

TITLE: Report of the Council on Christian Unity

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

I submit this report on 2007 program and activities of the Council on Christian Unity in hopes that it will enable the General Board to fulfill its task “to promote and coordinate the activities of general ministries to assure that such actions conform to the policies of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).”

LONG-RANGE PLANNING GOALS:

In 2005 the Board of the Council on Christian Unity (CCU) adopted a *visioning statement* for the coming years that sets forth *three major “frontiers” in our quest for Christian unity* as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), especially as we claim an “open Table” as our primary vision and witness to the oneness that God intends for the whole human family:

1. Becoming a multi-cultural and inclusive church;
2. Developing a deeper and more dynamic ecumenical spirituality; and,
3. Understanding what it means to live in the changing landscape of an interfaith context and interreligious world.

The CCU sees these three frontiers as our long range goals which represent exciting benchmarks that give content and direction to our search for unity and faithfulness to God’s calling to mission in the 21st century.

CURRENT PRIORITIES OF THE CHURCH AND THE CCU:

The Council on Christian Unity has contributed to fulfilling our church’s overall priorities set out in the “2020 Vision” statement :

New Congregation Establishment: the CCU has planned a consultation this coming March 27-29, 2008, on the theme, “*Becoming a Multi-cultural and Inclusive Church,*” as a major contribution in helping new church pastors and congregations understand the nature and calling to Christian unity in the 21st century as part of our “Disciples DNA.” This consultation was jointly planned with the New Congregation Establishment Program and the executives of our racial/ethnic constituencies. Each delegation from the different racial/ethnic groups in our church will include one new church pastor as one of their five representatives.

Transforming Existing Congregations for Mission: in response to our church’s overarching mission “*to embody Christian unity,*” the CCU has developed and made widely available study materials for congregational use around three important areas in our church’s ecumenical life and witness: (1) our Stone-Campbell Dialogue; (2) the issue of Disciples of Christ and interfaith dialogue and engagement; and, (3) understanding the relationship between the Lord’s Supper and our calling to unity (*Unity Feast*). We have also produced resources in the area of ecumenical worship and spirituality in promoting the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, World Communion Sunday, and the World Day of Peace. In 2008 the CCU is working in partnership with Reconciliation to produce the Reconciliation Offering materials, bringing together the themes of our unity in Christ and God’s call to reconciliation across the lines of race, culture, and class.

Leadership Development: the CCU has sponsored several ecumenical formation events for young adults in a variety of settings and experiences (e.g., the Young Adult Ecumenical Forum, “EcuCamp” experiences in Indiana and Kentucky, an internship in the office of the US Conference of the WCC), and has enabled seminarians and younger clergy to attend and participate in assemblies and governing body meetings of Christian Churches Together in the USA, Churches Uniting in Christ, the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches. We have also visited in and met with Disciples seminarians in four of our seminaries (Chicago, Vanderbilt, CTS and Claremont) to provide basic education and ecumenical formation for ministry.

Becoming a pro-reconciling/anti-racist church: in addition to the major consultation (noted above) on the theme of “becoming a multi-cultural and inclusive church” (the *key* issue to be explored is that of truly being inclusive in receiving the gifts of racial/ethnic constituencies in what it means to be the Disciples of Christ today), the CCU has coordinated our church’s representation and efforts in several ecumenical arenas where the issue of combating racism is a primary focus in its programming, e.g., in Churches Uniting in Christ, the National Council of Churches, and Christian Churches Together in the USA. It is important to state that we Disciples understand that if we are truly to have an impact on overcoming the racism that exists in our society today, we must address those issues ecumenically, in a coordinated and common approach with our ecumenical partners.

PARTNERSHIPS IN MISSION:

In response to an initiative of the CCU Board at its meeting in November 2006, the CCU is actively pursuing the question, “*What is the best way to continue, and to expand, our expressed commitment to Christian unity as Disciples to our ‘core value’ as part of the wider church’s discussion around ‘restructuring for mission?’*” The CCU convened two meetings in 2007 with representatives of other general ministries in our church (the OGMP, Week of Compassion, and Reconciliation Mission) to explore potential new partnerships and relationships – even structural realignment – that might re-energize our passion as Disciples to the unity of the church and our witness and service in the world. An early proposal is to establish a “Council on Compassion, Unity, Reconciliation and Justice” within the OGMP to give leadership and coordination to our common work and programming in these basic areas of mission and service. The CCU Board has expressed its openness to explore what the ecumenical office of the Disciples might look like in the future – in putting our ministry and work of Christian unity ahead of issues of preserving our current structure as a general administrative unit of the church.

CCU AND GENERAL BOARD:

The CCU is delighted to be represented by the Andy Mangum, pastor of First Christian Church in Arlington, Texas, and chair of the CCU Board, as a member of the General Board. He understands that his role in this capacity is not only to bring the concerns, work and agenda from the CCU to the whole church discussion and planning, but to listen for opportunities where the CCU might participate in and contribute to the priorities and policy setting as we restructure our life for greater mission, witness and service in the world.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND FOR CELEBRATION:

The CCU -- now functioning with only one full-time staff (Robert Welsh as president) due to the major decline of income from DMF in recent years -- continues to provide leadership within the ecumenical movement in its local, national and international expressions, e.g., our International Commission for Dialogue between Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church; our joint work with the Disciples of Christ Historical Society in planning the *Great Communion Celebration* in 2009; chairing the international steering committee of secretaries of Christian World Communions; sharing in the development of a common Christian response to the Muslim letter (*A Common Word Between Us and You*) addressed to Christian leaders around the world; publishing a journal, *Called to Unity: Resourcing the Church for Ecumenical Ministry*; advancing our partnership with the United Church of Christ; sponsoring two biennial lectureships (the *Peter Ainslie Lecture* and the *Joe A. and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup Lecture on Christian Unity*); continuing to encourage our “partnership in mission” with the Alliance of Baptists and the United Church of Christ; providing regular “Updates from the CCU” via the internet on major initiatives and developments in the ecumenical life of our church.

In one of those “Updates” I wrote, “*Exciting times. Tough days.* But, much to celebrate in the life, witness and program of the Council on Christian Unity! . . . in spite of the challenges and difficulties, it may be one of the most creative periods I have experienced in over 30 years of direct involvement in the ecumenical movement.” There is much to celebrate! Thanks be to God.

Recommended action: *the General Board receives this report from the Council on Christian Unity*