to be mentioned is the Executive Board, which consists of the Presiding Bishop, Presiding Elder, the General Secretary, and Treasurer. This board undertakes the day-to-day operations needed to assist the church's administration to function effectively. Should an Executive Board vote result in a tie or deadlock, whatever the issue under discussion is will be referred to the entire Connectional Council for further action.

How Our Church Grows

We're a new denomination. How does a new denomination start a church? In this section, we'll tell you!

NEW CHURCHES

New CUC churches may be planted primarily in one of two ways:

1. An individual or group appointed by the bishop may work with the Connectional Council to develop a new worshipping body which from the beginning can designate itself as a potential Christian United Church affiliate; or
2. A satellite work may be developed by an existing Christian United Church congregation, after approval from the Bishop. The satellite work will remain under the auspices of the existing church until such time that it is ready to apply for affiliation independent of the original church.

Another way our denomination can grow is by an existing congregation or faith community joining the United Christian Church. These

churches may be members of another denomination, or independent churches, and may apply to the Bishop for affiliation with Christian United Church as a local faith community. Once approved by the Bishop and the Connectional Council, the local faith community immediately becomes a member church of Christian United Church.

LOCAL CHURCHES - The Local Churches are the missionary outposts of the Christian United Church. The Pastor is ordained after completing the requirements for ordination, if he or she has not already been ordained, and is appointed by the Bishop to a Local Church and confirmed by the congregation. Pastors are to preach and or/teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and continue in building the Kingdom of God and working to build a just society for all people.

Member churches in CUC have the right and responsibility to order themselves according to the Book of Discipline and our Pastoral Guidelines, working with honesty and integrity to proclaim the Gospel of Christ through their worship services and day-to-day local governance and management. The Annual Conference determines the structure under which local churches operate, but must include the following steps:

1. A local faith community will request the Bishop and Connectional Council to appoint a Pastor.
2. Each local faith community shall elect a Church Council including a Treasurer, Clerk or Secretary, and at least one other member. The Pastor is automatically a member of the administrative body of the church. The guidelines for Church Councils are listed in the appendix.
3. Each local Church Council body is required to enter into a Covenant of Agreement with the Christian United Church which includes affirming the denominational Statement of Faith and Book of Discipline.
4. Each local faith community agrees to give 10% of its general income on a monthly basis for ministry work as determined by the denomination.
5. Local churches shall have members; membership is in the denomination and the local church. Only official members of the church may serve on the local administrative body, serve as Lay Delegates, hold office as a pastor, or serve as a denominational official.

As has been stated before, each Local Church is governed by the Local Conference. This is how it works:

The District Minister appoints the time and place of the Local Conference. The Local Conference is quite important as it is a law making body. Its duties include:

1. Examining the officers of the fellowship.
2. Granting or withholding the approval of the character of the members of the Local Conference.
3. Support and Care of Local Preachers, and making recommendations to the Board of Ordained Ministry on the renewal or revocation of licenses for local pastors.
4. Recommendation of suitable candidates to the Annual Conference for ordination. Deacons are full members of the Local Conference, which is the entry point for full membership in the Annual Conferences. Local Pastors are also members of the Local Conference
5. Election of delegates to the Annual and District Conferences.

Becoming a Church Member

In order to serve on a committee, or to hold an office, yes, you have to be a church member. How, you ask? If you are a Christian, and have been baptized, all you need to do is simply state that you want to be a member of The Christian United Church, and your Local Pastor can put you on the roll as a member in full connection with the church. If you are a Christian who has not been baptized, let your local pastor know that you would like to be baptized, and he or she will make arrangements for that to happen. Then you can become a member in full connection with the church, too!

If you aren't a Christian, and you haven't accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, and are interested in making that commitment, your pastor, or any church member, would love to have the opportunity to talk with you, share with you, pray with and for you, and to help you find your way.

The Great Commission

So now what? We've learned how The Christian United Church believes, works, operates, and runs. What do we do now? We simply follow the direction given to us by Our Lord, Jesus Christ. This is His Great Commission: Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

How, you ask, can an insignificant person like me do that? Most of us don't even know how to begin to make disciples of the people on our block or in our apartment buildings, to say nothing of those in our schools or where we work. The job of being a practicing Christian is so unrealistically big that we can be discouraged before we begin.

Martin Luther wrote a hymn which contained the words:

Did we in our own strength confide
Our striving would be losing.

How right Luther was! It is not in our individual strength that we can act, but in the strength we find in the Power of God the Father, God the Son,

and God the Holy Spirit. It is this strength that gives us the courage to speak, the courage to act, and the courage to live our lives as we know we should.

It is also because of this that we value the concept of connectionalism so highly. If a pebble is dropped into a still pool of water, circles of ripples develop and become wider and wider. So it is with everything that we do in our Christian ministry. Nothing, and no one, stands alone, we are all inter-connected with one another, and as we grow, our 'circles of ripples' become wider and wider. The more people we touch, the more people those people touch, and those people touch others in turn. This is how we, as Christians, can, indeed, baptize peoples of all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And now, in closing, we quote from the Book of Common Prayer, the closing prayer of the Great Thanksgiving:

"And now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do: to love and to serve you, with gladness and singleness of heart. Amen."

Covenant Prayer

(From John Wesley's Covenant Service , 1780)

I am no longer my own, but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom
thou wilt.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for
thee,

exalted for thee or brought low for thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.

Amen.

A Final Note from the Authors

It is our hope that this booklet has helped you to understand what it means to be a part of the Christian United Church family, to be a Christian, and to be connected.

God Bless

REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Christian United Church Book of Discipline

These Holy Mysteries

An Introduction to the Episcopal Church – William Sydnor

Wikipedia

The Christian United Church Website

The Blogs of Bishop David Strong

In This House of Brede – Rumer Godden

The United Methodist Hymnal

The United Methodist Book of Worship