

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of stylized hands in various colors including shades of blue, green, orange, red, purple, and grey. The hands are oriented in different directions, some pointing up, some down, and some to the side, creating a sense of movement and diversity.

Living in Community

A Local Church Study Guide
to the
Community Churches Movement
and the
International Council of Community Churches

Robert A. Fread

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Introduction

So, you belong to a Community Church? I do too!

I was baptized and confirmed in a Community Church which was a member of the International Council of Community Churches (ICCC). In 1988 that local church ordained me to Christian ministry in cooperation with the ICCC. Over my years of involvement in the ICCC from serving as pastor of a local ICCC church, to involvement as a board and committee member in both regional fellowships and the national ICCC, to representation of the ICCC at national and international ecumenical gatherings, I found the most important part of our tradition is the strength of the local church. That is not surprising given the fact our name as “Community” churches would reflect our key relationship being the local church in any given “community”. Yet I have noticed in many local churches a lack of knowledge and even complete disinterest, in what a Community Church is and how it connects to the whole Church of Jesus Christ.

This resource is a small attempt to help remedy this lack of knowledge and to hopefully sow new appreciation for the unique roll Community Churches have in the history of the Christian faith and North American Christianity. So, this resource is aimed at the local church, the “people in the pews”, to hopefully begin a journey of knowledge and appreciation of the unique Community Churches Movement.

This resource is being released in August 2020, to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the International Council of Community Churches.

Bob Fread

August 17, 2020

70th Anniversary of the Founding of the International Council of Community Churches

Using this Resource

This resource is meant to be a simple and concise introduction to the Community Churches Movement and the International Council of Community Churches. Whether your church is a member of the ICCC or considering membership, this resource is designed to be distributed to the “person in the pew” as a quick and easy educational guide. It can be used by individuals or by groups. Each section provides some questions for individual reflection or group discussion. Some suggested uses are:

- + Distribution to members on the Church Board or Council. Have members read one section each month for four months and open each board meeting with a 10-minute discussion.
- + Distribution to a church committee which has oversight of the church’s connection with the ICCC and other ecumenical relationships held by the church.
- + Use in an adult Sunday School class. The four sections can easily be covered in one month.
- + Distribution and use in a new members class. Helps new members coming from a denominational understanding of the church to see a new and different type of church body.
- + This resource also contains some information which pastors or teachers may find useful for youth Confirmation classes.
- + A tool to help recruit laity and clergy to attend the ICCC Annual Conference and a simple introduction for those attending Annual Conference for the first time.

Or, just be creative and use this resource however it best fits your needs!

I. Who Are “We”?



“Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness,
you that seek the LORD.
Look to the rock from which you were hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were dug.”

Isaiah 51:1 NRSV

I grew up in a Community church. Some of my friends who were religious called themselves Catholics or Lutherans or Methodists. But what was I? Was I a “Communityite” or a “Communitarian”? I did not seem to have a simple religious label like others. Then how was my church different? How were the beliefs taught in my church different from theirs? I was confused.

As I grew older and learned more about my faith, I learned more about Community churches, their history and what made their beliefs unique. As it turned out I ended up devoting my life to studying the unique movement within North American Christianity called the “Community Churches Movement” and serving as an ordained minister within that movement.

So, what have I learned? Well that is what I would like to share with you in these pages!

What’s in a Name?

Your church’s name may have the word “Community” in it. It may not. Community-types churches can be identified by many names: Community, Union, Independent, People’s, Federated, United or other names. Your church’s name most likely has some historical significance and may reflect what the founders of your church understood your church to be.

Community-type churches began to appear in the late nineteenth century. There were several common historical circumstances that led to many of these churches. First, there were many towns which had several denominational churches already established, but as the years went by these towns were “over churching” with more churches than what the population could support. In many towns these churches began working together on projects, often including a joint or union Sunday School. As years passed these joint efforts moved the separate churches to look at

merging into one church. Churches from various denominations that merged into one and broke all denominational ties were often called “Community” or “Union” churches. Churches which maintained affiliation with denominations of the merging churches, often now affiliated with two or more denominations were often called “Federated” churches.

Another type of church were those intentionally created as an ecumenical church. In some newly emerging towns when there was yet no church in the town, people of a particular denomination would want to start a church of that denomination. The problem would be not enough people of that denomination to start a viable church. People then from various denominations, who were not numerous enough to start a church of their own denomination would then band together to start one church that would include people of many denominations. These churches too were often called “Community” churches.

A third type of church were those who started as a denominational church, but as the church grew and the community changed, people from other denominations would become members and that church soon found more people in its membership from other denominations. These churches began to see themselves as more of a church for the whole “community” rather than for people of a single denomination. These churches many times added “Community” to their name and ended their denominational affiliation.

