



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on July 10, 2011

United Church of Christ Votes to Remove “Heavenly Father” from Bylaws

Explaining the change, which reflects a trend toward gender-neutralizing (and in some cases feminizing) God that has been in vogue throughout the denomination for years, UCC spokesperson Barb Powell told [World Net Daily](#): “In the UCC, our language for God, Christ and the Holy Spirit ... is preferred to be more open for different expressions of the Trinity. Heavenly Father is just one vision.”



Noting that the denomination wants the language it uses to be “inclusive,” Powell told WND’s Bob Unruh that “therefore we will tend to change language that is more traditional to be more inclusive.” She noted, for example, that some UCC pastors and congregations refer to God as “Creator” or “Father and Mother,” rather than maintain a masculine designation. “There are a lot of people who decided, if God still is speaking to us, there is more light and truth to break forth,” she said.

But a group of UCC pastors and members are speaking up about the move, warning that such changes are serving to move the already troubled denomination further from its biblical roots. “Rejecting God as Father in an age of fatherlessness is unthinkable,” said David Runnion-Bareford of [Biblical Witness Fellowship](#) (BWF), a group formed to battle “UCC’s theological surrender to the moral and spiritual confusion of contemporary culture.”

In a statement prior to the delegates’ vote for the change in language, Runnion-Bareford pointed out that “God acted toward us in amazing grace when He offered to be our Father through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ, who offers us life in his name. This is not something we as humans made up in some other time.” He charged that rejecting God as Father “is an act of arrogant rebellion in the name of cultural conformity that only further alienates members, churches — but, more importantly, God himself.”

Runnion-Bareford noted that the reference to God as “heavenly Father,” which has been part of the church’s constitution since its founding in 1957, “remains the covenant connection with the basic truths of Christianity that keeps many churches affiliated who are otherwise alienated by the denomination’s very liberal agenda.”

He called the latest compromise by the church, which is one of the most rapidly shrinking Protestant denominations in America, “a powerful confession by the Synod of the UCC that, having rebelled



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against the word of God, is on sinking sand — with our members, churches, historic witness, and identity in Christ washing away before our eyes.”

The website notes that the UCC has had a net loss in membership and congregations in every year since 1965. “Since 1990 the UCC has lost more than 250,000 members and 500 congregations,” the website explains. “We contend that those who have left represent some of our most spiritually mature and committed lay leadership as well as some of our most capable pastors.”

The BWF website explains that the group’s members “are deeply concerned about the alarming rate at which the UCC is encouraging the ordination of those who choose 'alternative' lifestyles (i.e., homosexuality, bisexuality, and sexual activity outside of marriage), embrace moral relativism, seek authority in human experience, or are ambivalent about such basic beliefs as the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the reality of the Resurrection and other doctrines of the church which are the foundation of our faith.” It warns that continued “ordination of ministers who cannot accept even the simplest truths of the Christian faith will only contribute to the further collapse of our church to the prevailing mythologies of the culture.”

Religion writers around the country tended to respond derisively to the concern expressed by Runnion-Bareford and other biblically minded UCC members. For example, apparently missing the significance of the denomination’s move away from historical Christianity, as well as its decades-long history of scriptural compromise, [USA Today's](#) religion writer, Cathy Lynn Grossman, lightly reassured her readers that the UCC “did not saw off one leg of Christianity’s Holy Trinity” with the change, but merely “tweaked the language in its bylaws....”

Another writer, self-described “conservative” UCC pastor [Daniel Schultz](#), accused Runnion-Bareford and BWF of having a “credibility problem,” while blithely refusing to acknowledge that the “tweaking” of the church’s constitution, regardless of how seemingly minor, is representative of the denomination’s blind race into irrelevance.

While making much fun of BWF’s alarm over the UCC’s moral and theological slide, the “conservative” Rev. Schultz, a sometime contributor to [religiondispatches.org](#), was surprisingly silent over his church’s insistence at making “LGBT” issues a major part of its denominational platform, as it did at the national UCC meeting (as reported [here](#) and [here](#)).

WND reported that the deletion of “heavenly Father,” along with other changes to the UCC constitution, now goes before the 38 UCC conferences, which will decide on ratification of the revised document before the denomination’s next national meeting in 2013.

Graphic: detail of God the Father from Michelangelo's "Creation of the Sun and Moon"



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