

# *Call to Unity*

RESOURCING THE CHURCH FOR ECUMENICAL MINISTRY

**Issue 12 • October 2011**



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Council On  
Christian Unity

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**The Search for Unity:  
It's Personal**



## FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Subscribers and Friends of the Council on Christian Unity,

This issue of *Call to Unity* will be the last issue published in print format. I deeply regret that this decision was needed to be taken by the Board of the Council on Christian Unity, but the increased costs involved in the publication, printing and mailing of “hard copies” had reached a point where it was simply too expensive to continue. My Board also asked that I begin to explore the possibility of continuing the journal in electronic format, which I hope to launch in 2012.

My vision for this new e-format publication of *Call to Unity* is that it can continue to offer significant articles, addresses and documents that are shaping the future directions of the ecumenical movement and do it more quickly than is possible in a once-a-year publication. There will be no subscription fees (though contributions to the Council on Christian Unity will always be welcomed!)

If you wish to receive an e-mail notice when this “e-journal” is launched, as well as when updates are posted on the web, please send an e-mail with your name and e-mail address with the “Subject” box identified as “E-subscriber request” to me at [rwelsh@ccu.disciples.org](mailto:rwelsh@ccu.disciples.org).

As you read through this issue, you will note that it includes a rich variety of voices and perspectives on the current agendas that are shaping the ecumenical movement today: prophecy and peacemaking, eucharist and engagement. The call throughout is to a different world, a new order—and in each statement, listen for the words that conclude my address to the 2011 National Workshop on Christian Unity: *it’s personal*. It’s not about organizations or institutions, it’s about people—all people living the gift of unity and oneness in Christ.

As I conclude this editorial, I want to express my sincere thanks for your support of *Call to Unity* over the past eleven years in *resourcing the church for ecumenical ministry*. I intend that the e-journal will continue the important and urgent task of ecumenical formation and education in new and creative ways that will reflect not only the next generation in communication, but will impact and empower the next generation of leaders in the quest of unity and reconciliation within the Church and the world.

Robert K. Welsh

**Notice: Last issue of *Call to Unity* in print format**

CALL TO UNITY / Resourcing the Church for Ecumenical Ministry is published by the Council on Christian Unity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), P.O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, Indiana 46206. Fax number: (317) 713-2588.

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ISSN 1545-7311

# Call to Unity

## Resourcing the Church for Ecumenical Ministry

Issue No. 12 • October 2011

### The Search for Unity: It's Personal

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# Prophecy!

Eleventh Joe A. and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup  
Lecture on Christian Unity

Sharon E. Watkins



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SHARON E. WATKINS serves as the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This lecture was presented on June 13, 2011 at East Dallas Christian Church.

I have occasionally had the opportunity to play a certain genre of Bible trivia game where one of the categories of question and answer is “prophecy.” I have avoided that category whenever possible.

In those games, “prophecy” usually has to do with predictions of the “end time.” They feature heavily the more lurid details out of *Revelation* and *Daniel*—scary matters of beast or last battle. Sometimes they highlight the occasional chapter from one of the gospels or epistles, warning about thieves in the night and people suddenly whisked away from earth. (Right in time for this very lecture, the news has been full of just this kind of end-time fascination, with endless attention being paid to wondering about the exact day and time of the world’s appointed demise.) For the last 30 years, I have lived with a biblical scholar, Dr. Rick Lowery, who has written two books on Daniel and Revelation, and I have to say that this popular definition of prophecy—predicting the date and chronology of the end times—is not a big preoccupation in our house. We tend to avoid this type of end time thinking altogether . . . although judging by the success of books like the *Left Behind* series, it might have been more to our family’s economic advantage if my author-spouse had given a little more attention to predicting the end of the world!

In spite of my discomfort with end-time predictions—whether in game or novel or radio/television form—on this day of Pentecost 2011, I

want to invite us think about . . . well . . . prophecy. And especially about prophesying.

But let’s take a slightly different definition of prophecy and prophesying. In much of biblical tradition, *prophecy* is less about predicting future events or naming the end of days, and more about having eyes to see the world of God’s desiring, and the heart to long for that world. Prophesying is about beginning to live into that vision now and calling upon others to do the same. Thus, Pentecost—when we traditionally read out of Joel, “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy . . .”—is a great day for a little prophetic visioning, a day for focusing our eyes on the world as God wants it and then seeking the Pentecost power to act upon what we see.

Letty Russell was an important ecumenical theologian and activist from the late 20th century (and one of my favorite professors). She understood prophecy as seeing God’s intended world. In her book *The Future of Partnership*, Russell played a bit with Alvin Toffler’s notion of *future shock*, where future shock is understood as “maladjustment with the present because of a longed-for past.” “Future shock,” she said, “leaves people not knowing how to cope and fearful of the unknown because they are thrust into a world where there are no familiar landmarks or customs.”

Russell’s solution for those of us uncomfortable with the subject because of a longed-for past, was to redirect our gaze toward the future, toward God’s future. God’s future is well described in biblical texts. The landmarks there are well known. The landmarks of God’s future are justice and compassion, unity and wholeness. By focusing on

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*Let's prophesy a bit in the biblical manner.  
Let's strain to catch God's vision and gear up to live into it.*

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the future, Russell suggested, we would be inviting a voluntary "maladjustment with the present [but] out of a longed-for future." She called such maladjustment *advent shock*, and she called us to embrace it! She said, "Because of advent shock we seek to anticipate the future in what we do, opening ourselves to the working of God's Spirit and expecting the impossible . . . in such a perspective we will see ourselves as pilgrims on the way to tomorrow."

That's the kind of prophecy I'm talking about! Where we see the world of God's desiring as represented in biblical witness and begin to live it—*now!*

Pentecost is a day every year when we call to mind that type of prophecy—fulfilling the Joel passage that your sons and daughters will prophesy. On Pentecost we remember the birth of the Church as disciples caught the vision of God's saving love with such power that it could not be contained. They poured out onto the streets to proclaim it in many languages but with one voice. And it was catching. The Church at its birth was a movement for wholeness, a witness for unity, as the disciples proclaimed the love of God so that it captured the attention of people across the normal boundaries of nation and culture, language and faith. From that day, God's vision of unity and wholeness for all God's children, lived through the Church, began to change the world.

At this 2011 Joe A. and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup lecture, let's prophesy a bit in the biblical manner. Let's strain to catch God's vision and gear up to live into it. I propose that we focus first on God's vision for the world as we Disciples tend to understand it through scripture—a Disciples perspective which is always ironically and (sometimes) awkwardly an ecumenical perspective of unity or wholeness. (We are, after all, a community whose very birth certificate was a last will and testament! We are, as Kenneth Teegarden said, a people for whom unity is like peace is for the Quakers . . .) Then let's reflect a bit on how we are called to live that vision of unity and wholeness through the church—as sacrament or sign to the world—and how we might focus our own prophetic imagination and Pentecost

power through practices of welcome, charting waters of disagreement, and making a public witness for wholeness through love of God and neighbor.

That's a lot for one afternoon, but let's see what we can do.

### **God's Vision**

The Bible is rich in images of God's desired future. Biblical text describes God bringing the nations together in a new world of justice and peace. Sabbath is observed, the bonds of injustice loosed, the hungry are fed, the homeless are sheltered, the naked covered and nations stream to the light. (Isaiah 58:6-7, 60:3)

The Hebrew word *shalom* and its Greek equivalent *eirene*, both commonly translated as *peace*, describe a world of completeness, fullness, health, well-being and prosperity. They are perhaps best translated by the English word *wholeness*. In many prophetic passages, these words describe a covenantal relationship that results in harmony with God, with other people and with creation itself—where the world is filled with the intimate knowledge of God; even the wolf and the lamb can live together, the leopard can lie down with the kid, ". . . and they will not hurt or destroy." (Isaiah 11:6,9)

Though visionaries, the biblical prophets do not look at the world through rose-colored glasses. They are hopeful realists. They understand that the world is broken and its people fragmented, in need of repentance and repair. Yet these prophets hope that, by God's power, the world can mend. Isaiah the prophet prophesies, "The LORD has anointed me, has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, to comfort all who mourn." (Isaiah 61: 1-2) The world is broken and sick, but God is at work to heal and restore, to bring wholeness to the whole inhabited earth, the *oikumene*. Here is the original ecumenical vision.

This prophetic witness lies at the heart of Jesus' message and ministry as portrayed in the gospels. According to Luke, Jesus began his ministry, in his home synagogue, by proclaiming Isaiah's ancient

vision of wholeness. The synoptic gospels witness that Jesus built his movement on the conviction that the reign of God was springing forth into history precisely in the midst of a people beaten down by the unrelenting pressures of economic and political division and oppression in the Roman Empire. Healing the sick and exorcising the demonized, Jesus restored fearful and marginalized people to full participation in community. Marshaling the seemingly meager resources of the community gathered, he showed his disciples that when the community shares its resources, everyone can be fed, with fish and loaves to spare.

The logic of sharing, of community, of the commonwealth of God, stood in stark contrast to the logic of Roman imperial power built on military might, social status and economic concentration in the hands of an elite few. The reign of God, God's commonwealth, would transform the political, economic, and spiritual structures of the world, giving the vast numbers at the bottom of society newborn hope, an opportunity to live life abundantly, to become the complete, whole people God intended them to be. No more division on the basis of economic class or political power.

Paul and others in the early Christian movement kept faith with Jesus' prophetic vision of human wholeness. Paul discusses the connection of Jews and the Law with Christians and the Gospel. After asserting that the foundation for both communities is faith in God, Paul claims that Christ has broken down the wall that divides people according to class, gender, social status, and political condition. (Eph. 2:11-14, Gal. 3 :28) Though often confused and limited in their vision, the Christians reflected in the Epistles were struggling to build communities that overcame the fracturing pressures of everyday life in the Roman empire, to realize the different kind of life that was possible by the same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead, a life consistent with the teachings of Jesus who had organized everything around love of God and neighbor.

God's intention expressed in the prophetic search for shalom, Jesus' witness and proclamation and the apostles' teaching, is that the human community, indeed the cosmos, though broken,

divided and dying, can and should live in shalom, in peace, in wholeness.

This is an ecumenical vision that understands the healing of a broken church to be a foretaste of the

healing of a broken world. It goes to the root of the word *oikumene*. Bringing wholeness to the whole inhabited earth is at the root of the ecumenical vision. Because of the vision of God's wholeness as lived through Jesus Christ, because of a prophetic *seeing* of our future in God, we become maladjusted to the way things are. In Letty Russell's words, we begin to experience advent shock. We start desiring to live already "as if" God's way were our way, as if God's future were already here. We pray, "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."

Out of such prophetic seeing grows the vision that Disciples, indeed all ecumenical Christians, share of unity, of wholeness, where there is no more crying or pain, no walls or barriers among people, no oppression of worker for personal gain, no passing by on the side of the road in the face of a neighbor's need, no more Table that cannot be shared. For the sake of the world, we want to live already as if it were so. And that is where the church comes in. For the prophetic vision of Disciples has always been if we begin to live it now, we help to make it so; we become part of bringing in God's reign; we serve as evidence that the reign of God is indeed at hand. Part of the Disciples' vision has always been that part of the healing of the world involves the healing of the Church.

### **Our Calling**

Elsewhere I have called the Church "a sacrament of wholeness," a visible sign of God's in-breaking reign of Shalom. To speak of the Church as a sacrament means that its concreteness as a social form allows us to perceive a reality that is greater than the world we experience now. The early chapters of the book of Acts show us such a community. From the Pentecost moment where the Holy Spirit took hold of a dispirited, frightened, discouraged group of Jesus' followers and made of them a power surge of vocal and physical witness, people in that upper room experienced forgiveness and received a new spiritual power. Ethnic separations were overcome as people heard the gospel in their own languages. New communities were formed in which participants experienced great joy. A new spirit of generosity emerged that bound people together despite the fact that they represented different social classes. "All who believed held things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need." (Acts 2:44-45)



For a while at least, the people “who were being saved” could believe that the holy commonwealth, God’s empire, had already broken in upon them. Through the church, it was God’s government, not Rome that now ordered their lives and gave them a foretaste of so much more.

Our possibility in the 21st century is to see that same trans-historical vision and pattern of the future, to capture that prophetic vision, to be the sons and daughters who prophesy, who name the future as God reveals it to us in scripture and in the life of Jesus and the early church, to name it and to live it, demonstrating our advent shock, our unwillingness to stay with the present as it is—because of the vision we already have of God’s future and the impatience we have to begin experiencing it right here, right now.

Disciples always believed we could make this move. According to Jesse O. Hale, Jr., in the Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, “The basic notion was that . . . “unity based on the scriptural pattern would lead to the evangelization of the world, and this unity could usher in the millennium (!)” The early days of our movement were not just about us but about ushering in the reign of God—for the world. We saw ourselves living in the light of Jesus’ prayer of John 17:20—that all might be one so the world would believe. In other words, if we would just live as one, the world would become as one, more nearly like the biblical prophetic visions of justice and wholeness, of unity and peace.

And so for any Christian unity movement of the last two centuries, we Disciples have been there! We were part of the post-WWII conciliar movement, for the sake of the world. Together we participated in the healing of Europe, the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa, the Civil Rights movement in the USA. We always believed that big “D” Disciples of Christ should go out of business—although not just merging into another denomination but sinking into “the Body of Christ at large” joining everyone else as little “d” disciples, as followers of Jesus. That’s why our identity statement insists: we are “part of the one Body of Christ . . .”

So what does it take—in our time or in any time?—in our church or in any church?—to live as a

sacrament of the wholeness that God desires for all of creation?

For Disciples, our core practices are part of our being a movement for wholeness, part of our being a sacramental sign of God’s in-breaking reign. No Creed but Christ, we have said—no doctrinal walls or boundaries separating us here. With profound simplicity we maintain that to profess our faith in Jesus is adequate basis for Christian community, a strong foundation for our covenant with God and with each other.

Our insistence on an open table—at Christ’s invitation all are welcome—is a visible sign already of God’s unconditional love for all God’s children

where God’s house is a house of prayer for all people. (Isaiah 56:7) In this movement for wholeness the barriers are few, the bridges many. Our practices of radical welcome are not meant to differentiate us from any other Christians but to anticipate a world where all persons have a place of honor and safety and abundant life in the commonwealth of God. Our core prac-

tices of radical welcome are part of our prophetic, ecumenical witness.

But it’s not just who is welcome that matters. It’s how we live together that makes the strongest witness to God’s in-breaking reign. When everybody is welcome, we’re going to have disagreements. The community of Acts 2, where all was held in common, quickly gave way to theological debate that required the calling of the church council of Acts 15. Though Paul wrote about a Christian reality where there is “no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female,” (Gal. 3:28) reality defined by Roman custom set in for the Corinthian church where the wealthy were back to asserting their preeminence over the working poor and slaves. Paul found himself issuing some stern reminders: “Those who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment upon themselves!” (I Cor. II:29.)

As a movement for wholeness, as a sacrament of God’s in-breaking reign, we need to know we’re going to enter the waters of disagreement. But we also need to realize that how we disagree with each other says more about the vision we share than what particular matters we may agree on. The world can

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*Through the church, it was  
God’s government, not  
Rome that now ordered  
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foretaste of so much more.*

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disagree violently, but we must not. The care and respect we offer to each other in our disagreement is where we will make our mark, where we will display our commitment to unity, our vision for wholeness, our bedrock belief that coming together in Christ is enough to make us one and becomes the fundamental sign to the world that God intends the world to be one.

It starts with us, with us having the prophetic vision to see the world as God intends and the Pentecost power to live it. Then people can look at us and say, “See how they love each other!” and they can want to share in that love.

### **For the Sake of the World**

The vision is clear. Still, on this Pentecost Sunday, as any day, we are seriously challenged. Instead of a maladjustment in the present due to a longing for God’s future, we continually find ourselves just well-adjusted enough that is difficult to find the motivation to go pouring out onto the streets—and yet that is where the action is. As important as it is to start with the church, it is more important not to end there.

Today’s world is much like the Jerusalem world of that first Pentecost outpouring. Many peoples, many languages, many who do not know that God is love. Just as many in Jesus’ day were crushed by a hierarchical Roman Empire that counted only those closest to the Emperor of any value at all, so today millions are disempowered by a global economic system that does not value their labor and leaves them in poverty, sickness and despair. In our own time the ecumenical challenge is to seek the wholeness of the whole human family—to see oneness in the midst of rich racial/ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as in the different forms of

Christianity which have long been the barriers we have sought to dismantle.

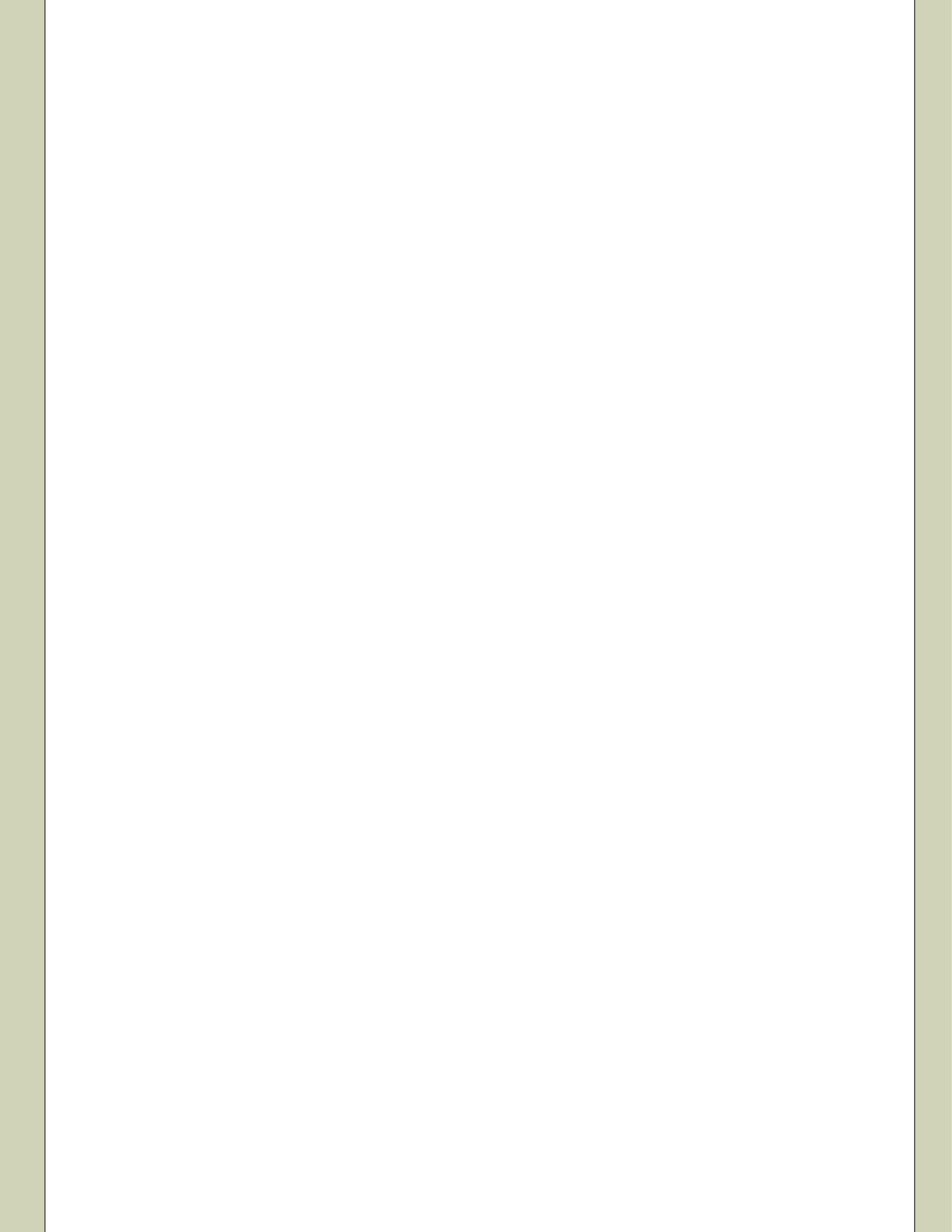
In our time we struggle to recognize that Christianity is no longer a western religion; it lives most strongly in the world south and is going to look different than what we have been used to. In our own front yard Christianity can no longer be lived as an attractional religion—new generations of Christians will only be reached if we go to them with a vision of God’s world of wholeness and hope, a vision which we live with Pentecost power. It will only make sense if we prophesy with our lives.

Our ecumenical witness in the 21st century calls us to make a public witness for wholeness through love of God and neighbor (living now as if God’s justice is just at hand and already visible in us). In God’s world, people have jobs, they are healthy and whole, they are forgiven. In God’s future, the most unlikely of bedfellows rest together. In God’s future, justice is done, bellies are filled, tears are dried. As ecumenical Christians, our maladjustment with the present where such is not the case already, must be manifest. As sacrament, we begin to embody already a different way. 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.

### **Conclusion**

On Pentecost, the disciples poured out onto the street. They made their voices heard, able to communicate in the language of the people they were reaching. They formed communities that conformed to the message they proclaimed. They prophesied. And many understood the truth of the love of God—and were saved

*The Joe A. and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup Lecture on Christian Unity is a biennial event that takes place in the North Texas Area, bringing together the challenge of Christian unity in today’s world with the commitment to the theological education of the laity. The lecture, jointly sponsored by the Council on Christian Unity and the School of Theology for the Laity, was inaugurated in 1989, and has continued to provide a meeting place for the local, regional, national and international witness to the oneness of the Church and the interconnectedness of the ecumenical movement. This lecture is made possible through the generosity of Joe A. and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup.*





# Hush, Somebody is Calling Our Name

26th Peter Ainslie Lecture on Christian Unity  
John F. White

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**BISHOP JOHN F. WHITE**, the 130th elected and consecrated Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, serves as the Ecumenical and Urban Affairs Officer for the A.M.E. Church.

Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,  
And all the king's horses and all kings' men  
Could not put Humpty Dumpty back  
together again.

Poor Humpty Dumpty was an egg, and he fell off the wall, and we've been doing him an injustice for years. Folks have concluded that Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall because he was careless. But they haven't taken into account some other considerations. Just maybe Humpty Dumpty was pushed. Maybe the wall gave way. And when the wall gives way, there is nothing to hold onto.

We are being called to celebrate God's gift of unity when the walls are giving way. It seem to me that you are called to do ministry when the walls of black men are either disappeared, disabled, dusty or in detention, and no one cares that people are becoming rich on an industry that is being built for their incarceration instead of schools being built for our education. You are called to celebrate God's gift of unity in a world where corporate capitalism, mindless materialism and pop culture have helped to unravel the moral fabric of our society. You are called celebrate God's gift of unity in times when the least, the lost and the left behind's quest for learning has been suffocated in dim corridors and classrooms where there is no order, no discipline, where the schools are in crisis.

You are called to celebrate God's gift of unity in

times of steep profits and shallow relationships; people are looked to for world peace, but we still here of wars and rumors of wars around the world.

You are called celebrate God's gift of unity in times of domestic warfare; more leisure but less fun; two incomes and more divorce. It is a time when there is much in the show window and nothing in the stockroom, and a time when technology can bring a letter to you in seconds and you can choose either to make a difference or just hit the delete key and it is gone.

You are called to celebrate God's gift of unity in the midst of high unemployment, economic meltdown and foreclosures, and to minister to a people who have lost respect for God, the Church and the men and women of God.

We are called to celebrate "Celebrating God's Gift of Unity" and reconciliation when the ecumenical landscape is changing. Cardinal Walter Kasper reminds us, "Ecumenism is not a human invention, not a political issue of interest" and that ecumenism is founded on the word of our Lord himself—"may they all be one." (*John 17:21*)

Dr. Michael Kinnamon, the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches states, "Christian unity is not something we are working for as the people of God. Rather, it is a gift that has been given to us from God. It is now our job to strive to live into this unity in its fullest and most robust form."

The context of world Christianity poses new challenges to Christians and churches seeking to be faithful to God's gift of unity and reconciliation. How can we be faithful to God's gift of unity when we belong to so many different denominations, live in such diverse cultures, speak so many different

languages, and experience such widely differing socio-economic conditions?

The 2010 centennial commemoration of the Edinburgh World Mission Conference provides an excellent opportunity to examine the intersection of evangelism and interfaith relations. The churches are by no means united on how to understand the Christian relationship to people of other faiths! However, there is a new openness to engage with interfaith partners on the part of not only Orthodox, Catholics, Anglicans and mainline Protestants, but on the part of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians.

The 2010 centennial commemoration of the Edinburgh World Mission Conference made us aware of the new openness to engage with interfaith partners of other faiths (It did not include in the partnership those of the Black Methodists, Black Baptists, and the Black Pentecostals who are often excluded.) We as Christians do not enter into dialogue and cooperation with neighbors of other faiths merely on pragmatic grounds, but out of a deep sense of mission as followers of Jesus Christ who have received the gift of unity from God. “The basis on which Christians enter into and continue their dialogue with others is their faith in Jesus Christ . . . It is not about more meetings, more things to do, more interreligious conferences; it is a call compelled by Jesus Christ that we should work among all people of all faiths and ideologies. Christ draws us out of our isolation into a closer relationship with all.

Central to our pursuit of Christian unity is the growing number of issues that divide us at the very core of our oneness. Dr. Douglas John Hall states that we must recognize the real issues within the church that cause us so much division. These are not the issues of the 16th century, but realities of the 21st century. He identified the following:

- Issues of personal, institutions and systemic racism. Issues around our understanding of human sexuality and relationships—especially those related to homosexuality, the ordination of gay and lesbian persons and gay marriage.
- Division between Christians and churches around the issues of war and violence, support of one’s national policies, and what it means to actively seek peace.

- The urgent issues of stewardship of the earth, the ecological crisis, and care of our environment as a matter of faith.

I raise another issue that is more prevalent than that of division between Christians and churches around war and violence. The issue of division among and within the churches cut at the heart of our being.

Many lament the onset of an *ecumenical winter* in which the commitment of the Churches to the unity of Christ’s Church has been put on ice. Ecumenical councils contract as denominational engagement and funding decline. Thin ecumenical agreements preserve the essential self-sufficiency of the churches. Congregations in one denomination engage in cooperative mission with neighboring congregations from other denominations (and other faiths) and call it ecumenism. They wonder what all the institutional and academic fuss over unity is about, even as they continue to believe and worship in mutual isolation. It is often said that 11:00 AM on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America.

Subdued dedication to the unity of the church is no longer solely an ecumenical concern. What was an ecumenical issue among the churches is now a denominational issue within the churches as well. Because internal theological and moral diversity is sometimes irreconcilable, many American churches are now coping with the reality of discord, departure, splits, schisms and breaks in communion. Even within particular churches commitment to ecclesiastical unity wanes as both majorities and minorities assert diverse theological, moral and ecclesial convictions, insisting on agreement as their condition for concord.

Discourse about ecclesial unity and diversity has become attached to conflicts within the churches in odd ways. Denominational establishments, which used to be celebrants of diversity, now invoke unity as a means of suppressing diversities that challenge the ecclesiastical institution. Dissidents within the churches, which used to call for unity in faith and practice, now invoke diversity as justification for departure to alternate church bodies. While diversity among denominations can generally be accommodated by expressions of mutual appreciation, diversity within churches may harden into mutual exclusion.

In the midst of it all, diminished ecclesial concern

for unity is accompanied by a blossoming appreciation for diversity among the churches as well as within churches. Reception of diversity now embraces far more than the gospel-created inclusion of race, gender, class and ethnicity, extending to variety in all aspects of Christian faith and life. As we struggle with the gospel's call for Christian unity in the current reality of radical diversity, we are charged to live out our Lord's prayer "that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (*John 17:23*). The call for Christian unity is not for the sake of the churches, but for the sake of the world.

The essence of the call for Christian unity is the highlight of the prayer by Jesus Christ in John's Gospel. Jesus prayed, "so that they may all be one, as you Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe." Asking for the gift of unity, Christians join in Christ's prayer and commit themselves to work actively for manifesting this unity. This is the very heart of the love of God—it is the very heart of being the Church.

This prayer is both an expression of a wish and a call for action, action by those who share the unity that is in Christ. Jesus brings us into fellowship and then puts the fellowship into movement. The whole of our celebration of God's gift of Christian Unity flows from this prayer. Our starting point is not any human endeavor but the divine impulse.

Given all the issues that cause division within the church, it is this prayer that renews and recommits us to the divine gift that calls us to be one. I am convicted that Christian unity is a gift of God to be received and expressed in all aspects of the life of the Church.

