

A prayer for the church inspired by John 17:21 and based on The United Church of Canada's "A New Creed" and the United Church of Christ's "Statement of Faith (in the Form of a Doxology)." Congregations are invited to share in this prayer on Sunday, October 18, 2015, in celebration of the full communion of these two denominations.

That all may be one

Uniting God,
you call us into your church to accept the cost and joy
of discipleship:

to celebrate your presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to be your servants in the service of others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

Send your Holy Spirit to bind us in full communion
so that we may be a uniting church
embodying your love for the world.

As one we proclaim:

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
you are with us,
we are not alone,
all glory and power be unto you.
Amen.



Full Communion

The United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ (USA) share a rich and similar history as "united and uniting" churches in North America. In 2013, both denominations began exploring the call of God toward full communion. This summer, the 30th General Synod of the United Church of Christ, meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, and the 42nd General Council of The United Church of Canada, meeting in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador, approved a full communion agreement. This agreement will be enacted at a service of worship to be held at St. Andrew's United Church, Niagara Falls, Canada, on Saturday, October 17, 2015, at 6:30 p.m.

The United Church of Canada came into being in 1925 as the first union in the 20th century to cross historic denominational lines. While union discussions in Canada first began at the end of the 19th century, the Methodist Church in Canada, the Presbyterian Church in Canada (about one-third of Presbyterian churches in Canada stayed out of union), and the Congregational Union of Canada, along with a large number of Local Union Churches that had formed in anticipation of union, formally celebrated the formation of the new church on June 10, 1925, in Toronto, Ontario. In 1968, at the time of the formation of the United Methodist Church in the United States, the Canadian Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church also joined The United Church of Canada.

The United Church of Christ was formed on June 27, 1957, in Cleveland, Ohio, with the merger of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches. Conversation toward union began in 1938, but the impetus to union had started long before as both denominations were the result of earlier mergers. The Congregational Churches traced their roots to the English Reformation and to Puritan New England, while the Christian Church had its beginnings on the American frontier. The Evangelical Synod of North America, a 19th-century German-American church, was prominent in the Mississippi Valley, and the Reformed Church in the United States, which was of German and Swiss heritage, was initially made up of churches in Pennsylvania and surrounding colonies in the early 1700s.

There are remarkable similarities between the two churches in their commitment to social justice, inclusion of diversity, and theological openness and expression. For example, the United Church of Christ, through its predecessor bodies, ordained its first female minister in 1853, its first Black minister in 1892, and its first openly gay minister in 1972. The United Church of Canada first ordained women in 1936, and in 1988 declared that sexual orientation was not a criterion for determining eligibility for ordination.

The churches share many global relationships as well as similar commitments to the ideals of partnership in mission. They have a history of shared appointments in overseas personnel, and ministry personnel already move through admission processes between the churches. Both churches have also played significant roles in the social transformations of their societies.

The mottoes of both churches are based on Jesus' prayer in John 17:20–21, a passage that has often been cited as a foundation for church unions and ecumenism: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." The United Church of Christ's motto is "That They May All Be One," while The United Church of Canada's motto is *Ut Omnes Unum Sint* ("That All May Be One" in Latin).

The United Church of Canada also recently added to its crest the Mohawk words *Akwe Nia'Tetewà:neren*, meaning "All My Relations." These mottoes are a reminder that both churches share a common heritage and ethos as united and uniting churches.

A full communion agreement does not mean the two churches are merging. Rather, it recognizes that the local context of each church is not incidental but central to its identity and that each church has been called to God's mission and ministry in its distinctive location and context. However, the fact that the churches share many common issues and challenges suggests there is much to be gained from increased collaboration. Together, the churches can bring their distinctive and perhaps contrasting approaches, gifts, and skills to the task of building a new church of the future.

In being open to their calling as united and uniting, the churches can be drawn once again to the core of their identity as followers of Jesus. In their growth together in full communion they can discover the unity that is already present in Christ. They can learn once again the vision of a church that transcends the divisions of the world. They can seek to be more than just a body of faithful people struggling on their own to survive. They can rediscover what it means, once again, to be a movement of people who choose to follow Christ into the unknown.

For more information on the full communion agreement go to The United Church of Canada website: www.united-church.ca.

