

NORTH CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST SANCTUARY MINISTRY

Introduction

North Congregational United Church of Christ (NCUCC) stands solidly within a long-established tradition that regards commitment to social justice as a core element of the Christian's call to think, speak and act in this world. Our decision to offer sanctuary flows from our church's fidelity to this commitment, and its priority within our faith tradition has deep historical roots.

North Congregational United Church of Christ is a member of the wider United Church of Christ (UCC) Protestant denomination. The UCC was established in 1957 and was formed by the union of four traditions of Protestant Christianity.

The four traditions were the Congregational Churches of the English Reformation with Puritan New England roots in America, the Christian Church with American frontier beginnings, the Evangelical Synod of North America and the Reformed Church in the United States. The Congregational and Christian church denominations were concerned with freedom of religious expression and local autonomy. They were united on June 17, 1931 to become the Congregational Christian Churches. The Evangelical and Reformed churches were strong in the liturgical traditions and service to their communities. They merged in 1934 to become the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

The Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches shared a strong commitment under Christ to the freedom of religious expression and local autonomy. Their union provided a unified and strengthened platform for the sharing of God's word and care of their communities. They stated at the time of the merger "two companies of Christians hold the same basic belief: that Christ and Christ alone is the head of the Church ... From him [we] derive the understanding of God, ... participation in the same spirit, the doctrines of faith, the influence toward holiness, the duties of divine worship, the apprehension of the significance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the observance of church order, the mutual love of Christians and their dedication to the betterment of the world" ("Report on the Uniting General Synod." Advance, July 12, 1957, p. 22).

The UCC traces its origin to an immigrant and refugee experience. Our forefathers emigrated from Europe and many were refugees of European wars. In 1620 when the Pilgrims left Europe for the New World their pastor, John Robinson, stayed behind, urging them as they departed 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." This thread continues in the UCC with the "God is Still Speaking" proclamation. We are always challenged to see new ways in which we are called into God's service. North Congregational UCC takes this statement to heart as the congregation lives out its mission in this world. NCUCC's mission in the world is based upon the gospel of Jesus Christ, a gospel that strongly emphasizes love of all the world's people.

A few biblical references that call NCUCC to be a Sanctuary Church are:

Leviticus 19:33-34 (NRSV): "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The immigrant who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the immigrant as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."

Matthew 2:13 (NRSV): An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” Jesus and family were refugees who fled danger and emigrated to a new homeland.

Matthew 25:35 (NRSV): “When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger you welcomed me....” Jesus speaks of those who will receive the kingdom of God.

Mark 12:31 (NRSV): Jesus also says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The UCC and NCUCC both have rich histories stemming from the embrace of diversity and freedom with an understanding that salvation is not earned but is a gift, and that all people are God’s people. This basis of belief leads the UCC as well as NCUCC in their decision-making regarding social justice ministries and community outreach. This history of decision-making has not always agreed with societal norms. Often this history has been characterized by prayerful discernment, embodied beliefs and bold leadership in action.

UCC History

Examples of bold social justice ministry “firsts” in UCC history include:

1630: The Congregational churches did an early experiment in democracy wherein each congregation was self-governing and elected its own ministers. The Congregationalists’ aim was to create a model for a just society lived in the presence of God.

1700: Congregationalists were among the first Americans to take a stand against slavery. A pamphlet written by the Rev. Samuel Sewall was the first anti-slavery pamphlet in America. This pamphlet laid the foundation for the Abolitionist Movement that came more than a century later.

1773: The first act of civil disobedience occurred when five thousand angry colonists gathered in the Old South Meeting House, a Congregational church, to demand repeal of an unjust tax on tea. Their protest inspired the first act of civil disobedience in U.S. history – the “Boston Tea Party”.

1777: Old Zion Reformed Church hid the Liberty Bell under their floorboards in Allentown, PA to prevent the British from melting it down to make cannons.

1785: The first African-American pastor was ordained, Lemuel Haynes, a Congregationalist, who became a world-renowned preacher and writer.

1839: Congregationalists and other Christians organized a campaign to free the captive slaves from the schooner *Amistad*. The slaves had been arrested and held in a Connecticut jail for breaking their chains and seizing control of the schooner. This campaign led the Supreme Court to rule the captives were not property, and the Africans gained their freedom.

