

CHAPTER TWENTY:
THE NEW UNITED CHURCH:
PIETY, THEOLOGY AND ECUMENISM

How did people in the new United Church of Christ encounter God? What disciplines did they follow to cultivate that relationship? The various traditions of the UCC intermingled and new trends developed. Theology, the foundation of piety, was also in transition.

PART A:
THEOLOGY IN THE NEW UNITED CHURCH

The United Church of Christ was birthed in an ethos of neo-orthodoxy and Christian Realism. The chief executive officers of the two denominations were the first translators into English of Karl Barth. The most influential theologian of the new UCC was Reinhold Niebuhr. The Statement of Faith was written by Niebuhr's disciple and successor. New currents in theology soon made themselves felt. Liberation theology, developed by Roman Catholics in Latin America, read the Bible through the eyes of the poor. Black, Feminist, American Indian and several Asian theologies read the Bible and interpreted the divine-human encounter through the experiences of those communities. All these theologies served to broaden the church's perspective from its middle-class-intellectual-male-North Atlantic base, and to challenge some of its assumptions.

The moral collapse of Western civilization, demonstrated by two world wars, led to doubts about the superiority of Western civilization's religion. Some feminist theology, the "Creation Spirituality" of Matthew Fox, and the writings on comparative religion of John Hick, rejected the transcendent God of neo-orthodoxy for an immanent God within creation, and ceased to make claims for the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ. Most Christians, whether or not they accepted these theological trends, were more open to learning from the wisdom of other religions.

In times of uncertainty, those who offer certainty have a strong appeal. Fundamentalism¹ continued to have its supporters. The milder, less exclusive and more affirming "Evangelicalism," grew to much greater significance than

¹See Chapter 12, Part E.

exclusive Fundamentalism. The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, born in 1900, grew rapidly, until by century's end this movement affirming personal reception of the gifts of the Spirit included one of every four Christians worldwide.

The United Church of Christ moved into the future, pulled from its original ethos in multiple directions.

Sound Teaching

In 1976 the Office of Church Life and Leadership convened a seminar on theology. The seminar report identified two dangers faced by the denomination. On the one hand, the social concern of the denomination had led it to act in response to issues before it had time for theological reflection. On the other hand, concern for institutional maintenance led some to such a close identification with the cultural values of harmony, growth, and efficiency, that the church's teaching became indistinguishable from American civil religion. The seminar report expressed the conviction that,

The ministry of the church must become more intentional and disciplined in teaching the faith of the church, in valuing its theological tradition and in responding to the present place of the church in culture.

The seminar report, *Sound Teaching*,² made theological statements on (1) confessions of faith, (2) polity, and (3) collegiality for accountability. It then made a strong affirmation of liberation theology: "In Jesus Christ, God takes sides with the poor." This Christocentric liberation affirmation called on the church to be in "constant conflict" with the powers that legitimate injustice, to oppose the "death dealings" of the culture, and to work for a culture obedient to God's will without being co-opted by the culture. It affirmed the corporate nature of worship and the importance of disciplines of piety.

Gradually, *Sound Teaching* influenced the life of the church. The denomination created working groups for theological reflection on issues such as peace and sexuality. Other denominations looking for a UCC doctrinal statement found in *Sound Teaching* a basis for discussion.

²*Toward the Task of Sound Teaching in the United Church of Christ*. It can be found as an appendix in *Justice Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980) by Frederick Herzog.

Theological Ferment

Theological discussion increased, until nine years after *Sound Teaching*, denominational publications recognized “theological ferment” in the church. The Board for Homeland Ministries devoted the Spring, 1985 issue of *New Conversations* to this theological ferment, presenting and discussing four theological statements:

1. *The Dubuque Declaration*, adopted by Biblical Witness Fellowship in November, 1983, written by Donald Bloesch.
2. *Craigville Colloquy Letter*, prepared by a consultation of UCC clergy and laity, 16 May 1984.
3. *A Most Difficult and Urgent Time*, an appeal from 39 UCC seminary faculty in October, 1983, addressed to denominational leaders.
4. *The Prophet Speaks to Our Times*, a commentary of *Isaiah 58* prepared by UCC social activists specifically for the *New Conversations* issue.

The first three statements were motivated by a concern over “a tendency for theological thought to be utilitarian, in the service of programmatic ends, without sustained, disciplined reflection,” and “the caucus mentality of our churches.” All four statements began with the Bible and ended with action in the world. The first two made strong appeals to past creeds and faith statements of the church, and the central doctrines of Christianity.

