



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



The Disciples and The United Church of Canada Full Communion Celebration

On October 6, 2019, which happened to be the World Communion Sunday, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada and The United Church of Canada celebrated the full communion relationship at Broadway Disciples United Church in Winnipeg, MB. Broadway is affiliated with both denominations.

2019

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT



The Disciples of Christ is seeking God-given unity with other communions in the United States, Canada and beyond.



This new agreement with The United Church of Canada is similar to the one with the United Church of Christ based in Cleveland, OH. Through a series of conversations for the past several years, the Disciples and the United Church have also adopted these five marks as the indications of a true full communion relationship:

1. Common confession of Christ;
2. Mutual recognition of members;
3. Common celebration of the Lord's Supper;
4. Mutual recognition of ordained ministry; and
5. Common commitment to mission.

These core partnerships could lead to additional educational and network opportunities and common works for social justices as the relationship grows.

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Ministry Introduction

From its beginnings in the early nineteenth century, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has had as its central concerns the unity of all Christians. Barton Warren Stone declared “Let Christian unity be our polar star.” Thomas Campbell affirmed, “The Church of Jesus Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.”

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

Mission

The mission of the Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry is to rekindle, confess, and nurture the visible unity of the Church as a witness to the reconciling nature of the Gospel and to the unity and renewal of humankind and creation. This mission will focus on engaging, educating, and equipping the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada to embody the ecumenical vision and to understand humanity and creation in our own faith tradition and different religious traditions.

Vision

Crafting Unity:

Our Calling and Journey as Disciples of Christ

- **Becoming a Multi-Cultural and Inclusive Church**
- **Developing a Deeper and More Dynamic Ecumenical Spirituality**
- **Understanding What It Means to Live in the Changing Landscape of an Interfaith Context and Interreligious World**

Initiatives

▪ **Becoming a Just Peace-Making Church**

As Disciples of Christ seek to live out our witness to God’s gift of peace and reconciliation in Jesus Christ and to God’s call to justice in a broken world, we declare our intent to be a “just peace-making church,” with the understanding that this commitment represents an essential mark of our life and mission as a church.

We Are...

Seeking Peace in the Community
Seeking Peace with the Earth
Seeking Peace in the Marketplace
Seeking Peace among Peoples

▪ **Live Life in Harmony and Peace in a Multi-faith World**

We invite everyone to certain places of life and to become one community together. We will bring our gifts, as other people of faith will bring their gifts, and by sharing these gifts together, we can build a better community and a better world!

From Paul's Desk

"Divisions among Christians are embarrassing to our interfaith friends."



Commitment to a Movement for Christian Unity and to Be a Movement for Unity for All Humanity

For the past one hundred years, the Council on Christian Unity's mission has been clear:

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

Since the inception of our church, we have sought every indication of unity among Christians. Even when we feel we are only witnessing disunity in the Church and the world, we have never despaired. We believe that the unity of God's Church is already given to us as soon as we confess Christ as our Lord. Thus, no force in either heaven or earth could forfeit this divine gift from the followers of Christ. Maybe a person, a group, or some heavenly or earthly power could hide it for a moment or could conceal it for a long time in the darkness of human history. Yet we know that there has been no such successful attempt.

The Council on Christian Unity (CCU) and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) have toiled for centuries to be a voice of hope amid people's frustration about the progress in ecumenism. As others simply give up on the effort to bring unity to the Church, the Disciples hold their hands and encourage them to keep on walking in the faith of God. We are therefore known for our resilience in faith and our zeal for unity. We have a dream that one day, all followers of Christ will sit at the Lord's Table together without shame or entitlement.

As we continue walking on this journey with Christian friends, many of us have come to realize that God intends for us to accompany all humanity on earth. We understand that the unity we seek for Christians is not the same kind of unity we would find with other religious or nonreligious friends. We have struggled prayerfully in this relatively new journey to accompany all humanity, and we are not shy in revealing our struggle as Christians to understand God's grand design for all humanity and how to live in this multireligious world as Christians. We have humbly let our interreligious friends know that we desire to walk with them and seek their invitations to do so. As in the past, we would not pretend to stand in the center and treat other

neighbors as people in the margins. With God's divine illumination, we understand we are also in the margins with our other religious friends, even at home, where society has become more secularized.

