

Press Release

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST—ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR DIALOGUE

Bayamón, Puerto Rico, June 23-28, 2017

Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, Puerto Rico – The fifth session of the Fifth Phase of the Disciples of Christ—Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue took place in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, June 23-28, 2017. The general theme for the current phase of dialogue is “Christians Formed and Transformed by the Eucharist.” After an introductory meeting in Nashville, TN, USA in January 2014, the Commission approached the topics related to what it means to be *formed* by the Eucharist discussing the following themes: “The Structure of Liturgies among Catholics and Disciples” (Rome, June 2014) and “The Significance of Eucharistic Catechesis—Knowing by Doing” (Bethany, WV, June 2015). In 2016, the Commission moved its study focus to “Christians Being *Transformed* by the Eucharist,” and the 2016 session was held in Calgary, AB, Canada discussing the general theme “The Eucharist and Relationships within the Church.” This year’s session approached topics related to the theme “Living the Sacraments.” The overall goal of the dialogue, which started in 1977, is to seek the full visible unity between the two communions.

The Disciples Co-Chair of the Dialogue is Rev. Dr. D. Newell Williams, President of Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX, USA. The Catholic Co-Chair of the Dialogue is the Most Reverend David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay, WI, USA.

Papers were prepared by the Most Reverend David Ricken, “Transformed by the Eucharist: Living Encounter with Jesus Christ,” and for the Disciples of Christ, Rev. Dr. D. Newell Williams, “Transformed by the Eucharist: Coming Face to Face with the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.” A biblical paper entitled “Breaking the Rules: Jesus Transformed by His Experience” was presented by Dr. Mary L. Coloe, pbvm, of the Catholic Church. At this session, the Commission also worked on a very preliminary draft which will be finalized in Green Bay, WI, USA in 2018. Each day of the dialogue began and concluded with prayer together led alternately by Disciples and Catholics.

While in Puerto Rico, the Commission, at the invitation of the Most Reverend Roberto González Nieves, Archbishop of San Juan, attended the Holy Mass on the Feast of Saint John the Baptist at Catedral de San Juan Bautista on June 24. The following day, they attended the Sunday worship service at Primera Iglesia Cristiana Central (Discipulos de Cristo), the first Disciples congregation to be founded in Puerto Rico. The Commission was greeted by Pastor Gamaliel Ortiz. After the worship service, the Commission members interacted with the church members over lunch. On June 26, Rev. Miguel Morales, General Pastor of the Disciples of Christ in Puerto Rico, invited the Commission to the Puerto Rican Disciples national office for dinner and conversation. The Commission was joined by the Disciples local church pastors and national staff along with Rev. Carlos Algarín, Catholic episcopal vicar of Bayamón. The Commission expressed thanks and appreciation to both Catholic and Disciples communities in Puerto Rico for their hospitality and support.



Picture: International Commission Members at Central Christian Church, the first Disciples of Christ Church to be founded in Puerto Rico, with Pastor Ortiz and his wife. The table in front of the members is the first Communion Table that the congregation used when the church was established.

In reflecting on this meeting of the dialogue team, Dr. Merryl Blair, Disciples, said, “While we have been talking about how we are formed and transformed by the Eucharist, so we are also experiencing

the transforming joy of being welcomed into each other's worship. We affirm together that we encounter Christ in the Eucharist, and leave, transformed, to live as a community of hope, love, and compassion.”

At the end of the meeting, Mr. Julien Hammond, Catholic, affirmed, “Our experience in Puerto Rico has been extraordinary. Not only were we treated to the most gracious hospitality by both our Catholic and Disciples hosts, but we witnessed a high degree of real (if still incomplete) communion between our two churches on this island. Our study on ‘Christians being transformed by the Eucharist’ took on special meaning and impetus in the context of the Puerto Rican experience.”

The members from the Disciples of Christ are: Rev. Dr. D. Newell Williams, Brite Divinity School, Fort Worth, TX, USA, Co-Chair; Rev. Dr. Thomas F. Best, Belmont, MA, USA; Rev. Dr. Merryl Blair, Stirling Theological College, University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia; Rev. Dr. David M. Thompson, University of Cambridge, UK; and Rev. Paul S. Tche, Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, Indianapolis, IN, USA. The following Disciples were unable to attend: Rev. Dr. Robert Welsh, Indianapolis, IN, USA, Co-Secretary; Rev. Dr. James O. Duke, Brite Divinity School, Fort Worth, TX, USA; and Rev. Angel Luis Rivera, Latin America and Caribbean Executive, Global Ministries, IN, USA. This year, Rev. Dr. Hector M. Rivera from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico attended the meeting as an observer.

The members of the Catholic team are: Most Reverend David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay, WI, USA, Co-Chair; Msgr. Dr. Juan Usma Gómez, Bureau Chief of Western Section, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican City/Colombia, Co-Secretary; Msgr. Dr. Michael Clay, Associate Dean for Seminary and Ministerial Studies, School of Theology and Religious Studies, The Catholic University of America, Washington D.C., USA; Dr. Mary Coloe, pbvm, University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia; Mr. Julien Hammond, Ecumenical Officer, Archdiocese of Edmonton, Canada; Rev. Dr. Joseph T. Shenosky, Vice-Rector, Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary, Philadelphia,

PA, USA; and Rev. Dr. Michael G. Witzcak, School of Theology and Religious Studies, The Catholic University of America, Washington D.C., USA.