

Choosing to trust



**UNITED PROTESTANT
CHURCH OF FRANCE**
lutheran-reformed communion

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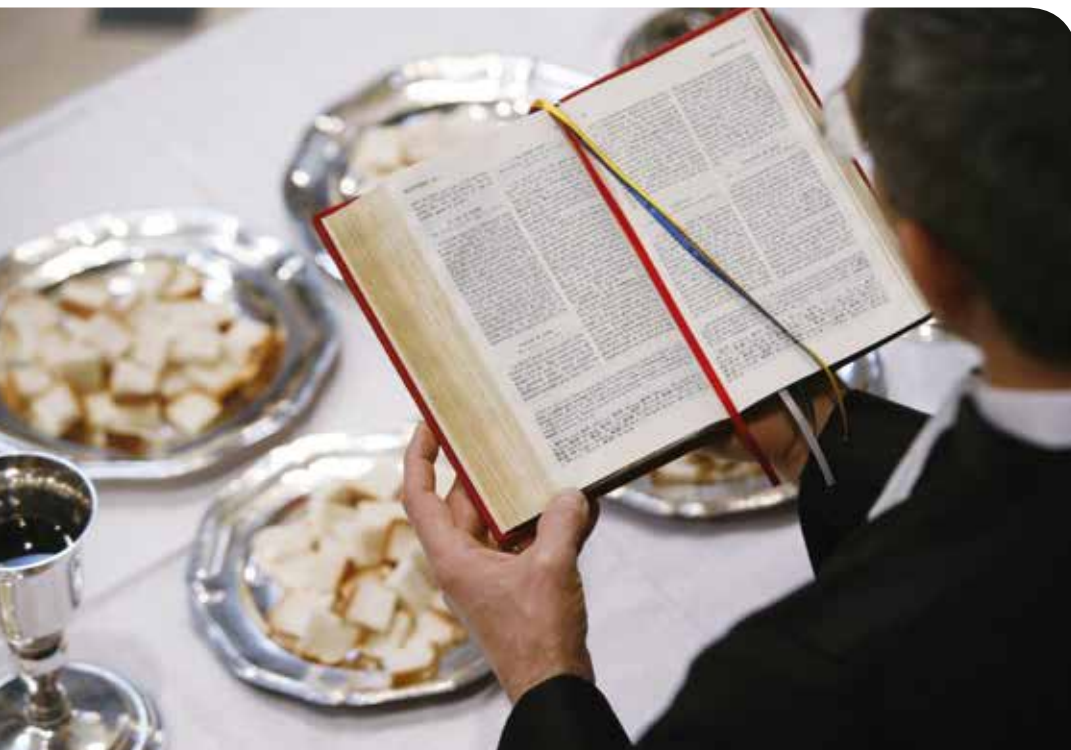
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A new impetus for a church of witnesses

The Church draws its life from different encounters.

They are why it exists. They indicate the way forward, they open up new horizons. First of all, encounters with God who comes to meet us, each one. God does not remain distant in some sort of unattainable heavenly sphere. Instead, he comes unconditionally to join us in the midst of our daily lives – he comes to meet us where we are, however we are. In Jesus Christ, God has taken his place amongst us. In Christ we discover his unexpected closeness, his liberating, indefinable, faithful presence. Jesus personifies, as it were, the encounter between God and humanity, made new every day. The Church is born of this discovery, of this Good News, this encounter. She lives by it, celebrates it, and desires to witness to it.

The United Protestant Church came into being to **enlarge and deepen this desire for encounter.**

Historically, the Lutheran and Reformed traditions have on occasions been actively opposed to one another. But they have now chosen to welcome each other as members of the same Church. It is a radically new form of hospitality.

This hospitality has been made possible by the ecumenical movement, the process towards unity that has been renewing Churches for the past hundred years. It is an encouragement towards wider hospitality, a call to put our trust in others and in the future, it has given us an **impetus for a church of witnesses.**

For this is what witnessing to Jesus Christ means: discovering, through our daily encounters with others, that we are brothers and sisters in and through Him, despite appearances and way beyond the limits of our imagination. It means working together to make the world a more livable, more human place. This is what we are called to do, and what we are eager to accomplish.

