

Revised 6/3/07

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES TOGETHER IN THE USA

February 5 – 9, 2007

Pasadena, California

The annual meeting of *Christian Churches Together* began with dinner at the Sheraton Hotel in Pasadena, California. The Very Reverend Leonid Kishkovsky, CCT president and chair of the planning committee, welcomed the participants to the first annual meeting of CCT since officially organizing in Atlanta in 2006. After reviewing the agenda for the meeting, Father Kishkovsky invited each participant to introduce him/herself.

The Reverend John Thomas, assisted by the Reverend Lydia Veliko, led the evening prayers on behalf of the historic Protestant family. In his meditation on Luke 5.1-11, Thomas noted that

“...Jesus is by the lake, pressed by eager crowds... Imagine, then, the amazement when Jesus approaches... to invite himself into Peter’s boat. “Take me out into the lake.” Some of you know what that experience is like, what an amazing thing that simple request from Jesus must have felt like....Of course, the story doesn’t end with Jesus stepping into the boat. Put out into the deep water and let down your nets... Schools of fish are caught up in the nets, help is needed hauling them in, and then the boats begin to founder in the deep water. Blessing gives way to fear and, at least for Peter, all the old demons flood back. “Go away from me. I am a sinner.” Our faith, even in our own sacredness, is often elusive and fleeting. But it’s more than that. The blessing is also a difficult calling; the joy brings with it a cost. While it’s not in our text, I can imagine Peter turning to Jesus to say, “You can sit in my boat, but please don’t ask me to fish!”
....

The joy of discipleship always brings with it the cost of discipleship. All too often the church has decided a comfortable cruise is all that’s really required - a cruise ship of blessing. So on our comfortable cruise with Jesus we grow complicit with all that contradicts the very reign of God Jesus proclaims beside us in the boat....But when Christ calls us, he bids us come and die. There’s fishing to do, and following to do, and risk to assume, and dangerous waves threatening the boat. And always the question, how will the coming generation live? Peter’s life as disciple and apostle, as martyr and as founder was a kind of enduring response to that challenging question. Yet it all began where we regularly find ourselves: “Come, Jesus, sit in my boat. But please don’t make me fish.” To which Jesus replies: “Don’t be afraid. From now on you’ll be catching people.” And they left their nets. And followed him.

Lake Avenue Church Sessions

Participants gathered at Lake Avenue Church for day sessions, beginning with worship on Wednesday morning through Friday morning. Wednesday morning worship was led by the Catholic family, with Bishop Sklba, chair of the Bishops’ Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, presiding. Using the reading from the Book of Tobias as the basis for his remarks, Bishop Sklba noted that the context in which Tobias had written was different from our own context, but still instructive for our understanding of evangelism. A summary of his remarks follows:

In a far distant time and place amid the heavy burdens of oppression and persecution, God's people were forbidden to give expression to their faith. They were forbidden to honor the Sabbath, to give praise for creation, to show the mark of the covenant. Pagan authority attempted to silence God's people and render them invisible. Tobias could not and would not abide that situation. So his way to praise God was revealed in his relation to the poor, in clothing the naked, in respecting the wise, in caring for those who had died to give them respectable burial. Such was his way to praise God.

We gather in a land of freedom to give public witness to our faith. We extend our hands to those in need and here in CCT we can do so together in a wondrous way... We extend care to those in need, among whom we are ourselves. We also are in need of God's mercy and love, this week and every single day of our lives.

Opening Plenary Session

The Reverend Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, chair of the Steering Committee, welcomed the group, especially observers present for the first time, including Church of God in Christ, American Bible Society, Church of God (Cleveland), Emergent Church and Habitat for Humanity. He welcomed the seminarians and young church leaders present for the day and thanked Rachel Medema who had coordinated the effort on behalf of the Steering Committee to secure the participation of seminarians. He noted that two churches had made decisions to become founding participants since the meeting in Atlanta: Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.

In his opening remarks, Granberg-Michaelson noted that the vision statement was written here in Pasadena four years ago.

We committed ourselves to draw closer together in Christ in order to strengthen our witness in the world. We understand the way in which structure has to give framework to vision. Vision without organizational implementation is like faith without works. This is the first official meeting of the CCT since adopting the bylaws, even though the group has been meeting for over five years. We feel a fresh start. CCT is not formed to replace existing structures that are dear and relevant. It is to transcend the institutional and some theological barriers in order to give better witness to Christ. But it is what we have encountered here in CCT that draws us back. Through the building of relationships with each other we draw closer together in Christ and strengthen our witness in the world.