To clearly communicate with the broader church about this journey toward unity for all humanity, the Council Board has decided to change its ministry name at the fall 2019 board meeting. As of January 2020, the name will be "Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry" of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

The name change, however, does not indicate that the Council has not been working on the area of interfaith or has set this as its new ministerial direction. In the past years, the CCU has continuously strived to reflect on our cultural circumstances and a place of Christian communities in a multireligious world. In 2007, the CCU published the report "Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement" and the accompanying study guide, and in the following years, the joint "Interfaith Toolkit," with the United Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church (USA). In 2018, the multifaith study guide for Sunday Schools, "Disciples of Christ in a Multi-Faith World," was published, which has been used and appreciated by many congregations.

Also, the CCU has been part of the interfaith dialogues with Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and other partners through the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCUSA). With the World Council of Churches (WCC), we participated in the Christian Confucian Dialogue in 2017 and the Interreligious Officers Gathering in 2019. The CCU has been involved in an international effort, especially with Muslims, through the Alliance of

Virtue in Washington, DC, in 2018. In early 2019, I was invited to attend a historical event called the "Global Conference of Human Fraternity," hosted by Al Azhar Al Sharif, Sheikh Professor Ahmed At-Tayeb, and Chairman of the Council of Muslim Elders and His Holiness Pope Francis in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Ironically and rightfully so, all these interfaith efforts urge the CCU to be a prophetic voice seeking unity among Christians. Divisions among Christians are embarrassing to our interfaith friends. Many interfaith neighbors are puzzled by so many different streams within Christianity. Even though they understand that division among religious traditions is somewhat natural, they are perplexed by the presence of over 3,000 different Christian sectors. It is scandalous because it is hard for us to say who represents Christianity in "legitimate" ways or in what ways. Consequently, it is only fair for us to say we represent the Disciples or the historic Protestant church tradition.

Even in this era of much well-received multireligious cooperation, we should not regard our ecumenical movement as something obsolete. Because much of the current or coming generation does not care about ecumenical endeavors, it is not right that we simply dismiss the Christian unity movement. If so, it would mean that we just abandon our calling from Christ, who prayed and still prays for his followers to be one. (John 17)

As McAllister and Tucker indicate in their book, *Journey in Faith*, the Council on Christian Unity has reminded the Disciples of their deep commitment to the unity of the Church of Christ. (p. 35) The CCU will do so without ceasing.



The Church of American Individualism

The year 2019 marks the 50th anniversary of the Disciples' governing document, the "Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)." (Originally, it was "A Provisional Design for the Christian Church [Disciples of Christ], but later, "provisional" was removed.) We should note that the document wasn't titled a constitution of the church. It was a design because it wasn't a human desire to be a church but God's design. The Disciples of Christ have understood that God's design or plan for the Church of

Christ is to be united through God-given unity. Some scholars would claim that this attempt had something to do with conversations around the theme of the first General Assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948, which was "Man's Disorder and God's Design." In 1968 and 1969, as an ecumenical church, the Disciples wanted to clearly express themselves to be a church that God has designed since the first Pentecost in Jerusalem.

In 1968, according to McAllister and Tucker, “After more than a century of compromised and eventually unsuccessful efforts, Disciples had felt their way to a form of church government which provided for representative democracy” (McAllister and Tucker, *Journey in Faith*, p. 35). Even though it was a significant accomplishment for the Disciples of Christ, it was anything but a perfect solution. I am afraid to say that this document was a clear indication of the ethos of the Disciples, which was born on American soil in the 1800s, where the Church suffered from considerably European divisions and an individualistic approach to freedom and Christian traditions in the American frontier.

With the so-called “camp meeting Christianity” arising in the American frontier in the 1800s, people rejected any authority over individual or local churches. No one, including a bishop or other entity, could give a “marching order” to anybody. If people agreed to form an association for mission, for example, the purpose of that para-church organization did not need the whole church to reflect on it. It was a cooperative organization of the people who agreed and were funded by those individuals or local congregations who decided on the purpose. Although it gave the Disciples of Christ an excellent opportunity to move freely and be responsive swiftly without any limitation, it lacked a collective theological understanding from the whole body. As a result, the Disciples of Christ had become a manifestation of American individualism in the form of a church. Thus, for more than two centuries, no one in the Disciples of Christ tradition could speak on behalf of the church or any individuals.

Even when the church decided to form a governing body in 1968 and finalized its governing document in 1969, the ethos of the Disciples hadn’t changed much. The governance of the church was still fragile because every ministry and local congregation claimed to be autonomous, which is, in my understanding, biblical. Of course, we have strived hard to suggest the theological concept of “God’s covenant.” I am afraid, however, that the covenant was practiced among Disciples in being autonomous or individualistic.