The year 2017 will be a major landmark for us on this journey. It will be the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. The United Protestant Church of France wishes to seize the opportunity this anniversary will provide to further the Gospel, expressing together our understanding of this Good News and living it out in today's world, sharing it openly with everyone that we may encounter.

Laurent SCHLUMBERGER,
pastor,
President of the National Council
of the United Protestant Church of France.



About us

Key figures

2 theological colleges

10 regions

over 450 parishes or local churches

1000 places of worship

around 500 ministers, of whom about one third are women

10 000 leaders and facilitators

250 000 people taking part in the life of the church

400 000 people using services provided by the church

Sharing our convictions

Within the joyful diversity that has always been a feature of Christianity, the Protestant family – and especially the Lutheran and Reformed Protestant tradition, that of the United Protestant Church of France – places particular emphasis on four convictions.

We thrive on trust received and shared

According to John's Gospel, "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son". This love was there before we were. It is a spontaneous and free gift. The trust is unconditional; its power to set us free calls us to trust in our turn.

Reading the Bible helps us to stand firm

The Bible is not a rule-book: it is a library of 66 books that speak to us both at an intellectual and at an emotional level. Together, and with the help of God's Spirit, we accept it as the reference for our faith, we read it as a source of inspiration, we interpret it for our lives today. Reading the Bible makes us effective and responsible.

We need one another

God speaks to us in our hearts through the Bible and through our neighbour. We cannot have a relationship with Jesus Christ unless we have a relationship with others. Parishes are in solidarity with one another, and no specific church can exist without the universal Church. God calls us never to cut off others, for God joins us through them.

The good life is the simple life

Simplicity is a lifestyle that encourages sharing, responsibility and sobriety. This does not mean narrow-minded austerity (Jesus was called a "glutton and a drunkard"), but it does mean not allowing oneself to be fascinated by ostentatious expenditure, whether of energy, natural resources or money. It means cultivating a healthy detachment from our plans and our actions, our achievements and our failures, a detachment that enables a healthy sense of humour !

These are not new convictions. They are sometimes summarized in the slogan *sola fide* (faith alone), *sola scriptura* (scripture alone), or a formula: the priesthood of all believers (joint responsibility and equality between minister and congregation). We believe that nowadays they are more relevant than ever.

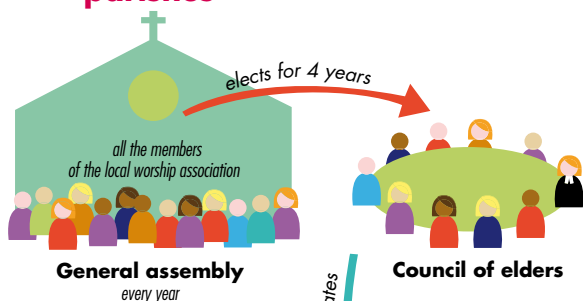


Democratic governance

The system of governance of the United Protestant Church of France is known as the presbyterian-synodal system. Jesus Christ, is ultimately the only head of the Church; his authority is not delegated.

The United Protestant Church is organized into congregations and elected councils of elders who seek to bring Christ's authority to life and oversee the different types of service (or "ministry").

