

# **A HISTORICAL SKETCH**

## **of the**

### **United Church of Christ in the Philippines**

- 1898 - June 12. The Philippine Revolution against Spain culminated in the declaration of Philippine Independence in Kawit, Cavite, and the setting up of the first Philippine Republic through a congress held at the Barasoain Church in Malolos, Bulacan.

August 13, with the Spanish Forces surrounded in the Walled City of Intramuros by the Philippine Revolutionaries, the Spanish Fleet under the command of Admiral Montojo surrendered to the US Navy under Admiral George Dewey in the "Battle of Manila Bay." On December 10, Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States through the Treaty of Paris.

George C. Stull, a Methodist chaplain with the US Armed Forces conducted the first Protestant worship service and preached the first Protestant sermon in the country.

- 1899 - March 2. An American Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, James M. Thoburn, who was based in India, visited the Philippines to look at possibilities of starting mission work in the country. In April, 1900, the first missionaries sent by the Methodist Episcopal Church arrived. They were Rev. Thomas Martin and Rev. and Mrs. J. L. McLaughlin.

In April, the first missionaries sent by the Presbyterian Church in the USA arrived. They were Rev. James B. Rodgers, Dr. and Mrs. George Wright, and the Rev. and Mrs. David Hibbard. The Wrights and the Hibbards were assigned to the Visayas.

- 1901 - Rev. E. S. Eby and Rev. Sandford Kutz, missionaries sent by the Church of the United brethren arrived. In 1904, Dr. Howard Widdoes came and worked in La Union and Pangasinan for more than 40 years.

On August 3, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Hannah of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society of the church of Christ (Disciples) arrived. They were followed by Rev. and Mrs. Hermon P. Williams. The Disciples established mission work in the Ilocos and Tagalog Regions.

Silliman Institute was established by Dr. and Mrs. David Hibbard in Dumaguete City. This will later become Silliman University, the first university outside of Manila.

As part of the Institute's service to the community, an infirmary was set up, which later became a hospital. Its buildings were constructed in 1916. Other Medical work started by missionaries which became hospitals were Brokenshire Memorial Hospital in Davao City (1908), Bethany Hospital in Tacloban City (1913); Bethany Hospital in San Fernando, La Union (1921); and several others in Laoag, Bohol, Zamboanga, Abra, and Manila which were

later sold when the missionaries returned to the US because of the post World War I depression and other factors.

April 26. The Evangelical Union was organized. It was a “council of representatives” of various mission groups and organizations allied to the Church. Its primary purpose was to bring about a spirit of comity, unity, and cooperation among the mission groups that will eliminate competition. Initiated by the Evangelical Union were: 1) the territorial division of the country among the different mission groups, 2) a common name for the newly organized churches, the name agreed upon was the The Evangelical church, 3) a plan to effect the formation of a national church, and 4) cooperation work in schools, hospitals, printing presses, newspapers, and other fields of endeavor.

1902 - The American Board of Foreign Missions of the Congregational Church in the US sent Rev. Robert Black and was assigned to Davao. In 1915, the Congregational church opened its work in Northern Mindanao. Among those who were sent was Dr. and Mrs. Frank L. Laubach who worked among the muslims in Marawi City. This is where Dr. Laubach developed methods of illiteracy programs which became internationally recognized.

1907 - The Union Theological Seminary in Manila was formed for the training of pastors, deaconesses and lay leaders. It was the result of the merger of the Ellinwood Bible School of the Presbyterian Mission and the Nicholson Seminary of the Methodists. Later, the Disciples joined the cooperative effort.

1914 - The Silliman Bible Training Institute was established as a cooperative venture between the Congregationals in Mindanao and the Presbyterians in the Visayas for the training of church workers. This became the College of Theology of Silliman University and much later, the Divinity School.

1924 - March 15. The Articles of Incorporation of the United Church of Manila was signed and registered formalizing the organization of a local church to demonstrate the viability of the union of members coming from various Protestant churches on the local level.

August 24. The Central Committee for Church Union, composed of representatives from the Presbyterian, Congregational, and the United Brethren Churches, and the United Church of Manila as a local church, met and adopted the principles embodied in a document called the “Nanking Agreement” as its basis of union.

1929 - March 15. The Basis of Union was adopted by the three churches and the United Evangelical Church was organized. It became the first Protestant Church covering the whole country. The following were its officers: Rev. Enrique Sobrepeña as Moderator of the General Assembly, Rev. George W. Wright as General Secretary, and Rev. J. C. Hooper as General Treasurer.

