

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST FIRSTS

*Highlights of how UCC ministry has shaped
our religious, social and political landscape*

let it shine

the UCC at 50 years

UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST



UCC FIRSTS

The United Church of Christ is a blend of four historic traditions — Congregational, Christian, Evangelical, and Reformed — and many newer traditions. Each has left a mark on U.S. religious and political history. Here are just some of the many ways the UCC and its predecessor bodies have led the way through ministry.



1620: PILGRIMS SEEK SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

Seeking spiritual freedom, forbears of the United Church of Christ prepare to leave Europe for the New World. Later generations know them as the Pilgrims. Their pastor, John Robinson,

urges them as they depart to keep their minds and hearts open to new ways. God, he says, “has yet more light and truth to break forth out of his holy Word.”



1630: EARLY EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY

The Congregational churches founded by the Pilgrims and other spiritual reformers spread rapidly through New England. In an early experiment in democracy, each congregation is self-governing and

elects its own ministers. The Congregationalists aim to create a model for a just society lived in the presence of God. Their leader, John Winthrop, prays that “we shall be as a city upon a hill ... the eyes of all people upon us.”



1700: AN EARLY STAND AGAINST SLAVERY

Congregationalists are among the first Americans to take a stand against slavery. The Rev. Samuel Sewall writes the first anti-slavery pamphlet in America, “The Selling

of Joseph.” Sewall lays the foundation for the abolitionist movement that comes more than a century later.

1730s: THE GREAT AWAKENING

The first Great Awakening sweeps through Congregational and Presbyterian churches. One of the great thinkers of the movement, Jonathan Edwards, says the church should recover the passion of a transforming faith that changes “the course of [our] lives.”

1773: FIRST ACT OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Five thousand angry colonists gather in the Old South Meeting House to demand repeal of an unjust tax on tea. Their protest inspires the first act of civil disobedience in U.S. history — the “Boston Tea Party.”



1773: 1ST PUBLISHED AFRICAN-AMERICAN POET

A member of Old South in Boston, Phillis Wheatley becomes the first published African-American author. “Poems on Various Subjects” is a sensation, and Wheatley gains her freedom from slavery soon after.

Modern African-American poet Alice Walker says of her: “[She] kept alive, in so many of our ancestors, the notion of song.”



1777: REFORMED CONGREGATION SAVES LIBERTY BELL

The British occupy Philadelphia — seat of the rebellious Continental Congress — and plan to melt down the Liberty Bell to manufacture cannons. The Bell is safely hidden under the floorboards of Old Zion Reformed Church in Allentown.

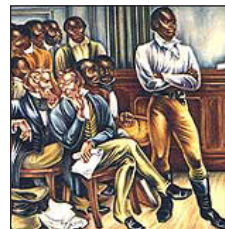


1785: FIRST ORDAINED AFRICAN-AMERICAN PASTOR

Lemuel Haynes is the first African-American ordained by a Protestant denomination. He becomes a world-renowned preacher and writer.

1798: ‘CHRISTIANS’ SEEK LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

Dissident preacher James O’Kelly is one of the early founders of a religious movement called simply the “Christians.” The Christians seek liberty of conscience and oppose authoritarian church government.



1839: DEFINING MOMENT FOR ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT

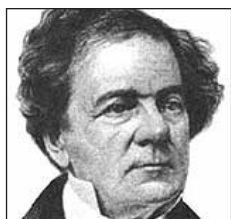
Enslaved Africans break their chains and seize control of the schooner Amistad. They are arrested and held in a Connecticut jail while the ship’s owners sue to have them returned as property. Congregationalists and other Christians organize a campaign to free the captives. The Supreme Court rules the captives are not property, and the Africans regain their freedom.

1840: 1ST UNITED CHURCH IN U.S. HISTORY

A meeting of Missouri pastors forms the first united church in U.S. history — the Evangelical Synod. It unites two Protestant traditions that have been separated for centuries: Lutheran and Reformed. The Evangelicals believe in the power of tradition, but also in spiritual freedom.

1845: 'PROTESTANT CATHOLICISM'

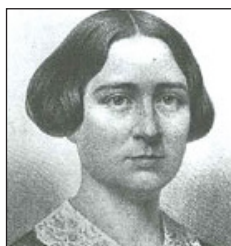
Theologian Philip Schaff scandalizes the Reformed churches in Pennsylvania when he argues for a "Protestant Catholicism" centered in the person of Jesus Christ. The movement founded by Schaff and his friend, John Nevin, revives sacramental worship in the Reformed church and sets the stage for the 20th-century liturgical movement.



1846: FIRST INTEGRATED ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY

The Amistad case is a spur to the conscience of Congregationalists who believe no human being should be a slave. In 1846 Lewis Tappan, one of the Amistad organizers, organizes

the American Missionary Association—the first anti-slavery society in the U.S. with multiracial leadership.



1853: FIRST WOMAN PASTOR

Antoinette Brown is the first woman since New Testament times ordained as a Christian minister, and perhaps the first woman in history elected to serve a Christian congregation as pastor. At her ordination a friend, Methodist minister Luther Lee, defends "a woman's right to preach

the Gospel." He quotes the New Testament: "There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

1862-77: COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES FOR BLACKS IN THE SOUTH

The American Missionary Association starts six colleges: Dillard University, Fisk University, LeMoyné-Owen College, Huston-Tillotson College, Talladega College and Tougaloo College, all historically black colleges and universities that continue to offer excellence, access, and opportunity in higher education. It also founds Brick School, today part of the UCC's Franklinton Center in North Carolina.



