

No. 8513

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE ON THE COVENANT BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) AND THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

RECEIVED by the General Assembly with adoption of the recommendation calling for a new ecumenical partnership between our churches and authorizing the Council on Christian Unity to facilitate the implementation of the ecumenical partnership.

I. Report of the Steering Committee

Foreward

Union conversations between the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ, or their predecessor church bodies, have taken place since 1912, though the major activity has occurred during the past thirty years. During the time of the formation of the United Church of Christ (1949-1957), the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) participated as observer-consultants on the commissions which prepared the UCC Constitution and Statement of Faith. In the same year that the UCC Constitution and by-laws were adopted (1961), the General Synod voted to begin union conversations with Disciples at the "earliest mutually convenient time."

Official conversations between Disciples and the UCC took place between 1961-1966. After that time it was jointly decided to devote full energies to the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) and to delay bilateral conversations. Participation in COCU enabled our churches, along with the other member denominations in the Consultation, to identify basic principles of union and to develop an emerging theological consensus in the quest of a uniting church.

By 1975 our two churches concluded that COCU would involve a longer range process than originally anticipated. It, therefore, seemed appropriate to renew our bilateral conversation, while maintaining our commitment to COCU and the wider union envisaged by the Consultation. In 1977, the General Synod and General Assembly adopted a joint resolution authorizing a two-year period of exploration regarding union to be undertaken at all levels in the life of our two churches.

In 1979 the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the General Synod of the United Church of Christ "covenanted with one another to work together toward embodying God's gift of oneness in Jesus Christ" (See Appendix A.*). This document is a report to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ on the covenant journey of these past six years. It brings to the General Assembly and General Synod a recommendation for next steps in our pilgrimage of Christian Unity; that recommendation appears on pages 186-188 of this report.

A. Our Years Together (1979-1985)

Beginning in 1979, congregations, regions and conferences, general units and instrumentalities, and all other denominational structures of both churches were called upon to participate in a six-year period (1979-1985) of work and study based upon three broad tasks of Christian witness and theological reflection:

1. the theology and practice of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, giving particular attention to the meaning of the sacraments in our time and their significance for worship and witness;
2. the nature, task and equipping of ministry, both ordained and lay;
3. the identifying of the responding to the continually emerging new forms and tasks of God's mission, with special attention given to the constant need for the church to reform itself.

A Steering Committee composed of ten representatives from each church was named to lead and direct this period of work and study. The two presidents, Dr. Avery D. Post and Dr. Kenneth L. Teegarden, have served as co-chairpersons of the Steering Committee.

We found ourselves drawn from a wide spectrum of the membership of both churches: lay and ordained; women and men; of the 20 members, six came from racial and ethnic communities. Professionally we encompassed a wide variety of skills: local pastors (3), regional/conference staff (2), national staff (4), business and industry (4), communications (1), government/law (2), seminary faculty (2), and ecumenical ministry (2). We came from large cities, small rural areas, and the suburbs, from New England to Hawaii, from Montana to Texas, representing 15 different states in all regions of the country.

Perhaps more importantly we found ourselves representing a wide variety of experience and viewpoints in both churches. We were constantly surprised by how much alike we are, and yet, star-

* Copies of the appendices are available and may be ordered from the Council on Christian Unity, P.O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46206.

bled at how different. We were fascinated that seldom, if ever, did we agree or disagree solely along denominational lines. But differ we did! Seldom with anger, but often with warm conviction!

Worship played an important part of our life together. As our conversation and work became difficult, we were grateful to pray together and to recognize and affirm our common commitment to the will of God. We have been especially grateful for the experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst, prodding us, guiding us, challenging us, and on more than one occasion, praying for us and our churches with sighs too deep for words.

As we sought to give leadership and direction to covenantal activities and study across the life of our churches, a basic assumption guided our discussions and planning. That assumption was: whether or not union between our churches is desirable will be determined in the course of these six years in an open process of mutual exploration, honest dialogue and conversation, and shared activity between the two denominations.

During the first two years (1979-1981), we worked primarily to design and develop a study to engage local congregations in discussion of the key issues of ministry, mission, sacraments, covenant and unity. The major objectives of the study process were: (1) to facilitate a deeper understanding of sacrament, ministry, and mission; (2) to contribute to the dialogue about what decision the two churches would make at the conclusion of the six-year period of the covenant, and (3) to serve as one of the major covenant activities of getting better acquainted with each other.

