



REV. PAUL S. TCHÉ
President

SPRING 2018

President's Report

A Year of Renewal



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2018 SPRING REPORT

The President's Report is a comprehensive report on a Council on Christian Unity's ministries and initiatives. The report is intended to express clearly the mission and foci of the Council to the Board of Directors of the CCU and the wider church.

PRESIDENT'S ROLE

As the chief ecumenical officer for the denomination, the President of the CCU works closely with the General Minister and President (the primary ecumenical representative of the church) collaboratively to give leadership to the Disciples' ecumenical and interfaith involvement.

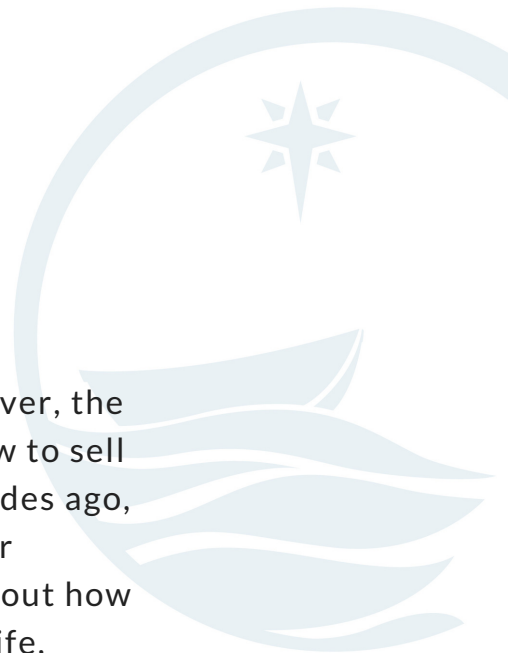
The President is elected by and reports to the CCU Board of Directors. The President is evaluated by that body's Executive Committee as outlined in the CCU Personnel Handbook.

The President gives leadership in three primary areas (External, Internal, and Administrative) of responsibility as the Ecumenical Officer for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

FUTURE ECUMENISM

I am not a marketing expert. As far as I understand, however, the trend within marketing for this century is more about how to sell experience than how to sell a product itself. Several decades ago, marketers were content to talk only about how good their products were. Now they will try hard to convince you about how their products will change or affect your experiences of life, which in my understanding used to depend only on the judgments of customers. Members of the younger generation will buy their “experiences”—whatever they are—rather than products.

Interestingly, many churches in North America have followed this marketing trend. Several decades ago, churches in the United States seemed to focus on the good news—whatever each denomination’s interpretation of the good news was—and the good news was the only reason the faithful went to church Sunday after Sunday. When I started a local church ministry about fifteen years ago, however, the church had moved from emphasizing the Gospel, which was often interpreted to represent personal salvation or redemption by many churches—to not the Gospel itself but to the church as a community of people, which could change the religious experiences of each member of faith communities. Then, later, many churches started “selling” their programs for children, youth members, young adults, newlyweds, divorced people, widows and widowers, so-called “seasoned” people, and so on. That was the point when people started “church-shopping” and also when the loyalty to a particular denomination diminished to the point of triviality—perhaps the ability to use church restrooms without waiting in a long line after church.



Because I am not a sociologist, let me move to the area of my expertise: ecumenism. I have heard so many concerns regarding the future of ecumenism. It is rare to see relatively younger people at ecumenical gatherings unless they are working for ecumenical institutions or doing ecumenical work on behalf of their denominations. Several decades ago, there was genuine enthusiasm or interest toward ecumenism. Many ecumenists fervently promoted their conviction that ecumenism would change the Christian religious landscape, especially in terms of how we could be church “together” beyond the lines of denominations and theological, ecclesiastical, and polity differences. Unfortunately, these days, it is no longer easy to convince people about this particular product of ecumenism. Why? We should ask.

The Disciples of Christ, known for its zeal for ecumenism, is struggling to maintain its enthusiasm for the church unity movement. In my understanding, this is because the ecumenical movement itself, which has been based on conciliar ecumenism, is struggling. Nowadays, there are many Disciples who do not see ecumenism as relevant to this world. Some of the Disciples of Christ might still say that unity is our polestar, but the Disciples of Christ as a denomination has made ecumenism a program rather than the core of who we are. That is why the Council on Christian Unity doesn’t function as a church-wide council anymore.

It should be noted, however, that leading the ecumenical movement has changed us as a denomination, a collective body of the Christ, and the way we do our ministries as a North American church. Now we do things ecumenically. Period. The Global Ministries no longer focus on establishing Disciples churches abroad. Rather, they focus on partnership/cooperation with ecumenical partners. Recently, Hope Partnership launched an innovative, shared business model with mainline Protestant denominations, an initiative that is ecumenical by its nature.