The *Dubuque Declaration* expressed the doctrinal stand of BWF, using much traditional creedal language. It affirmed the trinity, Christ’s divine-human nature, sacrificial atonement, and the infallibility of the Bible.

The first Craigville Colloquy was organized by the “Biblical, Theological, Liturgical Group,” an ad hoc movement for theological reflection begun in 1978. Craigville Colloquy became an annual event leading to the organizing of “Confessing Christ” in 1993. Frederick R. Trost, then Wisconsin Conference Minister, led this movement, which blended Barthian neo-orthodoxy, Mercersburg Theology concern for worship and doctrinal continuity with the past, and a liberation theology solidarity with the oppressed. The *Colloquy Letter* condemned the “idolatries of our time”: racism and sexism, materialism and consumerism, secularism, militarism, identity with any ideology of the right or left, cultural captivity and accommodation. Confessing Christ soon included over a thousand clergy and lay people, following a daily lectionary and gathering periodically for theological reflection.

“Theological ferment” did not lead to immediate direct results, but gradually influenced the church in a multitude of ways. The “ferment” influenced worship and educational resources prepared by the denomination. New publications included a theological journal, *Prism*, and a seven volume collection of primary documents from the church’s past, *Living Theological Heritage*. Confessing Christ came into being, and BWF broadened its theological agenda.³

Theologians

UCC theologians participated actively in denominational life, as well as in academia. Douglas Horton and George Richards led their denominations into union. Roger Shinn, who wrote the first draft of the Statement of Faith, continued to provide resources for educational ministries.

Walter Brueggemann (1933-) was rooted in the Evangelical Synod tradition, graduating from Elmhurst and Eden and teaching Old Testament at Eden before going to Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia. This “contemporary prophet” applied the scriptures to modern issues in his writing. In addition to his interpretation of peace in *Visions of Shalom*, he addressed environmental and economic issues in *The Land* (1977). Brueggemann chaired the committee that produced the *Sound Teaching* statement, and contributed to the “Most Difficult and Urgent Time” statement.

Frederick Herzog (1925-1995) was born in Ashley, N. D., in a Midwestern German Reformed environment. He studied with Karl Barth in Switzerland, and from 1960 until his death taught at Duke University in North Carolina. Herzog, in his life and thought, formed a unique link between the church of the past – neo-orthodox Germany – and the church of the future – liberation theology Latin America. In *Liberation Theology and Justice Church*⁴ Herzog applied liberation theology to the North American situation. He made a sharp distinction between liberation theology and liberal theology. He blended neo-orthodoxy’s condemnation of culture-religion with liberation theology’s commitment to struggle for justice. Herzog participated in the discussions between the UCC and the Evangelical Church of the Union in Germany, was on the committee that produced *Sound Teaching*, and wrote the first draft of “A Most Difficult and Urgent Time.”

³I thank Barbara Brown Zikmund for this summary of the fruit of “theological ferment.”

⁴*Liberation Theology: Liberation in the Light of the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Seabury, 1972). *Justice Church: The New Function of the Church in North American Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980).

Susan Thistlethwaite (1924-) graduated from Duke University and Divinity School, was ordained in 1973, and later joined the faculty, then became President, of Chicago Theological Seminary. A constant advocate on non-violence and justice, Thistlethwaite has promoted feminist theology and addressed the racial divide in the nation and world. In addition to giving leadership to the Peace Theology Development team, 1981-1985, and contributing to the development of inclusive language scriptures, she also participated in the development of “A Most Difficult and Urgent Time.”

Donald Bloesch (b. 1928), son of an Evangelical Synod pastor, and grandson of two Evangelical Synod pastors, studied at Elmhurst College, Chicago Theological Seminary and University of Chicago Divinity School. Uncomfortable with the liberal theologies of the latter two schools, Bloesch found spiritual nourishment in Evangelical⁵ groups. Ordained into the Evangelical and Reformed Church in 1953, Bloesch taught theology at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary⁶ 1957-1993.

