

CCT E-newsletter

Volume 4, No. 3

July, 2010



## **Annual Meeting January 11-14, 2011 in Birmingham!**

The 2011 Annual Meeting will focus on domestic poverty through the lens of racism. Drawing on Dr. King's "Letter From Birmingham Jail", we will examine the personal and systemic elements of racism and poverty in the United States and conclude by issuing a "Letter From Birmingham" to our own churches and the public. Since we are in Birmingham, we will be able to draw on the wonderful historical resources there such as the Civil Rights Institute, the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church, and Kelly Ingram Park.

**January 11:** The meeting will begin on Tuesday evening with opening worship followed by "The Civil Rights Movement of the 50's – 60's: Voices of Experience" – personal testimonies from two who were present in the Birmingham demonstrations.

**January 12:** Wednesday morning, we will have an academic presentation addressing how the situation in regard to racism has improved since the 60's and how it is as bad or worse. This will be followed by small group discussion and discernment. Wednesday afternoon (January 12), we will visit the Civil Rights Institute, the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church, and Kelly Ingram Park. Weather permitting, in the Park we will have a prayer service remembering those saints who dared to challenge racism in the 50's - 60's and beyond (if the weather is poor, we will move this prayer service to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church).

**January 13:** In the morning, we will hear and reflect on three plenary addresses (one from a Black perspective, one Hispanic, one Anglo), "How can our churches move into the future with greater faithfulness?" In the afternoon, we will begin drafting a "Letter from Birmingham" addressed to our own churches and to be "overheard" by the nation.

**January 14:** A final draft of the "Letter From Birmingham" will be prepared and Joshua DuBois has been invited to preach (Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships).

Registration forms will be available in a few days. Heads of communions/denominations, ecumenical officers, and representatives of Christian organizations are invited. CCT participant churches and organizations are also encouraged to invite 3 or 4 other representatives (including at least one young adult). The theme and content of this year's annual meeting suggests that it would be appropriate for churches to invite their staff who are responsible for racial justice and reconciliation, as well.

*Reflections from Executive Director, Richard L. Hamm*

## A “Front Porch” for Christian Unity

A good way to describe Christian Churches Together in the USA is “A ‘Front Porch’ for Christian Unity”.

Time was when most houses had front porches. They were a place out of the sun where people could meet informally, get to know one another, begin friendships and, sometimes plan to do significant things together.

Today, most neighborhoods are devoid of front porches, or if present, few people actually sit on them or invite others to come up off the sidewalk or street to talk. Houses today more often feature decks or patios out the back door, where we can escape from interaction with others. These are often surrounded by a “privacy fence” to insure our solitude.

Solitude has its place, but we are becoming strangers in our own neighborhoods. When we don’t know our neighbors, not only do we miss out on good fellowship and the capacity to help one another, we also have a tendency to begin to be *suspicious* of one another. It is the same dynamic we have always seen among the hundreds of Christian denominations in the United States. We divide over issues large and small, and within a generation or two all communication between leaders ceases. Long after the issues that divided us have become fuzzy, or even irrelevant in some cases, we become total strangers and that estrangement leads to suspicion, caricature of one another, and hostility. Yet we remember that Jesus’ last prayer was that we “may all be one so that the world will know who sent me.” (John 17:20)

“One” doesn’t mean identical or uniform, for God obviously loves diversity: all of nature is full of diversity. But “one” means we as Christians are not *over-against* each other; “one” means we are all utterly dependent upon the grace of God made known in Jesus Christ.

Other organizations are much broader in their scope and deeper in programming. But CCT provides a place where Christians, who have not been accustomed to being together and have sometimes been suspicious or even hostile toward one another, can learn about each other, come to appreciate each other’s varying gifts, learn from one another, and partner for common cause in visible expressions of the unity that is ours in Christ.

There is a need for, and an important role for, the great and long-standing institutions of Christian unity in the United States. But CCT is more of a place of hospitality than an institution per se. We are a place where busy Christian leaders can come up on the porch, make new friends, and see where the conversation can lead. Sometimes it will lead merely to a new appreciation of each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, sometimes it will lead to common action on behalf of justice, sometimes it will lead to individual communions becoming part of the long standing institutions of Christian unity: but *always* it will be part of the answer to Jesus’ final prayer for his church.

