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CouncilOnChristianUnity.org



Sunesis

Disciples Ecumenical and Interfaith Journal



A Publication of the Council on Christian Unity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada



**Council on
Christian Unity**
CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)

Σύνεσις

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October 2017

Issue Number 01

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Editor: Rev. Paul S. Tche, President of the Council on Christian Unity

Sunesis (Σύνεσις) is an occasional publication of the Council on Christian Unity, bringing to the attention of members and friends significant materials on ecumenical and interfaith issues.

The Council on Christian Unity is the office for ecumenical and interreligious affairs for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

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The CCU has published prominent ecumenical journals such as *Midstream* and *Call to Unity* for more than fifty-five years. The very first issue of *Midstream* was published by George G. Beazley, Jr., in 1961. Since then, the council has introduced important ecumenical mile markers and has interpreted the vision of unity to the wider church and other ecumenical partners through these publications.

As a community of faith that was born out of the desire to seek Christian unity among fellow disciples of Christ, we have been asking ourselves and others what it means to pursue unity among Christians. I believe that it is still a very important and relevant question for us as long as we dream together as a community of faith to realize what Jesus prayed for before his impending torture and death, which is “that they may all be one” (John 17:23).

We won’t be able to be one in Christ unless we get to know other communities of faith better, work together with fellow Christians for the sake of the world, and embrace one another as sisters and brothers. So it is critical for us to keep our minds open to every possible opportunity to learn about, work with, and embrace one another.

I can proudly say that the Disciples of Christ community has invited other Christian communities to learn about and work with us, and we have asked other Christian communities to do the same. By taking these “small” steps together, we have created an ecumenical movement!

To continue being a movement and to expand our minds, the CCU has decided to renew our commitment to publishing journals. We cannot publish regularly, but we are planning to do so once or twice a year.

As we renew our commitment, we renamed our journal as *Sunesis*. Dr. M. Eugene Boring said, “I think Σύνεσις (sunesis or synesis) would be an excellent choice for the name of the new journal. Among the fairly narrow range of meanings, ‘insight’ would be appropriate for the journal (Eph. 3:4).”

I pray that *Sunesis* will provide you with new insights regarding not only ecumenism but also our interfaith neighbors. There is joy when we acquire new insights about others, and many times that joy leads us to pursue friendship. I hope that through these friendships and relationships with other ecumenical partners and interfaith friends, we will achieve a better understanding of others, as the word *Sunesis* implies. Then I am certain we will be able to live peacefully together as God’s children and work together to bring peace to this fragmented world.

Sisters and Brothers by Other Mothers

Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ¹²But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. ¹³The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. ¹⁵As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. (John 10:11-16, NKJV)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Greetings to Joe and Nancy Stalcup, who created this lecture series to demonstrate their commitment to Christian unity, Dr. Newell Williams, President of Brite Divinity School, Dr. Joretta Marshall, Dean, Rev. Deborah Morgan Stokes, Pastor of East Dallas Christian Church, and CUIC Colleagues Rev. Robert Welsh and Rev. Paul Tche, who invited me to participate in this lecture today. I also want to

acknowledge my Senior Bishop, the Resident Bishop of the CME Church here in Texas, Bishop Lawrence Reddick and Mrs. Wynde Reddick and my husband, who has traveled to Dallas with me, Rev. Lawrence Jefferson-Snorton.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to share some of my thoughts in the form of this lecture around the current ecumenical work that rests in our hands as the Protestant Church. It has been a privilege to serve during the past year as President of Churches Uniting in Christ, an ecumenical organization whose history spans more than 50 years. I have learned much about and much from the opportunities we have and the challenges we face in the ecumenical movement.

My first exposure to ecumenical world was as a teenager serving on the Youth Council of the Kentucky Council of Churches in my home state. Through that work and through the influence of two great CME Ecumenists—Bishop Nathaniel Linsey

and Bishop Thomas Hoyt, my appreciation of the need for Christians to transcend their own limited denominational definitions of what it means to be a part of the body of Christ was formed. I am grateful to be part of a denomination, The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, who places a high priority on our ecumenical relationships. It is a delight to represent our Church as its Ecumenical Officer.

Today, I have selected a text from John 10, as the basis of my message. I want to give focus to verse 16 *“¹⁶ And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”* For me, this statement attributed to Jesus, as he taught his disciples, is a foundational statement of ecumenism—“other sheep I have which are not of this fold,” “there are others that I claim,” “you are not the only ones.” Jesus reminds us that as the body of Christ, we are all part of a large, vast extended family, that we literally have “sisters and brothers by other mothers.”

The ecumenical movement in America has made considerable process since the emergence of the Campbell and Stone movements in the early 1800s as resistance to the rigid denominationalism of that day. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has been a persistent advocate for Christian unity—in fact the desire for unity of the body of Christ is why the denomination was founded. As your founders and others called for unity, progress was made, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly.

Yet, the work continues because the goal of unity eludes us. Jesus’ words for us to know that there are other sheep continue to compel us to move forward. In doing so, let us attempt to reflect on some basic questions today. Who are we to one another? What should be the nature of our relationship? What are some of the current challenges to Christian unity? What is a way forward?

WHO ARE WE TO ONE ANOTHER?

Family systems imagery and concepts can help us to better grasp what I would consider the gospel call to know that there are other sheep and to embrace one another as “sisters and brothers” in Christ, not just because it sounds good, but because this is a pillar of our identity as the Christian Church. However, it is a concept that we still wrestle with because though we call ourselves “family,” the truth is that we have become so silo-ed and pre-occupied in our own cul-de-sacs of denominational separatism, our ecumenical work often resembles nothing more than a periodic family

“Family systems imagery and concepts can help us to better grasp what I would consider the gospel call to know that there are other sheep and to embrace one another as “sisters and brothers” in Christ”

reunion, where we renew old relationships and meet new relatives, but do nothing more beyond the event to weave these old and new relationships into our daily lives.

In his book “The American Church that Might Have Been,” Dr. Keith Watkins recalls the work of COCU (the Consultation on Church Union). “Throughout the Consultation’s history, most of its churches received members from other churches on the basis of their baptism in the other church, received members from other churches at Holy Communion, and recognized the ordinations that had been performed in the other churches. Even so, these churches tended to live as separated communities of faith, rarely sharing in sacramental relations with one another.”¹ These words convict us today and reveal the incompleteness of our work towards unity.

If the future of the ecumenical movement is to have greater meaning and impact, it will be dependent upon our willingness and commitment to stop just “visiting” with one another, to stop being content with the period “family reunion” and figure out more consistent ways to “live together in community.”

This is particularly necessary at the local level where the witness of the Christian Church is needed to affect the lives of real people with real problems and a real need for the liberating, empowering gospel of Jesus Christ. All of our denominations are also threatened by diminishing congregations, declining memberships and limited resources while the need for spiritual grounding grows exponentially. The future of the ecumenical movement is dependent upon us to accept and live with one another authentically as “sisters and brothers” and not as distant relatives, allowing Jesus, through us, to draw men and women to him.