1887: POOR WOLF BECOMES CHRISTIAN

Poor Wolf, Chief and Spiritual Leader of the Hidatsa people, converts to Christianity. In 1971, the UCC Council for American Indian Ministry is formed to provide ministry and witness in Indian settings, and

understanding of Indian communities to the wider church.



1889: DEACONESS MOVEMENT

The Evangelical Deaconess Society and the Evangelical Deaconess Home and Hospital begin in St. Louis. Katherine Haack, a trained nurse and widow of an Evangelical pastor, is the first deaconess to be consecrated.

At a time when women were often silenced at church, women such as Haack were leaders in the administration and guidance of the home and hospital.



1897: SOCIAL GOSPEL MOVEMENT DENOUNCES ECONOMIC OPPRESSION

Congregationalist Washington Gladden is one of the first leaders of the Social Gospel movement, which takes literally the commandment

of Jesus to "love your neighbor as yourself." Social Gospel preachers denounce injustice and the exploitation of the poor. He writes a hymn that summarizes his creed: "Light up your Word: the fettered page from killing bondage free."



1943: 'SERENITY PRAYER'

Evangelical and Reformed theologian Reinhold Niebuhr preaches a sermon that introduces the world to the now famous Serenity Prayer: "God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that

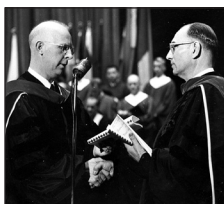
should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other."



1952: 'THE COURAGE TO BE'

Evangelical and Reformed theologian Paul Tillich publishes "The Courage to Be" — later named by the New York Public Library as one of the "Books of the Century." "Life demands again and again," he writes, "the courage to surrender some or even all security

for the sake of full self-affirmation."



1957: SPIRITUAL AND ETHNIC TRADITIONS UNITE

The United Church of Christ is born when the Evangelical and Reformed Church unites with the Congregational Christian Churches. The new community embraces a

rich variety of spiritual traditions and embraces believers of African, Asian, Pacific, Latin American, Native American and European descent.

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1959: HISTORIC RULING THAT AIRWAVES ARE PUBLIC PROPERTY

Southern television stations impose a news blackout on the growing civil rights movement, and Martin Luther

King Jr. asks the UCC to intervene. Everett Parker of the UCC's Office of Communication organizes churches and wins in Federal court a ruling that the airwaves are public, not private property. The decision leads to hiring of persons of color in television studios and newsrooms.



1972: ORDINATION OF FIRST OPENLY GAY MINISTER

The UCC's Golden Gate Association ordains the first openly gay person as a minister in a mainline Protestant denomination: the Rev. William R. Johnson. In the following three decades, General Synod urges equal

rights for homosexual citizens and calls on congregations to welcome gay, lesbian and bisexual members.



1973: STANDING WITH FARM WORKERS

Meeting in St. Louis, the UCC General Synod suspends business after learning from Cesar Chavez that farm owners have unleashed a campaign of violence and beatings against strikers. The church flies delegates to Coachella Valley to show support.

1973: CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS FREED

The Wilmington Ten — 10 civil rights activists — are charged with the arson of a white-owned grocery store in Wilmington, N.C. One of them is Benjamin Chavis, a social justice worker sent by the UCC to Wilmington to help the African-American community overcome racial intolerance and intimidation. The UCC's General Synod raises bail. Chavis' conviction is overturned and he is released after spending four-and-a-half years in prison.



1976: FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN LEADER OF AN INTEGRATED DENOMINATION

General Synod elects the Rev. Joseph H. Evans president of the United Church of Christ. He becomes the first African American leader of a racially integrated mainline church in the United States.



1977: NATIONAL UCC DISABILITIES MINISTRIES

Harold Wilke (standing in photo) is first to lead national UCC disabilities ministries. Born without arms, the internationally known disabilities advocate serves as pastor, author,

denominational executive. When President George H.W. Bush signs the Americans with Disabilities Act, newspapers worldwide carry a photo of Bush handing Wilke one of his pens, which Wilke accepts with his left foot.

1989: ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIP

The United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) approve a historic partnership of full communion. The two denominations proclaim mutual recognition of their sacraments and ordained ministry.



1993: APOLOGY ACCEPTED

Sometimes "being first" means being the first to admit a past mistake. In Hawai'i, UCC President Paul Sherry apologizes on behalf of the church for the complicity of missionaries in the 1893 overthrow of Hawai'i's government and leader, Queen Lili'uokalani. \$3.5 million is pledged to native Hawai'ian churches and a non-profit organization.

1995: SINGING A NEW SONG

The UCC publishes The New Century Hymnal — the only hymnal released by a Christian church that honors in equal measure both male and female images of God. Although its poetry is contemporary, its theology is traditional."



1997: 'FORMULA OF AGREEMENT'

Centuries of division between the Lutheran and Reformed branches of Protestant Christianity end when UCC, Presbyterian Church USA, Reformed Church in America and

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America agree on a relationship of full communion through a "Formula of Agreement." The Formula acknowledges the common historical roots — and the theological differences — between the traditions, and celebrates the potential for shared mission and ministry.



2005: MARRIAGE EQUALITY

On July 4, the General Synod overwhelmingly passes a resolution supporting same-gender marriage equality. UCC General Minister and President John Thomas says that the Synod "has acted courageously to declare freedom, affirming marriage

equality, affirming the civil rights of same gender couples ... and encouraging our local churches to celebrate and bless those marriages."