The New Testament is replete with exhortations on Christian unity. The Scripture exhorts us to "live life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" and to be of "one mind for the faith of the gospel" (*Phil 1:27*). We are urged to unity in faith and unity in the character of our living—faith and life, theology and morality, doctrine and ethics, evangelism and justice. Of course, these are precisely what divide the body of Christ, separating churches from one

another and creating factions within churches. Moreover, these are precisely the matters that receive superficial attention in too many ecumenical proposals and too many attempts to resolve intra-church conflicts. Ecumenical and denominational discussions are often constrained by anxiety that attempts at theological precision will uncover divergences, and that attention to moral issues will expose oppositions.

Ephesians 4:1-16 presents us with a marvelously modulated insight into unity/diversity, moving from one to all to each to some and then back to the unity of the whole that requires the working of each. The one body is to lead a life worthy of its calling in one faith and one hope because there is one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father of all. Yet each was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift so that some have one calling and some others have different yet complementary callings. The purpose for all is building up the Body of Christ. It is as each part is working properly that the body is whole. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit are evidenced in a diversity

of gifts that are to be exercised for the health and maturity of the whole body.

All of this suggests that the unity of the Church resides in the faith of the gospel that is lived out by persons, groups and denominations *side by side* in a manner worthy of the gospel. What an incredible challenge has been given to us by the New Testament.

I am reminded of Sonya Vaughn Herring, a black female I met at my mother-in-law's funeral a month ago in Tallahassee, Florida. Sonya grew up in Monticello, Florida, a member of Bethel AME Church, but now is a church leader in a United Methodist, UCC and Disciple of Christ Church congregation in Virginia. This only confirms our celebration of Christian unity that is lived out by persons, side by side, who are committed to a new order for a new day that is worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For me this is an answer to the Lord's prayer that we might be one.

So by the power vested in me from God the father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. By the power

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*Given all the issues that cause division within the church, it is this prayer that renews and recommits us to the divine gift that calls us to be one.*

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that rests, rules, reigns and abides, by the power that resurrects and redeems, by the power that converts and comforts, by the power that loves and liberates, by the power that saves and soothes, by the power that gives and guides, by the power that delivers and directs, by the power given to me in the name of Jesus, I declare that somebody is *calling our name*, and it sounds like Jesus!

Hush, hush, somebody's calling our name  
Hush, hush, somebody's calling our name  
Hush, hush, somebody's calling our name  
O my Lord, O my Lord, what shall I do,  
what shall I do?  
Sounds like Jesus, somebody's calling our  
name  
Sounds like Jesus, somebody's calling our  
name  
Sounds like Jesus, somebody's calling our  
name  
O my Lord, O my Lord, what shall I do,  
what shall I do?

We should now seek every opportunity to facilitate deep conversations among various churches, inviting them to engage in the hard task of giving a candid account of the relation of their own faith so that we can live in the spirit of "Called to Be the One Church."

Hush, hush, somebody's calling our name, and it sounds like Jesus who is calling us—to provide the forum in which each church can articulate the

judgments that shape, and even qualify, its relationship to the others so that honest sharing of commonalities, divergences and differences will help all churches pursue the things we share in common.

Hush, hush, somebody's calling our name, and it sounds like Jesus who is calling us—to commit ourselves publicly to pray for peace and goodwill among the various faith communities in the United States and around the world.

Hush, hush, somebody's calling our name, and it sounds like Jesus.

May God bless each of you as we continue to "Celebrate God's gift of Christian Unity" in challenging times like these.

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3. General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, *The Ecumenical Implications of the Global Nature of the United Methodist Church*, New York: United Methodist Church, 1999.

*The Peter Ainslie Lecture on Christian Unity is delivered biennially by an internationally recognized ecumenical scholar, and is intended to witness to the vision of Christian unity, which inspired the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Rev. Dr. Peter Ainslie, III. Dr. Ainslie (1867-1934), a distinguished ecumenist, was the minister of Christian Temple, the Disciples congregation in Baltimore, Maryland, and the first president of the Council on Christian Unity. This lecture, inaugurated in 1982, is endowed by the Peter Ainslie Fund and sponsored by the Council on Christian Unity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).*



# The Scandal of our Disunity – it's personal

Robert K. Welsh



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ROBERT K. WELSH, *President, Council on Christian Unity Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*, delivered this presentation as the keynote address at the 2011 National Workshop on Christian Unity in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am honored to be presenting the keynote address at this year's National Workshop on Christian Unity. When I was invited by Fr. Daniel Hamby on behalf of the members of the planning committee, I readily accepted—in part because I have been a strong supporter of the National Workshop and its work in providing information about the wider ecumenical movement and in promoting and training leaders for local and regional ecumenism across the life of our churches and our nation. I also accepted, *in part* because of the personal connection I feel in returning to Pittsburgh, where in 1977 I attended my first National Workshop on Christian Unity. At that time I was 31 years old, just back in the States after serving for three years on the staff of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. That event, for me, was a powerful moment in my own life and ecumenical formation. I believe it was the first time that the Workshop was co-sponsored by a local conciliar ecumenical organization: the Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania. I recall writing to several colleagues in Geneva, Switzerland about that gathering of some 350 Christians representing churches and confessions across the whole spectrum of the ecumenical movement. It was an amazing gathering! I went on to add in my letters (we didn't know of e-mail back then) that "unfortunately, the NWCU is probably the best kept secret in the

ecumenical movement." I still believe there is more potential for Christian unity assembled in this room than most of us dare to acknowledge, or dare to dream.

So, it's great to be back to the National Workshop and to Pittsburgh, back to join again with so many longtime friends and colleagues, "Together with Glad and Generous Hearts."

I want to thank Clare Chapman for her gracious introduction.

I want to celebrate the magnificent opening worship service last night and the powerful sermon by Bishop Donald McCoid.

I am excited about the breadth and depth of the seminars that are being offered in this year's workshop—which together represent the new agenda in the ecumenical movement of the 21st century. It is an amazing rich offering, along with a plenary session on the topic of racism, and a closing address by Br. Jeff Gross.

And, I am sure that there are great things happening in the different networks and programs that are being offered in building the fellowship and shaping the future work of each of your communions in the urgent tasks of harvesting, reception, expanding partnerships between and among our churches.

It's great to be here in Pittsburgh where I hope our days together will contribute to the ongoing ministry of the Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania as it serves to be "a unifying voice in the name of Jesus Christ for the mission of the Gospel and the wholeness of communities."

In this keynote address I plan to do four things:



1st—to offer some reflections on the “state of the ecumenical movement today” in reviewing the landscape of our current efforts in seeking Christian unity [or rather, I would say: “in seeking to manifest God’s gift of unity, oneness, and reconciliation in Jesus Christ within the whole family of God’s people.”]

2nd—to identify what I see to be major frontiers for the ecumenical movement that call us from our current landscape into areas and challenges still before us in this journey.

3rd—to offer a specific proposal for the future of the NWCU as a way to move us from being the “best kept secret” into a new role of encouraging greater engagement by all of our churches in common witness, service and the mission of unity and reconciliation as we look to the coming decade in hope and in confidence.

4th—and finally, to present some personal reflections about the ecumenical vision, task and calling today.

## **I. Reflections on the state of the ecumenical movement today**

Bishop Donald McCoid offered a quick overview last evening in his sermon that identified we are living in a time of new divisions within and between churches and Christians; and for some observers, we appear to be stuck in a perpetual season of winter.

As I prepared for this address I was surprised to discover the large number of articles and books that have recently been written on the current state of ecumenism in our churches by persons who have offered significant leadership in national and international settings; in bilateral dialogues and multilateral conversations; and those who are giving primary attention to confessional ecumenism and those engaged in conciliar ecumenism. And from this review of a wide variety of voices and perspectives—from the Vatican to a local community of churches in the Eastern Area of Louisville—what I discovered was a surprising convergence around the shape and landscape of the ecumenical movement today.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, president emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome—in a recent article in *Ecumenical Trends* that addressed “a vision of Christian unity for the next

generation,” looking back to the 2nd Vatican Council and the enthusiasm for ecumenism that was generated for the cause of Christian Unity between the divided churches—asked himself, “After 50 years of significant engagement, what did we really achieve? The ecumenical enthusiasm of the decades after the 2nd Vatican Council is over. The previous enthusiasm in our Church and in most other churches and church communities has gone; many people are disappointed and ask: ‘Does it still make sense to engage in this issue? Can we ever make substantial progress and reach the goal of visible unity?’ Is it not an unrealistic dream and a useless utopia? Is ecumenism a dead relic of the 2nd Vatican Council?”<sup>1</sup>

But then immediately he answers these questions with a fundamental answer: “Ecumenism is not a human invention, not a political issue of interest. Ecumenism is founded on the words of our Lord, himself—‘may they all be one.’”<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Michael Kinnamon, the current General Secretary of the National Council of Churches (who was the keynote speaker for the 2008 National Workshop) offered a theme that he believes runs throughout the ecumenical movement today. He stated, “The ecumenical movement is itself in great danger of fragmenting. One split is between an ecumenism that focuses on bilateral theological dialogues—and an ecumenism that is expressed through conciliar life. One element focuses upon the goal of Eucharistic communion that can be achieved through painstaking theological dialogue aimed at the recovery of the Church’s apostolic faith; the other element focuses upon inter-denominational cooperation, and is only interested in ecclesial unity to the extent that such unity contributes to greater peace and justice in the world.”<sup>3</sup> Faith and Order, Life and Work—and for many, Mission and Evangelism—continue to operate in isolation (or at best, they exist in an uneasy tension).

Dr. Kinnamon also does not leave it there for he too affirms that “none of these tensions can be sustained if our focus is on God’s initiative—to which we respond, in which we participate.”<sup>4</sup>

Kinnamon concludes with a quote from the message of the First World Council of Churches Assembly in Amsterdam, “It is not in our power to banish sin and death from the earth, or to create the unity of the holy Catholic Church. But it is within

the power of God. God has given us at Easter the certainty that his purpose will be accomplished. By our acts of obedience and faith we can set up signs which point to the coming victory.”<sup>5</sup>

And there are other voices, other challenges, that continue to be expressed both from within the ecumenical movement and from those outside.

Dr. Douglas John Hall, a retired professor of theology at McGill University in Montreal, has written that in the ecumenical movement today we must recognize where the real divisions are within the Church—and they are no longer in the 16th century theological and ecclesiological disputes, but in the realities of our 21st century world.

- Issues of personal, institutional and systemic racism.
- Issues around our understanding of human sexuality and relationships—especially those related to homosexuality, the ordination of gay and lesbian persons, and gay marriage.
- He also notes the growing division between Christians and churches around the whole range of issues surrounding war and violence, support of one’s national policies, and what it means to actively seek peace.
- Finally, there are the urgent issues of stewardship of the earth, the ecological crisis, and care for our environment as a matter of our faith.

For Hall, and for many Christians, these are not side issues or secondary issues, but are central to our pursuit of, and witness to, Christian unity in today’s world.

Theologians from racial/ethnic communities here in North America and from the southern hemisphere (Latin America, Africa, and Asia) are calling for the solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, women, minorities and those on the margins of society—voices that see liberation and justice at the heart of the ecumenical agenda if the Church is to be a faithful witness to the Good News proclaimed in Christ— not for the sake of the Church, but for the sake, salvation and liberation of our societies and world. The scripture text in last night’s worship service from Isaiah 58 reflects their primary agendas: to loose the bonds of injustice, to let the oppressed go free, to feed the hungry, to cover the naked—*then* your light shall break forth like the dawn.

Dr. William Tabbernee, the new Executive Director of the Oklahoma Conference of Churches and host of the 2012 National Workshop in Oklahoma City, has written about a “new ecumenism” that has emerged, not so much built upon agreement but one that focuses upon differences as a way to move our churches to greater unity in Christ: the differences between unity and uniformity; between built comparative ecclesiology and ecumenical theology; between ecumenism and interfaith dialogue; and between full *koinonia* and cooperation. This *new* ecumenism embraces diversity and accepts controversy as part of our understanding of the ecumenical quest today.<sup>6</sup>

One final insight about the current landscape of the ecumenical movement—and it is a word from Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor, the Roman Catholic Archbishop in England who presented a paper on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the promulgation of the *Decree on Ecumenism*. He identified three complementary approaches in the Church’s ecumenical witness: the *ecumenism of truth*, *spiritual ecumenism*, and the *ecumenism of life*. He then went on to identify the inhibiting factors today that often undermine our ecumenical efforts: the “three enemies” of ecumenism are *suspicion* (the fear of a diluting of the truth), *inertia* (where we pay lip service to ecumenism but we do not live it out in our daily life), and *impatience* (wanting to move ahead without the sanction of the authorities and without the education of the people).<sup>7</sup>

## II. Frontiers on the horizon

With all of this as background—words both of caution, hope and commitment—where do we see the major frontiers that call and challenge us to new agendas and relationships in our journey to unity in Christ?

**1st frontier**, where work has already begun, but must be carried further if it is to give new life to the ecumenical venture, is in the area of *harvesting* and of *reception*.

In his review of the past 40 years of ecumenical work and dialogue since the 2nd Vatican Council, Cardinal Kasper observed, “It may be useful to bear in mind that the ecumenical documents produced during the last decades at the international level (leaving aside the many regional and local documents) now comprise three thick volumes, all

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*The real divisions are within the Church—and they are no longer in the 16th century theological and ecclesiological disputes, but in the realities of our 21st century world. These are not side issues or secondary issues, but are central to our pursuit of, and witness to, Christian unity in today’s world.*

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together 2,310 pages.” He asked, “Who can read all this stuff? And indeed, who wants to?”<sup>8</sup>

Most of this documentation is not really received in the churches, neither at the hierarchical nor the grass roots level. Often it is only destined for the bookshelf. And Cardinal Kasper says he can well understand lay people who disappointedly ask: “Where and what are the concrete results, and what is the visible outcome of your illuminated discussions and documents?”<sup>9</sup>

Harvesting the fruits is a first step—but the next step, the *next frontier*, is to make the results of the harvest available and accessible to people in our churches. Harvested fruits—no matter how good—must be made available, or they will soon spoil and rot and lose their value.

**2nd frontier** is that of *interfaith engagement and dialogue*.

Back in the summer of 2007 when Muslim leaders from around the world issued their open letter to the Christian world—“*A Common Word Between Us (Muslims) and You (Christians)*.” It was fascinating to see how and to whom they addressed this letter: first to the Pope, then to the Archbishop of Canterbury, to the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Churches, the General Secretary of the WCC; and also to heads of Christian World Communions (Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Methodist, Anglicans, Mennonites, Disciples and Baptists). It was interesting to see how they understood their Christian counterparts. For me, it was even more interesting to see how the Christian world might respond *together*—to make a common response “to their common word.”

Somehow the challenge, the frontier, of inter-religious engagement presses all of us to understand how we are viewed by other faiths—and to discover our common Christian voice and witness.

**3rd frontier** is the emerging *encounter, dialogue and relationships with Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians and communities*.

This encounter has found a new expression here in

United States in a body known as Christian Churches Together (and on the international level, this same dynamic is taking place in the Global Christian Forum).

Msgr. John Radano has identified this development as one of the promising initiations in the ecumenical movement in the last decade: serving as a “neutral place where Christians who generally had not spoken to each other before, or had negative contact in a form which one side would call proselytism, could come together in an unthreatening context.”<sup>10</sup> And in that encounter, Pentecostal/Evangelical Christians and “mainline Christians” (Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, Catholics—together) have begun to build mutual trust and to see each other for the first time as a brother or sister in Christ.

Dr. Wonsuk Ma, a Korean Evangelical who teaches at Oxford University in England, delivered the keynote address at the first international gathering of the Global Christian Forum in Limuru, Kenya, where he identified the image of two siblings who had been separated at birth who were now meeting for the first time—and finding their shared, common identity as brothers and sisters in Christ. Two siblings: the Pentecostal movement that had its focus on *spreading out* in faithfulness to the Holy Spirit; and the ecumenical movement that had the dynamic of *gathering in* in faithfulness to the call to our unity as Christians and as churches, now coming together in shared life in the Triune God.

The challenge to us is not to bask in the glory of these international and national encounters, but to bring this same dynamic for our local communities.

These three frontiers are competing tasks that would pull us in different directions out on the horizon, but are complementary and interrelated: (1) harvesting, making accessible, and the reception of the fruits of these past 50 years, (2) interfaith dialogue and interreligious engagement, and (3) reaching out and opening ourselves to encounter Evangelical and Pentecostal brothers and sisters as one family in Christ.

### III. A Proposal

I want to turn briefly to a proposal for the future of this body, the National Workshop on Christian Unity. And I'm going to get specific. Three years ago Michael Kinnamon in his keynote address to the 2008 Workshop asked, "What if this body (and he recognized that the National Workshop is not an organization)—what if this body issued a statement to all of our churches insisting that unity is not an option and that it remains an urgent priority? What if we issued a statement that lifted up both God's gift and call and the urgent necessity of our human response?" Such a statement could build upon the statement quoted by Bishop McCoid last night from Pope Benedict XVI, in his declaration that "Christian unity is a moral imperative of the Gospel," which echoes the words of the *Decree on Ecumenism* from the 2nd Vatican Council that "division among Christians contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature."

Can we together, next year in Oklahoma City, issue a statement to all of our churches together, urging this holy cause—inviting them to receive the fruits of the harvest, to discover our common witness as Christians in an interfaith world, and to seek out our Evangelical and Pentecostal brothers and sisters in Christ beginning in common prayer, praise and worship?

### IV. Personal Reflections

Let me conclude with three brief personal reflections on my own personal ecumenical journey for over 38 years of active participation and leadership within the ecumenical movement.

**First reflection:** I am convinced that the ecumenical movement in the future must recapture a sense of the scandal of division built Christians. Ecumenism is not just one more program on the churches' agenda; it is related to the very core of what it means to be church today! And from this sense of scandal, we need to recapture the importance of confession as individuals and as churches for the sin of our division.

The most memorable and powerful moment in my

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*I could not share in that meal—I could not witness to my deepest conviction that we have been made one in Christ.*

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involvement in National Workshops on Christian Unity took place in 1980, in Seattle, at the opening worship service in the Roman Catholic Cathedral when each of the "bishops" of the various churches and judicatories in the Seattle area began that service by stepping forward (led by Roman Catholic Arch-

bishop Hunthausen) to declare, "I confess before God and before this gathered community that my church has participated in the sin of dividing the Church, the Body of Christ." True ecumenical engagement begins in confession. It is often said that "confession is good for the soul." I believe deeply that confession good for the "soul" of the ecumenical movement. It changes how we meet one another—as fellow sinners—standing in need of God's grace and forgiveness and love.

**Second reflection:** I continue to believe that a growing divide within the Church today and within our separate communions and churches is between those who hold a basic approach that is either *inclusive* or *exclusive*. This attitude, this approach, impacts how one reads scripture, undergirding the nature of the Church, of salvation, of the truth of Jesus Christ. And this attitude and approach is not only found within the churches, but within our society.

Jesus prayed that "they may *all* be one so that the world may believe." My question is: "What part of 'all' don't we understand?!"

**Finally,** and very personally, in my own life one of the strongest motivations in my ministry in seeking Christian unity has come as my daughter, who was brought up as a member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), married a Roman Catholic. And in her marriage, for many reasons, she decided to join the Catholic Church (all with my blessing). Eleven years later, she and my son-in-law have given birth to three beautiful children—the joy of my life. (I will be glad to show pictures later.) And each of them, two grandsons and a granddaughter, have been baptized, not into the Catholic Church, but (as all of our traditions affirm and teach) baptized into the one holy catholic and apostolic church. As I have attended those services of baptism, they took place in relation to the regular morning Mass. And in each service where the priest celebrated the Mass and distributed the bread and wine as the body of Christ offered "to all believers," it came home to me



again that I could not officially receive—I could not share in that meal—I could not witness to my deepest conviction that we have been made one in Christ.

My friends, *it's personal*. Our division within the Church is personal. It divides families. It breaks my heart—and I believe it breaks God's heart. And it denies the power of the Holy Spirit to bring resurrection and new life.

Sometimes people will ask me, "Robert, do you really believe that all these denominations and churches will actually come together and be one?" My answer is quite simple, "Yes." They say, "Robert, that's impossible." I say, "I don't know who you are following as Lord and Savior, but the Lord and Savior I follow specializes in the impossible." They say, "It's not going to happen in our lifetime." No, probably not. But it's amazing how far we have come in the past 50 years.<sup>11</sup>

You see, I believe that one day the Church will be

visibly and authentically one, and that God will receive the glory. Jesus prayed a prayer for our oneness and unity so that one world might believe, and I don't think God will leave that prayer unanswered.

Like a grandmother who loves all of her grandchildren with unique intensity and yet also loves to see them gathered together around her dining table as a single family, so God loves each of us with a unique intensity, yet longs for us to sit together at a common table—as sisters and brothers in Christ.

This is my prayer for this National Workshop on Christian Unity—for each of the congregations and dioceses and communions represented—that we may be one in the Apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer.

For me (and I hope for you) that dream, that vision, that passion, begins with a deep confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit—and it's personal!

## Notes

1. Walter Cardinal Kasper, "May They All Be One? But How?," *Ecumenical Trends*, April 2011, 40:4, p.1.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Michael Kinnamon, "Pray Without Ceasing," National Workshop on Christian Unity Keynote Address, April 15, 2008, p.1.
4. *Ibid.*, p.7.
5. *Ibid.*, p.9.
6. William Tabbernee, "Sailing the Ecumenical Boat in the Twenty-First Century," *Call to Unity: Resourcing the Church for Ecumenical Ministry*, 2004, Vol. 6, pp. 1-17.
7. Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Address at the Conference on the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the promulgation of the Conciliar Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, Rocca di Papa, November 13, 2004.
8. Kasper, *op.cit.*, p.5.
9. *Ibid.*
10. John Radano, "Ecumenical Dialogue in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Some Steps Forward, and Some Continuing Concerns," *Ecumenical Trends*, November 2009, 38:10, p.7.
11. Adapted from sermon by Andy Mangum, "Disciples, People of Unity," *Call to Unity*, No.8, October 2007, pp.43-44.



# A Different World is Possible

La Marco Cable

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LA MARCO CABLE, *Program Associate for Advocacy and Education, Common Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ was an official representative of the Disciples of Christ to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica in May 2011.*

The World Council of Churches' International Ecumenical Peace Convocation convened under the theme of "Glory to God and Peace on Earth." It has been described, and rightly so, as a "harvest festival" celebrating the achievement of the Decade to Overcome Violence which began in 2001. The convocation also encouraged Christians and churches everywhere to renew their commitment to nonviolence, peace and justice. For nine days some 1,000 participants from more than 100 countries gathered in Kingston, Jamaica on the campus of the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus. How ironic for a peace convocation to gather on a campus that was built on a port for slavery, and in Jamaica, an island nation that has suffered so much indignity and pain as a result of colonialism, racism, exploitation and violence. Yet we gathered.

The conference kicked off with the theme, "A Different World is Possible." In our opening plenary we were challenged and inspired to embark on a journey towards *just peace*. The most moving speech was given during the opening plenary by an Anglican priest who is German but was raised in New Zealand, Dr. Paul Oestreicher. He started his speech with strong indictments; he stated unapologetically that Christians,

. . . have bowed down ever since the time of Emperor Constantine in the 3rd century, bowed down deeply to empire and nation rather than the single new humanity into which we are born. We have made a pact with Caesar, with power, the very pact that the early Christians called idolatry. Because the newly converted ruler declared it to be our duty, we have squared it with our conscience to kill the Emperor's enemies, and to this with Jesus on our lips.

Under the sign of the cross, Christian nations conquered other nations. In the Crusades, they massacred the children of Islam. He said, "We, just like our brothers and sisters in Islam, regard those who die in battle as heroes and are guaranteed a special place in heaven." He gave examples of how church and state are closely linked. Let me share three such examples he gave:

One was the wedding of Prince William to Catherine. "William, a crown prince, marries in a Christian cathedral; he is expected to wear full military regalia. Such symbols are powerful." He continued, "That is the extent of our problem. Even when the Pope comes on a state visit, he is received, like every head of state, by soldiers carrying fixed bayonets that are designed to kill, rather than by children bearing flowers. His Holiness accepts the military rituals, as do practically all of our churches. Do we even register the absurdity?"

Another example is our unquestioned comfort with military chaplains embedded with the men and women who are trained to kill. He states that he is "sure they are good pastors, but if they were also the questioning, prophetic presence that the gospel

demands, they would undermine the cohesion and the morale on which every army depends.” Chaplains are “welcomed because they raise the troop’s morale.”

He goes on to challenge the Church’s severe ties with empire and nation and to strengthen its resolve to abolish war and establish peace on earth. He suggested that just as William Wilberforce and his evangelical friends campaigned to end slavery, which at the time was thought to be an unrealistic dream, the Church can join its efforts in the abolition of war. It is possible; Wilberforce and his friends triumphed against all odds. Slavery was abolished and that needs to become the fate of war. He continued, “If the churches of the world fail to embark on such a campaign, we will have nothing that is uniquely and specifically Christian to say on the subject of world peace.”

Most of our days were given a theme or focus—by which we gave attention to the theme through worship, reflection on scripture, participation in workshops and through plenary engagement. Each evening was concluded with prayers. The most memorable evening prayer was led by the Ethiopian Orthodox Rastafarians. In this service they played steel drums and used fire to invoke the presence of God and call the gathered community to worship. On Sunday we worshipped Caribbean style, and after worship we enjoyed a Caribbean Day Festival; we listened to Jamaican music, which of course included reggae. However, on Sunday our disunity was felt by the absence of the Greek Orthodox sisters and brothers who worshipped apart from us on the opposite side of the Mona campus.

The themes that grounded our gathering were Peace in the Community, Peace with the Earth, Peace in the Marketplace and Peace among the Peoples. Please allow me to explain each theme and share what insights I gained as I listened to the presentations and speeches from Christian sisters and brothers from around the world.

### **Peace with the Earth**

Our goal for this day was to raise awareness on the various threats to Creation, present churches’

statements and actions addressing caring for Creation and offer theological and spiritual insights from various religious perspectives on peace and Creation. On this day, I listened to Rev. Tafue Lusama, the General Secretary of the Congregational Church of Tuvalu, give a testimony about how climate change is affecting his nation’s 11,000 people. Tuvalu is a Polynesian island nation in the Pacific between Hawaii and Australia. Rev. Lusama said that, “climate change poses a serious immediate threat, and our violence against the earth is also violence against people.” He continued by sharing stories of how his island nation is shrinking as a result of rising ocean levels, how they are experiencing coastal corrosion, longer periods of drought, unpredictable weather patterns and an increase in intense winds. If the ocean level continues to rise, as all predictions have suggested they will, the people of Tuvalu will be forced from the place that witnessed their birth, which will result in them becoming environmental refugees. Leaving their island means loss of home, culture, lifestyle and dignity—and in some ways their spirituality, which is deeply rooted in their spiritual understanding of their interconnectedness with all of Creation . . . the land, the water, the environment. The gathered convocation was invited to imagine what it would be like to leave the place that witnessed your birth, never to be allowed to return home, never allowed to return with your children and grandchildren, never allowed to visit your loved one’s final resting place or connect with your earliest childhood memories, and in many cases adulthood memories. We were reminded that “we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.” Therefore, we have a responsibility to our children and our God to take the best care of that which does not belong to us.

### **Peace with the Marketplace**

On this day we reflected on the links between economic injustice and violence based on biblical and current example. We spent time in our bible study groups praying, reflecting, and discussing Matthew 20:1-16. the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, the parable where Jesus says the kingdom

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*“If the churches of the world fail to embark on such a campaign, we will have nothing that is uniquely and specifically Christian to say on the subject of world peace.”*

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of heaven is like a landowner who pays workers who labored three hours the same pay he gave those who worked the whole day.

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*On this day we reflected on the links between economic injustice and violence.*

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We spent time thinking about economically-related violence, particularly against vulnerable groups such as women, youth, indigenous people and persons with disabilities, and how peace and justice can be forged in the market by sharing goods and practices. On this day we were challenged by Rev. Dr. Roderick Hewitt, ordained minister of the United Church in Jamaica and Cayman Islands, to think about the Church's role in participating in the market that oppresses and exploits people. Rev. Hewitt posed a question that I am still wrestling with. He asked, "Is the Church ambivalent towards globalization?" and answered it by saying that the Church is a partner in the globalization project. In fact, the Church is critiquing the market within the context of contradictions. We learned through the testimony of Archbishop Valentine Mokiwa, President of the All African Conference of Churches, that some churches are even giving theological credence to poverty, and it becomes impossible to address the issue of the marketplace when the Church is complicit. Ms. Omega Bula, United Church of Canada's Executive Minister for Global Justice and Ecumenical Relations, suggested that people around the world have been pulled into a single model of a market economy, that alternative models are being ignored and alternative voices are not being heard. She said that the marketplace of domination and exploitation needs to end in the South and North, but also in the South within the North and the South within the South. "The ideology of racism is alive and well and can be seen in the logic of a system that moves large groups of people from one place to another for the sole purpose of creating wealth. Unfortunately, such a system needs victims, so consumers (including the Church) become complicit in the marginalization of people all over the world."