We have stressed that the first four purposes in article 3 of the Bylaws draw us closer together in Christ... We experience each other's ways of worship... we are deepening bonds of fellowship. Purposes 5 – 7 frame our agenda for our time together; today we look at evangelism; tomorrow we take up our ongoing work around poverty, a commitment that we made in Atlanta.

***On the Theme* – Evangelism Presentations and Discussion**

Theme: Is Jesus' Proclamation our Proclamation?" Luke 4:18

Evangelical/Pentecostal family presentation

Bishop Leggett, CCT president, moderated the *On the Theme* session for the evangelical/pentecostal family. Dr Grant McClung, Associate Professor of Mission and Evangelism at the Church of God Theological Seminary, presented the paper.

There are several key descriptors of evangelism for the evangelical/pentecostal families: 1) experiential (evangelism flows out of personal experience); 2) exegetical (evangelism flows out of the word of God; there is a high regard for Scripture); 3) expressive (verbally expressed following the model of Jesus...to preach, to proclaim -- with a view to persuading people to make a decision); 4) eschatologically urgent (we believe that Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly; this is a spur to evangelism); 5) exposure and confrontation (a proliferation of discussion and publication on the topics of spiritual warfare, power encounter and signs and wonders in world evangelization as well as active discussions of and active experience with the realities of evil that are displayed in economic and political systems); 6) ecologically active (bringing the message and realities of the kingdom of God into the social affairs of human beings and into responsible stewardship of all creation); 7) ecumenically interdependent (perhaps more observable at the beginning); 8. egalitarian in recruitment and leadership (marked by the recognition of human equality - an equal opportunity movement, motivate and effectively deploy women as well as encourage participation of the laity).

Among the areas of faithfulness, McClung noted that there has always been a social awareness and activism among Pentecostals, even while affirming the primacy of evangelism. A recent Pew survey noted (to the surprise of many) that the survey revealed strong support for political engagement among Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Failures were summed up under three subtitles: publication deficit, premillennial deficiency, partial declarations. He concluded with ten possible starting points in enabling collaboration with other Christians.

Catholic family presentation

As Cardinal Keeler, CCT president, was not able to travel to Pasadena; Bishop Sklba moderated the *On the Theme* session for the Catholic family. The Reverend John E. Hurley, CSP, former Executive Director of the Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat for Evangelization, presented the paper.

Not many years ago mission was understood as something that happened overseas; we were a mission sending country. Today we are a mission receiving country. In 1974 Pope Paul called for a Synod of Bishops on Evangelization in Rome that focused on three questions: 1) what has happened to that hidden energy of the Good News? 2) to what extent and in what way is that evangelical force capable of really transforming the people of this century? 3) what methods are needed in order for the gospel to change people? These questions and the discussion that followed raised the issue of discipleship. We as a church have been very liturgical. We were dealing with a membership more comfortable in a vertical relationship, than a horizontal. Mission was still a foreign idea. While evangelization is a link uniting all Christians in a common mission, it presents challenges of methodology within and among the churches.

The reawakening of evangelization in the Church was affirmed by John Paul II as a “new evangelization” *not* a re-evangelization. It was to try to awaken a methodology appropriate to the time. The content is the gospel. We are not the message;

the gospel in the message. In 1992, the USCCB approved a national plan and strategy for the US, which was essentially to bring the good news of Jesus into every human situation. Since 2000, there has been a focus on discipleship. We are hearing more about Christian identity and ongoing personal formation. When one thinks of oneself as a disciple, it involves identity -- personal identity with Jesus Christ. Young people, especially, are less interested in church issues, and more interested in working on social justice issues. They are quite open in talking about their personal spiritual encounters.

A lot of our parishes are creating smaller communities of 8 or 10 in which they reflect on the Scriptures and apply it to their lives. It is an antidote to the larger impersonal nature of a most churches. Breaking down into smaller communities is essential.

Sometimes the enthusiasm comes from the margins, or what we perceive as the margins. How can we be open to the enthusiasm of the Spirit in the structures? Fear inhibits; we need to put ourselves into the margins. We need openness to racial and ethnic diversity.

Cardinal Cassidy speaks of dialogue and identity. You can either have an identity that is closed in and locked in or one that is involved in dialogue and you are enriched by others. We are in relationship with others.

Racial/Ethnic presentation

Dr William Shaw, CCT president, introduced and moderated the *On the Theme* presentation for the Racial/Ethnic family.

