

Consultation on Church Unity

Tom Quigley

Mukilteo, Washington

I trust you have been following the news regarding the Inauguration of Churches Uniting in Christ. After forty years of “Consultation,” nine mainstream churches came together in Memphis January 18 to 21 to mark the beginning of a period of “Commitment” to one another. They came to Memphis to celebrate and bring to a conclusion the Consultation on Church Union and to inaugurate Churches Uniting in Christ.

It was a significant moment in their journey together as churches. The Inauguration Service was held at Mt. Olive CME Cathedral in a glorious service witnessed by 1,200 people. Leaders of each of the member churches brought symbolic gifts and spoke a word of confession on behalf of their church for their complicity in keeping the churches separate.

Thank you for your continuing efforts to strengthen the Church and its mission and witness to create the kind of human community that God wills.

Tom Quigley

The new effort toward Christian unity went right to work on Monday morning. After a March from the Memphis City Hall to the National Civil Rights Museum, the leaders of the Churches Uniting in Christ signed an Appeal to End Racism in the Church and Society. They did so on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel at the very spot where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968. It is this commitment to each other to work together to end racism and white privilege that will set Churches Uniting in Christ apart from other church union movements. Those churches have chosen to stake the life of their relationship on being able to

erase racism from their own structures and from the society at large.

The work of Churches Uniting in Christ now shifts to regions, states and local communities, where congregations are encouraged to reach out to each other, to worship together regularly, to share baptism and eucharist, to join together in mission and to work to end racism.

The next several months will be a crucial time as middle judicatories and congregations begin conversations about what this new relationship means in their regions and local communities. Several celebrative events have already taken place in places like Abilene and Lake Jackson, Texas, Denver, Colorado, and Hopkinsville, Kentucky.

I have been asked by Robert Welsh (ecumenical officer of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ) and Lydia Veliko (ecumenical officer of the United Church of Christ) to help support their efforts to inform, interpret, celebrate and further develop relationships among their churches and other members of Churches Uniting in Christ. For those of you who don't know me, I am a Disciple minister, and I have served as the executive director of local councils of churches over the past thirty years, in Seattle, Dallas, Minneapolis, Indianapolis and Louisville.

Robert and Lydia are particularly interested in being sure that state ecumenical agencies are fully informed and appropriately involved in the efforts to develop the CUIC relationships at state and local levels. We are particularly interested in documenting what has happened and what is being planned to recognize the inauguration of Churches Uniting in Christ in local and regional

settings. As we receive reports of creative and interesting ideas and developments, I will be sharing them with you.

The upcoming meeting of the state council executives might offer a really good opportunity for state executives to talk about the roles you have been playing and might play in this new effort at Christian unity. Eleven state council executives participated in the Memphis Inauguration, and they will certainly be telling you about that experience. I think it would be particularly helpful for there to be some conversation, in your sessions or around the edges, on questions like these:

What kinds of roles are state councils willing to play, and equipped to play, in terms of CUIC? To what degree are these roles appropriate and possible:

- Interpretation of the CUIC relationship and telling the story;
- Providing study and discussion resources for use in local communities;
- Convening CUIC leaders to encourage conversations about what the new relationship might mean;
- Convening CUIC leaders to plan worship celebrations of the CUIC relationship;
- Interpreting the CUIC decision and launch to other communions;
- Organizing or coordinating the anti-racism efforts of the CUIC churches in your state;
- Convening CUIC leaders to consider other joint mission opportunities in your state.
- What kinds of support do you need from the (national) churches in order for you to play a helpful role in local and regional settings?

- How would you envision working in partnership with CUIC and its member churches, now and in the future?
- How do you see yourselves relating to local community CUIC developments? As events are planned in neighborhoods or cities within your state, would you want to be involved, informed, and/or consulted?

If a conversation takes place at your meeting, I would really appreciate hearing about it, and receiving a record of your discussion. I will also welcome opportunities to hear directly from you as plans develop in your state.

Up-to-date information about Churches Uniting in Christ, the Memphis event and the opportunities before us may be found at their website at www.cuicinfo.org.