Rev. Hewitt rightfully observed that "The Church likes its comfort zone." And within the Church not all hands are clean. "The market is demonic; it co-opts and deceives." So the Church must do the necessary soul searching and answer: "Are we

prepared to pay the cost of facing up to the awesome forces aligned against economic justice?" He said, and I agree, that there is a time when the Church must say "no." If we are cooperative, we do so by stepping aside. But the Church cannot live out its prophetic mission in the world nor begin to forge justice in an inhumane marketplace until it opts out of that marketplace, a marketplace in which structural violence is embedded. We have to know who the Church is investing with. Are we investing our mission, foundation and pension dollars with corrupt corporations which exploit the poor and most vulnerable? Forging justice in the marketplace is not easy.

### **Peace among the people**

Under this theme, we discussed obstacles and opportunities for building peace among people and nations and debated critical concerns that inform a collective approach to Just Peace at the international level. In this plenary we spent time discussing the World Council of Church's document, "An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace," which has been commended to all of the World Council's member churches for study, reflection and action, and we listened to presentations from the Deputy Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research in Geneva, the Armenian Orthodox Archbishop of Baghdad and others. The Just Peace document was written to counteract and respond to the *just war* doctrine. The doctrine of just war was created by the Church to humanize war, and many have suggested that this doctrine is becoming invalid and a new doctrine needs to be developed to promote just peace that will be grounded in theology and oriented by virtue of its openness towards universal human values. I strongly encourage all of us to read this document (included in this issue of *Call to Unity*) and its companion study guide.

### **Peace in the Community**

The focus: violence against women in many forms, the violence of racism and other forms of discrimination, and violence caused by the assertion of religious identities. On this day, Martin L. King, III came to share reflections on the life and ministry of both his father and mother. He especially highlighted his mother's involvement in Civil Rights for all people regardless of their race, religion, gender, nationality and sexuality. We also heard testimony of Dalit women activists from India

about their struggle for human rights in India. Dalits are considered the *untouchables* in the Indian caste system. They are considered impure and less than human. Dalit children are prevented from sitting on the front row of class at school and are forced to clean the toilets. Dalit women live with triple discrimination on account of caste, class, and patriarchy. We were invited to “think of Dalits as human beings, as people aspiring for dignity in life” and asked to “join the struggle for the despised and discriminated and strive for a world of greater peace and justice.”

The most moving story on this day was that of Dr. Muna Mushawar, a Palestinian Christian from Jerusalem. She shared explicitly how the checkpoints control the lives of Palestinians. It controls who you fall in love with. If you happen to fall in love with someone who lives on the opposite side of the checkpoint, there is no guarantee if you marry that you will be able to share a home together because there is no law that says that anyone can automatically cross the checkpoint on grounds of marriage. The checkpoint controls you economically, where you can and cannot work. Many Palestines have lost jobs because they were not able to cross in order to go to work. The first time it happens, your boss may be sympathetic, the next time somewhat understanding, but after the third or fourth time many employers say, “We need someone we can depend on.” Childbirth is increasingly a casualty of violence because Palestine

women are often refused passage through the checkpoint to receive medical care, which has resulted in many giving birth at the checkpoint, and some have lost babies and some their lives because they have not been able to pass through to get the appropriate care. Some guard decides, although they are in visible pain, that they are not worthy enough on that day to pass through. Dr. Mushawar warns that we cannot have justice in the community until we have it in the Church. “The Church must stop the misinterpretation of scripture that speaks of Israel as God’s chosen people.” Palestine is one example of a nation where individuals use their religious identity to promote their political goals. We were reminded in a powerful way that peace can only come when a Palestinian state lives peacefully next to an Israeli state.

I would like to end with a quote from Paul Oestreicher at the open plenary: “Unless we change, unless the Church moves to the margins and becomes the alternative society that unconditionally says ‘no’ to war, ‘no’ to the collective murder that every embattled nation or tribe, every warring alliance, every violent liberation movement, every fundamentalist cause, and the War on Terror declares to be just, until we throw this justification of war, this just war theology, into the dustbin of history, unless we do that, we will have thrown away the one unique ethical contribution that the teaching of Jesus could make both to the survival of humanity and to the triumph of compassion.”

# Background to the Disciples-Catholic Dialogue

David M. Thompson



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DAVID M. THOMPSON, former professor of Modern Church History at the University of Cambridge (England) and Fellow of Fitzwilliam College, prepared this paper for the preparatory meeting of the fifth phase of International Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church that took place in Toronto on May 2-4, 2011.

## Introduction

The Disciples of Christ-Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue began in 1977. I have been involved since 1980, particularly in the drafting of the four Agreed Statements, *Apostolicity and Catholicity* (1982), *The Church as Communion in Christ* (1992), *Receiving and Handing on the Faith: the Mission and Responsibility of the Church* (2002), and *The Presence of Christ in the Church, with special reference to the Eucharist* (2009). [To be referred to here for the sake of convenience as *A&C*, *CCC*, *RHF* and *PCCE* respectively.] As we enter upon a fifth phase, with some significant changes of membership, it was felt desirable to sketch the background to the Dialogue and the way in which it has developed. This is an updated version of a paper, originally prepared for the beginning of the fourth phase in 2004. Obviously I write out of a Disciples background and perspective (and also a British one), but I am a church historian and hope therefore to have reached a reasonable degree of objectivity in making such analyses.

One of the points which has been regularly emphasised in our conversations is that Disciples and Roman Catholics do not start their discussions from a specific historical break in communion in

the background (see *A&C* §6). The point was developed in *CCC* §8 as follows:

The Disciples movement emerged out of nineteenth-century Protestantism but it had nothing to do with a deliberate break from the Roman Catholic Church and lacked the memories of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century controversies. Moreover some of its most specific concerns were criticisms of the way in which contemporary Protestantism understood and lived out fidelity to the apostolic witness. It came from the desire to lead the Church towards a unity rooted in the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. Alexander Campbell was convinced that "the union of Christians is essential to the conversion of the world," an insight which has lost none of its force in the twentieth century. The Roman Catholic Church too proclaims that it has a specific mission for the unity of the world, and affirms that this unity is signified and given by the eucharistic communion. It too teaches that the restoration of unity among all Christians is linked with the salvation of the world. Indeed Disciples and Roman Catholics pursue these goals in ways deeply marked by their different histories. But they have to discern whether all these affirmations and convictions are not in fact the expression of a very profound communion in some of the most fundamental gifts of the grace of God.

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*The Disciples' slogan, "No creed but Christ," does not mean that Disciples do not believe anything else, and this has led us into a discussion of...the process of receiving and handing on the faith.*

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Disciples came into existence as a separate communion of churches in the nineteenth century, initially from a Presbyterian background but embracing members from the range of Christian Churches affected by the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It should be emphasised that, although the numerical strength of the churches has historically been in North America, Disciples have never been an exclusively American movement. The Churches of Christ in the British Isles began at roughly the same time, and indeed their regular Annual Conferences began earlier than in the U.S.A. They spread to New Zealand and Australia in the 1840s, and from the second half of the nineteenth century Disciples were involved in missionary work in Asia and then in Latin America and Africa from the 1890s, spreading world-wide in the twentieth century. There are seventeen member churches of the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, which is the international sponsoring body for this dialogue. These are churches which are involved formally, to a greater or lesser extent, in the ecumenical movement, some of whom are not eligible for membership of the World Council of Churches because of their size. There is also an even larger number of places in the world where the inheritors of the Stone-Campbell tradition exist without any formal ecclesiastical organisation beyond the level of the local congregation.

One consequence of this different starting point is that our conversations have covered some topics which have not been discussed to the same extent in other international dialogues. In particular there has been a persistent engagement with the relationship between the faith of the individual and the faith of the Christian community as a whole. In part, this is because of the Disciples' practice of believers' baptism. But perhaps to an even greater extent it is because of the Disciples' formal rejection of creeds as tests of faith and fellowship. Traditionally among Disciples the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour made at baptism has been regarded as a sufficient expression of faith—sometimes epitomised in the slogan, “No creed but Christ.” Nevertheless, this does not mean that Disciples do not believe anything else, and this has led us into a discussion of the significance of the Church and its continuity (particularly in *The Church as Communion in Christ*) and then into a careful discussion of the process of receiving and

handing on the faith, which was the theme of the third phase. In view of the significance of the Disciples' emphasis on New Testament Christianity, the third phase also paid careful attention to the process whereby the canon of scripture was accepted and the relationship between that process and the conciliar definitions of the faith in the first millennium.

### **Apostolicity and Catholicity**

Our first Agreed Statement began with a clear affirmation of the significance of spiritual ecumenism, as defined in the *Decree on Ecumenism* §8. Notwithstanding the fact that Disciples and Roman Catholics are not in communion with each other, we have sought to take advantage of the “evangelical space,” available to those who repent of the attempt to justify our divisions and seek reconciliation, in order to discover “new possibilities for genuine exchange and sharing” (A&C, §19). This has certainly been the experience of the International Commission as it has worked together over the last thirty years.

The first phase affirmed several underlying agreements about baptism (A&C, §24) as well as elucidating differences over the relation of personal faith to baptism and the mode of baptism. But the conclusion was that “we affirm the mutual recognition of baptism administered by Roman Catholics and Disciples, convinced that the oneness we received by the grace of God in baptism must find its completion in visible ecclesial unity, so that the world may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, as we together confess him to be” (A&C, §35). There were also several affirmations about the unity we seek, notably “that there can only be one Church of God (*unica Ecclesia*) and that this Church already exists” (A&C, §52) and that “divisions among Christians cannot destroy the one Church of God” (A&C, §56). The first phase also began a discussion about faith and tradition, which has been developed subsequently.

### **The unity of the Church**

Since the goal of the dialogue has been the visible unity of our two communions, the fourth phase spent some time spelling out what was meant by this. We affirmed that “Both Disciples and Catholics agree that the Church is communion in Christ. The Church is the covenant people of God, founded by and in Jesus Christ and sustained and empowered



by the Holy Spirit” (*PCCE*, §6). This affirmation is important because without it the Church might be reduced to a purely human institution. On the other hand any identification of the Church with Christ without distinction runs the risk of failing to recognize the sins of the members of the Church. Nevertheless we had already agreed in an earlier phase that “the Holy Spirit guides the Church, which because of this guidance will not finally fail in its task of proclaiming the Gospel” (*RHF*, §2.4). The discussion of such concepts as *communion* and *mission* led inevitably to the question of the marks of the Church—though it should be noted that this “Reformed” way of speaking about the Church does not come naturally to Disciples.

It proved relatively easy in the first phase to affirm that Catholics and Disciples shared the apostolic faith of the Church in one God, revealed in three persons (*A&C*, §§36-37). In the third phase of the Dialogue members discovered that Disciples and Catholics shared more agreement about the first seven ecumenical councils than had previously been recognized (*RHF* §§3.12-13). That unity of faith is also expressed in the one baptism, which we share, as affirmed in *Apostolicity and Catholicity* (*A&C* §24). But, in view of these agreements, the question about the sense in which we can both speak of being part of One Body was posed even more sharply.

The first Agreed Statement spoke of Catholics and Disciples as having “a communion in via.” “The unique unity of the One Church of God is the goal. We are already on the way; we have taken the first step in faith through baptism which is also the call to that final unity” (*A&C* §57). This reflects the recognition, expressed in the *Decree on Ecumenism*, that “those who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church” (*UR* §3); it also corresponds to the less-formally-stated Disciples conviction that persons baptized in other churches (whether as infants or at a later age) are sisters and brothers in Christ, in no need of “rebaptism” by immersion.

The implications, both positive and negative, of this “imperfect communion” remain to be explored further. The fourth phase posed the issue thus: “Catholics ask Disciples in what ways they understand themselves to be catholic and apostolic. Disciples ask Catholics what space there is for Disciples within the Catholic understanding of the catholicity and apostolicity of the Church” (*PCCE*

§II). One possible starting point for the answer was sketched in the first phase, in which we spoke of “a quality of evangelical life marked by the will to be faithful to Christ and open to one another . . . This *metanoia* thus provides what might be called an “evangelical space” . . . in which we find God’s grace newly available to bind us together in praising, blessing, beseeching the God who makes us one” (*A&C* §19).

The fourth phase summarized the agreement so far in this way. “Disciples and Catholics therefore discover promising agreement in their understanding of the implications of their belief in the unity of the Church in Christ. This understanding of the Church as communion (explored particularly in the second Agreed Statement) obliges us to regard the Church’s existence as part of the revealed will of God and not a matter of human construction. Equally it underlines the seriousness of our separation from anyone who shares the common apostolic faith in the triune God” (*PCCE* §13).

### **The transmission of the faith**

One question which continually presses upon this Dialogue in particular is, How is “the common apostolic faith” transmitted? The reason why it is a sharp question for this dialogue is the traditional criticisms by Disciples of creeds and confessions of faith as human constructions, lacking the same authority as Scripture, particularly the New Testament. We have sought to unravel the issues in this question by sustained reflection on the relationship between the faith of the individual and the faith of the community. This discussion began in the first phase. A key affirmation was that “Each Christian’s faith is inseparable from the faith of the community. Personal faith is an appropriation of the Church’s faith and depends on it for authenticity as well as for nurture. At the same time, bearing witness to personal faith builds up the life of the Church and quickens and strengthens the faith of all” (*A&C*, §41). The balance between receiving and handing on the faith was even then indicated in the statement, “Each generation must come to faith anew through the power of the Holy Spirit and hand on this faith to succeeding generations. At the same time, the Church in every age inherits the successes and failures of the past” (*A&C*, §47).

The issue of receiving and handing on the faith was

prominent in both the second and third phases. Although the trigger for the discussion has been the Disciple commitment to believers' baptism on the one hand and the rejection of creeds as tests of fellowship on the other, it has had the useful and probably unexpected consequence of teasing out what is really believed about the relationship between the faith of the Church and the faith of the individual Christian on both sides. The result has been a much more careful account of this than is conventionally conveyed by the simple affirmations that what the Church teaches is expressed in the creeds and believers are expected to confess their faith in those terms.

The first step was the affirmation that:

Both Disciples and Roman Catholics share an intention to live and teach in such a way that, when the Lord comes again, the Church may be found witnessing to the faith of the apostles. By preserving the memory of what the apostles taught, and by proclaiming and living it anew for the present day, both Disciples and Roman Catholics believe that they maintain continuity with the apostolic witness, forming a living tradition that is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20) (*CCC*, §27).

Furthermore memory was affirmed to be "more than a recalling to mind of the past." It was "the work of the Holy Spirit linking the past with the present and maintaining the memory of that on which everything depends—the faith itself and the Church which embodies that faith . . . The Spirit keeps alive the sense of the faith in the whole community, and lavishes a variety of *charisms* that enable it to live in the memory of Jesus Christ" (*CCC*, §28). Thus memory was affirmed to be more than an intellectual quality; indeed it became a central ecclesiological category.

Since Christians receive the gift of faith "within and for the communion (*koinonia*) which is the Church," the sense of faith in individual Christians reflects the extent to which they share in the life of the Church. "The inner dynamism of the gift of faith—the power of the Holy Spirit which draws believers into spiritual unity—sustains the interaction of the faith of the individual and the faith of the community" (*CCC*, §40). Hence "the Spirit gives a variety of gifts or *charisms* which enable the Church

as a whole to receive and hand on the Apostolic Tradition" (*CCC*, §41). Whilst there is a particular charism for the ordained ministry in this respect, we have noted that the faithful as a whole share different gifts which recall the community to the Gospel imperative of love. Again in the third phase we noted the variety of different gifts exercised within the Church which witness to the Gospel (*RHF*, §§5.8–10). Two points should be emphasised here. The first is that we agree that the whole range of charisms in the Church is vital for its life and witness. There is nothing particularly remarkable in this agreement, but there is a tendency to move straight to speaking of the ordained ministry as the vital lifeline in the continuity of the Church and we have put that in context. The second is that we do both agree that the ordained ministry has a unique role, even though we expound that role differently (see *CCC*, §45, *RHF*, §§4.10–13).

The third phase of our Dialogue also did important work on the canon and the councils of the Church, which had not occupied the attention of other international dialogues up to that point. The reasons for this are again to be found in the Disciple emphasis on the New Testament in particular and scripture more generally, and in the need to address questions raised by Disciples about the significance of creedal formulations. There were no significant problems in reaching agreement on the significance of the development of the canon; and it was affirmed that the differences between Roman Catholics and Disciples on the number of books in the Old Testament canon need not be church-dividing (*RHF*, §§3.2–9). However the conclusion is worth quoting:

There is a close relationship between the canon of the Scriptures and the unity of the Church. Because it is held in common by Christians, the Bible holds Christians together with one another as they read and proclaim the same Word of God received from the Church of the apostles. The diversity of the Bible also helps to explain why the same Word of God has led to different emphases among different Christian communities. The canon of the Scriptures determines and supports the faith of both of our communions, so Roman Catholics and Disciples again and again recognize each other as brothers and sisters in Christ (*RHF*, §3.10).

The most recent Agreed Statement also presented an important insight into the significance of Scripture in the Church. Because of the Old Testament emphasis on the Word as performative, the reading of Scripture becomes a way in which the Word of God is both heard and made effective within the Church. Although the subject of that Statement was “The Presence of Christ in the Church,” this patristic understanding of the role of the Word of God, through public reading of Scripture and through preaching, as a manifestation of Christ’s presence in the Church, is a significant broadening of understanding by comparison with the more traditional approach through the doctrine of inspiration (*PCCE*, §§19, 22-23).

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The work on the councils of the Church was necessary to elucidate the significance of doctrinal definition, particularly in the early centuries. One important point here was the recognition that the distrust for confessions of faith felt by the first generation of Disciples leaders was not intended to exclude the use of creeds for the purpose of teaching the faith, but was primarily a rejection of the way in which they were used as tests of fellowship, particularly at the Communion Table. Indeed their criticism originally was more directed at Reformation and post-Reformation confessions than the Apostles’ or Nicene Creeds (*RHF*, §3.16). Although it was recognized that most Disciples theologians turn less readily to the patristic writers than Roman Catholics, the Commission was able to affirm that “Roman Catholics and Disciples agree in recognizing the theological definitions of the first seven ecumenical councils as part of the common history of the Church” (*RHF*, §3.12) and that we shared more agreement about these councils than previously recognized.

This discussion led immediately to consideration of the process of reception of the faith, and a nuanced statement on this:

Disciples and Roman Catholics both recognize the importance of the way in which the Gospel has been received and handed on from generation to generation for an authentic understanding of Scripture. They recognize a process of development in the understanding of doctrine in the Church which can be traced through history. Reception plays a crucial part in this ongoing process. Disciples and Roman Catholics are not unanimous on the ways in which reception is achieved, but they agree on its necessity (*RHF*, §3.26).

That could be regarded as a rather banal statement, but part of its significance lies in the fact that it recognizes that one cannot simply read answers out of Scripture to contemporary problems without taking account of the way in which the Church’s understanding of the faith has developed over the centuries. Section 4 of this Statement develops this at greater length, starting from an important paragraph in the report of the previous phase: “Roman Catholics are convinced that, although they must decide for themselves, they cannot decide by themselves. Disciples, on the other hand, are convinced that, although they cannot decide by themselves, they must decide for themselves” (*CCC*, §16). This led to a discussion of “Conscience, Freedom and Being in Christ” and “Teaching with Authority.” In both respects differences between our two communions became more apparent. One issue concerns what happens when Christians disagree with the prevailing teaching or practice because of their discernment of the Word of God; the other concerns the location of the responsibility for teaching the faith.

The Commission’s conclusion was as follows:

For both Roman Catholics and Disciples the authority of the Church’s teaching derives from a combination of elements; the truths of revelation, the theological arguments based upon them to guide human thought and behaviour, the position and experience of those responsible for teaching, and reception by the whole Church. However, the relative weight attached to the elements differs between Roman Catholics and Disciples. Thus the claims made for the authority of the Church in matters of conscience differ in our two communities. In the Roman Catholic Church those with



episcopal or primatial oversight, who hold the apostolic teaching office conferred by ordination, can at times make decisions binding upon the conscience of Roman Catholics. For Disciples ultimate oversight rests with a General Assembly or Conference (comprising both ministers and other church members), but their decisions do not bind the conscience of individual members. The Commission needs to reflect further on whether these different emphases can be held together within the one Body of Christ (*RHF*, §4.16)

In conclusion, however, the Commission returned to a discussion of the way in which the whole Church is involved in handing on the faith, emphasising again that this is a matter of faithful lives as much as teaching: “Teaching the faith is more than communicating the contents of a catechism or a book on Bible history and doctrine. It is inseparable from the witness of a faithful life and authentic devotion to God and the Church” (*RHF*, §5.6).

### The sacraments

The other theme running through all the Agreed Statements is the sacraments. Reference has already been made to the agreements on baptism noted in the first phase as well as the differences (*A&C*, §§24–34), culminating in an affirmation of mutual recognition of baptism. In retrospect, it might have been useful to do more work on baptism at that stage, since we have never returned to the topic as a substantive one. However, in the most recent phase, there was some spelling out of the basis for the agreement. Baptism is rooted in Scripture, but it is more than symbolic. Like Catholics, Disciples retained the biblical sense of the efficaciousness of the sacraments. Biblical texts were used to show that “persons are begotten by the Spirit of God, impregnated by the Word, and born of the water.” Belief in the power of baptism to remit sins was a basic belief of the early Disciples movement (*PCCE*, §21). Moreover the relationship between baptism and faith is fundamental to its understanding, as in all sacramental theology.

In the second phase reflection on the biblical usage of the concept of memory led to a series of affirmations about the way in which the Spirit makes Christ present to the members of the community in the Eucharist. Both Disciples and Roman Catholics celebrate the Eucharist regularly and frequently—at

least every Sunday. Hence the Eucharist has a specific role in each communion of making real and deepening visible fellowship with God, and empowering members of the Church to be made a part of the work of reconciliation in the world. “The Eucharist both symbolizes and makes present, together with the gift of Christ himself, the salvation offered through him” (*CCC*, §30). Furthermore the essentially communal nature of the Eucharist most fully expresses the fellowship that is the Church and impels all who share in it “to extend themselves in care for all those in God’s creation, especially those who suffer” (*CCC*, §31). Finally, “God in Christ invites to the Eucharist, and through the Holy Spirit binds together into one body, all who break the one loaf and share the one cup. At the Lord’s table the unity of the Church is accomplished, for believers are joined to Christ and to one another” (*CCC*, §32). These are all significant agreements, even if we are well aware that there is further work to be done.

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Furthermore we agreed on the significance of the celebration of the Eucharist as a realization of the visibility of the Church:

There, gathered together and after having confessed their faith, the baptized people receive the body and blood of Christ, the Son of God who reconciled humanity to God in one body through the cross. There they enter into communion with the saints and members of the whole household of God. Moreover, what is celebrated at the Eucharist has to be actualized in a life of common prayer and faith, of faithfulness to the Gospel, of sharing the spiritual and even material goods of the community, and of commitment to the will of God that the saving work of Christ be extended as offer to all (*CCC*, §48).

There is a shared sacramental emphasis among Disciples and Roman Catholics which made it possible for us to agree “that the Church is the

company of all the baptized, the community through which they are constantly kept in the memory of the apostolic witness and nourished by the Eucharist. The Eucharist is never celebrated and received by a member isolated from an ecclesial community gathered around its ministers. The Church is therefore at the same time the sign of salvation (to be saved is to be in communion) and the community through which this salvation is offered" (*CCC*, §49).

We probably said less on the sacraments in the third phase than in the two previous ones. Nevertheless there was an important statement at the end of the section on the Word of God:

Disciples of Christ and Roman Catholics agree on the necessary link between the Word and the sacraments. The Word of God has its own efficacy: and its saving power is experienced most fully when the Word is received together with the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The fullness of the Good News is received in the gift of communion with God and with each other, a communion beginning through baptism and incorporation into the Body of Christ and extending throughout one's life. In both the Roman Catholic Church and the Disciples of Christ the sacraments make real the communion the Gospel announces. The sacraments are by their nature integral to the life and being of the Church. They bring a new believer into the community, creating a link between the believer and all other Christians in every time and place. Thus each believer receives the living Tradition, becomes part of it, and participates in passing it on (*RHF*, §2.5).

### **Real presence, eucharistic sacrifice and priesthood**

The most recent phase was deliberately intended to approach detailed discussion of the real presence of Christ in the eucharist and related issues by way of our understanding of the presence of Christ in the Church generally, in the conviction that this was the right way round. So some time was spent reflecting on the presence of Christ in both the world and the Church. This was why we came first to an understanding of the dynamic nature of the Word of God in the world, which was the common thread linking our understanding of the presence of Christ

in world, Church and sacraments. We concluded that "the sacramental approach to the whole of life is one way of affirming our underlying faith that we live in God's world and that God is continually active in it" (*PCCE* §25).

With this background we turned to the eucharist, which, despite its importance for Disciples weekly worship life, we had never discussed in any detail in the previous twenty years on the road together. The impetus to do so is expressed in an important paragraph: "Because the Church's visible unity is so central for both Catholics and Disciples, the divisions which keep us from sharing the eucharist together are especially painful. But different ways of understanding the Church and its unity lead us to different practices in offering eucharistic participation. The founders of the Disciples, notably Alexander Campbell and Barton Warren Stone, taught that the communion service demonstrated the oneness of all believers. For Catholics, sharing the eucharist signifies full communion in Christ's body, the Church, which means sharing agreement on the content of faith, the sacraments and ministry of the Church, and structures of authority (see *LG* §14)" (*PCCE*, §28).

We framed our consideration of the topics of real presence and Eucharistic sacrifice around an examination first of the historical background and then of contemporary teaching. So there are under each heading relatively long historical sections. Nevertheless we recognize that there is much work still to do here. One thing which almost certainly helped our discussions is that for at least twenty years most of us have participated, so far as our respective church disciplines allow, in daily Mass and a celebration of the eucharist according to the Disciples' order once in each meeting. We also found that it was extremely difficult to escape from a methodology, which almost instinctively began with denials of certain positions rather than an affirmation of what we might hold in common.

Rather than giving a detailed account of the argument of the Fourth Agreed Statement, it is perhaps most convenient to highlight the summary paragraphs on the topics in question. In relation to the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, we noted that "Disciples and Catholics have used different language to describe the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, and they have emphasized different moments of this mystery. Yet we both affirm the mystery of Christ's real presence in the

eucharist, especially in the bread and wine; we both oppose reductionist understandings that see Christ's presence as simply materialist or figurative. We reached some real convergence on this topic through the elimination of mutual misunderstandings, though we also recognize many remaining differences" (PCCE, §45).

Although our discussion of sacrifice was far from complete, we surprised ourselves by some of the agreements we discovered. "Although the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross cannot be repeated, Christians in the celebration of the eucharist are drawn into the movement of Christ's self-offering" (PCCE, §56). We found complementary statements from authoritative documents in both our tradition to support this understanding. Some of our differences in practice relate to the ways in which we locate the priestly function within the Church. Here most clearly, we found disagreement as well as agreement: "On the issue of the representation of Christ by the ordained, Disciples and Catholics both agree and disagree. While they agree that ordained ministers represent Christ, the head of the Church, they disagree first about the nature of this representation of Christ and secondly about the relationship between the ordained ministry and the priesthood of the faithful" (PCCE, §68). This was the "most unfinished" area of our work.

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*How do we know when a form of words or practice which differs from ours expresses, in fact, the same understanding of faith?*

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### **Hermeneutics**

Tom Best in his comments on the Agreed Statement of the Third Phase drew attention to a statement in the section on Future Work:

As we have grown to understand each other better, we have also become aware that we often do and say the same things but for different reasons. There is a need to investigate whether there is mutual recognition of the legitimacy of different ways of arriving at the same practices or the same conclusions. We also sometimes do different things to achieve the same purpose, and there is a corresponding need to reflect upon the legitimacy of that (RHF, §6.1).

He goes on to ask, "When working towards mutual recognition, when seeking to discern the Church in other churches, how do we know when a form of words or practice which differs from ours expresses, in fact, the same understanding of faith? More troublingly, is it possible that the same form of words or practice in fact expresses, within another confessional or cultural context, a different understanding of the faith?" (*Call to Unity*, I, 2003, p. 39). These are important questions, and it is still valuable to bear them in mind as we approach our new Phase of work.