Over 450 local churches, or parishes

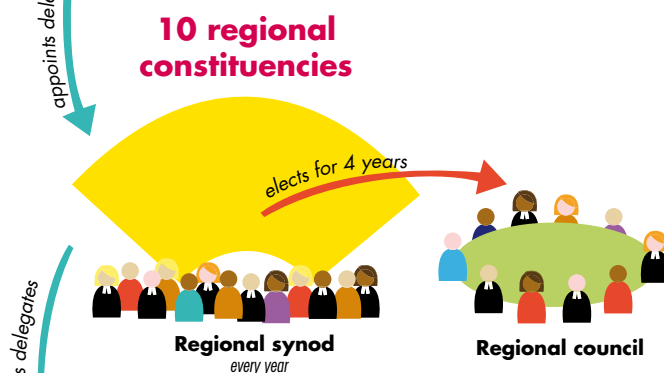


At local level

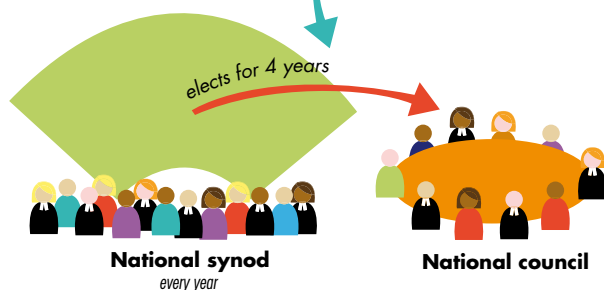
In practical terms, each local church, or parish, is responsible for its day-to-day running and policy. It is run by a council of elders elected every 4 years by the general assembly. The minister, or pastor, appointed by the council, is a member of the council by right.

At regional level

There is strong solidarity between local churches in each region, including in financial terms. Each local church sends delegates to the annual regional synod, which elects a regional council every 4 years. The regional synod elects delegates to the national synod (every 4 years).



1 national union



At national level

The annual national synod lays down major policy guidelines, draws up statutory texts, ensures mutual solidarity, elects a national council (ministers and lay people), which elects its president (four years in office)

Finances

Each local church (or parish) is fully responsible for its own finances. There is strong solidarity between churches both within and between regions. This solidarity enables joint regional and national commitments to be met (such as

training, mission, international relations, ministers' pensions, etc.) to be met.

The stipend paid to ministers (pastors) is based on standard conditions decided by the national synod. The overall budget of the French United Protestant church (i.e. comprising local, regional and national budgets) is close to 26 million euros.

Parish life in the local church

A local church, or parish, of the United Protestant Church is an open community where all are welcome. The life of the church involves sharing in a variety of activities.

Worship

Worship is a time for gathering and renewing. It revolves around meditating on a passage from the Bible, in the light of contemporary issues. Space is given for singing, sharing, praying and silence. Worship services are usually weekly events, open to everyone: individuals, families, believers, well-wishers and the simply curious.

Pastoral care

The minister, home visitors, perhaps a hospital chaplain are always available for a visit, a chat, advice and support.

Life events

Baptism, a blessing on a marriage, the proclamation of hope in the event of bereavement, prayer in difficult or joyful situations: the community rejoices with those who rejoice, weeps with those who weep and is available for all who need it.

Spiritual development

Whether old or young, newcomer or long-standing committed believer, we can all benefit from discovering the Bible, deepening our convictions, growing in our life choices, exploring questions together, gaining skills that will enable us to assume fresh responsibilities...

Youth and childrens' ministry

Young people are at the heart of the church's life through Bible groups, Sunday school, youth clubs, scout groups etc. at local, regional and national level (including the "Grand Kiff" gathering).

Solidarity and service

This involves working with and for the marginalised, the lonely and the excluded, often in partnership with voluntary associations.

Ecumenical and cultural engagement

This is lived out through such activities as ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue, intercultural meeting, international relations (twinning, exchange visits etc.) and cultural events (e.g. concerts, lectures, round table discussions and exhibitions).

Sociability

A welcoming parish community means enjoying shared activities: this might involve a choir, a community lunch, meetings around shared hobbies or particular age groups, etc.

The range of initiatives is very wide, and it varies from one parish to another.

Each local church organises activities depending on its surroundings, its specific wants and needs, requests received, and the available skills and talents.



Training for personal and community development

In the United Protestant Church, training is intended to give impetus to individuals and the church as a whole, with the aim of developing spiritual life.

Training opportunities exist in a wide variety of fields: Bible study, theology, social action, liturgy, youth work, leadership, legal and financial aspects of church life... Training is provided at local, departmental (consistory), regional or national levels, and takes various forms (workshops, courses, programmes, videos etc.)

