

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

# 2022

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PRESIDENT



CHRISTIAN UNITY  
AND INTERFAITH MINISTRY



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## Introduction

The ecumenical movement and interfaith engagements have been affected by the global pandemic to such an extent that everyone in the ecumenical and interfaith communities has begun to reconsider the ways in which we have been engaged in dialogues and activities. Our programs in these two areas heavily rely on relationships, specifically friendships of trust, which are more likely to be formed during in-person encounters, conversations, and fellowships. For the past three years, unfortunately, our ecumenical and interfaith communities have been almost isolated from one another during lockdowns and have had only a few opportunities to see one another and to thus build friendships and seek mutual understandings.

To make our situation worse, the economic crisis hit in 2022, and it has created considerable anxiety among our ecumenical and interreligious communities—we are exceedingly afraid that our uncertain economic situation may deprive us from traveling and being engaged in dialogues and common activities, which will further perpetuate isolation among our communities.

There is no doubt, however, that ecumenical and interreligious communities once again prove to be resilient and creative in times such as this. Our communities are rooted in faith after all, and history has shown that faith always prevails, even during the grimmest human challenges. Our faith has always helped us see beyond challenges of life, and our faith in God (or the ultimate being) and humanity have never been diminished under any circumstance.

In any crisis or challenge, ecumenical communities actively seek a lesson. As the ecumenical communities have anticipated the end of the pandemic, we have diligently shared reflections and lessons with one another in efforts to compile the wisdom that we have obtained through this pandemic. Those reflections on and observations of our collective life under the global pandemic are theologically well articulated and sociologically insightful and will help us further navigate this current sea of uncertainty.

As any crisis does, this pandemic has also required our ecumenical and interfaith communities to be more pastoral and to give significantly more attention to one another. We have acknowledged that we are one community of distressed humans facing the challenge and that we can only overcome it through our collective wisdom and care for one another. Ironically, the pandemic has rather promoted deeper relationships among divided churches and diverse interfaith communities. We now have deeper and broader awareness of one another because we have paid more attention to one another in our daily struggles.

The pandemic has prompted the ecumenical and interreligious communities at the national and global levels to become more attentive to what happens at the regional and local levels. The local and regional communities have collaborated more to tend those who are more effected by the pandemic, and more local initiatives have been organized to help care for those in need. The decentralized collaborations among ecumenical and interfaith communities have offered us new insights about the future of ecumenism and interfaith engagements. Although we recognize our ecumenical and interfaith activities may be fragile during any human crisis, we are cautiously hopeful that we will always find new directions and new ways to be engaged with one another.

## **Churches and Ecumenical Communities Responding to the Pandemic**

For the past three years, the church has responded to the pandemic in various ways. New activities have emerged to respond to this interruption of the ministries and works of the churches. Some denominations have endured restructuring. Other churches have conducted a series of surveys to assess the current social, cultural, and religious landscape. The churches have created financial programs to support clergy and local congregations. They have increased their support of social services and have been part of the national or international vaccine distribution initiatives.

What surprises us is that new programs have emerged during the pandemic despite many churches allowing their ministers and staff members to work remotely and disallowing any national staff members to travel or visit any partners in person.

Among many attempts to systematically assess how churches have responded to the pandemic, the most well-documented one is from the Catholic Church. The Pontificia Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU)—its office was promoted to be the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity in 2022—published a document titled *Ecumenism in a Time of Pandemic: From Crisis to Opportunity* in January 2022, and then, the PCPCU held a hybrid event to discuss this document with the World Council of the Churches in February 2022.

The PCPCU surveyed Catholic bishops throughout the world regarding what they have learned from the pandemic. It asked questions concerning these areas:

- local reflection on theological and ecclesiological issues raised by the pandemic;
- new opportunities provided by the pandemic;
- opportunities to draw inspiration from other Christian communions;



- new problems or tensions arising as a result of the different churches' responses to the pandemic; and
- the impact on the work of the joint dialogue commissions (because the Catholic Church has entered dialogues with most Christian world communions).

Surprisingly, or not so surprisingly, the reflections from Catholic Bishops' Conferences in the world are identical to ones made by Orthodox, Protestant, and evangelical churches.