Two reflections occur to me. One is that certain words actually carry a range of meanings, and the key thing is to be sure that the same meaning is intended on each occasion. Take, for example, the word *Church*. This may refer to the Church in general or to particular Churches. For the most part references to Church in our Statements refer to the Church in general rather than to particular Churches. Historically there has been a tendency on the part of the Roman Catholic Church to equate the Church in general with the Roman Catholic Church; but this was clearly dispelled by the Second Vatican Council, and indeed this was a development which made possible their ecumenical initiatives from 1965 onwards. The fact that international theological dialogues are understood as taking part within the Church, rather than between those inside the Church and those outside it, has made a tremendous difference to the kind of ecumenical development that has been possible. Of course, those of us who are not Roman Catholics understand the limits of the development that has taken place; the question asked by Avery Dulles about whether the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church and its pastors has diminished in the second millennium illustrates the way in which even a very experienced theologian still instinctively equates Church with "Roman Catholic Church," if the distinction is not specifically made, in more recent times (*Call to Unity*, I, 2003, p. 33). The question of whom the Holy Spirit was guiding to do what in the period since the Church became visibly divided cannot be answered with reference to one part of the Church alone.

The second reflection is that much of the work in our Dialogue has been historical. The hermeneutical implication of this is that we have tended to use words as they were used in particular historical contexts, and we have also been sensitive

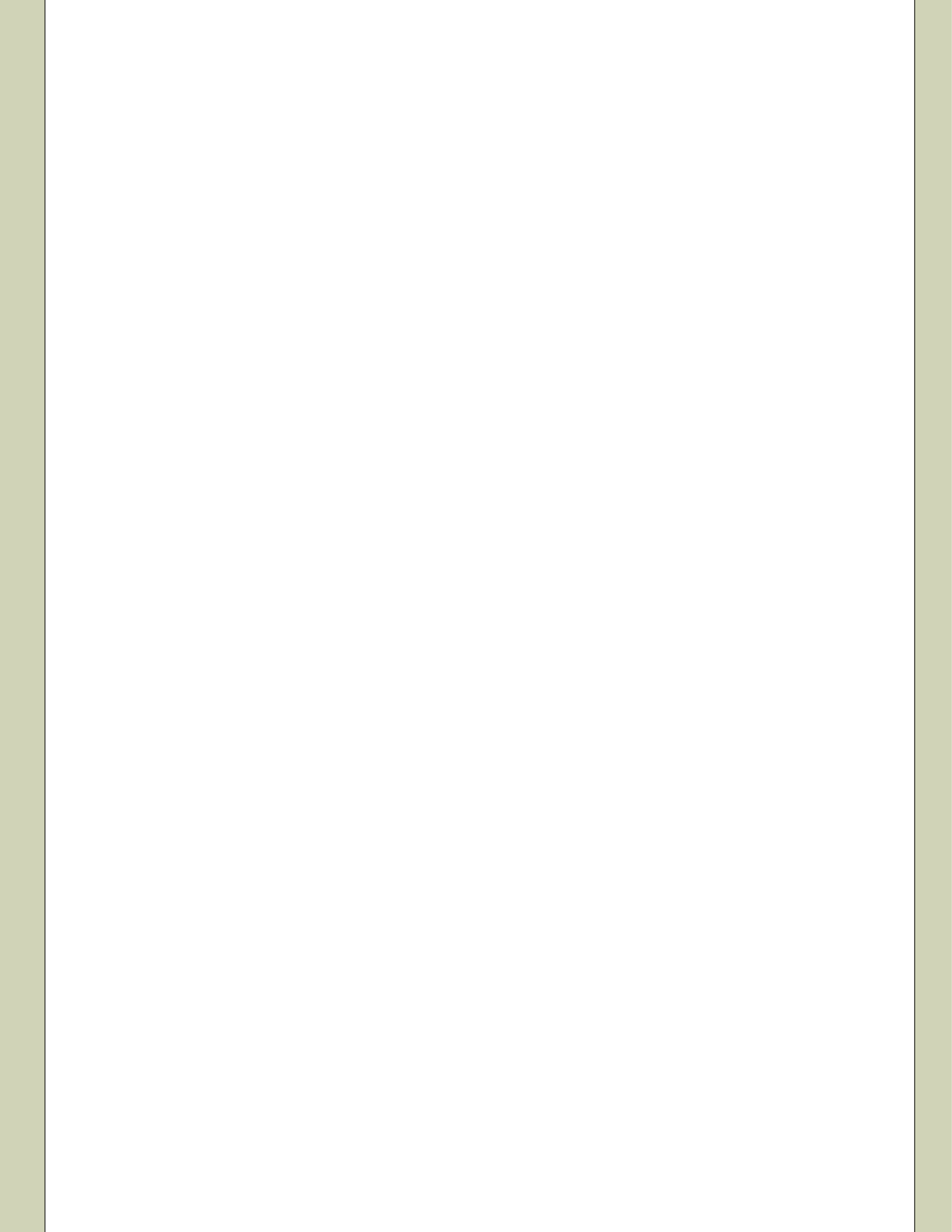
to the way in which the context has varied over time. We have also paid particular attention to the way in which the Church has handled particular issues at different periods, recognizing that the whole history of the Church needs to be understood in the way in which we approach the problems caused by division.

### **Conclusion**

The last phase was the first sustained discussion of the sacraments since the very first one. The hope expressed at the outset that the topic of the presence of Christ in the Church would hold issues of ecclesiology and sacramentality together seems to have been largely justified. After lengthy discussion between us, Margaret and I have proposed that the topic of the next phase be “Formed and Transformed at the Table of the Lord.” Without prejudging the reception of that proposal, I would like to emphasize that, by focusing on the eucharist as the place of formation and transformation, we once again wish to bring a broader perspective to the way in which we characteristically reflect upon it. The emphasis on liturgy as *lived faith* is congenial to

both our traditions. Perhaps it is important to note at this stage, that our thinking about this topic was done twelve months ago, before the issue of the new English version of the Roman Missal had caused quite so much controversy as it is now doing (though it is difficult for those of us who have only seen extracts to make informed comments on this matter); it was not and is not our intention that the work of the Dialogue should be diverted or side-tracked along that particular road.

It has already proved illuminating in the past for Catholics actually to attend Disciple eucharists and see “the words in action,” as it were. This dynamic element of liturgy also relates naturally to issues of catechetical formation for children and adults, and possibly even “the new evangelization” that Pope Benedict is so concerned to see. But perhaps most important in our thinking was the value of reflection on whether Christian commitment to a eucharistically-based faith has a distinctive character, and whether we could identify what it might be. But to continue further along these lines will go beyond my present remit!



# Introduction to the “Faithful Conversations” Process

on  
**Christian Unity, War, and Peacemaking**  
2011 General Assembly  
of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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**ROBERT WELSH**, *president of the Council on Christian Unity:*

This process was developed in response to a resolution that was referred to the Council on Christian Unity (CCU) by the Indianapolis General Assembly in 2009 on “Christian Unity and War.” The basic challenge and question to us as a church is: “Can we maintain our unity as a church when we disagree over significant issues, such as issues related to war and peacemaking?”



The design proposed by the CCU, working in partnership with the Disciples Peace Fellowship (the original submitters of the 2009 resolution), hopes to provide a “safe space” for honest and tough dialogue, but without moving to a vote—and without creating division and a sense of “winners and losers” within the family of the church.

It is my strong belief that somehow, somewhere, we need to model honest, genuine disagreements as Christians and still claim each other as one family.

The *big picture* objectives of this process for engaging in conversation and dialogue around the potentially divisive issues of war and peace are:

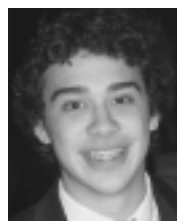
- (1) We are not seeking to move those attending the General Assembly to a specific “outcome” or point of view beyond thoughtful consideration of the issues involved and seeking faithful response as Christians to these issues.
- (2) We will seek to expose those attending the Assembly to differing points of view on the issues presented and discussed.

- (3) We hope to illustrate in this process how persons holding different positions and convictions can maintain unity and stay together in dialogue, even when they disagree.

A report on the learnings and recommendations from the three “Faithful Conversations” on Monday afternoon will be presented during the Wednesday morning, June 13, business session as a way to encourage our congregations to continue this process of engaging the issues involved. A proposed format for this report is that it would be a *pastoral reflection*, or *emerging word*, from this Assembly to our congregations on the issues of Christian unity and peacemaking, enlisting further conversation, dialogue and action.

Let’s hear, then, the kinds of issues that will be discussed in the conversations tomorrow afternoon—not as academic concepts or as theological positions, but as statements speaking from the heart as Christians faithfully struggle with the issues of war, peace and unity:

**JONATHAN ENARI**, *young adult from Bloomington, Indiana:*



As a young adult who just finished high school, I have friends going into the armed forces. Some of my best friends are joining the army and navy specifically. I do not fully understand their decision considering the dangers involved, but I support their decisions none the less. The way troops and friends will risk their lives is scary, but at the same time it is very courageous and honorable. Those people are heroes in their



own right, and I will not be one to take that away from them. I, however, could not do the same. That course of action is never my first course of action. I do believe that there are ways of solving problems other than violence. Whether those problems are between a brother and sister arguing over a toy or an international dispute about WMD's, mediation is always a viable option, and a better way.

**KATIE HAYS**, *pastor of Northwest Christian Church in Arlington, Texas:*

In 1941, my grandfather was an undergraduate at Abilene Christian College, a pocket of pacifism in the mainstream *a cappella* Churches of Christ.

So when my grandfather, in the days after Pearl Harbor, enlisted in the Army, he was shunned by his classmates and professors. My great-grandfather was so embarrassed by his enlistment that he would not speak to his son until Great-Grandmother Katie urged their reconciliation just before Granddaddy shipped out.



And so I was raised with a sense of cautious respect for Granddad's service in World War II. He did not talk about it much, and when he did, his stories were always funny, always about the men he served with, and always about the

ones who lived, the ones he reconnected with at reunions every several years for the rest of his life. He did not, in my presence, recount the terrible cost of that war, or war generally.

I am sure that Jesus meant for his followers to lay down their swords, never to pick them up again. I am sure that God intends for all God's people to live in peace, turning the other cheek to each other to avoid escalating violence. I have been angry and ashamed of the violence perpetuated by the country I love in the first years of this new millennium.

But I am also sure that without the intervention of my grandfather's generation, had we continued turning the cheeks of all those who bore the wrath of one regime's hatred, the world would be much less good now. I'm grateful to my granddad and his compatriots for their service. And so, I am a Pacifist with Problems.

**ANDY MANGUM**, *pastor of First Christian Church in Arlington, Texas:*

Every church needs a forum to discern the con-



nection between the gospel and the headlines. Our context is complex. And the gospel is good. But our forum is inadequate. For decades our approach to discerning the gospel-context connection has

been General Assembly resolutions. But my time as a local church pastor convinces me that this resolution forum fails to bring together our context's complexity and the gospel's goodness. General Assembly resolutions create ripples that touch the local congregation. Each time we take a vote on a Sense of the Assembly Resolution, people in the pews experience their church questioning their opinions. They need to trust that their church does so after great discernment. But our format gets in the way of that necessary discernment. Issues can barely be introduced in 12 minutes. Many issues have more than two sides. We report the vote outcome suggesting that we are univocal not conversational. The format of our discernment needs to show that we are a church seeking true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice. Twelve minutes is not enough for that.

**BELVA BROWN JORDAN**, *associate dean at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma:*

It's complicated! How do you walk with seminarians who oppose war, yet clearly honor those who are "called" to fight? In February of 2007 a group of seminarians came to me seeking advice about organizing a peace rally to mark the four-year anniversary of the beginning of the Iraq war. In the process of planning, they wrote a "Statement of Solidarity Against the War in Iraq."



As a community representing a wealth of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, they began their statement by expressing a united voice of "commitment to human dignity and the essential worth of every person."

The conversation that led to the final version of the statement was rich. It involved testimonies of how the war had affected some of them personally with siblings, other relatives, best friends, classmates and partners being deployed. They discussed the economic and social injustices of the war and an

“emerging awareness of neglectful treatment of troops,” particularly when they came home. In the final statement they vowed:

We are committed to act against these injustices, holding ourselves accountable to our global community . . . We stand in solidarity with all those affected by violence and war: those who have died, those who are still in battle, those who suffer in body and spirit, and those who mourn. Embracing our moral agency, we come together today to take a stand against the ongoing war in Iraq . . . We are saying “Yes!” to something much deeper (than war) . . . We are rejecting the culture of fear and calling for a culture of possibility.”

Their statement was a call for reconciliation in the midst of war. March 2011 marked the eight-year anniversary of the Iraq war. What statement of solidarity can we write; what acts of unity might we engage as we seek to be peacemakers in a broken, fragmented world?

**STEVE DOAN**, *chaplains’ endorsement officer for Disciples of Christ:*

I was drafted during the war in Vietnam, entered the Artillery and served a tour there. While teaching English and philosophy at West Point, I became immersed in the ethics curriculum and taught just war theory to future Army officers. Feeling a call to ministry, I finished seminary and eventually spent fourteen years of 26 in the Army as a chaplain.

No one glamorizes war less than a soldier does or detests the thought of senseless destruction and killing more. War is evil—and it is always a sin. But I also believe from endless study, and prayer and reflection, that peace without justice, peace with slavery or genocide or tyranny is not peace at all. And the soldier is not the policymaker, nor is the legislator the one who suffers when a loved one goes overseas or never returns.



The slaughter and suffering of innocents leaves blood on all our hands. I know in the depths of my soul that war is never God’s desire for us. I can never forget that people died because our guns sought them out. Peace is not just a theory—it is the way we survive the madness of violence and learn to live together in love. I serve

our chaplains now as their endorser because I believe in the ideals they embrace and the ministry they provide to so many women and men. They heard the call first to serve the Prince of Peace and then to wear the uniform as non-combatants. It is a labor of love. As I speak, some of our chaplains are in Iraq and Afghanistan. And they want to know that their church supports the work they do. Thank you all for doing that so well.

**CRAIG WATTS**, *pastor of Royal Palms Christian Church in Coral Springs, Florida:*



I’m Craig Watts, and I am a member of Disciples Peace Fellowship. I am a pacifist. Because of what Jesus taught and how he lived, I cannot see how one who follows him can participate in warfare. Jesus gave a new commandment, that we love as he has loved us. There is no room for deadly force in his kind of love. Jesus loved both friends and enemies; he blessed those who cursed him and indeed those who crucified him. He calls us to do the same. While we should seek to help those who are vulnerable and in danger, we are to do so through means that are nonviolent. While nonviolent action has not always worked, it is likewise true that violent interventions have frequently failed. But nonviolent action is compatible with the way of Jesus Christ, as violence is not, and it reflects the love our Lord wants us to embody. It seems to me that as Disciples of Christ, with our commitment to Christian unity and our claim to be “a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world,” opposition to all war is crucial.

**LA MARCO CABLE**, *program associate on staff of Disciples Overseas Ministries:*

As a college student at Transylvania University, I participated in a student-led organization that advocated for a living-wage for Lexington’s sanitation workers. One evening at an organizing meeting, a student volunteer invited us to a Peace Rally opposing the Iraq War. Back then I was drawn to rallies on campus and around town. So I decided to attend the rally, not realizing how my participation would impact my life. After the rally the volunteer who had invited us joined my friends and me at a locally owned coffee



shop. There I learned he was a pacifist and received literature on Christian Pacifism. That night when I returned to my dorm, I reflected on what I heard at the rally and read through the materials my new friend had given me. As I read and reflected, my heart was being converted, but as it is with many issues of the heart, it took my head some time to catch up. Today, some years later, after much praying, reflecting on the teachings of Jesus as it relates to peace and justice, many conversations and some debates, my heart and head have been converted to a position that opposes war and violence to settle disputes. This position is grounded in faithfulness and hope, but also in realism. It provides me not only a moral basis for dealing with conflicts but a framework within which I can work and partner with others to carry on the vital task of building structures that can eventually eliminate war and its causes.

**TIM LEE**, professor and director of Asian/Korean Church Studies at Brite Divinity School, Ft. Worth, Texas:



This General Assembly has a new process that I believe is quite valuable. It is called *Faithful Conversations*. As Robert Welsh has shared, this process comprises three conversational sessions.

And we are having them so that we can engage tough issues like those we have just heard—engage them honestly and critically but without rancor. That way, we can better clarify our own positions as Disciples who seek faithfulness and wholeness in a fragmented world.

The three Faithful Conversations sessions will be held tomorrow afternoon between 2:30 and 5:00 at the Renaissance Hotel. A description of the sessions can be found on a document that was handed to you as you were entering the plenary session. All the sessions deal with the general theme of war, unity, and peace-making from Christian perspectives, but each has a distinct emphasis. You can choose to participate in any one of them:

**Session 1** will explore “Christian Perspectives on War and Peace.”

**Session 2** will address the “Pastoral and Theological Approaches to These Issues.”

**Session 3** will examine “New Developments Regarding War and Peace in the Ecumenical Movement.”

I will be moderating the first of these conversations, along with Jim Higginbotham, who is a member of the Executive Committee of the Disciples Peace Fellowship. This session will begin with a facilitated conversation on crusade, just war, and pacifism—the three historic positions that Christians have held on the issue. Sharon Warner of Lexington Theological Seminary will be our facilitator. This conversation will be followed by a presentation and discussion led by Newell Williams of Brite Divinity School and Craig Watts of Royal Palm Christian Church. They will focus more specifically at our Disciples’ understandings, looking first at the views of Disciples founders Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell, and early 20th century Disciples ecumenical leader, Peter Ainslie, and then examining how Disciples actions during the Civil War, World War I, and the War in Vietnam have influenced our life as a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. There will undoubtedly be a lot of food for conversation.

**VIRZOLA LAW**, associate pastor at Mississippi Blvd. Christian Church in Memphis, Tennessee:

I am pleased to be moderating the Faithful Conversation that will take place tomorrow afternoon around the issues of Pastoral and Theological Perspectives on War, Peace and Unity. As the congregational pastor who carries responsibility for the spiritual life of Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church, I have spent much of my ministry in dealing with, and helping to address, issues of conflict within the lives of individuals, families and congregations. Those conversations always require that persons begin by identifying clearly and honestly the issues at stake in the situation where conflict exists—and then to be willing to work through those issues prayerfully and openly.

The *faithful conversation* tomorrow will begin with a time of sharing by persons who hold different positions related to Christian perspectives on the important issues of war and peace. They will engage in a dialogue with each other in a *fish bowl* setting to see if they can do more than “agree to disagree,” but rather to find common ground in their faith commitments as they seek to maintain their unity within the one family of



Christ's love. Perspectives will be offered by a former member of the military (Steve Doan), a military chaplain (Landa Simmons), a strong advocate working for peace (Krista Johnson), and the perspective of a pacifist (Rita Nakashima Brock). It should be a lively conversation.

The second session of this conversation will then open to all participants as we will be led in dialogue and "faithful encounter" by a congregational pastor, Doug Skinner, and a regional minister, Dani Loving Cartwright. This session will consider the values and practices that make faithful conversations possible within congregations—in board meetings, elders meetings, Sunday school classes and other gatherings.

I hope many of you will want to join us for this conversation, and look forward to being with you.

**ROBYN FICKES**, *young adult member of the board of Council on Christian Unity:*



A priest, a rabbi and an imam walk into...well, anyway, it's a joke opener we're all familiar with. The combination of different perspectives intrigues us, leading us to make jokes to break the tensions that exist in our differences. It creates moments we want to retell, and it also brings about new insights, shared learning, and stronger friendships as a result. This is the hope of our third faithful conversation on the topic: New Developments Regarding War and Peace in the Ecumenical Movement. If we were to continue in our joke format, our conversation would go more like this. A few Disciples, a member of the Church of the Brethren, and participants in this General Assembly walk into a conversation on war—and peace breaks out, or at least that's what we're hoping for.

Our panel of speakers has a depth of experience working on peace issues with Christians within and beyond the Disciples of Christ. They provide a broad spectrum of fields of study from the pew and pulpit, classroom and academy, to the wider global context. Our conversation will then only be complete by the perspectives you bring, and experiences and insights you have to offer.

Come join a *faithful conversation*, learning about what our partner Christian denominations and the

larger Ecumenical Movement are doing in regard to understanding and working for peace: in our faith, in our lives, and in our world. It is the set-up for a great joke, but it might also be the set-up for an even better shared ministry. Aren't we all looking, just looking, for a little peace? I hope to see you there.

**BRUCE ERVIN**, *member of executive committee of the Disciples Peace Fellowship:*

My name is Bruce Ervin. Along with my colleague, Craig Watts, I am the co-moderator of Disciples Peace Fellowship.



I want to thank each and every one of our presenters this afternoon for speaking from the heart, and for helping to provide an excellent outline of what we can expect tomorrow as we engage in Faithful Conversations on the topic of Unity and Peacemaking.

And I want to encourage each of you to take part in this process. It will be a full afternoon of talking together, listening together, reflecting together and discerning the Spirit together. At the end of the day we're not likely to all agree. That's okay. Historically we Disciples have not been afraid to openly disagree, and sometimes even engage in heated debate. Alexander Campbell was one of the great debaters of his day. What we're looking for is a civil discussion from divergent yet faithful points of view. What we're looking for is an opportunity to learn from each other and to listen for the Spirit as She speaks to us through the hearts of one another.

There's always the temptation in church circles to sweep conflict under the rug so that we can be *nice* to each other. Well, there's nothing *nice* about war. In fact, there's little that's nice about peacemaking; it's hard work! But we are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world!! We are called to be engaged in the work of peacemaking and unity, no matter how hard that work might be. To be involved in Faithful Conversations tomorrow is to be involved in that work.

We Disciples come from a long line of folks who were engaged in the social issues of their day, from Barton W. Stone and Ovid Butler, through Emmett Dickson and Rosa Page Welch, Itoko Maeda and Daisy Machado, to A. Dale Fiers and Sharon Watkins. I invite you to join in that parade of faithful



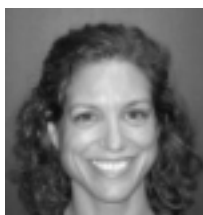
witnesses to the very down-to-earth Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you.

**LAURA MAHN**, *chair of board of Council on Christian Unity:*

The mission of the Council on Christian Unity is to provide leadership to our church's core value of seeking the unity of all Christians and the oneness of the Church

The Council on Christian Unity seeks opportunities for dialogue between people of faith. Often these opportunities occur between Disciples and Christians of other denominations. But authentic Unity begins at home among ourselves. The Christian Church, Disciples of Christ is often raised up as a model among our friends in Christ as a part of the body that functions well even when we do not always agree.

It is not *new news* that the issues of war and peace are issues that can and do cause divisions among Christians, among friends and families. And yet we are a church that claims Unity as our Polar Star. So, how can we have unity when we disagree over such significant issues as war and peacemaking? It is this question that brought the 2009 Disciples Peace



Fellowship resolution to the Council on Christian Unity, and it is this question, along with our belief that we can be united as Disciples while wrestling with the issues of peacemaking, that has inspired the faithful conver-

sations model we hope you will be a part of during this assembly.

As the Chair of the Council on Christian Unity, my hope is that these faithful conversations will serve as reminders that we Disciples cherish the unity of the Body of Christ and that, because we believe in that unity, we commit ourselves to having faithful conversations, *safe* conversations in which we are free to disagree, but not to divide; conversations in which we are committed to listen more than we speak. We are part of the Body of Christ. Unity is not a choice but a call.

*Hymn: "O for a World" (Chalice # 683).*

*Closing Prayer* offered by Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



# An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace

“Guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79)



*Received, endorsed and commended for study,  
reflection, collaboration and common action  
Central Committee, World Council of Churches  
February 2011  
Geneva, Switzerland*

**PREAMBLE:** This call is a concerted Christian voice addressed primarily to the worldwide Christian community. Inspired by the example of Jesus of Nazareth, it invites Christians to commit themselves to the Way of Just Peace. Aware that the promise of peace is a core value of all religions, it reaches out to all who seek peace according to their own religious traditions and commitments. The call is received by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and commended for study, reflection, collaboration and common action. It is issued in response to a WCC Assembly recommendation in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006, and builds on insights gained in the course of the ecumenical “Decade to Overcome Violence, 2001–2010: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace.”

Just Peace embodies a fundamental shift in ethical practice. It implies a different framework of analysis and criteria for action. This call signals the shift and indicates some of the implications for the life and witness of the churches. A resource document, the Just Peace Companion, presents more developed biblical, theological and ethical considerations, proposals for further exploration and examples of good practice. It is hoped that these materials, together with the commitments arising from the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, in May 2011, under the theme “Glory to God and Peace on Earth,” will assist the

forthcoming Assembly of the WCC to reach a new ecumenical consensus on justice and peace.

**1. Justice embracing peace.** Without peace, can there be justice? Without justice, can there be peace? Too often, we pursue justice at the expense of peace, and peace at the expense of justice. To conceive peace apart from justice is to compromise the hope that “justice and peace shall embrace” (Psalm 85:10). When justice and peace are lacking, or set in opposition, we need to reform our ways. Let us rise, therefore, and work together for peace and justice.

**2. Let the Peoples speak:** There are many stories to tell—stories soaked with violence, the violation of human dignity and the destruction of creation. If all ears would hear the cries, no place would be truly silent. Many continue to reel from the impact of wars; ethnic and religious animosity, discrimination based on race and caste mar the façade of nations and leave ugly scars. Thousands are dead, displaced, homeless, refugees within their own homeland. Women and children often bear the brunt of conflicts: many women are abused, trafficked, killed; children are separated from their parents, orphaned, recruited as soldiers, abused. Citizens in some countries face violence by occupation, paramilitaries, guerrillas, criminal cartels or government forces. Citizens of many nations suffer governments obsessed with national security and armed might; yet these fail to bring real security, year after year. Thousands of children die each day from inadequate nutrition while those in power continue to make economic and political decisions that favor a relative few.

3. **Let the Scriptures speak:** The Bible makes justice the inseparable companion of peace (Isaiah 32:17, James 3:18). Both point to right and sustainable relationships in human society, the vitality of our connections with the earth, the “wellbeing” and integrity of creation. Peace is God’s gift to a broken but beloved world, today as in the lifetime of Jesus Christ: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.” (John 14:27). Through the life and teachings, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we perceive peace as both promise and present—a hope for the future and a gift here and now.

4. Jesus told us to love our enemies, pray for our persecutors, and not to use deadly weapons. His peace is expressed by the spirit of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11). Despite persecution, he remains steadfast in his active non-violence, even to death. His life of commitment to justice ends on a cross, an instrument of torture and execution. With the resurrection of Jesus, God confirms that such steadfast love, such obedience, such trust, leads to life. This is true also for us.

5. Wherever there is forgiveness, respect for human dignity, generosity, and care for the weak in the common life of humanity, we catch a glimpse—no matter how dim—of the gift of peace. It follows therefore that peace is lost when injustice, poverty and disease—as well as armed conflict, violence, and war—influct wounds on the bodies and souls of human beings, on society and on the earth.

6. Yet some texts in the Scriptures associate violence with the will of God. On the basis of these texts, sections of our Christian family have legitimized and continue to legitimize the use of violence by themselves and others. We can no longer read such texts without calling attention to the human failure to answer the divine call to peace. Today, we must interrogate texts that speak of violence, hate and prejudice, or call for the wrath of God to annihilate another people. We must allow such texts to teach us to discern when, like the people in the Bible, our purposes, our schemes, our animosities, passions and habits reflect our desires rather than the will of God.

7. **Let the Church speak:** As the Body of Christ, the Church is called to be a place of peacemaking. In manifold ways, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, our liturgical traditions illustrate how God’s peace calls us to share peace with each other

and with the world. Yet, more often than not, churches fail to live out their call. Christian disunity, which in many ways undermines the Churches’ credibility in terms of peacemaking, invites us to a continuous conversion of hearts and minds. Only when grounded in God’s peace can communities of faith be “agents of reconciliation and peace with justice in homes, churches and societies as well as in political, social and economic structures at the global level” (WCC Assembly, 1998). The church that lives the peace it proclaims is what Jesus called a city set on a hill for all to see (Matthew 5:14). Believers exercising the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to them by God in Christ point beyond the churches to what God is doing in the world (see 2 Corinthians 5:18).