I hope you have noticed that big conciliar bodies such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), the National Council of Churches in Christ in the USA (NCC), and the Canadian Council of Churches have recently launched justice-oriented initiatives. The WCC has an initiative called Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, and the NCC just launched a program to combat racism in association with the huge rally in Washington, DC, in April 2018. These social issues require ecumenical partnership at every level of the church because they cannot be resolved by one particular communion.

I should point out that we are reaping the harvest from former generations' ecumenism. The Christian communions never imagined that we would reach this level of cooperation. In order to make my point clear, I would like to recall the landscape of US religious life as recently as the 1950s. In that time, if you were a Protestant, you wouldn't go to your friend's funeral at a Catholic church. As a matter of fact, it wouldn't even be easy for you to befriend a Catholic or a member of a different denomination.

The ecumenical movement is not dying. It is rather changing its course. The younger generations want to "experience" ecumenism. They do not want to hear from denominational leaders engaged in high-level talk or reconciling theological differences. Surely there are still many theological and ecclesiastical issues that should be discussed, understood, and if possible reconciled among Christian communions. At the same time, however, we should be faithful to God who so loves this fragmented world. In the unity given by God in Christ, churches should work together for the sake of the world.



PURPOSE OF THE COUNCIL ON CHRISTIAN UNITY IN OUR CURRENT CONTEXT AND WITHIN THE WIDER CHURCH



The board of directors of the council initiated a conversation with Rev. Teresa Hord Owens regarding possible integration of the council into the Office of the General Minister and President (OGMP). The proposal was drafted by the council board and discussed by the Administrative Committee (AC), which functions as the board of the OGMP, in fall 2017. There were some concerns that were raised by the AC, including these:

- 1) Where do Council on Christian Unity (CCU) programmatic pieces go?
- 2) What is the role of the standing committee? What authority does the committee have? What will the reporting structure look like?
- 3) What role might AC play in the conversation? Is everyone who needs to be in this conversation at the table? Is greater clarity needed about whether the standing committee is an advisory board or a governance board?
- 4) What does CCU see as an advantage in being a part of the OGMP?
- 5) CCU's financial sustainability is in question if it continues as is; can the OGMP sustain such a realignment?

Although I believe that these questions are legitimate concerns and should be answered in the process of integration, unfortunately they are related only to functions of the CCU and the process of integration, not to the mission and purpose of the CCU for the wider church. The clear purpose of the proposal was to reorganize the council's structure in order to fulfill God's calling for the council. Also, unlike its name, the Council on

Christian Unity hasn't functioned as a council but as a program ministry of the Disciples. It seems to me that the main concern of the AC should be whether this integration will ensure that the CCU can fulfill its calling or not. And in order to answer this question, the AC members should know the history and functions of the CCU, not only within the denominational structure but also within the Stone-Campbell movement. But the AC members have not been offered any opportunity to learn more about the CCU, and I feel I am responsible for this shortfall.

The CCU was established as a para-church organization in 1910 before the Disciples structured themselves as a denomination in 1968. Since then, the president of the CCU has been the chief ecumenical officer, who represented the Stone-Campbell movement and later the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). So leading the ecumenical movement to bring unity among Christians was the main purpose of this establishment. In the year that the council was founded, Rev. Dr. Peter Ainslie attended the Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, which was a debut of the Disciples on the international ecumenical stage. Over time, the CCU began to function as a theological office because the Disciples started engaging in bilateral theological conversations such as with the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed churches. Without clear theological and ecclesiastical self-understanding, it would be nonsense to engage in a dialogue. Later, this was the reason that the CCU embarked on the Faithful Conversation and the Disciples Identity Initiative.

In this current context of religious pluralism, the council has also served as a resource for the Disciples for interfaith, interreligious, multi-faith, and multiple-belonging engagements and activities. A tool kit for interfaith engagement was published by a joint effort among the Disciples, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Church of Christ. In 2005, the CCU released a report from the General Assembly floor regarding the Disciples of Christ and interfaith engagement that provided theological grounds for interfaith engagement.

In sum, the council has threefold functions: theological, ecumenical, and interfaith. But these are functions of the office. The main purpose of the council, according to its mission statement, 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.” To fulfill its mission, the council has engaged, educated, and equipped the Disciples to embody this vision of unity.

The conversation between the CCU and the GMP regarding integration will be halted as Rev. Terri Hord Owens casts a bigger vision for the whole church. My prayer for her is that she helps the church to create a God’s mission-fulfilling vision that entails and ensures a new structure. Until then, the council will support Rev. Hord Owens with prayers.

