Collection of Documents about Vision, Mission, History, and Programs of the Council on Christian Unity

2017
Introduction to the Council on Christian Unity

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was born in the early nineteenth century out of a search for catholicity and unity. Believing divisions among Christians deny Christ's reconciling love on the cross, Thomas Campbell and his son, Alexander, Barton Warren Stone, and others gave voice to the biblical call for reconciliation and wholeness in the Body of Christ “so that the world may believe.”

From then until now Christian unity has been foremost in the Disciples’ understanding of the church and witness to the kingdom of God. We believe visible unity is centered in the Lord’s Supper, rooted in the scriptures, embraces a diversity of Christian theology and practice, and remains open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Council on Christian Unity (“CCU”) was created as an instrument of the church to keep this ecumenical vision before the Disciples of Christ and the wider ecumenical movement. Its origins came at the 1910 National Convention (now General Assembly) of the Disciples at Topeka, Kansas. The church’s president that year was Peter Ainslie III, the 43-year old minister of Christian Temple, a vital Disciples congregation in Baltimore. In his presidential address, “Our Fellowship and the Task,” Dr. Ainslie spoke candidly to this church about the loss of its original vision of a united church and called it to renew its commitment to the ecumenical life.

Following his address, Ainslie and others called a special session of the Convention to make concrete decisions which would reclaim the Disciples’ original purpose and plea for unity and union. The outcome was the creation of a permanent organization, the Council on Christian Union. Peter Ainslie was elected the first president, an administrative position which he voluntarily filled. In 1913, the name was changed to the Association for the Promotion of Christian Unity; in 1954 it became the Council on Christian Unity.

The purpose of the council, expressed in its constitution by those early ecumenical pioneers, still speaks courageously of a catholicity in mission and methodology: to watch/or every indication of Christian unity and to hasten the time by intercessory prayer, friendly conferences, and the distribution of irenic literature, until we all attain unto the unity of the faith.

In 1911, an ecumenical journal, The Christian Union Quarterly, was launched. Soon dialogues were set up with the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregational and Christian Connection churches (the last two united in 1931 and later became constituent parts of the United Church of Christ). Communications and relations were established with unity movements in South India, Australia, Great Britain, and Europe. Disciples participated in the first multilateral proposal for church union in America in the 20th Century, the Philadelphia Plan (1918-1920), officially known as the American Conference on Church Union, and in
the Faith and Order movement leading to the first World Conference at Lausanne in 1927. The first generation of the Council on Christian Unity was lived out in an effective, prophetic, spiritual presence.

Later generations of CCU leadership courageously and vigorously helped guide the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. and Canada, and Disciples throughout the world, toward their destiny in the one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Its leadership has been uncompromising in the call for the visible unity of the Church as a sign of the unity of humanity. The names of a few can symbolize the larger company. After Peter Ainslie resigned the presidency of the Council in 1925, two generations of administrative leadership were given by H.C. Armstrong and George Walker Buckner, both working only part-time at the Council due to the lack of operational funds. The presidency was resumed in 1960 when George G. Beazley, Jr., became the chief executive officer of the Council and served with distinction until his sudden death in Moscow in 1973. The next year (1974) Paul A. Crow, Jr., succeeded as the president of the Council on Christian Unity and ecumenical officer of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US. and Canada. When Crow retired, as of December 31, 1998, he was succeeded by Robert K. Welsh who once served as an associate ecumenical officer under Paul Crow from 1976 to 1988. Upon Welsh’s retirement after his faithful service over 16 years as the President, the Board of Directors of the CCU called Paul S. Tche as successor and installed Tche as president April 2016.

The Council on Christian Unity has been blessed with a diverse and representative group of leaders who have served on its board of directors. Chairpersons of the board from 1954 when name was changed to Council on Christian unity include Hampton Adams, William Jackson Jarman, Albert Pennybacker, Walter Bingham, Nancy Vaughn Stalcup, C. Roy Stauffer, G. Hugh Wilson, Roy G. Griggs, Sally Paulsell, Jack Sullivan, Jr., Helen Enari, David W. Brown, Andy Mangum, Laura Mann, Paul Tche, Kory Wilcoxson, and Darla Goodrich.