### THE WAY OF JUST PEACE

8. There are many ways of responding to violence; many ways of practicing peace. As members of the community that proclaims Christ the embodiment of peace, we respond to the call to bring the divine gift of peace into contemporary contexts of violence and conflict. So we join the Way of Just Peace, which requires both movement towards the goal and commitment to the journey. We invite people of all worldviews and religious traditions to consider the goal and to share of their journeys. Just Peace invites all of us to testify with our lives. To pursue peace we must prevent and eliminate personal, structural and media violence, including violence against people because of race, caste, gender, sexual orientation, culture or religion. We must be responsible to those who have gone before us, living in ways that honor the wisdom of our ancestors and the witness of the saints in Christ. We also have a responsibility to those who are the future: our children, “tomorrow people.” Our children deserve to inherit a more just and peaceful world.

9. Non-violent resistance is central to the Way of Just Peace. Well-organized and peaceful resistance is active, tenacious and effective—whether in the face of governmental oppression and abuse or business practices which exploit vulnerable communities and creation. Recognizing that the strength of the powerful depends on the obedience and compliance of citizens, of soldiers and, increasingly, of consumers, non-violent strategies may include acts of civil disobedience and non-compliance.

10. On the Way of Just Peace the justifications of armed conflict and war become increasingly implausible and unacceptable. The churches have struggled with their disagreement on this matter for decades; however, the Way of Just Peace now compels us to move forward. Yet, to condemn war is not enough; we must do everything in our power to promote justice and peaceful cooperation among peoples and nations. The Way of Just Peace is fundamentally different from the concept of “just war” and much more than criteria for protecting people from the unjust use of force; in addition to silencing weapons it embraces social justice, the rule of law, respect for human rights and shared human security.

11. Within the limitations of tongue and intellect, we propose that **Just Peace** may be comprehended as *“a collective and dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerable and respect the integrity of creation.”*

## LIVING THE JOURNEY

12. Just Peace is a journey into God’s purpose for humanity and all creation, trusting that God will “guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79).

13. **The journey is difficult.** We recognize that we must face up to truth along the way. We come to realize how often we deceive ourselves and are complicit with violence. We learn to give up looking for justifications of what we have done, and train ourselves in the practice of justice. This means confessing our wrong-doings, giving and receiving forgiveness and learning to reconcile with each other.

14. The sins of violence and war divide communities deeply. Those who have stereotyped and demonized their adversaries will need long-term support and accompaniment in order to work through their condition and be healed. To reconcile with enemies and to restore broken relationships is a lengthy process as well as a necessary goal. In a process of reconciliation there are no longer powerful and powerless, superior and inferior, mighty and lowly. Both victims and victimizers are transformed. 15. Peace agreements are often fragile, temporary, and inadequate. Places where peace is declared may still

be filled with hatred. Repairing the damage of war and violence may take longer than the conflict that caused it. But what exists of peace along the way, though imperfect, is a promise of greater things to come.

16. **We journey together.** The Church divided about peace, and churches torn by conflict, have little credibility as witnesses or workers for peace. The churches’ power to work for and witness to peace depends on finding a common purpose in the service of peace despite differences in ethnic and national identity, and even in doctrine and church order.

17. We travel as a community, sharing an ethic and practice of peace that includes forgiveness and love of enemies, active non-violence and respect for others, gentleness and mercy. We strive to give of our lives in solidarity with others and for the common good. We pursue peace in prayer, asking God for discernment as we go and for the fruits of the Spirit along the way.

18. In loving communities of faith that journey together, there are many hands to unburden the weary. One may have a witness of hope in the face of despair; another, a generous love for the needy. People who have suffered much find the courage to keep on living despite tragedy and loss. The power of the Gospel enables them to leave behind even the unimaginable burdens of personal and collective sin, of anger, bitterness and hatred, which are the legacy of violence and war. Forgiveness does not erase the past but when we look back we may well see that memories were healed, burdens were set aside and traumas were shared with others and with God. We are able to travel on.

19. **The journey is inviting.** With time and dedication to the cause, more and more people hear the call to become peacemakers. They come from wide circles within the church, from other communities of faith, and from society at large. They work to overcome divisions of race and religion, nation and class; learn to stand with the impoverished; or take up the difficult ministry of reconciliation. Many discover that peace cannot be sustained without caring for creation and cherishing God’s miraculous handiwork.

20. Sharing the road with our neighbors, we learn to move from defending what is ours towards living generous, open lives. We find our feet as peacemakers. We discover people from different

walks of life. We gain strength in working with them, acknowledging our mutual vulnerability and affirming our common humanity. The other is no longer a stranger or an adversary but a fellow human being with whom we share both the road and the journey.

## SIGNPOSTS ON THE WAY OF JUST PEACE

**21. Just Peace and the transformation of conflict.** Transforming conflicts is an essential part of peacemaking. The process of transformation begins with unmasking violence and uncovering hidden conflict in order to make their consequences visible to victims and communities. Conflict transformation aims at challenging adversaries to redirect their conflicting interests towards the common good. It may have to disturb an artificial peace, expose structural violence or find ways to restore relationships without retribution. The vocation of churches and religious communities is to accompany the victims of violence and be their advocates. It also includes strengthening civic mechanisms for managing conflicts and holding public authorities and other perpetrators accountable—even perpetrators from within church communities. The ‘rule of law’ is a critical framework for all such efforts.

**22. Just Peace and the use of armed force.** Yet there are bound to be times when our commitment to Just Peace is put to a test, since peace is pursued in the midst of violence and under the threat of violent conflict. There are extreme circumstances where, as the last resort and the lesser evil, the lawful use of armed force may become necessary in order to protect vulnerable groups of people exposed to imminent lethal threats. Yet, even then we recognize the use of armed force in situations of conflict as both a sign of serious failure and a new obstacle on the Way of Just Peace.

**23.** While we acknowledge the authority of the United Nations under international law to respond to threats to world peace in the spirit and the letter of the UN Charter, including the use of military power within the constraints of international law, we feel obliged as Christians to go further—to challenge any theological or *other* justifications of the use of military power and to consider reliance on the concept of a “just war” and its customary use to be obsolete.

**24.** We acknowledge the moral dilemma inherent in

these affirmations. The dilemma is partially resolved if the criteria developed in the just war tradition may still serve as a framework for an ethic of the lawful use of force. That ethic would allow, for example, consideration of ‘just policing’, the emergence of a new norm in international law around the ‘responsibility to protect’ and the exercise in good faith of the peacemaking mechanisms enshrined in the UN Charter. Conscientious objection to service in armed forces should be recognized as a human right. Much else that is antithetical to peace and the international rule of law must be categorically and finally rejected, starting with the possession or use of all weapons of mass destruction. Our common life invites convergence in thought, action and law for the making and building of peace. As Christians we therefore commit to a transformed ethical discourse that guides the community in the praxis of non-violent conflict transformation and in fostering conditions for progress toward peace.

**25. Just Peace and human dignity.** Our Scriptures teach us that humanity is created in the likeness of God and is graced with dignity and rights. The recognition of this dignity and these rights is central to our understanding of Just Peace. We affirm that universal human rights are the indispensable international legal instrument for protecting human dignity. To that end we hold states responsible for ensuring the rule of law and guaranteeing civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights. However, we observe that abuse of human rights is rampant in many societies, in war and in peace, and that those who should be held accountable benefit from impunity. In response we must reach out in friendship and cooperation to all partners in civil society, including people of other religions, who seek to defend human rights and strengthen the international rule of law.

**26. Just Peace and caring for creation.** God made all things good and has entrusted humankind with the responsibility to care for creation (Genesis 2:4b-9). The exploitation of the natural world and the misuse of its finite resources disclose a pattern of violence that often benefits some people at the expense of many. We know that all creation groans to be set free, not least from the abusive actions of humans (Romans 8:22). As people of faith, we acknowledge our guilt for the damage we have done to creation and all living things, through action and our inaction. The vision of Just Peace is much more



than the restoration of right relationships in community; it also compels human beings to care for the earth as our home. We must trust in God's promise and strive for an equitable and just sharing of the earth's resources.

**27. Building cultures of peace.** We are committed to building cultures of peace in cooperation with people of other religious traditions, convictions and worldviews. In this commitment we seek to respond to the Gospel imperatives of loving our neighbors, rejecting violence and seeking justice for the poor, the disinherited and the oppressed (Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 4:18). The collective effort relies on the gifts of men and women, the young and the old, leaders and workers. We acknowledge and value women's gifts for building peace. We recognize the unique role of religious leaders, their influence in societies and the potentially liberating power of religious wisdom and insight in promoting peace and human dignity. At the same time, we lament the cases where religious leaders have abused their power for selfish ends or where cultural and religious patterns have contributed to violence and oppression. We are especially concerned about aggressive rhetoric and teaching propagated under the guise of religion and amplified by the power of media. While we acknowledge with deep humility Christian complicity—past and present—in the manifestation of prejudice and other attitudes that fuel hate, we commit ourselves to build communities of reconciliation, acceptance and love.

**28. Education for peace.** Education inspired by the vision of peace is more than instruction in the strategies of peace work. It is a profoundly spiritual formation of character that involves family, church, and society. Peace education teaches us to nurture the spirit of peace, instill respect for human rights, and imagine and adopt alternatives to violence. Peace education promotes active nonviolence as an unequalled power for change that is practiced and valued in different traditions and cultures. Education of character and conscience equips people to seek peace and pursue it.

## SEEKING AND PURSUING JUST PEACE TOGETHER

**29.** The Christian pilgrimage toward peace presents many opportunities to build visible and viable communities for peace. A church that prays for peace, serves its community, uses money ethically,

cares for the environment and cultivates good relations with others can become an instrument for peace. Furthermore, when churches work in a united way for peace, their witness becomes more credible (John 17:21).

### • **For Peace in the Community—so that all may live free from fear (Micah 4:4)**

*“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness . . . ?” “Love your neighbor as yourself.” “Pray for those who persecute you.” (Micah 6:8; Luke 10:27; Matthew 5:44)*

**30. Global challenges.** All too many communities are divided by economic class, by race, color and caste, by religion and gender. Homes and schools are plagued by violence and abuse. Women and children are violated physically, psychologically and by cultural practice. Drug and alcohol abuse and suicide are forms of self-destruction on a large scale. Workplaces and houses of worship are scarred by conflicts within the community. Prejudice and racism deny human dignity. Workers are exploited and industries pollute the environment. Health care is inaccessible for many and affordable for only a few. There is a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Traditions that bind communities together are weakened by commercial influences and imported lifestyles. Media, games and entertainment that promote violence, war and pornography distort community values and invite destructive behaviors. When violence occurs, young males will generally be perpetrators as well as victims and women and children will find themselves at greatest risk.

**31. Main directions.** Churches become builders of a culture of peace as they engage, cooperate and learn from one another. Members, families, parishes and communities will be involved. The tasks include learning to prevent conflicts and transform them; to protect and empower those who are marginalized; to affirm the role of women in resolving conflict and building peace and include them in all such initiatives; to support and participate in non-violent movements for justice and human rights; and to give peace education its rightful place in churches and schools. A culture of peace requires churches and other faith and community groups to challenge violence wherever it happens: this concerns structural and habitual violence as well as the violence that pervades media entertainment, games and music. Cultures of peace



are realized when all, especially women and children, are safe from sexual violence and protected from armed conflict, when deadly weapons are banned and removed from communities, and domestic violence is addressed and stopped.

32. If churches are to be peacemakers, Christians must first strive for unity in action for peace. Congregations must unite to break the culture of silence about the violence within church life and unite to overcome habitual disunity in the face of the violence within our communities.

• **For Peace with the Earth—so that life is sustained**

God created the world and made it whole, offering humanity life in all its fullness. Yet sin breaks relationships between people and with the created order. Creation longs for the children of God to be stewards of life, of justice and of love. (Genesis 2:1-3; John 10:10; Romans 8:20-22)

33. **Global challenges.** Human beings are to respect and protect creation. But greed at many levels, self-centeredness and a belief in unlimited growth have brought exploitation and destruction on the earth and its creatures. The cries of the poor and vulnerable echo in the groans of the earth. Excessive consumption of fossil fuels and other limited resources is doing violence to people and the planet. Climate change as a consequence of human lifestyles poses a global threat to just peace. Global warming, the rise of sea levels and the increasing frequency and intensity of droughts and floods affect especially the most vulnerable populations in the world. Indigenous people are exemplary in sustainable living and, along with inhabitants of coral atolls and impoverished coastal communities, they are among those who contribute the least to global warming. Yet they are the ones who will suffer the most.

34. **Main directions.** To care for God's precious gift of creation and to strive for ecological justice are key principles of just peace. For Christians they are also an expression of the Gospel's call to repent from wasteful use of natural resources and be converted daily. Churches and their members must be cautious with earth's resources, especially with water. We must protect the populations most vulnerable to climate change and help to secure their rights.

35. Church members and parishes around the world must self-critically assess their environmental impact. Individually and in communities, Christians need to learn to live in ways that allow the entire earth to thrive. Many more 'eco-congregations' and 'green' churches are needed locally. Much ecumenical advocacy is needed globally for the implementation of international agreements and protocols among governments and businesses in order to ensure a more inhabitable earth not only for us but also for all creatures and for future generations.

• **For Peace in the Marketplace—so that all may live with dignity**

In wondrously creating a world with more than enough natural riches to support countless generations of human beings and other living things, God makes manifest a vision for all people to live in fullness of life and with dignity, regardless of class, gender, religion, race or ethnicity. (Psalm 24:1; Psalm 145:15; Isaiah 65:17-23)

36. **Global challenges.** Even as tiny global elites accumulate unimaginable wealth, more than 1.4 billion humans subsist in extreme poverty. There is something profoundly wrong when the wealth of the world's three richest individuals is greater than the gross domestic product of the world's 48 poorest countries. Ineffective regulation, innovative but immoral financial instruments, distorted reward structures and other systemic factors exacerbated by greed trigger global financial crises that wipe out millions of jobs and impoverish tens of millions of people. The widening socio-economic chasms within and between nations raise serious questions about the effectiveness of market-oriented economic liberalization policies in eradicating poverty and challenge the pursuit of growth as an overriding objective for any society. Over-consumption and deprivation are forms of violence. Global military expenditures—now higher than during the Cold War—do little to enhance international peace and security and much to endanger it; weapons do not address the main threats to humanity but use vast resources that could be rededicated to that end. Such disparities pose fundamental challenges to justice, social cohesion and the public good within what has become a global human community.

37. **Main directions.** Peace in the Marketplace is nurtured by creating “economies of life.” Their essential foundations are equitable socio-economic relationships, respect for workers rights, the just sharing and sustainable use of resources, healthy and affordable food for all, and broad participation in economic decision-making.

38. Churches and their partners in society must advocate for the full implementation of economic, social and cultural rights. Churches must promote alternative economic policies for sustainable production and consumption, redistributive growth, fair taxes, fair trade, and the universal provisioning of clean water, clean air and other common goods. Regulatory structures and policies must reconnect finance not only to economic production but also to human need and ecological sustainability. Deep cuts in military spending should be made in order to fund programs that advance the goals of sufficient food, shelter, education and health for all people and that provide remedies for climate change. Human and ecological security must become a greater economic priority than national security.

• **For Peace among the Peoples—so that human lives are protected**

We are made in the image of the Giver of Life, forbidden to take life, and charged to love even enemies. Judged with equity by a righteous God, nations are called to embrace truth in the public square, turn weapons into farm implements, and not learn war any more. (Exodus 20:17; Isaiah 2:1-4; Matthew 5:44)

39. **Global challenges.** Human history is illuminated by courageous pursuits of peace and the transformation of conflict, advances in the rule of law, new norms and treaties that govern the use of force, and now judicial recourse against abuses of power that involve even heads of state. History is stained, however, by the moral and political opposites of these—including xenophobia, inter-communal violence, hate crimes, war crimes, slavery, genocide and more. Although the spirit and logic of violence is deeply rooted in human history, the consequences of such sins have increased exponentially in recent times, amplified by violent applications of science, technology and wealth.

40. A new ecumenical agenda for peace today is even more urgent because of the nature and the scope of such dangers now. We are witnesses to prodigious increases in the human capacity to destroy life and its foundations. The scale of the threat, the collective human responsibility behind it, and the need for a concerted global response are without precedent. Two threats of this magnitude—nuclear holocaust and climate change—could destroy much life and all prospects for Just Peace. Both are violent misuses of the energy inherent in Creation. One catastrophe stems from the proliferation of weapons, especially *weapons of mass destruction*; the other threat may be understood as the proliferation of *lifestyles of mass extinction*. The international community struggles to gain control of both threats with little success.

41. **Main directions.** To respect the sanctity of life and build peace among peoples, churches must work to strengthen international human rights law as well as treaties and instruments of mutual accountability and conflict resolution. To prevent deadly conflicts and mass killings, the proliferation of small arms and weapons of war must be stopped and reversed. Churches must build trust and collaborate with other communities of faith and people of different worldviews to reduce national capacities for waging war, eliminate weapons that put humanity and the planet at unprecedented risk, and generally delegitimize the institution of war.

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42. **A people born to longing.** Our home is not what it might and will be. While life in God’s hands is irrepressible, peace does not yet reign. The principalities and powers, though not sovereign, still enjoy their victories, and we will be restless and broken until peace prevails. Thus our peace building will of necessity criticize, denounce, advocate, and resist as well as proclaim, empower, console, reconcile, and heal. Peacemakers will speak against and speak for, tear down and build up, lament and celebrate, grieve and rejoice. Until our longing joins our belonging in the consummation of all things in God, the work of peace will continue as the flickering of sure grace.

# Glory to God and Peace on Earth

## The Message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation May 2011

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

*Ephesians 3:16-17*



We understand peace and peacemaking as an indispensable part of our common faith. Peace is inextricably related to the love, justice and freedom that God has granted to all human beings through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit as a gift and vocation. It constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God's love for the world. The dynamic nature of peace as gift and vocation does not deny the existence of tensions, which form an intrinsic element of human relationships, but can alleviate their destructive force by bringing justice and reconciliation.

God blesses the peacemakers. Member churches of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and other Christians are united, as never before, in seeking the means to address violence and to reject war in favor of "Just Peace"—the establishment of peace with justice through a common response to God's

calling. Just Peace invites us to join in a common journey and to commit ourselves to building a culture of peace.

We, nearly 1,000 participants from more than 100 nations, called together by the WCC, have shared the experience of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC), a gathering of Christian churches and interreligious partners dedicated to the pursuit of Peace in the community, Peace with the Earth, Peace in the marketplace and Peace among the peoples. We met on the campus of the University of the West Indies (Mona) near Kingston, Jamaica from 17 through 25 May 2011. We are profoundly grateful to our hosts in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean region who generously have provided a rich and spacious setting for fellowship and growth in God's grace. By the very fact that we met on the site of a former sugar plantation, we were reminded of the injustice and violence of slavery and colonialism and of the forms of slavery that still plague the world today. We have been informed by the severe challenges of violence in this context as well as the brave involvement of churches in order to meet those challenges.

We brought the concerns of our churches and regions to Jamaica; we spoke with one another here; now, we have a word to share with the churches and the world. We have encountered one another through Bible study, spiritually enriching common prayer, inspiring expressions of the arts, visits to local ministries and other service agencies, plenaries, seminars, workshops, cultural events, lecture sessions, wide-ranging deliberations and deeply moving conversations with persons who have experienced violence, injustice and warfare. We have celebrated the achievements of the ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010). Our

engagements have inspired us in showing that overcoming violence is possible. The Decade to Overcome Violence has generated many beautiful examples of Christians who have made a difference.

As we gathered in Jamaica, we were keenly aware of events in the world around us. Stories from our churches remind us of local, pastoral and social responsibilities for people who must deal daily with each of the issues we discussed. The aftermath of earthquake and tsunami in Japan raises urgent questions concerning nuclear energy and threats to nature and humanity. Governmental and financial institutions face the necessity of taking responsibility for their failed policies and the devastating impact on vulnerable people. We witness with concern and compassion the struggle for freedom, justice and human rights of the people in many Arab countries and other contexts where brave people struggle without global attention. Our love for the peoples of Israel and Palestine convinces us that the continued occupation damages both peoples. We renew our solidarity with the people of divided countries such as the Korean peninsula and Cyprus, and people yearning for peace and an end to suffering in nations like Colombia, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Great Lakes region of Africa.

We realize that Christians have often been complicit in systems of violence, injustice, militarism, racism, casteism, intolerance and discrimination. We ask God to forgive us our sins, and to transform us as agents of righteousness and advocates of Just Peace. We appeal to governments and other groups to stop using religion as a pretext for the justification of violence.

With partners of other faiths, we have recognized that peace is a core value in all religions, and the promise of peace extends to all people regardless of their traditions and commitments. Through intensified interreligious dialogue we seek common ground with all world religions.

We are unified in our aspiration that war should become illegal. Struggling for peace on earth we are confronted with our different contexts and histories. We realize that different churches and religions bring diverse perspectives to the path towards peace. Some among us begin from the standpoint of personal conversion and morality, the acceptance of God's peace in one's heart as the basis for peacemaking in family, community, economy, as well as in all the Earth and the world of nations.

Some stress the need to focus first on mutual support and correction within the body of Christ if peace is to be realized. Some encourage the churches' commitment to broad social movements and the public witness of the church. Each approach has merit; they are not mutually exclusive. In fact they belong inseparably together. Even in our diversity we can speak with one voice.

### **Peace in the community**

Churches learn the complexities of Just Peace as we hear of the intersection of multiple injustices and oppressions that are simultaneously at work in the lives of many. Members of one family or community may be oppressed and also the oppressors of others. Churches must help in identifying the everyday choices that can end abuse and promote human rights, gender justice, climate justice, economic justice, unity and peace. The churches need to continue to confront racism and casteism as dehumanizing realities in today's world. Likewise, violence against women and children must be named as sin. Conscious efforts are required for the full integration of differently abled people. Issues of sexuality divide the churches, and therefore we ask the WCC to create safe spaces to address dividing issues of human sexuality. At every level churches play a role in supporting and protecting the right of conscientious objection, and in assuring asylum for those who oppose and resist militarism and armed conflicts. The churches must raise their common voice to protect our Christian brothers and sisters as well as all humans who are subjected to discrimination and persecution on the grounds of religious intolerance. Peace education must move to the centre of every curriculum in schools, seminaries and universities. We acknowledge the peacemaking capacity of youth and call on the churches to develop and strengthen networks of Just Peace ministries. The church is called to go public with its concerns, speaking the truth beyond the walls of its own sanctuary.

### **Peace with the Earth**

The environmental crisis is profoundly an ethical and spiritual crisis of humanity. Recognizing the damage human activity has done to the Earth, we reaffirm our commitment to the integrity of creation and the daily lifestyle it demands. Our concern for the Earth and our concern for humanity go hand in hand. Natural resources and



common goods such as water must be shared in a just and sustainable manner. We join global civil society in urging governments to reconstruct radically all our economic activities towards the goal of an ecologically sustainable economy. The extensive use of fossil fuels and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions must be reduced urgently to a level that keeps climate change limited. The ecological debt of the industrialized countries responsible for climate change must be considered when CO<sub>2</sub> emission shares and plans for adaptation costs are negotiated. The nuclear catastrophe of Fukushima has proved once again that we must no longer rely on nuclear power as a source of energy. We reject strategies such as an increased production of agro fuel which hurt the poor by competing with food production.

### **Peace in the marketplace**

The global economy often provides many examples of structural violence that victimizes not through the direct use of weapons or physical force but by passive acceptance of widespread poverty, trade disparities and inequality among classes and nations. In contrast to unfettered economic growth as envisioned by the neoliberal system, the Bible signals a vision of life in abundance for all. The churches must learn to advocate more effectively for full implementation of economic, social and cultural rights as the foundation for “economies of life.”

It is a scandal that enormous amounts of money are spent on military budgets and toward providing weapons for allies and the arms trade while this money is urgently needed to eradicate poverty around the globe, and to fund an ecologically and socially responsible reorientation of the world economy. We urge the governments of this world to take immediate action to redirect their financial resources to programs that foster life rather than death. We encourage the churches to adopt common strategies toward transforming economies. The churches must address more effectively irresponsible concentration of power and wealth as well as the disease of corruption. Steps toward just and sustainable economies include

more effective rules for the financial market, the introduction of taxes on financial transactions and just trade relationships.

### **Peace among the peoples**

History, especially in the witness of the historic peace churches, reminds us of the fact that violence is contrary to the will of God and can never resolve conflicts. It is for this reason that we are moving beyond the doctrine of just war towards a commitment to Just Peace. It requires moving from exclusive concepts of national security to safety for all. This includes a day-to-day responsibility to prevent, that is, to avoid violence at its root. Many practical aspects of the concept of Just Peace require discussion, discernment and elaboration. We continue to struggle with how innocent people can be protected from injustice, war and violence. In this light, we struggle with the concept of the “responsibility to protect” and its possible misuse. We urgently request that the WCC and related bodies further clarify their positions regarding this policy.

We advocate total nuclear disarmament and control of the proliferation of small arms.

We as churches are in a position to teach nonviolence to the powerful, if only we dare. For we are followers of one who came as a helpless infant, died on the Cross, told us to lay aside our swords, taught us to love our enemies and was resurrected from the dead.

In our journey towards Just Peace, a new international agenda is of the utmost urgency because of the scope of dangers surrounding us. We call on the ecumenical movement as a whole, and particularly those planning the WCC Assembly of 2013 in Busan, Korea, with the theme “God of life, lead us to justice and peace,” to make Just Peace, in all its dimensions, a key priority. Resources such as *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace* (ECJP) and the *Just Peace Companion* can support this journey to Busan.

All thanks and praise to you, O Triune God: Glory to you, and peace to your people on earth. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.



# Christian Understanding of War in an Age of Terror(ism)

A VISION AND STUDY PAPER FROM THE 2010 CENTENNIAL ECUMENICAL  
GATHERING AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL  
OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE USA  
AND CHURCH WORLD SERVICE, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

An Ecumenical Study Guide is available, by Jordan Blevins, et al, prepared by the Church of the Brethren and can be found at:  
<http://www.brethren.org/peace/ncc/christian-understanding-of.pdf>

*“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.”* Colossians 3:15<sup>1</sup>

## I. Introduction

### A Painful Wound in the Body of Christ

Dear Abby:  
My father is a businessman who travels. Each time he returns from one of his trips, His shoes and trousers are covered with blood - but he never forgets to bring me a nice present.  
Should I say something?  
Signed, America<sup>2</sup>

The words of the poet disturb and provoke, yet there is a truth in them that cannot be ignored. And what about the church?

The *central message* of the Church of Jesus Christ is the message of grace and peace (Lk 10:5; 2 Cor 5:19; Eph 2:17; Rom 1:7). Participating in God’s reconciling work is the *central task* of the Church of Jesus Christ (Jn 20:21; Col 1:20; 2 Cor 5:18; Eph 1:9-10, 3:10). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, followers of Jesus are called to love like Jesus, standing with those who are at the margins, loving even enemies, and forgiving. This is a love that precludes violence and killing (Mt 25:52). Even more, *in its very life together*, the church is a fellowship of people who were at one time strangers and aliens but now, through the grace of God, have become

brothers and sisters (Eph 2:19-22, Gal 3:27-28; 1 Pet 2:9-10). The church delivers the message of reconciliation not just by what it says, or even by what it does, but also by what it is. The Church of Jesus Christ is a peace church. This is both a gift and a calling.



Many Christians regularly recall the four marks of the church when they recite the Nicene Creed. The church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Peacemaking would be a fifth mark.<sup>3</sup> Who are we? We are one, holy, catholic, and apostolic fellowship (*koinonia*), knit together as the body of Christ which embodies and carries the peace of Christ into the world.

But there are open and painful wounds in the church in our land. Our Sunday prayers are disconnected from our Monday realities. How do we hear the words “Be not afraid” while living on orange alert? We have said many things, but our position papers and pronouncements carry less and less weight, even among our own members. Every time we fill our gas tank, we are reminded how enmeshed we are in the projection of US military force into villages and homes on the other side of the globe. Parts of the church, often within the same denomination, are marching in very different directions, but rarely, if ever, do we listen and speak

to each other. When Christians attack and kill others, sometimes even brothers and sisters in the faith, the depth of the wound is fully known only to the mind of God.

### **Putting on the Mind of Christ and Being Led by the Spirit**

We take hope, however, that gathered together around the cross of Jesus Christ, we *have* become brothers and sisters and we are made new. He “is our peace, who has made us both one” (Eph 2:14). Our life and witness is rooted in the One who ushered in God’s reign of shalom and who is uniting all things through the power of his saving love. Together we testify that the grace and love of God has power to continue to transform us and our world. Only this power can help us move through our fears which so often immobilize us or keep us entrenched in old ways of thinking and being. Jesus is the One who poured out his life in love for us while we were weak, while we were yet sinners, even as we were God’s enemies (Rom 5:6–10). It is only as we enter more deeply into relationship with Jesus the Christ that we can hope to speak and act faithfully and effectively in a world racked by the horror, pain, and suffering of war. Our peacemaking involves putting on the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5) and being led by the Spirit—apart from this it is impossible.