- 1933 - March. The Philippine Methodist Church, which grew out of the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized under the leadership of Rev. Samuel Stagg and Rev. Cipriano Navarro.
- 1941 - December 8. The Japanese Imperial Forces attacked the American military installation in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and brought the Second World War into the Pacific. In less than a month, on January 2, 1942 the Japanese occupied the Philippines.
- 1943 - The Evangelical Church of the Philippines was formed and brought together the United Evangelical Church, the Church of Christ (Disciples), the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Cristo, some segments of the Iglesia Evangelica Metodista En las Islas Filipinas (IEMELIF), Iglesia Evangelica Nacional, the Philippine Methodist Church, and some independent local congregations. It was the first union of churches under the full leadership of the Filipinos.

After the war, the former Presbyterians and the Congregationalists reconstituted the United Evangelical Church. On the other hand, the former United Brethren, together with the Church of Christ (Disciples) and the independent congregations remained as the Evangelical Church of the Philippines.

- 1947 - A basis of union was formulated under the initiative of the Philippine Federation of Christian Churches an aggrupation that evolved from the Evangelical Union, and was sent to the different churches for study and approval.
- 1948 - May 22-25. One hundred sixty five delegates coming from the Evangelical Church of the Philippines (except the Tagalog Convention of the Church of Christ (Disciples); The Philippine Methodist Church, and the United Evangelical Church gathered at the Ellinwood Malate Church and signed a declaration of union proclaiming that the three churches “shall be one church known as the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.” Elected officers were:

Rev. Enrique Sobrepeña	Bishop for North Luzon
Rev. Cipriano Navarro	Bishop for South Luzon
Rev. Leonardo G. Dia	Bishop for Visayas
Rev. Proculo Rodriguez	Bishop for Mindanao
Rev. Hugh Bousman	General Evangelist
Mr. Jose L. Navarro	General Treasurer
Rev. Stephen L. Smith	General Secretary

The Basis of Union provided the initial structure of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines with the National Organization known as the General Assembly. It meets once in two years and is the highest legislative body of the church. The country was divided into four jurisdictional areas headed by a Bishop. The Jurisdictional areas were composed of conferences which were in turn composed of local churches.

The offices of the UCCP were first located at the ground floor of the building of the Ellinwood Bible School and Dormitory in Malate, Manila, which also housed the offices of

the Philippine Interboard Office. National programs on Mission, Evangelism, Medical, Public Welfare, and Christian Education were implemented and promoted by various commissions. Later, these commissions were called Departments.

- 1952 - Rev. and Mrs. Jorge Quismundo and Rev. and Mrs. Jose P. Estoye were the first overseas missionaries appointed by the UCCP. The Estoyes left the country in September, 1953 for Thailand, while the Quismundos went to Indonesia in 1954. The UCCP also sent missionaries to countries like Iran, Egypt, Nigeria, Nepal, Turkey, the USA, Japan and Lebanon, so that at one time, there were 18 overseas missionaries serving 24 countries.

The General Assembly adopted a Book of Government and a Book of Common Worsihp. Bishop Leonardo G. Dia became the first Filipino General Secretary of the UCCP.

- 1954 - Rev. and Mrs. Lorenzo Genotiva started mission work among the Blaan tribes in Southern Mindanao while Rev. and Mrs. Samuel Velez were sent to work among the Kalingas and the Apayaos in the Mountain Provinces. These highlighted the UCCP's mission work on the home front.
- 1956 - The General Assembly decided to call for the drafting of the UCCP Constitution and By-Laws. Rev. Norwood Tye, a Disciples missionary was elected as General Secretary.
- 1957 - Construction of the UCCP National Offices Building along Highway 54, now known as Epifanio delos Santos Avenue in Quezon City began. In 1958, the building was completed and the offices were transferred from Malate to the new location.
- 1958 - A Constitutional Convention was held. In the same year, the General Assembly approved the Draft of the UCCP Constitution for referral to the annual conferences.
- 1960 - The General Assembly proclaimed the approval of the UCCP Constitution for implementation. It provided for the election of the jurisdictional bishops by the General Assembly with a term of four years and for the General Assembly to meet biennially. Bishop Enrique Sobrepeña was elected as General Secretary. The General Assembly approved the Statement of Social Concern.
- 1962 - The union of the Tagalog Convention of the Church of Christ (Disciples) with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines was proclaimed in appropriate ceremonies at the General Assembly held in Cebu City.
- 1966 - A new organizational set up for the General Secretariat was approved, providing for the transformation of the commissions to divisions for the implementation of church programs.
- 1968 - Dr. Cirilo A. Rigos was elected General Secretary.
- 1972 - May 21-27. A Constitutional Convention was held at Ellinwood-Malate Church to revise the UCCP Constitution. On the succeeding week, the General Assembly approved the proposed

draft and referred it to the conferences for ratification. Because of the imminent withdrawal of foreign subsidies, the General Assembly abolished the national divisions and placed the operation/implementation of these programs in the offices of the jurisdictions. At the same time, the “At Least One Million Pesos” Fund campaign aimed at generating local resources, was launched.