Accessible to all

Théovie is an internet-based training resource aimed at exploring questions of life from a biblical perspective. It is a tool for deepening theological and biblical knowledge, provided as a free service to all. Students pick and choose the modules in which they enrol, according to their special interests; teaching support is available.

University training

The Protestant theological institute (*Institut Protestant de Théologie – IPT*) is comprised of the theological colleges of Paris and Montpellier. The institute operates under contract with the state. The colleges operate in partnership with a number of French and foreign universities. The IPT offers university training to degree and doctorate levels, and is responsible in particular for training ministers of the United Protestant Church of France. Students come from a wide range of denominations, origins and age groups.

Some figures

400 students enrolled in courses leading to recognised qualifications at the IPT (200 in Montpellier, 200 in Paris)
Students are **60% male, 40% female.**
> www.iptheologie.fr

On average, **12 new ministers** are appointed in the United Protestant Church each year.

There are over 4000 students enrolled in Théovie.
60% of users are under 50.
> www.theovie.org

Average age for entering the ministry is **35** (often after an earlier career in a different branch)

Age of the youngest minister: 24.



The United Protestant Church in protestant history

Development

In the 16th century, the Protestant Reformation emerged almost simultaneously in different areas of Europe. It was united around certain basic convictions: God is not a judge to be feared, but a father who loves us unconditionally; all humans are equal before God; the authority of the Bible is superior to that of the Church, etc. However, the forms and the expression of the Reformation varied across Europe. In France its origins are to be found in the intersection between Renaissance humanism and the Lutheran ideas coming from the German states.

French Protestants have always been a small minority. After a long period of persecution, they gradually took their place in French society from the Revolution onwards, thanks to the progress of the secular state, an idea which they actively promoted.

About a million and a half French people (some 2.3% of the population of metropolitan France) claim to be Protestant.

Present-day Protestantism is growing more varied

In France, two thirds of Protestant churches and movements are members of the Protestant Federation of France, founded in 1905; the United Protestant Church was a founder member, and is the largest member church. Evangelical protestantism (including baptists, pentecostals, etc.) is gaining ground, especially under the influence of Protestants from overseas departments and the southern hemisphere.

As the creation of the United Protestant Church in 2012 shows, Lutheran and Reformed Protestantism is also undergoing renewal.



Martin Luther

Union in diversity

The formal process of creating the United Protestant Church of France took five years. Practical unity had already been achieved with the joint training of pastoral ministers from 1969, enabling them to serve in parishes of either church. The United Protestant Church seeks to express the theological, organisational and liturgical diversity between the two traditions. Indeed, it considers such diversity an asset, a basis from which to offer society at large a shared witness. The regional organisation of the churches has been preserved, and operational disruption has been avoided. It is worth noting, at a time when the religious landscape is marked by splits and separations, that all the local churches (parishes) agreed to be part of the union. The United Protestant Church of France is open to future developments, and eager to welcome other churches with roots in the Reformation.

By bringing together Lutheran and Reformed Protestants in a single church, the United Protestant Church of France bears witness to the possibility of a life of union in diversity and pluralism.



Jean Calvin

The United Protestant Church in the universal church

Just as a Christian needs to meet other Christians to progress in faith and witness, so a church needs other churches to deepen its convictions and put them into practice in response to the challenges of our time.

No single church can carry out its mission on its own, because no single church is the one and only Church of Jesus Christ. Meeting and sharing are essential to the mission of individual Christians, and of churches.

Ecumenical relations in France

Grass-roots meetings with other Christians, and a commitment to ecumenical dialogue and to joint caring ministries and social action are the essential basis of our witness to Jesus Christ in society.

Through the **Protestant federation of France** (Fédération Protestante de France – FPF), the United Protestant Church of France is committed to developing close relations with other churches, organisations and movements in the Protestant tradition.

It is also involved in multilateral ecumenism with the Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic church through the **Council of Christian Churches in France** (Conseil d'Églises Chrétiennes en France – CECEF).

At a time when the ecclesiological and ecumenical landscape is growing more complex in France and elsewhere, the United Protestant Church continues to be in theological dialogue with other churches in the framework of the Lutheran-Reformed Protestant communion. It encourages its members to reach out to the churches of different ethnic origins and to evangelical and pentecostal churches.