In a year-long process of writing, discussion, and developing materials to be included in a "Covenant Study Packet", the Steering Committee wrestled with the hard issues involved in our churches' understandings and practices related to Baptism and the Lord's Supper, mission, and ministry. In preparing those study materials, we did not seek to gloss over the differences, nor did we seek to resolve the areas of disagreement or divergence. The Steering Committee believed that task was both beyond our present mandate, which was to involve the memberships of our two denominations in work and study around these issues in relation to the possible union of our churches, and beyond our scope of competency (i.e., it should appropriately be taken up by a formal theological commission appointed by the churches).

The Steering Committee printed 12,000 copies of the "Covenant Study Packet," and within nine months, more than 11,500 copies were distributed. In partnership with regional and conference ministers, 700 congregations were invited to share in the study process. More than 628 congregations accepted this invitation, with approximately 60% agreeing to undertake the study as a "paired group" with a partner UCC or Disciples congregation, and to report back by December 31, 1982.

Responses which we received from local churches indicated that the material was used by a wide diversity of groups. Congregations represented included large and small memberships, ethnic/racial diversity; urban, rural and suburban settings. Geographically, thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia were represented. Of the congregations that agreed to participate in the study, responses were received from 523, including 119 reports which indicated that a study did not take place.

After serious discussion and review of the local study group responses, we prepared two reports summarizing the reactions to the issues set forth in the Covenant Packet and the suggestions to the Steering Committee for next steps in our conversations. Our major learnings from that reflection are presented in the following points:

- (1) There appeared to be a genuine interest in learning more about the teachings and practices of the partner denomination, especially in the areas of the sacramental life and worship, and the meaning of church membership;
- (2) At least for those who joined in the study process, there was no disparagement of the doctrine or practice of the other church; in fact, there was strong affirmation of the wide amount of doctrinal similarity between our churches, along with a positive expression claiming the rich diversity of teaching and practice already embraced by each denomination;
- (3) No one seriously questioned the "validity" either of the ordination or of the eucharist as practiced in the sister communion; however, some Disciples congregations (based upon their right of congregational self-governance) would not, at present, accept as full members by transfer those who were baptized as infants;
- (4) Mission (though variously defined as social change, evangelism, *diakonia*, or proclamation of the Lordship of Christ before the powers and principalities in society) was seen to be a primary factor and motivation in the pursuit of the unity of our two churches in making a more credible witness to the world;
- (5) Alongside requests for stronger national and regional/ conference leadership in relation to our present covenant and to the pursuit of the visible unity of the church, there was an equal and steady celebration throughout the responses of local self-governance and congregational freedom as important in both churches.

The two summary reports on this covenant study process were widely distributed throughout both churches: one is contained in the Appendices of this report (See Appendix D.), and a second one prepared in the popular "tabloid format" was sent to every congregation in August 1983. These reports were intended to provide information and encourage further conversation, dialogue and activity around our covenant "to embody God's gift of oneness in Jesus Christ."

The Steering Committee also launched a special Sunday to be celebrated annually in congregations during the six-year period to call attention to our covenant set within the wider context of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Worship resources and suggestions for local covenantal activities were mailed to all congregations each year to encourage and facilitate their celebration of "Covenant Sunday."

As the Steering Committee struggled to discern the meaning of God's gift of unity in Christ for the life of the church, a growing consensus emerged within the Committee's own life midway in the process (1982) which became the beginning point for *its own* exploration of any possible union:

1. The God of Jesus Christ who gives the unity of the Church requires the pursuit of union by all its parts for the sake of the reconciliation of human kind and the fulfillment of God's mission.
2. As part of the context of our wider search for the visible unity of Christ's church, it is necessary to pursue further embodiment of union between our two churches (UCC and Disciples) in order to be faithful to God's call to unity in Christ and for the sake of the reconciliation of humankind and the fulfillment of God's mission.

Building upon these affirmations in its own life, and in response to many requests from the local Covenant Study groups for some description of how our churches might embark on a journey toward union, the Steering Committee developed and widely distributed a working paper, "Shared Life: A New Approach to Church Union." (See Appendix F.) Reactions to the "Shared Life" working paper were requested by July 31, 1984, in response to the following three areas:

1. evaluation of the concept of a "shared life" approach to church union;
2. reactions to the listing of the five areas of church life identified to be the focus of the expanding covenant (mission, membership, theology, ministry, eucharistic fellowship); and
3. specific suggestions to the Steering Committee regarding its recommendation in 1985 to the General Assembly and General Synod.

