

# International Commission Members for the Sixth Phase

## Brief Bios

### Co-Chairs



**The Most Reverend David L. Ricken** was ordained to the priesthood on Sept. 12, 1980, at La Junta Catholic Parish in southeast Colorado. His first appointment was as associate pastor to the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Pueblo. Five years later, he was named the administrator of Holy Rosary Parish in Pueblo and vice chancellor of the Diocese.

In 1987, then-Father Ricken attended the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome where he received his Licentiate degree (J.C.L.) in Canon Law. Upon returning to the diocese, he was appointed the vocation director and vicar for ministry formation. Three years later, he added diocesan chancellor to his responsibilities as well as assisting in the Diocesan Tribunal. He served in these positions until Oct. 1, 1996, when he was nominated to be an official of the Congregation for the Clergy at the Vatican.

On Jan. 6, 2000, he was ordained to the episcopacy for the Diocese of Cheyenne at the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II. On Sept. 26, 2001, Bishop Ricken became the seventh leader of the Diocese of Cheyenne. During his tenure in the diocese, Bishop was one of the founding members of the Wyoming Catholic College.

Pope Benedict XVI named Bishop Ricken the twelfth bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay and he was installed as bishop on Aug. 28, 2008, at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral in Green Bay.

Bishop Ricken is a member of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and is presently a member of the Bishops' Advisory Council for the Institute for Priestly Formation and the Catholic Mutual Relief Society. Bishop also serves on various boards and committees, both locally and nationally. Bishop Ricken was appointed by the Holy See to be the Co-Chair to the International Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church.



**Rev. Dr. Robert K. Welsh**, an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), grew up as in Dallas, Texas, and graduated from Transylvania University (BA) and Lexington Theological Seminary (D. Min.) in Lexington, Kentucky. During his ministry, he has served as a congregational pastor; as the Dean of Students at Transylvania University, and taught at Transy in the area of religion and psychology; he was on the staff of the World Council of Churches on its Faith and Order Commission; and, he offered leadership in various general ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Robert retired in April 2017 after 18 years as President of the Council on Christian Unity where he served as the chief ecumenical officer for the Disciples of Christ, representing our church in a broad range of international, national and local efforts in giving expression to the unity of the church and our oneness in Christ, including our church's international dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church and our church's initiatives in interfaith engagement and dialogue.

Dr. Welsh did post-graduate studies at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches outside Geneva, Switzerland, and Westminster College in Cambridge, England.

He is married to Nancy Moorhead Welsh, has two grown children, Jennifer and David, and three grandchildren.

## Co-Secretaries



**Msgr. Juan Usma Gómez** is originally from Colombia. After Secondary School, he entered the Diocesan Seminary of Medellín, studied Philosophy and Theology at the Pontifical Bolivariana University, and specialized in Dogmatic Theology and Ecumenism in Rome. He has been a Curate and later a Parish Priest in Medellín, and he combined this service with some teaching at the University.

At the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, he is responsible for the Catholic–Pentecostal International Dialogue, the International Consultation with the World Evangelical Alliance, the Conversations with the New Charismatic Churches, and the Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Disciples of Christ. He is also in charge of relations with the United Bible Societies and the Catholic Biblical Federation. Currently, he is a member of the Roman Curia Interdicasterial Group on New Religious Movement and a member of the Joint Working Group between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. Since 2009, he has served as the *Bureau Chief* of the Western Section of the PCPCU. Since 2019, he has been the Vice-Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum, Rome).



**Rev. Paul S. Tché**, ordained Disciples of Christ minister, has served the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada as President of the Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry (CUIM). In his role and ministry with the CUIM, he offers leadership as the ecumenical officer for the Disciples of Christ in North America, representing the church in local, national, and international efforts in giving expression to the unity of the church and our oneness in Christ. As the Interreligious officer for the church, he has engaged in various national and international interfaith dialogues on behalf of the church. Also, he has equipped local congregations and regional bodies of the church to embody the vision of unity for all humanity and to understand humanity and creation in different religious traditions.

Rev. Paul S. Tché also serves the Disciples of Christ World Communion (Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council), the global body of the Disciples of Christ tradition, as General Secretary. This body 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.