Although not well known in his own denomination, the UCC, Bloesch’s many works were widely read throughout the world Evangelical community. Bloesch called his theology “progressive evangelical,” a synthesis of neo-orthodoxy and evangelicalism, rooted in Evangelical Synod piety. Interested in intentional Christian community, the church and the sacraments, Bloesch also took strong stands on social issues (anti-war, pro-labor, anti-abortion). Firmly committed to the authority of Scripture, yet opposed to a rigidly literal interpretation, he challenged both Evangelicals and mainline liberals to intellectual responsibility. Described as “a catholic evangelical ordained in a mainline denomination,”⁷ Bloesch remained a loyal – and often critical – member of the UCC. He wrote the *Dubuque Declaration* and has been active in BWF. Piety and church renewal were constant themes in his writing, integral to his theology.

As the Twenty-first Century began, the theological leadership of the United

⁵To avoid confusion between “Evangelical” as a reference to Evangelical Synod, and “Evangelical” as a reference to the theological position of churches related to the National Association of Evangelicals, I will *in this section* use “Evangelical Synod” for the former and “Evangelical” for the latter.

⁶A seminary of the Presbyterian Church (U. S. A.).

⁷Elmer L. Colyer, ed., *Evangelical Theology in Transition* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1999), 15.

Church of Christ was still shaped by the neo-orthodoxy of Barth and Christian Realism of Niebuhr. Theology was profoundly practical and ethical. American Civil Religion was seen as the greatest threat to the integrity of the church; the Bible and sound teaching its strongest defense.

PART B: MOVEMENTS FOR DEEPENING SPIRITUALITY ⁸

Traditional forms of piety persisted in the United Church of Christ. In a 1990 random sampling of UCC members, 71% reported that they prayed or meditated, 30% read the Bible, and 24% read other religious literature at least once a week. In a 1989 survey of worshipers in Indiana-Kentucky Conference, one third claimed to practice proportionate giving; 12% tithed. Adult Bible Study groups met in 56% of the churches in 1978, 42% in 2000.

Other findings indicated changes in piety. In 1997, 79% of UCC congregations used the lectionary, a sign of the increasing role of liturgy. In 2000, 34% of UCC congregations held occasional spiritual retreats.⁹

Confirmation

How were youth prepared for church membership? The E&R pattern of a systematic course of study soon spread to CC background churches. A 1976 survey calculated that the average confirmation class consisted of ten students, ages 13 and 14, meeting 34 times for an hour and twenty minutes.¹⁰ Pastors or Associate Pastors were the sole instructors in 53% of the programs. In 99% of the programs the principle teaching method was discussion. Although the UCC produced several series of confirmation materials, *My Confirmation* was still used by 60% of the programs in 1976, and continued to be published by the denomination into the 21st Century.

Children and Communion

Should communion be offered to children, or only to confirmed church members? Generally, churches of the Reformed tradition restricted communion,

⁸For earlier discussion of piety see Chapter 3, Part B, Puritan Piety and worship, Chapter 4, Part A, German reformed Piety and Worship, Chapter 12, part C, and Chapter 17, Part A, Piety and Worship.

⁹The information on the charismatic movement is contradictory. In a 1978 survey, 8% of UCC congregations had charismatic prayer groups. However the 1989 Indiana-Kentucky survey reported charismatic activity to be negligible.

¹⁰One third of the programs met for two years; 2% for 3 years.

believing it to be harmful to a person who had not made a profession of faith (1 *Corinthians* 11:27-29). Intermittently through the years, a few churches opened communion to all as a “converting ordinance.” In the UCC, Christian Educators who highly valued both children and communion, believing it was “a gift of grace from God,” advocated inclusion of children in communion. BHM in 1981 held a consultation on Children and Communion, and in 1984-85 produced teaching materials interpreting communion to children. Several Conferences passed resolutions in 1991-92 supporting the inclusion of children, and carried their concern to General Synod, which in 1993 endorsed the concept.

In UCC polity, this kind of policy decision was made by each congregation separately. Gradually, the policy of serving communion to children spread. Resistance was strongest in congregations with a long tradition of a first communion service after Confirmation.

Liturgical Renewal

The Twentieth Century liturgical renewal movement lifted up: (1) active participation by the laity, (2) continuity with the church of all times and places, and (3) the importance of symbolic actions, such as the sacraments, of equal value with the spoken word. The UCC inherited a strong interest in liturgy from the Mercersburg movement. Congregational Christians, historically suspicious of set forms of worship, were by mid-century moved by ecumenical interest to be open to liturgical innovation.