Once again there was a clear indication that the material was studied by a wide diversity of our memberships and representative bodies. Over 950 pages of responses were received from 314 pastors and local congregations in 35 states; 30 regions and 29 conferences; 9 General Units and 8 Instrumentalities and Other Bodies; 72 individuals; and 20 "other" groups including seminaries and colleges, Councils of Churches and other ecumenical bodies. These responses represented a wide testing of the hopes and concerns from across the life of both churches.

In fulfilling one aspect of its mandate, the Steering Committee provided reports to the General Synod and General Assembly in 1981 and 1983 (See Appendices C and F.), and initiated and/or kept in touch with a number of local, regional and national joint activities, such as pastors retreats, local service projects, congregational programming and youth camps. (See Appendix G.) In February 1983, a joint meeting of the United Church of Christ Executives and the Disciples Council of Ministers was held involving the regional and conference ministers and national executives more directly in the covenantal process of work and study. Since that meeting, the United Church of Christ Executives and the Disciples Council of Ministers have met together at their own initiative in 1984 and 1985 for general and specific discussions on Christian unity.

Throughout the six years, the Steering Committee shared in worship together; interacted with and listened to responses from congregations and groups within both churches; and engaged in hard discussion and even heated debate on the issues involved in Christian unity and church union. The members found their own understandings of Christ's church enriched by the contributions of the other members and the many persons with whom we consulted. We offer thanks to both our churches for entrusting to us this important assignment.

B. What We Have Heard in Response to "Shared Life"

In the last two years of our pilgrimage of work and study (1983-1984), during which the Steering Committee urged the widest possible discussion and testing of its "Shared Life" working paper, people across the length and breadth of both denominations have responded vigorously. Every response sent to us has been distributed to and read by each member of the Committee. The comments, reactions and suggestions have been studied diligently.

We have heard many things, both positive and negative. We have heard concerns about the purpose, the process and various interpretations regarding the oneness of the church of Jesus Christ. While most formal responses dealt with concepts related to the document "Shared Life" and addressed the specific issues of that document, the Steering Committee has also been aware of obstacles to union related to structural, bureaucratic and personal issues as well as polity and power concerns internal to both denominations.

There is evidence of some distrust of the elected and administrative leadership in the churches in relation to the "Shared Life" working paper. Some expressed a fear that a hidden plan of union was already in existence. We also found a widespread apathy towards union. In some geographical areas of the country we found a growing lack of interest, and a decline in commitment after the earlier conversations (1977-79) and the extended period of our present covenant.

In the opinion of many, the cost of corporate union and organizational change would be too high—in money, and in energy diverted from mission. We found also a communications problem. Communication failed because of conflicting understandings of the meaning of unity and union. There was also a belief that a decision for too great a commitment was being requested too soon and without sufficient information.

We encountered false stereotypes of each other. The Disciples of Christ for example, were "pietistic;" the United Church of Christ, "only social action oriented." The Disciples, "conservative;" the United Church of Christ, "liberal." The Disciples, "too casual in their worship practices;" the UCC, "only concerned about mission."

A serious concern arose from the trauma left over from previous unions (UCC) and from previous separations (Disciples). People in both churches report they still feel pain from those experiences. Some UCCs reported having little energy for (or were quite opposed to) any commitment that would lead toward organizational union because of unresolved issues and feelings from the 1957 merger that produced the UCC. People still ask, "Who are we? What is our identity?" A few felt we would be uniting out of weakness rather than strength. There was fear of losing current denominational identity in a union.

There were yet other significant issues: Would union be a diversion from ecumenical relationships with other bodies? Would it, therefore, impede the Consultation on Church Union? Would the identities of racial and ethnic minorities be further swallowed up in a predominantly white church? Does not the wider scope of the Consultation on Church Union give greater promise of dealing with these concerns? The Steering Committee also noted a recognition of a need for more women and minorities in significant national and regional leadership roles.

Due to the geographical distribution of congregations, there was a lack of partner churches in a number of areas, and often these were in sections of the greatest numerical strength of the two churches, e.g. in the Southeast and Southwest for the Disciples; and in New England, Pennsylvania and the northern Plains states for the UCC. While some interpreted this geographical spread as unfavorable to union, others saw it as favorable to achieving a truly nationwide church.

While not a barrier to union for some, differing views and practices of ministry, the Lord's Supper and baptism were seen as possible barriers for others. Some could not envision yielding up their inherited patterns or sharing different practices with others in one common Christian body. Moreover, our differences in polity were too great, said others.