The Council on Christian Unity is a general ministry unit of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. and Canada, working collegially with congregations, regions, institutions of higher education and plenary bodies to encourage their participation in, and contribution to, our church’s efforts in fulfilling Jesus’ prayer in John 17, “that they may all be one ... so that the world might believe.” This work includes:

- **Church unity efforts**, represented in the Churches Uniting in Christ, the ecumenical partnership between Disciples and the United Church of Christ (USA) and relations with united and uniting churches in different parts of the world.

- **Overseeing participation in conciliar ecumenical bodies** such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC), and the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC).

- **International dialogues** with the Roman Catholic Church and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC, formerly, World Alliance of Reformed Churches.)
• **Other dialogues for reconciliation and understanding**, such as the Stone-Campbell Dialogue with members of the Churches of Christ and the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ.

• **Preparation for interfaith dialogue**, providing resources for Disciples as we seek to understand how Christian unity is related to the unity of the whole human community, including persons of other faith traditions.

• **Local and regional ecumenism**, where mission and unity are lived out through the witness of Disciples congregations, areas and regions, as well as a network of state and metropolitan ecumenical bodies.

• **Theological studies**, pressing for a common faith and consensus about the Church. Ecumenical leadership formation and education that engages and prepares each new generation of Disciples ministers, elders, lay people, youth, seminarians and administrators for effective and powerful participation in the different aspects of the ecumenical movement.

• **Interpretation and teaching**, through publications, the Peter Ainslie Lectures on Christian Unity, the Joe A. and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup Lectures on Christian Unity, conferences on unity and mission, and other projects designed to interpret the new directions of the ecumenical movement.

The unity of the Church is the calling of every Christian and every church. The Council on Christian Unity seeks through prayer, people and programs to witness to the reality of the one Church of Christ in each place and in all places and throughout the ages.
Diagram of CCU’s Programs

- Disciples Regional Commissions
- National Worship on Christian Unity
- Disciples in Ecumenical Ministry
- Local and Regional Ecumenical Organizations

International:
- Disciples/Roman Catholic
- Disciples/Reformed
- Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council
- Global Christian Forum

National:
- UCC - Stone-Campbell - Alliance of Baptist
- Christian Churches Together
- Churches Uniting in Christ

Interfaith Engagement:
- Study Resources
- NCC Interreligious Relations Convening Table
- Supporting Local Initiatives

Councils of Churches:
- World Council of Churches
- Canadian Council of Churches
- National Council of Churches of Christ, USA

Publications and Lectureship:
- E-Journal
- Peter Ainslie Lecture on Christian Unity
- Joe A. and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup Lecture on Christian Unity

Ecumenical Formation and Education:
- Commission on Theology
- Congregational Study
- Young Adult Program
- Ecumenical Institute at Bossey
Mapping Christian Unity in the 21st Century

Council on Christian Unity Vision Statement

(Approved by CCU Board, April 2005)

Summary:

Crafting Unity: Our Calling and Journey as Disciples of Christ

- Becoming a multi-Cultural And inclusive church
- Developing a deeper and more dynamic ecumenical spirituality
- Understanding what it means to live in the changing landscape of an interfaith context and interreligious world

Crafting Unity: Our Calling and Journey as Disciples of Christ

In an era marred by mounting disagreements and social disintegrations leading to injustices and incivilities, the world needs the clear witness of Christ toward the unity of the human family.

As Disciples, we find this witness always at its most sublime and radical when we come to the Lord’s Table. With the simplest elements of daily life, it is at the Table that Jesus draws the disparate into one. Diversity of thought and background among the early followers of Jesus was gathered around that first Table. The ministry of Jesus mirrored this as well. He was accessible to all: people from various stations of life or ethnicities, women, the disabled, Romans, Samaritans.

His invitation to the Table displays the openness of God. At the Table, Christ continues the healing and consolidating work of redemption.

