

## Questions and Answers: Churches Uniting in Christ

### What is this proposal about?

The proposal of “Churches Uniting in Christ” (CUIC) offers a 21st century model for Christian unity and church union that is new. It is *not* about structures or organizations; it is *not* about voting on a “plan of union.” Rather, CUIC is based upon establishing a **new relationship** between churches through which Christians might more fully manifest their oneness in Christ. It is about faithfulness to the biblical witness that the Church of Jesus Christ is like a body whose members are so linked with one another that they cannot say, “I have no need of you” (I Corinthians 12: 20). CUIC offers a framework for churches to express our unity in Christ as a sign of reconciliation before a broken and divided world as a visible testimony to just how amazing God’s grace really is!

### Where did the proposal come from?

The CUIC proposal came from the 18th plenary gathering of the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) in January 1999, after almost 40 years of study, prayer and conversation among its nine member communions. At this plenary, the churches involved in COCU decided it was time to *stop consulting* and to *start living* their unity in Christ through a new relation known as “Churches Uniting in Christ.”

### What will be the marks of the CUIC relationship?

While the churches involved will retain their own identities and decision-making, they will also commit themselves to seek together to grow in sacred things. The CUIC relationship will thus be marked by:

- Sharing in frequent common worship and celebration of the Lord’s Supper;
- Joining in mission and service together to the world, especially in the task of combating racism;
- Confessing our faith together in Jesus Christ; and

Committing ourselves to serious dialogue around issues of ministry.

### Who would be the churches in the CUIC relationship, and where do they stand on the proposal?

In addition to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), there are eight other churches looking to participation in the CUIC relationship: the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church, the International Council of Community Churches, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church. Each of these churches (except for the United Church of Christ, which will also be voting on the proposal in Kansas City this July 2001) has already voted to approve the recommendation, and will become part of the CUIC relationship at the official inauguration on January 20, 2002 in Memphis, Tennessee.

**In 1995, the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) approved two earlier documents from the Consultation on Church Union called *The COCU Consensus* and *Churches in Covenant Communion*. How is this vote on CUIC different?**

The CUIC proposal is built upon these two earlier documents. The primary difference is that CUIC does not require any new layers of structure or organization (“covenanting councils”), which would have been needed for the purpose of holding services of reconciling the ministries. Indeed, several issues around ministry are left unresolved in this CUIC proposal - - which are to be worked on intentionally over a five-year period (2002-2007) as the churches begin to share life together in worship, mission and service. For Disciples, we have identified the need to affirm and clarify our eldership within the CUIC understanding and practice of ministry.

Like the earlier proposal of “Covenant Communion”, CUIC affirms that each church will retain its own name and identity, including its own form of church governance and worship; its own pattern of ministerial training, ordination and call; and its own practices in baptism and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

### **What will CUIC mean for congregations?**

This is a key issue because the answer depends upon how congregations will respond to the proposed relationship in their local communities with other CUIC churches. This is not a “top-down” process. It is a framework that offers new possibilities — not new requirements! Several suggestions are offered in the proposal regarding implications for what the new relationship might mean; the invitation, however, rests with local initiative and creativity as congregations look to new ways of being church together in mission, worship, and shared life in Christ.

Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary of the Consultation on Church Union has said, “The real test of this new CUIC relationship will be whether attitudes and perspectives begin to change. When a local AME congregation struggles against discrimination in housing, do we begin to see it as our struggle? Are we open to receive the gifts of other traditions - gifts of lively worship, of different music, of being more inclusive community? All of this will take patience and imagination . . . Local initiative will be crucial.”

### **What about ministry? Will CUIC require Disciples to accept the title of bishop?**

CUIC begins with the agreement on ministry set forth in *Churches in Covenant Communion* that states, “It will be the responsibility of each participating church . . . to determine how its present categories of ordained ministry relate to the historic categories set forth in the *COCU Consensus*.” That is, while each participating church in the Consultation on Church Union has given its basic approval of a three-fold ordering of ministry - - bishop, presbyter, and deacon - - “each church may assign or continue to use such names for these offices as it may desire” (*Churches in Covenant Communion, pages 24-25*). No church will be forced to use, or to accept, any title related to its ordained ministers, including the title of bishop.

## **What about the issue of accepting homosexual persons in the church?**

One of the marks identified in the CUIC relationship is “an intentional commitment to promote unity with wholeness and to oppose all marginalization and exclusion in the church and society based upon such things as race, age, gender, forms of disability, sexual orientation and class.” The reference to sexual orientation has, of course, provoked discussion and opposition. It is important to point out (1) that the churches are free to maintain their own standards of ministerial selection, and (2) that the CUIC proposal does not necessarily condone homosexual behavior (indeed, several of the CUIC churches officially reject homosexual behavior as sinful).

## **Does the CUIC relationship mean that congregations will lose their autonomy?**

Nothing in the proposal changes the basic “rights and responsibilities” of congregations that Disciples cherish: congregations will continue to hold their own property, to call their own pastors, to decide their baptismal practices and membership policies. In fact, congregations (and pastors) will have the right to choose *not* to participate in the CUIC relationship, even if the General Assembly votes to proceed.

## **Why should we vote in favor of this proposal as Disciples of Christ?**

The basic question is finally not, “In this new relationship of ‘Churches Uniting in Christ’, what will we give up?”; rather, “In this new relationship of CUIC, are we willing to take on a larger identity in Christ: locally, regionally, and nationally?” The plea for Christian unity is both our heritage and our destiny as Disciples of Christ. Barton W. Stone called unity our “polar star”. The CUIC proposal offers us a genuine opportunity in this new decade, this new day, to join with other Christians and churches in receiving and witnessing to God’s gift of oneness in Christ “so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me . . . to behold my glory which thou hast given me before the foundations of the world (John 17: 21, 24).”

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