Meanwhile, I would like to suggest changing the name of our ministry. Even though our mission statement undoubtedly speaks about our commitment to be a witness not only to Christian unity but also to the unity of all humanity and creation, our current name doesn’t reflect this commitment. This is not an attempt to change the name of our legal entity, however. We will keep the legal entity as it is and maintain it for incorporation purposes while we will operate under a new name, i.e., “doing business as.” Corporations are said to be “doing business as” when the name under which they operate their business differs from their legal names. I hope that the board of directors will find a suitable functional name for the CCU, which will help it to better communicate with all church constituents about who we are.

SEEKING A FULL COMMUNION RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

The “Report of the Planning Committee for Full Communion between the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada and The United Church of Canada” has been released. The report is pending approval in April 2018 in Newton, Iowa, by the General Board, which will take action to recommend that the General Assembly ratify the full communion relationship with The United Church of Canada.

This is an exciting new covenantal relationship between the two prominent communions of North America. If approved by the General Assembly in 2019, it will be the first full communion relationship of the Disciples since 1989.

Even though this new relationship will enrich both communions in many ways, there are also challenges on the road to living out this covenant. Among the challenges recognized by the report are institutional capacity, learning to know each other in our present contexts, restrictions on immigration, and challenges that both denominations face in becoming intercultural, justice-seeking churches.



CONFERENCE ON WORLD MISSION AND EVANGELISM IN TANZANIA



I was honored to serve as a Disciple delegate for the WCC's Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, March 8–13, 2018 in Arusha, Tanzania, with Rev. Julia Brown Karimu, Rev. Marco Cable, Rev. Vy Nguyen, and Ms. Nia Sullivan. The theme for this conference was “Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship,” which is based on Galatians 5:25—“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (KJV).

The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC defined the conference as a mission conference, an ecumenical conference, an African conference, and a young mission leaders' conference, and the overall execution of the meeting fulfilled these characteristics. The participants had opportunities especially to hear, learn, and experience diverse African contexts. As you know, the most vibrant region of world Christianity in terms of dedication to the faith and transformation of life is Africa, and African participants offered many spiritually transformative “gifts” to others from a different corner of the world.

In my understanding, the greatest significance of this conference's location was the fact that Africa used to be a mission field of Western churches. It is no exaggeration to say that Christian missiology was shaped in Africa. In 2018, however, Africa does not merely accept the missiology that has been articulated by the Western church but shapes the new missiology for the world as its gift to the Church in other parts of the globe.

The so-called Arusha Call to Discipleship statement from the conference clearly indicates that it is we Christians who should be transformed by those who come from the margins. The statement also calls us to witness God's transforming love in dialogue with people of other faiths.

Personally, I was touched by the vibrancy of Christianity in Arusha. I attended a worship service at a local Mennonite congregation. The service lasted for more than three hours and was completely filled with God's Spirit. From little children, to young people, to the elderly, there was only joy and gratitude while they worshipped.



Link to the **Arusha Call to Discipleship**



BECOMING A JUST PEACE-MAKING CHURCH

As I shared above, the mission statement of the council 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. In order to help the Disciples, in its different expressions, to be a carrier of peace that entails justice for all humankind and creation, the council has initiated a campaign called Becoming a Just Peace-Making Church.

In November 2017, in Colombia, I was part of the group of the general secretaries of the Christian world communions, which had a series of meetings with representatives of the Colombian government—the minister and vice minister of the Interior Department and the high peace commissioner—as well as with leaders from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). This was an opportunity to hear from government officials and former and current rebel leaders about how these individuals see the current process of implementing the peace agreement between the government and the FARC and to hear from ELN leaders about why they would not accept such an agreement soon.



I believe that the road ahead for the Colombian government and the FARC will be rocky rather than smooth until both groups are truly motivated by the possibility of peace. Also, it seems to me that the road to reconciliation among Colombians hasn't yet been found. During the meetings, what I heard from everyone was that a role for the church is important in this peace process. I hope that Christians worldwide pray for the Colombians and support the peace process. Faith leaders should help Colombians to reconcile with one another. As Disciples, we also express our concerns to the Colombian government and show solidarity with our partners and Colombians. Let us remember the Colombian Disciples in our prayers. I believe this is how we become a Just Peace-Making Church.

