

CCT E-newsletter

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Reflections from Executive Director, Richard L. Hamm

An Outstanding Annual Meeting!

The evaluations from most of the ninety registrants plus fifteen seminarians and young church leaders are in and the results are clear: CCT had an outstanding Annual Meeting, January 12-15, 2010! The keynote speakers were rated as top notch (Dr. Mel Robeck and Dr. Doug Strong), the preachers and worship were highly lauded, and the visit to World Vision was much appreciated (especially coming at the time of the earthquake in Haiti). The business we conducted helped clarify our direction for the future (see related article). It seems like we are finding our stride as an organization, what we are and what we are not. All in all, I could not be more pleased.



Of course, not everything was perfect and there was helpful feedback. We knew going in that the site was both beautiful and too expensive for our purposes. We need more small group time and to be more intentional about our use of family time. We need to spread our business throughout the meeting rather than grouping most of it on the last morning. And, everyone's favorite: too little free time in which to build relationships and relax a bit (we continue to struggle with this as last minute requests for additions to the program always come in, but we'll be harder-nosed about this in the future even though the additions are always excellent - because relationship building is "job one").

I am deeply grateful for all who helped make the meeting a success: those who helped with planning and recruitment of program leaders, panelists, speakers, and worship leaders, those who helped the meeting go smoothly (including Moderator Kishkovsky), and especially my assistant Val Ruess who did such good work. Our stewards, Jeff and Carrie McLain were hugely helpful.

Significant Business Sessions

There was important business done (see more in this and later editions). We released a pastoral statement in solidarity with the people of Haiti who have been so devastated by the earthquake and with the Christian community in Egypt where Coptic Christians were gunned down after Christmas Eve services in Nag Hammadi. We decided to move ahead with a plan to offer the CCT model to local and

regional groups. We further shaped and affirmed a Vision Plan for the future direction of CCT. We affirmed a plan for a “Common Day of Action Against Poverty” in 2011. We received with joy the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference as a new CCT participant. We approved a small but deficit budget which will require some additional fundraising to support. Steering Committee members were elected. We reviewed a report of what our participant churches and organizations have been doing to combat domestic poverty the past year.

Relationship Building

Personally, I think the most significant sign of health and growth in CCT is the depth of relationship and friendship across family lines that we saw demonstrated at the Annual Meeting. We were able to discuss matters around which we have great differences with a high degree of trust, mutual respect and appreciation.

Our sevenfold purpose is to (1) to celebrate a common confession of faith in the Triune God, (2) to discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer and theological dialogue, (3) to provide fellowship and mutual support, (4) to seek better understanding of each other by affirming our commonalities and understanding our differences, (5) to foster evangelism faithful to the proclamation of the gospel, (6) to speak to society with a common voice whenever possible, and (7) to promote the common good of society and engage in other activities consistent with its purposes. I believe we faithfully lived out these purposes in this Annual Meeting. Now, as always, the challenge is to live these out throughout our churches and throughout our land between annual meetings.

Below, read Wes Granberg-Michaelson’s excellent reflections on the meeting.

As always, I am so very grateful to be a part of this work of the Spirit called Christian Churches Together in the USA.

Grace and peace,

Dick Hamm

Released on January 15, 2010 by Christian Churches Together in the USA

A Pastoral Prayer of Comfort and Hope for Haiti and Egypt

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” – Luke 4:18-19

At the annual gathering of Christian Churches Together (CCT), we have met once again to deepen our fellowship as a diverse group of national Christian leaders. In the midst of this time together, and here on the eve of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we have been deeply affected by recent events that have led to the suffering of parts of the body of Christ.

We grieve the devastation and loss of life caused by the January 12, 2010, earthquake in Haiti. We mourn the death of brothers and sisters, including Archbishop Joseph Serge Miot of the Catholic Church and other faith leaders. In the face of devastating scenes of the “living walking among the dead,” we seek to

be icons of the living Christ. We pray that our affected brothers and sisters will be comforted and encouraged by our pastoral presence that includes prayers, visitation and physical aid that our churches have rushed to provide. Such a presence seeks to give witness to Christ's work of healing and hope.

