

Reflections from Executive Administrator, Richard L. Hamm

Christian Churches Together Represents Unity and Diversity

January 8-11, 90 representatives of participant churches and organizations and several observers and visitors gathered at the Conference Center at The Maritime Institute in Baltimore to affirm the rich fellowship that CCT has become and to further discern God's direction. The time was spent mostly in small discernment groups, in worship, and in sharing our experiences and learning with one another. It was a time of rich fellowship and deepening appreciation for each other and for what God is seeking to do in us and through us. Although CCT is the product of conversations that began in 2000, we have been "officially" formed only since February of 2007 and we are still finding our way into this new-old model of Christian unity.



The model is new in that we are reaching across old dividing walls of hostility and isolation to focus on what unites us in our Christian faith rather than what divides us. This is not to say that we merely "paper over differences." The point was made by one representative at the Annual Meeting that "our divergences are as important as our convergences." This is true because we learn from both our similarities and our differences and because "unity" does not mean "uniformity."

I am reminded of my experience in conducting weddings during my years as a parish minister. In the Midwest, where I was serving in the 1970's, the tradition of lighting a "unity candle" was becoming popular. At first, each using a lighted taper, the couple would ceremonially light their unity candle and then blow out the tapers. The idea was to symbolize "the two shall become one." But before long, couples began to talk about the idea that unity does not mean surrendering all of one's individuality. And so, couples continued lighting their unity candle together, but they began placing their lighted tapers in holders next to the lighted unity candle, representing the fact that they were becoming one but were still individuals each with their own unique gifts and graces.

While CCT does not represent a marriage, the unity candle and the lighted tapers seems to me to be a fitting image for the churches and organizations of Christian Churches Together. In fact, in each worship and business session at the Annual Meeting, we had a table with a Christ candle in the center and five candles placed in a semi-circle around the Christ candle representing the five church families that compose CCT: Catholic, Evangelical/Pentecostal, Historic Protestant, Orthodox and Racial/Ethnic. Each draws its light and life from Christ, each is a part of the Body of Christ yet only a part.

Annual Meeting Receives Seven New Churches and Organizations, Commissions Father Kishkovsky and Hamm, Discerns Next Steps in Poverty Initiative

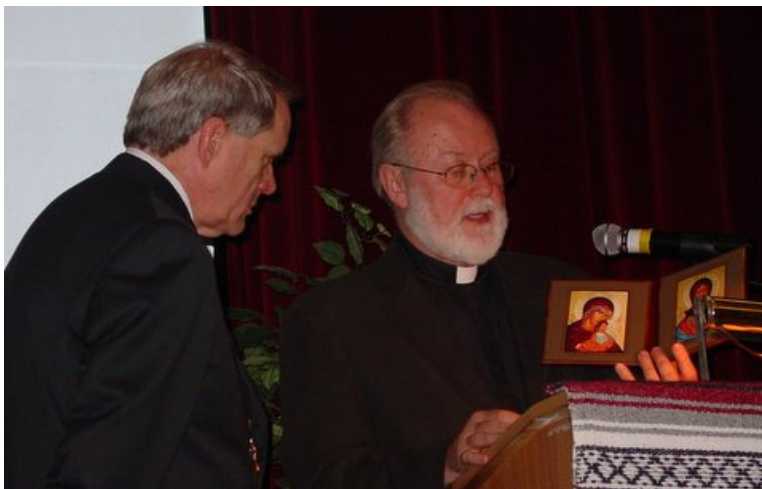
In the opening worship of the Annual Meeting, representatives of the seven new participant churches and organizations were asked to come forward in a Service of Reception. The new participant churches and organizations include: the American Bible Society, the Church of the Brethren, Elim Fellowship, Habitat for Humanity, the Mennonite Church USA, the Polish National Catholic Church, and The Vineyard USA. This brings to 43 the number of CCT participants. Each of these seven will enrich our fellowship and witness.



