

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Reflections on 10 Years of Stone-Campbell Dialogue
Members of the 2009 Disciples Team
Newell Williams

HIGHLIGHTS

Five members pointed to the Madison, TN dialogue that resulted in the development of our Confession and Affirmation.

One member could not resist repeating again the yet powerful words of that confession: “We, therefore, participants in the Stone-Campbell Dialogue, confess to God and to each other that we are guilty of the sin of division and of harboring and maintaining a spirit of division. . .We now bring to God our brokenness and repent of the sin of division. We ask God for forgiveness. We ask God to heal us so that our Movement within Christ’s church can more perfectly embody the unity to which we are called.”

Another remembered the surprise at how compatible the Disciples Preamble to the Design was to the whole group. With only the slightest of revisions, which in fact were more of the character of clarifications, we adopted that Disciples statement as *our* affirmation.

Another noted that the Confession and Affirmation still reverberate in our best discussions.

Four members lifted up the Nashville meeting when streams wrote out their stereotypes of the other two and shared in honest and painful dialogue. One referred to this exercise as “speaking the truth in love.”

Four members identified as a highlight of the dialogue their own richer faith experience because of growing friendship with partners from other streams.

Writing of this experience, one member identified our willingness to stay in dialogue despite times of frustration, misunderstanding, or too great an understanding about the things that separate us, as a witness to our intrinsic unity in Christ, our commitment to grow closer in unity of spirit and witness, and the high regard that we have developed for one another as persons of faith.

Three members of the group noted as a highlight the work on scripture with its unexpected convergence.

Other highlights noted were:

The unexpected convergence in the papers on global mission

The confessional nature of the “What We Might Have Done Differently in the Past” papers

Respectful understanding of differing views

The Dallas meeting on the Lord’s Supper which provided depth and demonstrated how alike we are

Worship and celebration of the Lord's Supper at every meeting that fed out encounters and challenged us to be about the task of manifesting God's gift of unity in Christ

Christian Churches and Churches of Christ member Susan Higgins' paper on women, with her plea for a word to say to women who are called to ministry

Inviting a woman to preside at the Lord's Supper on our closing day of our meeting on the Lord's Supper

Meeting Local groups, particularly the group in Austin

ISSUES

Not every member of our team could in good conscience participate in the Lord's Supper on the occasion when a woman presided

How to affirm our oneness in Christ when core commitments, such as pro-life /pro-choice, are threatened by the core commitments of our dialogue partners

Continuing preconceptions of each others' streams' way of understanding Christ's call

Limited success in starting and maintaining local dialogue groups

How to take what we have experienced and share it with members of congregations

FUTURE OF THE DIALOGUE

Recommendations for Increasing Depth

Continue to grow in claiming what we share in common as three streams of one movement

Devote more time at each session to honest dialogue on those issues that we believe must be faced in the history of our division within the framework of our common confession of the sin of division

Gain a clearer understanding of both the nature of unity and how it is faithfully lived out in this time in history

Continue to look at our understanding of scripture, which we have affirmed allows for recognition of the role of context in interpretation. How do we decide what is essential? How do we hear God speaking in scripture?

Look again at the issue of accepting and celebrating the gifts that women bring to the practice of ministry

Consider how we can respond to the growing numbers of religiously unaffiliated – up from 8% to 15% of the US population since 1990 according to a recent survey. What does our continued brokenness say to our religiously unaffiliated neighbors?

Recommendations for Increasing Breadth

Get the word out in congregations. As one member observed, if it doesn't get to the grass-roots, it isn't really making much difference.

Explore how we might do something to change the misperceptions of the "stereotypes" by way of engagement with each other in local, regional, and national settings

More than one member proposed using those institutions that we hold in common, World Convention, Historical Society, Cane Ridge to help us actually do more things together, so that we can get close enough to hear each other in practical ways through shared witness

One member suggested a traveling Dog and Pony Show that would play the General Assembly, the North American Convention, the Abilene Lectures, Pepperdine Lectures, regional assemblies, etc.

Another advised that we be sure to review the experience of the Great Communion—what will we learn from it to guide future efforts?

Be a helpful model to other families of the church in creating family dialogues