At the same time, another set of concerns came to us from the congregations and from leaders across the life of the church, concerns as profoundly felt and convictions as dearly held as any of those expressed above.

Among some there was an impatience with the passage of years, suggesting that it would be a simple matter and a painless step to enact corporate union between the two denominations beginning in 1985. Give us stronger leadership, they said. The Shared Life working paper was seen by these persons as a failure of nerve and even as a betrayal of the unity Christ gives us, because it spoke only of intention and first steps rather than a decision. It was not seen as something new.

From others there was an immediate and enthusiastic response to the Shared Life working paper. Growing toward union, trusting grass roots processes and waiting for them to evolve was hailed as the right way to embody Christian unity, letting corporate union follow.

In some of the responses we were reminded that much of the identity in our two denominations is found in our open, ecumenical spirit as *uniting* churches. This was offered as an answer to the anxiety about the loss of identity, an anxiety expressed by so many who rejected the suggestion that the two churches pledge themselves in 1985 to work toward organic union.

Some reminded us that, through union, we would be sharing gifts and traditions we would otherwise lack. Of equal importance was an argument stemming from the sadly fractured state of American Protestantism. We should pioneer, it was argued, in undertaking specific steps toward greater manifestations of Christian unity. Many claimed that American Protestants need a far deeper sense of the unity in which we live, given one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. These two churches would

complement each other geographically and would thus be strengthened for witness. Christian unity means that Christ has broken down all the walls that divide us. The progress of the Consultation on Church Union could be advanced significantly by our union, it was said. Many responses, even among those who believed the Shared Life working paper to be unwise, affirmed the need for the COCU process to go forward.

C. What We Have Heard From Scripture And Tradition

As we have listened to the voices and concerns, the hopes and the fears, from across the life of both churches, the Steering Committee has also found itself called (as our church members were called) to listen deeply to the Scriptures, to the biblical and theological witness of the church, and to the living Tradition of the faith which we have received in our histories and traditions as churches. Scripture, theology, and history were, therefore, placed alongside the many words which came to us in response to our covenantal conversations and to the working paper on "Shared Life: A New Approach to Church Union."

What have we learned? What can we affirm together as we come to the end of this six-year period of covenantal work and study which might serve as fundamental background to our recommendation to the churches?

1. We heard again the imperative of the Gospel for oneness among Christ's followers and reconciliation within the church. We thus affirm the gift of unity-in-diversity which is already ours in Christ Jesus.

Commentary: The New Testament repeatedly affirms the essential unity of Christ's church. In John 17, Jesus prayed for his followers "that they may all be one... so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). Similarly, in John 11, we are told that Jesus should die, not for the nation of Israel only "but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:52). Paul enjoins the Philippians to "stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). To the Galatians Paul writes that, despite their theological differences, they must eat together as a sign of their unity in the Gospel (Gal. 2). The Corinthians, as Paul sees them, are denying the Gospel by gathering around party names, saying "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." The apostle's rejoinder is swift, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?" (I Cor. 1:12-13).

Paul was confronted often with the churches that were torn by internal bickering, some of it related to deeply-held convictions, some of it nothing more than struggles for position and power. In Rome, for example, the various house churches were almost split apart over the status of Gentiles and Jews in God's plan of salvation. The Gentile Christians, thinking they were following Paul, did not observe the traditional Jewish laws. The Jewish Christians, for their part, regarded the Gentile Christians as undisciplined. Paul's entire epistle to the church in Rome can be seen as an effort to show that God is served, not by the victory of one party over the other, but by their willingness, despite their differences, to live together on the basis of their common experience of grace through faith in Jesus Christ. All of us are undeserving "householders" of God whose obligation is to conform to God's will, rather than to insist that others conform to ours. This message culminates in Romans 15:7 where the gospel exclaims: "Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God." Why welcome one another — Jew and Gentile, male and female, black and white, rich and poor, "catholic" and "congregational," "evangelical" and "reformed?" Because we have already been welcomed- accepted, loved, forgiven — by God, despite our failings. And because through our life of diversity in community, God is glorified.

There should be no doubt that, according to the witness of the New Testament, a divided church is a denial of the unity that is our gift as followers of the risen Christ. Division within the early church was scandalous, for it jeopardized the church's mission to the unbelievers (I Cor. 3:1-23) and it separated Christ's followers at the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:17-23). Division was a betrayal of the power of the Cross to stand as sign of reconciliation and healing before all powers and principalities of this world. Division was a witness to corruption, while the Gospel witnessed to the constant need to die and be born again in the spirit of Christ's love.

