

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE THE NEW UNITED CHURCH--ITS MISSION AND STRUCTURE

Mission, as traditionally understood, decreased in importance in the United Church of Christ. Congregations reduced the proportion of receipts sent to Conferences;<sup>1</sup> Conferences reduced the proportion they forwarded to the national church;<sup>2</sup> and the denomination reduced the proportion of the national budget given to the historic mission boards.<sup>3</sup> Overall, out of every ten dollars given in the local church, over twenty cents went to World Missions in the early days of the UCC; by 2000 it was down to three cents.

Two factors contributed to this decline: (1) competition for limited resources in a church of declining membership, and (2) new understandings of mission, emphasizing the mission of each local congregation in its community. Congregations and members engaged directly in mission. Habitat for Humanity, a housing enterprise founded by a UCC layman, became a major local mission of many congregations. Various racial and ethnic minorities moved from being objects of mission to being organized groups within the denomination. The UCC struggled to redefine and practice “evangelism,” once considered the “grand object” of missions, and then to practice the new evangelism. Declining financial support led to restructuring.

### PART A: RACIAL/ETHNIC PLURALISM

The United Church of Christ continued the ministry of its predecessor denominations to immigrants, many of whom in the old country had church relations similar to the UCC. Several racial and ethnic groups – American Indians, Hispanics, and Pacific Asian Americans – followed the example of African Americans in organizing to claim a larger role as a constituent part of the UCC.

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<sup>1</sup>From 9.6% in 1965 to 4.2% in 2000.

<sup>2</sup>From 61% in 1965 to 38% in 2000.

<sup>3</sup>In 1973 United Church Board for World Ministries (BWM) and United Church Board for Homeland Ministries (BHM) were allocated 35% and 32% of the national church budget respectively. By 1999 the proportions were 21% and 20%.

By 2000, the UCC had, in addition to its predominantly English, German and African American congregations, the following numbers of congregations with ethnic identities either in origin or acquired.

ETHNIC CONGREGATIONS IN 2000		
ethnic group	congs.	congs. since 1957
Samoan	58	54
Hispanic	82	31
Filipino	22	15
Korean	8	8
Magyar	37	5
South Asian	5	5
Chinese	13	3
Hawaiian	51	2
Japanese	32	2
American Indian	20	2
Haitian	1	1
Lao	1	1
Marshallese	1	1
Sudanese	1	1
Taiwanese	1	1
Others	29	0

With the exception of the Magyars, all new work with European immigrants had ceased, and those ethnic churches were in decline. The principal growth was among Pacific Islanders, Asians, and Hispanics.

### Samoa Congregationalists in America<sup>4</sup>

By century's end over 60,000 Samoans had immigrated to the United States. The overwhelming majority of Samoans were Congregational. Samoan Congregationalists organized their own congregations in the United States, without outside help. Three groups of Samoan Congregational churches co-existed in the United States, with some movement between them, and some dual affiliations: (1) congregations affiliated with the parent denominations in Samoa; (2) independent congregations; (3) congregations affiliated with the UCC. A General Synod resolution in 1997, "Declaration of the Intention to Work Toward Partnership Between the Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa and the United Church of Christ," helped to improve relations and to facilitate the exchange of pastors.

Most Samoan congregations were extended kinship groups with fewer than fifty members. Following the kinship pattern, the Samoan constituency of the UCC grew through the multiplication of small congregations, rather than growth into larger congregations.

### Filipino Churches<sup>5</sup>

By 2000 over 1.8 million Filipinos had settled in the United States. Although the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) was the largest Protestant church in the Philippines, it constituted less than 1% of the population. The UCCP chose to work with the UCC as another united church, and the two denominations established a partnership agreement in 1987. BHM cooperated with UCCP in placing ministers from the Philippines and organizing churches. Before 1980 the Filipino presence in the UCC was confined to Hawaii; from 1980-1993 thirteen Filipino congregations were opened across the US mainland.

