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**Church leaders make response
to "Letter from Birmingham Jail"**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BIRMINGHAM, Jan. 14, 2011 – Participants at the annual meeting of Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. (CCT) have issued a response to the "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

The CCT church leaders, who were in Birmingham Jan. 11-14, 2011, to examine the issue of domestic poverty through the lens of racism, noted that apparently no one has ever issued a clergy response to Dr. King's famous letter.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s letter was an answer to a message from a group of clergy in Birmingham in 1963. In their "Call for Unity," the clergy appealed for restraint and "common sense," and a withdrawal of support for the civil rights demonstrations.

In their one-page letter, the church leaders remember with gratitude the sacrifices of the leaders of the civil rights movement, who demonstrated the power of Christian, nonviolent action. They also express repentance that "some of us have not progressed far enough beyond the initial message from the Birmingham clergy."

"Too often our follow-through has been far less than our spoken commitments. Too often we have chosen to be comfortable rather than prophetic. Too often we have chosen not to see the evidence of a racism that is less overt but still permeates our national life in corrosive ways."

In their experiences at the Civil Rights Institute and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, the church leaders, who were of multiple races and represented a wide range of church backgrounds, found inspiration and renewed commitment. They describe two windows at the church – one where the face of Jesus had been blown out from the bombing in 1963 that killed four girls, and the other that depicts a Christ figure who with one hand rejects the injustice of the world and with the other extends forgiveness.

"In the spirit of this loving Jesus, and in the spirit of those who committed their very lives to that love, we renew our commitment to ending racism in all forms. We begin by taking time on Monday, January 17, to reread the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"--along with the message from the Birmingham clergy that prompted King's letter--and to reflect on its meaning for us today. We urge all within our churches to do the same."

Formed in 2007, CCT is the broadest Christian fellowship in the country, with members from the Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Historic Black, and Evangelical/Pentecostal families. In addition to 36 national communions, its membership includes six national organizations--the American Bible Society, Bread for the World, Evangelicals for Social Action, Habitat for Humanity, Sojourners, and World Vision. For the full letter and a list of the member communions, go to www.christianchurchestogether.org.

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Birmingham letter

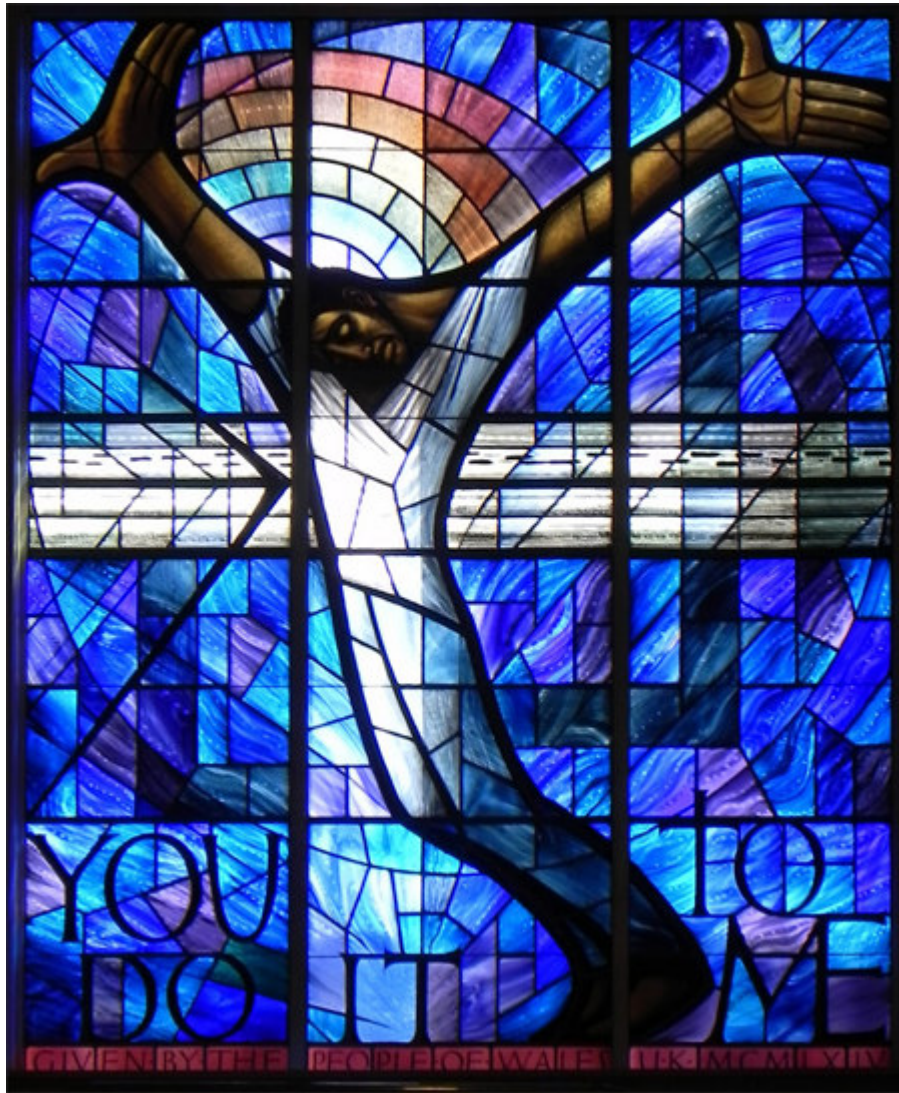


Photo caption

The Wales Window for Alabama, created by artist John Petts, was a gift to the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church from the people of Wales, U.K., after the 1963 bombing. The Christ figure is rejecting injustice with one hand and extends forgiveness with the other. (Photo by Wendy McFadden)