Fifty years after the design was approved, where are we? Structure-wise, there has been little to no change. As for denominational identity, ironically, the Disciples have fallen victim to denominational provincialism. We are too proud to be something else but the Disciples of Christ. Yet, there is no church-wide theological understanding of the church that allows us to define who we are as a church. Many times, we have identified ourselves in terms of who we are not or by practices of the church, such as baptism by immersion and the open Table of the Lord.

Unfortunately, every constituency of the Disciples do not agree on practicing open Table theologically, either.

I believe that the CCU has been an indication of what the Disciples of Christ has become. The church is ecumenical and seeks the unity of God’s Church. No one would deny this among Disciples. The CCU has done its best to fulfill this calling since 1910. Given that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has tried to embody the ecumenical call, however, one would think that the CCU would receive more support in building the health of the ministries of the church. The reality has been the complete opposite. The CCU is the smallest ministry in the General Church. Even though there is no support staff or administrative person, no associate ecumenical officer, and no physical office due to financial straits, there is no way for the Council to appeal to the wider church for support. Some people say this office should be merged into a more significant ministry; others say that the CCU needs aggressive financial campaigns. These ideas may resolve those practical issues that the Council is dealing with. However, they would not help us to examine the root cause of the main problem: an ecclesiastical understanding of the church.



Even if the Council disappears into history, no Disciple would feel it could be otherwise. What matters here is not whether the CCU would be gone without adequate support from the whole church or not but rather that the Disciples would feel that there is no way for us to see each ministry in the General and Regional Churches from the perspective of the whole church. Thus, what we are dealing with now is an ecclesiastical crisis.

How can we examine ourselves as a church in terms of its vision, calling, mission, purpose, and structure? These are the primary concerns that I am raising in this section of the report. If we continue down this path, the church called the Disciples of Christ might disappear as one ministry after the other walks into the past. I am not afraid of demise or death. I am worried that we Disciples will pass suddenly without leaving a legacy. If the Disciples of Christ closes its chapter in its 200-year life, who among the ecumenical or interfaith communities would grieve our vanishing? Who would miss the Disciples’ contributions to the ecumenical tables and interreligious activities?

Sadly, many Christian denominations are in survival mode, and I am afraid that we are as well. That is why we must reflect on our ecclesiastic understanding of the church and renew our structure so that we fulfill God’s calling as the Disciples of Christ. This time it could certainly be a blessing disguised in this crisis.

Ecumenical Partnership

Full Communion with The United Church of Canada

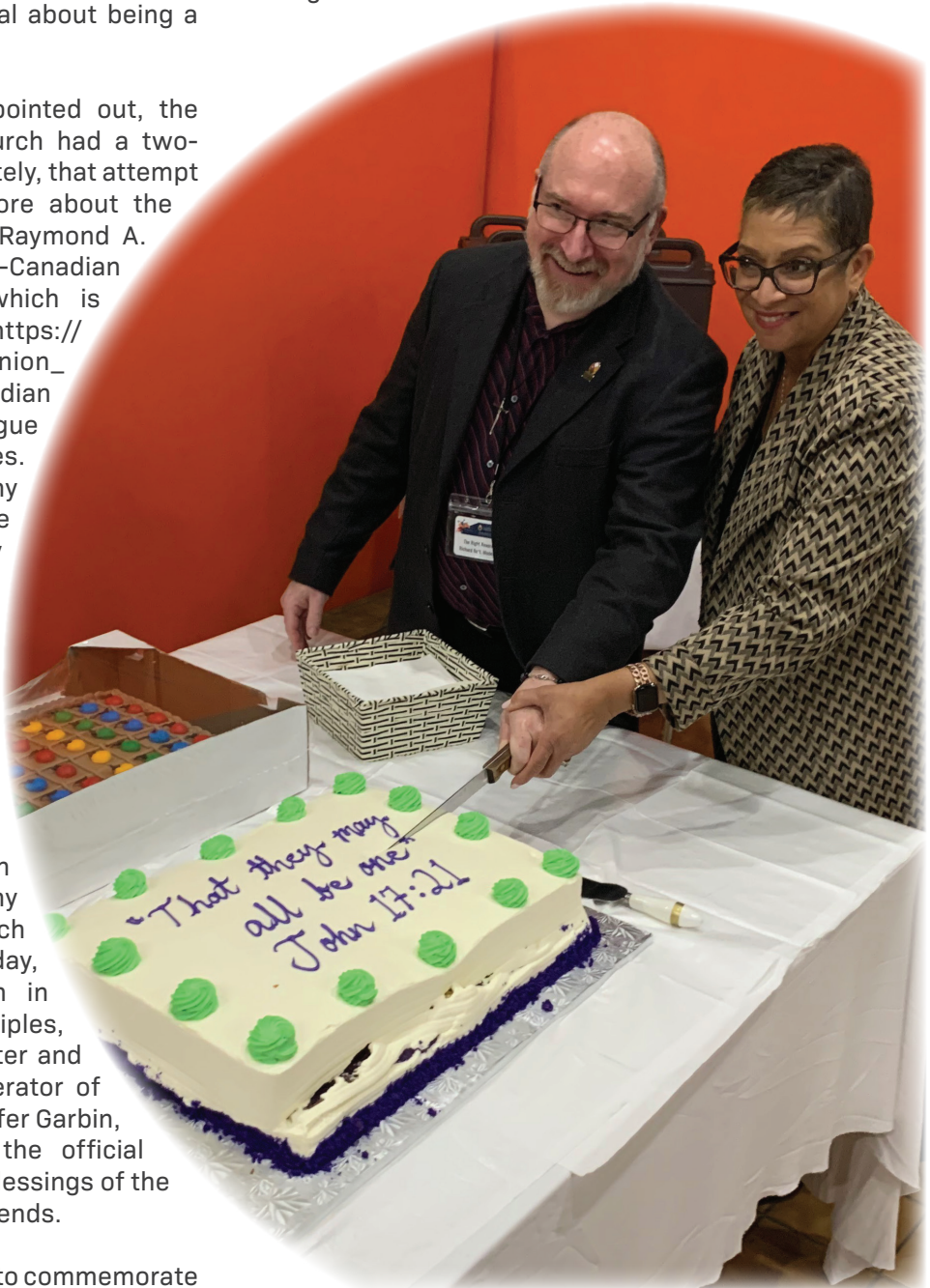
The 2019 General Assembly, which gathered in Des Moines, IA in July 2019, approved the full communion relationship with the United Church of Canada. This is the first full communion relationship for the Disciples of Christ since 1989 when the Disciples and the United Church of Christ officially shook hands and agreed to have full communion. The United Church has become our first full communion partner in Canada. It has been an essential step for us to be intentional about being a binational church.

