

## The Conservative Congregational Christian Conference Our Conference Origins<sup>1</sup>

The story of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC) begins back in the mid 1930's. Within the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches (CCC) there was disagreement over different theological issues, in particular the inerrancy of Scripture and dual nature of the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Two publications emerged which articulated different positions; the *Advance* (a liberal publication) and the *Beacon* (more conservative). Even though these conflicts emerged on theological issues, both parties were able to coexist peacefully for a number of years because of the polity of the Congregational church. Historic Congregationalism maintains that the local church is autonomous and accountable to Christ alone. The local church thus administers its own spiritual and procedural affairs.<sup>3</sup> The *Cambridge Platform* of 1648<sup>4</sup> states,

The government of a church is a mixed government. With respect to Christ, the head and king of the church, and his sovereign authority, the church is a monarchy. With respect to all the members of the body and the authority granted by Christ to them, it resembles a democracy. With respect to the elders and the authority committed to them, it is an aristocracy.<sup>5</sup>

According to historic Congregationalism, there is only "one" true church, made up of all believers with Jesus Christ as her Head.<sup>6</sup> Since Christ is Head of the universal church, He is also Head of the local church. The local church is thus independent of any human government and accountable to Christ alone. Unfortunately the harmony within the CCC was only provisional.

In the early 1940's the CCC began a process of merging with the Evangelical and Reformed Church (E & R). The E & R's governmental structure was more Presbyterian in form and practice. The more conservative constituent within the CCC (those who held to the inerrancy of Scripture and the Deity of Christ) were concerned that if the CCC merged with this group, the essence of historic Congregationalist polity would be lost. The autonomy of the local church would no longer be tenable, because a more ecclesiastical form of government would oversee the denomination. As a preventative measure, in 1945 the conservative constituent formed an assembly within the CCC. The group was named the Conservative Congregational Christian Fellowship (CCCCF) in an attempt to remain within the CCC yet maintain its theological orthodoxy.

In 1948 the CCC held a national vote to determine if the merger with the E & R should go forward. The result was a 72% tally in favor of forming the new alliance.<sup>7</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> The majority of this article is a summary of the CCCC origins as written in *Modern Day Pilgrims: The First Fifty Years of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference*. Foresee Publications. St. Paul, Minnesota, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Day Pilgrims*, p. 11. Another valuable resource is *Congregationalism in America*, Manfred Waldemar Kohl, The Congregational Press. Oak Creek, Wisconsin, 1977.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> The *Cambridge Platform* was the result of an assembly of Congregational leaders in New England in 1648. This group assembled to define, establish and confirm the Congregational government structure.

<sup>5</sup> *Cambridge Platform*, Chapter X, Section 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 1:22; 5:23.

<sup>7</sup> Out of 5765 churches, 4224 voted. 3034 churches voted in favor of the merger and 1190 voted against. In terms of the voting parties, this gave the CCC a positive vote of 72%. Regarding the entire denomination, a positive vote of 53% was achieved.

CCC decided to go forward with the merger, despite a previous statement and commitment to the churches that unless a 75% consensus could be reached, the merger would not take place. This did not bode well with the new internally formed CCCF. Later that year an assembly of leaders from the CCCF met in Chicago to discuss the recent vote and decision. The assembly emerged declaring a new conference, the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC).

The newly combined denomination of the CCC and the E&R put forth its first constitution in 1961 becoming the United Church of Christ (UCC). The newly formed CCCC's move away from the CCC was initially motivated by the CCC's more liberal theological leanings. When historic Congregationalism became further jeopardized, the CCCC saw no choice but to move out of the denomination.

Today there are five groups whose birthright began from historic Congregationalism. These include (1) Unitarian Universalists, (2) the United Church of Christ (UCC), (3) the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC). This group formed in 1955, breaking away from the then CCC on the basis of polity alone, which today maintains a wide range of theological positions, (4) the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC), and (5) those churches who pulled out of the new UCC and became independent and unaffiliated.

Today, the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference is a theologically conservative denomination believing strongly in the autonomy of the local church. It is comprised of churches that are Congregational, Christian, and Evangelical and Reformed in background, as well as independent Community churches. They are solidly committed to the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, but allow for diversity in those areas where Christians have tended to disagree. The CCCC affirms certain doctrines and principles as basic to its existence and, therefore, non-negotiable in its practice. Their members hold strong convictions, but do not believe that Christians should divide over secondary issues. As an evangelical denomination, they are strongly committed to evangelism and missions.<sup>8</sup>

For more information on the CCCC, go to [www.cccusa.com](http://www.cccusa.com)

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from the CCCC website, [www.cccusa.org](http://www.cccusa.org).