The last type of church to be considered are those that started as a denominational church but found themselves at odds with denominational leadership or policy. Often issues such as how pastors were selected, the inclusion of women, or the amount of decision making allowed by laity in the local church, caused churches to sever denominational ties and become independent. These churches often took the name “Independent” or “People’s” churches.

Early Organizations of Community Churches

As the number of Community, Union, Federated, Independent and People’s churches significantly grew in the early decades of the twentieth century, some sort of organization was needed for the mutual support of these churches and to help provide resources. This is how “Councils” of Community Churches began.

In 1923 pastors and laity from many Euro-American Community-type churches gathered in Chicago for the first national gathering of the Community Churches Movement. They decided to create the Community Church Workers of the USA (CCW) beginning in 1924. This group saw itself as a service agency and was comprised not of churches, but of clergy and laity who worked in local Community-type churches. This organization held national conferences in local churches around

the country employed national and regional staff and had a headquarters in Chicago. As the Great Depression hit, hard financial times followed. The CCW received a grant from the Hoover Foundation (of vacuum cleaner fame) in the late 1920's, but by the mid-1930's that money was gone. The CCW voted to cease operation in late 1936 and closed their national office in 1937.

Also, in 1923 pastors and laity from African American Community Churches met in Chicago and formed the National Council of the People's Community Churches. This group changed its name in 1928 to the Annual Conference of the People's Church of Christ and Community Centers and in 1933, when they incorporated in the state of Illinois, they became the Biennial Council of the Peoples Church of Christ and Community Centers of the United States of America and Elsewhere. Unlike the CCW, this group had local churches as members. This group had national conferences held in local churches around the country but did not hire any paid staff to run the organization. The elected officers did the executive and administration work, and office space was donated inside of local churches, with many years the office housed at Metropolitan Community Church in Chicago. This style of operation without paid staff and rented office space kept this group financially stable for over two decades.

The last group to be considered is the National Council of Community Churches which was founded at a national conference in 1946 in Columbus, Ohio. Also founded by Euro-American Community-type churches, this group quickly engaged with African American churches, with Metropolitan Community Church in Chicago hosting their national conference in 1947. Much like the Biennial Council this group had their elected officers do much of the executive and administrative work, and housed their office out of a local church, First Community Church in Columbus.

QUESTIONS

1. How was your church named? Is there any significance to the name?
2. There were four descriptions on how many Community-type churches were formed. Does your church fit any of those historic descriptions?
3. Do people in your church claim various denominational backgrounds? Which denominational backgrounds seem to have the largest representation in your church?
4. Was your church a member of either the Biennial Conference or the National Council of Community Churches?



A Hymn

The Community Church

Through centuries of conflict and clash of thought with thought,
Our forbearers for opinions and formal creeds have fought;
But we have greater freedom, the Way of Christ to prove,
“Let us resolve to differ, while we resolve to love.”

The living God we worship, the Lord of humankind,
Almighty and all loving, creating, ruling Mind,
The universe pervading, to heaven's remotest sphere –
Yet with each soul indwelling, that calls upon God here.

Let each believe in Jesus, according as one sees,
Revealed in gospel story, the Savior, One who frees
Our lives from sin and sorrow, and who before us trod
The way that finds through service, we seek the reign God.

Our lives and deeds we govern by Jesus' own commands;
That we love God and neighbor, this simple law demands,
With prayer and praise and worship, with tolerant mind to know
The truth that makes for freedom, this church shall forward go!

Tune: LANCASHIRE 7676D

This hymn was written in 1928 by Samuel R. Scholes. As the decades passed and theological language changed some words were altered in 1978 by David Brown and in 2019 by Robert Fread.

II. Together as a Council



“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

I Corinthians 12:12,27 NRSV

John Donne famously wrote, “No man is an island.” I like to say, “No church is an island either.” I think that is borne out by Paul’s metaphor in I Corinthians 12 as he speaks of the various body parts forming one body of Christ. Individual local churches need each other so together we may be the body of Christ. The ICCC is one means whereby local, autonomous Community churches can come together to live as the body of Christ.

Founding of the ICCC

With the National Council of Community Churches having their national conference in 1947 in Chicago at Metropolitan Community Church, an African American church historically affiliated with the Biennial Council, a relationship developed between the Biennial Council and National Council and their leaders. Quickly plans were developed for the merger of these councils.

In August, 1950, at a national conference at Lake Forest College, in suburban Chicago, the Biennial Council and National Council merged to form the International Council of Community Churches. Reflecting on that historic conference, Rev. Roy Burkhart, pastor of First Community Church in Columbus, Ohio, and President of the National Council said, “It was more than a convention. It was the birth of a new spirit. It was an expression of God’s true church in the world.” (*The Christian Community*, September, 1950) Rev. Joseph Evans, pastor of Metropolitan Community Church in Chicago, Illinois, and President of the Biennial Council said of the occasion, “Our meeting together as brothers and sisters in the Lord, was quite a striking, and arresting manifestation of that kind of Christian fellowship humanity needs to develop more, if the lofty purposes of humanity’s creation are ever to be realized.” (*The Christian Community*, September, 1950)

Following all the business meetings of this merging conference at Lake Forest College, a celebration of this new Council was held in the Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago. In 2000, the ICCC would return to Rockefeller Chapel to celebrate its 50th anniversary.

