

Congregational Affiliation with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

A guide for congregations reconsidering their denominational relationship

Occasionally a congregation will enter into discussion and discernment on their relationship with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Such conversations should be guided by the following.

Benefits and blessings of affiliation

Identity

Disciples congregations share a set of basic core values and practices: weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, believer's baptism by immersion as the normative practice for new Christians, a rejection of creeds as tests of fellowship, openness to diversity, and an ecumenical spirit. If a congregation does not continue to claim a Disciples tradition it is open to theological confusion and drift.

Community connection

Disciples congregations understand that they are part of a larger body of Christ, a national and global fellowship of persons. Those connections assist a congregation in understanding parts of the world unlike their own, and in being enriched and supported by persons who are part of their church in other places. If a congregation does not continue to claim a Disciples connection it can lead to a sense of isolation.

Mission connection

Disciples congregations share in mission through the Disciples Mission Fund, supporting mission work around the world. Together we support colleges, universities, and seminaries for the training of church leaders. Cooperatively we fund ministries that support new church establishment, care for clergy and other church employees, develop resources and events appropriate to our tradition, preserve our history, care for the elderly and disabled, provide disaster recovery and relief, and maintain ecumenical relations. Through our Region we assist one another with summer camp experiences for children and youth assisting in faith formation, assistance in the calling of new pastors, conflict resolution, and leadership training. If a congregation does not continue to share a Disciples connection it would be difficult for them to replicate this variety of missions and ministries on their own.

Accountability

Disciples congregations are accountable to one another for their life and bear responsibility for one another. Ministers serving our churches are accountable not only to their congregation but also to the Regional Commission on Ministry. This provides protection for both the congregation and the pastor should issues arise around ministerial ethics. If a congregation does not continue as a Disciples church, there is no relationship to assist them should a question of misconduct arise.

Support

Disciples congregations receive support from the denominational family in a variety of ways: consultations on change and growth, opportunities for funding building expansion and repair, conflict resolution, pastoral encouragement, assistance in calling a new minister, scholarship opportunities for clergy and lay persons seeking educational enrichment, salary support for churches calling a new pastor and new congregations. If a congregation does not continue as a Disciples church they lose that network of support for their life.

Risks and cost in ending affiliation

Congregations should proceed cautiously and carefully before making a decision on withdrawing from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Any such action must be taken at a properly called congregational meeting and upon recommendation of the congregation's governing board. It should only be considered after opportunity for consultation with the Regional Minister has been arranged and consideration of the variety of ways in which the congregation would be impacted, such as:

- Congregations who disassociate may be in violation of their own governing documents, including their Articles of Incorporation and their Constitution and Bylaws. These documents should be examined carefully.
- Congregations who disassociate would immediately lose their 501(c)3 status with the Internal Revenue Service which they have through the denomination. That means that they would immediately be vulnerable for property tax on their building and grounds, and charitable contributions made by their members would no longer be tax deductible.
- Congregations who disassociate may or may not jeopardize their insurance coverage. Some carriers feel that there is increased risk for ministerial misconduct if the church is not part of a connectional system which provides oversight and accountability to its pastors.
- Congregations who disassociate would no longer be able to use the red chalice logo of the denomination on its stationary, e-mail, website, church documents, furnishings, walls, building, or signs.
- Congregations who disassociate would cause any minister in their church to lose standing in the denomination unless and until they become a member of another Disciples congregation. Without standing, ministers may or may not be eligible to claim a housing allowance exemption. The minister should seek counsel from an attorney and an accountant. Ministers without standing are not eligible to participate in the denomination's Search and Call process.
- Congregations who disassociate would no longer have the assistance of the Regional office in calling a new pastor or resolving internal conflict.
- Congregations that disassociate no longer have voting privilege at Regional and General Assemblies.