

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 program and activities since the 2009 General Assembly in hopes it will enable the General Board to fulfill its task “to promote and coordinate the activities of general ministries to assure such actions conform to the policies of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).”

MISSION OF THE COUNCIL ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

The Council on Christian Unity was created in 1910 as an instrument of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to reclaim the passion for 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. Our mission statement today continues that same vision as we “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.”

VISION

Through an extensive church-wide process of “mapping Christian unity for the 21st century,” the Board of the CCU in 2005 reaffirmed its vision for Disciples as a people seeking unity and oneness at an “open Table” where Christ continues the healing work of reconciliation. 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 inter-religious world

The CCU understands these three frontiers as long-range, inter-related goals which give content and direction to our search for unity and faithfulness to God’s calling to mission in the 21st century.

MAJOR EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN OUR WORK AND PROGRAMMING

1. In 2009 the CCU sponsored two major lectureships that represent significant challenges to Disciples in our ecumenical witness in the coming years, as well as important contributions to critical thinking about the vision of unity for the whole ecumenical movement:

a. 10th Joe A. and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup Lecture on Christian Unity on June 14, 2009 by Dr. John Thomas, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, on the topic, “*Polar Star or Shooting Star: Ecumenism’s Challenge Today.*”

b. 25th Peter Ainslie Lecture on Christian Unity on July 31, 2009 (as the address at the Unity Celebration Dinner during the Indianapolis General Assembly) by Dr. Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, on the topic, “*Celebrating Our History as a Movement for Unity.*”

Both of these addresses were published in the October, 2009 issue of *Call to Unity* that also included the addresses by Newell Williams at the General Assembly on “*Historical Reflections on Stone-Campbell Spirituality in Recognition of the 200th Anniversary of Thomas Campbell’s Declaration and Address.*”

2. The CCU continues to coordinate and give leadership to our church’s participation in several key ecumenical relationships and involvements, including Christian Churches Together in the USA; Churches Uniting in Christ; Ecumenical Partnership with the United Church of Christ; the National Council of Churches; the World Council of Churches; and, the annual meeting of Secretaries of Christian World Communions.

3. The CCU provided oversight to a process in preparing our church’s official response to the WCC Faith and Order Commission’s document on *The Nature and Mission of the Church.*

4. The CCU named a small working group that is providing follow-up to the resolution referred to the CCU by the 2009 General Assembly on the issues of “Christian Unity, Peace-making, and War.” A report and recommendations from this working group will be presented to the 2010 General Board.

5. The CCU worked with the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in preparing the Agreed Statement on the Fourth Phase of our International Commission for Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church on the topic, “*The Presence of Christ in the Church, with special reference to the Eucharist.*”

6. The CCU partnered with the Disciples of Christ Historical Society in promoting the Great Communion Celebration on Sunday, October 4, 2009, and continues to offer leadership to the annual meetings of the national Stone-Campbell Dialogue.

7. The CCU provided staff leadership to the planning of a Disciples young adult event/program in follow up to the March 2008 Consultation on “*Becoming a Multicultural and Inclusive Church.*”

8. The CCU continues to provide a variety of interpretive resources to our church related to our ecumenical and interfaith involvements, including regular updating of our CCU website; publication of a journal, *Call to Unity*; and, offering resource materials and study guides for congregational use, e.g., on interfaith engagement and dialogue.

9. And finally, the CCU initiated a full program of various activities and programs related to the 100th anniversary of its founding in 1910 that will include:

- a. Providing worship resources throughout the year related to themes of unity, reconciliation, justice and peace.
- b. Hosting a dinner on April 27 celebrating the CCU's past and honoring Dr. Paul A. Crow, Jr., as "President Emeritus of the CCU."
- c. Holding a major conference on June 14-17 to develop a fresh statement of our ecumenical vision as Disciples of Christ for the coming generation.
- d. Celebrating the CCU's founding in Topeka, Kansas in worship and an educational event related to the Kansas Regional Assembly in October 2010.

“HOW ARE WE A MOVEMENT FOR WHOLENESS IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD?”

The CCU believes all of its programming and work is finally an expression of, and witness to, our church's claim to be a “movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.” Indeed, the overall theme chosen for our 100th anniversary celebration is “*A Century of Witness, A Journey of Wholeness*” – thereby relating our life and future to this core value of our church's identity and life.

Our commitment is that we will continue to lift up and keep before our church, with clarity and conviction, the second phrase of our church's identity statement—“As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us”—which offers the foundational content and theology to our understanding of “wholeness” and unity within the community of God's welcome and love for all.

INFORMATION ON CCU STAFF

The current staff of the CCU are one full-time executive (President) and, since August 2007, one part-time administrative secretary (Ayanna Garrett, a seminarian at CTS). During September and October, 2009, I had a sabbatical leave in which I devoted a major portion of my time to reading books and sermons by Peter Ainslie as background preparation for the 100th Anniversary of the CCU, and to reflection on the “frontier” of our vision statement related to “developing a deeper and more dynamic ecumenical spirituality.” I am deeply grateful to serve as the President of this vital ministry at the heart of our whole church's life and witness, and look forward to exciting and challenging years ahead.

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