### American Indian Ministry<sup>6</sup>

In the wake of African American efforts for greater self-determination within the denomination, American Indians took similar action. The Three American Indian groups in the UCC, Dakota Association, Fort Berthold Council, and Ho Cak church, came together as the Council for American Indian Ministries (CAIM) in

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<sup>4</sup>For information on the Congregational Church in Samoa see Chapter 7, Part B, Samoa, and Chapter 16, Part B, The Church in Samoa..

<sup>5</sup>For earlier information on the church in the Philippines see Chapter 16, Part B, the Philippines, and Chapter 17, Part C, The Church in thge Philippines.

<sup>6</sup>For earlier information on American Indian churches see Chapter 3, Part D, Chapter 7, Part B, Cherokee and Choctaw, and Dakoto, and Chapter 14 Part D.

1970. BHM authorized this council of representatives of the Indian churches to set policy and allocate funds<sup>7</sup> for the denomination's Indian ministry. In 1971 General Synod recognized CAIM as an agency of the church. In 1982 the UCC opened its first urban Indian congregation, All Nations Church in Minneapolis.

### Hispanic Ministry

Hispanic UCC related communities in Puerto Rico,<sup>8</sup> Mexico, and the mainland of the USA developed closer relationships in this period.

ABCFM missionaries arrived in Guadalajara, Mexico in 1872, and in 1879 organized a Mexican Congregational church. In 1896 one of these missionaries to Mexico was transferred to California to work with Mexicans there. Congregational work with Mexican-Americans, an extension of the mission to Mexico, led to the organization of churches in Chino, California (1920), El Paso, Texas (1924), Albuquerque, New Mexico (1926), and other locations in California. Hispanic Congregational churches also developed in Chicago and a few other urban centers. The ABCFM transferred its Mexico Mission to the care of Southern California Conference in 1927. In 1972 the Christian Congregational Church of Mexico became fully autonomous.

In the summer of 1972 several UCC Hispanic pastors from different areas began the process of getting to know each other. They identified and contacted other Hispanics in the UCC and in 1977 organized the Hispanic Council. Through the Council, Hispanics became more visible in the life of the UCC and gave each other support.

Hispanic delegates walked out of General Synod in 1987, when they believed their concerns were not being heard, then after negotiations walked back in. General Synod created a Hispanic Ministries Implementation Team. Concerns of the Hispanic Council were:

1. *Pastors*—They called for seminary training designed with Hispanic input, to be appropriate for Hispanic students, and for scholarships.
2. *Churches*—They asked for financial assistance in organizing new congregations without having to use the expensive and culturally inappropriate methods of BHM.

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<sup>7</sup>A percent of the Neighbors in Need special offering was set aside for Indian work and administered by CAIM.

<sup>8</sup>For earlier material on Puerto Rico see Chapter 16, Part B, Puerto Rico.

3. *Resources*—They requested Spanish language and culturally appropriate resources for congregations and Church Schools.

After 1987 slow progress came on these concerns. Hispanic new church starts multiplied on the mainland, and Hispanic representation in denominational life increased.

In 1983 the Hispanic Council held its annual meeting in Mexico. Beginning in 1981 Youth Encuentros were held alternately in Mexico and the United States, occasionally on Puerto Rico. The Hispanic Council also established the Centro Alberto Rembar Lectureship, which took place alternately in the United States and Mexico. In 1990 the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico conducted a plebiscite of its membership and decided overwhelmingly to remain affiliated with the UCC. In these various ways the UCC Hispanic communities of Puerto Rico, Mexico and the USA mainland grew together into one community.

#### Pacific Asian American Ministries<sup>9</sup>

In 1972 the Japanese American Council of the UCC decided to organize an Asian American caucus. They contacted representatives of other ethnic groups, together organized Pacific and Asian American Ministries (PAAM) in 1974, and received recognition from General Synod in 1975. This collection of nine ethnic groups with diverse languages and cultures included recent immigrants, second to fourth generation Americans, and one indigenous group (Hawaiians). Leadership development and youth ministry have been central PAAM concerns.