I’m grateful to be a part of this endeavor of the Spirit, in whom we are all one.

Grace and peace,

*Dick Hamm*



## Local Expressions of CCT Beginning To Form

In several communities around the country, individuals are beginning to explore the creation of local expressions of Christian Churches Together. CCTUSA is for leaders of communions and denominations, but many see the value of the model for local communities as well. CCT has always been clear that it does not want to undercut any currently operating Christian unity organization, but welcomes local expressions of CCT where there are no currently operating organizations.

In some cases, existing local Christian unity organizations are considering adopting the CCT approach as a way of broadening their own appeal to groups that have never been a part of them, or as an alternative approach that they intend to offer in addition to their current model.

CCTUSA has no intention of forming "local chapters" per se, but will regard local expressions as colleague organizations and facilitate communication among the various local groups through our website. If you are interested in starting such a group, Dick Hamm is available to meet with you to share the CCT model in depth and to share what we have learned nationally at this point.

## Presbyterian Church (USA) Affirms Full Participation in CCT

At its General Assembly in Minneapolis in early July, the PCUSA affirmed full participation in CCT. Their participation had been probationary among concerns about inclusion of women and people of color in leadership roles. CCT has been working to address these legitimate concerns and continues to take steps to address them by broadening participation to include more racial ethnic communions, by broadening the membership of the Steering Committee, and by being sure to have broad representation among the presenters at Annual Meetings. It is good to have the implicit endorsement of the PCUSA even as these efforts toward greater inclusivity continue.

## David Beckmann Awarded 2010 World Food Prize Laureate



We celebrate Rev. David Beckmann's award as a 2010 World Food Prize laureate! He shares the award, the Nobel Prize equivalent for food and agriculture, with Jo Luck, president of Heifer International.

The laureates were recognized for their "landmark achievements in building two of the world's foremost grassroots organizations leading the charge to end hunger and poverty for millions of people around the world."

In honoring them, the World Food Prize "recognizes the critical efforts of NGOs in mobilizing and empowering everyday citizens to end hunger in communities around the world."

"The World Food Prize recognizes all that Bread for the World members and churches across the country have done to get our government to help end hunger in our country and around the world," said Rev. Beckmann. "U.S. funding for poverty-focused development assistance has tripled over the last decade; nutrition programs for hungry people in this country have more than doubled. This would not have happened without the advocacy of members and local congregations of Bread for the World."

The World Food Prize cited the effectiveness of Bread for the World's advocacy. "I hope the World Food Prize will encourage more people to get involved in changing the politics of hunger. The progress the world has made against hunger and poverty is God moving in our time, and God is calling us now to get our country to do more to provide help and opportunity to hungry people," he said.

## **Poverty Action Report On Line**

A Poverty Action Report, detailing what CCT participants are doing to combat domestic poverty, is available on our website. Go to [www.christianchurchestogether.org](http://www.christianchurchestogether.org) to see the link to this report on the front page. Thanks to Bread for the World's David Beckmann and Sarah Turner for preparing this report.

## **Three Task Forces To Be Formed**

Three task forces are currently being formed: 1) an "Outreach Task Force" to encourage more communions/denominations to join in CCT participation; 2) a "Funding Task Force" to develop more sources of income for CCT beyond church and organization dues; 3) a "Communications Task Force" to develop more effective communication between and beyond CCT participants, including the media.

If you have an interest in serving on one of these task forces, please contact Dick Hamm at [dhamm@ddi.org](mailto:dhamm@ddi.org).

## **In Other News**

Uniting General Council 2010 News Release 18 June 2010

*The Uniting General Council 2010 in Grand Rapids, United States (June 18-28) marks the merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches.*

**World Communion of Reformed Churches is Born** *By Jerry L. Van Marter, UGC correspondent*

More than 80 million Reformed Christians in 108 countries around the world formally united Friday when the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) approved articles of union and a constitution bringing them together as the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

The merger of the two organizations took place at the Uniting General Council, which is meeting through June 28 on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the upper Midwest of the United States.

Although the long-awaited merger went through, afternoon discussion on passage of a constitution and bylaws grew lively and took longer than planned over the issue of representation of women on committees and in leadership positions in the new body.