The document has three sections. The first part of the document reports about the opportunities that were offered by the pandemic. According to the document, against our assumptions, the pandemic has strengthened ecumenism and inter-church activities. Every church has dealt with the same challenge and sought out the wisdom of other churches, as beforementioned. What overall challenge did the pandemic pose for churches was not a challenge that a single denomination, including the Catholic Church, could address alone. Ultimately, no single church possessed enough wisdom to overcome this enormous challenge. Thus, the churches reached out to one another to seek wisdom and guidance in overcoming this crisis. The churches have valued different ways to respond to COVID and have adopted them. The pandemic also provided an occasion for valuing other Christians' practices and initiatives. Furthermore, one interesting aspect that the PCPCU's report points out is that ecumenical relationships have been strengthened because the churches have come to realize that they all have a common destiny as a human family with shared vulnerability.

Here are the main points in the first section of the document:

- The pandemic has not allowed us to establish new contacts, but it has, in a way, allowed communities to gain a deeper understanding of each other. The fact that so many church activities were accessible online provided an opportunity for Christian communities to gain a greater knowledge of one another.
- With the pandemic, new spirituality emerged, including a new way of being a worshipping community.
- Another outcome of the use of digital tools was an increase in participation in ecumenical initiatives and local churches' worship services and activities.

The second section of the document addresses the negative impacts of COVID-19:

- Theological and liturgical divergences: different concepts and celebration of sacraments and different understandings of the holy space—where do you livestream your service? a church building or home?
- Different understandings of the pandemic: Another dividing issue among Christians has been the differences in interpreting the pandemic. Reports

often mention that denial or conspiracy theories of the crisis, apocalyptic/divine punishment interpretations, the rejection of vaccines, and proposals of nonscientific or magical cures have resulted in tensions and negative consequences among Christian communities.

- Different attitudes toward public health restrictions: Opinions have varied widely as some more conservative Christians have viewed the restrictions as an assault on religious freedom while more liberal denominations have not perceived any threat.

In sum, the PCPCU's document highlights four areas in which the pandemic has raised internal issues for all churches:

- Spiritual: Christian lifestyle has been questioned and challenged by providential and eschatological approaches—"God will take care of us, or is this pandemic God's punishment?"
- Ecclesiological: A new way of being a church developed because of a deeper understanding of the Church as a community, a growing participation of laity, and a stronger experience of a "domestic church."
- Liturgical/Sacramental: The lockdown has resulted in a new way to participate in worship virtually, challenging the understanding of the role of sacraments in the Christian life.
- Missional: Will people come back into the churches? How can new people following online services be integrated into the church community? These questions pertain to all churches.

If you are interested in this document, please visit this website for the full text: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/documenti/altri-testi/-ecumenism-in-a-time-of-pandemic--from-crisis-to-opportunity---.html>

One point that the document does not address, in my opinion, is that there is no mention about Christian relationships with other religious communities, especially during the pandemic. In the United States, many Eastern religious groups including Asian Christian churches have suffered most from unbearable hatred, including physical violence and vandalism of properties, because of the origin of the pandemic. It is necessary now more than ever that the Church walk in solidarity with interfaith communities who have been targets of hatred and racism.



## Interfaith Engagement as an Ecumenical Call

As the ecumenical and interreligious officer for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, I am always asking myself and my disciples and ecumenical colleagues this question: “What does it mean to be a church here today?” This question implies that there is an ontological purpose for a church of which we need to remind ourselves constantly. Moreover, it alludes to God’s call for a church to exist in a particular time and place. Specifically, I am asking how we can be the church God has intended for today. I also believe such is the fundamental question that the ecumenical movement is asking.

Obviously, the Church does not exist in a vacuum. The Church is Christ’s institution, given to us through the Holy Spirit for the sake of God’s mission for the world. It is planted among people in the world. It is located within the web of relationships. God’s redemptive action is not a magical act that exists far away from our reality. God’s redemption occurs in the process of building relationships. The Church has been called to be a redemptive community as it builds harmonious, just relationships with all creation here on Earth.

