



What is a Congregational Church?

If you are visiting University Congregational Church, you may be curious about the faith and practice of the Congregational Church, a faith tradition brought to America on the Mayflower.

The single most important characteristic distinguishing Congregationalism from other denominations is that we are a *non-creedal* church. Creeds came into existence to perpetuate certain interpretations of Scripture by men or women charismatic enough to find followers. So it is that churches are born. Lutherans exist because of Martin Luther, Methodists because of John Wesley, Presbyterians because of John Knox, Christian Scientists because of Mary Baker Eddy, and so on through some 350 denominations.

We think this proliferation of differing churches proves that intelligent people who read and interpret the Bible for themselves, without coercion, will never see all things alike. So we do not expect conformity of opinion among those who worship with us.

We have no catechism to memorize, no Apostles Creed to recite. *We are open to all who accept Jesus as Lord of life and who promise to walk in His ways as they come to know and understand those ways.*

We offer a church home for those who may have been put off by rigid dogma and who may feel guilt when they have honest doubts or ask tough questions. Our pulpit features sermons about how to live rich, full lives rather than arguments about which religion has a monopoly on truth.

For people who find comfort in these comments, the Congregational Church can be a place where study and worship are a rewarding, challenging and uplifting experience. To discover the essential characteristics of a Congregational Church, please read on...

A Covenantal, not a Creedal Church

We are covenantal, not creedal. That is, we make a simple “agreement” to live together as people inspired by Christ’s life and teaching, seeking to know the truth and do good work in our world. While most churches place great emphasis on a creed—a written or unwritten interpretation of important Bible verses one is expected to accept and defend upon becoming a member—we have no such requirement. We do not make judgments about where people are before we accept them. We merely seek their company on a long, exciting road of learning about Christ and his kingdom of justice, peace and love in the world.

Freedom of Conscience

We really do believe in the freedom of individual conscience. With no formal or itemized creed, we do not bind statements of faith on our fellow seekers. We would not expect a person to become a member of this church who did not believe that Christ has the answers about how to live. However, just how Jesus came into this world, how he went out of it, whether he will come again physically, and what might be the accurate translation of what he said are all concepts left to each individual’s conscience as we study the Bible together. We feel it is impossible, given the complexity of scripture

and the differing mental attitudes and capacities of people, to create a church in which everybody thinks exactly alike.

This freedom extends to our pulpit. We expect our minister to share the insights of his or her schooling in the biblical literature and in a wide range of useful books, and we expect that thoughtful listeners will at times disagree. This is a freedom we cherish!

Scholarship and Science

We embrace the assistance of modern scholarship and science in understanding both the complexities of the ancient world and the textual difficulties one encounters in studying the Bible. It does not shake our faith to find that the stories of creation, the flood and the Tower of Babel in Genesis were all influenced by much earlier Babylonian tales. Nor are we dismayed by the realization that most of the laws “brought down” from Mt. Sinai by Moses were anticipated long, long before in the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi.

We are not literalists. We recognize that at least a third of the Bible is poetic and not meant to be read literally. Bible writers used legend, saga, myth, parable, song, history--a great variety of literary strategies. These have to be read in terms of their own unique ways of expressing truth. We recognize that the Bible expresses some truths that are universal and eternal, while other ancient culturally-conditioned commandments and prohibitions have no relevance for a quite different modern society.

Not surprisingly, Congregationalists have always believed strongly in education. The first college in America—Harvard—was established by the Congregational Church to train its ministers. That college was named for John Harvard, the man who donated its first library. Dartmouth was founded similarly, as were some 40 of the finest American colleges and universities. In Kansas, Washburn and Fairmount Congregational College (later Wichita State University) were both founded by Congregational Churches.

The Role of Women

In a Congregational Church, the spiritual and intellectual gifts of women are utilized fully with gratitude and respect. From top to bottom, no position or office in a Congregational Church is denied to any person on the basis of gender. We ordained women to ministry over one hundred years ago, and they have served ever since in pulpits and on all the boards of the church. The work of the women in our church is one of the special strengths of Congregationalism.

Democratic Self-Rule

Each Congregational Church has total control over its own affairs. Each congregation decides which minister to call or dismiss, how to allocate its funds, and what rules and regulations shall govern its worship life. At University Congregational Church, democratic decisions are made at an annual church meeting. The democratic nature of our church life is guaranteed by our constitution, which makes it possible for any member to collect a small number of signatures and call a special all-church meeting at any time. To date, the tolerance and harmony that exist among the members of University Congregational Church have made it unnecessary for anyone to exercise the right to call such a meeting.

What Are the People Like?

An audience on any given Sunday morning will include church members who grew up in Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, Unitarian, Presbyterian, Quaker, Mennonite, Episcopalian, Catholic, Lutheran and other Christian traditions. We rejoice in this rich diversity and ask only that church members graciously accept and respect as fellow searchers those who may differ from

themselves. Many of us came out of churches which stake their existence on exclusivity and a belief that only their followers read the Bible correctly. For the people of this church, the freedom of conscience of Congregationalism is a cherished blessing.

We think a sense of humor is compatible with our profession of faith. Life, even church life, often displays irrelevant triviality, even self-deception, and the cure is laughter. We are wary of people who think Christian living requires a kind of solemn humorlessness. And as we embrace humor, so do we maintain a healthy dose of skepticism to see us through the illusions and hypocrisy of life.

The people at this church run the gamut from A to Z when it comes to education, money, politics and opinions on a variety of controversial issues. But with hearty laughter and loving acceptance as a part of our faith life, we get along splendidly.

If you would like to join with us to make a great church even better, University Congregational Church welcomes you!