As the previous reports of the CCU pointed out, the Canadian Disciples and the United Church had a two-decade dialogue for a merger. Unfortunately, that attempt failed. (To help the Disciples learn more about the process from the '60s and '80s, Rev. Raymond A. Cuthbert, former moderator of the All-Canadian Convention, wrote a short article, which is posted on the Council's website at https://councilonchristianunity.org/full-communion_uccan.) After the union talk, Canadian Disciples did not seek any formal dialogue with the United Church for decades. However, they never gave up on any opportunities to work together with the United Church in Canada. The two jointly affiliated congregations, Broadway Disciples United Church in Winnipeg and Campbell-Stone United Church in Calgary have faithfully witnessed to the visible unity of God's church. There have been many joint efforts to share ministries in different regions in Canada between both communions.

In much anticipation, the celebration worship service and signing ceremony were held on October 6, 2019, which happened to be World Communion Sunday, at Broadway Disciples United Church in Winnipeg, MB. On behalf of the Disciples, Rev. Teresa Hord Owens, General Minister and President; Rev. Dr. Belva Jordan, moderator of the General Assembly; and Rev. Dr. Jennifer Garbin, regional minister of Canada, signed the official document of the full communion in the blessings of the congregants, ecumenical guests, and friends.

The celebration service was not an event to commemorate

the end of our journey between the two communions. Rather, it was a public acknowledgment of our promise to each other that we will continue working in unity to bring God's kingdom to Canada and beyond. There will be an Ecumenical Partnership Committee meeting in the spring of 2020 and a series of conversations regarding the reconciliation of the "ordered" (ordained) ministries throughout 2020.



Church-wide Initiative

Becoming a Just Peace-Making Church



The CCU's initiative, "Becoming a Just Peace-Making Church," has been the underlying principle for the CCU as we have sought opportunities to work ecumenically with other communions to bring peace to the conflicts. As a Korean American, I have worked with several Korean partners to bring peace to the Korean Peninsula. I was invited to the International Conference in Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the March 1st Movement in Seoul, Korea, in early February 2019. The theme was "Envisioning Peace on the Korean Peninsula/Northeast Asia." Following the conference, there was the International Seminar on the Ecumenical Diaconal Ministry of North/South Korea, and I was invited to be a panel member. In the same week, I also met with the members of the Committee for the Human Rights of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK) regarding human sexuality and gender issues in South Korea.