Bishop Estanislao Q. Abainza was elected General Secretary. He went on to serve in that capacity up to 1981, making him the longest to have served in the said office.

September 21. President Ferdinand E. Marcos declared Martial Law, “to save the republic and to build a new society.”

- 1973 - The conferences during their annual sessions, ratified the UCCP Constitution and By-Laws.
- 1974 - The General Assembly held in Cebu City proclaimed the ratification and effectivity of the UCCP Constitution and By-Laws. The new UCCP Charter provided for the holding of a Quadrennial General Assembly, making Cebu as the first Quadrennial Assembly. The Bishops were to be elected by the jurisdictional conventions but proclaimed by the General Assembly or its Executive Committee. Dr. Eliezer D. Mapanao was the first chairperson elected under this new set up. Other significant decisions in the General Assembly session were:
  1. The declaration of a moratorium in receiving foreign missionaries;
  2. It declared the self reliance stance of the United Church. The “At Least One Million Pesos” Fund Campaign was substituted with the Self Reliance Program Fund Campaign geared to raise at least five million pesos for five years, 1975-1981.
  3. It approved a Statement of concern on the deteriorating Socio-Economic and political situation in the country resulting from the declaration of Martial Law.
  4. the Insurance and Retirement Program was launched.
- 1978 - The General Assembly in Cagayan de Oro City reiterated the UCCP’s position on Martial Law and denounced the escalating incidents of Human Rights Violations: “that this body is against the perpetuation of one-man rule in the country; that it is for the restoration of all the civil and political liberties of its citizens; and that it is for the immediate dismantling of the machinery of martial law in the country.” It started a process of creating program desks that will implement nationally coordinated programs. The first to be created was the Human Rights Desk and the Christian Muslim Desk, which were later changed to the Justice, Peace and Human Rights Desk and the Christian Muslim and Tribal Filipinos Desk, respectively.

The Faith and Order Committee was formed to work on the formulation of a Statement of faith for the UCCP, a clamor which date back to 1952.
- 1981 - Bishop Marciano Quiocho was designated Acting General Secretary and served up to 1982.

- 1982 - The General Assembly held in Malolos, Bulacan, approved Evangelism and Church Growth as priority program (for the Quadrennium.) It called for the establishment of 2,000 new local churches and congregations by the year 2000. The draft of the Statement of Faith was approved for dissemination to the various conferences for study, comment, and approval. The General Assembly created a new program desk, the Commission on Christian Education. Bishop Mercurio M. Seriña was elected General Secretary.

A week before the General Assembly session, the National Christian Youth Fellowship was organized and was subsequently recognized as the UCCP's national youth organization.

- 1983 - August 21. Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr. was killed at the Manila International Airport upon his arrival from a three-year self-exile in the USA. His death sparked a series of protest actions from the citizenry.

- 1984 - New desks created through Executive Committee actions were the Development and Services Desk and the Mission and Evangelism Desk.

- 1986 - February 22-25. What is now known as "People's Power Revolution" ended the 20-year rule of President Ferdinand E. Marcos and installed to the presidency, Mrs. Corazon C. Aquino.

March 18. The UCCP Council of Bishops issued a statement protesting the interventionist policies of the United States to the economic, political, and cultural life of the Filipino people. It called for the non-renewal of the Military Bases Agreement between the Philippines and the United States when it expires in 1991. On August 21, the Council of Bishops issued a statement "Peacemaking: Our Ministry" calling the UCCP constituency to "join hands with people of the world in the common quest for peace based on justice" and to "follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace."

The General Assembly held in Quezon City approved the UCCP Statement of Faith. It adopted the theme: "The Church for the Life of the World" and mandated the General Secretariat to come up with a programmatic expression of the said theme. It provided for the possibility of streamlining the church's organizational structure including possible amendments to the UCCP Constitution and By-Laws if necessary, to suit the needs of a relevant ministry for the Church. Bishop Erme R. Camba was elected General Secretary.

- 1987 - Implementing the General Assembly mandate for a thorough study and evaluation of the UCCP's organizational structures and for the streamlining of its operations, a series of consultations were held resulting in the initial clustering of the UCCP's Programs into three areas: Education and Nurture, Stewardship, and Witness and Service upon the recommendation of the General Secretariat. (The said clustering was approved by the General Assembly Executive Committee on September, 1988).

