

A NEW, MORE INCLUSIVE U.S. ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

Christian Churches Together

SUMMER 2001 AND JANUARY 29, 2003 FOUNDATION LAID FOR THE CCT

In the summer of 2001, four religious leaders in America, **two of which were high-placed Roman Catholic priests**, contacted every denomination in America and asked them to join a new, **gigantic ecumenical organization**. They issued their call from the palace of the Cardinal of Baltimore.

Then, on January 29, 2003, 46 national church leaders from many denominations and parachurch agencies met on the campus of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. They prepared an initial constitution for a new organization, entitled: **Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. (CCT)**,—**intended ultimately to include nearly every religious body in America!** As if by clockwork, the National Council of Churches (NCC) immediately announced that it was thrilled at this new development. (The NCC, headquartered in New York City, is a subsidiary of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland.)

But it was mutually agreed that the organization would not come into existence until 25 denominations in America joined it. That has not yet occurred.

“The CCT plans to include church denominations from five major groups: ‘Evangelical/Pentecostal, Historic Protestant, Orthodox, Racial/Ethnic (including African American churches), and Roman Catholic.’ Eighteen of the churches represented hold membership in the NCC. When 25 denominations or communions approve the CCT, the organization will officially begin.”—*Bible Presbyterian Church, Resolution 67:5.*

Many denominational representatives who have never held full membership in the NCC were in attendance at this January 2003 meeting: High-placed leaders, representing the Roman Catholic Church, various Orthodox churches, various evangelical churches (including the Salvation Army, the Church of the Nazarene, The Christian Reformed Church, the International Council of Community Churches, the Evangelical Covenant Church, the Worldwide Church of God, and the Free Methodist Church). Several parachurch organizations (including World Vision, Fuller Seminary, Evangelicals for Social Action, and Sojourners) also gladly came. Lastly, official observers were present from the Southern Baptist Convention, as well as other groups. This gathering is of such momentous importance, it is very likely that official Seventh-day Adventist observers were also present; but we do not have certainty of this.

Here is a significant comment about the event in one church paper, three months after the historic Pasadena meeting:

“When representatives of 40 denominations, com-

munions, and Christian organizations gathered in late January at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California, no one knew for sure the outcome.

“Eighteen months earlier a nucleus of this group had met outside of Baltimore to begin asking whether it was possible to form a new, more inclusive structure of Christian fellowship . . . **Nothing quite like it had ever been tried in the United States.** The National Council of Churches of Christ encompasses mainline Protestant, Orthodox, and historic black churches, but not others. **The National Association of Evangelicals was organized, largely in reaction to the NCC.** Suspicion and hostility between the two groups has long spread division and mistrust. Meanwhile, **the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB] has not officially joined any wider ecumenical fellowship in the United States.**

“Around the world, the situation is quite different. In about 65 countries [70 countries according to an official RC source quoted later in this report], the Catholic Church is a full member in such national church councils or associations. (See box at end of this report for data on our own church’s membership in ecumenical councils in various parts of the world.)

“The national Council of Churches in Korea recently welcomed the Assemblies of God. Likewise, the South African Council of Churches now includes two of the largest pentecostal bodies in that country. And **in many countries, national ecumenical organizations have undergone radical changes to build a fellowship that expresses more fully the breadth of the Christian community within their land,** as church leaders have concluded that new ecumenical wine cannot be poured into old wineskins . . .

“This much seems clear. **CCT is the best chance that we will have in this decade to change the ecumenical landscape** and to create a body that more fully reflects the life of the churches in the United States. That could become a powerful tool for strengthening the mission of the church at the beginning of a new century.”—*Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary, Reformed Church in America, in Sojourners, May-June 2003.*

NOVEMBER 17, 2004

CATHOLIC CHURCH OFFICIALLY JOINS

It has happened! Although representatives of the papacy initially appealed for such an organization to be formed, and signed its charter nearly two years ago, it was not until November 2004 that the final decision was made.

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in America has officially joined this new ecumenical movement! Never before in church history has the RCC officially

The official charter statement of the CCT is printed on this page and the next. We have added bold face to certain key points.

Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A.

An Invitation to a Journey

April 6, 2002
Chicago, Illinois

As Evangelical, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic church leaders, we write to all Christians in the United States to share **our longing for an expanded Christian conversation in our nation.** In Baltimore on Sept. 7 - 8, 2001, we met to pray, to listen and to seek the guidance of God on whether all who confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures **can talk together about how to share with the world our common confession of Jesus Christ.** We continued this prayerful conversation in Chicago on April 4 - 6 and sensed the Holy Spirit leading us to new possibilities.