THE FIRST CHALLENGE—FAMILY ORIGINS

If we are indeed “sisters and brothers”, albeit by “other mothers”, what then should be our relationship to one another? From time to time we hear of a news story about a man who has two different families, each unknown to the other, in different parts of town, or in another city or state. Often, it is because of the man’s death that the two families learn about the other’s existence, with shock, surprise and often anger.

Each “wife” would say “Well, I knew he was gone a lot, but I never imagined he had another family.”

Once while serving as chaplain, I sat with the children of a dying man who had two families. One of the young adult children said to me, “well the biggest surprise in all of this is that I have sisters and brothers by another mother.” His conflicting emotions were evident as he spoke.

Our western culture tends to offer harsh critique of a man like this, citing the deception and lies that must have been involved in maintaining this dual life. Often, it is the children who suffer the most from this judgement, being labeled, “illegitimate” or “bastards” or other uncomplimentary labels. We are hardly tolerant of these models of family that

challenge our neat, monogamous, nuclear family models.

But in the reality of these post-modern times, while not always in the extreme of two separate and unknown-to-one-another families that exist simultaneously, the number of families who fall into the category of blended, remarried or reconstituted continues to rise daily. The reality of having or becoming sisters and brothers by other mothers is quite common. In the therapeutic world, we advocate for and attempt to facilitate the health of such families by encouraging acceptance and inclusion in these new kinds of families.

The church could benefit from a fundamental shift to a healthier, more robust posture of acceptance and inclusion. Through years of ecumenical work, and through organizations like Consultation on Church Union, Churches Uniting in Christ, National Council of Churches, Christian Churches Together

“This dynamic in ecumenism holds the same danger for us. When Jesus reminds us that he has other sheep, he offers no indication as to whether those sheep became “sheep” before or after the ones to whom he was speaking.”

and many others, thankfully we at least know of each other’s existence and realize at some level our kinship.

However, the challenge before us is whether and how far we have moved from tolerance and simple acceptance, to a position of inclusion, not just in doctrinal or organizational ways, but in our core beliefs about who we are as the body of Christ. Have we put so much emphasis on the doctrinal and organizational constructs and failed to absorb a basic truth about our origins.

Family systems theory identifies several types of families. Three primary family types due to origin are: a. the *consanguine* family—those related by blood, b. the *conjugal* family—those who become family by marriage and c. the *affinity* family—those

relationships we form by choice, usually with those with whom we have something in common. I want to suggest that the primary challenge for ecumenism is the need to shift from thinking of ourselves as family by virtue of our *affinity* to one another as Christians. Even our traditional efforts at unity through covenants and bi-lateral agreements are great efforts at marrying one another—becoming *conjugal* families—are not enough. Christian unity is necessary because we are family by virtue of our blood relationship—*consanguine* family.

If we claim to be new creatures in Christ through our baptism and redemption of the suffering and shed blood of Jesus Christ, then we are blood relatives. Sisters and brothers, though by other mothers. Not distant relatives, not cousins, once or twice removed, but sisters and brothers who share a common progenitor, a common ancestor, a common parent, descendants of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps this is what Jesus wanted us to know when he spoke these words in John 10: 16 “And other sheep I have that are not of this fold.” He was saying to the church of then and now, that while we can claim kinship as sisters and brothers in his name in the worshipping communities, churches or denominations where we hold membership, we also have sisters and brothers by other mothers.

ANOTHER CHALLENGE OF THIS REALITY — EQUALITY

While it seems easy to grasp this concept and affirm it without question, it is quite another thing to live as if we fully embrace it. There are several challenges before us, even if we agree that we are sisters and brothers. First, we have the simple problem of birth order. As the oldest sibling in my natural family, I must acknowledge that I often think of myself as more experienced, more informed, more prepared than my younger siblings. I see myself as the “boss of them” because of the privilege of being the first-born. As a member of the first of my father’s three

different families with children, I also see myself as having a special relationship with my father, due if nothing else but longevity. Unless I wrestle with and manage these feelings of entitlement, I am subject to think that my siblings have less to offer than I, are less skilled or equipped than I, or somehow simply inferior to me, just because of when they happened to become part of the family.

This dynamic in ecumenism holds the same danger for us. When Jesus reminds us that he has other sheep, he offers no indication as to whether those sheep became “sheep” before or after the ones to whom he was speaking. There is no paternal “look after your little sister and brother sheep” in his words. Instead there is an implied equality about the “other sheep,” again, I would pose that Jesus is saying you have other “sisters and brothers in my name,” not less than you, but equal to you. This posture of acceptance of our equality with one another at the ecumenical table could liberate us in a way that we can only imagine, if this were to become the way in which we see one another denominationally. The need to subordinate some denominational traditions and elevate others purely based on length of existence (our birth order) or any chronological, numerical or linear modality that implies superiority is contrary to the notion of a God who continues to reveal himself in new ways in every generation and in the present age. Any refusal to accept that my younger siblings have value to add to any family endeavor is a denial of a God who also reveals God’s self differently and uniquely to each one of us.

Everything we bring to the ecumenical table—our history, our traditions, our polity—are of equal value. They emerged out of a divine inspiration and interpretation of God working in the world at a particular time. Our tendencies to evaluate, judge, criticize, reject or dismiss our differences is a denial of God’s diversity. We will be imprisoned by clinging to our sectarianism and denominationalism if our way is viewed as the “right” way or the “only”

way when we have the opportunity to be liberated by God's call to live together in a new reality that we can trust God to inspire and create.

Theologically, we are challenged to see ecumenical work and Christian unity as something we can

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accomplish! We must live in pregnant anticipation of what God could birth next through us and through future generations of the family. In our siloed comfort zones of denominational life, it seems that we would prefer the family stay the same familiar one, when God is calling us to embrace the rich diversity of our own "sisters and brothers by other mothers".

THE OTHER CHALLENGES—LEGITIMACY AND FORGIVENESS

Beyond the concept of being "sisters and brothers," the concept of "other mothers" might help us grasp the additional challenges before us ecumenically in the 21st century post-modern world. If we could more robustly accept the origin of our blood kinship and the equality of all members of the body, there remains one other significant challenge to the ecumenical movement in America. Most ecumenical conversations in the United States that seek to be inclusive on all levels eventually must deal with the dynamics of race and ethnicity and their impact on the evolution of the Christian Church in America. While there are many issues around racial and ethnic diversity, I must focus on the "black/white" issue for a moment.

Without belaboring you with details already known about this racial struggle in our country, permit to simplify the discussion around the ideas of legitimacy and forgiveness. Demographically, we must first buy into the notion that "African-

American" as an ethnic race is a construct unique to America and the slave experience. Further, we must acknowledge that the origin of this new racial identity is the result of the adulterous behavior of European Christians who held slaves (since racially mixed marriages were rare and prohibited). While

there are a few African-Americans whose biological lineage is purely African, many more are of mixed heritage, mainly with Euro-white-Caucasian descendants. The DNA

ancestry analysis company, 23&Me, recently reported that on average, African-Americans in the United States are only 73.2% African.²

A few years ago, I was at the Ancestry Center maintained by the Church of Latter Day Saints in Salt Lake City. I was delighted when after painstaking research of many documents, I found the names of my paternal great-grandparents and their children, including my grandfather, listed on the 1910 US Census. I was shocked when I read in the column labeled "race," that they were listed as "mulatto." While I had heard the stories of my family of origin, which included being related to the white "Snowden" family, it was surreal to see this simple word in print, and digest its meaning for me as a person who identified herself as "African-American."