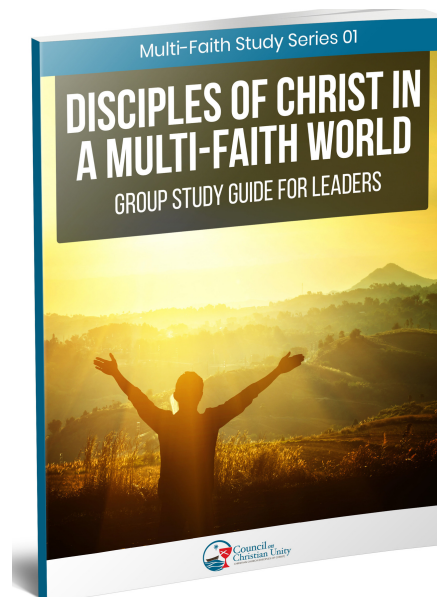


INTERFAITH RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The Interfaith Resource Development initiative will soon begin its second phase, which means that the first phase of publishing the Sunday school interfaith curriculum is almost done; the curriculum is ready to be published in hard copy and on the CCU website. The title for this study series is “Disciples of Christ in a Multi-Faith World,” written by Rev. Daniel E. H. Bryant, senior minister of First Christian Church, Eugene, Oregon, and edited by CCU board member Teresa Crist.

My hope is that we release the Sunday school curriculum after we have a new name for the Council on Christian Unity, which I also hope reflects this area of the ministry.

Regarding the second phase of the Interfaith Resource Development initiative, in consultation with Rev. Julia Brown Karimu and Dr. Peter Makari of the Global Ministries, Dr. Makari will help us to revise, update, and rewrite the current interfaith tool kit. Also, my hope is that the board will form a small team to be part of the project. A more detailed timeline for this project will be discussed before this summer in the hope of launching the project this fall.



COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY

This project remains at its incipient stage. Rev. Hord Owens, Rev. Chris Dorsey, Rev. Dr. Jon Barnes, and I will continue to have conversations to find a better way for this commission to serve on behalf of the entire church and to lay out the theological foundation for a future vision process for the Disciples of Christ.



DISCIPLES ECUMENICAL CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL AND THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST WORLD COMMUNION



I recently attended the General Assembly of the Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo) in Puerto Rico as general secretary of the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council (DECC) and was able to have conversations and meetings not only with the leadership of the Puerto Rican Disciples of Christ but also with their missionaries who have been helping to establish Disciples churches in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Paraguay, Venezuela, and Colombia. In these meetings, the leadership and missionaries expressed a real hope that they too might join in the work of the DECC in the future. The DECC will welcome the addition of such new member churches to this fellowship and the world communion of Disciples of Christ.

Over the past three years I have been attending the annual meetings of general secretaries of Christian World Communions (for example, the Lutheran World Fellowship, the Anglican Communion, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Mennonite World Fellowship, and the World Methodist Council). These meetings have included informal conversations for sharing involvements and perspectives in relation to the life and witness of these churches today and about the ecumenical movement. In these meetings I have come to understand the important role of the DECC within the global context of other world communions and churches.

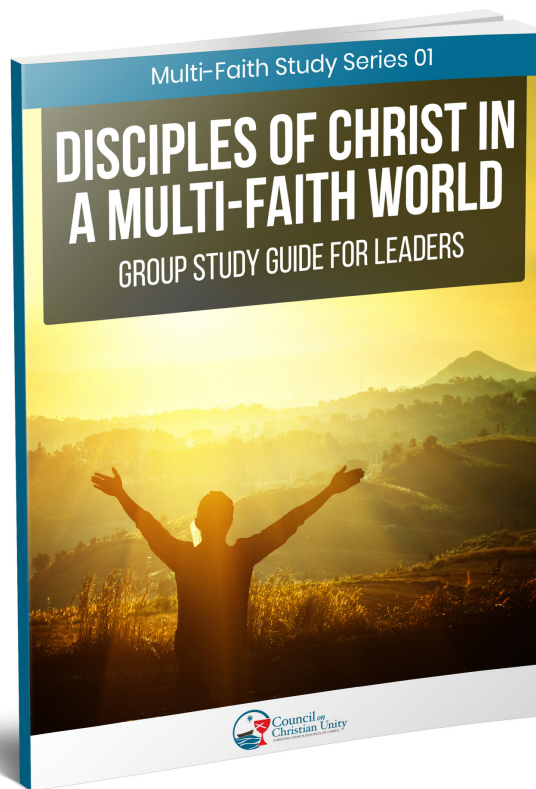
2018 Puerto Rican Disciples General Assembly Ordination of Ministers



As we look to the future of the DECC, its Reference Committee, which functions as a steering committee, has decided to change the name of the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council because this name does not always communicate to those who don't know this organization either who we are or what we do. In a conversation, a new name was suggested, which is the "Disciples of Christ World Communion."

I am currently forming a new Reference Committee and will name new officers (moderator, vice-moderator, and secretary) for the Disciples of Christ World Communion.





A DISCIPLES OF CHRIST MINISTRY FOR
**CHRISTIAN UNITY
AND UNITY FOR ALL
HUMANITY**