The UCC published new worship resources in pamphlet and loose-leaf formats. General Synod in 1977 called for a book of worship using inclusive language. The UCC published *Book of Worship: United Church of Christ* in 1986.

Worship shapes the faith of the church. The *Book of Worship* offered several options for Sunday morning worship, all rooted in the Western Christian tradition. Innovations, besides inclusive language, included greater use of the Church Year (Advent, Ash Wednesday, Easter Eve) and services for healing. Within a decade the *Book* was being used frequently by 28% of UCC congregations, occasionally by 38%.

The UCC produced *The United Church of Christ Hymnal* in 1974. Criticized for its lack of inclusive language and relatively small hymn selection, it did not gain wide acceptance. A 1989 survey showed that only 21% of UCC congregations used the *UCC Hymnal*, 38% used the *Pilgrim Hymnal* (1958), and 20% used *The (E&R) Hymnal*. General Synod in 1977 called for a new inclusive language hymnal. BHM began work on the project in 1989, and in 1995

published *The New Century Hymnal*, which soon exceeded the *UCC Hymnal* in sales and usage. Like the *Book of Worship* it provided more resources for the church year and for healing services. The *New Century Hymnal* included a larger selection of new hymns, as well as older gospel songs, and music from the racial/ethnic communities of the denomination. In spite of controversy over the theological implications of some of the inclusive language, and new wording for old familiar hymns, the *New Century Hymnal* received wide usage in the UCC.

Charismatic Movement in the UCC

The Pentecostal movement began in 1900, claiming the gift of speaking in tongues as a sign of reception of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals organized their own denominations and generally held Fundamentalist theology. In the 1960s the “charismatic movement” affected many in non-Pentecostal denominations with celebration of all gifts of the Spirit (*1 Corinthians 12:27-30*), not just speaking in tongues. In 1976, seventy-one UCC people attended a major charismatic gathering in Kansas City, decided to promote the work of the Spirit in the UCC, and organized Focus Renewal Ministries (FRM). FRM developed lay witness programs, training events, and retreats, which it offered to congregations.

“Spirituality”

In the 1980s many Americans searched for meaning through “spirituality,” some turning to the Roman Catholic monastic tradition, others to Eastern religions, or psychologies of self-fulfillment. Within the United Church of Christ, some persons believed the emphasis on social action led to a neglect of “spiritual life.” In March, 1984, seventy persons gathered in Cleveland and organized a “Spiritual Development Network.” The Network enabled persons interested in spiritual development to share ideas and resources and to work together on regional and national events. The Network promoted spirituality grounded in the historic piety of the UCC, and affirming its social justice concern and its diversity. General Synod in 1985 designated “Spiritual Renewal” a priority of the church for four years. The Office of Church Life and Leadership developed resources and designed *The Pilgrimage: A Retreat Movement*.

What is UCC Piety?

Through the Spiritual Development Network and Spiritual Renewal Priority, the United Church of Christ began to recover its own authentic piety.¹¹ UCC piety

¹¹Three articles outlining UCC piety were: Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, “A Spiritual Vision for the United Church of Christ,” *Historical Intelligencer* 3:2 (1985): 12-17; Randi Jones Walker, “The Roots of U. C. C. Spirituality,” *Impact* no. 23 (1989): 23-26; Barbara Brown Zikmund, “Historical Sources of Spiritual Vitality in the U. C. C.” *Historical Intelligencer* 3:2 (1985): 8-12. A packet of brief

was intellectually responsible, nurturing the knowledge of God through Confirmation classes, adult study, and retreats. UCC piety was not individualistic, but communal, growing toward God through fellowship in the church. UCC piety valued both Word and Sacrament, developing rich liturgy, rooted in the ancient traditions and relating to contemporary issues in plain language. Word and Sacrament helped worshipers to focus on the central events of salvation history, the Cross and the resurrection. UCC piety ideally encouraged living a Christian life in gratitude to God, had a passion for justice in society, and was ecumenical. Communion in Christ led to a desire for communion with all in Christ. UCC understandings of piety were broad, including social action and charismatic renewal. The church of Jonathan Edwards, John Nevin and Charles Sheldon had rich resources for cultivating a walk with God.

PART C: THE NEW UNITED CHURCH AND THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

“United” was the first name of the United Church of Christ, the center of its denominational identity. This new denomination entered union discussions with other denominations before its own union was complete. The UCC soon had to divert its attention from more plans of union to concentrate on its own internal ongoing process of becoming one people of God, (1) creating a common identity from different denominational traditions; (2) uniting by inclusion into the leadership of the church, racial, ethnic and other groups that had been on the margins; and (3) uniting with Christ’s compassion for the poor. A third round of organic union did not materialize.