In his remarks, Dr Shaw noted that in reflecting on evangelization and social justice within the community of faith, Luke 4: 18 ought to be balanced by the summary statement in Matt 4: 23 after Jesus had been led by the spirit into the wilderness, he went "throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people." Teaching, preaching, and healing. If our ministry is authentic, it is the ministry of our Christ. He does it through us in the power of the Spirit. It is incumbent to engage in these same practices. It was the announcement of the presence of the kingdom of God which confronts all authority. The healing instances were not just random miracles, but the concentration of the powers of God dealing with the powers of this earth...this is all part of the same thing, not optional choices.

The Reverend Dr Angelique Walker-Smith, Executive Director of The Church Federation of Greater Indianapolis, read the paper.

The Black Church has understood and practiced evangelism through the experience of racism and injustice. The NBC came into being as a response to slavery, so it is rooted in a protest of social injustice. Salvation and liberation are tied together. The Black Church maintained a clear moral judgment against slavery and legitimized resistance to injustice.

The NBC inherited this legacy of social activism, rooted in the Evangel. Many pastors were active in the Civil Rights Movement. The Convention has operated under the umbrella of VISA, an acronym for Vision, Integrity, Structure and Accountability. The Vision speaks of the focus of the Convention on Christ by affirming that we are Christ's people commissioned to do His work in the world. The mission and ministry of Evangelism in the National Baptist Convention is Christ-centered and contextually conscious. Jesus is our model and, like Jesus, we proclaim the Good News with

compassion and a consciousness of the contextual challenges that oppressed and poor people are confronted with.

There is no dichotomy between spiritual salvation and social liberation. The redemption of individuals is not divorced from the fight for social justice.

In the tradition of the Convention, emancipation of the oppressed from social, political and economic injustice is connected to evangelization. The Gospel that saves souls is also concerned about the bodies that house those souls as “temples of the Holy Spirit” and the communities that are home to the bodies. As a Christ-centered body, the Convention refuses to “get in bed” with the custodians of the status quo for that contradicts the Good News of Jesus that calls for Christians to follow Him in identifying with those who are forsaken, forgotten, oppressed and downtrodden. The National Baptist Convention does not limit its’ concept of ministry to benevolence for individuals but pursues social justice.

Dr Stephen Thurston closed this session with prayer.

Historic Protestant family presentation (panel)

The Reverend Larry Pickens, CCT president, introduced and moderated the *On the Theme* presentation for the historic Protestant family. Panel presentations were made by the Reverend John Thomas (General Minister and President, United Church of Christ), The Reverend Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (General Secretary, Reformed Church in America), The Reverend Rothang Chhange (Ecumenical Officer, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.), The Reverend Dr Jack Rogers (Fuller Seminary professor, Presbyterian Church, (USA)).

Pickens, United Methodist Church

We can note some distinctive features of the Methodist/Wesleyan movement as: all need to be saved; all may be saved; all may know that they are saved; all may be saved to the utmost. Other essential features of Methodism include the importance of both piety and knowledge, the inclusion of both clergy and lay in leadership, the blending of personal commitment and social justice, the sharing of songs of faith, sharing in sacramental worship, the creation of small communities within which people can be nurtured and the importance of connectional networks.

Albert Outler described Wesley as an obsessive-compulsive neurotic, with an authoritarian temper. He was not a strong communicator of the gospel; so how did he experience the ability to change the hearts of men and women? He moved from being a zealot to an effective witness, from a critic to a pastor. This is important for our efforts today to be agents of transformation. Our willingness to move from arrogance to humility will enable us to be witnesses to God’s grace today.

Thomas, United Church of Christ

I am struck that we [historic protestant presenters] have neither power point nor a scholarly paper. It feels thin. There is a thinness to our evangelism over the past 50 years, born out of churches that saw themselves as establishment, or as immigrant communities, and out of a caricatured notion that evangelism equaled fundamentalism. Interfaith that made us less confident of the gospel,

We are now in the process of recovering. The UCC as case study: an advertising campaign, that started as an identity campaign became transformed into an evangelism initiative that is helping us recover from ambivalence.

Our evangelism was a following of our people as they became more mobile, a chasing of the demographic. Conversion was around sanctification or social justice. We had lost the linking of social justice with the gospel.

We have been displaced from the center of American religious life. The orientation is not simply to assure generational transmission.