We confess how deeply enmeshed we are in systems of war. We rejoice at the times and places where God’s grace has broken through and empowered brothers and sisters to offer a word of truth, a deed of courage, and a sign of God’s peace. We pray for an outpouring of God’s Spirit. We appeal to each other to be open to the new thing God wants to do in us and through us. God has been preparing us for such a time as this.

## **II. The Past**

### **War and Christendom**

In assessing our current moment, it is important to trace the long arc of history through significant historic and ethical shifts in the church’s teaching and practice related to warfare. The early church underscored the blessedness of the peace-builders’ calling to love and serve the neighbor—and even the enemy. Church historians remind us that for much of its first three centuries the early church disapproved of war and military participation, because of how it understood the way God was at

work in the world in light of the parables, prophetic teachings, and pastoral ministry of Jesus. Through God’s grace the church was a new community, a reconciled humanity, that in its very life together was a sign of what God intended for all of creation.

In the fourth century CE, Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. This moment has come to represent what was a more gradual but very profound shift. In less than one hundred years the early church went from a persecuted minority to the only legal religion in the Roman Empire. This new marriage with imperial power was a dramatic change in the relationship between church and state, and marked the beginning of the Christendom era. As the church moved from the catacombs to the cathedrals many related significant understandings and practices were profoundly altered, including Christian understandings of war.

A striking example of the shift in Christian ethics is illustrated in the story of St. Martin of Tours. “It is not lawful for me to fight,” he declared when he left the Roman Army in CE 356. St. Martin understood his confession to be in harmony with the teaching and discipline of the pre-imperial church. He told his officers he would be willing to go to the front line, unarmed if necessary, but that, as a soldier of Jesus, he could no longer carry a sword against others. While still a soldier, St. Martin started reclaiming the visible witness of peace-building when he divided his fine military cloak with a knife and gave half of it to a scantily clad and hungry man. Martin later dreamt that the man was in fact Jesus.

Ironically, after his death St. Martin was declared a patron saint of the military and one king even carried Martin’s famous cloak into battle trusting it would bring military victory. This is but one example of how the stories and symbols of early Christian faith were transformed and appropriated into a new piety where church and empire served a common cause.

The new, close relationship of the church and state in Christendom, combined with the threats to the Empire of barbarian invasions, led Christian leaders to ask how they could responsibly join Christian emperors in wars that might protect their interests, vindicate justice, and preserve peace. Evolving Christian attitudes blended with the ideals of war and peace in classical antiquity and in the

Hebrew Bible gradually developed into theories and theologies of “just war.”

The intent of just war theory was never to simply license war but to place careful ethical limits on warfare in service of the eventual goal of peace and justice in society. But the marriage of cross and sword often led to the justification of war as a means of extending the reach and witness of the church, whether one considers the crusades, the Iberian conquistadors in the Americas, or the aspirations of European colonists. In heart-wrenching examples we are witness to new practices and teachings about war which eclipsed the earlier Christian resistance to participation in war. Within Christendom the prophetic longing for peace and mandate to “seek the welfare of the city” (Jer 29:7; see 28:9) and the call of Jesus to “Love your enemies” (Mt 5:44) were reframed as subterranean ethical interests or naive ideals of a simpler time. Christendom used religious principles in order to reinforce structures of power and sanction violence against other human beings. This was a long way indeed from the Jesus story of prophetic dissent and visionary peace-building. In the long arc, Christendom was an immense detour from the church’s self-understanding as a fellowship of the body of Christ, as a lived message of reconciliation and peace to the world.

### **War, Peace, and the Ecumenical Movement**

The last hundred years have likely been the bloodiest in human history. It is not surprising, then, that the modern ecumenical movement was shaped by periods of particularly intense conflict and often sought to bring the gospel of grace and peace to bear in war-ravaged settings.<sup>4</sup> The Life and Work movement, one of the streams that formed the World Council of Churches (WCC), was born amid the debris of World War I. Those four years of carnage were, in effect, a Christian civil war: Protestant Britain, Roman Catholic France, and Orthodox Russia aligned against Protestant Germany, Roman Catholic Austria, and Orthodox Bulgaria—with no mechanism or platform for bringing the churches together for dialogue and possible common witness.

In a similar fashion the Oxford Conference on Church, Community, and State, meeting in 1937, declared: “If war breaks out, then preeminently the church must manifestly be the church, still united as the one Body of Christ, though the nations

wherein it is planted fight each other.”<sup>5</sup> Willem Visser’t Hooft, first general secretary of the WCC, called this “the charter of the ecumenical movement.”<sup>6</sup> In the wake of World War II the WCC’s First Assembly (Amsterdam 1948) declared that “War is contrary to the will of God”<sup>7</sup> and the Second Assembly (Evanston 1954) declared that war is “inherently evil.”<sup>8</sup>

These declarations led some delegates to confess their perplexity about how such visionary statements might be acted on in the real world. They maintained that in this real world of violence and military aggression, nonviolent negotiation and peaceful conflict transformation remained an impossible ideal. While war may be “inherently evil,” it was nonetheless sometimes necessary. Some Christian pacifists likewise agreed that while nonviolence might be the most faithful response to conflict it was hardly a pragmatic political answer to the terrors of the times. Machiavelli’s classic articulation of this position—where the practical needs of the state trump the idealism of the church—continued to shape the framework for many Christians.

But these statements also expressed an important point of convergence among Christians, that we should never identify our wars with God’s purposes. “Crusade” is not an acceptable Christian position and we can never go to war in the name of God. God’s purpose is shalom and all churches and individual Christians are called to be peacemakers. This is an essential mark of Christian discipleship. In the midst of the Cold War, with nuclear weapons aimed at Christians on both sides, newly created ecumenical networks helped the church be the church. The WCC’s New Delhi Assembly (1961) noted that “the entry of the Orthodox Church of Russia into membership of the

World Council is a dramatic confirmation of our faith that God is holding his family together in spite of human sin and complexity, and is a sign of hope for the world.”<sup>9</sup>

As Christians wrestled with their calling to be peacemakers in the real world, another hard-won point of broad ecumenical agreement emerged. In the words of the WCC Central Committee, that “there are some forms of violence in which Christians may not participate and which the churches must condemn.” The committee, in a study published in 1973, listed the following:

“ . . . the conquest of one people by another, the deliberate oppression of one class or race by another, any form of torture, the holding of innocent hostages, and the indiscriminate killing of non-combatants.”<sup>10</sup> This last point is the primary basis for the broad ecumenical denunciation of nuclear weapons. The WCC’s Vancouver Assembly in 1983 declared that “The production and deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity and must be condemned on ethical and theological grounds.”<sup>11</sup> The endless wars, atomic and nuclear blasts, holocausts, genocides, ethnic cleansings, and religious violence of the last hundred years, recent preemptive wars, the immense commitment of resources to procuring weapons of war while half the world’s people live in staggering poverty, have all called into serious question the ideology of military “realism.” In a sobering way, the realistic Jesus speaks directly to us: “all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Mt 26:52). The dreams of justice and lasting peace secured through military force lie in waste in the cemeteries and forgotten graves of broken bodies around the world.

While the last century has been one of the bloodiest, it has also marked the development of nonviolence as a powerful tool for social change. Badshah Khan and Mahatma Gandhi first demonstrated the power of nonviolence on a mass scale. Numerous nonviolent victories over injustice during the past years, from the Southern Freedom Movement in the United States to Solidarity in Poland, have highlighted the power and effectiveness of courageous nonviolence. It is estimated that during this century more than half the world’s population has been involved in nonviolent struggles of liberation, from the Philippines and Korea to Ghana and South Africa, from El Salvador and Guatemala to East Germany and Estonia.<sup>12</sup> Christians and Christian churches have been at the heart of many of these movements. The lived experiences of these movements and the preaching and teaching of their leaders have powerfully shaped the political and theological imagination of Christians around the globe. A new kind of realism is emerging which recognizes the power of nonviolence because it follows the grain of the universe.

The WCC picked up the conversation about nonviolent social change at its Fourth Assembly in Uppsala in August 1968. Dr. Martin Luther King,

Jr., was scheduled to preach at the opening session, but his life had been cut short by an assassin’s bullet four months earlier. One year earlier, to the day, in a speech entitled “Beyond Vietnam—A Time to Break Silence,” he had called his own government “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.”<sup>13</sup>

During the Uppsala assembly the delegates unanimously approved a resolution calling on member churches to hold up the example of Dr. King as a way of deepening their faith, and they initiated a process for studying nonviolent methods of social change. This process led to a five-day consultation on Violence, Nonviolence, and the Struggle for Social Justice in 1972 in Cardiff, Wales, which involved fifty global church representatives and was chaired by James Lawson, Methodist minister and close friend and co-worker of Dr. King.<sup>14</sup>

In 1984 evangelical author and activist Ron Sider gave a powerful challenge to Mennonites to move beyond a passive rejection of violence to an active nonviolent engagement for justice and peace. He challenged pacifist Christians to take the same risks for peace that soldiers take in war. Out of this call was born Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), which now trains and fields teams of nonviolent peacemakers in communities from the West Bank and Iraq to Colombia. CPT and similar groups such as the Friends Peace Team, Peace Brigades International, and the WCC-initiated Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel are gathering experience in nonviolent intervention in war zones.

God is bringing forth a new heaven and a new earth, uniting all things in Christ (Eph 1:10). Throughout Christendom, the church aligned itself with the emperor’s way of uniting all things—peace through superior firepower. Christendom freely told the just war story which claimed violence was the last resort. But a cloud of faithful witnesses reminds us that for followers of Jesus, the cross, and not the sword, is the last resort. It is bold, nonviolent service, confrontation and love empowered by God’s own Holy Spirit that has the power to unite all things and bring forth a kingdom of shalom.

We see these shifts in imagination and practice reflected in many places. The Catholic Church offers one striking example. During Vatican II Dorothy Day, Hildegard Goss-Mayr, and numerous others prayed and wrestled with bishops and



cardinals to have the path of nonviolence and conscientious objection acknowledged as a faithful possibility, if still only a minority voice at the margins. In 1993 when the US Conference of Catholic Bishops revisited their pastoral letter on nuclear weapons, they stated that “The Christian tradition possesses two ways to address conflict: nonviolence and just war. They both share the common goal: to diminish violence in this world.”<sup>15</sup> The bishops wrote that the nonviolent revolutions in places as diverse as the Philippines and Eastern Europe “challenge us to find ways to take into full account the power of organized, active nonviolence.” Pope John Paul II spoke repeatedly about nonviolence as the path of Christian discipleship, with the use of violence being permissible only in certain extreme exceptions. Early in his papacy, while visiting Ireland he declared: “To all who are listening I say: Do not believe in violence; do not support violence. It is not the Christian way. It is not the way of the Catholic Church. Believe in peace and forgiveness and love; for they are of Christ.”<sup>16</sup> In a 2008 homily, Pope Benedict XVI said that “Loving the enemy is the nucleus of the ‘Christian revolution.’”<sup>17</sup> A 2008 joint Mennonite and Catholic Contribution to the World Council of Churches’ Decade to Overcome Violence initiative states that “We affirm Jesus’ teaching and example on non-violence as normative for Christians.”<sup>18</sup>

Ecumenical dialogue during the last hundred years and reflection together on experiences during that time have led to remarkable points of convergence in Christian understanding of war. Exceptions, questions, and differences persist, but the possibilities of Jesus’ nonviolent way of righting wrong are being explored, practiced, and promoted in unprecedented fashion.

### **III. Our Present Moment**

#### **The End of Christendom**

Though Christians are a large and active majority in the United States, we increasingly recognize that we live in a pluralistic society. The Christian church no longer wields the kind of power and authority it once did within the broader culture and the political arena. Christianity is less “in charge.” “Post-Christendom” is one apt name for this change.

At deeper levels, many in the church are becoming

aware of the ways the intimate alliance between the church and political power has been detrimental to the church’s life and witness. Too often, the church has accepted a role as chaplain to our culture, concentrating on “spiritual” matters, while blessing the government and corporations as they shape public life. This has become more problematic as our nation bases its security on nuclear weapons, and guards unjust global economic relations with hundreds of military bases worldwide. US military spending is more than 40% of the world total—equal to the next sixteen countries combined. What future do we see for the cozy relationship between American Christians and the American imperial project?

This in no way means that Christians should be less engaged in the public sphere. In his earthly ministry, Jesus healed, taught, drove out demons, and challenged the powers—all without “taking over,” legislating, or governing. Even after his resurrection, the Roman empire continued to rule. That we are today in a post-Christendom world does not mean that we should withdraw; it means that we will be active in different ways.

Some may see the end of Christendom as a disaster. Others view it as an opportunity for the church in the US, noting that, in some sense, “post-Christendom” may have some similarities to the “pre-Constantinianism” of the early church. Still, within the church we are trapped in a Christendom mindset. We often believe that real change comes by moving the levers of power. We are convinced that the real actors meet in Washington, DC, or on Wall Street. It strains our faith to believe that God’s transforming power breaks in dramatically where Christians gather together at the foot of the cross and allow their lives to be shaped by the Holy Spirit. We have a hard time imagining that ordinary Christians simply following Jesus might be effective in transforming our world.

Moving into a “post-Christendom” context will bring uncertainties and anxieties, and require significant re-thinking and reorientation for the church to be able to navigate the challenges and opportunities of these new realities.

#### **An Age of Terror**

Since the awful events of September 11, 2001, many in the United States have come to think of our time as an age of terrorism. Thousands of fellow citizens



were killed at their workplaces in several US cities in a matter of minutes. We struggled as a nation to make sense of these events. In a short time, our national shock and grief was transformed into fear and anger.

The root of the word “terror” is “to frighten.” In part, we are describing the spread of fear when we refer to our time as an age of terror. What happens to us when we are frightened? The physiological reactions of humans when they are frightened are pretty well understood—specialized organs in our bodies release chemicals into our bloodstream that change the functioning of our brains, our intestines, other organs and muscles. In a few situations, these changes may have survival value. The fear response often includes a drastic narrowing of focus, so that our brains ignore nearly everything except that which we perceive as a threat. Sometimes fear may cause us to freeze. The effect of fear is often not helpful in terms of creative thought or careful decision-making. Groups of people rarely act out their best intentions when they are frightened. How much more if the threat is vague—and with no discernible end in sight?

We are not alone in experiencing terror. The events of 9/11 can link us to the experiences of earlier generations of African-Americans who watched family members be lynched, or Native Americans whose people were slaughtered. In the wars fought around the globe, terror is often a central feature. The silence between bombings, a period of protracted anxiety and dread, is often the most terrifying time. Many attempts to define terrorism hinge on the targeting of civilians: Perhaps the constant increase in the proportion of civilians among the casualties of war in the last century must be described as the increasing terrorism of war in general. If terrorism is an aspect of all warfare, it is an inescapable consequence of living in a highly-armed world.

“War on terror” is a strange and confusing term. If terror is an emotion, how can you combat it with cruise missiles and smart bombs? A “war on terror” involves an undeclared conflict with no clear beginning, without demarcated boundaries, against multiple (often invisible) adversaries. Without an address to appeal for a truce, with no enemy leader able to sign an armistice or surrender, the path to peace is difficult to discern. In this war, we soon encounter the limits of violence. It appears at times that the more casualties we inflict, the more enemies

we have. In our own land, fear appears to be the sharpest implement in the “war on terror.” A permanent state of fear mobilizes the populace and numbs the spirit.

Yet each week Christians gather and hear the words “Peace be with you” and the biblical refrain “Be not afraid.” In this context the church is challenged to nurture communities of hope whose members are saved from an immobilizing fear so we can be open to receive God’s gifts of creative imagination and hope.

### **Just Peacemaking**

While just war theory has at times been used unjustly to promote and defend too many wars, Christian pacifism has likewise sometimes been an excuse to retreat from public responsibility into sectarian reservations of spiritual life which betray the biblical mandate to seek the peace of the city. Just war theologians and Christian pacifists alike agree that to love our neighbor means we have some responsibility for our neighbor’s welfare and well being. We want to serve the public good but the old debates between just war and pacifism no longer seem to capture Christian imaginations that are most alive and awake.

For many Christian ethicists and practitioners, just peacemaking is pointing the way forward.<sup>19</sup> It has examined and linked the various constructive initiatives necessary to prevent war and to create a just and enduring peace. This framework identifies ten key practices that help individuals and groups fan the flames of peace. Just peacemaking is the product of numerous scholars from a range of faith traditions who have collaborated over an extended period to specify the practical steps and develop the undergirding principles of this critical approach. A broad spectrum of the Christian church is ready to work together in initiatives of active peacemaking, from conflict mediation and nonviolent direct action to protecting human rights and supporting economic development. This approach challenges pacifists to be peacemakers and just war theorists to explore the resorts that should be tried before turning to the last resort.

### **IV. The Future**

As we look to the future, we again call to mind that we are one, holy, catholic, apostolic, and peace-making fellowship (*koinonia*) knit together as the

body of Christ. We are gathered together around the cross of Christ, trusting in the Holy Spirit to guide us and strengthen us as we seek to embody and live out the peace of Christ in our world. As we reflect on our experience and listen to the voices of brothers and sisters, we hear God's invitation to consider the following steps into the future together.

### **I. A Christian Reassessment of Faith and Life in a Post-Christendom Context**

The end of the Christendom era brings profound possibilities for the church to reclaim its calling as the body of Christ. But the church and its pastors, elders, theologians, sociologists, missiologists, and other thinkers and dreamers will need to rethink almost every aspect of church life through a post-Christendom lens—including Christian understandings of war. This is a task of vital importance and pressing urgency.

*We envision:*

- The NCC/CWS and other church bodies calling on their member churches to encourage their seminaries, mission agencies, denominational assemblies, synods, publishing houses, and other church-affiliated agencies to host and convene consultations, workshops, and conversations on the Christendom legacy and new opportunities in a post-Christendom era.
- The NCC/CWS and other church bodies gathering and preparing accessible educational resources to help church members reflect on the end of the Christendom era.

### **2. Being the Body of Christ across the Divides on War and Peace**

While there are significant convergences, the church is also deeply divided in its understanding of war. The barrier does not run so much between denominations, nor even between so-called "historic peace churches" and churches that maintain some version of the just war theory. It is striking that in nearly every denomination there is a deep gulf even within the credentialed clergy and staff, which often separates those who minister as military chaplains to soldiers and their families from those who engage in the formal and informal peace and justice ministries of the church. There is a lack of familiarity and sometimes deep mistrust or even hostility between these parts of the church. Rarely

do they meet and even more rarely do they listen to each other and wait together on the leading of the Spirit.

If we are indeed the church together, it is vital that these divided leaders within the church meet regularly and engage earnestly with each other. In prayerful attentiveness, these leaders should study scripture and Jesus' call to peace-building together, discuss the teachings and statements of the church on war, assess the ethics of nuclear weapons as well as particular military strategies, and explore with each other the challenges and opportunities in their ministry settings. This should be understood as an essential aspect of each of these ministries, not an optional distraction. At times participant-observers from the global church or from other traditions can be invited to help the conversation be accountable to the broader church.

*The Spirit beckons:*

- The NCC/CWS to request that each member communion convene at least annual gatherings and conversations between members of its military chaplain corps and church staff working on peace and justice issues, and that they report on their experiences and share them among the member churches.
- The NCC/CWS to periodically convene an ecumenical gathering for military chaplains and staff of member churches who are working on peace and justice issues, to build relationships and wrestle with each other and with the gospel invitation to be agents of God's peace and reconciliation.

### **3. Putting Just War Theory to the Test**

The just war theory sets stringent conditions for when Christians might engage in lethal violence or support the use of such violence by the state. The entire thrust of the just war theory is to limit and restrain the use of violence. As noted above, this framework has been increasingly used to condemn certain forms of violence, most notably the use of nuclear weapons.

In an era of modern warfare, the proven effectiveness of active nonviolence, and a new appreciation in a post-Christendom context for the relevance of Jesus in the social and political arena, many are questioning whether the just war theory is still tenable.

Churches operating within the framework of the just war must engage the required discernment with integrity at the denominational level. Almost no Christian denomination in the US has formal structures or procedures for evaluating a proposed military action as to whether it meets the criteria for a just war, nor for evaluating ongoing military actions as to whether the criteria for just war are being met. Almost no Christian denomination in the US has procedures in place for giving teaching to their members in the military regarding the expectations the church has for them in case the nation pursues an unjust war or unjust military policies.

*For the sake of integrity and credibility we plead that:*

- The NCC/CWS and other church bodies examine previous statements critiquing particular aspects of modern war (such as condemnation of the deployment and use of nuclear weapons) and consider what these statements might ask not just of political decision-makers, but also of church members, including those serving in the military.
- The NCC/CWS request from member churches that subscribe to the just war theory a report of what structures or procedures are used in that communion to evaluate a proposed or ongoing military action or weapons system in light of the just war theory and what the practice is for offering teaching and counsel on these matters to members of the church, including those serving in the military. Follow-up conversations, consultations, and actions could be encouraged.

#### **4. Tending to the Injury of War and Supporting Christian Discernment and Conscience**

Denominations and congregations have theologies pertinent to just war that have promoted men and women placing themselves in harm's way. This statement is not a moral condemnation of these denominations, but it is a clear recognition of both theological, ecclesial, and pastoral responsibility. Thus, these communities must be further attentive to the emotional, spiritual, and physical harm visited upon returning veterans, and thereby offer resources to assist these men and women in their reorientation to the activity of community life.

Men and women serving in the US armed forces who claim allegiance to Jesus Christ and seek to

adhere to just war teaching must also discern whether they can in good conscience participate in a particular war or obey particular orders. However, if they—like their churches—discern that particular wars or weapons systems are immoral, they have no legal means of exercising their conscience. The United States and other countries do not allow for selective conscientious objection.

Christian churches must much more vigorously stand with their members in the military who seek to follow church teaching. Churches should energetically support their members in uniform who face disciplinary measures for refusing to work with certain weapons systems or participate in particular military campaigns. Churches should further appeal to the US government (as the Christian Reformed Church in North America has done) to establish selective conscientious objector status. Without such status Christians may be assigned to work with nuclear weapons or be pressed to perform other duties that violate their conscience.

Until selective conscientious objector status is established churches may feel compelled to counsel men and women not to enlist in the military unless they are prepared to disobey military orders and face the consequences. For those who nonetheless enlist, a church will want to provide clear teaching about the grave moral danger of participating in the threatened use of nuclear weapons, or other military actions it deems unjust. Given the immense tension and contradictions of trying to both follow the One who died on the cross for his enemies and being an active participant in the largest military enterprise in world history, some churches may join their voices with the churches of former East Germany and counsel their members to choose conscientious objection as “the clearer witness” of God’s call to peacemaking.<sup>20</sup>

*We urge:*

- The NCC Justice and Advocacy Commission to solicit information from member churches and fraternal church bodies about programs to assist soldiers in finding healing from the horror of war, and to explore further specific ecumenical ministries that tend to the emotional, spiritual, and physical healing for returning soldiers.
- The NCC/CWS and member churches to give special attention to the struggles of soldiers wrestling with conscience and support them by

sharing their stories, holding them in prayer, and standing with them if they face disciplinary action.

- The NCC/CWS in partnership with member churches and fraternal bodies to make selective conscientious objection a priority for education and advocacy during the next five years followed by a consultation to evaluate and discern next steps for supporting men and women in the armed forces struggling with issues of conscience as they seek to follow the Prince of Peace.

### 5. An Intensified Christian Commitment to Active Peace-building

Inspired by the development of the numerous large-scale, effective, nonviolent social change movements of the last decades, many churches or church-related groups have initiated training programs in active nonviolence addressing issues of personal conflict as well as communal and national conflicts. Several initiatives are training and fielding dozens of peacemakers in conflict zones.

But compared to the numbers of Christians who are each year extensively trained in war and killing through the military, these efforts can only be described as puny. Compared to the financial contributions American Christians make to war efforts each year through our tax payments, the resources devoted by churches to peacemaking efforts are likewise minuscule.

The moment has come for Christians to dramatically increase their commitment to active peacemaking, particularly to further developing the movement of unarmed Christian soldiers for peace, trained and disciplined to work creatively, sacrificially and courageously in high-conflict situations. Can our churches imagine working together to field an army of one thousand international, trained, disciplined Christian peacemakers who would be engaged in one or more situations of significant, long-term conflict? This would require the commitment of the most gifted and experienced peacemakers and trainers among us, the readiness of many ordinary Christians to take courageous risks,

serious financial and spiritual support of the churches, the prayers of the faithful, and a powerful movement of God's own Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup> But this may be a *kairos* moment. It is as if the whole world has been waiting with eager longing for the sons and daughters of God to be revealed (Rom 8:19).

*We want to embolden:*

- The NCC/CWS to convene a two-day consultation with key leaders, ten from churches that subscribe to the just war theory and ten from pacifist churches or movements, to consider together a dramatically increased commitment to active peacemaking.
- Christians in the just war tradition who have always taught that war must be a last resort will be challenged to engage in serious large-scale testing of nonviolent peacemaking.
- Pacifist Christians who reject violence and claim there are alternatives to war will be challenged to be prepared to make similar sacrifices as soldiers as they engage in active and risky peacemaking.

### Conclusion

The church is the body of Christ, a new humanity reconciled and united in Christ. The mission and witness of the church is to be a peace-building fellowship (*koinonia*) of Christ in the world. Through the centuries and for manifold reasons, this central gift and calling of the church was minimized and manipulated. The wound to the church remains. The church today must reclaim its identity. Theologians and activists—laity and clergy—must forgo ideological answers and seek robust and sustainable models of witness and mission that address today's conflicts in practicable ways. Past centuries provide evidence for a thorough reassessment of the role of the church in a post-Christendom era. That is our moment. Together we are invited anew to explore, practice, and promote Jesus' nonviolent way of righting wrong and establishing justice. If the church reclaims its gift and calling, it will serve as a powerful catalyst for peace and reconciliation in our world.



## Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, scripture references are taken from Bruce Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books: New Revised Standard Version*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); also cited as NRSV. When noted, scripture passages are taken from Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Revised Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); also cited as RSV.
2. The quotation is from the poem "Hard Rain" by Tony Hoagland in *Hard Rain*, (Venice, CA: Hollyridge Press Chapbook Series, 2005). The son of an army doctor, Hoagland was born in Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, and grew up on military bases across the South.
3. This is the conviction that emerged from conversations of the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches reported in *The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking*, edited by Jeffrey Gros and John D. Rempel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).
4. Much of this section is taken from "Being Church Together in a Time of War," an unpublished paper by Michael Kinnamon presented to the Lutheran-Reformed dialogue on May 11, 2002, in St. Louis, MO.
5. *The Church Survey Their Task: The Report of the Conference at Oxford, July 1937 on Church, Community, and State*, edited by J. H. Oldham (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd, 1937), p. 59.
6. W.A. Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs* (London: SCM Press, 1973), p 73.
7. *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, edited by W.A. Visser't Hooft (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 89.
8. *The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1954*, edited by W.A. Visser't Hooft (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers), 1955, p. 132.
9. *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1961*, edited by W.A. Visser't Hooft (London: SCM Press, 1962).
10. "Violence, Nonviolence and the Struggle for Social Justice," WCC Central Committee 1973 in *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* edited by Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997,) p. 217.
11. *Gathered for Life: The Official Report of the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, edited by David Gill (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), p. 137.
12. See Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).
13. The text of the speech may be found at [www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm).
14. See H. Lamar Gible, *Ecumenical Engagement for Peace and Nonviolence: Experiences and Initiatives of the Historic Peace Churches and the Fellowship of Reconciliation* (Elgin, IL: Historic Peace Churches/FOR Consultative Committee, 2006), p. 43.
15. This and the following quotations come from *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/harvest.shtml>, §I.B from the Office of Justice, Peace and Human Development, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
16. John Paul II, "On my knees I beg you to turn away from violence" (homily preached at Killineer, near Drogheda, Ireland, October 29, 1979) and published in the *Irish Times* online, <http://www.irishtimes.com/focus/papaldeath/drogheda.htm>.
17. Benedict XVI, on Nonviolence, Angelus Address, February 18, 2007, Catholic Peace fellowship website, [www.catholicpeacefellowship.org/nextpage.asp?m=2308](http://www.catholicpeacefellowship.org/nextpage.asp?m=2308).
18. A Mennonite and Catholic Contribution to the World Council of Churches' *Decade to Overcome Violence*, §III (3), <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources/documents/declarations-on-justpeace/contributions/from-confessional-bodies-councils/a-mennonite-and-catholic-contribution-tothe-wccs-dov.html>.



