

Non-Denominational or Pre-Denominational

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The sign in front of the meeting place of the church of Christ in Mount Holly Springs, Pennsylvania that was placed there by Charles Yana II, the local minister, and reads:

CHURCH OF CHRIST
Pre-denominational

His sign expresses the truth that the church Jesus established (cf. Matthew 16:18) was built before men started denominational churches. Churches that have used denominational names in order to set them apart from other churches have denominating themselves because they differ from each other in doctrine, and/or organization, and practice.

In recent years churches that accept people of all creeds call themselves non-denominational because they no longer embrace a specific denominational creed but accept people of all creeds. They open their doors to almost all people with differing beliefs who do not want to be identified with any denomination.

For this reason the term “non-denominational” does not identify churches of Christ as being different than these groups and thus does not best communicate our goal.

Development of Denominations

Denominational practices began when churches began to be led away from Christ by men, even as Paul warned the Ephesus elders that such would happen (Acts 20:28-31). One bishop began to take control of one congregation, then a number of congregations, and finally all congregations fell under the umbrella of one leading bishop, known as the father bishop, the pope.

The lack of biblical authority for this arrangement, and for many other practices, was opposed by Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, John Smith, and many others. These men began what is known as the Reformation Movement, which was built on some biblical principles, but which also fathered contradictory doctrinal teaching. From these men and those of like nature have come the many denominations we have today.

Modern churches that have wanted to avoid identifying with those denominations began congregations that would accept people from all denominations. In order to attract followers they invited people to join

them regardless of their religious viewpoint and to become a part of a conglomerate of beliefs under a non-denominational umbrella. Their purpose in most cases was not to go back to the teaching that preceded the development of denominations, but was to include teaching and practices of all denominations and thus to be known as non-denominational.

The Biblical Goal

The goal of the churches of Christ is to follow Jesus’ teaching, which preceded the teaching that has created the many denominations of today. In order to do this, we accept only the teaching that predates the teaching of denominations.

In order to communicate this effort, we should express it by letting the world know that we are not simply non-denominational but pre-denominational. Since non-denominational has come to mean an amalgamation of doctrinal beliefs, the term pre-denominational might better communicate our plea to return to the simple New Testament teaching of Jesus.

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