“God is still speaking” has brought home to many of us in the UCC the realization that our communities are filled with folks yearning for a relationship with Jesus, but who feel alienated and unwelcome and distant. Spiritual homelessness is a profound reality in all of our communities. It is a realization that has sunk deeply in recent years. The comma is an invitation to talk about a speaking God. It is a new experience for us and a claiming of an evangelical mandate.

Granberg-Michaelson, Reformed Church in America

The most crucial challenge today is how we can move from settled denomination to missional church. Mission is about being sent - crossing boundary in word and deed with the love of God. His instruction to his disciples was to proclaim and heal. In mission, individuals are transformed, communities of faith are created, societies experience the healing and reconciling power of God’s love and are confronted with God’s intentions for the world.

Mission is the faithful response of those who follow Jesus to join God’s work in the world. Crucial to this task is evangelism. But evangelism takes place, and is understood, within the broader, biblical call to mission. This understanding gets us beyond the awkward dichotomy between evangelism and social action, and the discussion of how they relate and which takes priority. A more helpful starting point, and I would argue a more biblical one, is how we are being sent by God to follow Christ in mission. To use words that come from the RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision, the Spirit empowers and shapes the church “to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world.”

It’s the missional identity of the church that we need to recover today. The RCA is in the midst of this journey. So much draws us inward rather than outward. The theology, organizational patterns, values, and norms that have undergirded a “settled denomination” must be challenged by what it means to be a missional church in today’s diverse cultural context.

For the RCA this has fueled a fresh and compelling focus on starting 400 new congregations since this is clearly one of the most effective ways that the gospel can touch and transform the lives of those who are spiritually homeless. We don’t think in linear terms but rather that social change, personal conversion and prophetic witness are all related to each other and intrinsic to the power of the gospel. These don’t happen sequentially.

Chhangte, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. (see attached paper)

Chhangte began by quoting from the American Baptist Churches’ 1984 statement on evangelism: “Evangelism is the joyous witness of the People of God to the redeeming love of God urging all to repent and to be reconciled to God and each other through faith

in Jesus Christ who live, died, and was raised from the dead, so that being made new and empowered by the Holy Spirit believers are incorporated as disciples into the church for worship, fellowship, nurture and engagement in God's mission of evangelization and liberation within society and creation, signifying the Kingdom which is present and yet to come."

Individual conversion is important; we affirm that new life begins when an individual accepts God's forgiveness through the Holy Spirit's power. We call people to Christ by proclamation of the gospel. Historically, American Baptists have been a great commission people. We have taken seriously the mandate in Matthew 28:19 and have gone to all parts of the world, as well as in this country, which is the third-largest mission field in the world.

In 2000, American Baptists launched New Life 2010, a commitment to plant 1,010 new churches and reach 1,000,010 new disciples by the year 2010. So far, we have baptized close to 400,000 new believers. We have also started more than 250 new churches, in addition, to more than 800 initiatives in congregational transformation.

We are also a great criteria people. We are convinced that conversion is not just a private thing between a person and God. How you treat what Jesus calls the "least of these," in Matthew 25:45 is the great criteria. We take seriously the passage in Luke 4:18, "to preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free." American Baptists have been particularly concerned for people groups that are marginalized and oppressed.

We have gone from being a majority "Anglo" church family to a multicultural family without any ethnic majority. Many of our congregations are multi-cultural and multilingual in both rural and city contexts.

American Baptists emphasis has been on relational evangelism that includes the formation of disciples. Radical discipleship has been the mark of many of our leaders, both clergy and lay.

Rogers, Presbyterian Church (USA)

The church is called to tell the good news of salvation, to be Christ's faithful evangelist, proclaiming in word and sacrament and also by demonstrating the love of members for each other and participating in God's ministry in the world.

Evangelism is not a separate activity, but God working through the life of the church in all its myriad forms, through proclamation and presence. This calls for a new openness in its membership for providing for inclusiveness as a sign of God's grace. The current struggle over whether people who are gay and lesbian can have the full rights of membership in the church is, in one sense, a conflict over the meaning of one aspect of evangelism.

We understand that God saves through Jesus Christ, but how and whom? No one is saved apart from God's gracious redemption in Jesus Christ, but we do not limit the gracious sovereignty of God's grace. Grace, love and communion belong to God and are not ours to determine. God can illumine who and whom he will even without external ministry. God says through Christ and God can effect that salvation however he wills. We in the church are his evangelists by witnessing to that work in the world.

Orthodox Family Presentation

The Very Reverend Leonid Kishkovsky, CCT president, introduced and moderated the Orthodox family *On The Theme* presentation.