Rev. Kang, Chairman of North Korea's Korean Christian Federation (KCF)

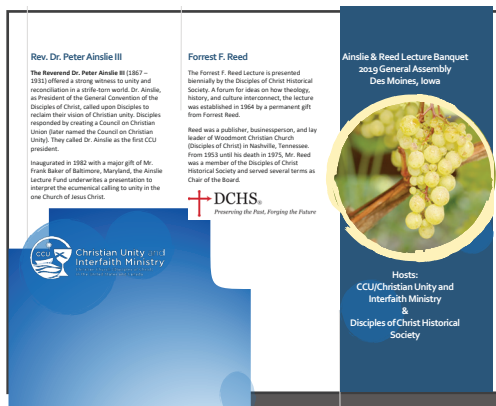
In July 2019, as a member of the Ecumenical Forum for the Korean Peninsula (EFK), I attended a meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, where the members of the Korea Christian Federations, North Korea's official Christian body (a government agency), were present. This meeting was significant because it was the first time the members of the EFK heard how North Koreans evaluated the failed Hanoi Summit between North Korea and the United States in April 2019. There was much tension as the members of the EFK worked on the joint statement regarding the meeting, and the differences in the issues of peacebuilding in the Korean Peninsula were revealed through conversations. After days of discussion, the report was issued to assert that Christian communities throughout the world should support any efforts to ease the tension between North Korea and the United States.



Visit of Rev. Dr. Lee, General Secretary of the Presbytery Church in the Republic of Korea

This initiative, which is based on an ecumenical effort led by the WCC to bring peace based on justice, is the perfect example to show why Christian unity matters. It matters because the world needs the presence of Christians in every conflicted area, and it cannot be done if the church is divided by its own differences and conflicts. Unity is not the goal in itself. Christian unity is necessary to heal a fragmented world marred by violence and war.

Biannual Lectures



Peter Ainslie Lecture on Christian Unity and the General Assembly

The Council on Christian Unity submitted a resolution regarding the full communion with the United Church of Canada (GA-1922), which was adopted enthusiastically by the 2019 General Assembly. Rev. Dr. Richard Bott, the moderator of the United Church of Canada, spoke from the floor in favor of the resolution.



The 30th Peter Ainslie Lecture was held at the joint dinner of the CCU and the Disciples of Christ Historical Society at the 2019 General Assembly in Des Moines, IA. The lecturer was Rev. Dr. Peter W. Marty, senior pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA, and publisher of the Christian Century. As the publisher of the journal, which started as a Disciples magazine in Des Moines and later became a journal beyond the denominational boundary devoted to shaping American's conversation about religion and faith in public life, Marty presented to the attendees of the dinner a talk about Charles Clayton Morrison, a Disciples minister who purchased the Christian Century in Chicago in 1908 and whose editorship of the magazine made it prosper.

Because the CCU has chosen not to have a banquet or dinner at the future General Assemblies, the board of the CCU is in discussion for a new venue for the Peter Ainslie Lecture.



Our ministry strives to offer different opportunities to introduce new ecumenical and interfaith insights, to interpret the new directions of the ecumenical movement, and to initiate interfaith engagements through the Peter Ainslie Lectures on Christian Unity, the Joe A. and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup Lectures on Christian Unity, conferences on unity, peace, justice and mission, and other projects.

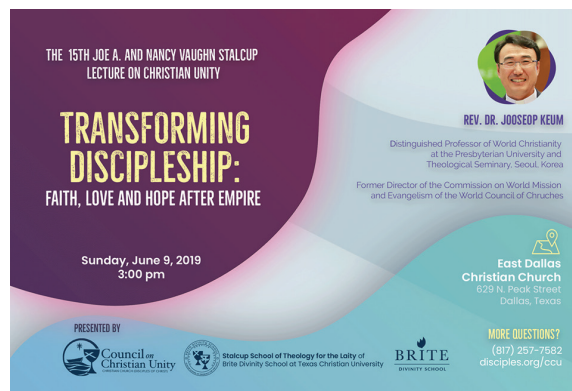
Fifteenth Joe A. and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup Lecture on Christian Unity

The biannual lecture presented by the Council on Christian Unity and Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University was held on Sunday, June 9, at East Dallas Christian Church. The keynote speaker was Rev. Dr. Jooseop Keum. Also appearing were distinguished professors of World Christianity at the Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary in Seoul, Korea, and the former director of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches.