Theological reflection of Pacific and Asian Americans began with the gospel and ethics of the missionaries, and included a respect for other religions, and the need to deal with shame. Theology and polity were both shaped by the high value given to family.

African Americans, American Indians, Hispanics, and Pacific and Asian Americans organized caucuses within the United Church of Christ to assert their concerns. This strategy moved these groups from being objects of mission to being colleagues in mission with the rest of the UCC. They gained greater control over their own community's life and a larger role in the life of the

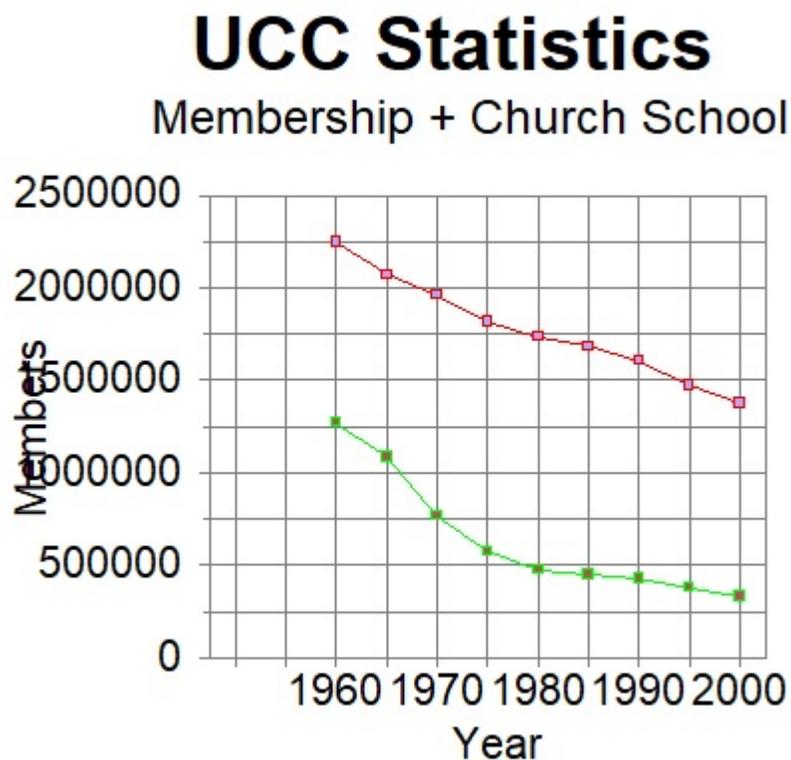
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<sup>9</sup>For earlier information on Pacific and Asian churches see Chapter 7, Part B, Hawaii, and Samoa, Chapter 15, Part B, and Part F, Chapter 16, part B, Haoles and Hawaiians, and Hawaii's Ethnic Mosaic and The Church in Samoa, and The Philippines, Chapter 17, Part C, Japanese Christians in Japan, Hawaii and the Mainland, and the Church in the Philippines, and in this Chapter and Part, Samoan Congregationalists in America, and Filipino Churches.

denomination. These groups joined forces in 1983 to form the Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries (COREM).

PART B:  
EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH

From 1960 to 2000 United Church of Christ membership declined by 39% and Sunday School enrollment declined by 74% (See figure 4). The UCC was not unique; all “mainline” predominantly white American denominations had declined.



“Evangelism,” formerly a central activity of the church, was out of favor because of association with the practices of more conservative Christians, from whom most UCC people distanced themselves. A theology that de-emphasized the urgency of conversion combined with the societal trend toward secularization to create a crisis.

The new United Church of Christ had to define “evangelism” before it could

develop a strategy. General Synod in 1973 declared:

Evangelism is the costly and joyous response of the people to God's acts in Christ and through His disciples in every age. It is not an activity separate unto itself, but it is related to the total life of the church. For the United Church of Christ evangelism must be a way of telling the story and living it, of being God's people and of celebrating God's grace.