The problem is that the churches have betrayed God’s trust in them—to exist as a redemptive community—by becoming a broken and divided community. The churches are not only divided among themselves but have also put one another in harm’s way. The ecumenical movement is an honest and sincere effort of the churches to turn back from their collective sin so that they can be the Church God has intended us to be. It has been meaningful and fruitful.

I understand there has been frustration toward the ecumenical movement recently. Some Christians, particularly among younger generations, dismiss ecumenism as a thing of the past. However, we should remind ourselves that ecumenism still matters because it is not about us Christians but rather our relations to the world. The Christian unity movement is for the world. Therefore, we need to place the churches in the current context where our life happens.

As we continue our journey to the visible unity of the Church, we need to know the world. We need to acknowledge the context of today. Here are two challenges that I want to highlight out of many:

- The Church is not at the center of the universe anymore, even in what used to be Christendom. Besides, COVID-19 has accelerated secularization.
- Even in the global South, where Western Christians are excited to believe Christianity is growing, Christianity is still only one of many religious groups.

Christians in the global south have never experienced what Western Christians have experienced: wholly dominating culture and society.

Even though it has been said in many different contexts, it should be reiterated now: Challenges and problems in our lives often become blessings in disguise as long as we can and are willing to address them together as one body of Christ.

As the churches humbly recognize that the Christian community is now one of many religious communities globally, there is a call for the church that arises from this acknowledgment. The churches are called on to build authentic relationships with other religious and nonreligious groups, and the churches should respond to this call.

As the churches strive to build authentic relationships with others, we should ask what gifts the Christian community—as a “small” part of the world and one body of Christ—can offer the world.

Interreligious conversations matter to the ecumenical movement because they challenge the Christian churches to engage with other religious groups as one Christian community. Will we live in harmony with differences, or will we live without any significant sign of unity—creating confusion for other religious communities and nonbelievers alike?

Expanding Christians’ interreligious commitments is an ecumenical call. As each Christian engages in interfaith activities, we will not abandon who we are with a confessional identity. However, we should be able to present ourselves ecumenically as we do.

As we are engaging interreligiously, the call to build relationships with other religions should not be confused with the call to be in communion with them. Seeking the unity of all humankind is different from seeking Christian unity. The Christian community as one body should articulate with other interfaith dialogue partners what it means to seek the unity of humankind.

It should also be noted that it is an ecumenical call, not ecumenism itself. Ecumenism and interfaith engagement have different starting points. The Christian churches are already one in Christ. However, unity in the world is something we Christians should “achieve” with others, and what it means to be in unity with one another as fellow human beings should be discussed together.

Although Christians should commit to interfaith dialogue, we should not attempt to understand others by substituting other religious terms with Christian ones or their



spiritual understanding of God and creation with Christian theological doctrines. I see this as another form of imperialism—our bad habits from the past.

Many have dismissed ecumenism as a movement irrelevant in the modern world. However, we should understand that being ecumenical means being in authentic relationships among the churches in terms of God and the world. In this case, the churches are nothing but ecumenical. From this understanding of ecumenism, Christians see the churches within the larger context of the world and seek relationships with other religious groups to build together a better community for all. Thus, Christians' interreligious commitment is an ecumenical call that will ensure the churches are related to the world as one body of Christ.

For the full text, visit this webpage: <https://www.disciplescuim.org/publications/interreligious-commitment-as-an-ecumenical-call/>.

## **Disciples and the Confession of Faith**

The Disciples of Christ began its journey as a Christian unity movement first on the frontiers of the United States in the 19th century. However, this Christian unity movement in western Pennsylvania and Kentucky became an international movement soon after its inception. The vision of Christian unity at the Lord's Table inspired Christians beyond North America to promptly join this movement .

Because of the desire “to die, be dissolved and, sink into union with the Body of Christ at large” as the Church's founding document, *Last Testament and Will of the Springfield Presbytery* (1804), states, some churches within the Disciples's heritage have been part of or have led a uniting and united church movement. And I expect that more churches in the Disciples of Christ World Communion will be joining the uniting church movement.