"We had a very vigorous and intense conversation. It may have taken us longer than we thought it would," but God remained with delegates and the Holy Spirit helped to guide the discussion, said Clifton Kirkpatrick, president of WARC who chaired the discussions for his organization that led to the formation of the WCRC.

By late afternoon, the two separate ecumenical bodies became one. Afterward, delegates gathered around tables to sign the documents passed by the assembly.

REC was represented by 79 delegates from 28 of its member churches. WARC had 301 delegates from 132 member churches present.

Kirkpatrick noted that 73 participants, including 46 delegates, were denied visas to attend the event by the US government. "We need to acknowledge the deep pain we feel about the absence of these brothers and sisters," he said.

The daylong series of events included separate meetings of the REC and WARC, an opening worship service, recognitions of several leaders who have been instrumental in the unification process, an exchange of greetings and gifts between WCRC officials and Native American leaders and a gala reception celebrating the union.

The articles of union affirm “that such an act of union is implemented not only in order to carry out the major aims for which both organizations have existed separately, but also in order to respond to God’s call for service in the church and the world.”

The 64-year-old REC — with 41 member churches in 25 countries representing 12 million members — approved the union unanimously with no debate.

It was a different story with WARC, which dates back to 1875 and numbers 214 member churches in 107 countries representing 75 million members. The intense discussion over representation by women was led by delegates seeking assurance that the organization’s longstanding commitments to racial and women’s justice will go forward.

Speaking for the Pre-Assembly Women’s Conference, the Rev. Dora Arce-Valentin of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba, said, “During these past years we have seen many advances in the role and status of women — we must not retreat.”

Those underlying tensions rose again during consideration of the draft constitution Friday afternoon. After more than 90 minutes of debate, the group amended the document to provide that “when a church sends four or more delegates (to General Council meetings), half shall be women.” The drafting committee’s recommendation was one-third women.

In a related action designed to ensure the participation of youth as well as women, the group increased from two to three the number of delegates accorded to churches with less than 100,000 members. Larger delegations were already mandated to include at least one delegate 30 years of age or younger.

Some delegates expressed hope that the new organization would make sure to show sensitivity to its member churches as it moves forward.

Charity Majiza, of the Uniting Church in Australia, referred to the suspension of three South African churches. In 1972 WARC declared apartheid a sin and those churches that supported it heretical. She sought assurance that WCRC would address the “woundedness in our separation and not gloss over it.”

Kirkpatrick responded that racial justice is “a bedrock commitment” that will go forward, noting that the REC has committed to support of the *Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth*, adopted by WARC in 2004 that reaffirms its commitment to global economic and climate justice.

Peter Borgdorff, president of REC, called the day’s events a “construction zone,” proof that God is using all Reformed Christians to “build a new spiritual house for God.”

Kirkpatrick said, “I do believe it is God’s intention that we live together in unity and I thank God for this momentous day ... in which we are not just called to be more cooperative, but to be one in Jesus Christ.”



CRC President Jerry Dykstra Speaks to the assembled body



Setri Nyomi (General Secretary of WARC), Clifton Kirkpatrick (President of WARC), Peter Borgdorff (REC President), participate in the Uniting Celebrative Worship service

Pictures from Dick Hamm

## **A New Way Forward' Proposed for CUIC**

March 11, 2010 – The heads of churches and ecumenical officers of the member communions represented in Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) met in Baltimore, Maryland, on February 17 for what proved to be a significant and hopeful moment of recommitment to CUIC's original vision in giving expression to the visible unity of the church.

This meeting grew out of a plenary session of CUIC in 2008 when the member churches determined that, in the face of the decision of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AME Zion) to sever its relationship with CUIC and in light of concerns expressed by other member churches that CUIC had not been fully committed to addressing issues of racial justice, CUIC would take time to grieve this breach in our covenant, to understand how racism operates both within our CUIC relationship and the wider church, and to seek reconciliation with the AME Zion before moving forward in this relationship.