Those who believed the UCC’s ecumenical ardor was fading, proposed in 1986 that the President have a full time staff assistant for ecumenical affairs. Because of financial restraints the position was not created until 1991, when John Thomas entered this new office.

Marjorie H. Royle of BHM Research Department reported in 1990:

Has the ecumenical movement stalled? If ecumenism is understood as the union of denominations into one new denomination, that seems to be true. . . . Ecumenists, themselves, see the lack of progress toward denominational union, not as a failure, but as a sign that the ecumenical movement has moved forward toward a new

descriptions of *Practices of Faith in the United Church of Christ*, produced about 2001, also described UCC piety.

understanding of unity.¹²

Its commitment to catholicity severely tested by the long process of union, the UCC was unwilling to immediately enter another organic union.

The UCC continued involvement in ecumenical activities, from the local to the global level. A World Council of Churches consensus document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, released in 1982, was thoroughly studied on all levels of the UCC, and General Synod adopted a response in 1985. As a consensus statement, BEM described a theology and policies of faith and order that no one denomination followed; it represented a direction toward which all denominations could move, and facilitated ecumenical activities.

The UCC continued to search for ways to grow in spiritual unity with other Christians. Four significant efforts, leading to new relationships short of organic union, were (1) partnership with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), (2) Consultation on Church Union, (3) full communion with the Evangelical Church of the Union in Germany, and (4) a formula of agreement among Lutheran and Reformed churches.

Ecumenical Partnership

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) expressed interest in participating in the Congregational Christian-Evangelical and Reformed union discussions in 1946. The latter two denominations believed their negotiations had progressed too far to introduce a third party at that point, but promised to consider union with the Disciples as soon as the UCC union was accomplished. Accordingly, Disciples observer-consultants participated in the UCC commissions on the constitution and the Statement of Faith.

The Disciples of Christ had discussed union with Christians and Congregationalists several times in the past. Disciples shared with the UCC a commitment to Christian unity, congregational polity, and one founder—Barton Stone.

The UCC and Disciples began talks on union in 1962, and in 1965 General Synod authorized the UCC Commission on Christian Unity to develop a Plan of Union when it believed the time was right. In 1966 the two denominations suspended union conversations in deference to the Consultation on Church

¹²Marjorie H. Royle, "The Meaning of an Ecumenical Partnership" (Nov. 1990), 1-2. UCC Papers, UCBHM Research-Findings and Reports, 1972-2000, box 1.

Union (see next section).

The UCC and Disciples resumed talks in 1977, and in 1979 agreed to a six year “covenant for study” across the denominations. This study revealed a “widespread apathy towards union.” In 1985 the two denominations declared an “ecumenical partnership,” which was to be more than cooperation but less than organic union.

The United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) recognized “full communion” in 1989, established procedures for mutual recognition of ministers in 1994, and united their foreign mission work in a “Common Global Mission Board” in 1 January 1996.

Consultation on Church Union

I am moved by the conviction that Jesus Christ, whom all of us confess as our divine Lord and Savior, wills that His church be one.

Eugene Carson Blake, stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church, elaborated on this conviction in a sermon at Grace Episcopal Cathedral, San Francisco, on 4 December, 1960, by calling on the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches to invite the Methodist Church and the new United Church of Christ “to form with us a plan of union both catholic and reformed.” Such a union would bring most American main line Protestants into one denomination.

On 9 April 1962, representatives of the four denominations met and gave birth to the Consultation on Church Union (COCU). The number of participating denominations grew through inclusion of groups with whom the four charter members had close relations, and through most of its history COCU had from six to ten members. The Consultation soon reached theological consensus and prepared a *Plan of Union* which it commended to the churches in 1970. Over 1300 study groups across the country examined the *Plan*. Responses, reported to the Consultation in 1973, were overwhelmingly negative. The *Plan* created too much bureaucracy and a “Parish” system that left congregations with less control over their own lives than they had in any of the existing denominations. The office and powers of “bishop” were too authoritarian for the UCC. The Consultation could never resolve the issue of apostolic succession through bishops in a way fully satisfactory to both Episcopalians and the other denominations.