In his introduction, Fr Kishkovsky noted that we have much to learn from one another. We are all on a level playing field. But at the same time, the Orthodox churches are less well known than the others. Orthodox churches are often not seen as part of the Christian story. Adding to the complexity in understanding, since the 5th century, there have been two families - eastern and oriental – within the larger Orthodox family.

Father Martin Ritzi, Executive Director, Orthodox Christian Mission Center, presented the paper.

Fr Ritzi noted that in these days the press is preoccupied with alleged misbehavior by an astronaut, but pays little attention to the significance of this gathering. Sometimes it is better to work in secret. The fact that we are together is beyond anything that we might say.

The Orthodox have been engaged in mission (despite perceptions to the contrary) from earliest times. Though there have been periods of lessened activity, due to political oppression, there is again a renewed interest in mission.

Mission carries a holistic understanding, including preaching, teaching, evangelizing, baptizing. It is an effort aimed toward the goal of reaching beyond the needs of the local congregation for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At its best, Orthodox mission brings to present practice principles from the past: 1. Establishment of the Eucharistic community (it will be local, and take on local characteristics). 2. Building of churches that witness to the glory of God; 3. Emphasis on the whole person (and thus addressing the needs in society); 4. Incorporation of cultural elements; 5. focus on indigenous leadership.

1.8 billion have not had a presentation of the gospel...

The Orthodox motive for mission proceeds from a love of God and men, from obedience to the Great Commission, a longing for God's glory and an inner necessity. If we refuse mission, we are refusing what we are – ontologically. We have been created in God's likeness and Image.

God has given us amazing resources and we can share this with the world.

Participants continued the evangelism discussion in a plenary session on Thursday morning. The comments included expressions of surprise at how much was learned by listening to each other as well as appreciation for such an enriching session telling our stories. Suggested common threads in the presentations: 1) evangelism is rooted in personal relationship with Jesus Christ; 2) social ministry flows from that; 3) respectful listening to each other. Another person noted 1) the level of vulnerability in the

presentations; and that 2) we are laughing a lot more as a group. There was a call for continued exploration of the commonalities and differences and a plea for holding poverty and evangelism together: how do we connect the revival of faith with this need for social justice? We need a powerful emphasis on discipleship. One raised the challenging question: "Is evangelism and war making compatible?" Others agreed on the incompatibility, noting that our participation in state sanctioned violence implies allegiance to something other than Christ. How do we as *American* Christians reflect on evangelism? We are *American* evangelists and there are competing allegiances. Another expressed excitement at the convergence around discipleship and evangelism - radical discipleship -- about making disciples whose primary identity is as a follower of Jesus, rather than an American. How do we do discipleship formation that results in lives lived as followers of Jesus? How do we do it in our various churches?

The Family Groups agenda included an opportunity for further discussion on evangelism:

What did we learn that is helpful to our understanding and practice of evangelism?

Is there something that we want to do or say together, as CCT, out of this discussion?

Inclusive small groups met around lunch tables to consider what, if anything, CCT could uniquely say or do about evangelism.

A small committee (Fr Kishkovsky, chair, Fr James Massa, Dr Grant McClung, Dr Stephen Thurston, Rev. Lydia Veliko) met to consider the responses from the family groups and from the lunch groups. In the final plenary session Fr Kishkovsky brought their recommendations.

Recommendations from the Committee on Evangelism:

The Committee noted that the comments they had received indicated that participants felt there were many convergences revealed in the presentations. There was a sense of gratitude for what was learned from one another and much appreciation for the honesty with which we were able to talk with each other. It seemed to be a very good start. There are further issues, such as proselytism and evangelism, that were hinted at in the comments, which will take more time and depth to uncover.

After consideration of the various comments from the families and small groups, the committee recommended:

1. That the 2009 annual meeting have evangelism as its major focus. The 2008 meeting will focus on poverty, with a small segment on evangelism in the 2008 program to prepare for/preview the 2009 discussion.

2. That each family be asked to begin work on:

- 1) identifying its gifts for evangelism
- 2) identifying the cautions

3. That the Steering Committee name a committee to prepare 2009 discussion, with members from each family.

4. The task of the committee would be to give attention to the theme of evangelism (timeliness, scope, length, audience)

Some comments from the discussion:

In the discussion that followed, the sense was that “we have come a ways in four years” and that there are indications of a formed community. Several affirmed the suggestion that participants “commit ourselves with whatever binding authority we have, to invite someone else from CCT to participate in our own church conversations about evangelism.” Others stressed the search for connection between evangelism and overcoming poverty, for deepening areas of convergence and understanding as well as addressing difficult areas like interfaith dialogue and the relationship between religious freedom and evangelism.