1846: The *Amistad* case spurred the conscience of the Congregationalists, who believed no human being should be a slave. The American Missionary Association, of which the church was a principal founder, was the first anti-slavery society in the U.S. with multiracial leadership.

1853: Antoinette Brown, a Congregationalist, was the first woman 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, defended “a woman’s right to preach the Gospel”. He quoted the New Testament: “There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

1858: The Oberlin Congregational church rescued an escaped slave who was being held locally and sent him farther north on the Underground Railroad. Multiple northern UCC churches participated in the Underground Railroad.

1862-77: The American Missionary Association started six historically black colleges and universities that continue today to offer excellence, access, and opportunity in higher education.

1889: The Evangelical Deaconess Society and the Evangelical Deaconess Home and Hospital began in St. Louis, MO. Katherine Haack, a trained nurse, was the first Evangelical Synod deaconess to be consecrated. At a time when women were often silenced at church, women such as Katherine Haack were leaders in the administration of the Home and Hospital.

1897: Congregationalist Washington Gladden was 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.

1915: During World War I, a period of Turkish genocidal persecution of Armenians, the Near East Relief was organized out of the work of the American Congregational missionaries. The Near East Relief assisted thousands of Armenian refugees, many of whom were Evangelicals, and kept the entire Armenian people in the Near East alive. By 1980, 16 Armenian Evangelical churches held membership in the UCC.

1942: Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese and the President’s Executive Order authorizing the evacuation and incarceration of Japanese Americans, the General Council of the Congregational and Christian Churches adopted a resolution to denounce the fact that all persons with any Japanese blood, citizens as well as aliens in the U.S., were being subjected to evacuation without hearings or other means of determining loyalty.

1957: The United Church of Christ was born when the Evangelical and Reformed Church united with the Congregational Christian Churches. The new community embraced a rich variety of spiritual traditions and embraced believers of African, Asian, Pacific, Latin American, Native American and European descent.

1959: Southern television stations imposed a news blackout on the growing civil rights movement, and Martin Luther King Jr. asked the UCC to intervene. Everett Parker of the UCC’s Office of Communication organized churches and won in Federal court a ruling that the airwaves were public, not private property. The decision led to hiring of persons of color in television studios and newsrooms.

1971: The UCC Council for American Indian Ministry was formed to provide ministry and witness in an American Indian community, and to promote understanding of American Indian communities to the wider church.

1972: The UCC's Golden Gate Association ordained the first openly gay person as a minister in a mainline Protestant denomination. In the following three decades, General Synod urged equal rights for homosexual citizens and called on congregations to welcome gay, lesbian and bisexual members.

1973: The St. Louis, MO meeting of the UCC General Synod suspended business and flew delegates to Coachella Valley, CA, to show support when they learned from Cesar Chavez that farm owners had unleashed a campaign of violence and beatings against striking farm workers.

Also, in 1973: The Wilmington Ten – 10 civil rights activists – were charged with the arson of a white-owned grocery store in Wilmington, NC. One of them was 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 raised bail. Chavis' conviction was over-turned and he was released after spending four-and-a-half years in prison.

1976: General Synod elected the Rev. Joseph H. Evans President of the United Church of Christ. He became the first African American leader of a racially integrated mainline church in the U.S.

1977: Harold Wilke was first to lead national UCC disabilities ministries. Born without arms, the internationally known disabilities advocate served as pastor, author, and denominational executive.

1995: The UCC published *The New Century Hymnal* – the only hymnal released by a Christian church that honored in equal measure both male and female images of God.

2004: The UCC ordained the first openly transgender person as a minister in a mainline Protestant denomination, the Rev. Malcolm Himschoot.

2005: On July 4, the General Synod overwhelmingly passed a resolution supporting same-gender marriage equality. UCC General Minister and President John Thomas said that the Synod had “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”.

2011: General Synod affirmed the adoption rights of LGBT couples and urged congregations to provide sanctuary for LGBT refugees seeking sanctuary in the U.S.

2017: General Synod resolution called on the United Church of Christ and its congregations to become Immigrant Welcoming as it recognized the ongoing struggles of refugees and migrants who come to the United States seeking safety, security, freedom and opportunity but instead experienced suffering as they fear raids, deportation, and witness their families being torn apart. It further encouraged the development of policies to facilitate this resolution.