The theme was “Transforming Discipleship: Faith, Love, and Hope After Empire.” Here is the introduction to the lecture:


How can we describe the time and context in which we are living today? An unholy alliance of religious fundamentalism, racist claims and the ideology of neo-liberalism is creating fascist empires. Division, fundamentalism, violence, and discrimination are all on the increase everywhere in the world. Empires are no longer sustainable in a traditional way. Therefore, they are taking extremist measures to survive in the era of “after empire.” In our sociopolitical cultures, the darker side of human nature is overwhelming and without any shame. The greed of power, money, sex, violence, and claims of jealousy are competing to search for victims. The top leadership of the “global empires” and “little empires” are openly creating the politics of fear based on discriminating and bullying the other, particularly the weak, the minorities, the stranger, and the poor. Perhaps, the current rise of fascism all over the world is disqualified even to be called an empire in all aspects. Therefore, I call it the “ruins” after empire. Therefore, it will be answered to the challenges by the empires with the concept of “transformative discipleship,” and seeking an alternative form of leadership for the world and the future of global Christianity. There will be a triangular conceptual emphasis of transformative discipleship: Rediscovery of Faith at the Margins, Power of Love to Defeat Politics of Fear, and Hope as Agent of Change.

The lecture has been published at councilonchristianunity.org.



Ecumenical Communities

Churches Uniting in Christ

A woman with short grey hair, wearing a blue blazer and glasses, stands at a dark wood podium. The podium has a sign that reads "DOUBLETREE BY HILTON MONTGOMERY, AL". She is holding a microphone and speaking. Behind her is a large screen displaying the text "CHURCHES UNITING IN CHRIST". The setting appears to be a conference room or hall with a patterned carpet and recessed ceiling lights.

Since the last plenary in St. Louis in 2016, the CUIC has been in search of its purpose as an ecumenical body. I have understood that, for a half century here in the United States, the CUIC has tried to answer the question, How can we be one body of Christ? The first attempts of the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) were to physically or organically merge into one substantial Protestant denomination, which failed. Later, the CUIC had tried to reach full communion through the reconciliation of the ordained ministry, which has also proved to be unsuccessful. After these attempts, the CUIC has worked hard to find its new purpose that is unique to this particular body. For the last three years, however, our conversations have always circled back to the question of whether the CUIC's mission is to reconcile the ordained ministry, and some member churches do not want to do anything related to this issue because they believe that the only way to get to full communion is through bilateral dialogues, not multilateral. In 2016, the plenary decided to pursue racial justice, and the Coordinating Council of the CUIC has steered the CUIC to fulfill this mandate of the 2016 plenary.

The 2019 Plenary was held in Montgomery, AL, from June 6 to June 9. This press release gives a summary of the plenary:

This year's plenary session began with tours of the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, the Legacy Museum and the Legacy Memorial founded by the Equal Justice Initiative to memorialize the 4,000-plus lynchings that have been documented.

The remainder of the session was devoted to visioning and planning for the next three years. Reports were given by the Racial and Social Justice Task Force and the Young Adult Task Force, the two primary foci of CUIC since it last met in St. Louis in 2016. The two Task Forces have sponsored live forums and webinars addressing issues of racism, mass incarceration, and mental health. Videos and various statements from CUIC can be found on the website, www.ChurchesUnitingInChrist.org.

This plenary session established its foci for 2019-2022 as follows: 1) to continue and expand the work of the Young Adult Task Force to include a component to equip additional young adults as ecumenical leaders, 2) to work with other organizations who promote grassroots activity to combat racism, and 3) to envision a new structure or new entity that will provide continued opportunities for bilateral and multilateral agreements among the member denominations/communities. This work will be directed by the Coordinating Council, which includes three members from each member.

The CUIC's Coordinating Council is currently working on the structure to adequately fulfill the mandates of the 2019 plenary under the leadership of Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, president of the CUIC.

Unfortunately, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) has withdrawn its membership as a partner in Mission and Dialogue during this plenary session.

“The Disciples of Christ at every level of its life be urged to act together and in concert with other churches of Jesus Christ in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction or church order compel us to act separately.”

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA

The annual Christian Unity Gathering (CUG) was held in Newport News, VA, on October 14–16, 2019. Church leaders from around the world, including Dr. Agnes Abuom, moderator of the WCC; Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the WCC; and Bishop Kortu Brown, president of the Liberian Council of Churches, along with community and denominational leaders gathered in Newport News and Hampton, Va., for a public witness during the National Council of Churches USA’s Christian Unity Gathering.

The group of more than 200 national and international Christian leaders came together to lament and remember the arrival of enslaved Africans at this place 400 years ago, marking the beginning of institutionalized slavery in what would become the United States of America.

During the CUG, denominational leaders, including Rev. Teresa Hord Owens, acknowledge the unique role white churches played in slavery, recognize the black church’s formation out of the suffering of slavery, and strategize about what churches can do together now to end racism.