It must be noted, too, that there are also the churches within our global communion that have intentionally decided not to join other communions to keep the distinctive identity as the Disciples of Christ. Undoubtedly, the churches of the Disciples of Christ throughout the world have dedicated themselves to seeking Christian unity; yet, instead of seeking organic union with others, many Disciples churches have decided to pursue visible Christian unity in common mission and ministry with other churches within the ecumenical movement.

Since the beginning of the movement, the Disciples of Christ has been clear that its unity begins at the Lord's Table where we are made one in Christ. It is Christ who

has made his followers one, and, therefore, the founding fathers of the Disciples believe that the invitation to the Table has been extended by Christ and that there should be no test of fellowship to come to the Table.

Alexander Campbell, one of the founding fathers, was greatly disappointed that the creeds were typically used as tests of fellowship among Christians. He used even harsh words to express his disappointment at and frustration with the way Christians used the creeds. He said that “because they were made indispensable and authoritative terms of communion, or justifiable and valid grounds of exclusion; —because the terms and phrases, or the mental abstractions and opinions in them, propounded as the essential doctrines of Christ, expressed in human terms, were placed upon the same footing with the Oracles of God, and sometimes above them, insomuch that it became a greater sin to oppose or controvert the words of the creed than the words of the Bible” (Campbell, “Creeds Versus the Bible, Millennial Harbinger, Series 3, Vol. 3, 1846: 566).

This frustration, however, did not mean to Campbell that the Disciples is anti-creedal. In 1855, Campbell reflected on the creeds, suggesting that the Apostles’ Creed is worth all the creeds created over the past seventeen centuries, and he asserted that every word in the Apostles’ Creed is true. (Robert Cornwall, Robert, “Disciples of Christ: Confessing Faith as a Non-Creedal Community,” *Journal of Disciplina*: vol. 74: no. 1, Article 11; DCHS: Bethany, WV, 2021. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.discipleshistory.org/journalofdisciplina/vol74/iss1/11>)

The Disciples of Christ is non-creedal not because it denies the truthfulness of the creeds but because it refuses the way that Christians and the churches use them.

The churches within the Disciples of Christ tradition have expressed their confessions of faith with more biblical terms. Historically, the members of the Disciples churches have confessed their faith simply by reciting Matthew 16:16. Today, however, many national bodies of the Disciples of Christ have developed a confession of faith in contemporary languages.

However, it is undeniable that the Disciples has never suggested a list of approved ecumenical creeds even though the Disciples recognizes the value of many ecumenical creeds, including the Apostles’ Creed, and the Nicene Creed. From this long theological stance of the Disciples regarding the creeds, one significant question has arisen: What makes the Disciples of Christ throughout the world a confessional body among other Christian communions?

In other words, what bounds the Disciples of Christ as a community of faith? It is our *sacramental vision of Christian unity*. It does not simply mean that the most members of the Disciples of Christ asserts that we are seeking visible unity among Christians. It is unity at the Lord's Table that we are called upon to seek with other Christians. The members of the Disciples of Christ believe that God has called on us to fulfill the vision that all, without any exceptions, who confess that Jesus is Christ, son of the living God, and who are determined to follow Christ should be able to come to the Table and participate in the eucharistic feast without hindrance. Our communion with God, Christ, and one another at the Table enables us to witness the message of reconciliation and hospitality that we have experienced in our being welcomed.

## **Full Communion and Bilateral Dialogue Partners**

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada has two full communion relationships: the United Church of Christ (UCC) and the United Church of Canada (UC Can). The Disciples of Christ entered into the full communion relationship with the UCC in 1989, and, since then, the two churches have worked closely in our ministry and mission. The Global Ministries of the Disciples of Christ and the UCC is the most unique example of how the two churches witness together to the gospel in mission. In the history of ecumenism, there is no precedent of such a collaboration between two communions. Even today, the two churches remain strong and steadfast in their relationship and dedication to common witness to the gospel, and the year 2021 marked the 25th anniversary of the joint witness.

The UCC is now in the process of searching for a new general minister and president. Rev. John Dorhauer will not seek a third term and will retire from the position in 2023. Another significant transition was that the UCC has completed the process to move its national office to a new location in Cleveland in 2022 and has reopened the new office.