And yet, even in the face of the sharp criticism of division within the early church, Paul later defends the diversity that God gives (I Cor. 12:4-11). There are a variety of gifts, a variety of service, and a variety of workings. But each is given by the same spirit and the same God. Why? For the upbuilding of the whole community, "for the common good" (I Cor. 12:7).

In the light of this heritage, we acknowledge unity as a gift of God and confess that denominational divisions are a scandal that imperils the credibility of our witness to the Gospel. Similarly, we affirm that diversity is a gift of a loving God for the enrichment of the whole human family and of the family which bears the name of Christ.

2. We heard again that commitment to the unity of the church is central to each of our churches' histories — for the Disciples of Christ, unity is the "polar star"; for the UCC, its first principle is to be "united and uniting." We thus affirm that our identities are rooted in the pursuit of unity within the one household of God.

Commentary: The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ share a rich heritage in witness to the unity of all Christians within the one church. Both churches historically affirm a commitment to the unity of one people of God as an expression of God's mission in the world. And, though both churches have fallen short of their stated callings to manifest the oneness which Christ offers to the church, we acknowledge that our life as churches arises out of God's covenant of love. We are called to act faithfully and responsibly in relation to that covenant.

The Disciples of Christ, having come into existence in the early 19th century as a kind of protest movement against denominational exclusiveness and against the "fencing of the Lord's table" in the use of creeds as "tests of fellowships," have boldly declared that "the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one."

The United Church of Christ, born in 1957 in the union of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches, thus brings together a rich diversity of four earlier streams and traditions. In its **Basis of Union** the United Church of Christ declared "... devotion to one God... and (our) membership in the holy catholic church, which is greater than any single church and than all the churches together; believing that denominations exist not for themselves but as parts of that church, within which each denomination is to live and labor and, if need be die, ..."

Within the wider ecumenical movement, both churches participate actively within and give leadership to the life and fellowship of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and the World Council of Churches. Both are full members in the nine communion Consultation on Church Union, and both view COCU as a major commitment in seeking church union within the national context. Both are strongly committed to a unity that embraces a fuller participation and inclusiveness of women and racial and ethnic minorities in the leadership of the Christian community.

In addition, the United Church of Christ is a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and has established unique relationships with the Evangelical Church of the Union and the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Korea. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is engaged in an international bilateral dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, and its congregations in Canada are involved in union conversations with the United Church of Canada.

In the light of these wide ranging commitments, we affirm that our roots are deep in the soil of pursuing unity among all Christians. We also affirm that any effort to seek greater unity between our two churches must be firmly set within and related to the wider ecumenical context.

3. We heard again the cries of the world's oppressed, and have seen again the evil of segregation and other forms of brokenness within society which denies the fullness of God's creation to and for each human being. We confess the sin of our participation in that injustice. And, we thus affirm our need to eliminate all barriers of race, sex, age, class, and disabling conditions which are present within and between our churches. This will be a sign of healing in the renewal of true human community.

Commentary: As the Steering Committee struggled to understand the nature and calling of the church to unity in its mission, ministry, and sacramental life, it was also reminded that many of the deepest divisions encountered by Christians are not those founded upon denominational or confessional identities, but are discovered in the dividing walls of all social injustice and discrimination which are present throughout our world and our churches. These walls are often far more impenetrable and pervasive than those of theological difference or sacramental practice. A union of churches which does not address the systemic nature of the divisions between black and white and red and yellow and brown, between male and female, between young and old, between rich and poor, is not acceptable to us or we believe, to God.

To affirm authentic unity within the church is not to set our sights on organizational oneness, but, as stated in the New Testament, it is to seek to eliminate all barriers between persons and to live in anticipation of God's promised kingdom of peace and justice, "for Christ is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14).

In our discussions, we also became keenly aware of the momentous problems of our world—wide-spread hunger and poverty, daily oppression and societal injustice, deepening alienation among people and nations, and the ominous threat of nuclear war. And we asked: What is the relationship between the pursuit of unity between our two denominations in face of the magnitude of these problems and their pain and suffering and fear?

As a Steering Committee, we affirmed that our pursuit of unity is based on God's intention for the church to be a sign before the world—witnessing to reconciliation, justice, hope, and peace in the face of the oppression and fraudulent sovereignty of worldly powers that would divide and deny the unity of the human family.