The Steering Committee will move forward on this as required by the recommendations.

Initiative on Poverty – Discussion and Statement

Plenary presentation and discussion of the report from the Poverty Committee:

Dr Shaw moderated the session and introduced the topic:

You have read the verses from Luke: what would it mean if we were poor? What would be good news to us? What would it mean to be captives? What would liberty mean? If we were the oppressed, what would ‘go free’ mean? We need to look at the concreteness that this statement of Jesus confronts us with. Make it a matter of choice to be converted to him and redefine what he was all about.

Connection cannot be severed if we take seriously our conversion *to Jesus*, not just converted...

The Reverend Dr Ron Sider presented the Poverty Committee proposals circulated in advance to all participants:

In the discussion that followed, some noted that there will be a steep learning curve for many congregations. They became more aware of poverty in the Katrina aftermath, but are still far from understanding poverty as a moral failure or central to the mission. Many affirmed the statement, pointing out that it reflects the concern expressed yesterday about about what is part of the core of the gospel we preach. It was noted that though our focus is on poverty in the US, we would also need a link to poverty in the world. We also want to work with people of all faith and all people of good will. We do not want to isolate ourselves. The discussion affirmed that CCT is not going to develop an anti-poverty program; CCT is unique in that it is new and broad. We intend concretely to work with

the groups already working on this. The unique potential is the common voice to be maximized.

The Family Groups discussed the poverty initiative proposals and gave written comments to the Poverty Committee. (Bishop Stephen Blaire, Rev David Beckmann, Fr John Carr, Rev Steve Haas, Dr William Shaw, Dr Ron Sider)

The Poverty Committee met and prepared a revised statement and proposal which, following further discussion, resulted in the following statement and objectives agreed by consensus (the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches abstained in the consensus process toward a poverty statement.)

Christian Churches Together's Statement on Poverty

As Christian leaders in the wealthiest society on earth, we are called by God to urge our churches and nation to strengthen and expand efforts to address the scandal of widespread poverty in the United States and around the world. The Gospel and our ethical principles place our service of the poor and vulnerable and our work for justice at the center of Christian life and witness.

Our common faith compels us. Christ our Lord teaches us that when we serve and stand with “the least of these,” we serve and stand with Him. Our Bible teaches us in hundreds of places that the God we worship has a special concern for the poor. God judges individuals and societies by how they respond to the needs of the poor. As leaders in Christian Churches Together, we believe that a renewed commitment to overcome poverty is central to the mission of the church and essential to our unity in Christ. Therefore in order to obey our God, respect the dignity of every person, and promote the common good of society, we must act. Our focus here is domestic poverty, but we reaffirm our commitment to overcome poverty all around the world.

Widespread and persistent poverty challenges us to action. The painful truth is that about thirty-seven million people in our country live below the poverty line. Tragically, 18 percent of all our children struggle in poverty. The sad reality is that millions in our nation work hard and still cannot escape poverty. We lament this ongoing poverty.

Our faith in Christ who is the truth compels us to confront the ignorance of and indifference to the scandal of widespread, persistent poverty in this rich nation. We must call this situation by its real names: moral failure, unacceptable injustice. Our faith in Christ drives us to call our churches and our society to a more urgent, united response.

We are grateful for the vast array of ways our churches are already helping millions of struggling people. We want to build on these efforts, learn from each other, and collaborate more closely. But we can, we must, do more.

We also recognize and encourage leaders in community, economic and public life who seek justice for poor people in our land. But we can, we must, do more. Our goal must be the elimination of poverty in this land.

As we as Christians renew and strengthen our efforts to overcome domestic poverty, we will seek to work with people of other faiths and all persons of good will in this urgent task.

Unfortunately, partisan and ideological divisions too often promote one-sided solutions and prevent genuine progress. We believe substantial success in reducing domestic poverty requires an overall framework that insists that overcoming poverty requires both more personal responsibility and broader societal responsibility, both better choices by individuals and better policies and investments by government, both renewing wholesome families and strengthening economic incentives. We believe that genuine success in reducing American poverty will require greater commitment and concrete action by all four of the following: churches, neighborhoods, communities, and faith-based and other organizations; government that implements better public policy at local, state, and federal levels; individuals and families; the market and private sector (employers, unions and other economic actors).

