



## Watkins Address Identifies the Ecumenical Calling to Prophecy



DALLAS, June 12, 2011 – In her address at the 2011 Joe A and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup Lecture on Christian Unity, the Rev. Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the USA and Canada, highlighted the theme of prophesy as a major element in the ecumenical calling of the church. She stated, “Such is our ecumenical witness as Disciples, as Christians, because we have always believed that if we could just live it, God’s world would break in through us.”

In her lecture, presented at East Dallas Christian Church, Watkins began by reminding the 250 persons in attendance that in much of the biblical tradition, prophecy is less about predicting future events and naming the end days and is more about having eyes to see the world of God’s desiring. She introduced the topic of her lecture saying, “Prophesying is about living into that vision now and calling on others to do the same.”

The paradigm framing her topic came from the work of Dr. Letty Russell, a former seminary professor of Watkins at Yale Divinity School. In *The Future of Partnership* (which played with Alvin Toffler’s idea of “future shock”) Russell named “advent shock” as a Christian’s “voluntary maladjustment with the present” that comes out of a longing for future. Watkins expressed this is the kind of prophecy she advocates, one that sees the world of God’s desiring in biblical witness and is begun to be lived out now.

Watkins highlighted the significance of the 2011 Stalcup Lecture on Christian Unity falling on Pentecost Sunday, where the birth of the church was itself a movement for wholeness and a witness for unity. She outlined the main points of her lecture that would focus on a scriptural understanding of God’s vision for the world and the practical application of living out that vision through the church. Watkins identified the biblical prophets as hopeful realists and scripturally, identified God’s intention, as expressed in the prophetic search for shalom— peace and wholeness— for the entire cosmos. She stated, “When we see the landmarks of the ecumenical vision that scripture identifies, we experience ‘advent shock’ and start to desire to live as if God’s way were our way. Ecumenical Christians share this vision of unity and wholeness and then begin to help make it so, to serve as evidence that the reign of God is at hand.”

Watkins referred to the church as a sacrament of wholeness, a visible sign of God’s in-breaking reign of *shalom*. She traced the story of the church in Acts 2 and reminded listeners, “Our possibility now in the twenty-first century is to see the same transhistorical vision and pattern of the future, to capture that prophetic vision, to be the sons and daughters who prophesy. If we would live as one, the world would become as one.” Watkins’s challenge was to become followers, not fans, of Jesus.

She examined the historical practices of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as part of the movement for wholeness, citing a simple profession of faith in Jesus as the basis for Christian community and an open table to share in the Lord’s Supper. According to

Watkins, “Our core practices of radical welcome are part of our prophetic, ecumenical witness. But it’s not just who we welcome that matters; it’s how we live together that makes the strongest witness about God’s in-breaking reign. When everybody is welcome, we are going to have some disagreements.” The ability to disagree is just as important as the matters people agree upon, so it becomes important for the ecumenical vision to learn how to disagree. Watkins posited, “The world can disagree violently, but we must not. The care and respect that we offer for each other in our disagreement is where we will make our mark.” Watkins challenged those in attendance to prophesy with their lives and to reach out to others with a vision of God’s world of wholeness and hope; a vision lived with Pentecost power.

The Council on Christian Unity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Stalcup School of Theology for the Laity at Brite Divinity School sponsor the biennial lectureship which represents a special occasion in the life of the ecumenical movement – joining in one event the challenge of Christian unity in today’s world with the commitment to the theological education of the laity. The Stalcup Lecture on Christian Unity also involved the participation of many others in the ecumenical movement, including the Interfaith Council of Thanks-Giving Foundation in Dallas, the Texas Conference of Churches, Christian Churches Together, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and the World Council of Churches and from all levels of the church including congregations, area, region and general life of the church.

To listen to Sharon Watkins’ lecture, go to [http://www.brite.edu/stalcup/2011\\_lecture.asp](http://www.brite.edu/stalcup/2011_lecture.asp)