My point is this, the African-American ethnic race is primarily the result of state-sanctioned sexual violence against and violation of the bodies of black slave women. The results are mulatto children, who were ambivalently embraced and loved by slave mothers, denied by their white biological fathers, and resented by the wives of those fathers. We know that this "system of abuse" was condoned by the church in America through her silence on the issue of slavery and civil rights for hundreds of years. The implied "illegitimacy" of African-Americans is a factor that has continued to be passed from generation to generation in the psyche of American history.

The inability to accept African-American as full and legitimate citizens of the United States is linked to this painful history. The presence of the illegitimate child had to be tolerated by white women, who had to continue to live as if the unfaithfulness did not occur. For many of you, this concept will be a stretch, but if you allow me to stay with the family systems metaphor, I want to suggest that to truly achieve a spirit of ecumenicity, we must acknowledge this truth. In our psycho-social-political construct in 2017, the question of race and the legacy of this history become the linchpin that creates some of the greatest barriers and opposition to ecumenism.

The “elephant in the room” is one that must be named and confessed. It is the mark and stain of sin on the American church. It is so deep in our legacy that we will never really “get over it,” just like the crucifixion is so fundamental to our understanding of Christianity, we would never say its time to move past that fact. But we can move forward despite the brokenness and woundedness. We can move in forward although the some of the scars of injury are scabbed over, some are still raw and some are infected and potentially deadly.

My white sisters and brothers must choose to become better acquainted with this history and the lingering impact it has on African-Americans today. You must find “racism” believable, even if you have never seen or heard of or experienced it. You must acknowledge that “white privilege” is real and that you benefit from it, directly and indirectly, individually and corporately, even as the Church. You must be willing to challenge this privilege in its modern form, but also to give it up when necessary for the sake of unity.

My black brothers and sisters must accept the burden of having to constantly name and call out conscious and unconscious acts of racism with righteous indignation and not just with hostility and anger. We must acknowledge that even the most

liberal, anti-racist will do or say something that WE consider racist, but that is not cause to walk away from the table, to condemn or judge. When we do this, we not only give up on one another, but we give up on God, “who is able to do exceedingly and abundantly more than we can imagine.”

We all must covenant and recommit to move forward.

WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

We cannot undo this history, nor erase it away, but as the body of Christ, Jesus shows us a way. The way is “forgiveness.” I cite this not as some pious platitude nor a simple or easy endeavor. It is not easy for a wife to forgive an unfaithful husband. The apology for infidelity is not easy to give, nor is it easy to accept. It is not a one-time thing—trust must be re-earned continuously. Unfaithfulness forever changes the nature of the relationship of a couple. Most importantly, when the offspring of the unfaithfulness—the children of other mothers—are invited to come and live in the house, imagine the tensions that causes. Everyone feels awkward. No one knows how to behave. Shame lurks in the background, with unresolved and unexpressed anger in the shadows. This is how I often feel at ecumenical gatherings that include black and white people. We know we are related, we know we are to love one another—but there’s just that “thing” that we find so hard to talk about.

Our ecumenical future is dependent upon the Church in America coming to terms with her racist past and oppressive history as a constant part of our future life together. We cannot “solve” the race problem—it is a fact. But we must learn how to “live together” if we are to have a future together. We must learn how to have honest dialogue without disarming defensiveness, imposing blame and shame on one another or the desire for us to “just get along” because we are Christians. Asking for forgiveness and offering forgiveness is a part of what we must

learn to do authentically and to do often, so much so that it becomes an automatic part of the way we know we must engage one another.

Jesus reminds us that he has other sheep not of our particular fold. He does not cast them as unequals, nor as one being superior to another. By claiming them as his sheep, he reminds us that the “other sheep” are his legitimate heirs and our consanguine family, through his precious blood and sacrifice for the redemption of the whole world. He doesn’t bother to tell us how they came to be, because he probably knew we would attempt to question their legitimacy, just as the church in Corinth did as it divided and judged each other’s worth and legitimacy as followers of Paul or Apollos.

When we accept one another as consanguine family, we know that we cannot undo that relationship. Conjugal (marital) families can be undone by separation or divorce, affinity families can be undone by simply choosing others over them. In this text, Jesus uses the image of shepherd to illustrate his caring, nurturing relationship to all his sheep. The Church has been called by Jesus to take up this shepherding role. In John 21 (verses 15-17), Jesus uses shepherd language as his response to commend the duties of the shepherd to us as the church: Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.

But Jesus also reminds us that the family is larger than we think—“other sheep I have that are not of this fold.” Jesus is saying there are others for whom I am concerned. There are others for whom we should be concerned, care about, support, because they are our sisters and brothers, albeit by other mothers. The true shepherd, the good shepherd realizes that there are other sheep besides the ones that are most visible. There are other sheep besides the ones assigned exclusively in any shepherd’s care. There are other sheep.....other sisters and brothers, even if they are so by other mothers. This is the call to the ecumenical Church, the unified body of Christ, to be good shepherds, not just the hireling.

The good shepherd knows the sheep by name, the shepherd talks to them and they know the shepherd’s voice. The good shepherd *is in relationship*. In tumultuous times, the shepherd hangs in there, making sure the sheep are safe. The hireling, who has minimal investment, and runs away at the first hint of trouble or conflict or disappointment and through our hands up in defeat. The true shepherd risks his or her life and gives up privilege for the sheep, even those by other mothers.

The ecumenical charge for the Church today is to be a good shepherd, to resist the seduction of episodic instances of pseudo-intimacy with our ecclesial kin and aim instead for authentic, sustaining relationships that understand forgiveness is the constant, core task between us, if true equality and unconditional acceptance are to ever occur.

The ecumenical church as good shepherds know that our responsibilities to the call of Christ extend far beyond those we choose because they are like us in terms race and ethnicity and the myriad of other socio-political constructs that would seek to divide rather than unite us. The ecumenical church as good shepherds know there are other sheep, not of your fold at the local church, other sheep not of your fold as Disciples of Christ, Methodists, Presbyterian, Baptists, Pentecostals, Catholics and the number of other ways we identify ourselves. There are other sheep not of our fold be they Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Syrians, Ethiopians; other sheep not of our fold be they heterosexuals or lesbians, gay, bisexuals, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ); other sheep not of our fold be they middle class consumers and owners, or the working poor, the poverty stricken, the least, and the lost, the documented and undocumented, the immigrant and the refugee. Perhaps some of the other sheep not of the fold, are also Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist.

There are other sheep not of our fold, but they are our sisters and brothers by other mothers whom we

are called to love and embrace and to live together on this place called Earth. We are called to be advocates for letting justice roll down like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream for all of God's creation!

We are all sisters and brothers of the same God who is calling us to shepherd, as a unified, ecumenical church. Mahatma Gandhi once said "Religions are different roads converging upon the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal."

Today, I say to us, what does it matter that we are sisters and brothers by other mothers, if together we do the will of our father in heaven, preach the good news, proclaim liberty to those that are oppressed and set free those who are bound.

