

NO. 0906

TITLE: Report of the Council on Christian Unity

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Board of the Council on Christian Unity submits this report on its 2008 program and activities 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).”

A. MISSION OF THE COUNCIL ON CHRISTIAN UNITY:

The Council on Christian Unity was created as an instrument of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to keep the vision of the unity of all Christians and the oneness of the church before the Disciples of Christ and to encourage our church’s participation in the wider ecumenical movement. Its origins came at the 1910 National Convention (now General Assembly) in Topeka, Kansas. Its purpose, expressed in its constitution by those early ecumenical pioneers, speaks courageously of a catholicity in mission and methodology: *“To watch for every indication of Christian unity and to hasten the time by intercessory prayer, friendly conferences, and the distribution of irenic literature, until we all attain unto the unity of the faith.”*

The mission statement of the Council on Christian Unity today is “to serve as a general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), working with congregations, regions, colleges, seminaries, and other general ministries to encourage their partnership in our church’s efforts in the quest for the unity of all Christians as a sign of God’s love for the world.”

B. VISION STATEMENT:

In an extensive church-wide process of “mapping Christian unity for the 21st century,” the Board of the CCU in 2005 reaffirmed a vision for Disciples as a people seeking unity and oneness at an “open Table” where Christ continues the healing work of reconciliation. Common celebration of the Lord’s Supper stands at the heart of our witness to Christian unity and to the oneness that God intends for the whole human family.

In pursuing this vision, the CCU identified three “frontiers” for our future life and program; these frontiers were reported to and affirmed by the General Board in 2006:

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

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

C. HOW ARE WE PURSUING THIS MISSION AND VISION:

The Council on Christian Unity oversees and gives leadership to a wide-ranging program that involves a variety of inter-related areas of work – each keeping the core identity of the Disciples of Christ in focus as we seek to be “a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us”:

- **Local and Regional Initiatives** in common witness and mission.
- **Dialogues and Partnerships** with the Stone-Campbell family, the United Church of Christ, Alliance of Baptists, Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT), and the Global Christian Forum.
- **Overseeing participation in Councils of Churches**, including the World Council, the National Council (USA), and the Canadian Council of Churches.
- **International Dialogues** with the Roman Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.
- **Interfaith Engagement**, linking together and resourcing efforts on the local level in seeking to understand what it means to live in an inter-religious context and world.
- **Leadership Formation and Education**, especially for youth, young adults, and seminarians.
- **Publications and Lectureships** devoted to understanding Christian unity in today's context.

D. CURRENT PRIORITIES OF THE CHURCH AND THE CCU:

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

New Congregation Establishment: the CCU planned a consultation that took place on 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. The CCU published the report, bible studies and major articles from that event in its 2008 issue of *Call to Unity*, and has made this publication available in a special off-print that has been widely distributed

throughout the life of our church. As follow-up to this Consultation, a report (with three concrete recommendations) has been presented to the 2009 General Board for action.

Transforming Existing Congregations for Mission: in response to our church's overarching mission statement ("*to embody Christian unity*"), the CCU has developed and made resources widely available for congregational use around three important areas in our church's ecumenical life and witness: (1) our Stone-Campbell Dialogue; (2) an "Interfaith Tool Kit;" and, (3) worship resources and materials related to the 200th anniversary of the publication of the *Declaration and Address* as part of a "Great Communion Celebration" on October 4, 2009. We have also promoted and distributed resources in the area of ecumenical worship and spirituality for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, World Communion Sunday, and the World Day of Peace. In 2008 the CCU worked in partnership with Reconciliation Ministry 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 youth and young adults in a variety of settings and experiences (e.g., the Young Adult Ecumenical Forum, "EcuCamp" experiences in Indiana and Kentucky, the "stewards" programs of the National and World Council of Churches), and has enabled seminarians and younger clergy to attend and participate in meetings of the governing bodies of Christian Churches Together in the USA, the National Council of Churches, and the US Conference of the World Council of Churches. The major focus of our work with young adults in 2008 was in support of "New Fire," a new initiative that brought together the various ecumenical organizations that share a common goal of ecumenical formation of the next generation of leaders for the national and global ecumenical movement.

Becoming a pro-reconciling/anti-racist church: in addition to the major consultation (*noted above*) on the theme of "Becoming a Multicultural and Inclusive Church" (the key issue to be explored is that of being truly 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 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 Disciples understand that if we are 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.

E. PARTNERSHIPS IN MISSION:

In response to an initiative of the CCU Board at its meeting in November 2006, the CCU has actively responded to the question, "*What is the best way to continue and expand our commitment to Christian unity as part of our church's discussions around 'restructuring for mission'?*" Indeed, one of the major new elements in the life and program of the CCU in recent years has been in developing of partnerships in ministry that now link our

work across the life of our whole church in concrete and visible ways. In 2009 we are partnering in mission with:

- the Office of General Minister and President, Week of Compassion, and Reconciliation Ministry to explore new relationships that might re-energize our passion as Disciples to the unity of the church in our witness to compassion, reconciliation and justice in the world.
- a follow-up recommendation from the Consultation on “Becoming a Multicultural and Inclusive Church” calls for a new partnership with HELM and the Young Adult Commission of the DHM in bringing together young adults to explore their vision and hope for being a multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic and inclusive church for the 21st century.
- the CCU is joining with the National Convocation, NAPAD and the CPOHM in hosting a “Unity Reception” during the 2009 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Indianapolis.
- The CCU and the DCHS are co-sponsoring a dinner during the 2009 General Assembly that will highlight the 100th anniversary of the CCU in 2010 as a significant moment in our life as a church, with Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary of the NCCC, addressing the theme, “*Celebrating our History as a Movement for Unity: A Call and Declaration.*”
- The next issue of the CCU’s journal, *Call to Unity: Resourcing the Church for Ecumenical Ministry* is being prepared in partnership with our seminaries in bringing together articles by Disciples seminarians that offer their vision of the future of Christian unity for today’s world.

F. ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND FOR CELEBRATION:

The vitality of the CCU’s life and ministry cannot be measured solely by a review of its annual budget, the health of its investment portfolio, or the number of its staff (one full-time executive and one part-time administrative secretary since August 2007). Rather, the vitality of the CCU’s life can be seen in the leadership that Disciples continue to offer throughout the whole ecumenical movement (locally, nationally, and internationally) in our unflinching witness to God’s gift of unity in Christ --especially in our witness to the weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper at an open Table of God’s grace and love and reconciliation offered in Jesus Christ.

Recommended Action:

The General Board receives this report from the Council on Christian Unity.