

# Gay megachurch votes to join UCC: Cathedral of Hope in Dallas

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One of the nation's largest gay churches has voted overwhelmingly to affiliate with the United Church of Christ, in part because of the UCC's vote last July to support civil marriage rights for gay couples.

The 4,300-member Cathedral of Hope in Dallas has considered joining the UCC since at least 1997. It was formerly the flagship congregation of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. It left that California-based denomination in 2002.

The vote was held October 30, with 94 percent choosing to join the UCC.

"Their values are our values," said Jo Hudson, the church's pastor and an ordained UCC minister. "We look forward to joining in partnership and continuing the work for which God has called us together."

The church's membership bid will need to be accepted by the UCC's North Texas Association, but no timetable was announced. A spokesman for the congregation said leaders were optimistic; Hudson is not a stranger to UCC officials in the state, having served once as president of the UCC's South Central Conference, which covers Texas and Louisiana.

If accepted, the Cathedral of Hope would be the largest church in the conference and the third largest in the denomination. Because each UCC congregation is autonomous, there would probably be few practical changes for the megachurch.

The 1.3-million-member UCC voted in July to support gay marriage, and was already a pioneer denomination in allowing the blessing of gay relationships. UCC officials said an estimated 20 churches are expected to leave the denomination over that policy, but additions like the Cathedral of Hope will more than make up for the losses. -*Religion News Service*