The Leuenberg Agreement

The Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), originally known as the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, was founded on 16 March 1973 between the Lutheran and Reformed churches of Europe when they signed the Leuenberg Agreement. At present, the communion comprises 105 member churches.

The Leuenberg Agreement covers the sacraments of baptism and holy communion, and pastoral ministry. It rescinds the reciprocal excommunications of the Reformation, reconciles the signatory churches and establishes full communion between them. In 2013, the Leuenberg Agreement celebrates 40 years of ecumenical work between Lutheran and Reformed churches at European level, which has resulted in the birth of the United Protestant Church of France.





International relations

The United Protestant church of France maintains multiple links with many Protestant churches throughout the world, in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas.

The links are of two kinds:

- **Bilateral links with Lutheran, Reformed or United Churches** worldwide: this involves sharing information and experience, sending and receiving delegations, visiting each other's synods, organising conferences and other meetings.
- **Membership of international ecumenical organisations:** the World Council of Churches, the Cevaa (community of churches in mission), the Conference of European Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, and the Conference of Protestant churches in Latin Europe (CEPPLE). These organisations have a threefold role:
 - a theological and spiritual role: providing a forum for theological discussions and for deepening communion between churches;
 - a role in social action: joining forces to respond to the needs expressed by member churches (combating poverty, preventing HIV/AIDS, providing aid in cases of natural disaster, etc.);
 - an advocacy role: passing on to governments questions arising from the work of the churches on the ground (defence of migrants, calls for a more just and fair economy, environmental protection, working for peace, defending minority rights, etc.).

The universal Church sustains and nurtures the life of the United Protestant Church; in return, the United Protestant Church sustains and nurtures the life of the universal Church.

To find out more

Information on the website of the United Protestant Church
www.eglise-protestante-unie.fr

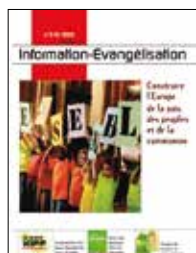
An exhibition: *Église de témoins* (church of witnesses)

This exhibition was created to mark the launching of the United Protestant Church of France. Christians express their faith and their commitment with conviction – and quirky humour! Twelve large-format photo panels reflect the joy of the message behind the new church. There is a dedicated internet site for this exhibition (with videos):
> www.eglisedetemoins.fr



A monthly magazine: *Mission*

The monthly publication of the mission service of the United Protestant Church (known as the Défap), *Mission* presents the projects carried out in partnership with overseas churches and provides food for thought on mission and the universal church.
> www.defap.fr



A periodical: *Information-Évangélisation*

The periodical of the United Protestant Church sets out convictions and thoughts on social issues. Some of the subjects dealt with recently: Hope and a different economy (January 2012); Church and handicap: being different in society (April 2012); Building a Europe of peace, nations and communion (Oct/Dec 2012). Several issues focus on the union between Lutherans and Reformed Protestants. For available issues, see the website of the publishers – Olivétan:
> www.editions-olivetan.com



A book: *Choisir la confiance* (Choosing to trust)

This book relates the origins of the United Protestant Church of France and the inaugural day on 11 May 2013: photos, background, convictions, messages, testimony, etc. A portrait of the new church, on the path to 2017 (500th anniversary of the Reformation) and beyond!

Olivétan publishing, 104pp, September 2013.
> www.editions-olivetan.com



Biblical and theological distance-learning: *Théovie*

An internet training resource provided by the United Protestant Church of France. *Théovie* is a free service available to everyone, providing opportunities for reflexion and courses adapted to individual needs.
> www.theovie.org

A publishing house: *Olivétan*

The works published by Olivétan disseminate Protestant history and culture, offer a Protestant perspective on topical themes, spiritual issues, Bible reading and study, catechism, liturgy and hymnology.
> www.editions-olivetan.com



The regional periodicals

Monthly magazines present regional news, explore important social issues, and keep abreast of national protestant events. For more information, contact the regional secretariats (see next page).



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