Notes

1. Keith Watkins, *The American Church That Might Have Been: A History of the Consultation on Church Union*, (Eugene, OR; Pickwick Publications, 2014), p.183.
2. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/25/science/23andme-genetic-ethnicity-study.html?_r=0, accessed June 9, 2017.

Bishop Teresa Elaine Jefferson-Snorton became the 59th bishop elected in the Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church and the first female bishop. In February 2016 she was elected President of Churches Uniting in Christ, an ecumenical organization representing six Christian denominations working toward unity and reconciliation. She also serves the wider community as Ecumenical Officer and Endorsing Agent for the CME Church, Chair of the Family Life Committee of the World Methodist Council, Chair of the Board of Directors of the National Institute for Human Development, and through membership on the Board of Directors of the World Methodist Evangelism, Inc. and the Pan-Methodist Commission.



Unity Today and Unity Tomorrow

Rev. Joel Ortego-Dopico

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

First of all, I want to thank our God for this great opportunity to be here together as one and to bring you greetings and love from all your sisters and brothers in Cuba. I bring you the love of Christians in Cuba and the love of our entire nation. Yes, I am coming from the island of Cuba just 90 miles from USA—so close, but at the same time so far.

Secondly, I bring you greetings on behalf of the Cuban Council of Churches, an institution founded in 1941. We had been serving among our people, our region, and our world, and witnessing to the love, mercy and justice of God in bad times and in good times. Since its founding, the Council has proclaimed unity for the service of our people and nation through the search for love, justice and peace among all peoples and nations, which are the most evident evangelical signs of the reign of God among us. Today, the Council is the leading institution of the Cuban ecumenical movement, composed of 51 churches and Christian institutions—Protestants, Reformed, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Episcopal and Orthodox—as well as Jews, Yogas, and centers for

studies, information and community services, and theological seminaries. Our slogan is “United to Serve, Together to Serve.”

We praise God for the Disciples of Christ in the United States and Canada, the United Church of Christ, your Common Global Ministries, and for all of your history and witness in this nation and throughout the world—especially your love for Cuba and your courage to stand with the Cuban church and with the Cuban people.

Unity is our dream for today and tomorrow.

In the year 1624 John Donne wrote a poem that became very well known, thanks to the novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, by Ernest Hemingway:

*Who casts not up his eye to the sun when it rises?
but who takes off his eye from a comet when that
breaks out?*

*Who bends not his ear to any bell which upon any
occasion rings?*

but who can remove it from that bell which is passing a piece of himself out of this world?

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

The unity we seek today comes from the eschatological idea of the presence of God's Kingdom among us. As stated in Revelation 7:9, "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

Today is a time for unity. But, we need to be very careful that the unity we seek will not just be a unity that makes us feel temporarily comfortable or happy because we are together; or because we are living on the same planet; or because we are living in the same country; or because we are Cubans or Latinos; or because we are Disciples of Christ, Presbyterians, or Pentecostals.

As a Cuban Church leader, God gave me the privilege and opportunity to be a Cuban living in the country that been an active witness to some of the most interest developments regarding unity and reconciliation:

- In the response of the world to stop the Ebola epidemic in 2014, Cuban doctors were serving in our region among many peoples from different nations in working together in unity to fight against this horrible disaster and to save many lives.
- I had the privilege to be at the dedication of both embassies (the Cuban Embassy in Washington, D.C., and the United States Embassy in Havana) in the summer of 2015;

this was a first significant and just step in realizing the dream to end more than half a century of conflicts between our nations.

- On February 12, 2016, for first time in history after the division of the Church in 1054, Patriarch Kirill of the Orthodox Church and Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic Church came together in Cuba, and they had a conversation for two hours and signed a joint statement. That fraternal meeting took place in Cuba as the crossroads of North and South, East and West. In one of the most dramatic events in the history in the Church since 1054, it was from this island that a symbol of the hopes of a "new world" was expressed in words addressed to all the peoples of Latin America and of other continents. In that encounter it was said, "if Cuba continues like this, it will become the capital of unity for the world."
- On Monday evening, September 16, 2016, Colombia's government and the country's largest rebel movement signed a historic peace accord ending a half-century of combat that caused more than 220,000 deaths and made 8 million homeless. Cuba was the place that four years the conversation and dialogue of peace took place. And, Cuba was one of the observers of the signing and one of the guarantors of that accord.

We know that all of these are fragile steps and expressions of unity, reconciliation and healing—but, they bring hope to us.

What exactly does unity mean? Why is unity important? And what does it mean to be one in our world context today?

When unity happens, it creates something that is unique, something that is extremely value—for we are united not just in order to *be* together, but also in order to *do* together. Why are we called as Christians to be united?

First, unity requires understanding the appropriate way to approach division knowing that there can be both good and bad unity, as well good and bad divisions. The greatest challenges of today to our unity are fundamentalism, consumerism, the theology of prosperity which are found not just in North America, but also in Africa, Latin America, and, of course, Central America and the Caribbean. Also, the economic and political models in our world today are unsustainable not just for the so called Third World countries, but also for the countries in the First and Second Worlds.

Second, authentic unity must bridge different cultures and different ideas and ideologies. We live in a world of so many cultures, but it is still one world. Unity is not uniformity but will only happen as it embraces the wonderfully richness of our differences and diversity.

I heard somebody say a few days ago that “the Western culture will win.” But God did not create any specific culture! God is not the creator of the United States, or the creator of Europe, or the creator of China, or the creator of Cuba, or creator of any church or denomination in particular—or even the creator of the Church. God is the creator of the world and all of the universe, and this world and this universe are something that has been united in God, despite our divisions. Unity is not about being equal; it is about been connected.

Third, unity comes from the way we communicate each other. And language is at the center of this communication. Every word, every gesture, and every expression is important. Words mean a great deal and are important to our work for unity. This also includes the way we communicate with God—and the way we listen to God.

Over the past century alone, it has been noted that around 400 languages have gone extinct—one every three months—and most linguists estimate that 50% of the world’s remaining 6,500 languages

will be gone by the end of this century (some put that figure as high as 90%!). Today, the top ten languages in the world are used by about half of the world’s population. The question is: Can language diversity be preserved, or are we on a path to becoming a monolingual species? Because different languages provide distinct pathways of thought and frameworks for solving problems and expressing one’s culture and meaning. Martin Heidegger once wrote, “Language is the House of Being. In its home human beings dwell. ... the widely and rapidly devastation of language not only undermines aesthetic and moral responsibility in every use of language; it arises from a threat to the essence of humanity.”

Many of the words and concepts we use today should be evaluated in the context of different languages, cultures and histories represented in the diversity of different countries and regions. We should explore the meaning of basic words and concepts we use in our dialogue as churches, and nations, and peoples; for example, democracy and freedom; human rights; men and women; black and white; rich and poor.

Unity is built upon dialogue. The languages we use to talk, to think and to speak about unity will determine the outcome of our efforts to be one.