It was so in the beginning of the Church, when Christians of diverse backgrounds, understandings and experiences broke bread and drank wine in a spirit of unity crafted by their shared faith and common witness in the world. It has continued to be so even as the world has propounded new concepts and technologies that tend to separate people into splintering fragments of self-interest and points of view.
It must also be confessed that the Table had been a source of pain and division within the Church. The celebration of the Lord’s Supper becomes a sign of our division and disunity as Christians when we cannot all come to the Table together. Our present gathering for Communion is seen to be a witness to our brokenness, and yet, it is also a reminder of and witness to the oneness that God intends for the whole human family.

The future frontiers of ecumenism require us to pursue this work of reconciliation — this ongoing crafting of the spirit of unity — so that we can truly manifest God’s gift of oneness in Christ as a multicultural and inclusive church with a deeper and more dynamic ecumenical spirituality, thriving in the ever-changing landscape of pluralism and interfaith relationships.

The unity we are called to seek will be made known so that more people can come together in love and acceptance in the face of differences; so that times of stark polarities nonetheless do not increase the distance between people; so that the opposing contrasts that divide groups from one another do not prevent meaningful reconciliation; so that the continuing act of resurrection itself is never overshadowed by rising tensions within the growing divisions of society.

In the search for new approaches to this crafting of unity, we return to where we began: to the simple act of the Lord’s Table. Here our differences do not divide. Here our divisions do not define. Here, we are imbued with renewed energy enabling us to bridge discord and disharmony.

As from the very beginning of our faith, our reconciling journey begins, and ends, at the Table.

**FRONTIERS IN OUR JOURNEY:**

1. **Becoming a Multi-cultural and Inclusive Church**

   *It’s About God, Not Us*
   - Celebrations
   - Reflections
     - Food – whole smorgasbord
     - Music
     - Cultures
   - Emotional understanding of everyone’s gifts
   - Ethnic backgrounds – embrace and bring together as one
   - Understanding through language
   - Enriching
   - All welcome to the Table
   - Internationality – work towards it in steps – experience gifts and modeling
It’s Not About Us; it’s All About God!

At Baptism
- Ecumenical and Multi-cultural representatives
- Share waters

Use all resources: where you live,
- Where you work, where you worship,
- Where you play

Encourage multi-cultural and inclusive church at all levels:
- National
- Regional
- Local

God pulls us
- Joy
- Food
- Celebration
- Scriptural and Prayers in Different Languages
- Dance
- Music

MORE GOD!
- Different cultures
- Different countries
- Authentic sharing of our gifts

Jesus prayed, ‘May they all be one.” One, multi-cultural, inclusive church.
‘Father, the hour has come’
It’s time!

2. Developing a Deeper and More Dynamic Ecumenical Spirituality

Imagine a time and a place when and where Christians come together for the sole purpose of living out the oneness that we have in each other, with God, and with Christ.

Imagine a time and a place where people are not afraid to be who they are, where time is taken to share our own stories and to hear each other’s stories, where laughter and tears are received and given as gifts, where conversations go way deeper than talking about the weather or the ball game, or about the latest trends, or about politics, or even about the future of the ecumenical movement.

Imagine a time and place where people feel free to be vulnerable towards each other, where they are not afraid to share the imperfections and pain in their lives, where they are quick to ask others
to pray for them and where they live in the confidence and security that they are constantly being held in prayer not only by each other but by Christ who calls them into oneness with him and with God.

Imagine a time and place where God is seen and heard and celebrated in singing aloud and clapping hands, in banners and balloons and body movement, and in scripture that comes alive as it is read.

Imagine a time and place where God is seen and heard and celebrated in quiet stillness, heads bowed, where silence and simplicity lay claim to frenzy and fragmentation. Where scripture is given time to soak through the skin and into the soul.

Imagine a time and place where neighbors are welcome, where strangers are invited in, where the door is always open, where walls are non-existent, where the table is always set.