We are Christians who long for greater unity. **It is our longing which most clearly points us toward "something new" as a possibility for the churches in the United States.** We celebrate the unique traditions, gifts and charisms of our respective faith communities. We also acknowledge that **when our differences create unnecessary divisions, our witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ is distorted.** We offer our lamentations and longings with prayerful expectation that **the Holy Spirit is moving us toward a new expression of our relationships with one another and our witness to the world.**

We lament that we are divided and that our divisions too often result in distrust, misunderstandings, fear and even hostility between us. **We long for the broken body of Christ made whole, where unity can be celebrated in the midst of our diversity.**

We lament our often diffused and diminished voice on matters critical to the gospel in our society. We long for a more common witness, vision and mission.

We lament how our lack of faithfulness to each other has led to a lack of effectiveness **on crucial issues of human dignity and social justice.** We long to strengthen **the prophetic public voice of the Christian community in America.**

We lament that **none of our current organizations represents the full spectrum of Christians in the United States.** We long for a place, where our differences could be better understood **and our commonalities better affirmed.**

In Chicago, we began to see a vision of **a new life together.** This vision has led us to provisionally call ourselves "Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A." With excitement we began to sketch the outlines of **a new level of relationship and action** that offer a common witness for Christ to the world. This common witness will be visible through our:

- Celebrating **a common confession** of faith in the Triune God
- Seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit through biblical, spiritual and theological reflection
- Engaging in **common prayer**
- **Speaking to society with a common voice**
- **Promoting the common good of society**
- Fostering faithful evangelism
- Seeking reconciliation by **affirming our commonalities** and understanding our differences
- **Building a community of fellowship** and mutual support

We invite all churches who confess

Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit to join us on this journey. We have only just begun to explore how to walk together. **The questions for conversation, the ways to talk together and the paths to take** all remain to be fleshed out by those whom, we trust, will join us on this difficult and essential journey of faith and obedience. We cannot know the details of the way, but we long to allow the Holy Spirit to answer our Lord's prayer to the Father, "that they may all be one . . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me." John 17: 21

- Bishop Vicken Aykazian
Armenian Orthodox
- Bishop Dimitrios Couchell
Greek Orthodox Church
- Dr. Peter Bouteneff
Orthodox Church in America
- Bishop Tod Brown
Roman Catholic Church
- Commissioner John Busby
The Salvation Army
- R__. Rothangliani Chhangte
American Baptist Church
- R__. Dr. Seung K. Choi
Korean Presbyterian Church
- Bishop Edwin Conway
Roman Catholic Church
- R__. Robert Edgar
National Council of Churches
- R__. Michael Livingston
International Council of Community Churches
- Sister Joan McGuire
Roman Catholic Church
- Bishop George McKinney
Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches of North America
- R__. Roy Medley
American Baptist Church
- Colonel Philip Needham
The Salvation Army

- R__. Judy Mills Reimer
Church of the Brethren
 - Dr. Ann K. Riggs
Director of Faith and Order
National Council of Churches
 - R__. Ronald Roberson
Roman Catholic Church
 - R__. Dr. David Engelhard
Christian Reformed Church in North America
 - Bishop Jon Enslin
Evangelical Lutheran Church
 - Bishop Chris Epting
Episcopal Church
 - R__. Dr. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
Reformed Church in America
 - Ms. Elenie Huzagh
President, National Council of Churches
 - Cardinal William Keeler
Roman Catholic Church
 - R__. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick
Presbyterian Church in the USA
 - Very Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky
Orthodox Church in America
 - Archbishop William Levad
Roman Catholic Church
 - R__. Ronald Sider
Evangelicals for Social Action
 - Bishop Melvin Talbert
United Methodist Church
 - R__. Lydia Veliko
United Church of Christ
 - R__. Jim Wallis
Sojourners/Call To Renewal
 - R__. Dr. Robert Welsh
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
 - R__. Robina Winbush
Presbyterian Church in the USA
 - Bishop McKinley Young
African Methodist Episcopal Church
 - R__. Robert Sawyer
Moravian Church in America
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joined any ecumenical body *in America* as a full member.