Fourth, unity must rise up from the margins and peripheries and move to the center. We are living in a world that knows inequality, poverty, slavery, human trafficking, stateless people, illnesses, war, racism and exclusion. As Christians and as churches, we are called to follow Jesus—the One who went out among persons on the margins and periphery of his society and witnessed to a unity built from those margins to the whole of society and the world that is welcoming and inclusive, where all are recognized as equal children of God.

Fifth, the whole of the New Testament witness proclaims a message of unity and reconciliation in building true community and fellowship. The entire story of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection is about

God's offer of forgiveness and healing, of unity and oneness among all peoples. Let us remember these words from scripture:

Mark 9:38-41 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward."

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Acts 2:42-46 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

I Corinthians 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

When we see that there is not unity among churches, we say the ecumenical movement is in crisis. But what is in crisis is not the ecumenism itself but the churches because they do not truly understand or carry out the mission of the church set forth in scripture.

To be ecumenical is to be an inclusive church; to be an open church; to be a transforming church; to preach and to expand the gospel (the good news) of Jesus Christ. To be united is not an option; it is God's commandment to his people; that is, a church is not a building, but a community or people that follow Jesus in tearing down the walls of division and in building up bridges of unity and love. Unity will only come from love—it is the only way.

Sixth, unity is the result of the Spirit working within and among us. We are living in a world that is experiencing brokenness and hostility. Many times people ask me how is it possible to be a Christian in a communist country? I answer with another question. How is it possible to be a Christian in a capitalist and consumer-oriented society? To build unity and to build Christianity is much more than the limitation of our societies—because, at the end of the day, we belong to God.

The question is thus a deeper question. How are we to be disciples of Christ today in bringing unity with God and among His people and in God's world? You see, unity goes beyond the ideologies and politics, beyond both time and history. Unity is the foundation of life as we acknowledge and affirm that we are living in the same home and are dependent upon the same Spirit.

To build unity and oneness, we must live out God's will and God's essence. There is no unity

- without worship,
- without love,
- without forgiveness,
- without reconciliation and dialogue,
- without hope,
- without justice,
- without the Spirit who makes us one.

My last world is for Cuba and the United States.

I know that I am under a very difficult ethical

dilemma as I speak tonight. I am a Cuban, so I think it would be almost unethical if I do not take advantage of this opportunity to advocate my own country on behalf of my people. I cannot leave tonight without giving you the perspective of the Cuban church regarding my country's situation. Before I do that, let me say, God loves the United States of America. I must also say, God loves the beautiful Island of Cuba.

We must work to remove the embargo! Not just because it is not moral; not just because it is unethical; not just because it is illegal; not just because the United Nations has voted a resolution for many years in which all nations except Israel and US vote in favor of removing the embargo; but because I deeply believe that is not the Will of God.

We belongs to Jesus. We belong to Christ. We belong to his church, a movement begun by fishermen which become the very first community of sharing in history. We are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord. And we believe in the God who calls us to be united and who makes us one.



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Reverend Ortega Dopico is active in the ACT Alliance and through ACT and the Cuban Council, has worked extensively on humanitarian emergency actions in Cuba, Haiti, the Caribbean Region, as well as Central and Latin America. In 2016, sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, he participated in the first United Nations World Humanitarian Summit, in Istanbul, Turkey.

Reverend Ortega Dopico participated in the visits of Pope Francis and of President Obama to Cuba. He was invited and present at the historic opening of the Cuban Embassy in Washington D.C., and the U.S. Embassy in Havana. The Cuban Council of Churches plays an important role in mutual understanding and normalization between Cuba and U.S. He receives visits of U.S. senators in his office in Havana and has visited Senate offices in Washington D.C. He works closely with churches and people in the U.S. around the move toward normal relations between the churches and people in both countries.

When You Do This, Remember Me

Remembering and Recovering the Purpose of COCU and CUIC¹

Rev. Dr. Keith Watkins

A NEW CHURCH TO BRIDGE THE CHASM

On Sunday December 4, 1960, the National Council of Churches began its triennial assembly in San Francisco. That morning an unusually large congregation gathered for the principal Eucharist at Grace Episcopal Cathedral. Guest preacher was Eugene Carson Blake, the head of communion of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. His ecclesial host and celebrant of the Eucharist was James A. Pike, bishop of the Diocese of California. The congregation consisted of the cathedral's regular worshipers, many delegates to the National Council's assembly, and a significant representation of the national media, who had been alerted to Blake's intention to propose something that was worthy of their attention.

Blake's text for his sermon address was Romans 15:5-7: "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus! That ye may with one mind and with one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive

ye one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God." In his sermon, that covers nearly eleven printed pages, Blake proposed that Bishop Pike join him in asking their churches to invite two others—the United Church of Christ and the Methodist Church—to develop a process by which their churches, and others that wanted to participate, would "develop a plan of union for a church that would be both catholic and reformed on the basis of principles" that he outlined later in the sermon.

It was time, he asserted, to bridge over the chasm that the Reformation had split open nearly 450 years earlier. "Our divided state makes almost unbelievable our common Christian claim that Jesus Christ is Lord and that he is the Prince of Peace." Quoting a recent statement by the central committee of the World Council of Churches, Blake said that the unity to be sought is primarily local, "one which brings all in each place who confess Jesus Christ as Lord into a fully committed fellowship with one another." In Blake's words: "The point of church reunion is not to be found chiefly in national or international organization; it is found most

fundamentally in local communion and common witness in all the places where men live” (pp. 205–6).

Bishop Pike was prepared for the sermon and responded with a strong word of commendation. His attitude toward Christian unity was more fully stated in an essay that appeared two weeks later in the *Christian Century* magazine. Pike was determined that the life of the church, including worship at altars in his diocese, would no longer be bound by denominational restrictions. “I shall go on doing the best I can to affirm the fact that all baptized Christians who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are members of the holy catholic church; and if our national bodies can’t grasp this fact, we will still do our best in the diocese of California to operate on that principle” (p. 8). I was a doctoral candidate in Berkeley at that time and occasionally attended worship at Grace Cathedral. A statement printed in the worship folder extended that invitation and I gladly responded by joining the communion line on those Sundays.

One of the people who understood the import of what came to be known as the Blake-Pike Proposal was Martin E. Marty, Lutheran church historian and rising star on the American religious scene. The delegates were wary in their comments to the press, he noted, because they recognized that they were meeting one another in a new mode. When they worked with one another in councils of churches, they operated “from guarded centers, from behind facades, from within protecting walls.” In this new discussion, they were becoming acquainted “not as a present cousin but as a future brother in the confessional life of the church.” Some people were “opposed to merger talk of any sort because they fear it will assault current traditions, preconceptions, prejudices and relationships.” Other were opposed because the process would be too slow, given “the dire situation of the church in the revolutionary world.” This attitude, he concluded represented “theological and moral laziness” that would be

satisfied with seeing “a denominational picture simplified, a confusion rendered clear” (pp. 20–21).

