



let it shine

National Ministries of the United Church of Christ

In the earliest days of New England Congregationalism there was no such thing as a “national church,” but the origins of the current national setting of the United Church of Christ, now headquartered in Cleveland, go back to stirrings in the early 19th century in which the role of New England churches loomed large.

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM), established in 1810, was inspired by the Haystack prayer meeting at Williams College in 1806, led by Samuel Mills of Torrington, Connecticut. The ABCFM afforded local churches and members the opportunity to participate in and support the global mission of the church. The American Home Mission Society (AHMS) was established in 1826; the Home Mission Society of Connecticut became an auxiliary for the purpose of “building up the waste places of Connecticut, sending the gospel to the destitute and assisting feeble congregations in other and more destitute portions of the United States.” The American Missionary Association (AMA), formed in 1846 and growing out of the Amistad incident, carried out the educational, evangelical, and justice commitments of the churches, first with freed slaves in the South, among the poor of Appalachia and then in Puerto Rico and among new immigrant communities.

Other predecessor churches made their contributions as well. The Herald of Gospel Liberty, a popular religious journal of the Christian churches served a national audience. The Reformed Church held its first General Synod in 1863, but earlier “national” bodies included the American Missionary Society (AMS), organized in 1828, and the Board of Foreign Missions (BFM), founded in 1838 and affiliated with the ABCFM. The first General Conference of the Kirchenverien, forerunner of the Evangelical Synod of North America, was in 1859, but the German churches had already developed deep relationships with the AHMS.

From this alphabet soup of early mission societies came the structures we now know as the National Ministries of the General Synod of the United Church of Christ (Office of General Ministries, Wider Church Ministries, Justice and Witness Ministries, Local Church Ministries, United Church Foundation, Pension Boards). Staff in Cleveland, Washington, DC, New York, North Carolina and Indianapolis

Our UCC Polity—How Our Church Works

help carry on the historic work of the societies along with new and emerging ministries: Church development and evangelism, Christian education, global ministries and church partnerships, justice ministries here and around the world, leadership support and development, public policy analysis and engagement, disaster response, congregational vitality resources, ecumenical and interfaith relations, publication and communication, pension and health insurance support for church workers, financial management services, and much more!

Each of the Ministries is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of representatives elected by the biennial General Synod, which, along with its Executive Council, oversees and coordinates the work of all. Financial support for these Ministries comes from endowments originating with some of the early mission societies, from congregations through their gifts to Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM), as well as special offerings, and individual gifts.

A key role of the National Setting is to provide a sense of unity in the church through opportunities for regular gatherings like the General Synod, and through the articulation of a unifying vision like the “God is Still Speaking” initiative of the past three years. This summer the Connecticut Conference will host the national setting at its General Synod in Hartford, June 22-26. Given the important role of the early New England mission societies in today’s national ministries of our church, this will be truly a homecoming. Join us!

Reflection:

- In what ways do the ministries of your local church extend beyond your community to the nation and the world through the United Church of Christ?
- How is your church preparing to participate in the hosting of General Synod in Hartford, June 22-26, 2007?

Resources:

- For further information on the national and global ministries of the UCC, visit our homepage at www.ucc.org.
- *UCC at 50: Our Future* traces the major events and involvements of the UCC through its first 50 years. Order 50th anniversary resources through www.ucc.org.

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