August. The annual Church Workers Convocation and the Alumni Homecoming of the Silliman University Divinity School which had been going on since 1961 was transformed into

the National Church Workers Convocation of the UCCP. "Like A Mustard Seed", a book of Commentaries on the UCCP Statement of Faith was launched as part of a Church-wide study for the UCCP Statement of Faith.

October 30. In a Moderators Consultation, 34 Moderators, 4 jurisdictional Bishops, National and Jurisdictional Program Coordinators and other National Officers of the UCCP wrote an open letter addressed to President Corazon C. Aquino, Members of the Senate and House of Representatives, Cabinet and military officials expressing concern over the widespread poverty of the people, the worsening political crisis, at the same time, pointing to the increasing involvement of the people for change as a sign of hope.

The Communications and Literature Desk and the Health Ministries Desk were created.

- 1988 - May 22. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines commemorated the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its founding with a Worship Service of thanksgiving held at the Ellinwood Malate Church, the site of its founding assembly.

Two major programs were launched during the Thanksgiving Worsihp: The "2,000 by the Year 2000 Discipling the Nation Church Growth Program" and the "Second Mile Giving Program".

The Worship Service was the start of a year-long celebration to be held by and in the various judicatories of the church as an act of remembrance and thanksgiving.

For God's enabling power that has made the church capable to respond to Christ's call for unity, and for God's continuing guidance and inspiration for the deepening of the bonds of common Christian fellowship;

For God's companionship in this pilgrimage of obedience and discipleship that has been shown through the Church's life and ministry as a uniting church despite all the barriers that have been encountered along the way;

For the empowerment we all have received to love God and to serve the neighbor, subservient to no one but to Christ our Lord, and servant of all, most especially to "the least of the people."

# UNITING ASSEMBLY DOCUMENTS

## BASIS OF UNION

*Whereas, the unity of the Church is founded upon loyalty to Jesus Christ, the Head and Lord of the Church, and on fidelity to the cause of His Kingdom.*

*Whereas, any unity is first of all a unity of spirit and life.*

*Whereas, having the same spirit and owning the same Lord, we, nonetheless, recognize the diversity of gifts and ministrations for whose exercise due freedom must always be afforded in the differences of interpretation, in forms of worship, and modes of operation;*

*Whereas, the Evangelical Church in the Philippines, the Convention of the Philippine Baptist Churches, the Philippine Methodist Church, the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Cristo, and the United Evangelical Church of the Philippines, by their respective General Assemblies, Conferences or Conventions did heretofore appoint commissions on church union;*

*Whereas, these commissions at a joint session held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of November, 1947, by joint action did agree upon, approve, and adopt a Plan and Basis of Union for the organic union of these churches and thereafter presented said plan and Basis of Union for the United Church of Christ in the Philippines to their respective denominational bodies;*

*Whereas, the Bishops, Moderators, and Secretaries of these churches did issue a call for sessions of their respective General Assemblies, Conferences or Conventions, and for a subsequent Joint Session to the Uniting Assembly of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines;*

*Whereas, this Uniting Assembly, now in session, is authorized to constitute itself as it does hereby constitute itself, the first General Assembly of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.*



## DECLARATION OF UNION

*Now, therefore, the delegates to this Uniting Assembly of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines do hereby solemnly publish and declare in the presence of God and before all men the following statement of facts:*

- I. That the Evangelical Church in the Philippines, the Methodist Church, and the United Evangelical Church of the Philippines are now and shall be One Church known as the United Church of Christ in the Philippines;*
- II. That the United Church of Christ in the Philippines places itself in readiness to continue to negotiate for an ever-expanding Church union with those new in negotiation as well as with others;*
- III. That the United Church of Christ in the Philippines as thus constituted is and shall be the ecclesiastical successor of these uniting churches, namely, the Evangelical Church in the Philippines, the Philippine Methodist Church, and the United Evangelical Church of the Philippines, permitting, however, in the meantime, the holding of properties by these Churches by the different corporations registered under their respective name, until such time as proper adjustments shall have been made with regard to such holdings;*
- IV. That by adoption of the name "United Church of Christ in the Philippines", for this Church Union, no right, interest or title in and to their respective names by which the Uniting Churches have been identified and known has been nor is surrendered, but all such rights are specifically reserved against the claims of all persons, associations and organizations whatsoever; and*
- V. That we, delegates to the Uniting Assembly, hereby formally adopt the Plan and Basis of Union formulated by the Joint Commission on Church Union of the Uniting Churches, as the fundamental declaration of faith and plan of government of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, and forthwith proceed to organize ourselves accordingly for the furtherance of the redemptive work of Christ in the world.*