

The International Council of Community Churches



International Council of Community Churches

A SKETCH OF A MOVEMENT AND A COUNCIL

Prayer of Confession

O gracious God, to whose greatness our worship adds nothing, but without whose worship we diminish everything. We lift up our hearts and voices in gratitude for the opportunity of worship; for the sanctuaries in which we worship; and for the Church of Jesus Christ, whose spirit always informs our worship and sometimes inspires us to reform our worship. Forgive us, dear God, for our selfishness of heart: the selfishness that makes us insensitive to your word, indifferent to your messengers, unfaithful to your mission. Renew our appreciation for the Church as the Body of Christ, and for ourselves as its members, open to your guidance and committed to your service. As Christ has opened the door of your Eternal Community to all your children, let us open the doors of his Church to all your children, that the Carpenter's unanswered prayer that we become one – even as he and you are one – might be answered in our lifetime. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Marion C. Bascom

Dr. Bascom (March 14, 1925-May 17, 2012) was among the last surviving clergy attendees at the founding conference of the International Council of Community Churches. Dr. Bascom served as Pastor of Douglas Memorial Community Church, Baltimore, MD from 1949-1995. He was named Pastor Emeritus by the church at the time of his retirement.

Preface to the First Edition, 1994

Some have asked me why a “sketch” of the Movement and Council, instead of a portrait, the reasons are twofold. First of all, there is the limitation of space. A portrait would necessarily seek to be complete, following Oliver Cromwell’s command of “warts and all”, and this work does not allow for such an effort. Further, there is the fact that a portrait suggests a finished product: “Behold the institution!” We are not in finished form; we are sure God is not through shaping us as a Movement and Council. The Community Church Movement is very much a work in progress. Some of its dynamics can be sketched, but there is no hope of fully portraying a movement evolving and reforming as it seeks to “Advance the love of God and humanity through serving Christ and community.”

As a pastor of my youth noted, “Even a dog wags its tail,” and it is appropriate that some words of acknowledgement and thanks be given. Appreciation is expressed to the Ohio Fellowship of Community Churches for requesting the presentation which initiated this work. Also, it was the gift of a quiet day in the sunroom of Jim and Nancy MacVicar’s house by Gull Lake, which allowed me the time to begin formulating my thoughts. My thanks go to Shirley R. Newhall for careful editing; to Margaret House, Vermelle Barnes, and Barbara DeCastro and other members of the Informational Service Commission for their feedback and advice as the manuscript developed. Friends and leaders in the Movement such as Marion and Dorothy Bascom, Larry McClellan, Lonnie Miller, and Herb Freitag gave valued advice. Finally, my thanks to the Revs. Theodore Richardson and Leon Perry, the former pastor and current pastor respectively of the historic Metropolitan Community Church of Chicago, for sharing photos and information from their historical archives.

It is my hope that this sketch will provide information about a great cause and alert seeking persons and churches to an exciting possibility for fellowship and service in Christ.

*Jeffrey R. Newhall
ICCC Executive Director
December 1994*

Foreword to the 2014 Edition

Two eventful decades have passed since Dr. Newhall's preparation of this "Sketch." The Council's mission and vision are constant. Other elements of our life together have seen change:

Nearly all the attendees at the founding conference of the Council have passed from the scene, and with them has gone the direct memory of the courageous saints who stepped out in faith in 1950. It remains for this and future generations to build upon their work, giving thanks to God that as we do so, "we stand on the shoulders of giants."

The Council has adopted new bylaws for the first time in over forty years, giving our Board of Trustees the opportunity to concentrate solely on the relationships that give life to the Council. The financial and promotional functions are now assigned to a Board of Directors. The intent is to allow greater focus in our fellowship and more efficient operation in our outreach.

Earlier bylaws reflected the situation in which they were written: the Council was then a U.S. – based fellowship with just a few members from other nations. As we have grown in our world-wide presence, the need for a board with broader membership has become obvious. Now, any national fellowship with seven or more participating member churches may elect a Trustee, who possesses full voting rights on the board.