The tone of the entire conversation during this gathering was set as Bishop Warren Brown, President of the Council of Bishops of AME Zion Church, expressed his belief that the AME Zion bishops will be considering an action to return to full participation in CUIC and that "we might all move forward together." The primary decision reached at this meeting was to recommend a proposal to the CUIC member communions at a plenary session in mid-January 2011 calling for re-affirmation of the "eight marks of commitment" originally approved in 2002 as the basis for our relationship within CUIC, and identifying overcoming racism and seeking racial justice as the core commitment for CUIC's life together in the future. In light of this basic recommendation, three initiatives were approved for the coming biennium (2011-2012):

- to convene a Consultation on the intersection between the reconciliation of ministries and race;
- to partner with the other ecumenical organizations to foster efforts around a significant issue where race plays a strong role (e.g., the penal justice system, public education, health care, etc.); and,
- that ecumenical officers convene the heads of churches annually so that they can deepen their relationship with each other, particularly in the context of our racial justice commitments.

It was agreed that the first issue taken up by CUIC would be in working together to develop educational materials for all of our churches in understanding the history of Haiti in light of racism that has impacted its development as a nation and has implications today for the current relief and rebuilding efforts following upon the earthquake in mid-January 2010.

The Rev. Michael Livingston, Executive Director of the International Council of Community Churches (ICCC), moderated the meeting. Bishop John White, ecumenical officer for the African Methodist Episcopal Church, served as chair of the steering committee that prepared for this gathering of heads of CUIC communions.

In reflecting on the day-long conversation, Bishop White expressed the hope of all participants in this meeting in stating, "This has been a very positive and productive meeting. Indeed, it is the first time since 2002 that the heads of these communions have been together to explore the promise of this relationship of unity for our common witness in the future. I look forward to the implementation of our decisions today and to God's blessings upon CUIC."

The gathering began with an opening worship led by the Rev. David Wickmann, President of the Moravian Church Northern Province, and concluded with a service of worship and celebration of the Lord's Supper that was led by Bishop Sharon Rader, Ecumenical Officer of the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church.

*Heads of churches and ecumenical officers attending this meeting were Bishop John Bryant and Bishop John White (AME), Bishop Warren Bryant (AME Zion), the Rev. Sharon Watkins and the Rev. Robert Welsh (Disciples), Bishop Thomas Hoyt and Bishop Ronald Cunningham (CME), Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori (Episcopal), the Rev. Michael Livingston and the Rev. Herman Harmelink (ICCC), the Rev. David Wickmann and the Rev. Hermann Weinlick (Moravian), the Rev. Gradye Parsons and the Rev. Robina Winbush (PCUSA), Bishop Sharon Rader and the Rev. Steven Sidorak (UM), and the Rev. Geoffrey Black and the Rev. Lydia Veliko (UCC). Bishop Mark Hanson (ELCA), who was on an ecumenical journey in Europe, was represented by The Rev. Sherman Hicks.*

## From Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Pope Benedict XVI has chosen Swiss Bishop Kurt Koch of Basel to be the new president of Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

Bishop Koch, 60, will succeed German Cardinal Walter Kasper, 77, who has been at the council for 11 years -- first as secretary, then as president since 2001.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, said the appointment would be published July 1.

In a letter to Catholics in Basel June 30, Bishop Koch said the pope had asked him in February if he would take the job, stressing that he wanted someone who had both theological knowledge and practical experience in living and working alongside Protestant communities.

Pope Benedict's words, Bishop Koch said, demonstrate that improved relations with the Orthodox are not the pope's only concern, but that the pope sees the unity of all Christians as the will of Jesus.

Bishop Koch has served as a member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity since 2002 and has been a member of the international Catholic-Orthodox theological commission and a member of the international Catholic-Lutheran dialogue commission.

In his farewell letter, the bishop -- a past president of the Swiss bishops' conference and a former professor of dogmatic theology and liturgy -- said that when he became bishop, he promised to personally answer every letter Catholics in Basel sent him.

"In recent years, however, so many new areas of work have been added and the time-consuming internal church conflicts and polarizations have grown, so it increasingly became impossible for me to honor my resolution. For that I apologize," he said.

Born March 15, 1950, in Emmebrucke, he was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Basel in 1982. He studied at Lucerne University and at the University of Munich. After three years' service in a parish in Bern, he began teaching at Lucerne, eventually becoming rector of the theological faculty in 1995.

