

What Do Disciples Believe?

A more difficult question than what you might think!

What is now The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) began, as stated in the previous section, with a movement on the American frontier in the early 1800s. At the time, there were few churches and the people who lived around them did not have much choice about the church they would attend. This brought people of many Christian faiths and traditions together. With such a variety of religious beliefs, practices, and traditions coming together, our earliest leaders quickly rejected the use of creeds which is simply a formal statement of religious belief. They discovered, and many have learned since, that trying to state precisely a religious belief is a very tedious task, causing division and exclusion.

The preamble to a document known as “The Design” is the nearest we come to a creed. It is very short on hard and fast rules, but long on our affirmation of the goodness of God that we know through Jesus Christ.

As members of the Christian Church, we confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world. In Christ’s name and by his grace we accept our mission of witness and service to all people.

We rejoice in God, maker of heaven and earth, and in the covenant of love which binds us to God and to one another. Through baptism into Christ we enter into newness of life and are made one with the whole people of God. In the communion of the Holy Spirit we are joined together in discipleship and in obedience to Christ. At the table of the Lord, we, with thanksgiving, celebrate the saving acts and presence of Christ.

Within the universal church we receive the gift of ministry and the light of scripture. In the bonds of Christian faith we yield ourselves to God that we may serve the One whose kingdom has no end. Blessing, glory and honor be to God forever.

Again, at the expense of being redundant, it is difficult to be specific about Disciple beliefs since we stress freedom and diversity—but most Disciples do share these basic beliefs:

- The Bible is a guide for Christian living and faith and truly reveals God’s purpose in the world: to free us from sin through Christ. Each person is free to explore and interpret the Scriptures according to his or her own experience.
- Through the teachings and grace of Jesus Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, God is revealed in many ways.
- Christ is the Child of God, part of God’s own divinity; the Son of Man and Woman, living on earth as human, our Savior, with us always.
- Public Confession of belief in Christ and repentance of sins; acceptance of Jesus into our lives.
- Open communion and the unity of all Christians in love of Christ. Doctrines and human differences should not be allowed to divide believers from each other.
- Inclusive Ministry in the life and work of the church. All members are “ministers” - entitled to interpret the Scriptures and perform many church functions.
- The Ordinances of the Gospels are:
 1. Baptism, an act by which a believer enters into the church universal and
 2. Communion, the heart of worship.