

A Basic Chronology of the Stone-Campbell Movement¹

The Stone-Campbell movement is today comprised of three distinct bodies: The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Churches of Christ, and Christian Churches/Churches of Christ.

Congregations of the movement throughout the 19th century are known as Disciples, Christian Churches or Churches of Christ and individuals preferred to be known as Christians or Disciples. The term “Campbellite” is often found in polemical contexts, but is never a preferred term used by members of the movement. As division became a settled reality in the first and second decades of the 20th century the terminology crystallized. Those congregations who do not worship with instrumental music or conduct missionary work through organized societies come to be known by the early 20th century as Churches of Christ. Congregations in the North using instruments and cooperating with societies may be called Christian Churches or Churches of Christ. In 1968 the liberal wing of the Christian Churches, through a decade-long process called Restructure, formed a denomination: The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Those not wishing to be identified with that denomination are often called Independents. This is sometimes, but not always, used in a polemical and derogatory sense. Independents usually refer to themselves as Christian Churches and Churches of Christ.

American Precursors and Parallels to the Stone-Campbell Movement

1780’s-1790’s – Vermont Baptist minister Abner Jones rejects Calvinism and commences ministering as an unencumbered Christian. His small New England movement is known as the Christian Connection (also spelled Christian Connexion). He is joined in 1803 by Elias Smith.

1792 - Methodist minister James O’Kelly, concerned to preserve the right of ministers and laity to interpret the Bible independent of the oversight of Bishop Francis Asbury, withdraws from the Methodist Episcopal Church and establishes the Republican Methodist Church. Concentrated in Virginia and North Carolina, they took the name “Christian” in 1794 at the urging of Rice Haggard. Haggard was present in 1804 at the dissolution of the Springfield Presbytery, the events surrounding which Barton Stone referred to as the “commencement of that reformation.”

1806 – Elias Smith, New England preacher who joined Abner Jones’ Christian movement, begins publishing the *Herald of Gospel Liberty* which greatly helped promote and disseminate their views. The first issue of the periodical reprinted Barton Stone’s *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*.

1810 – The movements of O’Kelly, Jones-Smith, and Stone consider themselves more or less united with 20,000 adherents. The Christian Connection after 1832 consists of those New England Christians who did not seek unity with the Campbell movement. In 1931 they merge with the Congregational Christian Church; in 1957 they merge with the Evangelical and Reformed Church to form the United Church of Christ. Today, the overseas missions of the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are united as one organization.

¹ Condensed and adapted from “Chronology”, *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005, pages xxxvi-xl by McGarvey Ice, Director of Public Services, Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Nashville, TN. To avoid cumbersome and repetitive footnotes in this chronology, the reader is urged to consult the Encyclopedia for essential introductory articles on the individuals, institutions and ideas noted in this chronology.

Barton Warren Stone (1772-1844): Promoter of Christian Unity

1798 – ordained a Presbyterian minister, serves churches in Cane Ridge and Concord near Paris, Kentucky, outside of Lexington.

1801 – Cane Ridge Revival: a revivalistic sacramental camp-meeting of over 10,000 (perhaps as high as 20,000) people from Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian groups.

1803-1804 – Stone and others are censured by the Synod of Kentucky and withdraw to form the Springfield (Ohio) Presbytery on September 12, 1803. By June 1804 they voluntarily dissolve the Presbytery to “sink into union with the Body of Christ at large.” In a fashion similar to the O’Kelly Christians, the Springfield Presbytery seeks to preserve the right of churches to call their own ministers and read the Bible for themselves and seek the unity of all professing Christians.

1826-1844 – edits and publishes the *Christian Messenger* to promote and advance his views and to communicate with ministers and congregations. This indexed journal provides invaluable insight into the theology of the Stone movement, its ministers and congregations.

1832 – Stone’s followers (Christians) meet with representatives of the Campbell movement (Disciples or Reformers) in Lexington, Kentucky in late December 1831 to discuss points of agreement and disagreement. January 1, 1832 marks the union of the two groups and is considered the beginning of what is called the “Stone-Campbell Movement.”

Alexander Campbell (1788-1866): Theologian for Reform

1807 – Thomas Campbell, Presbyterian minister, weary of the spirit of controversy among Presbyterians and between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, arrives in Philadelphia and begins serving churches in western Pennsylvania. He is soon censured for encouraging competing Presbyterian groups to share communion. Dissatisfied with this contentious spirit and the endless fighting over written creeds, he urges a return to the New Testament alone for the basis of union among Christians. With others of like mind he establishes the Christian Association of Washington, Pa. as a way for any and all professing Christians to cooperate in preaching, worship and communion. When the Presbyterian Synod in 1810 refused to recognize the Association, they formed a congregation at Brush Run and adopt a congregational polity.

1809 – Thomas Campbell publishes the *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington County*, widely held to be the founding document of the Campbell movement. When his family arrives from Scotland in 1809 his son Alexander shares his own dissatisfaction with the divisions among Scottish Presbyterians and eagerly joins his father’s efforts.

