

Pilgrim Congregational Church

2310 EAST FOURTH STREET
DULUTH 12, MINNESOTA

WILLIAM L. HALFAKER
MINISTER

February 1, 1958.

To the Members of Pilgrim Church:

This letter is written in response to numerous questions which have been asked recently with regard to the status of the merger. It is felt that a summary of the pertinent facts would be appreciated by all members of the church.

Merger developments since 1953 have had the continuing attention of the officers and official boards of the church. During the period 1954-1956 the Trustees and Deacons, acting as a joint committee, carefully analyzed the published literature on the subject. It was in response to the recommendation of this joint committee that the church adopted the enclosed resolution December 18, 1955.

In 1957 such matters had the attention of the Church Council, which includes the Boards of Trustees, Deacons and Christian Education, the chairmen of standing committees and the heads of auxiliary organizations. The committee writing this letter and issuing this statement was appointed by the Council in November and given the responsibility of keeping informed on all current developments with regard to the merger.

Implicit in our appointment is the understanding that we will not commit the church to any course of action, but that we will bring to the attention of the Church Council any developments of importance which may call for consideration and action. Without regard for our personal opinions on the merger question, our function and purpose as a committee is to be alert, informative and factual. We offer the enclosed summary of the merger situation.

You may be assured that our committee will keep informed on all current developments and will bring all matters of importance requiring our action to the attention of Pilgrim Church.

THE MERGER STUDY COMMITTEE

Howard P. Clarke, Chairman of the Deacons
Earl Farnam, Chairman of the Trustees
William L. Halfaker
J. E. Montague
R. H. Neimeyer

A SUMMARY OF THE MERGER SITUATION

February 1, 1958.

Understanding of any statement concerning the status of the merger will be furthered by refreshing our understanding of the structure of Congregationalism.

Congregationalism is generally described as a system of church organization which recognizes the independence and autonomy of the local church in all matters temporal and spiritual, and the association of local churches with one another through voluntary organizations for purposes of fellowship and cooperative effort without the vesting of any ecclesiastical authority in such voluntary organizations. Its essence is the right of the local church to decide things for itself as its members may determine, while at the same time cooperating with other Congregational Christian Churches through the medium of organizations such as local Associations, State Conferences, and the General Council at the national level.

Various agencies have been created to promote and carry on the wider work of the churches, such as The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the oldest foreign missionary society in America, The Board of Home Missions, combining the work of seven older societies established to promote Christian Education, Church Extension and Evangelism, Church Building, Sunday School Extension, Ministerial Relief, Higher Education, etc., and The Missions Council, which coordinates the promotional work of the various agencies.

Actions taken by the Association, the State Conference, or the General Council are not binding on the local church unless the church chooses to accept and be bound by such actions.

Against this background of understanding we offer this summary of the merger situation.

1. In 1948 each of the churches in our Congregational Christian fellowship was asked to register its decision on two questions relating to the proposed uniting of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church to form the United Church of Christ, as provided in a document known as The Basis of Union. The first of these questions was whether they favored the proposed merger. The second was whether they would participate in the church formed by such a merger were it carried out. Pilgrim Church voted "No" on the first question but reserved its decision on the second question.
2. In January 1949, the General Council, after considering the vote of the churches, voted to proceed with steps designed to consummate the merger. These steps were delayed for a considerable time by litigation commenced in the State of New York. The final decision in this litigation was handed down in December of 1953 and the General Council was then legally free to proceed with the merger.
3. On December 18, 1955 the Boards of Deacons and Trustees of Pilgrim Church jointly issued a statement recommending the adoption of a resolution which clearly described the position of Pilgrim Church with regard to its relationship with other organizations or ecclesiastical authorities. This resolution was adopted at a meeting of the Church on that date. A copy of the statement and resolution are attached to this summary. Please read them carefully and keep them for reference should questions arise in the future.

4. The General Council of Congregational Christian Churches and the General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church have by joint action created the United Church of Christ. The respective votes of the General Council and the General Synod to this end were taken in the summer of 1956 and the Uniting General Synod was held in Cleveland, Ohio in June of 1957.
5. Acting under instructions from each of these bodies, the delegates of the Uniting General Synod last summer voted that the structures of the two denominations should remain unchanged until the constitution of the United Church of Christ has been adopted. This means that the Congregational Church organizations with which Pilgrim Church has been affiliated in the past continue the same today and our relationship with them remains unchanged.
6. As provided in the Basis of Union, the Uniting General Synod appointed a committee to prepare a Constitution for the United Church of Christ. This committee is at work. When it has completed its task it will report to the United Church of Christ at a meeting of the General Synod. The General Synod will then submit the proposed constitution to all Congregational Christian Churches for approval or disapproval. It will become effective when it is approved by 2/3 of the Congregational Christian Churches voting and 2/3 of the Evangelical and Reformed Synods. The earliest date at which this Constitution could be submitted to the Churches would be the Fall of 1959. When it is so submitted it is expected that Pilgrim Church will be asked to register its decision after careful consideration by the members of the church.
7. Congregational Churches are not now members of the United Church of Christ, which exists only at the national level, and there only in outline form since the structures of the United Church will not be established until the constitution has been adopted. When a constitution has been adopted, the churches will have the opportunity of indicating whether or not they wish to be affiliated with the United Church of Christ.
8. Another law suit is now pending in the United States District Court, Southern District of New York, which seeks the declaratory judgment of that Court determining among other things the status of the various organizations and agencies of the Congregational Christian Fellowship in the light of the joint action of the General Council and the General Synod creating the United Church of Christ.
9. Some of the Churches have joined in forming a new association known as the National Association of Congregational Churches. Whether Pilgrim Church should take any action at this time with regard to this new association will be considered by our Church Council at its regular meeting March 18.

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