

SANTA CRUZ

Church changes name after 57 years

Churches

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SANTA CRUZ — While members of a church can often change religions, it's not every day a church does it.

The First Congregational Church of Santa Cruz switched its name to Peace United Church of Christ on Sunday after putting it to a vote with the congregation.

Theologically, the church has been a member of the United Church of Christ for 60 years, said the Rev. Dave Grishaw-Jones, senior minister at the church. But

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kept the name First Congregational Church because of its history. The Santa Cruz church was founded as the First Congregational Church in 1857. In 1957, the Congregational Christian Church merged with another theology and became the United Church of Christ.

The church kept its old name for its historical significance and

added United Church of Christ, making the full name: First Congregational Church of Santa Cruz United Church of Christ.

"It's a bit of a mouthful to say," said Sue Robinson, 72, the vice moderator for the church.

It was also confusing as people would call to ask for a different church or ask the church's denomination.

In 2010, Grishaw-Jones suggested the congregation explore changing the name.

"The old name wasn't capturing

the real, spiritual or ethical vitality that this church has been known for the for the last 20, 30 years," he said.

That led to the formation of a committee to identify values in the church and explore possible names. Name suggestions were taken from the congregation and there were 50 to 60 suggested names, Robinson said.

The committee winnowed the names down until it settled on Peace United Church of Christ as a possibility. Church leaders put the

decision up to a congregation vote Sunday: Did they want to change the name or leave it as it was?

The vote: 108 voted for the name change with 22 against and one abstention.

By taking out the "Congregational" and leaving only "United Church of Christ," prospective members can glean the church's values simply by glancing at the sign.

"People can get a better answer about what kind of denomination we are and the fact that were open

to gays and lesbians and on the liberal end of the Christian religion," said Natalie Blackburn, 42, church moderator.

Though the church makes plans to roll out the new name as soon as possible, the history will not likely be forgotten.

"It's a bit like getting married: you don't lose history," Robinson said. "You maybe just change your name."

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