1823 – Alexander Campbell publishes the *Christian Baptist*. Published until 1830 and indexed, it is a primary source of information about the earliest Campbell movement.

1830 – Alexander Campbell publishes the *Millennial Harbinger* to replace the *Christian Baptist*. The *Harbinger* becomes the major periodical of the movement until it ceases publication in 1870. Fully indexed, it is essential for reference and research.

1832 – Campbell’s followers, usually known as Reformers or Disciples, join with Barton Stone’s Christian movement.

1849 – First national convention held at Cincinnati, Ohio; formation of the American Christian Missionary Society (ACMS) with Alexander Campbell elected (*in absentia*) as president. The convention and the missionary society gave a sense of structure to the movement, which had a radically congregational polity. Southern leaders, like Tolbert Fanning in Nashville, criticized the ACMS when it passed pro-Union resolutions in 1861 and 1863.

1855 – Tolbert Fanning begins publication in Nashville of the *Gospel Advocate*. The *Advocate*, still published, becomes a major voice for Southern Disciples. The *Advocate* has not been fully indexed. However, obituaries have been indexed and this index is available online.

1856 – Benjamin Franklin begins publication of *American Christian Review*, a major Northern periodical reflecting conservative views. Though available on microfilm, it has not been indexed.

1863 – Publication of the *Gospel Echo*, the first of several predecessors to the *Christian-Evangelist*, begins. The *Christian-Evangelist* represented a center-left perspective among the Northern Disciples. A comprehensive index for 1863-1958 is available.

1866 – Isaac Errett begins publication of the *Christian Standard* in Cincinnati, Ohio. A moderate paper, it is still published and represents the positions of the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. A comprehensive index for 1866-1966 is available.

1874 - Christian Woman's Board of Missions organized

1875 – Foreign Christian Missionary Society organized

1883 – Christian Woman's Board of Missions begins publishing *Missionary Tidings*. Fully indexed, this journal is essential reference not only for overseas missions but also for domestic congregational development. The index is available online at www.discipleshistory.org

1884 – Austin McGary begins publishing *Firm Foundation* in Austin, Texas. A major conservative periodical among Churches of Christ in the south and west, it has not been indexed.

1886 – John F. Rowe begins publication of the *Christian Leader* in Cincinnati. The *Leader* represents a conservative to moderate position among Northern Churches of Christ. It has not been indexed.

1889 – Daniel Sommer and other conservative Northern Disciples in a mass-meeting at Sand Creek, Illinois, call for separation over instrumental music and missionary societies. The Sand Creek Address and Declaration intentionally played off Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*. This event is considered an early and strong marker in the internal division of the Movement.

1906 – Churches of Christ (acapella) are recognized as a distinct group by the US Government in the 1906 Census of Religious Bodies. This separate listing reflects about 20 years of division; it recognizes what had been years in the making.

1909 – Centennial Convention, celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the publication of the *Declaration and Address*, held in Pittsburg.

1919 – merger of the American Christian Missionary Society, Foreign Christian Missionary Society and the Christian Woman’s Board of Missions into the United Christian Missionary Society. This move was resisted by many who would come to be regarded as leaders in the Independent Christian Churches.

1927 – first North American Christian Convention held. An annual meeting emphasizing preaching, teaching and fellowship, it continues as a main venue of cooperation among those who are now known as Independent Christian Churches. The formation of the NACC is considered one of the markers of the second great division in the Movement.

1947 – *Christian Standard* publishes the Honor Roll of the Faithful, a list of conservative congregations among the Christian Churches.

1955 – first Directory of the Ministry published by conservatives among Christian Churches. Listing ministers, congregations and para-church ministries, this Directory is still published annually. It represents the best way to determine whether a minister or congregation is Independent or Disciple.

1960 – The United Christian Missionary Society authorizes the Commission on Brotherhood Restructure. This study process would lead to the formation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination in 1968.

1968 – The International Convention of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) approves Restructure and becomes the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Though denominational in structure, organization and ministry, the polity of the new denomination remained congregational. Restructure dispensed with annual conventions of churches in favor of a biannual General Assembly of one church. The General Assembly does not speak for the Disciples, rather it speaks to the Disciples. In all matters of denominational life, cooperation is carried on in covenant and manifests itself in local, regional and national levels. There is no legal obligation to cooperate, and in this regard the Disciples remain congregational in local polity and voluntary in regional and national ministries.

1971 – Christian Churches and Churches of Christ are listed as a distinct group for the first time in the *Yearbook of American Churches*.

1996 – Disciples and UCC form the Common Global Ministries Board through which both denominations cooperate in overseas missions.

2008-2009 Statistics

	Congregations	Members
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	3926	691,160
Christian Churches and Churches of Christ	5327	1,256,950
Churches of Christ	12,629	1,224,404
Total	21,882	3,172,514