

August 2009



Dear Friends of Christian Unity,

I am writing to share several highlights from the recent General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). I know others attending the Assembly would name other events or moments that took place during those five days. Indeed, I suspect each of the 5,600 persons attending had their own unique experience of the Assembly, and would likely identify a very different list. But, for me, these highlights represent significant moments that I believe begin to define more clearly the ecumenical life and witness of our church for the future.

Here's my "top three listing:"

First -- from the opening "State of the Church Address" by our General Minister and President, Sharon Watkins, to the closing worship -- what I found to be *the* most significant aspect of the whole Assembly was the naming and claiming of our new "statement of identity" as Disciples of Christ as the foundation for our present and our future witness and mission as a church. That identity statement declares, "*We are Disciples of Christ, 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.*"

Second, I found Michael Kinnamon's address at the Christian Unity Dinner that was co-sponsored by the Council on Christian Unity and the Disciples of Christ Historical Society to be the best presentation during the Assembly program. (And here I admit to a serious bias!) Reflecting on Peter Ainslie's stirring address to the 1910 Convention of the Christian Churches, Michael called on all Disciples to reclaim Christian unity as "our heart" -- that which gives us life and provides us a place to stand. (See news release on this address at <http://www.disciplesworld.com/newsArticle.html?wsnID=15670>)

- Michael's address will be published in the next issue of the CCU's journal, *Call to Unity*, and will soon be available on the CCU website.
- If you would like to purchase a DVD or CD of the address, please contact Greenhill Productions at www.greenhill-productions.com.

Third, the closing celebration of the Lord's Supper was built upon the Great Communion Celebration resources that have been prepared to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the publication of Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*. This worship service brought together representatives of the three "streams" of the Stone-Campbell movement: the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the Churches of Christ. We were invited to the Table by Jerry Taylor (an African American minister in the Churches of Christ); the Words of Institution were offered by Sharon Watkins (our General Minister and President); and the prayers for the bread and the cup were offered by Humberto Ramirez



(an Hispanic pastor of a new church start in the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ) and by Diane Spleth (a Disciples pastor of Franklin Central Christian Church). The Table thus served to bring us together, across our differences of race, culture, and gender, as well as the historical divisions that have existed between these churches for over 100 years. (See news release on this service at <http://www.disciplesworld.com/newsArticle.html?wsnID=15668>)

In presenting the Report of the Council on Christian Unity to the 2009 General Assembly (*see attached*), I outlined in broad strokes the vision that I believe sets the direction, empowers our witness, and gives focus to all programs and involvements in our church's ecumenical witness in the 21st century. I welcome and value any-and-all comments you may have in response to that presentation and that vision.

It was an Assembly to be remembered! My hope and my prayer is that we Disciples will live up to the challenges that we named together in being and becoming a reconciling community of God's inclusive love -- made known in Jesus Christ -- for "for the healing of the nations."

Thank you for your continuing support of me and of the ministry of the Council on Christian Unity. In Christ's love,

Robert