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DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

World Communion

REPORT



DECC



DISCIPLES OF CHRIST
WORLD COMMUNION

World Communion

The Disciples of Christ World Communion (DECC) was founded in 1979 as a council of member churches throughout the world from the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, together with United and Uniting Churches which Disciples have joined, who have taken official action to join the DECC in supporting its stated goals. The DECC was established to further and strengthen the common calling of Disciples of Christ and Churches of Christ to visible unity and mission. It is not a legislative body but is intended to enable the churches to consult with each other about matters of Christian faith, witness and unity.



4.5 million world-wide Disciples

MEMBER CHURCHES

- **Argentina:** Iglesia Evangélica de los Discipulos de Cristo
- **Australia:** Churches of Christ in Australia
- **Canada:** Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada
- **Congo:** Eglise du Christ au Congo—Communaute des Disciples du Christ
- **England:** Fellowship of Churches of Christ in England
- **Ghana:** Ghana United Churches of Christ
- **Great Britain/Ireland:** United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom
- **India:** Church of North India
- **Jamaica:** United Church in Jamaica and Cayman Islands
- **Malawi:** Church of Christ in Malawi
- **Mexico:** Asociacion Iglesias Cristianas Evangelicas (Discipulos de Cristo), Mexico
- **New Zealand:** Associated Churches of Christ in New Zealand
- **Paraguay:** Iglesia Discipulos de Cristo en el Paraguay
- **Puerto Rico:** Iglesia Cristianas (Discipulos de Cristo) en Puerto Rico
- **Southern Africa:** United Congregational Church in Southern Africa
- **United States:** Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States
- **Vanuatu:** Churches of Christ
- **Zimbabwe:** Associated Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe

Reflections

Rev. Paul S. Tché
General Secretary
DECC—Disciples of Christ World Communion

A Journey toward Being a World Communion

In the last two years, the Disciples communities around the world have struggled together to reach a common understanding of what it means to be a global church as the Disciples of Christ. As a Christian communion known for its zeal for Christian unity and commitment to the ecumenical movement, not only at a global level but at every expression of the church, we are asking ourselves a very foundational and fundamental question about who we are as a faith community in this multireligious world, our theological identity, and our ecclesiology.

Instead of seeking answers to these questions, we felt urged to express ourselves as a global family clearly. As many close ecumenical partners understand, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was born on American soil by mostly Presbyterians and other Christians who were growing weary of divisions among American Christians. European Americans had brought their divisions in Europe into this newly established land and even perpetuated this horrible, scandalous religious reality in their daily life. One interesting historical aspect should be noted in the so-called American frontier: fortunately, not a single denomination did not or, rather, could not dominate the entire nation. Of course, there were many “pockets” of concentration of one denomination, such as Lutherans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Wesleyans, Anglicans, and Catholics. Still, the Christian landscape in the border of the new nation 200 years ago was undoubtedly distinguishable from its European motherlands.

There are still many Americans who believe that this nation was founded on religious principles, especially Christian

ones. However, various historical and sociological studies have found otherwise. In my understanding, because of what European Christians and not-so-religious individuals alike experienced in European empires, kingdoms, republics, and territories, many did not have any desire to be engaged in or even encounter other “religions”—which simply meant other Christian denominations—at all. With sensitive and robust respect for an individual’s private spaces, personal experiences, and different understanding of life, the forbears of the Disciples of Christ understood the church as a gathering of faithful Christians, where individuals and local churches had sole authority over other church’s entities. Consequently, even though it may sound like a harsh judgment of the Disciples of Christ, this newly established Christian unity movement became a true manifestation of American individualism as the church evolved in the American culture.

Before the Christian church looked more diverse in terms of ethnicity and races globally, and when the cultural, moral, and life norms were something believed to be Christian in America, many Christian communities in the United States from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries were a dominant force for evangelicalism and mission works. The Disciples of Christ surely was one of them. So missionaries from the Disciples were sent out into the world and established national churches.

As the current structural reality of the global body of the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council (DECC) proves, it has been the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada that has set almost every

Church at Worship

Colombian Disciples of Christ is one of the vibrant communities of faith that is a relatively young national church.



agenda for the whole global family. It has been because of the history of the church and, of course, relatively well-developed human and financial resources. The Disciples in North America has been the very soul of the Disciples global community. Moreover, it is undeniable that this tendency had something to do with the United States' political and economic hegemony and colonialism.