As a Korean-American, he has participated in various efforts to bring just peace to the Korean Peninsula for a decade. While he was serving a local congregation in Kentucky, he was elected to serve the church as the moderator-elect of the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada for two years before he was called to the current ministry.

Rev. Tché received his Bachelor's degree in French and Philosophy from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and his Master of Arts in Catholic Social Philosophy from Sogang University in South Korea and earned his Master of Divinity from Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas.

## Members



**Rev. Dr. Thomas F. Best**, a pastor of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), served from 1984 on the staff of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, retiring as Director of the Commission in 2007.

His publications include contributions to *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy*, the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, and *Studia Liturgica* as well as to *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, the *Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies*, and *Called to Unity for the Sake of Mission* (Regnum Press).

He is editor of *Baptism Today*: (WCC/Eerdmanns) and *IV* (WCC), and has served as editor and book review editor of *The Ecumenical Review*.

From 1984 to 2007 he helped prepare the official international materials for The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and has lectured on the Week of Prayer at the Centro Pro Unione in Rome. He has served as President and Board Member of The North American Academy of Ecumenists, and is an Associate Regional Minister in the Northeast Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

He joined the International Disciples/Roman Catholic Dialogue at the beginning of its Fifth Phase.



**Rev. Dr. Merryl Blair** recently ‘retired’ after 25 years as Senior Lecturer in Old Testament Studies at Stirling Theological College (a college of University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia). She is an ordained minister with Churches of Christ in Australia, and now ministers as a professional Ministry Supervisor, as well as continuing some sessional teaching. This is Merryl’s 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of the Dialogue.



**Dr. Ian Boxall** is a lay Catholic from the UK, who has been Associate Professor of New Testament at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC since 2013. Brought up in an ‘ecumenical’ family (a Catholic mother and an Anglican father), ecumenism has been an essential part of his Christian life. After leaving school, he explored a vocation to priesthood and religious life with the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists), beginning seminary studies at the Franciscan Study Centre in Canterbury. He subsequently studied theology as an undergraduate at the University of Oxford, before specializing in New Testament at graduate level.

As well as his current position at CUA, he has taught New Testament at two Anglican seminaries, Chichester Theological College, and St. Stephen’s House, Oxford. His research interests are in the Gospel of Matthew, the Book of Revelation, and the reception history of the New Testament.



**Msgr. Michael Clay** is currently pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Raleigh, NC and adjunct associate professor in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

[Msgr. Clay's Curriculum Vitae](#)



**Dr. Elizabeth Groppe** is Professor of Religious Studies and Theology at the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio. She received her PhD in Roman Catholic Systematic Theology at the University of Notre Dame. She is the author of *Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Oxford, 2004), *Eating and Drinking* (Fortress, 2013), and articles and book chapters on topics including Catholic-Jewish relations and theological responses to the ecological crisis. She is the editor of the anthology *Seeing with the Eyes of the Heart: Cultivating a Sacramental Imagination in an Age of Pornography* (Catholic University of America Press, 2020). She is a board member of Bridgefolk, an ecumenical initiative to nurture friendships between Roman Catholics and Mennonites. She and her husband John are blessed to be the parents of a wonderful son who is a sophomore at a Jesuit high school.



**Rev. Dr. Taras Khomych** is a Lecturer in Early Christian Literature and Byzantine Theology at Liverpool Hope University (UK). He was born in former Soviet Union. After the fall of communism, he began my theological education in Ukraine and entered the Lviv Theological Academy (later on transformed into the Ukrainian Catholic University) at the moment when the theological tradition had just been revived. Shortly thereafter, he continued his studies at the Faculty of Theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium), where he obtained my Master in Religious Studies as well as my Master and Doctoral Degree in Theology.

His research interests lie mostly in early Christian literature, the writings of the Apostolic Fathers (1st & 2nd centuries) in particular, as well as later Patristic writings of the Byzantine period, including Old Slavonic transmission of early Christian literature. Within this field I focus on theological controversies (esp. Christology), liturgical practices (especially baptism, Eucharist, prayer), discipline (community formation, hierarchy, church orders), textual transmission, etc. His interest in Christian origins and later Byzantine period is not limited to history alone since he considers the encounter with the past as an excellent resource and opportunity for theological reflections today. In view of this, he deals also with more recent Eastern Christian theological trends (especially those from the 20th century) and contemporary ecumenical issues.