19. See Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War* (Pilgrim Press, 2008). The ten practices highlighted in just peacemaking theory are: 1) support nonviolent direct action; 2) take independent initiatives to reduce threat; 3) use cooperative conflict resolution; 4) acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustices and seek repentance and forgiveness; 5) advance democracy, human rights, and religious liberty; 6) foster just and sustainable economic development; 7) work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system; 8) strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights; 9) reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade; 10) encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations.
20. One source is the presentation by Michael Haspel, Lecturer for Social Ethics, Theological Faculty, University of Marburg, "Foundations of Protestant Peace Ethics in the German Context," p. 10, in the Report of an Anglo-German Conference held at the Evangelische Sozialakademie Schloss Friedewald.
21. This proposal is developed by Ron Sider in "Courageous Nonviolence," *Christianity Today* (December 19, 2007), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/december/27.44.html>.

# The Presence of Christ in the Church, with special reference to the Eucharist

Fourth Agreed Statement of the Disciples of Christ-Roman  
Catholic International Commission for Dialogue, 2003-2009

## Abbreviations

Previous Agreed Statements of the International  
Commission for Dialogue between Disciples of  
Christ and the Roman Catholic Church:

A&C *Apostolicity and Catholicity*, 1982

CCIC *The Church as Communion in Christ*, 1992

RHF *Receiving and Handing on the Faith*, 2002

Documents of the Second Vatican Council  
(references by paragraph number from the  
English translation in Norman P. Tanner, SJ (ed),  
*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ii, Sheed & Ward,  
London and Georgetown University Press,  
Washington DC 1990, unless otherwise indicated)

SC Sacrosanctum concilium:  
Constitution on the sacred liturgy,  
1963

LG Lumen gentium: Dogmatic  
constitution on the church, 1964

UR Unitatis redintegratio: Decree on  
ecumenism, 1964

PO Presbyterorum ordinis: Decree on  
the ministry and life of priests, 1965

Documents of earlier Councils are also taken  
from Norman Tanner's edition and are referred  
to as 'Tanner' with volume and page number.

References to the Faith and Order Commission's  
Statement, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,

Geneva 1982, are abbreviated, with paragraph  
numbers as appropriate, as follows:

B The Statement on Baptism

E The Statement on the Eucharist

M The Statement on the Ministry

The whole document is referred to  
as BEM

PL *Patrologia Latina*, ed J-P Migne,  
published in Paris from 1844 to  
1865. There is now an on-line  
database of the first edition plus  
indexes published by Chadwick-  
Healey, Cambridge, 1996-2008,  
which enables column references  
to be made to the original.

CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, English  
translation published by Geoffrey  
Chapman, London 1992, definitive  
edn. 1999 (references by paragraph  
number)

CDC *The Church for Disciples of Christ: seeking  
to be truly church today*, A Report and  
Resource by the Commission on  
Theology of the Council on  
Christian Unity, ed Paul A Crow, Jr  
& James O Duke, St Louis MO 1998  
(references by page number)

Biblical references are from the NRSV, except where otherwise noted.

## Introduction

1 This Agreed Statement completes the fourth phase of the international dialogue between Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church, the goal of which is the achievement of full, visible unity between our two communions. Although the ecumenical mood has changed since 1976, when plans for this dialogue were first made, neither Disciples nor Catholics would be satisfied with any lesser goal. The three earlier Agreed Statements considered 'Apostolicity and Catholicity' (*A&C*, 1977–82), 'The Church as Communion in Christ' (*CCIC*, 1983–92), and 'Receiving and Handing on the Faith' (*RHF*, 1993–2002). The theme chosen for the fourth phase was 'The Presence of Christ in the Church, with special reference to the Eucharist'. The earlier Statements continued to inform our work during this phase.

2 We began our work by recalling areas of convergence and agreement—not least on the sacraments and ways in which faith is handed on—that have emerged in the three previous phases of this international dialogue. One shared affirmation is the significance of spiritual ecumenism, of setting all our work within the context of prayer for God's guidance. The Agreed Statement following the dialogue's first phase spoke of the 'evangelical space' found by those who 'are set free as communities and as individuals from seeking to justify our divisions and . . . are moved to seek a shared life in a reconciled community'. When this happens 'new possibilities for genuine exchange and sharing' are discovered (*A&C* §19). To this end, we spent considerable time building relationships and presenting our ecclesiological self-understandings. We are not in full ecclesial communion, and therefore cannot share the eucharist together. Our lack of full communion contradicts the will of Christ and impels us to listen to God's Word and follow God's leading towards overcoming our divisions.

3 Our meetings were held in Bari, Italy in 2004, Indianapolis, USA in 2005, Rome, Italy in 2006, St Louis, USA in 2007 and Vienna, Austria in 2008. Each meeting was set within a context of daily worship, both morning and evening, including Catholic and Disciples celebrations of the Eucharist. As well as the two main theological papers for each meeting, there was a Bible study and opportunity for theological reflection. On each occasion there were opportunities to meet with representatives from the local churches.

4 In this period of dialogue we have discovered significant agreement in faith in relation to common understandings on aspects of our theme, which are now presented in this Statement. The first section of the Statement reiterates the shared commitment of Disciples and Catholics to the unity willed by Christ for his Church. The second section considers the presence of Christ in the world and the Church. We understand both the Word of God and the sacraments as means of the continuing presence of the Risen Christ. The third section specifically addresses the understanding of Christ's presence in the eucharist. The fourth section discusses the priesthood of Christ and his ministers. The Conclusion summarises our arguments briefly and notes areas of further work for our Dialogue.

## I Oneness in Christ in the Church

### I.1 A Shared Commitment to the Unity of the Church

5 Catholics and Disciples both confess the oneness of the Church and recognize it as the gift of God. For Disciples and Catholics, the visible unity of the Church is at the heart of the Gospel. In its second Agreed Statement, the Commission noted that 'Alexander Campbell was convinced that "the union of Christians is essential to the conversion of the world." . . . The Roman Catholic Church too proclaims that it has a specific mission for the unity of the world, and affirms that this unity is signified and given by the eucharistic communion. It too teaches that the restoration of unity among all Christians is linked with the salvation of the world' (*CCIC* §8). The goal of our dialogue is the visible unity of our two communions.

6 The basis for this goal is our unity in Christ. What is the nature of this union between Christ and the Church? Both Disciples and Catholics agree that the Church is communion in Christ. The Church is the covenant people of God, founded by and in Jesus Christ and sustained and empowered by the Holy Spirit Following the Apostle Paul, both Disciples and Catholics speak of the Church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27). The North American Disciples' Commission on Theology, speaking of the divinely constituted nature of the Church, said, 'The church is that community called into being by the Gospel, which is God's covenant of love in Jesus Christ, and given its life through the power of God's Spirit in order to praise and serve the living God'

(CDC 19). In the words of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, “The universal Church appears as “a people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” . . . Christ, the one mediator, set up his holy church here on earth as a visible structure, a community of faith, hope and love; and he sustains it unceasingly and through it he pours out grace and truth on everyone’ (LG, §§4, 8).

7 Without such an understanding of the union of the Church with Christ, the Church would be reduced to a solely human organization and its mission undermined. At Pentecost the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit became the mission of the Church, which is sent to proclaim and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity. The members of the Church following the apostles were sent to bear witness to the truth of Christ, They are empowered by the Holy Spirit to extend and expand the sending of the Son by the Father and the sending of the same Spirit by the Risen Christ into the world of all places and all times. They are washed in the blood of the Lamb, made holy as the bride of Christ. In an earlier phase of our dialogue, the Commission agreed that ‘the Holy Spirit guides the Church, which because of this guidance will not finally fail in its task of proclaiming the Gospel’ (RHF, §2.4).

8 The Church lives from Christ, in Christ, and for Christ. At the same time, we recognize the importance of distinguishing between Jesus Christ and his Church. If we identify Christ with the Church without distinction, we run the risk of failing to recognize the sins of the members of the Church or else blaming these sins on Christ. While Christ is the sinless Incarnate Word of God, his saving mission to human subjects leaves them free and does not prevent them from rejecting his grace. The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* states that ‘While Christ, “holy, blameless, unstained” (Heb 7:26) knew no sin (see 2 Cor 5:21), and came only to expiate the sins of the people (cf Heb 2:17), the Church, containing sinners in its own bosom, is at one and the same time holy and always in need of purification and it pursues unceasingly penance and renewal’ (LG §8).

### **1.2 One Faith, One Baptism, One Body**

9 The first Agreed Statement of the Commission affirmed that Catholics and Disciples share the apostolic faith of the Church in one God, revealed in three persons. This faith has been faithfully

proclaimed from age to age in different times and circumstances (A&C, §§36-37). In the third phase of the Dialogue members discovered that Disciples and Catholics shared more agreement about the first seven ecumenical councils than had previously been recognized (RHF §§3.12-13). That unity of faith is also expressed in the one baptism, which we share, as affirmed in *Apostolicity and Catholicity* (A&C §24).

10 If we share one faith and one baptism, in what sense can we speak of being part of One Body? The first Agreed Statement spoke of Catholics and Disciples as having ‘a communion in via’. ‘The unique unity of the One Church of God is the goal. We are already on the way; we have taken the first step in faith through baptism which is also the call to that final unity’ (A&C §57). This reflects the recognition, expressed in the *Decree on Ecumenism*, that ‘those who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church’ (UR §3); it also corresponds to the less-formally-stated Disciples conviction that persons baptized in other churches (whether as infants or at a later age) are sisters and brothers in Christ, in no need of ‘rebaptism’ by immersion.

11 The fact remains that our communion at present is imperfect. We need to explore further the implications of the kind of communion with the Catholic Church, although it is imperfect, which is enjoyed by those who belong to separated communities. While there is an apparent lack of agreement on substantial questions of faith, we need to identify and explore these questions more precisely than we have done so far. Thus we have appreciated with new force two related questions, which we pose to each other. Catholics ask Disciples in what ways they understand themselves to be catholic and apostolic. Disciples ask Catholics what space there is for Disciples within the Catholic understanding of the catholicity and apostolicity of the Church. In *Apostolicity and Catholicity* the Commission spoke of ‘a quality of evangelical life marked by the will to be faithful to Christ and open to one another . . . This *metanoia* thus provides what might be called an “evangelical space” . . . in which we find God’s grace newly available to bind us together in praising, blessing, beseeching the God who makes us one’ (A&C §19). Further reflection upon this may offer some clues to enable us to answer the questions posed above.

12 *Apostolicity and Catholicity* described our task as to give external expression to the communion on the way (A&C §57). Ecumenical dialogue should discover and publicly acknowledge the unity we already share, and then ‘put this unity to work’ through various kinds of encounter and joint action. With this in mind, we give thanks for the way Disciples and Catholics in numerous local settings have begun to pray for and with one another, to engage in common witness, to act together on behalf of persons marginalized by society, and to participate in each other’s community life. These are important signs of hospitality, ‘making room’ for one another as those who are commonly incorporated into the body of Christ. We hope that our communities will be able to take advantage of the many signs of *koinonia* already officially permitted; and we recommend that information about such activities be widely disseminated in our congregations and parishes, and that they be encouraged to express our communion *in via* in ways appropriate to their local settings.

### 1.3 Summary

13 Disciples and Catholics therefore discover promising agreement in their understanding of the implications of their belief in the unity of the Church in Christ. This understanding of the Church as communion (explored particularly in the second Agreed Statement) obliges us to regard the Church’s existence as part of the revealed will of God and not a matter of human construction. Equally it underlines the seriousness of our separation from anyone who shares the common apostolic faith in the triune God.

## 2 The Risen Christ and the Living Word: Word and Sacrament in the Church

14 Unity in Christ is more than identification with a group of people who have a continuous historical existence and look to a common founder. The significance of the resurrection of Christ is that he is dynamically present in both Church and world. The final promise of Christ—‘I am with you always’ (Mt 28:20)—has been a personal source of guidance for Christians through the ages; it has also been the basis of a wider belief in the presence of Christ in the world and of a specific belief in the presence of Christ in the Church. For example, we agreed that in the mission of the Church Christ is

present in prayer, in the reading of the Bible, in the liturgy, in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, in the preached Word, in the care of the poor and the sick, and in self-sacrificing love.

### 2.1 The Presence of the Risen Christ in the World

15 The world itself is God’s creation and, although it has been marred by the sinfulness of humanity, God’s purpose for it will not be finally frustrated. Catholics and Disciples believe that Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, was sent into the world by God to reveal God’s redemptive will and that by his death and resurrection this redemption was achieved. No longer confined to a particular place and time, the risen Christ is present in the world God created. In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus identifies himself with those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, strangers or in prison (Mt. 25:40). Christians through the ages have been inspired by the thought, not only that Christ sends them into the world with the promise of his continuing presence, but also that he is already there waiting to be recognised in the world. There is a long tradition in the Church that those who are not professed Christians may do God’s will. In his ministry Christ emphasised that ‘whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother’ (Mk 3:35). Many aspects of public life in the modern world reflect the attempt to embody Christian values, and Christians are able to join with non-Christians in urging political action on questions such as the relief of poverty, hunger and disease. Christians believe that Christ is mysteriously present in the world in a hidden way, and that he sends his Holy Spirit to be the agent in the righting of wrongs and the remedying of injustice, as well as in the healing of the nations. One day Christ will return in glory; we do not know the time but live waiting and praying.

### 2.2 The Presence of the Risen Christ in the Church

16 Both Disciples and Catholics also speak of the *gift* of Christ’s presence, experienced in the Church. Christ promised that he would be present wherever two or three gather in his name (Mt. 18:20); he constantly urged his disciples to pray, just as he prayed himself (Mk 6:46, Lk 9:28, Jn 14: 13–16, Jn 17, Heb 5:7). The apostles likewise urged their churches to pray (Eph 6:18, 1 Thess 5:13, 1 Pet 4:7, 1 Jn 3:21–22). When the churches gathered together they were urged to ‘offer spiritual sacrifices



acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Pet 2:5b) and to live lives of holiness.

17 Both Disciples and Catholics recognize those whose lives stand out as revealing the holiness willed by God—a response to the gift of Christ, which manifests itself in the fruits of the Spirit and compassionate living. The holiness of the Church is the gift of God. The Son of God has given himself for her to sanctify her and make a source of sanctification (Jn 17:19, 1 Cor 3:17, Eph 5:25b-27). The holiness of the Church is a perpetual resource for her members who recognise their need of conversion and sanctification. But we both also insist that spiritual life involves a constant struggle and a humility that resists any claims to our own 'achievement' of holiness. The focus is always on the work God has done and is doing in us. Beyond that, spiritual growth is always linked to concern for the other—an insight reinforced by the supreme example of God's self-giving love for the other seen in the Incarnation and the Cross. In thinking about these matters, we acknowledged a shared treasury of spiritual teachers and persons whose writings and lived witness we look to for inspiration, persons in whom we 'see' Christ.

18 Because divisions among Christians contradict the holiness to which the Christian community is called, Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their bad behaviour at the Lord's Table. Indeed he told them that the consequence of these divisions was that they were unable to discern the Lord's body (1 Cor 11:17-34), thereby illustrating the link between Christian living and the sacraments of the Church. The Pauline emphasis was not unique. In John's Gospel the identification of Christ with the Word who 'was in the beginning with God' (Jn 1:2), the 'spring of water gushing up to eternal life' (Jn 4:14) and 'the living bread that came down from heaven' (Jn 6:51) enables us to understand the ways in which Word and sacrament are integrally related in the life of the Church.

### 2.3 The Dynamism of God's Word

19 In the Bible the Word of God is active and potent. The Old Testament presents the Word as performative: the Word brings about something. It is the biblical way of expressing God's effective action: 'by the word of the Lord the heavens were made' (Ps 33:6). At the same time, God's Word calls for a response; it must be heard in faith. In the New Testament, the Word of God becomes flesh so that

now in these last days God has spoken to us by the Son (cf Heb 1:2). The Word become flesh is the central mystery of the New Testament: God's hidden purpose now revealed. The Word of God and mystery are two ways of speaking about one reality, Christ, who died and rose again, 'the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints' (Col. 1:25-26). 'When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom' (1 Cor. 2:1).

### 2.4 The Unity of Word and Sacrament

20 In the Pauline letters, the Greek term *mysterion* ('mystery') was sometimes translated into Latin as *sacramentum*. Its primary meaning is not a ritual action but God's saving plan revealed in Christ. Both baptism and eucharist were instituted by Christ as means for incorporating 'those who were being saved' (Acts 2:47) into the Christian community. In early Christian thought Word and sacrament were not understood as two different realities, but as two ways of referring to the same reality. When the word 'sacrament' began to be used to refer as well to ritual signs, the biblical sense was retained, so that these signs were understood to be participations in the great sacrament (mystery) of Christ's saving work, made present in the Church, which is like a sacrament of Christ's action: 'What was visible in our Saviour has passed over into his mysteries (Pope Leo I). These signs are not contrasted with the word; they are, as Augustine explained, the 'visible word'. This understanding deeply marked the Christian tradition from its first centuries.

21 Because of the biblical sense of God's Word, the early Church understood that the words of Jesus spoken in a sacrament were, by divine power, efficacious. Medieval Catholic theologians continued this teaching. Disciples retained the biblical sense of the efficaciousness of the sacraments. Biblical texts were used to show that 'persons are begotten by the Spirit of God, impregnated by the Word, and born of the water'. Belief in the power of baptism to remit sins was a basic belief of the early Disciples movement. The purpose of the sacraments is fully achieved only when they are received in faith. Underlying all sacramental belief is a conviction of the power and readiness of God through the Holy Spirit to respond to the prayers of those who ask in faith.

22 The reading of the Scriptures is another way in which the Word of God is heard in the ecclesial community. Celebrations of baptism and the eucharist in both traditions normally include readings from the Old and New Testaments. In baptism Jesus' command to baptize is repeated and obeyed and there is a prayer that by the use of water the one to be baptized will be cleansed from sin. In the eucharist Jesus' words of institution in relation to the bread and wine (either as recorded in the Gospels or by St Paul) will be invariably repeated.

23 Preaching in sacramental worship is understood as an extension of God's efficacious word, words about the Word Incarnate. Christ is also present through the preached Word. Both Catholics and Disciples emphasize the power of preaching. Disciples and Catholics celebrate the eucharist at least every Sunday, so that proclamation of the Word on Sundays always occurs with the celebration of the sacrament. Our agreement about the power of God's Word proclaimed clarifies the role of the ordained minister as the witness to the Word transmitted through the Church.

24 Because Christ is the living Word, the celebration of word and sacrament is an effective action, not simply a recollection of the past or a reading of written words. Both Disciples and Catholics believe that in the Church Christ himself acts in the sacraments. For Catholics the eucharistic prayer at the centre of the Mass makes this clear. For Disciples the prayers at the Table and the words of institution highlight the centrality of Christ's action. Christ's action in the eucharist is affirmed also in the hymns sung by Disciples before the prayers of thanksgiving for the bread and wine where Christ's sacrifice is pleaded before God. Typically in these hymns the passion is recalled and also represented; the focus is on the present action of the Risen Christ, actively present and awaiting a welcome in faith.

## 2.5 Summary

25 We therefore come to a threefold understanding of the presence of Christ—in the world, in the Church and in the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, each based on the dynamic Word of God. All three are integrally linked. Indeed the sacramental approach to the whole of life is one way of affirming our underlying faith that we live in God's world and that God is continually active in it. With this understanding we

can turn to examine the presence of Christ in the eucharist in particular.

## 3 The Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

### 3.1 The Eucharist: Sacrament of Communion in Christ

26 Disciples and Catholics share the conviction that the eucharist is at the centre of the Church's life, where we are one in the Risen Christ and hear his Word together. The Second Vatican Council teaches that 'through the sacrament of the eucharistic bread there is represented and produced the unity of the faithful, who make up one body in Christ (see I Cor. 10:17) (LG §3). The celebration of the eucharist is 'the chief means through which believers are expressing in their lives and demonstrating to others the mystery which is Christ, and the sort of entity the true Church really is' (SC §2). For Disciples, 'the affirmation that the church today, as in apostolic times, is called to gather at the Lord's Table on the first day of the week has been a prominent and enduring feature of Disciples church life. Indeed, it is a mark of our identity as a church'. Disciples experience the Lord's Supper as 'an act of inexhaustible spiritual richness . . . that [they] share in common with Christians of all times and places'. 'The Lord's Supper means more than the church is ever quite able to say about it' (CDC 139).

27 Both Disciples and Catholics teach that the Church is communion in Christ and is characterized by visible unity, within which we receive the eucharist, the sacrament of the Church's unity. *The Church as Communion in Christ* affirmed:

*This visibility is realized especially in the celebration of the eucharist. There, gathered together and after having confessed their faith, the baptized people receive the body and blood of Christ, the Son of God, who reconciled humanity to God in one body through the cross. There they enter into communion with the saints and members of the whole household of God. Moreover, what is celebrated at the eucharist has to be actualized in a life of common prayer and faith, of faithfulness to the Gospel, of sharing the spiritual and even material goods of the community, and of commitment to the will of God that the saving work of Christ be extended as offer to all (CCIC §48).*

28 Because the Church's visible unity is so central for both Catholics and Disciples, the divisions which keep us from sharing the eucharist together are especially painful. But different ways of understanding the Church and its unity lead us to different practices in offering eucharistic participation. The founders of the Disciples, notably Alexander Campbell and Barton Warren Stone, taught that the communion service demonstrated the oneness of all believers. For Catholics, sharing the eucharist signifies full communion in Christ's body, the Church, which means sharing agreement on the content of faith, the sacraments and ministry of the Church, and structures of authority (see *LG* §14).

### **3.2 The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Real Presence of Christ**

29 Disciples and Catholics regard the sacrament of the eucharist as a privileged, unique place of Christ's presence, where his words are spoken in obedience to his command and are made powerful by the Holy Spirit, making effective for those gathered what Christ first promised to his followers at the Last Supper. Christ's dynamic word brings his presence to those gathered at the eucharist for their forgiveness, healing and transformation. Because Christ has entered the realm of the Spirit after his resurrection, he offers himself now to believers through the Spirit as the bread of heaven, his very self given for the sake of the world so that 'whoever eats me will live because of me' (Jn 6:57). Both Disciples and Catholics know the power of the celebration of the eucharist, which remains for them the central and most important prayer of the Church. It is communion in the body and blood of Christ.

#### **3.2.1 Some Historical Aspects of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist**

30 While both Disciples and Catholics teach a lively faith in the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, they have inherited a set of historical controversies about the meaning of this teaching. Their understanding of these controversies shapes their understanding of each other and of each other's teaching concerning Christ's eucharistic presence.

31 For the first millennium of the Church's history the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the eucharist was affirmed without significant dissent. In the patristic period, Christian thinkers

taught that the bread and wine were transformed into Christ's body and blood. The prayer to the Holy Spirit that the bread and wine might become the body and blood of Christ shows how ancient and widespread was this belief. Patristic writers in the early centuries of the Church used a large number of analogies and concepts to explain this change in the elements of bread and wine, but following the lead of Irenaeus they related denial of the change to a denial of the Incarnation. By the fourth century, eucharistic doctrine on the conversion (*conversio*) of the bread and wine was sufficiently developed that Hilary of Poitiers could speak of 'the Word made flesh remaining in us "naturally." He joined the nature of his eternity in the sacrament of his flesh which he allows us to share.' In the fifth century Augustine explained that the eucharist contained the reality that it symbolized.

32 However, the patristic synthesis between the real and the symbolic disappeared towards the end of the first millennium and there followed a period of controversy in the Western Church about the mode of Christ's presence, which lasted for most of the second millennium of Christian history. Already in the ninth century, Paschase Radbert had developed a materialistic view of the change in the bread and wine, as though it were a physical or material change. Two centuries later, Berengar presented a 'symbolic' understanding of the eucharist in which the gifts may be called the body and blood of Christ but in fact remain bread and wine. These positions stimulated controversies and popular misunderstanding in their day, but they also motivated theologians to seek clearer understandings of Christ's presence in the eucharist.

33 To describe the conversion of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, theologians, synods and popes began to use the term 'transubstantiation' and the word entered official teaching for the first time in 1215 when the Fourth Lateran Council used it in defining the eucharist. The meaning of this term 'transubstantiation' was brought to maturity by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Aquinas used transubstantiation both as a means to counter materialist views of the eucharist, and to affirm the change of bread and wine inherited from the patristic period and manifested by the eucharistic prayer to the Holy Spirit. Aquinas used Aristotle's philosophy, which was popular in the universities of his day and hence

had an apologetic value. He argued that in the eucharist the ‘substance’—what it is—of the bread and wine are changed into the body of blood of Christ, leaving only the ‘accidents’—what it appears to be—remaining. Aquinas does not try to explain how this happens. He simply asserts that there is a change, not how it occurs. He emphasizes the uniqueness of this mysterious change: it is not a local or material change, but a supernatural change. Aquinas writes that the body of Christ begins to be present in the elements not in a local way, as though occupying a particular place, but ‘by conversion of the substance of bread into itself (i.e. the body of Christ). Yet this change is not like natural changes, but is entirely supernatural, and effected by God’s power alone . . . The whole substance of the bread is changed into the whole substance of Christ’s body and the whole substance of the wine into the whole substance of Christ’s blood.’ Because Christ is present in his humanity as well as his divinity in the eucharist, Aquinas explains, it must involve his bodiliness though this is the transformed body of the risen Christ that Paul describes as ‘a spiritual body.’ Aquinas gives not a physical but a metaphysical account of what takes place at the conversion of the bread and wine.

34 By the time of the Protestant Reformation, common understandings of the eucharistic presence had again been replaced by a variety of viewpoints. Terms once understood in common now received different interpretations. Just as today ‘substance’ would have a materialist meaning—something we can touch and feel—so in the sixteenth century it was taken to mean ‘materially present’, which was just the opposite of what Aquinas had intended when he used the term ‘transubstantiation’ to oppose materialist misunderstandings. Martin Luther held to the real presence of Christ in the eucharist ‘under the bread and wine’, but repudiated the concept of transubstantiation. In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* John Calvin condemned the use of the term ‘transubstantiation’ on the grounds of its relatively recent date, but he acknowledged that the Fathers (in particular Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose and John of Damascus) did use the term ‘*conversio*’. His particular objection was to William of Ockham, more than to Aquinas, and his primary emphasis was that ‘the truth of this mystery accordingly perishes for us unless the true bread represents the true body of Christ’.

35 While the Reformers discussed Christ’s presence in the eucharist in various ways, the Council of Trent (1545–63) defended the ‘true, real and substantial’ presence of Christ against attempts to understand it ‘as in a sign or figure’ or to combine Christ’s presence with a remaining presence of bread and wine. Trent began by recognizing that ‘though we can hardly express . . . in words’ the mode of Christ’s presence in the eucharist, ‘we can grasp [it] with minds enlightened by faith’. It therefore used the term and concept of ‘transubstantiation’ in order to affirm that the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ, explaining, ‘the holy catholic church has suitably and properly called this change transubstantiation’. While Trent made clear that the term was used ‘most aptly’, its primary intention was to condemn terms or concepts that deny its meaning.

36 Disciples of Christ came into existence in the nineteenth century, toward the end of this second millennium, which had been filled with controversies about Christ’s real presence in the eucharist. They separated from the Presbyterian Churches because Disciples did not believe that the requirement to accept the Secession Testimony as well as the Westminster Confession as a condition of the admission to communion was scriptural (cf RHF §3.16). Furthermore it prevented response to Christ’s invitation to his table. Hence Disciples tended to resist traditions about the eucharist that insisted on precision or detail in explaining Christ’s presence. Disciples have continued to resist attempts to explain the mystery of Christ’s presence in the eucharist too fully, not because they do not believe it, but because they have wished to avoid divisive controversies over a mystery where a variety of understandings has coexisted in the history of the Church.

37 The nineteenth century was a period when religious beliefs were defined as much in terms of denials as affirmations. For example, although Disciples always saw the Lord’s Supper as being more than a recollection of the Last Supper, they criticized the use of the term ‘transubstantiation’ as involving an unnecessarily metaphysical explanation. Moreover, the earliest Disciples were reared in the philosophical atmosphere of Scottish common sense realism in which what Aquinas described as ‘accidents’ were understood to constitute the real, and what he described as ‘substance’ was seen as an



unnecessary abstraction. In this different philosophical framework, then, transubstantiation was taken to mean almost the opposite of what Aquinas had intended. And the use of Aristotle's philosophical base by Aquinas—an effective apologetic tool in thirteenth-century Europe—no longer made sense within the different philosophical framework in nineteenth-century Britain and North America.