Our relatively new full communion partner, the UC Can, had its 44th General Council in 2022 and elected Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdown Kwis'lakw as its 44th moderator. She is the second indigenous person to be elected in the history of the UC Can.

At its prolonged online council meetings, the General Council approved five strategic directions with objectives: (a) Embolden Justice: Collaborating to Mend Church and World; (b) Invigorate Leadership: Adapting and innovating for Bold Discipleship; (c) Nurture Common Good: Equity and Sustainability in Resources; (d) Deepen Integrity: Living Climate Commitments; and (e) Strengthen Invitation: Humility and Confidence in Sharing Faith.

In March 2021, the Disciples entered into a bilateral dialogue with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and the two churches finally met in person for the first time in April 2022 to consider case studies and to identify themes and topics for further exploration. We are deeply invested in this dialogue, and we have begun our journey to learn each other's traditions and to build relationships with one another.

After this first in-person meeting, Rev. Dr. Robert Cornwall, Disciples cochair of the dialogue, shared his reflections:

When the restart of the dialogue was proposed by the leaders of the two denominations, full communion was a possible outcome but not the only possible outcome. The overarching goal established by the leadership involves the following: "Defining a new ecumenical relationship: What form of ecumenical relationship will enable the two churches to affirm their common confession of the Christian faith and to witness to the good news of Christ together more fully in local, mid-judicatory, national, and global expressions of the Church?" This would be accomplished through four actions:

1. Studying together each other's understanding of the mission and responsibility of the Church: How do we understand mission and ministry theologically and missiologically?
2. Collecting examples of current collaborations between both churches as well as examples of where deeper relations are desired: Where have the two churches been working together? What are the hopes for deepening mission and ministry?
3. Identifying and formalizing the areas in mission and ministry for the further partnership: How can the partnership be formalized? What are the mechanisms needed? What are the marks of mutual commitment and mutual accountability?
4. Establishing formal communication channels to foster collaborations and witness the Gospel together.

In October 2022, the Lutherans and the Disciples gathered again online to reflect on the spring meeting and to explore a convergence text of the World Council of Churches to identify areas of convergence between our churches and within the broader ecumenical movement. Rev. Dr. Thomas Best, former Director of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, convened our conversation around the theological convergent text "The Church: Toward a Common Vision."

## Conciliar Bodies

The World Council of Churches (WCC) convened its 11th General Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, from August 31 to September 8, 2022. The 4,000 participants gathered in Karlsruhe under the theme “Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity.” Although COVID-19 still lingers and the war in Ukraine is ongoing, the assembly was held successfully.

On behalf of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, five official delegates were sent along with observers and guests, including Rev. Belva Brown Jordan, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. The official five delegation consisted of the following: Rev. Terri Hord Owns, delegate representing the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States; Ms. Bethany Guy, young adult delegate representing the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States; Rev. Paul Tche, advisor to the delegation, representing the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States; and Rev. Janet Anstead, delegate representing the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada.

A “Unity Statement,” a key statement that will direct the WCC in its programs and activities until the next assembly, was adopted by the 11th assembly (<https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/A05rev1-Unity-Statement.pdf>). The “Unity Statement” asks a critical ecumenical question in our time as the assembly affirms that “a true unity is always founded in love”: “Can we open our hearts so that Christ’s love may move us in ways that breathe new life into the search for full visible communion?” It is our hope that every member church of the WCC strives together to answer this question.

The assembly approved and adopted four “public statements” and four “minutes,” with regard to the issues of justice and peace in the Middle East, the war in Ukraine, and the Korean Peninsula ([https://www.oikoumene.org/news/worlds-churches-converge-on-germany-city-of-karlsruhe-to-pray-and-act?fbclid=IwAR1lpj3Bla\\_vNdwlS01vus2NYZgQVEu8DyBqhiXb4ZVUO4NmsFYj4MpLGBvY](https://www.oikoumene.org/news/worlds-churches-converge-on-germany-city-of-karlsruhe-to-pray-and-act?fbclid=IwAR1lpj3Bla_vNdwlS01vus2NYZgQVEu8DyBqhiXb4ZVUO4NmsFYj4MpLGBvY)). Also, the assembly approved the formations of two new commissions: one on health and healing and the other on climate change and sustainable development.