Over the years the ICCC has undergone a few name changes. In 1957, the Council became known as the Council of Community Churches, then in 1969 it became the National Council of Community Churches. By 1984, as the global membership of the Council grew, the name was returned to International Council of Community Churches.

How the Council Operates

Throughout its history the ICCC has been served by just a small part-time and full-time staff, just a tiny fraction of what denominations have. While the staff has never totaled more than ten, through many years it has labored with just two or three persons. The Council has usually employed an administrative staffer to operate the office and at least one executive staffer to travel and offer support to local churches. The executive staff member has often been titled “Executive Director” and has been clergy. In stronger financial periods the executive staff was enlarged to have assistant executive directors and in some periods the Council used adjunct staff members, who were volunteers but had travel expenses covered.

The ICCC, much like a local church, is operated by a Board of Trustees elected by delegates at Annual Conference. Through most of its history this Board was served by elected officers such as President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer, plus “trustees” who represented various regions of the country. In recent years, as financial times were lean and executive staff was decreased, the Council began operating with an elected Board of Directors which included seven Vice Presidents which share procedural leadership over various aspects of the Council’s life. This change to both a Board of Directors and Board of Trustees begun in 2014.

Is the Council a Denomination?

If you hang around the Council long enough you will realize there is one “bad word” to be avoided and it has more than four letters. It is the word “denomination”. Is the Council a denomination? NO!

In 1950 the ICCC stated in its Constitution, “This Council is a fellowship of and for the churches which participate; it is not a denomination, not a church, nor in any manner a superior ecclesiastical body. It has no inherent rights to make rules or set requirements regarding churches within its fellowship.”

That seems clear. Yet, in 1984 when ICCC Executive Director, Rev. J. Ralph Shotwell wrote his book entitled, *Unity Without Uniformity: A History of the Postdenominational Community Church Movement*, he devoted half a chapter to setting out 16 reasons the ICCC was not a denomination. Not to recite all of Rev. Shotwell's reasons, some of his main reasons included: the council has no set of Biblical or theological beliefs, or creed; its governance favors democracy instead of power in an individual or small group; it has no set liturgical practices; it does not vote members in or out as membership lies with the local church; it does not mandate collection of statistical information; it offers its services to all Community churches, not just members; it does not license or ordain ministers instead recognizes the licensing or ordaining of local churches; it does not require termination of denominational affiliation to be a member; and it owns no colleges, seminaries or mission agencies.

It can best be said that the ICCC is a fellowship of local churches and centers. The word "fellowship" is drawn from the Greek word "*koinonia*" in the Christian Scriptures which literally means "partnership, participation, or sharing". The Council is a means by which autonomous local churches share together and participate with each other in the ministry and mission of Jesus.

Where Does the ICCC Live?

Where does the ICCC live? Well, it lives in hundreds of local churches and ministry centers around the globe. If your church is a member, it lives in your community.

The ICCC also maintains a national office. Over the years offices have been located in the Columbus, Ohio and in the Chicago, Illinois area. For many years, the Council rented office space, but in some lean financial years it used donated space in ICCC local churches. Finally, in 1994 the Council began a "Home-at-Last" campaign to purchase a permanent office, and by 1995 the ICCC purchased it's first and only permanent home in Frankfort, Illinois, called "Council House". Two years later the debt on Council House was retired.

Annual Conference

The true heartbeat of the ICCC is Annual Conference. Originally, national conferences in the Community Churches Movement were held in local churches. As attendance increased colleges and universities were used. Finally, for the convenience of attendees, in 1977 a shift was made to using convention hotels in major metropolitan cities, a practice still used today.

The Board of Directors determines the site and dates of Annual Conference, with it moving to cities around the county. Twice in history a national Community Churches conference was held outside the United States. In 1929 the Annual Conference of the People's Church of Christ and Community Centers was held in Chatham, Ontario, Canada and in 1999 the Annual Conference of the International Council of Community Churches was held in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

So, what is Annual Conference? Is it just another boring church business meeting? Absolutely not! Now it is true that business meetings do occur at conference. With each member church allowed two voting delegates (only one of which may be clergy), these voting delegates do assemble to hear reports, elect officers and board members and vote on a budget and other necessary business items. But business is only a small part of conference. Conference is inspiring worship, powerful preaching, dynamic Bible study, sharing of Holy Communion, informative workshops, and many opportunities for fellowship with new and old friends from Community churches around the country. For those who attend conference once, and then go back, it is truly a family reunion. Conference is a great celebration for every local Community church member.