### 3.2.2 Contemporary Catholic and Disciples Teaching on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

38 The ecumenical era has offered the opportunity for greater mutual understanding of different approaches to the question of Christ's real presence in the eucharist. Nevertheless, we also recognize that we are referring to a great mystery of our faith, a mystery not in the sense that it is unknown but that there is an inexhaustible depth in its meaning.

39 Our Bible studies helped us to discover the many ways that the presence of God is expressed in the Bible and to relate this to the presence of Christ in the eucharist. In the divine name in Exodus 3:14 the dynamic and creative presence of God in the world and in history is revealed, and this divine presence is also shown to be salvific in the theophanies of the Old Testament. The temple showed a kind of 'dwelling' for God in the midst of the people, which connoted a dynamic presence. This tradition is continued in the New Testament when it teaches that 'the fullness of God dwells' in Jesus Christ (Col. 1:19), and that the Risen Lord continues to dwell in the world in a continuous and new way after the resurrection. The body of the Incarnate Son, now transferred into the realm of the Spirit, still comes to us in the eucharist and transmits divine life. In the Gospel of John, Jesus reveals himself as the bread of life, come down from heaven for the sake of the world.

40 Contemporary Catholic teaching broadened its focus when, in discussing the principles of liturgical renewal, it emphasized the many ways that Christ is present in the Church's liturgical celebrations. Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* teaches that Christ 'is present through the sacrifice which is the mass, at once in the person of the minister—"the same one who then offered himself on a cross is now making his offering through the agency of priests"—and also, most fully, under the eucharistic elements. He is present through his power in the sacraments;

thus, when anyone baptizes, Christ himself is baptizing. He is present through his word, in that he himself is speaking when scripture is read in church. Finally, he is present when the church is praying or singing hymns, he himself who promised, "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Mt 18:20)' (SC §7).

41 The meaning of the term 'transubstantiation' continues to be normative for Catholic teaching today. In using this term, the Council of Trent intended to defend the mystery of Christ's real presence in the eucharist, which it did by opposing two extreme positions. On the one hand, Trent condemned positions in which Christ is present 'as in a sign or figure', or present along with the bread and wine, which remain. On the other hand, the Council of Trent taught the mystery of Christ's presence by counteracting materialistic interpretations of it. This meaning intended by Trent is highlighted when Catholics teach that the bread and wine become the body and blood of the risen, glorified Lord.

42 In the nineteenth century, early Disciples did not use the language of 'transubstantiation' to describe their belief in Christ's real presence in the eucharist, and today they still find the conceptual framework from which it emerged unfamiliar and therefore would not readily use the term. Nevertheless later twentieth-century work on Aristotle's understanding of the term 'substance' and its use in Aquinas and other scholars of that period has exposed the way in which this terminology has been misunderstood in the past. Furthermore Disciples readily acknowledge that the ultimate significance of the bread and wine in the eucharist is not to be explained by their physical characteristics alone. Thus they affirm the mystery of Christ's presence in the eucharist, which makes receiving the bread and wine a true communion in his body and blood.

43 Disciples also have characteristic ways of describing the presence of Christ at the eucharist. They affirm that Christ is the host at the eucharistic feast, and that his presence is experienced in the communion of the faithful. They also affirm that by the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become for us, through faith, the Body and Blood of Christ. Disciples gladly make their own the words of the statement in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* to confess 'Christ's real, living and active presence in



the eucharist' which is 'unique' and 'does not depend on the faith of the individual.' (E §13). In the celebration of the eucharist, 'the Spirit makes the crucified and risen Christ really present to us in the eucharistic meal' (E §14) so that it becomes a 'foretaste' of the 'final renewal of creation' (E §22). Disciples find that their characteristic ways of speaking of Christ's real presence in the eucharist have been enriched by the ecumenical dialogue and they welcome this expansion of their perspectives.

44 The presence of Christ in the eucharist now awaits a welcome by the believer's reception of communion: it should not be considered in isolation from this purpose. Catholics continue the practice of the early Church in reserving communion from the eucharistic celebration for those absent from the celebration due to illness. This remains the primary purpose of reservation of the consecrated elements, but in the Western Church this reservation also led to the adoration of Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. Prayer in front of the reserved sacrament, processions and devotions surrounding the reserved sacrament, and communion taken to the sick continue to be lively aspects of Catholic life today. Catholic liturgical instructions make clear that even adoration of Christ in the reserved sacrament should be understood as an extension of the sacramental action of the eucharistic celebration and that its purpose is sacramental and spiritual communion. Disciples welcome this clarification of a practice, which is unfamiliar to them. The anxiety felt by Disciples concerns any localization of the presence of Christ in the bread and wine, which is detached from the total eucharistic celebration. For themselves Disciples find prayer before the reserved sacrament open to misunderstanding, although they respect the contemplative and communal traditions of prayer to which it has given rise.

### 3.2.3 Summary

45 Disciples and Catholics have used different language to describe the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, and they have emphasized different moments of this mystery. Yet we both affirm the mystery of Christ's real presence in the eucharist, especially in the bread and wine; we both oppose reductionist understandings that see Christ's presence as simply materialist or figurative. We reached some real convergence on this topic through the elimination of mutual misunder-

standings, though we also recognize many remaining differences.

## 3.3 The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Sacrifice of Christ

46 Both Disciples and Catholics believe that the eucharist is the sacrament which makes real in a special way the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and the entire life, ministry and passion that led to the cross. With Paul, we experience the communion cup as a 'sharing in the blood of Christ' (1 Cor 10:16). The eucharistic prayer typically recalls not only the passion of Christ, but the whole story of creation and redemption, and it also looks forward to the consummation of the work of Christ in his coming again. In this way the Church fulfils the Pauline injunction 'to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Cor 11:26).

### 3.3.1 Some Historical Aspects of the Sacrificial Understanding of the Eucharist

47 In the New Testament, Christ's death on the cross is called an offering, made by Christ the high priest, who instead of offering sacrifices daily, instead 'once for all . . . offered himself' for sins (Heb. 7:27). In this 'single sacrifice for sins' (Heb. 10:12) Christ offered his body once for all (Heb. 10:10). The sacrificial understanding of Christ's death is prefigured in the Last Supper, where, according to Paul and the Gospel writers, Jesus linked the bread and the wine to his 'body, given for you', and his 'blood, shed for you'—the 'new covenant in his blood' (Mt. 22: 26-28, Mk.14:22-25, 1 Cor. 11:23-27). In the early Church theologians (e.g. Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus of Rome and many others) continued the tradition of sacrificial interpretations of the eucharist.

48 In medieval Western thought the patristic teaching concerning the sacrificial character of the eucharist was developed to encompass the view that the mass was a work of satisfaction for sin, which could be offered daily on behalf of the living and the dead. The identity of the sacrifice with the work of Christ on the cross was taken for granted, but theologians paid less attention to the nature of that identity than to the mode of Christ's presence in the sacrificial elements. Lay participation in the sacrifice was understood primarily in terms of spiritual identification with Christ in his passion, and devotionally this was expressed in meditation, relating successive stages of the mass to stages of the

passion. The propitiatory character of the sacrifice also encouraged the belief that particular masses could be directed to specific votive intentions: the result was a huge multiplication of celebrations, and the endowment of masses for the benefit of the souls of the donors and their family and friends.

49 Following Martin Luther, the Reformers of the sixteenth century rejected these theological interpretations and the practices that had accompanied them. Viewing the Mass as a sacrifice made it into a 'work' rejected by their theology of God's grace, they argued. They emphasized that the eucharist was not a repetition but a memorial of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, which had been made once-for-all and was sufficient to atone for the sins of all humanity. The Reformers differed among themselves about the meaning they gave to 'memorial'.

50 To counteract the Reformers, the Council of Trent cited teaching from the early centuries of the Church and taught that the Mass is a sacrifice in a true and proper sense and not just 'a bare commemoration'. Trent also said that the Mass is the same sacrifice as that of the cross, though offered in a different, unbloody manner. Though Christ offered himself once-for-all in a bloody way on the cross, Trent teaches, the same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody way in the Mass.

51 Three centuries later, the Disciples of Christ received and made their own, without much debate, the Reformers' rejection of sacrificial interpretations of the eucharist. Disciples emphasized the character of the eucharist as a meal where the sacrifice offered is the praise and thanksgiving of the believers.

### 3.3.2 Contemporary Catholic and Disciples Teaching on the Sacrificial Understanding of the Eucharist

52 Both Disciples and Catholics have benefited from the twentieth century recovery of the biblical understanding of memorial (*anamnesis*), whereby what is remembered is re-presented or re-enacted by the worshipping community. In our discussions, we linked the recovery of memorial (*anamnesis*) to the larger recovery of the dynamism of God's Word. For Catholics, the recovery of biblical language of memorial (*anamnesis*) helps to correct some theological misinterpretations of the teaching of the Council of Trent. While Trent taught that a new oblation of the Cross was not being made at every

eucharistic celebration, some theological interpretations of Trent gave the impression of a new oblation repeated daily during the eucharistic celebration. It was not easy for some Catholic theologians to find a conceptual tool which allowed the radical once-for-all (*ephapax*) oblation to be held together with its perpetual presence in sacramental form. But the biblical concept of memorial provided this tool. For Disciples, the recovery of the biblical meaning of memorial helps to prevent misunderstanding this term as simply mental recall, even though the Reformers themselves avoided this misunderstanding: 'These acts of God in history [in the *anamnesis*] were those which had meaning for eternity, and they were here set forth and actualized in the lives of the worshippers'.

53 Both Catholics and Disciples participated in drafting the statement of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, and we find it particularly helpful in its discussion of memorial (*anamnesis*). It says, 'The eucharist is the sacrament of the unique sacrifice of Christ, who ever lives to make intercession for us' (*E* §8) and its accompanying commentary: 'It is in the light of the significance of the eucharist as intercession that references to the eucharist in Catholic theology as "propitiatory sacrifice" may be understood. The understanding is that there is only one expiation, that of the unique sacrifice of the cross, made actual in the eucharist and presented before the Father in the intercession of Christ and of the Church for all humanity.' The eucharist is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered by the worshippers; and by being joined to Christ they are also drawn into the self-offering which constitutes Christ's sacrifice to the Father. The eucharist hence re-presents to those sharing in it the sacrifice of the cross; and communion in the body and blood of Christ is both based upon and results in a call to discipleship.

54 We have found the perspective of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* helpful to understand sacrificial interpretations of the eucharist. But we also noted that in their response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (which was largely positive), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity did note that the notion of intercession does not seem sufficient for explaining the Catholic sense of the sacrificial nature of the eucharist. The response noted that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice is not repeated, but

since the high priest is the crucified and risen Lord, this sacrifice can be said to be ‘made eternal,’ an idea not fully captured by the simple term ‘intercession.’ The response notes that Catholic faith ‘links the sacrificial aspect of the eucharist to the sacrament of the body and blood [of Christ] more closely than is done in the text.’

55 In our discussions we discovered more convergence than we had earlier recognized on the sacrificial character of the eucharist. Both of our traditions teach that the sacrifice of Christ has occurred once for all and can never be repeated. Yet in the celebration of the eucharist, the Church remembers by re-presenting the sacrifice of Christ in a sacramental way. As long ago as the Edinburgh Faith and Order Conference of 1937 the view of Disciples or Churches of Christ was described in this way: ‘The eucharist has been for them the great churchly service in which the Church as a royal priesthood offers worship, but not of a pattern of her own designing, nor one determined by her own preferences. Rather the priestly Church offers worship through her Great High Priest, who is here set forth in His Holy Redeeming Act as *sacrificium*.’ More recently Disciples have described this remembering (*anamnesis*) as ‘not merely a recollection of something long gone and hence remote from us, but a re-presentation which makes what is past a vivid and lively reality here and now. Jesus Christ himself with all he has accomplished for us and for all creation is present in this *anamnesis*’ (CDC 144). These affirmations, which may suggest more convergence with the Roman Catholic Response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* than the text of *BEM* itself, have striking similarities to the teaching presented by the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which explains that ‘in the sense of Sacred Scripture the memorial is not merely the recollection of the past events but the proclamation of the mighty works by God for men’ (CCC §1363). So ‘when the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ’s Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present’ (CCC §1364). In citing a text from the Council of Trent, the Catechism explains that the eucharist is a sacrifice ‘because it *re-presents* (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its *memorial* and because it *applies* its fruit’ (CCC §1366).

56 Disciples and Catholics agree that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the sacrifice of Christ.

Although the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross cannot be repeated, Christians in the celebration of the eucharist are drawn into the movement of Christ’s self-offering. ‘United with him and with the whole Church on earth and in heaven,’ affirms the Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church, ‘his people gathered at his table present their sacrifice of thanksgiving and renew the offering of themselves.’ Adding nothing to what Jesus has already done, ‘the whole people of God . . . in response to the sacrifice of Christ, offer up our own sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, a giving of ourselves to God who brings good news to sinners’ (CDC 145). In the eucharist the Church unites itself to Christ’s intercession with the Father for all people and for the whole of creation. ‘The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value,’ the *Catechism* explains (CCC §1368).

### 3.3.3 Summary

57 Disciples and Catholics both understand the eucharist as the sacrament which makes present the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. We have been surprised by the amount of convergence that we discovered, even though we recognize that we have different emphases. Now we will examine a distinct but related topic: the different ways that sacrificial language has been applied to the presiders at the eucharist when they have been described in priestly language.

## 4 The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers

### 4.1 Some Historical Aspects of the Priestly Understanding of the Ordained Ministry

58 Just as sacrificial interpretations began to be applied to the eucharist in the early centuries of the Church, there also developed a sacerdotal or priestly interpretation of the one presiding at the eucharist. Such usage does not occur in the New Testament, which calls the Church ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood’ (1 Pet 2:9), but does not use any one word to describe those presiding over the communal eucharist. But as the parallels between the Last Supper and the eucharist were developed, using the language of Hebrews 10:10 and the Old Testament in liturgical and theological imagery

during the patristic period, the presider at the eucharist was seen to stand in a sacramental relation to the sacrificial self-giving of Christ the High Priest and came to be called a 'priest'.

59 By the medieval period in the Western Church, a priestly interpretation dominated the theology and practice of the ordained ministry. The Council of Trent continued this emphasis by making the priestly category central in its doctrinal teaching about ordination. God had always provided for priests, it taught. At the Last Supper, Christ had made the apostles priests and entrusted them with the sacrifice of the eucharist.

60 The Council of Trent emphasized these elements especially to counter those points which the Reformers had denied, in particular the sacrificial interpretation of the eucharist, the priestly understanding of the ordained ministry, and the sacramental character of ordination. While the Reformers emphasized the importance of the ordained ministry for the Church, they underlined the tasks of preaching, teaching, and pastoral care entrusted to the ordained minister. In addition, the Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist reformers in Europe felt themselves forced to choose between continuity in episcopal office and continuity in teaching. In this situation they discontinued or deemphasized the office of the bishop and taught that apostolic succession came primarily through continuity in teaching. They also ceased to refer to the ordained presbyters as 'priests' and spoke of the 'priesthood of the faithful'. Disciples of Christ inherited this Reformation legacy. Although among Disciples an ordained minister or elder is the normal presider at the sacraments of both eucharist and baptism, they have not been in the habit of using the term 'priest', which has a specific application to the eucharist, to describe the one who also baptizes and preaches (*CCIC* §45).

61 The Second Vatican Council repeatedly addressed the question of ordained ministry and its relationship to the whole Church. On the one hand, the Council spoke of the 'common priesthood' of all of the faithful, who 'by virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the eucharist' as well as exercising their priesthood through reception of the sacraments, prayers and thanksgiving, and lives of holiness, self-denial, and charity. On the other hand, the ministerial priesthood of the ordained is described as different from the common priesthood 'in essence and not

simply in degree' because it 'forms and governs the priestly people' and 'brings about the eucharistic sacrifice' (*LG* §10). It exists to foster and nourish the common priesthood of all of the baptized.

62 Furthermore, the Council, following ancient tradition, affirmed the episcopate rather than the presbyterate as the fundamental category for understanding ordained ministry. Rather than seeing the episcopate as conferring simply additional jurisdiction and authority, the Council emphasized the sacramentality of the episcopal ministry and the collegiality of the bishops acting together as successors of the apostles. While the bishop's ministry continues to be understood as a participation in Christ's priesthood, it also confers the offices of teaching and governing (*LG* §21). Finally, the work of preaching is given the eminent place among the functions of the bishop (*LG* §25). Presbyters also, as fellow-workers with the bishops, have 'as their first charge to announce the gospel of God to all' (*PO* §4).

#### **4.2 Contemporary Catholic and Disciples Teaching Concerning the Priestly Understanding of the Ordained Ministry**

63 On some issues related to ordained ministry, our two traditions are in agreement. Both Disciples and Catholics agree, for example, that the measure and norm of all priesthood is Christ's unique priesthood. Christ serves as the mediator between God and human beings, sanctifying us through offering himself as a full, perfect, once-for-all sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. 'Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself' (Heb 7:27). Through his death and resurrection, constituting his unique and abiding high priestly role, he established a new relationship between God and humankind (Jn 17:21).

64 In addition, Disciples and Catholics agree that Christ has made of the baptized a priestly people, bound to Christ and hence to each other as his body. Because they are a priestly people, the baptized are to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving (Heb 13:15, Ps 116:17), to present their bodies 'as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God . . . your spiritual worship' (Rom 12:1).

65 Disciples and Catholics also agree that the ordained ministry is to be seen in the context of the



apostolicity of the Church. In an earlier phase of dialogue, the Commission has discussed and agreed on the relationship between the eucharist and maintaining continuity with the apostolic community. *The Church as Communion in Christ* stated, 'Both Disciples and Catholics share an intention to live and teach in such a way that, when the Lord comes again, the Church may be found witnessing to the faith of the apostles' (CCIC §27). It was also agreed that the Holy Spirit works to link the past with the present and to maintain the Church in the memory of the apostolic faith, making it present and enabling succeeding generations to appropriate the event remembered. 'In the Eucharist especially, the Spirit makes Christ present to the members of the community' (CCIC §28).

66 In addition, the Commission agreed that the Holy Spirit 'gives a variety of gifts or *charisms* which enable the Church as a whole to receive and hand on the Apostolic Tradition. At the heart of these are the gifts appropriate to worship, particularly in the celebration of the Lord's Supper' (CCIC §41). But within the multiplicity of gifts given to the Church, 'there is a particular charism given to the ordained ministry to maintain the community in the memory of the Apostolic Tradition. Both Disciples and Roman Catholics affirm that the Christian ministry exists to actualize, transmit, and interpret with fidelity the Apostolic Tradition which has its origin in the first generation' (CCIC §45).

67 At the same time, while agreeing about the relationship between the ordained ministry and continuity with the apostolic tradition, Disciples and Catholics understand and articulate this relationship differently. Disciples came from Reformation traditions which rejected episcopacy as they knew it in the sixteenth century, although 'Disciples have always recognized that the work of the ministry, shared in the local congregation by ordained ministers and ordained elders, is essential to the being of the Church and is a sign of continuity with the Apostolic Tradition' (CCIC §45). The Commission noted that Catholics believe that the bishop, in collaboration with 'presbyters, deacons, and the whole community in the local church, and in communion with the whole college of bishops throughout the world united with the Bishop of Rome as its head, keeps alive the apostolic faith in the local church so that it may remain faithful to the Gospel' (CCIC §45). Hence, the Commission has agreed that, despite different

ways of structuring the ordained ministry, for both communions the ordained ministers have a unique role in maintaining the whole community in the apostolic tradition. Both traditions affirm that 'the whole Church shares in the priesthood and ministry of Christ' and both 'also affirm that ordained ministers have the specific charism of re-presenting Christ to the Church and that their ministries are expressions of the ministry of Christ to the whole Church' (CCIC §45). This already represents a significant agreement on the apostolic nature of our ordained ministries and on the issue of apostolic succession, although with different understandings and expressions contained within it.

68 On the issue of the representation of Christ by the ordained, Disciples and Catholics both agree and disagree. While they agree that ordained ministers represent Christ, the head of the Church, they disagree first about the nature of this representation of Christ and secondly about the relationship between the ordained ministry and the priesthood of the faithful.

69 First, Disciples and Catholics disagree about the representation of Christ by the ordained. For Catholics, the priesthood of the baptized and the ministerial priesthood are two connected but distinct participations in the priesthood and person of Christ, differing 'in kind and not only degree' (LG §10). On the one hand, all of the faithful are given a participation in the priesthood of Christ through baptism. Christ continues his priesthood through the baptized who consecrate the world to God through their spiritual sacrifices. 'There is no member who does not have a part in the mission of the whole Body' (PO §2). The participation of the baptized in Christ's priesthood finds its consummation in the eucharist. On the other hand, by the intention and command of the Lord, this sacramental life requires the action of apostolic ministers who act in his person and speak in his name. The ministerial priesthood is given in a sacrament distinct from baptism whereby the ordained 'are so configured to Christ the Priest that they can act in the person of Christ the Head' (PO §2). Catholics believe that the ordained ministers exercise this function in a special way at the eucharist. 'There, acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming His mystery, they join the offering of the faithful to the sacrifice of their Head' (LG §28). In presiding at the eucharist, the ordained act in the name of all the baptized and for their sake.



‘Through the ministry of priests, the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is made perfect in union with the sacrifice of Christ, the sole Mediator. Through the hands of the priest and in the name of the whole Church, the Lord’s sacrifice is offered in the Eucharist in an unbloody and sacramental manner until He Himself returns’ (PO §2). Hence those ordained to the ministerial priesthood share in the person and work of Christ, the great high Priest, for the purpose of enabling the priesthood of the baptized.

70 Disciples have not developed such a detailed understanding of the relationship between the ordained ministry and the priesthood of Christ. They understand ordination to be, not a sacrament distinct from baptism, but sacramental in a wider sense. The foundation of the ordained ministry is Jesus Christ, the great high Priest, who is head of the Church ‘which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all’ (Eph 1:22-23). The whole community, commonly referred to by the phrase ‘the priesthood of all believers’, shares in the continuing ministry of Christ as members of his body. Hence in declaring the living Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the ordained call the Church to its own identity in Christ. But Disciples believe that the ordained have a distinctive role in the life and ministry of the Church, revealed especially at the celebration of the eucharist. An ordained minister, as representative of Christ presiding at the Lord’s Table, serves in Christ’s place as host at the Table. The ordained serve in the priestly role by leading the offering of sacrifices of praise and worship. By the action of the Holy Spirit, acting through the eucharistic prayer and the faith of the community, the bread and wine become for our sake the body and blood of Christ.

71 Secondly, because they understand the relationship of the ordained to Christ’s priesthood somewhat differently, Disciples and Catholics differ in the way they see and articulate the relationship of the ordained to the whole Church. On the one hand, they agree that ‘not all the members have the same function’ (Rom 12:4). On the other hand, Catholics describe the participation in Christ’s priesthood of the baptized and the ministerial priesthood as differing in kind and not only in degree, a conception foreign to the Disciples tradition which rather speaks of the ordained calling the whole community to its identity in Christ, or representing Christ to the community. While

Catholics emphasize the difference between lay and ordained, they also teach that the two are interrelated. ‘The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood, though they differ in essence and not only in degree, are nevertheless interrelated,’ Vatican II taught. ‘Each in its own particular way shares in the one priesthood of Christ’ (LG §10). Catholics note that the ordained ministry exists for the sake of the Church and not apart from the Church. In explaining this difference, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that ‘the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians’ (CCC §1547). Disciples find such clarifications helpful. But they also wish to emphasize the value of the gifts given to all of the baptized, and they fear any description of the ordained ministry that seems to undermine those gifts.

#### 4.3 Summary

72 Disciples and Catholics agree the priesthood of Christ is the criterion for all priesthood in the Church. We also agree that the whole people of God is a priestly people ‘called by God for his own’ (1 Pet 2: 9). Where we disagree is on the relationship between the priesthood of the faithful and that of the ordained ministry. In an earlier phase, it was recognized that Disciples carry out the role of *episcopo* (oversight) differently from Catholics, but that for both the ordained ministry has a unique role in keeping alive the memory of what Christ has done and thus maintaining the Church in continuity with the apostolic faith. In this phase, we discovered further agreement about the ordained ministry, but some remaining disagreement. While both Disciples and Catholics agree that the ordained represent Christ the high priest in their ministry, we disagree about the nature of this representation of Christ and whether they have a priesthood distinct in kind from the priesthood of the faithful. These disagreements will need further exploration in a future phase of our dialogue together.

#### 5 Conclusion

73 Because Disciples and Catholics share a commitment to the unity of the Church, we have carefully listened to each other and talked together to discern a way forward in our dialogue. We began with our common conviction that God is present

throughout the world and in the Church, speaking a Word that is dynamic and effective. In Christ, the Word of God became flesh, and through his death and resurrection he moved into a new dimension that enables him to be present to all time and space.

74 We sought in particular to relate the presence of the Risen Christ and God's dynamic Word to our understanding of the eucharist on points where we have disagreed. The active character of God's Word helped us to understand the power of the words of the *anamnesis* in the eucharist, calling to mind all that God has done for us in the work of redemption and proclaiming this in a way that makes these past events effective in the present. This also illuminated the efficacy of the words of the prayer to the Holy Spirit that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Because Christ is risen from the dead, he can offer himself to believers for their nourishment in a unique way in the eucharist, a sign and foretaste of the new creation that will be completed when he comes again in glory. Our common confession on the efficacy of God's Word and the power of Christ's resurrection helped us to reach more convergence on the eucharist than has previously been possible for Catholics and Disciples.

75 We therefore agree on the integral link between the presence of Christ in the world, in the Church, and in the Word and sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Furthermore we agree that the sacramental approach to life affirms our underlying faith that we live in God's world and that God is continually active in it.

76 Through this dialogue we have come to understand both why different views had been taken in the past on the presence of Christ in the eucharist, and also that our perceptions of each other's beliefs had been based on misunderstandings. Both Catholics and Disciples seek to defend the essential mystery of the way in which the bread and wine in the eucharist become the body and blood of Christ. To combat materialist understandings of this change (*conversio*), as well as others, Catholics developed the Aristotelian category of 'substance' to refer to the underlying reality of things. The concept of transubstantiation was therefore essentially a defence against such materialist understandings. However, transubstantiation was itself in turn misunderstood in materialist terms by the Protestant Reformers; and early Disciples thinkers, cradled in Scottish

common sense realism, rejected it as unnecessary or unhelpful metaphysical speculation. Both Catholics and Disciples agree that a materialist account of what happens at the Lord's Table is to be rejected, and both affirm the ultimate impossibility of fathoming this sacramental mystery.

77 Catholics and Disciples agree that the eucharist is the sacrament of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. The eucharist is the new covenant in Christ's blood, sealed by his death on the cross for our redemption. In the eucharist the Church unites itself to Christ's self-offering to the Father for all people and for the whole of creation.

78 Both Catholics and Disciples affirm the sacrificial dimension of the eucharist, and both therefore see it as a priestly celebration. However, Catholics identify the priestly action specifically with the presiding minister, while Disciples understand the whole priestly people of God to be those who celebrate the eucharistic sacrifice. Nevertheless Disciples normally expect the presiding minister to be an ordained minister or elder, and anyone who might preside can only do so after having been identified and called by the congregation for that representative office. There is further work to be done here in clarifying these points, which we have barely begun to address.

79 Nevertheless this is the first time in more than thirty years of our Dialogue when we have engaged in a detailed discussion of the eucharist. This Statement is not an exhaustive account of the presence of Christ in the eucharist. Rather it is a promising beginning—a 'communion in via'. We have identified several areas where further work needs to be done:

- a) it is necessary to explore more deeply our discussion of the presence of Christ in the eucharist (§45) and of the sacrificial understanding of the eucharist (§57), in order to examine how far our differences remain Church-dividing;
- b) it is also necessary to examine the ecclesial implications of this topic, especially the relationship between ordination and priesthood on the one hand, on which our discussion has only just begun (§§69-70) and the relationship between the ordained ministry and the representation of Christ on the other (§§40, 61, 69, 74). We have discussed the

latter before, but the eucharistic context gives it a new priority.

- c) in the background there remains the question of apostolic succession in relation to ordained ministry (§65-67), which again we have touched on before.

As a result we may be able to identify more precisely the substantial matters of faith on which agreement

still needs to be reached for the attainment of full communion (§II).

80 Once again we have discovered that by careful mutual explanation and listening to each other misunderstandings have been overcome. The extent of agreement is significant and offers hope to Disciples and Catholics for our greater unity. We present it as a contribution to the one ecumenical movement.



