

Essential Agreement Summary Statement

From its beginning, The United Church of Canada has required persons entering ministry to be in “essential agreement” with the denomination’s Statement of Doctrine and to see that Statement of Doctrine as in substance agreeable to the teachings of Scripture.

The Statement of Doctrine currently consists of the Preamble and Twenty Articles that formed the original Doctrine section of the Basis of Union (albeit as that section has been amended on a few occasions since 1925), plus three other United Church faith statements adopted by various General Councils: the 1940 Statement of Faith, the New Creed (also known as the United Church Creed) in 1968, and A Song of Faith in 2006. Each of these documents expresses the substance of the Christian faith, as understood by the United Church, in the spirit and context of the time in which it was written.

Two common misconceptions exist about essential agreement. Some persons think that essential agreement means that a candidate must believe and accept each and every word of the United Church’s Statement of Doctrine. Others have concluded that because the denomination does not require “literal subscription” (i.e., literal agreement) to its Statement of Doctrine, a candidate for ministry, and ministry personnel themselves, can believe whatever they like and still claim to be in essential agreement. Neither understanding is accurate.

Essential agreement means that the examining committee must be able to find that a candidate they are interviewing stands sufficiently within the Christian tradition, as expressed in the United Church’s Statement of Doctrine, to be able to carry out ministry in the United Church faithfully, intelligibly, and with integrity. The examining committee must be able to reach this conclusion because those whom it agrees to recommend for authorized ministry must be able to teach, preach, do pastoral care, and provide outreach and service to the wider community in continuity with the Christian faith as expressed in the doctrine of the United Church. In carrying out the ministerial office, ministers re-present the Christian tradition and the United Church to those with whom they interact, both inside and outside the particular communities they serve. They need to be able to carry out those functions of ministry faithfully and with integrity.