Meanwhile around us, the cultural situation continues to change. In the United States, church attendance is down. In contrast many of our international members report significant growth in membership and attendance at worship. In North America, denominations are experiencing internal conflict over issues that appear to be societal, but in many cases are more closely related to personal ambition and power. World-wide there is much inter-religious conflict. Through it all the community church movement and its members seek justice, reconciliation and Christian unity. May God continue to bless us in this sacred pilgrimage.

*Donald H. Ashmall
Council Minister, Emeritus
October, 2014*

A SKETCH OF A MOVEMENT AND A COUNCIL

Introduction

The prayer of the community church movement is Jesus' prayer for all of His followers, "that they might all be one." The witness of the movement is that Christians can achieve that unity without imposing uniformity. The joy of the movement is the sharing, caring relationships among churches and ministry centers worldwide. The hope of the movement is that all Christians will find it possible to celebrate diversity without division. We believe that prayer, witness, joy and hope have been present in the church from the time two or three first gathered in Christ's name.

Christian unity found expression at the very beginning of the Christian Church, when at Pentecost the barriers of language and custom were broken down. Tragically, the church's later history contradicted the Pentecost experience. Diversity became an excuse for division. Doctrinal precision took precedence over loving relationships. Appeals to power to enforce authoritarian decisions replaced patient dialogue. Violence took the place of compassion and mutual forgiveness.

Despite this, there have been repeated attempts to bridge the divides that have separated Christians. Medieval monastic communities prayed for reconciliation between the Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Catholic) branches of the church. As Protestants and Roman Catholics fought vicious wars in the 1600's there were calls for an end to separation. One author proposed a formula: "in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity."

"The American experiment" brought about important changes in interchurch and even interfaith relationships. Beginning with the experience of the Rhode Island and Pennsylvania colonies, government and religion were more or less separated. Now the power of the state could not be used to enforce doctrinal uniformity. The expansion of the American frontier meant that in many isolated communities there were no existing religious institutions and none of the peer pressure that might have kept some from thinking about how to express their faith in a new setting. Slave owners, anxious to separate their "property" from African roots including religious roots, encouraged slaves to convert to Christianity. In so doing they did not consider the basic and subversive New Testament teaching that all believers are equal before God. At the beginning of the nineteenth century it appeared that the stage was set for new expressions of Christian unity within the growing United States.

The potential for the development of a community church vision was not realized, at least not for a time. Why did the impulses toward community churches falter and fade? H. Richard Niebuhr in **The Social Sources of Denominationalism** (1929) has suggested the advance of denominations and their fragmentation of the body of Christ had to do with matters of race, economic status, social class, ethnicity, language, and regionalism. In short, the church turned away from the gift of Pentecost and returned to the dubious gifts of Babel.

One among the many causes for division was chattel slavery and its concomitant ill, racism. In 1787 Richard Allen and other Afro-Americans were forced from their prayers to leave a white Methodist church because of their skin color. That event led to the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. James Varick, who led in organizing the AME Zion Church had similar experiences. Meanwhile, Baptists, Methodists and other denominations split along sectional lines because of controversy over slavery and slave holding, with large segments of the church in the United States unwilling to accept the Biblical witness that “God is no respecter of persons” and “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34). Even after the Civil War these divisions continued, in some cases for decades and in others to the present day.

Developments in Europe during the nineteenth century led to further divisions in American Christianity. Marx and Darwin’s writings were controversial. New developments in Biblical study and theology coming from various sources on the European continent. Reactions from America were as varied as in the home countries from which the writings issued, leading to non-stop acrimonious debate and occasional schism. Christian unity seemed ever more distant.

The first half of the twentieth century was the golden age for American denominationalism. It seemed unrealistic to think that any national or international expression of a community church might emerge. Those who spoke about such an idea seemed hopelessly idealistic. A movement that was centered on a mission of reconciliation within the Church and society must surely be an impossibility. The American Church was divided; American society was segregated. That reality seemed permanent to many. Yet even in the midst of complacency there were signs of change. The Federal Council of Churches was mocked by some when it was organized in 1908; this “communion of denominations” would develop into today’s National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. Initially, inter-church Faith and Order conferences and correspondence were ignored. But they would lead to the 1948 formation of the World Council of Churches.