We are leaders of the Christian community, not an interest group. We have no partisan political agenda. We are conservatives and liberals, Independents, Republicans and Democrats. Together we believe that our faith demands and the people of this land yearn for concrete proposals that transcend divisive political divisions.

We give thanks to God for bringing together at one Christian table in Christian Churches Together for the first time in our history representatives of almost all the families in Christianity in the United States: Evangelicals/Pentecostals, Catholics, Racial/Ethnic, Orthodox and Historic Protestants. As a united voice of Christianity in this country, we pledge to strengthen our efforts to end the scandal of widespread poverty in the richest nation in history.

Four Objectives.

CCT will promote its commitment to overcoming domestic poverty by inviting all Christians and all people, especially our leaders in public life, to embrace and implement the following objectives:

- a. to strengthen families and communities; because they are essential bulwarks against poverty;
- b. to reduce child poverty; we seek to cut child poverty by 50 percent in the next ten years;
- c. to make work work; by combating racism and guaranteeing that full time work offers a realistic escape from poverty and access to good health care;
- d. to strengthen the educational system in our country with particular attention to the public schools; because access to quality education offers perhaps the best way out of poverty.

This statement will be released with the press statement.

Participants agreed to assemble the best materials on overcoming poverty from churches and make it available to everyone as a CCT effort. Bread for the World will produce a DVD which the churches can use/adapt for their work in raising consciousness about poverty.

2008 meeting

Dr William Shaw, CCT President and chair of the 2008 planning committee, led the discussion. The 2008 annual meeting will be held in/near Washington DC on January 8 - 11. The central focus of the meeting will be on poverty. Various suggestions were made

about how to interact with the political candidates on the issue of poverty – from a town hall meeting to a teleconference with congregations from the five families, to a focus on the poverty point person in each candidate’s campaign. Another suggested the real question was how the gathering could establish support and identification with the poor. Others voiced concerns about the seductiveness of having important people appear that can easily overwhelm everything else in a meeting. While many supported ways to get candidates to talk about overcoming poverty, they also wanted to be sure to use the meeting in the best way. The Planning Committee (Dr William Shaw, chair, Archbishop Viken, Rev. Ron Sider, Rev. Ron Roberson, Bowie Snodgrass, Rev. Don Williams, Bishop Roger Haskins) is asked to consider all these things and work together with the Steering Committee to decide on the program.

CCT Celebration and Commitment

On Wednesday evening, participants and local guests gathered in Pasadena Presbyterian Church for a special celebration of the formation of *Christian Churches Together*. Cardinal Roger Mahoney, Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and the Rev. Dr Barbara Anderson, Co-pastor at Pasadena Presbyterian, brought greetings. Each of the five CCT presidents (Bishop Sklba represented Cardinal Keeler who was unable to attend) gave short presentations on why they were participants in CCT. Various soloists and the St Mariana Coptic Orthodox choir brought music in the tradition of the five families. In the symbolic action of lighting candles, CCT founding participants committed themselves “to grow closer together in Christ in order to strengthen our Christian witness in the world.” A reception for participants and guests followed. (Full text of service is available on the website: www.christianchurchestogether.org)

Other Agenda Items and Concluding Actions

Seminarians:

About 30 seminarians took part in Wednesday’s program. A plenary session was given over to the students to ask questions or respond to what they had heard. Dr Loewen, Dean of Fuller Seminary, spoke of the way Fuller has encouraged and supported diversity in its student body.

Worship

In addition to the services already noted, the Racial/Ethnic family led the worship on Thursday morning. The Korean Pastors’ Wives Choir, on a US tour from South Korea, sang several beautiful choral numbers. Rev Choi brought a meditation on Genesis 11:1 – 9 and Acts 2: 1 – 4, (Tower of Babel and Pentecost) noting that both passages are concerned with speaking in many languages but with very different results. The presence of the Spirit allows for the understanding of the other. That is our experience and hope in CCT. Friday morning the Evangelical/Pentecostal family was responsible for the worship period. Jeff Farmer led the group in singing and invited small groups of three to share their prayer requests and concerns with each other. Richard Stearns reflected on Luke 4:18 and Mark 10:17 ff (the rich man’s encounter with Jesus), in light of the needs of the poor today and our desire to be faithful followers of Jesus. He then gave a very

moving personal testimony of God's call in his own life to leave a prosperous business career, move his family across country and take up work with World Vision

Plenary Session on CCT

The Reverend Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, chair of the Steering Committee, moderated this session on CCT. He noted that CCT is presently staffed by volunteer and part time staff, but that a search is underway for a full time staff person. Bishop Jon Enslin (ELCA) is chairing a committee (other members: Dr David Cole, Sheila Garcia, Rev David Williams, Fr Leonid Kishkovsky) that will receive applications until February 28. All of the day-to-day financial work has been carried by Sharon van Gelderen. An audited report is included in Participant's folders. .