Representatives of the seven new participant churches and organizations are officially received by Moderator, Wes Granberg-Michaelson.

In a very brief Service of Commissioning, Father Leonid Kishkovsky was commissioned as the new Moderator. Father Kishkovsky has been a part of the CCT conversation from the beginning and is the Orthodox CCT President (each of the five “families” of CCT has a president and the moderator is selected from among these presidents). He is the Director of External Affairs and Interchurch Relations of the Orthodox Church in America and serves a parish in Seacliff (Long Island), New York.

In the same service, Dr. Dick Hamm was commissioned as the Executive Administrator of Christian Churches Together, the only full-time staff person. Dick



Father Kishkovsky, new moderator, expresses appreciation to Wes Granberg-Michaelson with a gift of icons easily carried by a traveler.

commented, “I have a bias against ‘installation services’ – refrigerators are *installed* – we should *commission* Christian leaders!” Dick is a Disciples minister, ecumenist, church coach-consultant, and served 10 years as president of his denomination.



Cardinal William Keeler, Bishop James Leggett, Dr. William Shaw, the Rev. Cliff Kirkpatrick, the Rev. Wes Granberg-Michaelson, the Rev. Lydia Veliko, and Dr. Dick Hamm in opening worship. Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church USA, Kirkpatrick, brought the sermon.

The group met in small discernment groups to pray and think together about what God might be calling CCT to do as individuals, as churches and as CCT together in regard to poverty and in addition to the “Statement on Poverty” which was released last year (see www.ChristianChurchesTogether.org). There was also a discernment session on the theme of evangelism, the other primary focus of CCT.



“Discernment Groups” met several times during the Annual Meeting. This group included Dr. Bill Shaw (National Baptist Convention, USA), Rev. Michael Livingston (International Council of Community Churches) and the Rev. Carlos Malave (Presbyterian Church USA).



Eighteen seminarians from all five families joined the meeting for a day in Washington DC. Here Kate Davelaar (RCA) shares thoughts with Archbishop Karim in a discernment session.

The entire group (including 18 seminarians who joined us for the day) toured S.O.M.E. (So Others Might Eat – a local ministry to the hungry and poor in Washington D.C.) and heard about the anti-poverty work of several CCT participant organizations including Bread for the World, Habitat for Humanity, Sojourners, and World Vision.



Jim Wallis of Sojourners shares with representatives of CCT.



David Beckmann looks on as Asma Lateef, Director of Bread for the World Institute, shares information about hunger and Bread for the World.



CCT representatives visit the dining room of S.O.M.E. in Washington D.C.

(more pictures at www.ChristianChurchesTogether.org)

In the business session, next steps were approved, including dedicating the largest part of next year's Annual Meeting to a continued exploration of the convergences and divergences of the participant churches and organizations regarding how to eliminate domestic poverty. The group decided to press the new U.S. president-elect to make the elimination of domestic poverty a part of his or her administration's goals. New members of the Steering Committee were affirmed and the date for the next Annual Meeting was set for January 13-16, 2009 (place to be announced).

Forty Scriptures Focusing on the Poor Offered as tribute to the Fortieth Anniversary of the Assassination of Dr. King

Dr. Ron Sider, Evangelicals for Social Action, has drawn together forty passages from the Bible which distinctly refer to the poor and to the Christian's responsibility to address their need. These forty are a small sampling of the hundreds found in Scripture. These may be downloaded from the website (www.ChristianChurchesTogether.org).

Dr. Sider says, "On the fortieth anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's assassination, we honor his work by meditating on forty biblical texts that highlight God's special love for poor people....These texts could be used as a resource for personal Lenten devotions this year, or for a class on the issue of poverty."

At the end of his life, Dr. King was focused on poverty in America. His death occurred in 1968 while he was in Memphis to support the Garbage workers strike for living wages.

For more information or to make a donation to CCT-USA, please contact:

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