4. In these six years we have become increasingly aware of the changing character of the search for unity and union itself. It is not adequate to describe the goal of unity simply in terms of an organizational merger of our present structures and institutions. Rather, we discern the need for a more dynamic understanding of both the goal and the steps required in achieving that goal. The focus would be upon mutual sharing of gifts rather than a compromise of theological positions or practices. We thus affirm an approach to unity among Christians which is dynamic, growing, and responsive to the gospel and to the condition of the church in its present context and this historic moment.

Commentary: Throughout our covenantal period of work and study, two questions identified in the 1979 Resolution adopted by the General Synod and General Assembly (See Appendix A) have shaped much of our discussion within the Steering Committee itself: Does the commitment of work and study together enhance the churches' lives and witness sufficiently to call for a union? If so, what is its shape and form?

In our dialogue and study around these questions, the Steering Committee believes that we have received some new understandings about the changing character of the search for visible unity within the church. In the wider ecumenical movement and in our own memberships, we have seen that when one speaks of union or unity, one is no longer describing a process which is primarily related to organizational mergers, and certainly not uniformity of theologies, liturgies, or practices. Just the opposite! It is a dynamic process of sharing gifts, of growth into true oneness that will produce new patterns of life which exemplify greater diversity and flexibility than is now present in our separate denominations.

All agree that unity does not mean uniformity. Rather, union not only permits, but positively requires, great diversity. It requires the fuller participation of all its memberships (laity, racial and ethnic minorities, youth, and women) in the life and leadership of the church. It requires the resolution of divisions both old and new — between competing denominations claiming self-sufficiency in theology and ecclesial life, and between the brokenness of individuals in society. Unity within the church must not merely announce freedom to the oppressed and the despised; it must also offer them its fellowship.

We thus affirm the changing nature both of the goal of the unity we seek as well as the approach to that goal in its changing forms and shapes. We acknowledge together that:

- In the search for unity, the emphasis is not upon an organizational merger of our separate structures, but upon a more faithful witness, service, fellowship, worship and proclamation of our common faith;
- The unity we seek is not something we create, but comes as a gift; it does not depend upon our like-mindedness, nor is it destroyed by our diversity;
- The unity we seek is centered in the eucharistic gathering of the community around the one Table, which is the place where the church and the world intersect in the presence of Christ, and the place from which Christians are sent forth to serve and to love;
- The unity we seek is focused upon active participation in the mission of the church to overcome brokenness, alienation, and separation among all peoples;
- The unity we seek must include ways for Christians to take active responsibility for one another and to make basic decisions together that guide their worship, witness and service;
- The path to unity is neither a detailed map to follow nor a blueprint from which we work; rather, the road to unity is primarily a faith journey into the future in which, only when the first steps have been taken, will the next stage become clear; and,
- All efforts in the ecumenical movement must support and contribute to each other in making the gift of unity visible where it has been obscured, in maintaining it where it is threatened, and in recovering it where it has been lost.

II. Recommendation

Four areas of listening — the witness of Scripture, the commitments arising from our histories as churches, the cries of the world's oppressed and alienated, and the new insights into the changing character of the search for unity — serve as fundamental background and commentary to our recommendation to the General Assembly and General Synod meetings in 1985.

Based upon this intensive period of listening, we are proposing something other than a binding commitment to become one church. We are also proposing more than the continuation of another round of study, or that we simply join in cooperative mission without any commitment to pursuing a common future. We anticipate that our proposal may disappoint those in both churches who had expressed sincere desires that we move ahead now with full union negotiations. It may also seem to be too much for those who are convinced that nothing more than joining in cooperative mission is either wise or required at this time.

Our 1979 mandate was "to work together towards embodying God's gift of oneness in Jesus Christ." The Steering Committee sought to be faithful to that mandate as we reached out to involve the full memberships of both churches in programs of study and activities regarding sacraments, mission and ministry. We are grateful for the breadth of participation within our churches in the discussions and debate around the critical issues of Christian unity and church union. And, we have received many valuable suggestions regarding possible directions for the future of this relationship.

It should be stated, however, that our work and study have not brought about the oneness to which God calls us. Our work centered primarily upon the activity of study— and study alone does not lead to unity. The task of embodiment is still before us as we respond to God's gift in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, we affirm that God's Spirit has been with us and with our churches in this venture of faith and faithfulness.