NCUCC History

North Congregational UCC has a long history of serving those in need and participating in ministries of justice. NCUCC leadership has supported bold statements and justice work throughout its history just as the wider UCC has done. Leadership decisions are based on what is right according to our history and theology, particularly in the morally challenged global, national and local circumstances within which we find ourselves embedded. NCUCC utilizes the gospel, prayer and historical denomination actions to

discern how Jesus would react to the injustices of today and what he would do in these confusing and difficult times. Below are examples of NCUCC firsts, and NCUCC justice ministries.

1975: The first female Moderator of NCUCC, Eudora Huffman, was elected. Eudora described the “Spirit” of North Church as characterized by a quiet and steady meeting of challenges, by friendliness and caring, by a willingness to accept diversity within the unity of The Spirit.

1980’s: Pack-a-Pantry began as a once-a-month donation of food by members for distribution to local food pantries.

1992: NCUCC served the Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) by providing shelter for homeless families every eight weeks. This transitioned into providing shelter on a daily basis for homeless families for 26 months until the current Y Family Shelter was built. This shelter provides a solution for temporary housing of the homeless while permanent housing is established for the families. NCUCC continues to offer support by providing periodic meals at the shelter.

1996: NCUCC voted overwhelmingly to become the 194th UCC congregation in the U.S. to proclaim that it is Open and Affirming of LGBT persons. In 2009 the NCUCC congregation voted to expand its statement of inclusiveness by adding the words “gender identity”. The statement of inclusiveness is: “North Congregational United Church of Christ is committed in word and deed to the equality of all God’s people. We welcome and affirm persons of every race, gender, gender identity and/or expression, age, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, family status, economic status, physical, mental and emotional ability into full participation, membership and leadership in our faith community.” This statement became the foundation for decision-making by NCUCC in the pursuit of its justice ministries.

1997: NCUCC became a founding member of B.R.E.A.D. (Building Responsibility Equality and Dignity), a diverse group of multi-denominational faith communities, which uses a four-step process to drive change on issues of justice with local decision-makers.

2006: Beginning in 2006 and continuing through 2012 NCUCC organized and hosted several clergy efforts to safeguard the separation of church and state.

2007: NCUCC became a leading partner of the South Side Community Ministries Food Pantry. Volunteers, food donations and monetary gifts continue to feed the hungry on an ongoing basis.

2008: NCUCC organized and hosted a transgender educational series with UCC minister Rev. Malcolm Himschoot entitled “Called to Be” to learn from and welcome the transgender community into the wider community of faith.

2008: A delegation of members from NCUCC traveled to Nicaragua to work with the families of Project Chacocente. Project Chacocente is a group of persons who were relocated from the Managua city dump to a new property near Masaya, giving them the opportunity for clean air, a home, healthy food, and educational opportunities. NCUCC continues its relationship with Project Chacocente with biennial mission trips to Nicaragua.

2013: NCUCC became involved in working with The Mid-Ohio Foodbank and in providing volunteers for the Fresh Produce Market, which continues to serve those living in food deserts with fresh produce.

2018: NCUCC opened its space for use by the Olentangy Church Child Care Center.

2018: NCUCC partnered with local musicians to host a benefit concert that raised awareness and financial support for Children at the Border.

2018: NCUCC Council of Trustees voted to accept a person into the protection of sanctuary at North Church. This decision was based on a congregational meeting held the same day which showed major support by the entire congregation.

Summary

Historically the UCC peoples have been willing to make decisions based on what they felt God was leading them to do. From our beginnings in the 1600's to current times, the UCC and NCUCC have been purposefully living our belief that the gospel and God call us to care for all of God's people. In many of these situations the individuals were potentially putting themselves and their congregations at risk when their decisions did not agree with laws in effect at the time. Examples include participation in (1) The Underground Railroad, (2) The Abolitionist Movement, and (3) The Civil Rights protests of the 1960's.

In a world becoming increasingly globalized, more people are leaving their homelands to seek better lives and opportunities in new countries. Their reasons for leaving are diverse and complex: economic necessity, war, or persecution. The U.S. has long been a nation of immigrants and we have consistently been conflicted about this. We welcome immigrants and are grateful for their contributions, and yet we exclude them, discriminate against them and, at times, inflict grave harm upon them.

As Christians, we are called to love God with our whole heart and to love our neighbors as ourselves. The Bible is unambiguous in calling us to welcome aliens and strangers into our land. In these challenging times, NCUCC seeks to listen to the voice of the still-speaking God as we respond in faith and offer sanctuary in love to these new sisters and brothers residing among us.