Imagine a place where relationships are nurtured and cherished, where people take priority over processes and possessions, and where a spirit of joy runs so deep that it sustains in times of tension and disagreement and sadness and brokenness, a place where scriptures guide and sustain and give hope and challenge.

Imagine a place where people see and recognize and celebrate the Christ in each other and in themselves, where they know that they are so connected with each other and with Christ that when one of them is broken or hurt, all are broken or hurt. A place where reconciliation is a way of life, where self survival is one and the same as serving one another, a place where we become co-creators with God.

Imagine a time and a place people are open to the movement of the Holy Spirit, where they are deeply committed to something much larger than themselves, a commitment to living out the oneness they have been given, even when they know that they will experience the pain and brokenness that comes when they fall short of living out that oneness.

If you have ever experienced or captured even a glimpse of what has just been described, you know from deep within your soul that it is real, that it is of the Holy Spirit, that it is a gift, and you yearn for more. And you wish it for everyone. If you have never experienced it but you hope for it, know that your hope is grounded in the reality of God’s promise, and keep on hoping.

This is the time and place that Christ prays for, that God promises. This is the time and the place that has been given to us and that we are called to live in. The time is now. The place is here. Let’s move it beyond our imaginations and into our lives. Amen
3. Understanding What It Means to Live in the Changing Landscape of an Interfaith Context and Interreligious World

*Our world has changed.* We no longer live in a time of geographic and religious isolationism. We now live in a world where people in big cities and small towns increasingly find themselves surrounded by persons not like themselves. We stand in line at the post office and push our carts at the grocery store alongside people with skin tones ranging from deep beautiful brown, though cinnamon and amber, to pinkish cream. People in denim jeans and Nike shoes brush shoulders with others garbed in Latin ponchos or Mid-eastern turbans, in Chinese silks or Mongolian wools or the colorful floral patterns of Pacific Island dress. The hills and dales of this country from the bay area to the Berkshires and from Chicago to the South are no longer adorned only with the steeples of Christian churches, but are increasingly ornamented with the arches and domes of many temples and synagogues, ashrams and mosques. Our religious landscape is forever changed.

Change can often be scary. As we travel in this new world we know many boundaries will be crossed—boundaries of identity and certainty and tradition. The way we understand the world or interpret the bible or articulate our faith may not remain the same. But we trust God to guide us as we travel and thus see also here in this frontier an amazing opportunity to learn and to grow, to be challenged and to be enriched. In this new world Christian ministers may travel to India and Nepal and have their spirits nurtured by more than the psalms and icons of their tradition. On an early Himalayan morning they may see the sky grow light to the chanting of Buddhist monks and the rhythmic spinning of Tibetan prayer wheels, and reflect with wonder and awe on the tremendous mystery of the divine while sitting cross-legged on the floor. In this new world we see the Christian stories of old studied and retold by Christians who were born and raised in Asian lands and who know in the core of their being that people of other religious persuasions do not have to be "strangers" and "others," but can be parents and brothers and ancestors and friends. And Christ’s message deepens, and a fresh spirit moves, and the gospel comes alive.

Yet in this new world we also find wars and rumors of war. We know ourselves how tempting it can be to retreat into the familiar when confronted with the new. We look out into this new world and we are overwhelmed by the enormity of pain and suffering that exists. We see individuals and families and communities that are broken and bruised. We see ecosystems polluted and species destroyed. We see the fragmentation we experience in our personal lives become manifest in divisive politics and “us-versus-them” mentalities. We are astonished and scared by the many things that seem to separate us from one another, yet we understand. In the face of great violence and destruction we understand how easy it can be to turn to labels and stereotypes that, while misguided, offer the comfort of simple explanations.

In this new world we hunger to find ways to live together in peace. We believe that our best hope of resisting the person-destroying forces of power and violence is to come to know those not like us. Only when we know one another as human beings and neighbors, rather than strangers and
enemies, will we be able to live and work together in peace. On the new interfaith frontier, we must make authentic relationships the waypoints and guideposts of our religious lives. May our desire for peace give us the courage to risk change and to truly and deeply know our neighbors.

