



let it shine

The General Synod

Just as your congregation likely holds an annual meeting, as does your Conference or Association, the wider United Church of Christ gathers every two years as a General Synod to worship as a united family of faith, to take up issues in the organization and polity of the denomination itself, and to address pressing concerns for peace and justice in the nation and around the world. A General

Synod is a moment in time, a meeting of delegates from all the Conferences, representatives of the Covenanted Ministries and Officers of the denomination, all given authority to make decisions on behalf of the wider membership. Like the faith and polity of the local church, the delegates of General Synod seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their deliberations and decision-making, and believe that each vote cast, taken together, reflect God's will for the wider church as it is incarnated in the Synod.

It was the first General Synod in June 1957 in Cleveland that brought the United Church of Christ into being, and important issues of self-definition continue to be part of the work of General Synod: leaders are elected, budgets determined, mission and evangelism programs defined, and ecumenical and interfaith partnerships forged.

Yet it is the collective *voice* of General Synod (speaking *to* and not *for* its churches) which makes the Synod so powerful a moment, not only for those who participate, but for the wider world to which it speaks. Each Synod discusses Pronouncements (statements on moral and social issues based on biblical and theological grounds) and Resolutions (similar statements intended to guide the work of the national setting and to inform the Conferences and churches). The diversity of the gathered Synod—*theologically, ethnically and geographically*—makes for lively discussion and outcomes which both inspire and challenge.

Any reading in the history and evolution of our church's character and commitments quickly reveals the pivotal role played through the actions of the twenty-five General Synods to date. Synods have spoken clearly on issues of domestic economics, global politics and warfare, healthcare, environmental concerns, and racial, ethnic, gender and economic justice, among many others. In so doing, the General Synod has brought these issues into the life of local churches and challenged each to respond in their own faithful ways.

Our UCC Polity—How our Church Works

Now, in the United Church of Christ's 50th anniversary year, the 26th General Synod will meet in Hartford, Connecticut in June of 2007. As with every Synod, our Spirit-guided polity will be enacted, the diversity and inclusiveness of our church family will be celebrated and nurtured, the guidance of our Still-speaking God will be sought in relation to pressing issues of the day, and our family will worship as one body on a dramatically large scale. But this Synod will also be a celebration like no other, not simply about past accomplishments, but in eager anticipation of where and how the UCC is being called to bring good news in the next 50 years. One day, Saturday, has been set aside as "Synod in the City," a day-long festival of worship, lecture, dance, film, fun, drama, and workshop in which thousands of UCC folks will spread out to venues throughout downtown Hartford to experience a vivid expression of our church's commitments and aspirations. Experts and artists, teachers and prophets will share their wisdom and perspective about the opportunities and challenges that await us as our church moves into its second half-century of faithfulness.

The General Synod is an embodiment of our distinctive and faithful polity, a celebration of both our diversity and our covenants with one another, and a humble, shared recognition of where and how we have yet to allow the light of Jesus Christ to shine through our churches. The theme of this year's Synod is our ongoing calling as the United Church of Christ: "Let it Shine!"

Reflections:

- How do the polity and practices of your congregation parallel those of the General Synod? Of your Conference or Association?
- Does your church discuss the Resolutions and Pronouncements that come from General Synods? Do they reflect your values and priorities?
- How might your church participate in General Synod 26 in Hartford (hint: www.ucc.org/synod/)?

Resources:

- *The Constitution of the United Church of Christ* (see especially Article IX)
- J. Martin Bailey and W. Evan Golder, editors, *UCC@50: Our History, Our Future*
- *Index of General Synod Resolutions, Pronouncements and Proposals for Action*

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