

## PREFACE

When I was ordained into the ministry of the United Church of Christ in 1970. I wrote in my ordination paper:

The United Church of Christ is an experiment in ecumenism. . . .  
This union has existed in its present form for 13 years; if there is no further union in process 13 years from now, it will be a failure as a uniting church.

I believed in a “united and uniting” church moving steadily into new church unions and a fuller expression of our oneness in Christ. I fully expected most of my ministry to be carried out in a larger denomination that did not yet (in 1970) exist. Although I understand the reasons, it is nevertheless a disappointment to me that the United Church of Christ still exists in 2005. It is ironic that I share with you this book, a history of the United Church of Christ.

I love the United Church of Christ. I am grateful to the people of First Congregational Church, Fairhaven, Massachusetts, who guided me in my childhood and youth. I thank God for Faith UCC in State College, Pennsylvania, for its pastor Jacob Wagner, and for Lancaster Theological Seminary, where my faith grew as a reality of both heart and mind. For the Conference Ministers who were my pastors, for my colleagues in ministry, both ordained and lay, for the parishioners who taught me what it means to walk in His steps, I am deeply grateful. As pastor (and member) of dual alignment churches I have also been United Methodist, Presbyterian and American Baptist. I have learned to appreciate the gifts of these other denominations, and by comparison to appreciate my own denomination all the more. I will always be indebted to Union Theological Seminary of Richmond, Virginia – a Presbyterian institution – for accepting me into their doctoral program, and for my two mentors, who were Christians first, and then Presbyterians and professors: James Smylie and Ken Goodpasture. I write in this book of the denomination in which I have lived my life, always aware that God has shown forth light and truth to others as well.

I write this book out of necessity. I frequently teach a course on United Church of Christ History and Polity to lay ministers and to ministers of other denominations interested in the UCC. What can I use for a textbook? To get a complete view of the history of the UCC and its antecedents, one has needed to read five books: Louis H. Gunnemann’s *The Shaping of the United Church of Christ*; John Von Rohr’s *The Shaping of American Congregationalism, 1620-*

1957; David Dunn's *A History of the Evangelical and Reformed Church*; and Barbara Brown Zikmund's two volumes of *Hidden Histories of the United Church of Christ*. It would be unreasonable for me to require students to buy five books for the first half of a 20 hour course. I needed to bring together the history of the United Church of Christ into one volume.

My approach to UCC history is unusual. Instead of separately telling the four stories of the predecessor denominations, I have told one story. I have also included many stories usually omitted from the telling of our history, such as the Peace Movement, Thomas Gallaudet, and the Evangelical Synod experience in World War I. I see history through the eyes of one who has been a local church pastor for over twenty-five years, and whose graduate work focused on mission history. Parish life and missions loom large in this telling of the story.

When the United Church of Christ was formed, the synods and conferences of the two denominations were called "acting conferences" until they united. I offer to the reader this brief history of my "acting denomination," a pilgrim people, on a journey to that which is yet to be.

CHARLES MAXFIELD