So we lace up our boots and strap on our packs and head out into the unknown. We are nervous, but we are well-prepared because we have packed with us all the equipment we will need: the knowledge that God goes with us and has gone well before us, the certainty that all people are children of God, and the faith that Christ can be seen in every human face and heart. We know that there will be many rivers to cross and mountains to climb. But we look forward to the wonderful discoveries that this frontier will surely entail. We anticipate new religious vistas and deeper perspectives. Already on this new frontier our senses have encountered the sweet pungency of incense and the color and taste of saffron and curry. We have seen intricate tapestries, complex sand mandalas, and simple but beautifully woven prayer shawls. On the frontier we have been confronted and moved by the clamor of chanting and the sound of silence. And we know that this new world of ritual and rite and orientation and sense will be something strange and novel to behold. So in freedom and love, we embark on this great, new adventure with God.
From its beginnings in the early nineteenth century, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has had as its central concerns the unity of all Christians. Barton Warren Stone declared “Let Christian unity be our polar star.” Thomas Campbell affirmed, “The Church of Jesus Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.”

The Council on Christian Unity, one of the general units of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), exists with the specific purpose to keep that vision and calling alive. Formed in 1910, the Council on Christian Unity (CCU) has played an increasingly important role in promoting, enabling, and interpreting the movement toward reconciliation and wholeness in the Church and in the human community.

Over the years, the life of the CCU has focused its work in two directions. One is inward, working with Disciples at every manifestation (local, regional, national, and international) to develop their involvement in the search for unity in Christ through programs of education, training, and nurturing for local and regional ecumenical efforts.

The second direction is an outward thrust in which the CCU seeks to bring the concerns, witness, and presence of the Disciples of Christ to the various expressions of the ecumenical movement.

This includes such work as;

- **directing** our church unity conversations—with the United Church of Christ and the nine-church Consultation on Church Union;
- **enabling** the participation of Disciples in the programs and work of the National and World Council of Churches;
- **overseeing** a program of theological study, through the Commission on Theology, on such issues as the nature of the church, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and ministry;
- **interpreting** the vision of Christian unity to congregations and supporting local and regional ecumenical developments; and providing avenues for sharing within the local and regional network the various expressions of unity being lived out in our churches;
- **facilitating** the ecumenical formation of lay people and ordained ministers through ecumenical experiences in the U.S. (e.g., National Workshop on Christian Unity) and overseas (e.g., the WCC’s Ecumenical Institute Bossey).
With these two primary components for our work, the Council on Christian Unity thus serves as a bridge between Disciples and other churches and ecumenical bodies; between the local church and the global church; between theological reflection and ecumenical action; and between the present divisions within the church and the future vision of a reconciled family of God’s people.

The staff of the CCU is small. Our budget is modest, and is financed almost entirely out of the Basic Mission Finance dollar. Our task, however, is monumental as we seek to continue the witness of Disciples to “the polar star of Christian unity.”

The vision will live as Disciples - you and countless others - become Christian Unity Associates, supporting the Council’s work with your gifts, your prayers, and your advocacy.
COUNCIL ON CHRISTIAN UNITY MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Council on Christian Unity is to rekindle, confess, and nurture the visible unity of the Church as a witness to the reconciling nature of the Gospel and to the unity and renewal of humankind and creation. This mission will focus on engaging, educating, and equipping the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to embody the ecumenical vision.

COUNCIL ON CHRISTIAN UNITY GOALS, 1990-1995

Goal 1  
To evaluate the present methods of communication and to develop churchwide strategies and effective methods to interpret the unity of the Church to lay people and ministers.

Goal 2  
To affirm worship, including eucharistic life, as essential to and expressive of the visible unity of the Church.

Goal 3  
To develop a strategy that will provide leaders who will educate, empower, and equip others to be committed to Christian unity.

Goal 4  
To provide models, resources, and leadership that will challenge congregations and regions with an ecumenical vision and experience.

Goal 5  
To develop and implement a comprehensive plan to increase present and future funding of the Council on Christian Unity.