The assembly, held every eight years, is the highest legislative body of the WCC. The assembly offers not only governance and future direction of the WCC but also opportunities for the 352 member churches and other guests to reflect on the Church and the world, exchange ideas, share different gifts, meet as confessional and regional bodies, provide cultural excursions and fellowships, and rally justice and



peace campaigns. However, in noting the carbon footprints of 4,000 participants and inequity in financial resources among the member churches, the WCC—as the fellowship of the churches—should ask whether such a mass scale of the meeting is sustainable. As a body of Christ, the WCC has to be responsible in preserving creation, prevailing upon justice and peace of all, and promoting equity.

At the Central Committee meeting in June 2022 in Geneva, the new general secretary of the WCC was elected: Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay, former president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and professor at a seminary of Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, will lead the WCC, beginning in January 2023. The election process was extended because of the pandemic and took almost two years for a decision (<https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-general-secretary-elect-rev-prof-dr-jerry-pillay-if-we-learn-to-trust-the-work-of-the-holy-spirit-we-can-find-each-other-even-through-difficulties>).

The National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States (NCC) held its annual Christian Unity Gathering under the theme “The Challenge of Change: Serving a Never Changing Christ in an Ever-Changing World” in October 2022 once again online. Session topics included Christian leadership, the impact of trauma, humanitarian crises, the future of faith formation, racism/Christian nationalism/White supremacy, and domestic unrest and dramatic change.

The Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) had its annual meeting virtually in June 2022 and elected a new leadership team: president, Abraham Wright, International Council of Community Churches; vice president, Jean Hawxhurst, United Methodist; secretary, Hermann Weinlick, Moravian; and treasurer, Christian Choi, Presbyterian.

At its annual meeting, the Academy of Ecumenism was proposed and approved. The proposal—from a task force of Rev. Hawxhurst (United Methodist), Rev. Pettis (United Church of Christ), Rev. Rose (Episcopal Church), and Rev. Tche (Disciples of Christ)—envisioned a gathering of young adults, ages 24–35, ideally half lay and half clergy, comprising two students and one teacher from each CUIC communion, for ten sessions online and four days in person. Each participant would be expected to initiate or carry out an ecumenical project in their environment.

## **Other Ecumenical Organizations and Spaces**

The National Workshop on Christian Unity, which has advanced unity and reconciliation among various Christian communities for more than fifty years and continues to be the only gathering of its kind at a national level in the world, met at Christ Cathedral in Anaheim, CA, from May 3 to 6, 2022. Rev. Paul Tché (Disciples

of Christ), Rev. Margaret Rose (Episcopal Church), Ms. Kathryn Lohre (ELCA), and Rev. Jean Hawxhurst (United Methodist Church) conducted the seminar, which was organized to answer these three questions:

- Why do you care about the unity of the Church? Was there an event in your life that was a catalyst to make ecumenism matter to you?
- Where do you see the greatest possibilities in today's Ecumenical Movement, and where do you see its greatest frailties?
- What trends do you see in the Ecumenical Movement in the USA today, and what questions do those trends answer?

The Christian Churches Together held its annual forum in Indianapolis in September 2022. At the gathering, Christians from a broad fellowship of churches and Christian organizations considered the question “Who does Jesus Call our Christian Churches to be in a Polarized Society?” with keynote addresses from each “family” (Evangelical/Pentecostal, Historic Black, Mainline Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic), theological learning, spiritual sharing and reflection, a walking tour of landmark churches and monuments, and worship with member churches. Adelle Banks, Religion News Service, and Adam Taylor, Sojourners, were the guest speakers to lead conversations related to the theme, and Rev. Terri Hord Owens, General Minister and President, was one of the keynote speakers representing the mainline Protestant church family.