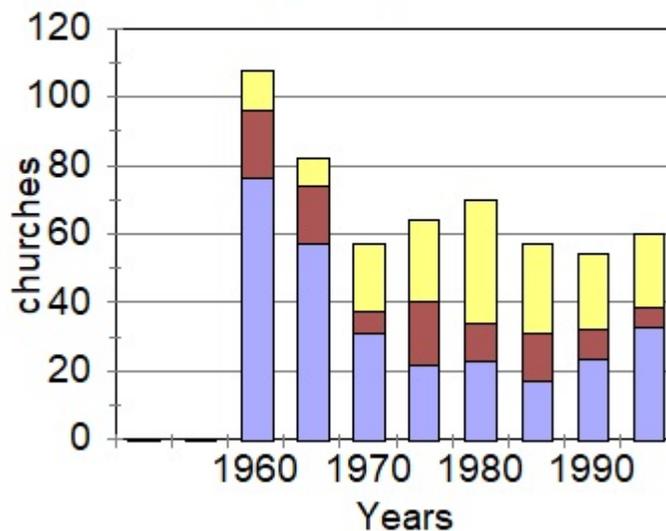
BHM soon began creating resources, training leaders and conducting research, and the following Synod affirmed a more lengthy Statement on Evangelism.

BHM began New Initiatives in Church Development (NICD) in 1979, fully supporting organizing pastors and sending them into demographically promising communities, where they gathered congregations that gradually took over their support.

General Synod in 1983 called for a southern strategy, organizing churches in the South, where population growth was great and UCC presence small. Because of the cost, relatively few new projects could be undertaken each year. The racial and Hispanic groups, who had different methods of church development, criticized the money-intensive and clergy-intensive methods of NICD; in time multiple strategies were used. As the following table indicates, an increasing proportion of the new church starts were by non-white racial/ethnic groups.

# NEW CHURCHES

5 year periods



Top segment—racial/ethnic churches  
Middle segment—non-racial/ethnic churches  
in 5 Southern conferences  
Bottom segment—other<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>This graph is based on the year of organization indicated in the 2001 *Yearbook*. It does not include new church starts that closed or merged with other congregations. As some congregations list the year of the uniting of two or more congregations as their year of organization, this may inflate the “other” figure.

## PART C: MILLARD FULLER

A self-made millionaire before he reached 30, Millard Fuller (b. 1935) found pursuit of wealth destroying his marriage, health, and faith. In 1966 he gave it all away, and looked for ways to serve God. Fuller had been active in the church all his life, serving as President of the Pilgrim Fellowship for the CC Southeast Conference, and later as president of the conference's laymen's organization. After giving his money away, Fuller joined a UCC-Disciples of Christ tour of mission work in Africa and was impressed with the widespread need of people for decent housing. After fund raising for African American UCC colleges, and directing a "partnership housing" project building homes for low-income people in Georgia, Fuller returned to Africa in 1973. As a BWM missionary working with the Disciples of Christ in Zaire,<sup>11</sup> Fuller directed a self-help housing project in Mbandanka, Equator Province.

Millard Fuller had a passion for decent housing. He believed this depressing aspect of poverty could be overcome by constructing sound, low cost houses, and selling them to the working poor with no-interest mortgages. In 1976 he organized Habitat for Humanity, a non-denominational mission society constructing decent houses around the world. By 2001 Habitat had built 100,000 houses, over 40,000 in the United States. UCC congregations and volunteers participated in this work along side Christians of all denominations.<sup>12</sup>

## PART D: THE NATURE OF MINISTRY

The new United Church published a *Manual on the Ministry* in 1963, to guide association ministry committees. The *Manual* provided for (1) students in care of association, (2) licenture, and (3) ordination. A licentiate was a seminary student serving a church, licensed to perform ministerial duties. The *Manual* also mentioned (4) commissioned workers, in full-time non-ministerial church work, and (5) lay ministers, doing supply preaching, assisting a minister, or occasionally serving a church part-time.