How Do We Communicate?

As the number of Community-type churches grew in the early twentieth century, it became evident that these churches needed a vehicle for communication. In 1921, the Rev. David Piper began to publish *The Community Churchman*, a religious journal, containing news and advertising aimed at the growing number of Community-type churches. In 1934, *The Community Churchman* merged with another religious journal of its day known as *The Christian*, to form *The Christian Community* which was published by the Community Church Workers. When the Community Church Workers disbanded in 1937 *The Christian Community* ceased publication until 1948 when it was revived by the National Council of Community Churches. For many years, *The Christian Community* was a magazine style religious journal which included a few pages of news for Community churches. As the years went by it became more of a newspaper and newsletter devoted less to scholarly articles and more to Community churches news. Today *The Christian Community* is published eight months of the year as the "official" newsletter of the ICCC and can be read in either paper or electronic format.

QUESTIONS

1. When did your church become a member of the Council? Has any Council staff, such as the Executive Director, ever visited your church?
2. What do you think of when you hear the word “denomination”? How is your church similar to and different from a denominational church?
3. Who from your church has attended the ICCC Annual Conference? If possible, have them share their experiences.
4. If your church seldom sends members to Annual Conference or sends only a few members, why is that? What would need to change for more members of your church to attend?
5. When and where is the next ICCC Annual Conference?
6. Have you ever seen or read an issue of The Christian Community? Have you been to the ICCC website?



A Statement of Affirmation and Commitment for Community Churches

We are God's people- created in diversity, gathered in unity.

We affirm our faith in one God;
in Christ our Teacher;
in the Spirit as our Guide.

We affirm our ministry as a Community Church-
a church which tolerates religious opinions;
a church which respects the sincere convictions
of every person;
a church which seeks to be as comprehensive
as the spirit and teachings of Christ,
and as inclusive as the love of God.

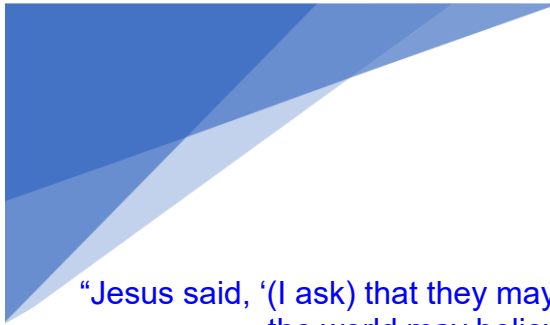
We affirm our place in the body of Christ,
in the one, holy Church,
in the people of God.

We commit ourselves to the continuing mission of Christian unity-
that unity for which Christ prayed,
“that they all may be one.”

We are God's people! Thanks be to God!

Written by Rev. Robert A. Fread
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III. Unity in Faith



“Jesus said, ‘(I ask) that they may be one...so that the world may believe’.”

John 17:21 NRSV

“There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

Ephesians 4:4,5 NRSV

“All of this is from God, who reconciled us to God’s self through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”

II Corinthians 5:18 NRSV, alt.

What do we believe? That is a tricky question. Just as every local church in the ICCC has a unique history and governance structure, so each church varies to its teachings, beliefs, worship style and ministries. One of the best statements on what Community churches believe was written around 1925 by one of the early Community Church Movement leaders, Rev. Orvis Jordan, pastor of Park Ridge Community Church in Chicago. Some of the language may be outdated, but his overall concepts are still true a century later:

Community Churches need not believe a multitude of things. But what they do believe should be with a multitude of conviction. We must fix our faith in God. The Christ as the Savior of Souls and the Savior of Society must be our Master. The Bible as the textbook of our religion must be reverently studied. We shall seek to destroy no person’s faith in the various doctrines which are consistent with these beginnings of faith, for the Community Church Movement is not an enemy to faith, though at times it may fight hurtful superstitions. In our churches, toleration of religious opinion is not inconsistent with deep-going loyalty; for our loyalties are to persons.

The basis of our unity is in one God who is revealed to humanity in Jesus Christ. But how each church experiences and worships that God and how they understand and apply the teachings of Jesus may be quite different. For example, some may say that statements like the Apostles' and Nicene Creed are useful expressions of a common faith, and some ICCC churches might recite these creeds each Sunday. Yet some churches will never use such historic creed as they understand such statements as too theologically restricting and not reflective of faith in a twenty-first century contemporary context. We often call our movement "non-doctrinal" which simply means we do not mandate the acceptance of any creed or doctrine as necessary for membership or fellowship.

Our theological diversity is maintained across the ICCC. Worship in some of our churches is quite traditional, while contemporary or blended in others. Some churches understand Baptism as a sacrament conveying God's grace, while others see it as an act of Christian discipleship. Some churches baptize by complete immersion while others by sprinkling or pouring water. Some understand Holy Communion as being the literal body and blood of Jesus, some as Christ being sacramentally present or still others using bread and wine as symbols of Jesus. Some serve Holy Communion in the pews while other churches may have people kneel at an altar rail. Our churches are truly diverse.