## **Interfaith Dialogues and Engagements**

The Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry (CUIM) continues its participation in the national Christian–Hindu, Christian–Buddhist, Christian–Sikh, Christian–Muslim, and Christian–Jewish dialogues through the NCC. These dialogues were held in person for the first time in three years since the pandemic began, except the Christian–Sikh dialogue, which took place virtually in August 2022, wherein I give a brief presentation about the Christian understanding of salvation.

The board members of the CUIM met with Nina M. Fernando, Executive Director of the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign, in September 2022. Shoulder to Shoulder was organized with the vision of directly engaging faith leaders in the United States to be strategic partners in countering discrimination and violence against Muslims, and the Disciples of Christ has participated in the campaign from its beginning. Dr. Peter Makari, Global Ministries, has represented the Disciples on the campaign's steering committee. At the online meeting, the board members learned in depth about its programs and promised to actively promote this campaign.

The CUIM continues to work closely with the Religions for Peace, USA, (RFPUSA) and supports it financially. In 2022, an election year, the RFPUSA has given more attention to Christian Nationalism and political violence.

## Publications

The CUIM has published three online booklets in 2022:

- Clark Williamson, *The Church and the Jewish People*, republished online
- Paul Tche, *Interreligious Commitment as an Ecumenical Call*
- Robert Welsh, Charles Blaisdell, Jess Hale, Rebecca Hale, and Guy Waldrop, *People of the Covenant*

## Disciples of Christ World Communion

The Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council (DECC), which is the Disciples of Christ World Communion, had its confessional meeting at the 11th Assembly of the WCC in Karlsruhe, Germany. Rev. Paul Tche, General Secretary of the DECC, convened the meeting, where about thirty people gathered, including participants who are not members of the Disciples of Christ World Communion.

Seven member churches were present at the gathering:

- Rev. Eliki Bonaga, Église du Christ au Congo - Communauté des disciples du Christ
- Rev. Bladimir Coro Mogro, Iglesia Evangélica Discipulos de Cristo en Argentina
- Rev. Terri Hord Owens, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States
- Rev. Janet Anstead, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada
- Rev. John Gilmore, Churches of Christ in Australia
- Most Rev. DrPrem Chand Singh, Church of North India
- Rev. Sarah Moore, United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom

This gathering was featured in the WCC assembly daily news digest:

Disciples: “God speaks before we ever do”

About 30 people from the family of churches known as Disciples of Christ/ Churches of Christ gathered, celebrating that the group is growing with at least a quarter present being young adults and seminarians. The Disciples church family grew out of an early 19th century movement with origins in both the

United Kingdom and the United States of America. Identity and ecumenism were key topics in their discussion.

The spirit of encounter was expressed by Rev. Allison Bright, currently studying at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute: “The most moving part of ecumenical work here is that these stories have faces now. They are real and they are tangible, and they are heartbreaking. I don’t always know what to say, but I know that God speaks before we ever do.” ([https://www.oikoumene.org/news/assembly-participants-come-together-as-church-families?fbclid=IwAR1\\_ThcPiLYQJ-PNtG5S5KBjTGaDcx0DoF0PlkvIrMFixLbW4VuxSYrhQdc](https://www.oikoumene.org/news/assembly-participants-come-together-as-church-families?fbclid=IwAR1_ThcPiLYQJ-PNtG5S5KBjTGaDcx0DoF0PlkvIrMFixLbW4VuxSYrhQdc))

## **Disciples–Catholic International Dialogue**

The first session of the sixth phase of the International Commission for Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Catholic Church (the Commission) took place in Melbourne, KY, USA, June 24–29, 2022. The Commission consists of fourteen Catholic and Disciples members appointed by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican, and the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, Indianapolis, IN, USA. The goal of the dialogue, which started in 1977, has been understood to be full visible unity between Catholics and Disciples of Christ.

For the sixth phase, “The Ministry of the Holy Spirit”—based on 2 Corinthians 3—has been chosen as the overall topic through which to explore the work of the Holy Spirit, particularly in the life and ministry of the Church.

Prior to this session in person, the Commission held three online meetings to allow its members to get to know one another, to discuss the Basic Outline of the Sixth Phase, and to help the Catholic members understand the history and polity of the Disciples of Christ.

