

## EXPRESSIONS TOWARD FULL COMMUNION

### Ecumenical Partnership: What It Looks Like - What It Could Be!

#### I. INTRODUCTION

1. History of Ecumenical Partnership
2. Vision - What are the marks of Ecumenical Partnership regardless of its expression
3. Relationship of Ecumenical Partnership to wider ecumenical movement
4. Renewal as goal of Ecumenical Partnership

#### II. CHURCHES GROWING TOWARD FULL COMMUNION (Each description to be followed by stories/testimonies of the particular expression.)

1. Joining in Covenant. Because of an awareness of the God-given unity of the church, close geographic proximity, and a shared community context, congregations may desire to express unity more visibly by entering into an ongoing relationship often expressed in formal, covenantal commitments to one another. These commitments include the establishment of a "council" or "board" composed of representatives from each congregation which encourages regular opportunities for sharing together in worship, nurture, mission and mutual support. In this expression, congregational and denominational identities are enriched by a deepening experience of shared life and witness.
2. Uniting Congregations. In some circumstances, congregations, after an intentional study process, may decide to unite. A new congregation is formed - with one ministry, one governing body and one mission - which relates to both denominations. These congregations represent an attempt to express more fully oneness in faith, sacraments, ministry and mission.
3. Occasional expressions are joint events/programs/celebrations that express the unity of the church or provide an opportunity for joint mission and ministry. Frequently these "occasional" programs become traditional annual or biennial events. Examples of occasional expressions are: Lenten Study Programs, World Communion Worship, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity events, Ecumenical Partnership Sunday, COCU Sunday, Thanksgiving Worship, Joint General Synod/General Assembly, ministerial gatherings/retreats, leadership training events, prayer partner programs, presence at one another's ordinations and baptism, joint mission project, camping or vacation Bible school. This expression allows churches to experience ecumenical partnership by focussing their witness on one or more of the marks of partnership related to the unique needs of their community.

4. Sharing Staff and Resources. Two or more congregations doing together what they cannot do alone through the sharing of ministerial staff, lay leaders and financial resources. A common program council may be appointed to plan and coordinate specific common ministries and common staff. These common ministries could include community services, joint worship, and/or programs that strengthen congregational life. In this expression toward full communion, relationships develop that enrich community life, and deepen commitment to Christian unity.
5. Non-geographical partners. A "sister-church" relationship between a CC (DC) church and a UCC church which does not have potential partner churches nearby. Opportunities include regular communications, exchange of information, resources and ideas; prayers and expressions of concerns and thanksgiving for the other; exchange visits; joint support of benevolence or mission project; joint undertaking of mission projects; pastor exchange for three months. Relationships could be established between churches of differing racial-ethnic traditions, economic backgrounds, size or setting ... Because the ecumenical partnership is set within the context of the whole ecumenical movement, the possibility exists for CC (DC) and UCC churches which do not have potential partner churches nearby, to establish partner church relationships with a nearby church of any denomination.
6. Celebrating within the local congregation. This expression would be most evident in those regions/conferences where the partner is not numerically strong (Disciples in New England, UCC in the Southwest). Congregations may seek ways to invite and welcome partners into the life of the community.

### III. WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND REWARDS?

This section would be motivational - lifting up the renewal element in Partnership, answering the "What difference will this make?" question - to energize, excite, etc.

### IV. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

UCC/DC identity piece  
Basic documents  
Who We Are - What We Believe  
Polity  
Guidelines for Uniting Congregations