

DISCIPLES REPRESENTED IN GLOBAL INTERFAITH GATHERING DEVOTED TO PEACE AND JUSTICE



ASSISI, Italy (October 28, 2011) – Robert Welsh, ecumenical officer for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and General Secretary of the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council (*DECC*), participated in a “***Day of reflection, dialogue and prayer for peace and justice in our world***” in Assisi, Italy, that had been called together by Pope Benedict XVI.

The event involved 300 religious leaders from around the world representing widely diverse backgrounds in continuing a tradition initiated by Pope John Paul II in Assisi 25 years ago. This year Pope Benedict identified the event as a time for religious leaders to focus upon the theme, “*Pilgrims of Truth, Pilgrims of Peace.*”

The day-long event brought together 16 different Christian communions (Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, Reformed, Methodists, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Baptists, Mennonites, Old Catholics, Pentecostals, Evangelicals, Brethren, the Salvation Army, Churches of Christ and Disciples) along with 12 other world religions (Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Shinto, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Confucian, Indigenous and Traditional Religions, Sabeis, Taoist, Sikh, and Bahais). In addition, for the first time at such a gathering, representatives from the non-religious groups (humanists and agnostics) were invited to share in the program as a witness to the common struggle of all humanity against violence in making our world a place of ever greater peace.

In the concluding event of the day, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, opened the public ceremony (which was carried live via a global television broadcast) in the Piazza of the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi expressing his hope that all those gathered might “renew our common commitment to never resign ourselves to wars and divisions.” He also invited all present to become witnesses and messengers of peace.

Other participants in this closing ceremony, representing the world religious leaders who had gathered in Assisi, then solemnly renewed their own commitment to peace: the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, followed by leaders of the World Lutheran Council, Sikhism, the Patriarchate of Moscow, the Baptist World Alliance, Islam, the Syro-Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, Taoism, Buddhism, Shintoism, the International Jewish Committee on Inter-religious Consultations, and the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

The proclamation of commitment was summarized in the statement, “We, as persons of different religious traditions, will tirelessly proclaim that peace and justice are inseparable, and that peace in justice is the only path that humanity can take towards a future of hope.”

Pope Benedict XVI then pronounced the words: "*Violence never again! War never again! Terrorism never again! In the name of God, may every religion bring upon the earth: justice and peace, forgiveness and life, love!*"

Following a few moments of silence after Benedict's declaration, a group of young people handed lighted lamps to the heads of each delegation as a symbol of the earnest desire "to become bearers of the light of peace throughout the world."

Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, then invited all participants to exchange a sign of peace as a seal the commitment to peace and justice they had just made.

Reflecting on the day's events, Robert Welsh stated, "I was deeply honored to be representing the Disciples of Christ in this amazing and wonderful event as religious leaders from around the world came together as pilgrims to Assisi to share in dialogue, reflection, silence and prayer for peace – each in their own language and each in their own way."

"The most moving moment of the day," Welsh shared, "was in receiving a lighted lamp from a young Franciscan monk, with the challenge (directed not only to me as an individual but as a representative of the Disciples of Christ) to tend to the flickering flame of hope it represented for peace and justice throughout the world. A peace that must always be carefully protected and conserved."

(For more information, go to

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/travels/2011/index_assisi_en.htm)