The UCC revised its constitution and bylaws in 1983 (ratified by the

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<sup>11</sup>Zaire is now called Democratic Republic of the Congo.

<sup>12</sup>After Millard Fuller moved to a community without a UCC church, he transferred his membership, and was no longer a member of the UCC.

Conferences in 1984), defining three forms of authorized ministry: ordained, licensed and commissioned. The licensed minister category combined the former licentiate and lay minister, as both were ministers of Word and Sacrament limited to a specific place for a specific period of time.

Marie Fortune, a UCC minister, founded the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence in 1977 in Seattle. In 1983 this Center received its first call from a woman who had experienced sexual abuse from her pastor. The Center studied clergy sexual misconduct, provided support for victims, and developed education for churches. Fortune published *Is Nothing Sacred* in 1989, challenging the churches to address this issue.

Steadily the UCC and its association ministry committees asserted ministerial standards and disciplined offending ministers. The shock of the Jim Jones incident, in which a minister recognized by the Disciples of Christ led his followers in mass suicide in 1978, combined with incidents of sexual misconduct over the succeeding decades, reduced resistance to the imposition of strong ministerial standards.

## PART E: STRUCTURAL ISSUES

Douglas Horton's definition of Congregationalism – that every unit of the church was autonomous – gave the Congregational Christian General Council the freedom to unite with the Evangelical and Reformed Church. However, it forced on the new United Church of Christ a polity in which every congregation, association, conference, instrumentality, college, seminary and benevolent institution was autonomous. The lack of cohesion in the new church was aggravated by the development of caucuses. One pastor believed a misprint to be descriptive which read “Untied Church of Christ.” Slowly the new church developed an identity and evolved into a new polity.

### Institutions

Colleges, seminaries and “Health and Welfare Institutions”<sup>13</sup> tended toward the Congregational pattern of autonomy in the early years of the United Church of Christ.

Of the 66 colleges in the United States organized by the antecedent groups

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<sup>13</sup>For earlier information on Colleges and Seminaries see Chapter 13 Part A, Educational Institutions. For Health and Welfare institutions see Chapter 14, Part A.

of the UCC, most no longer maintained ties to the denomination, or identified with it in any more than a historical sense. General Synod in 1979 called on the UCC Council for Higher Education to develop a clearer understanding of the relationship between the denomination and its colleges. A consultation with the colleges at Defiance, Ohio, 14 November 1980 developed a covenant of mutual recognition and cooperation. In 2003 twenty colleges were full members of the UCC Council for Higher Education.

The Evangelical Synod's inner mission had created most of the health and welfare institutions that came into the UCC. In the next four decades, conferences established many more institutions, mostly for the elderly. Close ties between the institutions and the national denomination slowly declined through neglect. General Synod in 1983 created a Special Advisory Commission Related to Health and Human Services, to determine the relationship between the UCC and the Council for Health and Human Services Ministries (CHHSM). This new group, organized in 1985, replaced the Council for Health and Welfare Services. The institutions soon established covenants with the conferences in which they were located.

The E&R denomination subsidized its seminaries, the CC churches did not. The new United Church of Christ gave the E&R seminaries a diminishing subsidy for a decade. General Synod in 1973 recognized six (later seven) "closely related seminaries," and called on local churches and conferences to support them. General Synod in 1993 adopted criteria by which the seven seminaries were designated "seminaries of the United Church of Christ." The Presidents of the seven seminaries began meeting in 1977; the Executive Council recognized the existence of this council of seminary presidents in 1985. The seven seminaries began publishing *Prism: A Theological Forum for the United Church of Christ* in 1985.

The seminaries and the denomination depended on each other. In the 1995-96 school year, 59% of all UCC Master of Divinity students were enrolled in one of the seven closely related seminaries. The seminary search for closer ties was realized in the restructuring, accomplished in 2000, with the formation of a Council for Theological Education.