We believe that we have given prayerful and serious consideration to the wide range of voices we have heard across our churches: voices of hesitancy and of hope, voices of reservation and of promise, voices expressing fear of being misled and others perceiving no leadership at all. We have also sought to give careful attention to the lessons learned in our study of the Scriptures and our own histories as churches, and to the urgent voices of many others who are yearning for some sign of genuine hope and wholeness.

The recommendation that follows is the result of a period of concentrated work and study throughout our churches, beginning in 1977 and intensified in 1979 as we entered our covenantal journey. It is a recommendation we believe is faithful to God's calling to full reconciliation within the household of the church. We hope that it will be seen as a responsible next step which moves us ahead in our journey. It proposes a step that has concrete implications and actions at its heart, building upon what already exists between us. It is a proposal that calls for flexibility, allowing for growth between different parts of our churches at their own pace and in their own ways, yet always within the context of mutual consultation and support. It is a proposal that begins with the understanding that unity is developed on the basis of a common vision, and the agenda is one of faithfulness to that vision of inclusiveness, participation, catholicity, and mission.

Declaration of Ecumenical Partnership

The General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, declare and celebrate a new ecumenical partnership between the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ, and identify three primary marks of our ecumenical partnership beginning in 1985: (1) commitment to respond together to the mission God has entrusted to the church, (2) theological work to equip our churches as they grow toward full communion, and (3) common worship with frequent and intentional sharing in the Lord's Supper/ Holy Communion.

This ecumenical partnership is to be set within the context of our churches' participation in the Consultation on Church Union. We see the partnership of our two churches as a positive contribution to COCU and its life, even as we receive gifts from the Consultation. Further, we affirm that, in both our participation in COCU and this ecumenical partnership, our ultimate goal is the oneness of the whole body of Christ.

Theological Affirmations for our Life as Ecumenical Partners

As the basis for making this declaration of a new ecumenical partnership:

1. We affirm that the God of Jesus Christ has given the unity of the Church, and that all who confess Jesus Christ as God and Saviour are members one of another in the one body of Christ.
2. We affirm that all who have received the grace of new life in Christ are called to manifest the given unity of the Church for the sake of reconciliation in the Christian community, the reconciliation of humankind, and the fulfillment of God's mission.
3. We affirm that our two churches are kindred in Christ, members together of the one, undivided Church of Jesus Christ.
4. We affirm, with thanksgiving, that our two churches have been called by God and led by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses to the given unity of the church, and to labor for the unity of all Christians. For our two churches the visible oneness of the whole body of Christ is the ultimate goal and overarching context in which this ecumenical partnership will evolve.
5. We affirm and rejoice in the long history of our partnership in the Gospel, and give thanks for the grace of God that has brought us, through conversation, covenant studies and cooperation in mission to a new threshold in our life as partners in the one church.
6. Affirming the mercies of God, we express deep sorrow and penitence that our two churches participate in the separations and divisions that violate the will of God for the one body, and that hinder the mission of God to bring wholeness and unity to the human family.
7. Affirming that "all are one in Christ Jesus," and that "Christ is our peace," we hear with urgency God's call to our two churches to claim together the signs of a fuller communion, namely, the

- recognition of one baptism and one eucharist, the mutual recognition of members, the recognition and reconciliation of ministries, the common commitment to confess the Gospel of Christ by proclamation and service to the world, and openness to common decision-making.
8. We affirm that God, who in the crucified and risen Christ acted to bring the world to wholeness, calls for our obedience and sacrifice from every center of pain and injustice, hunger and homelessness, violence and peril of war, and all wasted and endangered environments.
 9. We affirm these essential elements in the common journey to be God's people: life in a worshipping community, the treasuring of scripture and the apostolic faith, and self-giving discipleship in and for the world. These, together with other graces from God, nourish members of the one Church and support God's saving mission to the whole creation.
 10. We affirm that our brokenness is transcended at the Table of Christ Jesus where we are called to confess our sinfulness and receive the cup "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). There we discover our given unity in Christ, "for we all partake of the one bread" (I Cor. 10:17). There we are empowered by God's grace to witness to the saving acts and presence of the crucified and risen Christ.