When it comes to ordained ministers the Council does not ordain. Instead it recognizes the right of the local church to ordain and authorize various ministries. The Council does recommend that local churches when ordaining, to invite involvement and have representation from the Council so that an ordination can be done "in cooperation with the International Council of Community Churches". For those ordained ministers of other denominations who are serving Council churches, there is no need for a minister to terminate ordained standing in his/hers/their original denomination or for any ordained minister to be re-ordained. The Council recognizes and grants ordained standing to all ordained ministers who are authorized by local churches in Council membership.

As I think of what we in the ICCC believe and what theological concepts unite us as a Council, I keep coming back to two concepts which I can boil down to just one word each: Unity and Reconciliation. I often call these our "Theological Distinctives". I like to discuss each one as having both a micro and macro understating and implication for us.

Unity

Many decades ago, in 1961, the World Council of Churches expressed that unity is “God’s gift and (God’s) will” for the church. The Community Churches Movement has always sought this unity both locally (micro) and nationally and globally (macro).

The unity sought and practiced within the Community Churches Movement has been the formation and support of *community based, autonomous and theologically diverse religious communities*.

+ Community Based- our churches are community founded to meet the needs of each local community. We have always believed that people in a local area know best how to organize so to meet the unique needs of that community. Each community is different. Each community has different needs and different ways to best meet those needs. Each community has a different religious makeup. No one answer nor one single type of church can meet the differing needs of people in communities large and small around the country. Nor do denominational staff in regional or national offices miles away know best about the needs and ministries needed in local communities. Our churches are founded in the communities they serve, to minister to the needs of the communities they serve and composed and governed by the diverse religious people they serve.

+Autonomous – our churches practice a polity (governance structure) known as congregational polity which means each church is allowed to govern itself as it deems best. This mean no two Community churches are governed the same, each church is unique. The Council, its staff nor its Annual Conference, can tell a church how to operate, how to worship, who to call as pastor, or in any way interfere with the operation of a local church. Yet the Council is always there to offer support and resources as needed and as requested by the church.

+Theologically Diverse Religious Communities – our churches come from a diversity of backgrounds and have congregations which themselves are theologically diverse. One of my favorite statements on our unity comes from the original ICCC constitution of 1950 when it said that we seek a fellowship committed to “a church as comprehensive as the spirit and teachings of Christ and as inclusive as the love of God.” Some of our churches may lean to more conservative theological understandings of Christianity while others are very progressive. Many of our churches claim theological roots stemming from the Protestant Reformation or in African American spirituality which sustained their ancestors through centuries of oppression and slavery, while a smaller number of our churches come from diverse traditions such as Independent Catholic or Esoteric Christianity. Even though the ICCC sees itself as “within the Christian tradition” and seeking “to be faithful to the prayer of Jesus that ‘they all may be one’” (current ICCC constitution), some of our churches are intentionally inter-faith and seek to minister and include those of other religions.

At the global or macro level, the unity which unites our people in churches on the local level is also the unity we seek for the whole of the Christian church. The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1948 spoke to us saying that the various churches of the world “find their unity in [Jesus Christ]” and “They do not have to create that unity. It is the gift of God”.

Because of our commitment to the unity of the church of Jesus Christ, the ICCC from its birth in 1950 has sought to be involved with all ecumenical organizations both in the United States and the world. Currently the ICCC is a member of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Churches Uniting in Christ (formerly the Consultation on Church Union) and Christian Churches Together. Globally the Council is a member of the World Council of Churches.

Reconciliation

The early days of the Community Churches Movement, like American society of the early twentieth century, was racially segregated. In 1922 when Rev. David Piper printed his first handbook and directory resource for Community-type churches called *A Handbook of the Community Church Movement in the United States*, this book seems only to list Euro-American Community churches. Reinforcing this in 1923 when two national gatherings were held for Community-type churches and organizations formed, these two gatherings and organizations seem to be segregated with Euro-Americans in the Community Church Workers and African Americans in the Council of the People’s Community Churches.

Yet a quarter century later, still in a racially divided America, the Community Church Movement is ready to lead change and reform. Early in the history of the National Council of Community Churches, formed in 1946 by Euro-American churches, we begin to find involvement of African American churches. This led to the National Council holding their national conference at the African American Metropolitan Community Church in Chicago and African American church leaders, such as Rev. Joseph Evans, taking a prominent role at the conference. This began the process of the two councils discussing merger, and finally the historic merger of the primarily Euro-American National Council and the African American Biennial Council 1950, in the midst of a racist, Jim Crow American society.

