

UCC ROOTS

Remembering our History

July 2021

“A Leader with a Vision of Church Union”

It could rightly be said that the grand experiment that created the United Church of Christ began when clergy from several denominations began meeting informally in St. Louis, Missouri in the 1930s. They were interested in discussing their theological traditions, the foundations of their lives, and how they might relate with others to share and expand the strength of Christianity. As they learned to respect one another, they became deeply committed to find new ways to expand the “Body of Christ.”

Samuel D. Press, (1875-1967), was part of that group. In 1908 Press became the first professor to teach in English at Eden Seminary (a seminary established by the German Evangelical and Reformed (E&R) denomination). In 1919 he became Eden’s president. Press was very adept at bridging the gap between immigrant German churches and deeply rooted American churches. He also had an early interest in Church union.



When Press received a letter from a well-known pastor at Pilgrim Congregational Church (part of the Congregational Christians denomination) and others, he encouraged the group to cultivate “a strong unity of thought and mind”, and ecumenical enthusiasm. He served as chair of the E&R “Commission on Closer Relations with Other Denominations”. He sent a telegram to several Congregation leaders, encouraging them to join the group.

The creation of the United Church of Christ took twenty years. It started with an openness to explore faith and friendship with those of other denominations. A Congregational pastor wrote, “*My friendship with Dr. Press, who has strongly influenced a whole generation of E and R ministers, has been an authentic blessing to me.*” When the Uniting General Synod of the United Church of Christ finally came together during June 25-27, 1957, Samuel Press was there. His prayers were cherished.

“O Lord...Thy ardent prayer for the unity of thy followers has become a solemn commission laid upon us all.”

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