Implementation of Our Ecumenical Partnership

In order to give concrete expression, meaning and direction to the Ecumenical Partnership:

- I. The General Assembly and the General Synod establish an Ecumenical Partnership Committee with responsibility to:
 - A. Provide general guidance to the Ecumenical Partnership in the following areas:
 1. MISSION

Local churches, associations, regions and conferences, instrumentalities and general units, seminaries, and all other bodies in the two churches will be called upon to commit themselves, in all possible areas, to expressions of common mission, building on those that already exist and creating new initiatives. In particular, appropriate national and regional/conference bodies are called upon to begin, during the 1985-87 biennium, coordinated planning and, wherever possible, joint staffing in areas of mission such as: education, evangelism, peace with justice, economic justice, and human equality.

Opportunities for the ecumenical expression of mission will also be encouraged with other Christian bodies, particularly those with whom we share in the Consultation on Church Union.
 2. THEOLOGICAL WORK

The Ecumenical Partnership Committee will encourage in both churches the process of reception and claiming the theological convergence of the World Council of Churches, **Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry**, and the theological consensus of the Consultation on Church Union, **In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting**, as guides for understanding the theology of Christian unity. Building upon this work the Ecumenical Partnership Committee is asked to develop recommendations for submission to the General Assembly and General Synod in 1989 regarding actions that would lead to full communion between our two churches, i.e., mutual recognition of baptism, full eucharistic fellowship, the mutual recognition of members and ordained ministers, the common commitment to confess the gospel of Christ by proclamation and service to the world, and common decision-making.
 3. WORSHIP

Recognizing the centrality of worship in the life and witness of the church, a service of Word and Sacrament will be prepared to celebrate the Ecumenical Partnership. This service will be used in national, conference/regional, area, and local celebrations beginning with the General Assembly and General Synod in 1987. The Ecumenical Partnership Committee is asked to assist in familiarizing the churches with each other's worship resources, to prepare and provide resources for education in worship, including the significance of the sacraments and worship resources from Christian traditions throughout the world.

Worship is a significant aspect of our growing relationship. Frequent shared worship will be encouraged so that congregations and the various plenary bodies and boards of our churches might build on this foundation. Wider ecumenical worship is to be encouraged, including a growing use of the worship resources of the Consultation on Church Union.
 - B. Listen and respond to the partnership experiences of people throughout the two churches, so that insights might be shared and deepened.
 - C. Encourage understanding of and participation in the Ecumenical Partnership in order that it may be claimed more fully throughout the two churches.
 - D. Formulate and make recommendations, at appropriate times, on further specific steps and activities between these two churches in the pursuit of full communion and visible unity.
- II. The General Assembly and the General Synod authorize, respectively, the Administrative

Committee of the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Executive Council of the United Church of Christ to elect ten persons to the membership of the Ecumenical Partnership Committee. The presidents of each church shall be included in the delegations. In addition, provision shall be made for the inclusion of two ecumenical members from other churches in the Consultation on Church Union. The Administrative Committee and the Executive Council shall develop common procedures for establishing the terms of office as well as the orderly replacement of members. The Ecumenical Partnership Committee shall report biennially to the General Assembly and the General Synod through the General Board and the Executive Council.

- III. The General Assembly and General Synod authorize the Administrative Committee and Executive Council to negotiate with the appropriate bodies in the two churches for staff and funds to implement the work of the Ecumenical Partnership Committee. It is understood that in accomplishing its mandate the Ecumenical Partnership Committee will seek inclusive and collegial participation in the partnership endeavors.
- IV. As part of our search for growing relatedness and as a concrete way to express common decision-making, the General Assembly and General Synod encourage all governing and decision-making bodies to explore the possibility of moving toward ecumenical membership, with voice and (where possible) vote, from the partner church.

Conclusion

The General Synod and General Assembly call upon all congregations, districts and areas, associations, regions and conferences, institutions and national bodies to encourage and implement this partnership. In shared mission, growing theological understanding, and worship, we look forward to the leadership of God's spirit in our midst.

In adopting this proposal, we celebrate and declare to each other and before the world a new Ecumenical Partnership which we pray God will bless, enrich, and use as together we seek to be more faithfully and fully the people God calls us to become.

Covenant Steering Committee Members:

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Kenneth Teegarden (co-chair)
 Walter Bingham
 John Compton
 Paul Crow
 Charlotte Emel
 Dolores Highbaugh
 T.J. Liggett
 James Noe
 Nancy Brink Spleth
 Richard Taylor

United Church of Christ

Avery Post (co-chair)
 Dorothy Berry
 Dalila Delancey
 Lynne Fitch
 James Gilliom
 Gaylord Noyce
 Seido Ogawa
 John Shetler
 Irwin Smallwood
 Hattie Mae White