With such a beginning in 1950, the current ICCC has always sought to be in the forefront of proclaiming racial justice and reconciliation for all. Has the way been easy? No. Has there been bumps in our road? Yes. But still for over 70 years the ICCC has sought to “tear down the dividing wall” (Ephesians 2:14) of racism in the church and American society. The scourge and original sin of America, racism, must

be overcome, and through education and action in areas such as white privilege and mass incarceration, the work to dismantle an American society that is systemically racist must be the continuing work of the Council and everyone.

Reconciliation must also be seen at the macro level as the ultimate reconciliation of all people and all creation. The vision we glimpse in Revelation 7:9 of “a great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” is the vision of ultimate salvation and wholeness for all humanity. To such is the goal that God is moving us, and the work to which God is calling us. But even the reconciliation of all humanity is too shallow and narrow. God’s saving wholeness is meant to reconcile the whole created order. In today’s world as we consider “ecological justice” and dive into the study of “Creation theology” we must remember that the famous words of John 3:16 “that God so loved the world” means not just God loves humans. The word “world” in that verse is the Greek “kosmon” or in English “cosmos”, so literally that verse reminds us that God loves the whole created order. It is all parts of God’s wondrous and glorious interdependent creation, from the tiniest atom to the farthest reaches of interstellar space, that God is reconciling through Christ, and giving to us “the ministry of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:18).

QUESTIONS

1. Does your church have any “Statement of Faith” in its constitution? Does your church use “Statements of Faith” or any historic creeds as part of worship?
2. What elements of the Christian faith bind your church together? What elements of the Christian faith are “non-essential” thus allowing for diversity of belief and practice?
3. What is the denominational background of your current pastor? What are the backgrounds of other pastors in your church’s history?
4. What ecumenical connections does your church maintain in any local, regional, or state ecumenical organizations? What types of ecumenical connections are available to your congregation?
5. Does your church ever worship or have any interaction with other churches that have a membership racially or ethnically different from yours? If so, what has your church learned from that relationship? If not, what is keeping your church from pursuing such relationships?



Vision of the International Council of Community Churches

The Council is an international, intercultural, interracial fellowship of churches and ministry centers which seeks to realize Christian unity in local, national, and world relations.

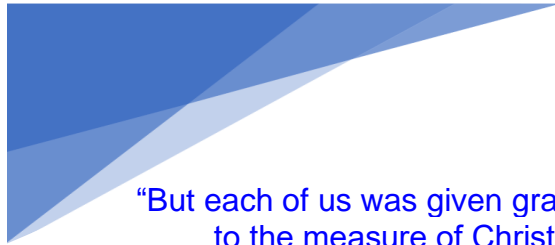
The Council seeks fellowship, mutual support, and common ministries that reflect the unity of all who see themselves within the Christian tradition.

The Council seeks:

- To be faithful to the prayer of Jesus Christ that “they may all be one;”
- To witness to the inclusive love of God that overcomes all divisions;
- To love and serve God, God’s people, and God’s creation;
- To seek and share the truth;
- To build toward a new world of peace;
- To affirm individual freedom of conscience;
- To affirm communities of justice, mercy, and love; and.
- To be an integral partner in the worldwide ecumenical movement.

Current Constitution of the ICC

IV. Ministry Together as Churches and Council



“But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”

Ephesians 4:7,12,13 NRSV

In my many years of association with the ICCC there is one question I get asked more than any other, “What does the Council do for our church?”. Each time I hear that question I think of President John F. Kennedy’s inaugural speech in which he spoke the famous words, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” So I really think the “what does the Council do for your church?” question might be the wrong question to ask, rather I think the more appropriate question is “What do we as churches do for the Council?” How is it that we as locally autonomous churches come together in the Council for mutual ministry and support? How do we share the gifts which the Spirit gives each of our churches for the common good of all in our ICCC? Then, how are those gifts returned to the local church via the Council?

Our Mutual Ministry In the ICCC

So how do we mutually support each other through the ministry of the ICCC? Sorry if this seems a little bit like a laundry list, but here are several ways in which the ministry of a local church is supported and enhanced through our mutual ministry in the ICCC:

1. Search and Call – At various times in the Council’s history the search and call process to connect clergy with local churches for pastoral ministry has taken different forms. Yet the Council is still available to support local churches in that

process. For one of the objectives listed for the ICCC in its 1957 constitution was to “help churches requesting such help to find community-minded ministers.” At no time does the ICCC appoint or tell a church who to call as pastor. Such a decision on calling a pastor is totally in the hands of the local church. But the Council can be of assistance during this transition time in a church’s life. The first thing to do when a church has a pastoral vacancy is to contact the Council office. The Council has a *Searching for Pastoral Leadership: A Guide for Community Church Pastoral Search Committees* booklet which can be shared with local churches. The Council through staff or a board member can also consult with the search committee through phone, internet or in-person meetings so to share insight or assistance. Likewise, clergy who are looking for a new pastoral call are encouraged to contact the Council for assistance in such a process.