Likewise, as we "mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15), we are one with our brothers and sisters in the Coptic Orthodox Church who have suffered when parishioners were gunned down in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, after Christmas Eve services. We lament the use of violence in the name of God.

In the midst of the world's suffering, we pray for God's compassionate and healing spirit.

We bow our heads in prayer to Him "Who loosens the bound and uplifts the fallen, the Hope of those who have no hope and the Help of those who have no helper, the Comfort of the fainthearted and the Harbor of those in the storm", to look, with a compassionate eye, on those who are suffering, and to be as He is, full of mercy, full of compassion, full of love. For He grants us more than we ask for, and more than we need, and more than we understand. – Adapted from the Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil, the Litany of the Sick

Elections at Annual Meeting

The African American family elected Dr. Stephen Thurston, President of the National Baptist Convention of America, to become president of the African American family as Dr. William Shaw, National Baptist Convention, USA, has completed his service as president.

The Historic Protestant family re-elected Ms. Wendy McFadden, Church of the Brethren, to the Steering Committee since she was filling an unexpired term.

The Orthodox family elected Archbishop Cyril Aphrem Karim, Syrian Orthodox Church, to serve on the Steering Committee as Bishop H.G. Serapion, Coptic Orthodox Church, has completed his term.

The Evangelical/Pentecostal family re-elected Commissioner Israel Gaither, The Salvation Army National Headquarters, to the Steering Committee.

A Photo Gallery of Annual Meeting 2010 (more news following below)





Dr. Mel Robeck provided an excellent keynote to begin the meeting.



Dr. Nick Garza, representative of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference joins in prayer with Moderator Kishkovsky and all gathered as the NHCLC is welcomed as a new participant in CCT.



The Rev. Amy Moiso (PCUSA) preached the opening worship.



The Orthodox worship was “The Eastern Orthodox Order of The Third Hour with the Lesser Blessing of Water” and was deeply appreciated by all.



Dr. Doug Strong provided a review of the church’s practice of evangelism in the first centuries and the most recent centuries.



Dr. David Cole moderated a panel that included (from left) Dr. Flora Wilson Bridges, American Baptist; Fr. Daniel Habib, Coptic Orthodox; Bishop Richard J. Malone, Catholic; Rev. Bert Waggoner, The Vineyard; Dr. Doug Strong and Dr. Mel Robeck.



Between sessions, the fellowship is rich. Wednesday was a great day for seminarians/young church leaders to connect with leaders of their communions (here Reformed Church in America folks enjoy lunch together).

Evangelism Connections, an association of evangelism staff persons and other interested persons from seven Protestant denominations sent several observers to the Annual Meeting, including Ms. Charlene J. Smith, Minister of Evangelism for Local Church Development and Renewal of the United Church of Christ (pictured). Other interested denominations may contact her at smithc@ucc.org.



David Beckman, President of Bread for the World, brought a report of what the churches and organizations have been doing in regard to domestic poverty during the last year. (See report at end of this E-newsletter). Domestic poverty continues to be a primary focus of CCT (together with evangelism).



Brian Wiele, pastor of River Ridge Covenant Church of Olympia, WA, was a participant from the Evangelical Covenant Church. The meeting owes him a great debt for enabling his interns, Jeff and Carrie McClain, to be available to serve as stewards for the meeting!

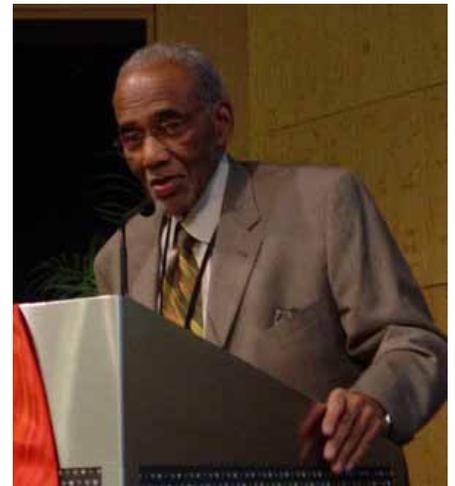


Jeff and Carrie McClain are M.Div. students of the Evangelical Covenant Church at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago. Carrie is discerning her call to ministry and Jeff is preparing for congregational ministry. They provided marvelous assistance throughout the meeting while also taking in the keynotes, panels and other sessions.