### Conferences

To Evangelical and Reformed leaders, whose synods had only one staff person, a full-time or part-time President, the multiple staffed Congregational Christian Conferences looked like a taste of heaven. The E&R influence showed itself in the new UCC Conferences in an increasingly pastoral role for Conference

leadership. Many Conferences recognized this new emphasis by changing their leader's title from "Conference Superintendent" to "Conference Minister." The UCC Conference was (1) the basic link between the national and local levels of the UCC, (2) developer of mission within its borders, (3) aid and advisor to local churches seeking pastors, and (4) provider of resources of both staff and material for supporting local church ministries. Gradually, specialized staff in education, stewardship and mission were replaced by regionally deployed "pastors to pastors and churches." BHM transferred responsibility for several mission activities to the conferences in which they were located. Faced with declining financial support, the Conferences did not maintain them. Ministers of Metropolitan Mission and Campus Ministers faded away; church camping also declined.

A few numerically small but geographically large Conferences could not support adequate staff; temporary subsidies from BHM became more frequent, and the denomination realized not all Conferences were financially viable.

Conference Ministers met together as the Council of Conference Ministers, an extra-constitutional body with much influence.

A "caucus mentality" pervaded the UCC. Not only racial/ethnic groups, but Conference Ministers, Health and Welfare Institutions, Seminary Presidents, and groups with various theological and spiritual concerns organized themselves, were perceived by the denomination, and often perceived themselves, as caucuses.

### Restructuring

In its quest for internal unity, and a need to "downsize" because of declining funds, the United Church of Christ General Synod in 1989 appointed a Committee on Structure. In 1995 General Synod received the committee's report and created another committee to prepare the needed amendments to the constitution and bylaws. General Synod approved constitutional amendments in 1997, the conferences ratified them in 1998, and General Synod adopted bylaw changes in 1999. The new structure went into effect 1 July 2000.

Restructuring marked the maturing of a new church polity. In place of the autonomy-of-everybody polity of the 1960 Constitution, the 1997 amendments defined a covenant polity:

Within the United Church of Christ, the various expressions of the church relate to each other in a covenantal manner. Each

expression of the church has responsibilities and rights in relation to the others, to the end that the whole church will seek God's will and be faithful to God's mission. Decisions are made in consultation and collaboration among the various parts of the structure. As members of the Body of Christ, each expression of the church is called to honor and respect the work and ministry of each other part. Each expression of the church listens, hears, and carefully considers the advice, counsel, and requests of others. In this covenant, the various expressions of the United Church of Christ seek to walk together in all God's ways.—*Article 3*.

The goal of the founders of the United Church of Christ to create a new polity, neither congregational nor presbyterian, appeared to have been achieved. Restructuring created non-hierarchical mutual accountability.

Restructuring replaced eight instrumentalities with three "covenanted ministries": Justice and Witness Ministries, Local Church Ministries, and Wider Church Ministries. The executives of these ministries, with the "General Minister and President," and "Associate General Minister" composed the "collegium," which met together and coordinated the work of the denomination. All of the new executives were elected by General Synod. Conferences were directly represented on the Executive Council and the three Covenanted Ministry Directorates.

Restructuring marked the "coming of age" of the United Church of Christ. The denomination had finally left behind the version of congregational polity it was forced to adopt as a result of the legal attacks of Congregational opponents of union. Its diversity and freedom still intact, members of the United Church of Christ had now bound themselves together with the bonds of love to share in the work of the mission of God. Whether or not this will bring about renewal in a "united and uniting" church, only time will tell.

<b>Before Restructuring</b>	<b>After Restructuring</b>
autonomy	covenant
8 instrumentalities	3 covenanted ministries
3 officers of national church	2 officers of national church
each instrumentality autonomous	work of covenanted ministries coordinated by collegium
instrumentality executives elected by instrumentality directorates	Members of collegium nominated by directorates (or executive council) and elected by General Synod
directorates elected by General Synod	Each Conference directly represented on Executive Council and directorates. Historically under-represented groups also directly represented