A more personal example of what Blake’s sermon might mean took place on Monday morning following his dramatic proposal. During the Sunday afternoon opening session of the National Council, an Episcopal delegate named John H. Burt heard that early the next morning, Lesslie Newbigin, once a Scottish Presbyterian missionary to India and now a bishop in the recently formed Church of South India, would celebrate the Eucharist in a chapel at Grace Cathedral. Burt was rector of a church in Pasadena, California, and to his surprise Ganse Little, a Presbyterian pastor from Pasadena also was there. These two men had been working together closely for several years, especially in developing programs of mission and justice throughout their community. The disciplines of their churches, however, did not allow them to receive the Eucharist in each other’s churches. On this Monday morning in San Francisco both men could come to the altar because their respective churches were in communion with the Church of South India. “Together, for the first time in my experience,” Burt reported, we “shared Christ in the Eucharist. It was an unforgettable moment for Ganse and me—a foretaste, we hoped, of the unity we believed God intends for his church in America. Our life together as pastors in adjacent local congregations was forever changed after that service” (p. 10).

The four churches that Blake had named responded quickly to begin the process. In a meeting April 9–10, 1962, they established the Consultation on Church Union to form a church that would be catholic, evangelical, and reformed. Before year’s end the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) and the Evangelical United Brethren joined them as participating members. In its next plenary session, March 19–21, 1963, the Consultation reached consensus on “Scripture, Tradition, and the Guardians of Tradition,” and the next year on “Baptism and Eucharist.” At the fourth plenary, held

in Lexington, Kentucky in April 1965, the African Methodist Episcopal Church entered COCU, followed in successive years by the Presbyterian Church in the United States, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

This rapid movement toward consensus was possible, in part, because the Consultation was propelled by a world-wide movement in which churches were coming together in new ways, thereby breaking down inherited ecclesial and cultural barriers. Notable examples were the Church of South India (formed in 1947) and the Church of North India (formed in 1970) each of which brought five or six divided, mission-founded, dependent-on-overseas-funding churches into a single, independent, autonomous church. Church unions, with union in South Africa an important example, were pioneering ways to overcome white/black divisions that had long been rooted in church theology and practice around the world.

During their annual assemblies, COCU delegates found common cause in theological discussions, but perhaps even more important was that they were experiencing one another's churches in new ways. Their fourth meeting in Lexington, Kentucky (April 5–8, 1965) was a noteworthy example. One morning the delegates traveled twenty-five miles through Kentucky's resplendent countryside, along roads bounded by sharply angled fieldstone fences, to celebrate their Eucharist at the Cane Ridge Meeting House. At this open country church and cemetery, in August 1801, one of the nation's most memorable events, had occurred—the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at a Presbyterian sponsored eucharistic festival. During the revival, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and other frontier Christians listened to impassioned preaching in cleared land around the little church, received Holy Communion, and then many in the vast assemblage were overwhelmed by dramatic moments of ecstatic experience (p. 40).

Barton W. Stone, the pastor of that little church, later joined with Thomas and Alexander Campbell, also with strong Presbyterian connections, to form a new movement that came to be known as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). They were determined to set aside the creedal and denominational systems that divided people, especially on the frontier. They were convinced that the new world, with its unparalleled challenges and opportunities, had no place for a church that was fractured into competing, antagonistic denominations. Alexander Campbell was especially troubled by the “hireling clergy,” whom he believed perpetuated this divided system for their own advantage. From his study of the Bible, through the lenses of the Reformed Tradition, he concluded that the proper pastoral leaders of congregations were locally chosen and ordained elders. Furthermore, the reason for the church to assemble every first day of the week was to celebrate the Lord's Supper as Jesus commanded. Under locally chosen and authorized elders this could be done. There was no need to wait until a member of the clergy came by to celebrate the communion ritual.

When COCU celebrated its Eucharist at Cane Ridge, the established protocols were all observed, with proper clergy from the churches concelebrating. Even so, the spirit of that frontier movement was much in the air. Later in the year, Blake told an audience that the Cane Ridge service had illustrated the “mutual enrichment” that was one of COCU's goals. “It could be assumed by most people,” he said, that “the Anglo-Catholics' and the Disciples' points of view on ministry and Sacrament would be at the extremes of the theological spectrum” since in Disciples churches lay persons administer the sacrament. “They are not even in the argument whether we non-episcopally ordained ministers can administer a Sacrament valid in Anglo-Catholic tradition.” At that service, however, many of the participants came to realize “for the first time that the chief reason for the Disciples' tradition and practice was because like the Anglo-Catholics, they

believed that the frequent and regular celebration of the Sacrament was essential to Christian worship.”

In that same address, Blake made one other statement that reaffirmed and extended COCU’s central purpose. It was not to “produce an upper-middle-class Protestant Church,” but instead a church “more fully inclusive, racially, economically, socially, and ethnically than any of the present denominations” (p. 41).

The time seemed right for a dramatic change in the pattern of American Christianity, and the Consultation made rapid progress. The number of participating churches increased, at one point numbering ten communions. Especially noteworthy was the decision of three predominantly African-American Churches to become full participants. Representatives of non-member churches, including Catholic, Lutheran, and Baptist, were actively present as observer-participants. Senior executives and scholars from the churches were among the delegates. Important scholarly papers were developed and debated. COCU’s activities were reported in church publications and the secular press. A steady stream of progress reports and provisional texts was produced. With surprising speed, classic stumbling blocks over the historic faith, forms of worship, and patterns of baptism came to what seemed to be resolution. In the 1966 assembly, delegates approved four principles of church union and in 1967 guidelines for the structure of the church and agreed to begin to develop a plan of union. The momentum was so strong that following the 1967 meeting COCU’s chairman, UCC pastor David G. Colwell, reported to his Seattle congregation that the union would be achieved by the time he retired, which was only fourteen years away.

In their “Open Letter to the Churches,” the delegates made a prophetic statement of purpose that continues to call us forward a full half century after it was proclaimed.

Our document “Principles of Church Union” proposes a plan which includes agents of continuity precious in each of our churches separately—the authority of Scripture, faithfulness to the Tradition, the witness of the historic statements of Christian faith, the central sacramental gifts, a ministry with authority as close to the universal and undoubted as any authority in a still-divided church can be, the unfailing steadfast community of worshipping Christians in their congregations through the ages. We mean to remember, God willing, every lesson he has taught his Church in history, and to incorporate it in our way of life so that it will continue to guide and nourish. In this, we have been guided by two principles—first, that we be true to every essential link with the apostolic gospel and community; second, that we guard every opportunity of action that will assist us to bear responsibility for the future” (*Principles of Church Union, Guidelines for Structure, and a Study Guide*, (COCU 1967, 15).

MUCH MOTION BUT LITTLE PROGRESS

The momentum continued and in 1970 the Consultation published *A Plan of Union for The Church of Christ Uniting*. In one decade, Blake’s sermon had brought nine Protestant churches at the center of American history and contemporary life into a venture that fleshed out details for creating a new kind of church for a new nation in a new era of human history. It was indeed a cause of great rejoicing.

At that point, however, the momentum slowed. Delegates labored to convert principles and guidelines into transformed patterns of life and organizational systems to make things work. New challenges and opportunities presented themselves and unexpected obstacles turned up. The commissions continued to meet and write documents, and the delegates to assemble and debate, but as time went on the documents grew longer and the agreements and relationships more hesitant. To use Martin Marty’s metaphor, the churches were not yet ready to become full brothers and sisters in a new relationship, but preferred to

remain cousins, although on a closer and more cordial basis. The hard work of change proved to be too hard.