The Consultation did not prepare a new plan, neither did it dissolve. COCU

was the only major church union discussion to include both predominantly White and predominantly African American denominations. It had the potential of addressing not just the theological and ecclesial divisions in the church, but also the racial divide. So it continued, looking for ways to promote unity short of union.

In 1984 the Consultation sent a theological statement, the *COCU Consensus*, to the churches, which the UCC General Synod accepted in 1989 as a “sufficient theological basis” for a covenant with the other denominations. COCU followed up this theological document in 1988 with *Churches in Covenant Communion*. This proposal called for intercommunion, mutual recognition of ministers, cooperation in missions, and “covenanting councils” with oversight of the covenant. UCC General Synod approved *Churches in Covenant Communion*, as did all the other denominations except the Episcopalians. This proposal was revised, not requiring covenanting councils, and postponing action on mutual recognition of ministers to a future date. In this form the proposal, now called “Churches Uniting in Christ” (CUIC) was approved by the denominations, including the UCC, in 2001, and went into effect in January, 2002.¹³

Kirchengemeinschaft

Soon after the uniting General Synod in 1957, two representatives of the Evangelical Church of the Union (EKU) of Germany approached the co-presidents of the new United Church of Christ to discuss closer ties between the EKU and the UCC.

The Evangelical Church of the Union was a federation of *landeskirchen* (state churches) in Germany that united Lutheran and Reformed churches. The Evangelical Synod had looked to the EKU as its parent, providing it with most of its members through immigration, although they never had formal ties. Both the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christians had assisted the German church in reconstruction after World War II and had participated in pastoral exchanges. The EKU, as the largest united church in the world, followed with interest the development of the UCC. Following the formation of the UCC, the two denominations continued to cultivate their relationship with pastoral exchanges and visits of delegations.

¹³Member denominations of CUIC were: African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Episcopal Church, International Council of Community Churches, Presbyterian Church (U. S. A.), United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church.

Germany was divided by the Cold War into two states, communist East Germany and democratic West Germany. In 1972 the ECU was forced to divide into two synods, reflecting the political boundary. In this crisis of isolation the ECU-East looked to still closer relations with the UCC. Through common contacts with the UCC, the East and West Synods of the ECU could keep in touch with each other. Also, having to justify its existence in an atheist and socialist state, the Eastern Synod found the UCC position on peace and social justice, expressed in *Sound Teaching*, to be helpful. From the UCC perspective, closer ties with a church in another country was an antidote for American provincialism.

At the invitation of the ECU-East, contact with the UCC increased and the relationship deepened. After further discussions of theology and ministry, the two German synods in 1980 voted to enter *kirchengemeinschaft* (full communion) with the United Church of Christ, which reciprocated in 1981. Kirchengemeinschaft included mutual recognition of ministers and full fellowship of pulpit and altar.

Kirchengemeinschaft led to more exchanges of pastors, lectures of scholars, discussion of social issues, and partnership agreements between regional bodies of the two denominations. Following Kirchengemeinschaft the UCC entered into numerous partnerships with denominations in other countries. Each agreement was different, pertaining to issues in that unique relationship. The ECU-UCC was the most intimate of these relationships, as the churches explored together issues of theology, ministry and society.

Formula of Agreement

In 1973 the Lutheran and Reformed churches of Europe, and union churches derived from them, adopted a plan, called the Leuenberg Agreement, by which they could have full communion and recognition of each other's ministers. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and Lutheran World Federation began similar discussions in 1982. In the United States, Lutheran-Reformed dialogue began in 1962.

Lutheran-Reformed dialogue directed itself to resolving the theological disagreements of the Sixteenth Century, in particular the understanding of communion. The potential benefits would include the possibility of shared ministry in union churches and local cooperation in many small communities.

Although the United Church of Christ had roots in both traditions, it was looked upon as a member of the Reformed side because of its membership in the

WARC. The UCC did not enter the dialogue until the second round of discussions in 1972. A proposal for reconciliation and mutual recognition, *Invitation to Action*, was sent to the churches in 1984. As the Lutheran churches, who could not agree on their position toward the dialogue, entered a process of union with each other, action was delayed until the new Evangelical Lutheran Church of America could organize and re-examine the proposal as one body. Some Lutherans had problems with the UCC because its polity did not bind ministers to particular confessions. After further discussion, the Formula of Agreement was presented to the churches and approved by all four bodies in 1997.