



NORTH PROSPECT UNION
united church of christ

**AN INTRODUCTION TO
OUR COMMUNITY**

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from the pastor

Dear Friend,

Church is not a popular thing nowadays. There's no widespread social pressure or cultural expectation that you should go to church. And, unlike our more conservative brothers and sisters, we don't believe that hellfire and damnation await you if you don't go to church or don't believe the right things.

So why even consider joining a church?

At NPU, we believe that you are first and foremost a beloved child of God – made *in love, for love*. As you go through life, however, you'll receive a lot of mixed messages about who you are and what will make you happy.

You'll be told that you're first and foremost a consumer, and that the latest gadget will bring you meaning.

You'll be told that you're first and foremost a worker, and that productivity will bring you fulfillment.

You'll be told that you're first and foremost a citizen, and

that looking out for your country's interests will bring you prosperity.

While there is nothing wrong with being a consumer, a worker, or a citizen, these identities have a way of obscuring the fact that you are, before everything else, God's child.

You are loved by God and were made to share that love with others.

NPU is about grounding your life in that first identity. Through our worship and service we try our best to discern and follow the way of Jesus, who we believe shows us the shape and movement of God's love. As we walk this path together, we find our ability to love expanded and moved to the very center of our lives.

If that sounds like the kind of community you'd like to be part of, we'd gladly welcome you as a member!

grace + peace

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Hathaway", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rev. Tom Hathaway
Senior Pastor

who we are

North Prospect Union United Church of Christ (NPU) is a small but mighty neighborhood church nestled in the heart of the Medford Hillside. Our mission is a simple one: to love God and to love people. That's it! This mission energizes everything we do as a church, from how we worship to the ways we serve our local and global community.

About Our Governance

NPU is truly a neighborhood church. In our denomination, each church has full freedom of belief and action. We have no bishops, cardinals, or popes that govern what we say or do. We, as a church community, are free to hire our own ministers and discern our own mission. Our accountability is first to God and then to each other, as those committed to knowing and loving God in the way of Jesus.

While we enjoy this great freedom, we, at the same time, recognize that no single church can corner the market on God's goodness. We maintain relationships of respect and mutuality with other congregations in our denomination, with the larger organizing bodies of our denomination, and

with a number of other Christian denominations. We believe that we are better together: diverse expressions of church create a more complete picture of God’s vision for the world.

About Our Denomination

NPU is a member of a denomination called the United Church of Christ (UCC). The UCC has more than 5,100 churches and 1.1 million members across the United States.

Founded in 1957 with the merger of four denominations, the UCC has been a leading progressive voice in American Christianity. We were the first historically white denomination to ordain an African-American, the first to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly gay man, and the first to affirm the right of same-gender couples to marry.

In joining a church that is a member of the UCC, you are joining a group of Christians bravely committed to living out Jesus’ way of radically inclusive love.



what we believe

NPU is a non-creedal church. This means that we don't have a list of doctrines that you have to accept in order to be a member. Rather, we look to the historic creeds of the Christian tradition as testimonies of faith that can help nurture and guide our own understandings of God. We believe they deserve a voice but not a veto in how we live out our faith in our own time.

While you'll never be asked to sign on the dotted line about a specific set of beliefs, there are three major ideas that inform the life of our church:

Trinitarian

At NPU, we look for God in the mystery of the Trinity: God who has created all that is, God who has come into human life in the form of Jesus, and God who continues to move in the world in the form of the Holy Spirit.

We do not pretend to fully comprehend the meaning of the Trinity or even the logistics of what it takes for one God to exist simultaneously in three forms. However, we join a long line of Christians in putting this mystery at the heart of our

worship and at the center of our meditations on the divine.

Welcoming and Inclusive

At NPU, we believe that all people are beloved children of God. No exceptions! We reject any doctrine that begins or ends with discrimination or prejudice against any of God's children. Whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

Seriously, Not Literally

At NPU, we take the Bible seriously, not literally. The Bible is a complex book containing the words of hundreds of authors compiled over more than a millennium. Captured in its pages are not only timeless truths and profound bits of wisdom, but also the opinions, values, and prejudices of its authors. We revel in this complexity, placing a premium on historical analysis and biblical scholarship in our preaching and study. As we wade through scripture as a community, we listen for God speaking to us in our present time and circumstances.



what we do

North Prospect Union lives out its mission to love God and love people through a community life grounded in worship and service. In both, we aim to create joyful, meaningful, and relational experiences for God's children of all ages.

Worship

Worship is about loving God. We believe that this time of prayer, song, and reflection helps us listen for God's voice speaking to us both individually and as a community.