Following special traditional procedures, he was elected bishop of Basel by the priests of the cathedral chapter in August 1995 and Pope John Paul II confirmed the election four months later.

As president of the Swiss bishops' conference, Bishop Koch was called upon to help smooth tensions with Protestants in 2007 when the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document reaffirming Catholic teaching that the Catholic Church is the one, true church of Christ, even if elements of truth and Christ's saving grace can be found in separated churches and communities.

Bishop Koch said at the time that he understood how the document could be confusing or even hurtful to Protestants and to Catholics who usually refer to the Protestant communities as churches.

The document, he said, was looking at the term in a "strictly theological" way, explaining that if the Catholic Church believes apostolic succession and valid sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, are essential aspects of the church established by Christ, it cannot recognize as "church" those communities who do not have them.

The Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, issued a statement June 30 saying the ecumenical organization rejoices at Bishop Koch's appointment.

"Bishop Koch is well known for his openness and deep ecumenical commitment. His book 'That All May Be One: Ecumenical Perspectives' is an excellent summary of the present state of ecumenical dialogue and relations," Rev. Tveit said.

Meeting reporters June 25, Cardinal Kasper said that a challenge he faced repeatedly in his 11 years at the pontifical council was clarifying the church's position when the wording of certain documents -- from the Vatican as well as from Orthodox and Protestant churches -- offended the other partner in ecumenical dialogue.

Particularly with the Anglicans and Protestants, he said, since the year 2000 there has been a noticeable loss of "the great enthusiasm" for the possibility of Christian unity that marked the years immediately after the Second Vatican Council.

"Errors, or better, imprudence in formulating the truth have been committed by both sides, including our own," he said.

Cardinal Kasper said his service at the council involved a lot of hard work, but the experience has left a deep mark on his life and his theological thought.

While he said he's ready at 77 to retire and get back to theological writing, he also said he will miss daily involvement in ecumenism, "which I always have considered to be the construction site of the church of the future."

Despite some continuing misunderstandings and new difficulties caused by differences over key moral and ethical issues, the cardinal said he is confident that he is leaving behind "a solid network of human, Christian relationships," which is essential for finding the truth together.

"Passing the torch" to his successor and to a new generation of ecumenists, Cardinal Kasper said he is confident that ecumenism will continue to move forward because in an increasingly secular, increasingly globalized world, Christians have to work together.

Good personal relationships also existed with leaders of the Jewish community involved in dialogues sponsored by the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, he said.

"At first, as a German I was afraid to take on this task, given the history of Germany and the Jews, but I must say our partners never mentioned this. I found not only partners, but many friends," he said.

When difficult moments arose -- including Pope Benedict's rewriting of a Good Friday prayer for the conversion of the Jews and his lifting the excommunication of a traditionalist bishop who denied the extent of the Holocaust -- the cardinal said the good personal relationships helped ensure the problems were clarified quickly.

"For us, this dialogue with the Jewish community is fundamental because the church has its roots in the Jewish world. The relationship is essential for the church," he said.

## From WCC News

**The World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit has welcomed the appointment of Bishop Kurt Koch as new president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.**

"We rejoice at the appointment of Bishop Kurt Koch as president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity", said Tveit commenting on the news. "We welcome his appointment and look forward to working with him for the visible unity of the church", he added.

Tveit said that "Bishop Koch is well known for his openness and deep ecumenical commitment. His book 'That All May Be One: Ecumenical Perspectives' is an excellent summary of the present state of ecumenical dialogue and relations".

"We see in Bishop Koch a reliable partner for all those involved in the ecumenical movement and trust he will continue Cardinal Walter Kasper's emphasis on spiritual ecumenism", Tveit said.

"Bishop Koch has been given a very important responsibility as the call for all Christians to be one comes from Jesus Christ himself", Tveit said. "I wish him much joy in fulfilling this calling, and that God may give him strength."

Currently bishop of the diocese of Basel, Switzerland, Koch has been a member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity since 2002. He will succeed Kasper, who is retiring, on July 1.

## Future Dates

|                              |                       |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Annual Meetings:             | January 11-14, 2011   |
|                              | January 10-13, 2012   |
| Steering Committee Meetings: | September 29-30, 2010 |
|                              | May 2-3, 2011         |

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

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