Dr. Ron Sider of Evangelicals for Social Action and CCT Poverty Committee Chair led a plenary in discussion of the proposed “Day of Common Action Against Poverty” which was eventually affirmed for April 2, 2010.

On Wednesday evening, there was a panel of local church leaders sharing their experience of doing evangelism in the Great Northwest. (from left, Dr. Samuel McKinney, Mt. Zion Baptist Church (NBCUSA) of Seattle; Rev. Martin Yabroff, Rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church of Tacoma; Sister Joyce Cox, Archbishop's Delegate for Ecumenism/Inter-Religious Dialogue; Rector Dean W. Kouldukis, Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption; and Dr. Matt Messner, Pastor of Eastside Foursquare Gospel Church).



Dr. Samuel McKinney preached a lively sermon Wednesday evening.



Bishop James Leggett led the Evangelical/Pentecostal family meeting Thursday afternoon at World Vision.



Members of the African American family of churches share a light moment.



We met at World Vision on Thursday and were provided tours of their facility. We always include a visit to the facility of at least one of our participating organizations when possible.



World Vision proved to be excellent hosts under the direction of Rich Stearns and Steve Haas.



Will someone please hold that elevator?!



Lt. Colonel Israel to Rev. Waggoner: "Honestly Bert, the fish was this big!" "Yeah right, Mark."



Bishop Leggett led us in a time of testimony Thursday evening followed by worship with a band from The Vineyard.



Archbishop Gregory led us in Catholic worship on Friday morning.

Wes Granberg-Michaelson's take on the Annual Meeting

(Wes is the Historic Protestant family president and General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America)

CCT in the “None Zone”

Christian Churches Together (CCT) held its annual meeting last week in the Pacific Northwest, where delegates explored evangelism. When research groups explore religious attitudes in the U.S., the Pacific Northwest region has the highest percentage in the country of people who answer “none”—about 63 percent. For this reason, it's been dubbed “the None Zone.” What better place to explore the contemporary challenges and understanding of evangelism?

This was the first time this young but growing organization has focused on evangelism. With participants from Catholic, historic Protestant, Orthodox, evangelical/Pentecostal, and historic black church backgrounds—the five “families” that make up CCT—this dialogue on evangelism was the richest I've experienced in so broad a gathering. Major ecumenical institutions such as the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches rarely put this topic on their agendas, and the evangelical/Pentecostal community, though it focuses heavily on evangelism, discusses mostly within its own ranks, so this was a fresh encounter.

Mel Robeck, a Pentecostal scholar from Fuller Seminary, reminded us that Jesus' mandate to make disciples was never withdrawn, and that common witness by divided church families requires trust-building. That's what has been happening within the U.S. through CCT and worldwide through the Global Christian Forum.

We looked at the history of evangelism with Douglas Strong, who teaches church history at Seattle Pacific University School of Theology. During the Second Great Awakening in the 1800s, the United States' free and open commerce and common language provided a social infrastructure similar to the conditions that enabled the growth of the early church. Revivals were often connected to movements of justice like the abolition of slavery, and many groups and camp meetings were biracial.

What does that mean for today? Globalization is leveling the field of commerce; we are witnessing a communications revolution that some say is as radical as the advent of the printing press; by 2030, it is expected that no racial or ethnic group will constitute a majority (more than 51 percent) of the population of the United States. Meanwhile, participation in religious institutions across denominational lines is mostly in decline.

The recovery of the church's missional mandate is essential. Strong argued that we need to be “reinvigorated by the idea that God's mission of the church is to be a sent community to restore the world.” Such a call means that immigrants and people of color are essential partners in building a faithful and fruitful future. That's our focus in the RCA; hearing this affirmed in a setting like CCT was deeply encouraging.

