

The Evangelical and Reformed Church

A blend of autonomy and authority, the Evangelical and Reformed Church retained a Calvinist doctrine of the church as "the reality of a kingdom of grace," and the importance of order and discipline in its witness to the reign of God in the world. The Heidelberg Catechism still at its heart, the new church would embody a synthesis of Calvin's inward sense of God's "calling" and Luther's experiential approach to faith. George W. Richards, the ecumenist first president of the new church, had expressed the insights of all Reformation streams by saying, "Without the Christlike spirit, no constitution will ever be effective; with the spirit, one will need only a minimum of law for the administration of the affairs of the fellowship of men and women." In such a spirit the union proceeded without a constitution until one was adopted in 1938. The church's 655,000 members lived mainly in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Texas, Kentucky, Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri.

Meanwhile, the practical act of consolidating Reformed and Evangelical programs, boards, organizations and publications went forward. The church addressed world-wide suffering during World War II with the War Emergency Relief Commission. The Hymnal (1941) and Book of Worship (1942) were published. Reformed missions in Japan, China, and Iraq were united under the Evangelical and Reformed Church Board of International Missions. New missions were undertaken through cooperative efforts in Ecuador, Ghana, and western Africa. The Messenger became the official church publication. Christian education resources soon followed. Organizations united. The Woman's Missionary Society united with the Evangelical Women's Union to become the Women's Guild.

Approach to the Congregationalists

In 1937, a study group of clergy from both the Evangelical and Reformed and Congregational Christian churches began to meet in St. Louis. Led by Eden Seminary President Samuel J. Press and future Congregationalist Christian leader Truman Douglass, it revealed to the participants a sense of "family." Dr. Press acted on this insight with a June 1938 telegram to the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches: "What about a rapprochement between our communions looking forward to union?" The affirmative response of Douglas Horton, minister and executive secretary of the General Council, was followed by four years of private conversations before a public proposal in 1942 would be endorsed by the General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches. After ten drafts of a Basis of Union were debated between 1943 and 1949, a special General Synod met in 1949 to approve "Interpretations of the Basis of Union," which ironed out differences between the two churches on a number of issues.

Approval by that General Synod (249-41) was followed by ratification by the church's 34 regional synods by a vote of 33-1. But a "Uniting General Synod for the United Church," first set for June 26, 1950, was postponed for seven more years. The Evangelical and Reformed were ready, but not all members of the Congregational Christian churches were eager for union. Some local churches sought a legal injunction, challenging the right of the General Council to participate in a union of the whole church with another.

Source: <http://www.ucc.org/aboutus/shortcourse/e&r.htm>
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