Today, the most growing and vibrant Disciples communities are located in the global south, particularly Latin America and Africa. Also, some national churches have joined the Uniting and United Churches to pursue a more visible unity of the church. Recently, the DECC has been paying more attention to a new development of the church globally: there are new national Disciples bodies that have grown out of missional works of the churches in Puerto Rico and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Because they do not have any formal relationship with the Disciples in North America, these new Disciples' churches in Central and Latin America have never heard about their global families. This new reality prompted the DECC to reflect on this phenomenon theologically. As a result of some theological reflections and many prayers, the leadership of the DECC was determined to be a world communion that expresses its identity as the Disciples of Christ with the understanding of the current cultural, political, and moral situations of the world.

The last year proved to be the most contentious time for this global family, however. While the newly established national bodies were excited about refreshing this global communion, including the name change, some member churches that were founded by European descendants have objected such an effort, in part, because of their historical tie with the World Convention of Churches of Christ (WCCC).

Although the DECC continues to persuade every member church to join together for discernment and prayer to set future directions of this global body, we would not hurry the process and hastily declare a new identity as a world communion.

Meanwhile, there have been five new national churches in Latin America—one in the Philippines and one in England—that have expressed their intention to join the DECC.

As general secretary of the DECC, I hope that the DECC relays the leadership to individuals from growing churches in the global south. It is hard to anticipate how much time the DECC needs to complete the transition from a mere ecumenical consultative body to a world communion and from the American-led leadership to the leadership of new emerging constituents. I am determined, however, to journey together with our member churches and have been encouraging our member churches to be honest about our reality and reflect on it. I am convinced that the DECC will make this transition sooner or later. I am confident that we will be a global church that reflects a new landscape of the Disciples world.

Bilateral Dialogue

Disciples and Roman Catholic Dialogue

The DECC has completed another fruitful phase of the Disciples and Roman Catholic Dialogue. Every member from both communions has committed faithfully and patiently to this five-year journey of theological engagement. Last year, the memoir from the dialogue had been produced, and both churches are currently in the process of reviewing and reflecting on this fruit of theological conversations to understand each church's historical view of the Eucharist. Several ecumenical partners and scholars have written to us asking when it will be published officially. Because of the theme for this

phase, genuine interests in this document are growing in the ecumenical community.

As we await somewhat anxiously to hear from each communion's proper authority regarding the memoir, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the DECC are planning the next phase. Serving as co-chairs of the soon-to-be-established commission will be Rev. Dr. Robert W. Welsh from the DECC and Bishop David L. Ricken on behalf of the PCPCU.



Annual Christian World Communions Gathering, Denmark, November 2019



The Church of North India Golden Jubilee Celebration, Nagpur, India, 2019



World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) Executive Committee Meeting
Zürich, Switzerland, 2019



Pope Francis visits UAE, Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2019

Church of North India

As General Secretary of the DECC-Disciples of Christ World Communion, I have been invited to the inaugural event of a year-long celebration of the Golden Jubilee (50th anniversary) of the Church of North India (CNI). It was indeed an honor and privilege to be part of the very first event of the series of celebrations of the 50th anniversary. Even though it took me more than three days to arrive at Nagpur, India, because of arrangement issues, this event was something that I couldn't miss. In the end, I gave thanks to God for the presence of the CNI among incredible Indians in that beautiful land.

The reason why the CNI began their year-long celebrational journey in Nagpur—even though their central office is located in New Delhi—is because, on November 29, 1970, six Christian communions, including the Disciples of Christ, formed the Church of North India and consecrated six new bishops as one body of Christ. On that day, the newly formed church marched through the whole town behind the names of their former church bodies. During the celebration, the Disciples' heritage was recognized and celebrated, and I am so proud of the fact that the Disciples led the movement of unity here in north India.

The Disciples of Christ in north India formed the CNI because Disciples wanted to manifest the visible unity of God's church. We have been a small

community; yet, for the last two hundred years, we have been a prophetic voice throughout the world, especially regarding unity of the church in this very fragmented world. We have been a challenging voice for those who are skeptical about unity at the Lord's Table, where the Disciples believe unity begins, and where all Christians are made one in Christ. From the Table, we are called to witness to the message of reconciliation, welcome others, and replicate the hospitality that we have experienced in our being welcomed.

I understand that God has accompanied this Christ's church on their 50-year-old journey with God's grace and has strengthened this community of faith as it has witnessed to Christ's love here in north India and beyond. For the last half century, the CNI has spoken with care and courage for the voiceless and has spoken without fear against any injustice that puts all God's people and creation in harm's way. Surely the CNI has raised a prophetic voice with love to bring justice and peace to this nation. This journey, as a united church, must not be comfortable. Now we praise God that God is indeed a god of people who never cease to be a genuine church and walk as a community of love and care.



CALLED TO LIVE LIFE IN UNITY



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



CHRISTIAN UNITY
AND INTERFAITH MINISTRY