CCT will continue its exploration of evangelism. Difficult areas such as proselytism, the challenge of interfaith relations, our theological understandings of salvation, and what evangelism looks like in a post-modern context still have to be discussed. However, we have discovered a place where leadership from the diverse sections of the Christian community can have an honest and engaging encounter about the meaning and practice of evangelism in contemporary culture.

During the meeting, delegates also addressed the challenge of domestic poverty. Over a three-year period, participants in CCT have developed a common commitment and strategy for overcoming poverty. Last year, when we met in the Washington, D.C., area, we spent time with policymakers of the incoming administration and members of Congress pressing for action. Our emphasis was on what our denominations and organizations could do in our commitment to overcome poverty.

At this year's meeting, David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, gave a comprehensive report on the current state of domestic poverty and CCT's actions. His report painted a discouraging picture of present conditions—as we would expect, the recession has increased levels of poverty, food insecurity, and joblessness. But the report was also hopeful, cataloguing the impressive number of initiatives taken in the past year by denominations and organizations who are part of CCT. Combined with government actions aimed directly at helping those caught in poverty, it's clear that the present situation would be far worse without the actions and advocacy of the religious community.

The next year will be critical. Beckmann closed his presentation by asking, "Is it possible to imagine a spiritual revival in which the experience of God's grace in Jesus Christ leads to an upwelling of compassionate zeal to transform our society? This is the moment to imagine such things."

CCT will continue its commitment to address poverty; we're planning for major action in several cities across the U.S. on April 2, 2011. This nationally coordinated effort will be aimed to focus attention on homelessness and poverty within each community.

On the first day of the CCT meeting, the earthquake struck in Haiti. Our prayers, conversations, and attention were continually drawn to the unfolding tragedy of horrible proportions. When we planned the meeting, we had arranged to spend one day meeting at the U.S. headquarters of World Vision, one of the organizations participating in CCT. That plan proved providential, because it provided us with a glimpse into how this Christian relief and development organization was mobilizing its energies in response to the crisis.

CCT's vitality comes from the depth of relationships and trust that has been built between its participants. Those relationships and that trust are enhanced in times of worship. At CCT meetings, each Christian family leads worship in its own tradition for the entire group. The Orthodox delegates led us in the Eastern Orthodox Order of the Third Hour with the Lesser Blessing of Water. This liturgy ended with the priest taking a large branch of basil, dipping it in water that had been blessed, and sprinkling each participant as he or she walked by. It's hard to convey the spiritual appreciation of participating in a worship tradition different from your own. The evangelical/Pentecostal family invited members of the Vineyard fellowship to lead us in worship. Vineyard sent some of its most talented musicians to lead us in singing with guitars and words projected on the screen; some of the songs they used were ones composed by Vineyard musicians. Other families provided similarly rich occasions for worship. These included an opening worship and sermon by Presbyterian pastor Aimee Moiso, a moving sermon by Samuel McKinney from the African-American church family, and a closing homily by Catholic Archbishop Wilton Gregory. Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., shared a gracious word of greeting and challenge with us.

Dick Hamm continues to provide CCT with inspired executive leadership. At its core, CCT will continue to grow as a movement that expresses the unity of the body of Christ in ways not previously seen in the U.S., and then witnesses to the world. Our time in the None Zone deepened our bonds and clarified our purpose.

Continuing Education Event for Heads of Communion at Duke December 2-3 was Good Start

Christian Churches Together and Leadership Education at Duke Divinity (LEDD) co-sponsored a continuing education event for CCT heads of communions. The 24 hour event featured dialogue with Brian McLaren, well known leader within the emergent church movement. Though attendance at this initial event was small, each participant declared the event to have been very stimulating and useful and expressed the desire for future gatherings. During the meeting, the LEDD program video recorded interviews with participants. You can see a couple of these at <http://bit.ly/5nMrnE>.

Future Dates:

Annual Meetings: January 11-14, 2011
 January 10-13, 2012
Steering Committee Meetings: May 3-4, 2010
 September 29-30, 2010

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

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