The discussion that followed affirmed giving more time in the schedule to the family groups and prayer in small groups. It was suggested that the public worship service with local involvement become a part of the annual meeting, along with encouraging the participation of seminarians.. It was noted that the current planning timeline is too short; the planning process should be three years out. The thin budget raises questions for the future. Several comments urged that the organizational infrastructure not become heavy. It was noted that CCT will be limited if we are not able to secure more resources; we should reach out to the members for things that are lacking. Some felt that we should not restrict artificially CCT's ministry and capacity by limiting its organizational capacity. We must be open to the leading of the spirit in our institutions as well. Our vision is big - - we long for Christian unity, we want to end poverty. Yet there is a sense that CCT as an institution must be weak. It will take creativity and imagination to connect. It is important to find new forms and not always fall back on traditional ways. The Steering Committee was encouraged to pursue the idea of local involvement in the Pasadena area and to use that as a model for future annual meeting.

Committees

The Poverty Committee, the Committee on Evangelism and the 2008 Planning Committee met during the Thursday late afternoon session.

Dinner at the Armenian Orthodox Center, including Orthodox evening prayers

On February 8th His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, hosted CCT participants and observers. The evening began with Armenian Evening Prayers with the participation of members of the Orthodox family. Dinner followed at 7:00 p.m.

In his welcoming remarks, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian welcomed the group to the Headquarters of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church. He affirmed that "Christian Churches Together, the largest ecumenical body in the United States of America, has an important role to play in the spiritual life of the citizens of this country." He extended his best wishes for success in all CCT's endeavors.

Following dinner and a group photo, Bishop Leggett, CCT President, led the group in a time of sharing possibilities and challenges.

Press Release

Rachel Medema and Dr David Cole prepared a short description of the meeting which formed the basis for a press release. Various suggestions and additions were made to the draft. The press release, based on this description, was prepared by Philip Jenks (see website: www.christianchurchestogether.org)

Election of Steering Committee members

The families reported that the following persons were elected to the Steering Committee: The Evangelical/Pentecostal family re-elected **Roger Haskins** for a 3 year term . The Orthodox family thanked Bishop Dimitrios for his service; **Bishop Serapion** was elected for a 3 year term. The Catholic family re-elected Bishop Blaire for a 3 year term; The Racial/Ethnic family thanked Rev. Seung Koo Choi for his service; **Rev. Jacob Jang** was elected for a 3 year term. The Historic/Protestant asked **Daniel Vestal** to serve through the next Steering Committee meeting with the expectation that he would be replaced by a representative from Church of the Brethren.

(The Steering Committee is waiting for the at-large appointment of a woman from the ELCA.)

Sharing and Evaluation of annual meeting

It has become traditional to have participants evaluate their experience during the closing session. A few of the comments follow:

A crucial turning point; we have moved past turning inward. It is whole new ballgame. We've made a good start

This has been a transforming event; you've been gracious to me as an observer. I hope the relationship with the Church of God (Cleveland) will grow.

Deeply grateful in two ways, powerful growing convergence on the importance of evangelism and social ministry and the deepening consensus of overcoming poverty
I stand in awe of how far God has brought us

It is in the coming together where all of us grow. I would hope in what CCT is and becomes that we will keep the conversation and learning.

It is not what you believe that counts, but what you believe enough to do.

A challenge to put to ourselves: when we next come to this gathering to talk about what we have done in our communities to foster CCT and the fellowship.

I live in ecumenical meetings, this is the broadest table but also the best balance between practical, prayer and outreach. I am grateful for the balance.

I've been deeply changed and impressed with the friendly way we struggle. Liberty has exceeded our loyalty.

This is a good pattern of how the church can non-institutionally move forward. Most ecumenism is modern, not post modern.

The sense of hope that this group gives is incredible.

The meeting was adjourned with prayer.

Annual Meeting Dates: 2008 – January 8 – 11 2009 - January 13 – 16

Steering Committee dates: May 15/16 (noon to noon) & September 27/28 (noon to noon)