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PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE ON CHURCH UNION SUBMITS MESSAGE TO THE CHURCHES

A Document of Vital Importance to the Church Which Will be Considered by All Sessions in Canada Before Final Decision is Reached.

The following message to the sessions of the Presbyterian churches has been issued by the Church Union Committee of the General Assembly. It has been sent to all the churches and will be considered by them in due course. It deals very fully with action taken at the General Assembly and sets forth in clear language just what the basis of union is and the effect it will have on the life of the church.

The General Assembly of our Church at its meeting in Winnipeg in June last resolved to unite with the Methodist Church and the Congregational Churches in Canada in terms of the resolution hereto appended, and appointed a committee to carry out this policy.

Although the actual consummation of the Union cannot be effected for several years, the decision of the Assembly was so momentous that this committee at its first meeting on July 26th, considered it important that the whole membership of the church should be fully informed as to what is involved in it.

The committee therefore has decided to lay before all the sessions the resolution of the General Assembly, and to point out its important features; at the same time urging upon sessions, in virtue of their position of responsibility, to explain to the members and adherents of the congregations the meaning of the action of the General Assembly, and thus to remove any possible misapprehensions as to the basis of Union or as to what the Assembly actually did.

The Action of the Supreme Court of the Church.

1. The action of the General Assembly in the action of the Supreme Court of the church, our church in common with other churches, as a part of the living Body of Christ, under His Headship and directed by His Spirit, is free to modify its doctrines, government and worship as fuller light may come, in order to the more effective fulfillment of its mission in the world.

By law and practice the Presbyterian Church in Canada is governed by sessions, presbyteries, and General Assemblies; and the church speaks through these courts. In order, however, that no hasty or ill-considered action may be taken, it is provided by the "Barrier Act," that any proposed change in the Constitution of the church must be submitted by the General Assembly to the presbyteries; and unless a majority of these pronounce in favor of the proposed change, it cannot be enacted by the General Assembly.

The Basis of Union: Some Points

I. The proposed organic union of the Presbyterian Church in Canada with the Methodist and the Congregational Churches of Canada has been under discussion for over eleven years. During this period a basis of union was wrought out with care by large and representative committees of the negotiating churches and was sent twice to the presbyteries of the church. It was also twice sent to the sessions and whole membership, so that the church might have the opportunity of giving the fullest consideration to the basis and to the question of union.

It is important to observe that the basis of union as adopted, does not require our people to abandon anything that is hallowed to them in faith, worship or government.

The basis of Doctrine contains the fundamental Christian beliefs that have always been held by our people but liberty is allowed in those aspects of doctrine which are the accompaniments of, rather than essentials in, the evangelic faith. It is this great fact that renders the proposed Church Union practicable.

In the basis of union express provision is made that existing congregations shall be free to continue without change the form of organization which they at present have. The names, "Session" and "Presbytery" are retained. Congregations will continue to call their own ministers, and the pastoral tie will remain unbroken as long as minister and people so desire. A settlement committee will be appointed to endeavor to remedy the very serious difficulties that at present often interfere with the transfer of ministers from one congregation to another. This committee will be a useful organ to aid, rather than restrain, congregations in their choice of a minister and to assist the minister in finding a suitable field of labor. Existing congregations will experience little or no change in the internal government of their affairs.

The question of union was twice submitted to the people for their opinion, and abundant opportunity afforded for the consideration and amendment of a proposed basis of Union. The basis as finally amended was adopted by the General Assembly of 1915, and the question of union on this basis was submitted to the sessions, communicants, and adherents of the church, and the vote resulted in a substantial majority for union.

After the vote of the people had been officially announced, the proposal was considered by presbyteries in

of practical Christian unity. It is our hope, also, that this union is only the forerunner of larger unions yet to come within the Christian church.

In conclusion, the committee would urge upon any who may not yet be satisfied with the decision of the General Assembly, to consider the question in all its bearings, calmly, and with the greatest care, and not to commit themselves in opposition to the will of the Assembly; being confident that the mature judgment of the membership as a whole will accept the action of the Assembly as being the highest interests of the Kingdom of God.

R. A. FALCONER,
Convener.

RESOLUTION ON UNION

Adopted by the General Assembly, June 14, 1916.

1. That the report of the committee on union be received.

2. That in accordance with its recommendations this General Assembly do now resolve to unite with the Methodist Church of Canada and the Congregational Churches of Canada to constitute "The United Church of Canada," on the basis of union, approved by the General Assembly of 1915 and by the Dominion and Provincial Legislatures since consulted under the Barrier Act.

3. That this decision be formally announced to the Methodist Church of Canada and the Congregational Churches of Canada.

4. That a committee be appointed to carry out the policy of the Assembly, and to act in co-operation with committees of the Methodist and Congregational Churches of Canada in obtaining the necessary legal advice and in taking such steps as may be deemed proper to prepare for making application to the Dominion and Provincial Legislatures for such legislation as may be necessary to secure the conveyance of property to the United Church. That this committee report to the first Assembly following the end of the first year after the close of the year and that, with the consent and authority of that Assembly, application be made for the legislation proposed at the following session of the Dominion Parliament and the Provincial Legislatures.

5. That provision be made in this legislation to conserve the property rights of all congregations that may determine by a majority vote of the communicants not to enter the United Church.

6. That the union be consummated as soon after the securing of legislation as the regular steps can be taken.

7. That in the meantime presbyteries be instructed to move along the lines authorized by the General Assembly in Edmonton in 1912 either by local unions or by withdrawal of one church or the other where serious overlapping is taking place to the detriment of religion.

8. That to the better furtherance of this end in each of the thirty-seven presbyteries of Western Canada including the four presbyteries of New Ontario a committee of three (one of whom shall be the superintendent of the bounds) be appointed to meet a like number of the Methodist Church of Canada and one from the Congregational Church of Canada, where missions of that church are found, and one from the Union Churches where there are such within the bounds, to advance local union or co-operation of congregations or mission stations, such joint committee to be authorized:

(a) To see that Union Churches are regularly visited.

(b) To select from the literature of the churches what may be suitable for their use and to urge its purchase.

(c) To send delegates to promote liberality in these Union Churches toward missionary, charitable and patriotic objects.

(d) To urge these Union Churches to advance local collections for the various schemes of the churches, to be divided proportionately between the churches represented.

9. That the General Assembly continue to any minister in good standing in this church who may accept the pastoral office of Union or Co-operative Church the rights that he now enjoys in this church, and that the Confer-

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