2. Continuing Education and Congregational Learning – The Annual Conference each year is a great source of continuing education for pastors and enrichment for laity. Several workshops are offered each year on a variety of topics. Plus, a nationally respected speaker or seminary professor leads several sessions of Bible study.

Over the decades continuing education for clergy has taken many other forms. The Council has endorsed participation in the Stetson Pastors School at Stetson University in Florida each winter. In decades past old technology such as audio cassette tapes and videos were produced for continuing education. Currently as this resource is being produced the Council through its Leadership Development team is offering several internet webinar events dealing with social and theological issues and congregational development which are valuable for both clergy and laity. Also, for clergy are some webinars on preaching and opportunity for small group, clergy support groups. The horizon is filled with opportunities for the Council to continue offering such internet based continuing education and congregational learning in the future.

3. Mission Agencies – No Community churches organization in the history of the Community Churches Movement has ever owned or operated a mission agency, college, university, or theological school. Instead the current Council has sought to endorse such existing agencies and schools whose mission and values match that of the Community Churches Movement. Many such agencies and schools have been endorsed over the years, but I would like to mention just two because of their historic connections to the Council and the significant number of ICCC churches who have supported them over the years. These two are World Neighbors and Church World Service.

World Neighbors was founded in 1951, one year after the formation of the ICCC. To some degree World Neighbors and the ICCC “grew up” together. World Neighbors is an international development organization that works to alleviate hunger, poverty, and disease in the most isolated areas of the globe. It does not give away food or material aid, but takes a big-picture, holistic approach focusing on the entire community rather than on one issue, as they have discovered that problems and issues within a community are all interrelated and that you cannot solve one problem in isolation. World Neighbors invests in people and their communities by training and inspiring them to create their own life-changing solutions through programs in agriculture, literacy, water, health, leadership, financial management and environmental protection. Over the years the ICCC helped sponsor some World Neighbors projects and persons from the Council have gone on World Neighbors educational trips.

The other agency is Church World Service, founded in 1948, and for many years was part of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Church World Service helps provide sustainable development, disaster relief and refugee and migration assistance. For many churches in the ICCC Church World Service is the Council’s “unofficial” disaster relief ministry. Many people know Church World Service for such ministries as One Great Hour of Sharing, emergency blankets, hygiene kits and school kits.

4. Retirement and Benefits Programs – The ICCC has had a long standing relationship with the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (MMBB) to provide retirement plans and other benefits for clergy and lay staff members in those ICCC churches who wish to participate. MMBB offers a pension fund, life insurance, disability insurance and other retirement accounts. They also offer educational materials and resources to our local churches on Pastoral Relations Committees and annual clergy compensation reviews, plus webinars and other educational opportunities for clergy on such issues as financial investing and clergy taxes.

5. Scholarships – The ICCC believes in education and helping students. The oldest scholarship of the ICCC is the Jordan Scholarship named of for Ralph and Helen Jordan. Ralph was the ICCC’s first treasurer and first layperson elected president, while, Helen served as president of the Women’s Christian Fellowship and is the scholarship’s founder. College students who are members of ICCC churches/centers are eligible to apply. The Council also has a scholarship fund for theological education, the Robert F. Thomas Scholarship Fund.

6. Books and Resources – The ICCC and its publishing ministry, Community Church Press, has been publishing books and various resources for local churches and ministry centers for over 30 years. Community Church Press has published a variety of books including books on history and theology including *Unity Without Uniformity* by J. Ralph Shotwell and *Faith and Fellowship in the Community Church Movement: A Theological Perspective* by the ICCC Faith and Order Commission. Currently Community Church Press publishes an annual worship journal of sermons, hymns and worship aids entitled *The Inclusive Pulpit: Resources for Community Church Worship*. The Council has also published a variety of resources to be used by local churches including resources for pastoral search and call, long range planning, new church planting and racial diversity and reconciliation. A complete list of books and resources can be found in the back of this resource.

As local churches work together in ministry through the ICCC the opportunities for mutual support and sharing are endless. When churches seek to give of themselves for the building up of our common ministry, it is then the Council is at its strongest!

QUESTIONS

1. What gifts does your church have which could be shared with other churches in the ICCC?
2. How has your church taken advantage of some of the ICCC ministries mentioned in this section? Were you aware of all the various ministries outlined in this section that the Council offers?
3. In the future what areas would you like the ICCC to provide assistance or resources?

Would you like to learn more about the International Council of Community Churches?

This resource just scratches the surface when it comes to information on the International Council of Community Churches.

For quick information, please visit: www.icccnow.org.

For detailed information, please contact the Council at:

International Council of Community Churches
21116 Washington Pkwy.
Frankfort, IL 60423.
Phone: 815-464-5690
Email: icccnow@sbcglobal.net

ICCC staff, officers or trustees are available to visit your church and share information with your church. Contact the Council office to discuss a visit to your church.