Both the RCC and the Seventh-day Adventist Church became voting observers in the WCC in 1965, holding those positions ever since. *(For more information on this, see box at the bottom of this page.)* And the Catholic Church is a member of various overseas ecumenical councils, along with our own denomination. But **the RCC had not, until the present time, joined one in America—where the National Sunday Laws will begin.**

Here is an official statement by Catholic News Service. Read it carefully. Every word sounds like something out of Great Controversy:

“Bishops Join New U.S. Ecumenical Forum

Catholic News Service

“Washington—The U.S. Catholic bishops, Nov. 17, took a historic ecumenical step by joining the new national ecumenical forum Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A.

“It marks the first time that the U.S. Catholic Church is a partner church in such a national body *[in America]*, although **Catholic churches in about 70 other countries belong to national councils of churches** of similar bodies.

“The bishops approved the proposal to join CCT by a vote of 151-73, slightly more than a 2-to-1 margin.

“Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, Calif., chairman of the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, presented the proposal to the bishops and urged its adoption, **noting that the Holy See [the Vatican] has also encouraged it.**

“He called the new organization ‘a forum for participation’ through which Christian churches can ‘pray together, grow in understanding together and witness together.’

“‘The purpose of Christian Churches Together is to enable churches and national Christian organizations to grow closer together in Christ **in order to strengthen our Christian witness in the world.**’ said a **25-page background report** the bishops had before them in preparation for the debate and vote.

“Bishop Blaire emphasized that for the Catholic Church the ultimate goal of ecumenism is the full, visible unity of all Christian churches in the one apostolic faith. *[A very important statement, declaring their ultimate objective.]*

“In that framework, the church views the CCT as an ‘interim process’ rather than a final goal, ‘even though it is a fresh and creative initiative to broaden the ecumenical table,’ he said . . .

Seventh-day Adventist / Vatican Ecumenical Involvement - Book 1: History—80 pp., 1999 8½ x 11, \$7.00 + \$2.50 // Book 2: Documents—133 pp., 1999 8½ x 11, \$11.00 + \$2.50

“Bishop Fabian W. Briskewitz of Lincoln, Neb., **asked if the other churches in the CCT are aware of the perspective from which the Catholic Church approaches the organization** *[i.e., to bring all the churches into its fold]*. Bishop Blaire said **not only are the other churches aware of the Catholic view, but many of them also believe that full, visible unity is the ultimate goal** and that organizations such as the CCT are only interim steps.

“Several bishops expressed concern whether there are sufficient safeguards in the organizational structure of the CCT **to protect the Catholic Church from being associated with statements that contradict Catholic beliefs.** Bishop Blaire said such safeguards are in place.

“He explained that **the CCT will be able to take positions or issue statements as a body only if all its members agree: A single ‘no’ vote is sufficient to block a statement.** He also explained that if a member church neither supports nor opposes a statement, it could ‘stand aside,’ neither voting for the statement nor blocking it *[Sunday legislation by the U.S. Congress is one of the very few things they could all agree on]* . . .

“He told the bishops that **their membership decision was crucial** to the survival of the CCT, since it will not exist without adequate membership from **each of the five “families” of churches:** Catholic, Orthodox, historical *[mainline]* Protestant, historical racial and ethnic, and evangelical and Pentecostal. *[Nearly all the churches must be represented, in order for its goals of ultimate unity to be achieved.]* . . .

“In addition to Christian denominations, the CCT **permits membership by national Christian organizations** *[such as Christian broadcasting, evangelistic, and welfare organizations]*, but they can form no more than 20 percent of the total CCT membership . . .

“Business will be conducted by the yearly General Assembly and, **between assemblies, by a steering committee.** That committee will be composed of three representatives from each of the five church families and three at-large members, chosen from among national Christian organizations according to criteria to be developed **by the steering committee.** *[Think through the math of this: The Catholic Church and Orthodox Church will each control the largest, single denominational voting block of any denomination on the steering committee. This will make them very influential.]*

“*[It was the Catholic Church that first conceived the idea for this massive ecumenical religious organization in America!]* CCT began with an invitation sent out to a number of church leaders in the summer of 2001 by **Cardinal William H. Keeler of Baltimore;** the R_. Robert Edgar, National Council of Churches general secretary; the R_. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America; and **Bishop Tod D. Brown of Orange, Calif., then-chairman of the [Catholic] bishop’s Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.**”—*Catholic News Service, November 18, 2004.*