We begin worship each Sunday as a full church community. Adults and youth gather upstairs in the church's sanctuary for a time of song and prayer. After an interactive youth message (which can be quite fun for all ages), children in third grade and under are welcome – but not required – to go downstairs with our professional child care staff for the remainder of the service.

If you have an infant who's not quite ready for child care, feel free to make use of our family room in the back of the sanctuary at any time. There's comfortable seating and a sound system so you don't have to miss out on what's

happening in worship.

Whether your spirit is uplifted by our music, our sermons, or even our coffee hours, you and your family will leave NPU feeling more connected to God, affirmed in your identity as one of God's beloved children, and better equipped for the rewarding work of mercy and justice.

Service

Service is about loving people. We believe that serving others in love is our highest calling as followers of Jesus' way.

While there are endless opportunities for volunteerism around us, we find in Jesus' example a particular commitment to serving those on the margins: the poor, the hungry, and the overlooked. Taking Jesus' lead, these are the folks we try to reach and build relationships with through our various service opportunities.

On the second Sunday of every month, NPU provides sandwiches for the Outdoor Church, a ministry to chronically homeless men and women. Church members are also welcome to participate in the Outdoor Church's weekly street outreach on Sunday afternoons. Each month, NPU prepares a meal for a youth shelter located just a few blocks down from our church building. Several of our members serve on the leadership team of the Friday Café, a welcoming space where housed and unhoused neighbors can join together for food and fellowship every Friday afternoon. Other NPU members are regular volunteers at local soup

kitchens and are always looking for people to take along with them.

We'd welcome you and your family to get involved in any or all of these opportunities. Serving others is not only how we respond to God's love for us, but we believe that it's something we were made to do!



two special things

There are two special and uniquely Christian things that we do at NPU: baptism and communion. Baptism and communion are what we call “sacraments.” On a basic level, sacraments are church rituals passed down to us from Jesus. On a less basic level, sacraments are visible symbols of invisible, spiritual realities.

Baptism

Baptism is the Christian ritual of initiation. As it was originally practiced, new Christians were immersed – dunked, really – in the waters of a river. The symbolism at work in baptism is twofold. Going under the water symbolizes the death of your old self, your inward-looking, grudge-holding, power-seeking, injustice-loving self. Rising out of the water symbolizes the birth of your new self into the way of Jesus. Following 1,000 years of Christian practice, NPU offers baptism by sprinkling water over a person’s forehead rather than dunking them in a river.

Baptism isn’t for those who have all the answers. Baptism is for those who simply have a desire to know and love God, and

for those who want to raise their children in the way of Jesus.

It's also important to note that baptism is a one-time thing. If you've been baptized before, you don't need it done again, even if you change churches.

Communion

Communion is the Christian ritual of remembering and renewal. During communion we re-enact the last meal that Jesus shared with his friends. Theirs was a meal of bread and wine; ours is a slightly modified version of bread and grape juice. With this meal, we remember all of who Jesus was to his disciples and celebrate all he is to us today: a teacher, a brother, a savior, and a friend. This meal likewise symbolizes the way we're continually nourished and renewed in Jesus' way through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

All people of all ages are welcome to participate in NPU's communion service. You don't need to be baptized. You don't need to understand the nuances of Christian theology. Like baptism, you simply need a desire to know and love God in the way of Jesus.



the joy of membership

If you've read through this booklet and like what NPU is all about, we'd invite you to strongly consider becoming a member. Below are two great reasons why you should become a member, as well as an outline of our membership process.

A Spiritual Reason

Spiritual growth is something that takes work. It takes time. It takes commitment. It takes accountability. In other words, spiritual growth takes community. By making the choice to join NPU you are making the choice to join a community that will support and encourage you, helping you to live out God's deepest callings for your life. You, in turn, will have the chance to do the same for others. That dynamic, loving mutuality is what the Jesus way is all about.

A Practical Reason

NPU has a democratic form of governance. Our members are the ones who set the tone, tenor, and direction of our church's ministry. As such, NPU depends on an active and engaged membership to help shape its future. By becoming a

member you're able to participate fully in our communal visioning and decision-making. We'd love to have you as a partner in this process!

The Membership Process

1. Have an honest desire to know and love God in the way of Jesus.
2. Contact the pastor and request to join the church.
3. Be baptized if you're not already.
4. Participate in a membership ceremony during worship.
5. Attend worship regularly and support the church according to your ability.



got questions?

If you have any questions about NPU, our community life, or the membership process, please reach out – we'd love to hear from you!

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