Another resource to assist your church in learning more about the Council is the booklet *Introducing the International Council of Community Churches*, 2018, which offers information on ICCS history, beliefs, constitution and endorsed mission agencies. Contact the Council office to receive a copy.

Books and Resources

Contact the ICCC office for availability and cost of the following items.

History & Theology

Unity Without Uniformity- The Community Church Movement, 2nd Edition, 2000, by J. Ralph Shotwell - a history of the Community Church Movement and the ICCC.

In Christian Love- Deliberations on a Decade. 1991, by J. Ralph Shotwell – history of the ICCC during the decade of the 1980's

Faith and Fellowship in the Community Church Movement: A Theological Perspective, 1986 – various authors share theological insights from a Community Church perspective.

Worship & Preaching

The Inclusive Pulpit: Resources for Community Church Worship, 1996 to present- an annual journal of sermons and worship aids.

The Postdenominational Pulpit: Inclusive Truths for Inconclusive Times, 1987, J. Ralph Shotwell, editor- sermons by various authors on Community Church themes.

Flame on the Mountain, Fire in the Field, 1997, by Jeffrey R. Newhall, - reflections on the semi-continuous first readings from the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Propers 16-25.

Skeletons in the Closet and Other Tellico Sermons, 2014, by Martin Singley, III, - sermons preached at Tellico Village Community Church in Tennessee.

Resources for Local Churches

Manual for Ministry: Resources and References for Community Churches in Administration and Relationships, 1986, J. Ralph Shotwell, editor- a variety of administrative, worship and mission resources including sample church constitutions, liturgies for ordination, installation, and other church occasions.

Building an Effective Youth Ministry, by Robert Coombs – book for administration of a youth ministry program.

Introduction to the International Council of Community Churches, 2018 – a resource booklet offering ICCC history and beliefs, the current ICCC constitution and a list of endorsed mission agencies.

Agape: An Exercise in Racial Tolerance and Diversity Through God's Love – Agape Training Team – an interactive curriculum on racial diversity and reconciliation.

Searching for Pastoral Leadership: A Guide of Community Church Pastoral Search Committees, 2011, by Donald Ashmall – a resource booklet to aid pastoral search committees.

A New Community Church: A Manual for Church Planters and Other Visionaries- a resource booklet to aid in starting a new Community Church including a sample constitution.

Long Range Planning Notebook, 1997, by Kenneth Webster – a resource booklet for developing the future directions and ministry goals for a church.

Renewing our Vision: A Venture for a Local Congregation – a resource booklet for developing a vision for renewed ministry within a congregation, including Bible study suggestions and sermon series ideas

Miscellaneous Books

Prophet in the House, 1993, by J. Ronald Miller – a biography of Charles A. Eaton, an international servant of justice and peace, member of the US House of Representatives and member of Wilson Memorial Union Church in New Jersey.

Power for Purposeful Living, 1994, by Kermit Long – an inspirational and devotional book on prayer.

Periodicals/Newsletter

The Christian Community - published eight times per year, has annual subscription cost – contains news from the ICCC and from ICCC member churches.

About the Author

Rev. Robert “Bob” Fread has been a life-long part of the Community Churches Movement. Raised in the Evendale Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1988 Bob was ordained into Christian Ministry by that church in cooperation with the International Council of Community Churches. He holds a BA in Theology from Cedarville University in Ohio. Committed to ecumenism he has pastored Community, United Church of Christ, United Methodist and Lutheran churches in Ohio, Missouri, Michigan, and Iowa. In over 30 years as an Ordained Minister in the International Council of Community Churches he has served as Vice-President and Area Coordinator of the Michigan Fellowship of Community Churches and on the Board of Trustees, Annual Conference Planning Committee, and Ecumenical Relations Committee of the ICCC. His ecumenical work for the Council has included representing the ICCC at the 7th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra, Australia, at numerous plenaries of the Consultation of Church Union/Churches Uniting in Christ and as an ecumenical observer at the national meetings of several denominations. He is also a two-time recipient (2001 & 2020) of the Rev. Dr. Charles A. Trentham Homiletics Awards given annually by the ICCC for a sermon best reflecting the spirit and values of the Community Churches Movement. Bob, and his wife, Sue, live in Iowa and have two adult children.

In 2018 Bob began work on the Community Churches Movement Heritage Project committed to preserving, sharing, and teaching the unique history and theological contributions of the Community Churches Movement.

Notes

commUNITY Churches Movement Heritage Project

The Community Churches Movement Heritage Project is a private, independent library and research effort committed to: 1) preserving the distinct history and theological contributions of the organized Community Churches Movement and the many Community, Union, Federated, Peoples, Independent, and Ecumenical churches, and their leaders, which comprise this Movement; 2) sharing and teaching the unique history and theological thinking of this Movement; and 3) developing needed resources to continue this Movement forward into the future.

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