One reason for this change of heart is that *the COCU churches boldly embraced some of the most controversial aspects of American life that were roiling the nation*. In his book *The Fifties*, David Halberstam summarized these transformations in attitudes toward established institutions, understandings of sexuality and patterns of sexual activity, gender relations, popular music and culture, relations between young and old, and the sense of America's greatness. With a surprisingly prophetic spirit, leaders of the ecumenical Protestant churches, including those in the Consultation, sided with forces pushing for change. Many of their constituents back home, however, were puzzled or angered by these developments and the effect upon COCU's momentum was seriously affected. Historian David Hollinger has written that a major explanation of the decline of the historic churches that once were preeminent in America and the rise of evangelical churches rests right here. At the time the ecumenical churches were embracing the changes, the evangelical churches were resisting them, with the result that one group seemed to fade away while the other came group came ever more into the spotlight (p. 191). At the top of the list of controversies were two explosive movements: Civil Rights and Vietnam. Not since the Civil War had the nation been so much at war with itself, and to their credit, the COCU churches stood on what most of the nation now knows was the right side of those movements.

One of the most important contributions that COCU made to the churches was the redefinition of what formerly had been described as "non-theological" causes of division, referring to factors such as culture, gender, race, ethnicity, and social location. The Consultation affirmed that these issues, contrary to former understandings, were also theological. One way to state this COCU insight

would be to say that Galatians 3:28—"there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ"—became as important in their deliberations as did biblical and theological texts on ministry, sacraments, and the church.

A second reason for COCU's loss of momentum was *the discovery that much of the work was more complicated than church leaders had anticipated*. Although corporate merger was not the primary purpose for this unity movement, most people assumed that a major restructuring of the participating churches would take place. In his sermon at Grace Cathedral Blake had stated that the division of the one church into organizationally separate and competing churches was itself a barrier to the work and witness that the Church of Christ was called upon to do. When a highly-qualified commission began working on the details of this corporate restructuring, however, the Consultation came to realize that wishes wouldn't make it so. They would have to consolidate boards and ministries, national bodies, middle judicatories, and local patterns of church life. How many bishops would this new church need, and how would they be appointed to their places of ministry and oversight? How would the flow of money be directed? Where would the powers of decision rest? Anticipating the difficulty of resolving these issues, one COCU commission proposed that the churches unite at the highest level, keep much of the existing infrastructure, and work out the detail of organizational reconstruction over time.

The most intriguing challenge was to find ways of manifesting Christian unity at the local level—Christian unity in which Christians from any and all of the churches, from all social, cultural, and ethnic segments of the community, would often and easily join at the communion table and in mission in the community. The most daring and widely debated proposal was to replace local congregations with larger units entitled parishes whose members would

be inter-racial and diversified in economic levels. The proposal was sharply debated and quickly set aside as being contrary to many of the most basic aspects of Christian identity (pp. 95–98). Even though the COCU vision was that every celebration of Holy Communion would be a time when everyone who came together would experience the risen Christ and their full union with one another, they were having trouble finding ways for this vision to be realized.

The third reason why COCU stumbled may be the easiest to understand and hardest to justify. *The pain of setting aside cherished ideas and deeply ingrained practices was too great to bear.* Even the promise of a fuller life and greater faithfulness to their Christian witness could not inspire the churches to keep moving forward. For some, it was not enough to change modes of ordination; instead, churches had to agree on a particular theology about ministry. For some, the importance of defining the office of bishop so that it would include presbyteries—groups of people acting as unified bodies of oversight—as part of the episcopal structure of the new church. Issues over baptism, confirmation, and membership were not as fully settled as some people believed they ought to be. There were questions: Why are the bishops of one uniting church more equal than those of another church? Have the ecclesial forms of racism been adequately addressed, and is there any reason to believe that things really have changed? At the center of virtually all of these issues lurked the insidious reality of recalcitrant systems of power and privilege.

COCU's sixteenth plenary assembly at Baltimore, November 26–30, 1984, was the turning point. Delegates from the nine participating churches approved and recommended to the churches a substantial document entitled *The COCU Consensus: In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting*. The decisive character of this moment in COCU's history was stated in an address by John Deschner, one of the Consultation's most respected leaders. In his academic life, he was an expert on John Wesley and

professor at Perkins Divinity School. He had represented his church on the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, serving as moderator in 1982 when the Commission adopted the convergent text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, and had also served as chair of COCU's theology commission. The Consultation was at a turning point in three ways, Deschner declared. First, the churches had shifted from an external ecumenism to an internal ecumenism, from "a COCU-centered to a church-centered next step in the quest for a Church of Christ Uniting." Second, the "way ahead is not a decision of each church about COCU, but about the other churches: does our church recognize the ministries of the other churches as apostolic? Does COCU's work help our church acknowledge the other churches as 'authentic parts of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ?'" Third, the churches were being asked to adopt a greater degree of seriousness in their relations with one another.

Deschner's statement unwittingly intensified the family metaphor that Martin Marty had introduced into the COCU conversation more than twenty years earlier. Marty had described the churches as cousins seeking to become brothers and sisters. Deschner's metaphor was that COCU had served as marriage broker for the churches. "It has even drafted out for them how to pop the question. An engagement ring is the next step, and that has to happen between the churches" (p. 152). Four years later, at COCU's seventeenth plenary assembly in New Orleans, December 5–9, 1988, delegates revised their 1984 draft and recommended *In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting* to their churches.

A major feature of the plenary's plan was that the transformative action would be liturgical, brought about in services of worship. The most important of the liturgies prepared for *In Quest* was the National Service entitled "Reconciling Ministers with Ordaining Responsibilities." The liturgy contains declarations of the Word of God, confessions of sin

and the Christian faith. The churches then prepare the eucharistic table with signs of the ecclesial treasures that they are contributing to the new church. Bread and wine, signs of God's gift of redemption in Christ, are brought forward, to complete the setting of the table. Each COCU church is represented by persons whom it has chosen to participate in the liturgy and by this action "be received by all as bishops in the Church of God." These ministers "recognize and receive the ministry and tradition of the others [and] become reconciled, that they may henceforth serve together as representative pastoral ministers of oversight, unity and continuity in the Church, fulfilling the ministry of bishop as expressed in the theological consensus affirmed by our churches."

During the liturgy, these ministers renew their ministerial vows in a litany prayer and then give the sign of reconciliation. Each of the ministers with ordaining responsibility lays his or her hands upon each of the others in silence. "When all have received this sign of reconciliation," the rubric states, "the covenanting bishops offer this prayer":

We give you thanks, O God,
for calling us into this new covenant.
Complete in us your gifts,
received and exercised in separation,
that we may now minister together as bishops
in your church.
Give us grace to manifest
and set forth the unity of your church,
proclaim the Christian faith,
maintain worship in spirit and in truth,
feed the flock of Christ,
and in all things care for your church.

Similar liturgies were designed to be celebrated in many locations around the country offering the opportunity for all whom the churches in their separation recognized as ministers of word and sacrament to be reconciled into one new ministry accepted and recognized by all (p. 164). With many

others present for those discussions, I trembled inwardly at the thought of participating and prayed that God would help me find the humility and hope to be able to do so.

