



let it shine

Celebrating the 1957 Union

*This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it. [Psalm 118:24]*

Some days are especially memorable, days that call us to rejoice and be glad. These days of joy – when a child is born, when emancipation is proclaimed, when a team wins, when a war is over, when promises are made to have and to hold until death - nourish families and society. They remind us of who we are and what is important.

June 25, 1957 is the most memorable day in the history of United Church of Christ. On that day, representatives from the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church came together to create the United Church of Christ. The road to union had not been easy. Fears of the loss of autonomy and the desire to protect cherished theological traditions were still present.

Yet, on that “birthday” our ancestors affirmed their “devotion to one God” and their membership in “the holy catholic (universal) Church, which is greater than any single Church and than all the Churches together.” They took a risk and they knew it. They believed “that denominations exist not for themselves but as parts of that Church, within which each denomination is to live and labor and, *if need be, die.*” They confronted the divisions and hostilities of the world and heard with “a deepened sense of responsibility” the prayer of Jesus for his disciples “that they may all be one.” [from the Preamble to the Basis of Union]

Douglas Horton led the Uniting General Synod in prayer that day with words of humility and hope:

“Deliver us from error, pride and prejudice...from narrow self-sufficiency. Forgive us if we are tempted to think merely of bigness and greater efficiency and bring to our remembrance that we unite to strengthen our

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faith, enlarge our vision and broaden our Christian witness to God’s love in Christ... Take our feeble efforts...the things we have done...the things we hope to do, and purge them of anything false and mediocre, anything superficial and partial and help us to know that we are not merely joined together by resolution and legal actions, but by Thy Spirit.”

Serving God often requires risk. Yet, things that are worth doing are rarely easy. “If need be,” we all know of times when the old must die.

Reflections:

- What days will you never forget?
- If someone or some group “sacrifices” something for a greater good, how do you feel? Thankful or envious, awed or irritated?
- In 1957, some people thought the United Church of Christ was naïve and arrogant. Yet here we are fifty years later. What risks are we taking today and how do you feel about those risks?

Resources:

- Louis Gunnemann, *The Shaping of the United Church of Christ*
- *The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ*
- Daniel L. Johnson and Charles Hanbrick-Stowe, eds., *Theology and Identity: Traditions, Movements and Polity in the United Church of Christ*

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