As a Catholic priest, he is involved in pastoral care of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in the UK and in chaplaincy at St Edward's College in Liverpool.



**Rev. Dr. Geritza Olivella** is an Ordained Minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico. She's currently the Pastor of Family and Church Growth of the denomination. She is the Executive Editor of the Sunday School Curriculums for Children and Adults: "Soy un Discípulo" and "El Discípulo".

Dr. Olivella has a Master's in Social Work from the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, a Master of Divinity from the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, and a Doctor of Ministry from Drew University.

She lives in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, where she is happily married to David Cortés and mother of two-year-old twins Emily and David Daniel.



**Rev. Noel A. Suministrado** is an ordained minister of United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). He studied Bachelor of Theology in Union Theological Seminary, Philippines. He attended the Graduate School of Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Geneva in 1998, and a year later he pursued the Master of Ecumenical Studies in University of Geneva. He taught Ecumenical Theology and Social Ethics in Union Theological Seminary after going back to the Philippines.

In 2017, he came to serve Broadway Disciples United Church in Winnipeg under the Mutual Recognition of Ministry Personnel between the United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

This year he was re-appointed as member of the Roman Catholic – United Church of Canada Dialogue. He is also part of the Faith and Witness Commission of the Canadian Council of Churches representing the Disciples of Christ.

He is married to his high school classmate Veronica Tabernilla, and have three children and a grandson named Liam.



**Rev. Dr. D. Newell Williams** has been President and Professor of Modern and American Church History of Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University since 2003. He has also taught at Christian Theological Seminary, where he served as Vice President and Dean from 1992 – 1998. He holds academic degrees from Vanderbilt and the University of Tulsa.

He is the author of several books and articles with such titles as *Barton Stone: A Spiritual Biography*, and *Ministry Among Disciples: Past, Present, and Future*. He is co-editor with Paul M. Blowers and Douglas A. Foster of two publications: *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Eerdmans, 2004) and *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (Chalice Press, 2013).

### Representative Articles and Book Chapters

- "Initiatives to Overcome Racism in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)" *Slavery's Long Shadow: Race and Reconciliation in American Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019, pages 189-212
- "Pursuit of Justice: The Antislavery Pilgrimage of Barton W. Stone" *Encounter* 62:1, 2001, pages 1-23
- "What I Learned about Churches of Christ and Christian Churches/Churches of Christ" *Stone-Campbell Journal* 2012, pages 165-176
- "The Future of the Restoration Movement: A Disciple of Christ's Response" *Leaven* 2006 pages, 172-177

Dr. Williams is an Ordained Minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and co-chaired the recently concluded fifth phase of the Disciples of Christ and Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue. He served a two-year term as Moderator of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) from 2007 to 2009, and was an active member of the Stone-Campbell Dialogue. He is currently chair of the General Commission on Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the immediate past president of the Association of Disciples for Theological Discussion.

He is married to the Rev. Sue McDougal; they are the parents of three adult children.



**Rev. Dr. Michael G. Witzak**, S.L.D., was born in 1951 in the City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He attended Catholic schools and went to our local seminary (dedicated to St. Francis de Sales), and was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee in 1977. After three years of parish work, he returned to studies and earned the licentiate (1984) and the doctorate (1987) in Sacred Liturgy from the Pontifical Liturgical Institute of the Pontifical Athenaeum of St. Anselm in Rome. He taught at his local seminary from 1983 until 2007, when he joined the faculty of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. He has also taught at St. Norbert College in De Pere, WI, and at the Pontifical Liturgical

Institute (1992-1999). In Milwaukee, he was a part of local ecumenical discussions with the Episcopal Church USA and in interfaith discussion with the Rabbi-Priest Dialogue of the Milwaukee Catholic-Jewish Conference. He was a part of the Fifth Phase of the Dialogue with the Disciples of Christ and look forward to continuing that relationship.

[Dr. Witczak's Curriculum Vitae](#)