The COCU churches took a decade to develop their formal responses to the plan that would bring them together into a new church that would be truly catholic, truly evangelical, and truly reformed. They prepared serious responses that affirmed many aspects of the plan and expressed a certain readiness to move forward. The reservations were stronger, however, and it became clear that they were not ready to exchange the churches they already knew for a church that did not yet exist. Theological barriers were too high and institutional barriers seemed even more insurmountable. To use the family analogy once again, after thirty years of deepening friendship, the churches decided to stay cousins. Becoming brothers and sisters in a new family was more than they could do and popping the question was inconceivable. When they finally acknowledged that the COCU vision could not be achieved, the churches established a new way to stay together, Churches Uniting in Christ—CUIC. Since then, we have stayed in good relations with one another, but no longer dream of becoming the new American church that we once believed to be God's will for our ecclesial life.

EXPLORING NEW WAYS TO MOVE TOGETHER

During COCU's later years, our churches were **reaching out** toward one another and to a widening set of churches, in the United States and across the world. Especially important are ongoing conversations referred to as bilateral conversations. So many of these serious theological were taking place that in 1984, the same year that COCU published the first draft of *In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting*, the World Council of Churches published a 500-page book of ecumenical documents entitled *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed*

Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level. Another thirty years have drifted by, and we still are talking. Important theological convergence on deeply divisive issues such as justification by faith is taking place. Churches are reaching what is sometimes referred to as “differentiated consensus,” in which participants agree on the fundamental and essential content of what had been a controversial doctrine and at the same time explain why the remaining doctrinal differences can be acknowledged without undercutting the agreement they have reached. It is right that we give thanks for these movements toward one another in our understandings of the faith.²

Furthermore, some of our churches are establishing “full communion” with one another. The details differ, but the emphasis in these agreements is upon shared life rather than merged structures; on faith, worship, ministry, and mission rather than on structure and denominational identity. These agreements are oriented more toward the future than toward the past. It is an open-ended process. Even when these formal agreements are made, however, these relationships of full communion become meaningful only when they enable and energize new relationships in local communities and larger regions when the people of God gather for worship and scatter for mission.³ Furthermore, these agreements still leave Christians and their churches separated from one another. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America can be in full communion with the Episcopal Church and with a group of Reformed Churches; but Episcopalians and Presbyterians remain separated from one another, much as John Burt and Ganse Little were separated in 1960.

As I travel among the churches, no longer active in leadership but very much a part of living worshipping and ministering congregations, I sense that our churches have largely settled back into our separate ways of life, bound more by the past than pulled forward by the future. Has any of our churches reshaped its faith, ministry, polity, and mission

according to ecumenical standards? After more than half a century of relations in COCU and CUIC, some churches cannot live without bishops, other churches cannot live with them, and still other churches have been finding ways of accommodating the office. Racism continues to be one of the deepest challenges in American life. We participated in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Our churches changed and we helped the larger society repent of the past and find new ways that no longer were defined by race. At our best, we fell short of the desired goals. In more recent years, institutional racism has reasserted itself, often in new ways and based on new ideas. It is relatively easy to describe what is wrong and how we got this way. Yet evil passions are abroad in the land, and we are having increasing difficulty in deciding how best to respond. No matter what our theology might be most of us continue to participate in churches where the members look, think, and act the way we do. While our churches have made progress here and there, we have not yet found ways of modeling the new society that we believe God intends.

I am grateful that most of our churches are readier than we were in 1960 to exercise eucharistic hospitality to one another even though our churches are still estranged over matters of eucharistic theology, ministerial form, and institutional history. The vision, however, continues: that by sharing in this meal in which our crucified and risen Savior comes to us in his continuing life we are connected to one another in a new way. My pastor for several years in Portland, Oregon, concludes the fraction each Sunday with a gloss on the text. “Jesus said that when you do this remember me. “Re-member me; put me back together.” When we come around Christ’s table, wherever it is spread, no matter who the host community, this full acceptance by one another, because Christ has already drawn us into himself, is the realization of the life that Christian unity is intended to make real.

It is right that we meet for convocations like this one on Pentecost Sunday 2017 and give thanks for all the good that has been accomplished in past years. Yet, it is even more important that we continue praying for new gifts of the Holy Spirit and working for the renewal of the churches in our nation. On the Pentecost Day following the Resurrection, Jerusalem was filled with Galileans, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and all the others whose names you know. On this Pentecost Day, Dallas is filled with Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists of various kinds, Lutherans, and all the rest of us. But the same Spirit is here, coming in wind and fire to sweep away the old and bring in something new. When this Pentecost Day is over, will we be able to say, as the writer of Acts reported long ago, that a new communion of faith, worship, and witness has come into being? When will that day come that it will be said of us that “all who believed were together and had all things in common?”

The title for this presentation, “When you do this, remember me,” is taken from a hymn by David L. Edwards and is based on a paragraph by one of the early leaders of my own church.⁴ The first two stanzas read:

You my friend, a stranger once,
do now belong to heaven.
Once far away, you are brought home
into God’s family.
“When you do this, remember me.”

Now my Lord is also yours,
my people are your own;
Embraced together in God’s arms,
I enfold you now in mine.
“When you do this, remember me.”

I want to close with another hymn, this one drafted by Brian Wren, an English Congregationalist, and set to a tune from the nineteenth-century folk hymnal *Southern Harmony*.⁵

I come with joy, a child of God,
forgiven, loved and free,
the life of Jesus to recall,
in love laid down for me,
in love laid down for me.

I come with Christians far and near to find,
as all are fed,
the new community of love
in Christ’s communion bread,
in Christ’s communion bread.

As Christ breaks bread, and bids us share,
each proud division ends.
The love that made us,
makes us all, and strangers now are friends,
and strangers now are friends.

The Spirit of the risen Christ,
unseen, but ever near,
is in such friendship better known,
alive among us here,
alive among us here.

Together met, together found
by all that God has done,
we’ll go with joy,
to give the world the love that makes us one,
the love that makes us one.

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2. "Differentiated consensus" and related topics are discussed in "Thinking Beyond Division: A Review Essay," by Keith Watkins. *Encounter* 67:4 (2006), 405–18; see especially 410.
 3. I draw upon an unpublished paper "Full Communion and the Disciples of Christ: Some Brief Reflections," by Robert K. Welsh.
 4. This hymn appears in *Chalice Hymnal* (St. Louis, Chalice Press, 1995), 400.
 5. This hymn appears in *Chalice Hymnal* (St. Louis, Chalice Press, 1995), 400.

Note

1. This paper was prepared for use at a convocation of Churches Uniting In Christ at Christian Chapel Temple of Faith (CME) Church, Dallas, Texas, June 4, 2017. Unless otherwise noted, all page references are to *The American Church that Might Have Been: A History of the Consultation on Church Union*, by Keith Watkins (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014). In addition to providing a fully documented history of COCU, this book includes a Foreword by Michael Kinnamon. The sermon by Eugene Carson Blake and the response by James A. Pike that launched COCU on December 4, 1960 are printed in the book, as are a timeline of COCU plenary assemblies and bibliographical data concerning the reports of these meetings.

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