On the first day, the Catholic cochair, the Most Reverend David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay, WI, USA, and the Disciples cochair, Rev. Dr. Robert Welsh, Indianapolis, IN, USA, opened this session with a prayer service. On the following day, Bishop Ricken led a *Lectio Divina* on Acts 2 to deepen the spiritual understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit, and Dr. Welsh reviewed the previous five phases of the dialogue.

Meeting in Kentucky provided the Commission with the opportunity to meet with local ecclesial leaders and to visit historic sites of the Disciples of Christ. The Commission was first welcomed by the Most Reverend Roger Foys, Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Covington, where the meeting was held. On Sunday,

the Commission attended the Sunday worship service at Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Lexington, Kentucky, a congregation founded by Barton W. Stone, one of the Disciples's founding fathers. Rev. David Shirey, Senior Pastor, and the church members welcomed the Commission warmly and hosted a luncheon for the Commission to facilitate further conversations. The Most Reverend John Stowe, Bishop of Lexington, also attended the worship service with the Commission. After the service, the members of the dialogue visited the Cane Ridge Meeting House, where Dr. Newell Williams presented a paper highlighting the most significant moments of the 1801 Communion Revival, which gave birth to a movement that became the Disciples of Christ. At the closing prayer service, Rev. Dr. Don Gillett, Regional Minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Kentucky, brought greetings to the Commission on behalf of the regional church.

The program of this meeting also included a Bible study on 2 Corinthians 3 by Prof. Ian Boxall. Two papers on the Holy Spirit and the Ministry of the Church were presented to the Commission: "Disciples of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Ministry" by Dr. Thomas Best and "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3): Laying Foundations" by Msgr. Michael Clay. Each day, the Commission began and ended its activities with prayers led alternatively by the members.

"The Holy Spirit as a Gift" is the topic for the 2023 session, planned to be held in Rome.

Bishop Ricken, Catholic cochair, reflected on this first session as follows: "It is very important to enter into a new topic and phase of an ecumenical dialogue by getting to know some of the history and the story of the other. It has been an honor for me and the Catholic team to visit the birthplace of the Disciples of Christ, the Cane Ridge Shrine, in Paris, Kentucky. Hearing the story in the place of the birth of this movement is inspiring and will assist us in the Dialogue in the years ahead."

At the end of the meeting, Dr. Welsh, Disciples cochair, shared, "This session of the Dialogue was a time of getting to know each other as the members of the Commission for Dialogue from a wide variety of nations from around the world (Australia, Korea, Puerto Rico, Ukraine, the Vatican City/Colombia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) as we joined together in common prayer and as we shared our understandings and personal experiences of the Holy Spirit."

The Commission members from the Disciples of Christ are the following: Rev. Dr. Robert Welsh, Indianapolis, IN, USA (cochair); Rev. Paul Tch  , General Secretary of the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, Indianapolis, IN, USA (cosecretary); Rev. Dr. Thomas Best, Belmont, MA, USA; Rev. Dr. Merryl Blair, Melbourne,



Australia; Rev. Dr. Geritza Olivella-Santana, Bayamón, Puerto Rico; Rev. Dr. Newell Williams, Brite Divinity School at TCU, Fort Worth, TX, USA; and Rev. Noël Suministrado, Hamiota, Canada/The Philippines, who was absent from this meeting.

The Commission members from the Catholic Church are the following: Most Reverend David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay, WI, USA (cochair); Rev. Msgr. Juan Usma Gómez, Bureau Chief of Western Section, Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican City/Colombia (cosecretary); Prof. Ian Boxall, School of Theology and Religious Studies, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, USA/UK; Msgr. Dr. Michael Clay, Diocese of Raleigh, NC, and School of Theology and Religious Studies, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, USA; Prof. Elizabeth Groppe, Department of Religious Studies, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH, USA; Rev. Dr. Taras Khomych, Department of Theology, Philosophy and Religious Studies, Liverpool Hope University, UK, and Catholic University, Ukraine; and Rev. Dr. Michael G. Witzcak, School of Theology and Religious Studies, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, USA.



BUILDING A COMMUNITY  
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 CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)  
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA