

Stone-Campbell Dialogue Launches New Phase

LEXINGTON, KY (November 9, 2009) – Marking a decade of discussion, prayer and fellowship centering on Christian unity, the Stone-Campbell Dialogue agreed at its recent meeting to shift its emphasis to a new phase of cultivating unity through mission and service among the three religious streams that trace their origins back to Barton W. Stone and Thomas and Alexander Campbell.

The 21-person dialogue team met November 1-3 in Lexington, Ky., first on the campus of Midway College, and then on the campus of Lexington Theological Seminary. Among topics discussed were: reporting on the Great Communion Celebration events that had taken place on October 4, 2009; the possibility and potential of common mission/service projects as a focus for our next phase of conversation and engagement; a desired involvement by youth and young adults; and, ways that unity might be nurtured at a “grass roots” level.

The Stone-Campbell Dialogue has been meeting at least annually since November 1999 to foster unity among the three churches. The three teams, representing the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ; the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); and the Churches of Christ, are comprised of seven members each. Discussions of previous years have centered on major themes and issues that contributed to the division of the single Stone Campbell movement into three streams. Those issues include understandings of Biblical authority, missionary agencies, and participation of women in ministry, among others. Team members have also identified and confessed stereotypes that continue to exist and contribute to division.

Six years ago, the dialogue proposed marking the 200th Anniversary of Thomas Campbell’s *Declaration and Address* by encouraging Stone-Campbell churches to hold joint communion services on a common date. In partnership with the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, resources for study and worship were provided on-line, and dozens of churches across the life our nation and around the world participated in the celebration.

To open this year’s meeting, the group attended a Great Communion service at Crestwood Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), with several dialogue members participating.

With the addition of several new members this year, the dialogue devoted a session of its meeting discussing ways to move its work forward:

- At its next meeting on November 7-9, 2010 (at the Emmanuel School of Religion in Johnson City, Tenn.), each team will invite an additional seven people to participate. Teams agreed to invite those individuals who they believe would influence the widening of the discussion at a grass-roots level in promoting understanding and enthusiasm for unity.

- The teams agreed to explore the potential of using existing national gatherings and events (such as National Missionary Convention, the Disciples General Assembly, or the Pepperdine Lectures) as opportunities for hospitality, education, and engagement with the other streams.

The three co-moderators of the national dialogue team (Doug Foster, professor at Abilene Christian University; Bob Rea, professor at Lincoln Christian University; and, Robert Welsh, ecumenical officer for the Disciples of Christ) stated, “We are excited about the direction that this new phase of our dialogue has taken. In moving beyond discussing divisive issues to encouraging projects of local mission as a basis for discovering our oneness in Christ, we sense a growing commitment to engaging a new generation of leadership in the Stone-Campbell tradition in claiming again the core value of Christian unity for our life and witness.”

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