As mid-century approached, Dr. Joseph M. Evans and Dr. Roy A. Burkhardt were two who were not content with present reality and who had a vision for a new form of church life and witness. Both men had come out of denominational backgrounds to pastor interdenominational community churches. Evans was serving as pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church in Chicago, and Burkhardt was pastor of the First Community Church in Columbus, Ohio. Metropolitan’s congregation was African-American, while “the First” was European-American. Evans headed the predominantly African-American body called the Biennial Council of the People’s Church of Christ and Community Centers. Burkhardt led the National Council of Community Churches, a primarily European-American body. These two visionaries saw that neither denomination nor race should separate the people of God. Following their common vision, Evans and Burkhardt worked for the reconciliation and the healing of divisions in the church of Jesus Christ and in American society.

What follows is an attempt to sketch in broad strokes the nature of the Movement that brought about a key moment in the history of the community church movement. In the summer of 1950 the two Christian visionaries – Evans and Burkhardt – stood on a dais in Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago and clasped hands as the choir of the Cosmopolitan Community church sang out “Let the Heavens Rejoice and Let the Earth Be Glad.” That moment brought to birth of the International Council of Community Churches. The worship of the assembly that day celebrated God’s guidance in bringing about the largest interracial merger of religious bodies in

American history and a great step toward the realization of a more healthy and united family of God.

Major Tenets

The community church movement and the International Council of Community Churches are by nature neither confessional nor creedal. One leader, asked what confession persons in the Movement might affirm, replied, “The oldest confession of the Church is ours, ‘Jesus is Lord.’ All the rest is commentary.” Another leader and the faith community he served determined that their creed would be simply the fulfilling of the commands: “Love the Lord God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37, 39) If the Movement has a creed, it is love.

The Council holds high a belief in the freedom of the soul and individual conscience. The Rev. Michael Owens wrote: “We encourage each person to work at relationship with God in a unique, personal way. We share our experiences to add hope and encouragement to our fellow pilgrims. No matter what path an individual may take, we trust God can be found and we promise there will be fellow searchers who will care and understand.” He concluded that the faith found in the Community Church Movement is not a goal to be attained but a process shared in mutuality. As the visible expression of the movement, the Council has come to know itself as a communion of dialogue rather than an organization of creed.

Certainly a major tenet of the Movement and its Council is that unity requires the acceptance and celebration of diversity. We are a quilting of congregations and persons from varied Christian traditions – Pentecostal and Catholic rites, Free Church and Reformed, Mystical and Orthodox – and our variety is a God-bestowed gift.

It is not possible for true community to exist unless there is affirmation of the value, dignity, and equality of each person. A church inclusive of all – a community without outcasts – necessitates a respect for persons and personality. Out of a conviction that each and every person is of ultimate value flows a strong desire for social and economic justice so all might live in true peace.

Some have criticized the Community Church Movement for its lack of particulars or distinctives. Many Christian communions have chosen to emphasize their denominational distinctives. They have stressed that which separates them from other parts of the body of Christ. In contrast J. Ruskin Howe, the first president of our Council, said: The Community Church Movement has “no desire to become a denomination and has committed itself never to do so.” We have consciously and consistently chosen to affirm what unites us – the love of God – and to always have under consideration and be in dialogue about the many other matters that have divided the church. We have confidence in the insight of Gamaliel that what is in the will of God will succeed (cf. Acts 5:39). And we are convinced that God’s will is for Christians to live and serve in an atmosphere of loving behavior and free thought and expression.

We believe that in this age our approach is very appropriate. A more visible unity in the church is required for an authentic witness in the contemporary world. Inevitably, any approach that does not seek to accept and affirm our diversity leads to division and competition. This era desperately needs church unity and cooperation.

This era also needs integrity in church and inter-church life. The community church movement is strengthened by those in its membership who view its expressions with a critical and prophetic eye. To these it is evident that the movement's greatest strengths can become its greatest weaknesses. The heresies – partial truths – we might raise to idolatry are rugged individualism, exclusive congregationalism, and an insular sense of community. Surely it is sinful folly to proclaim that either a single individual or a single congregation ought or can live to oneself. The community church movement has not been free of this. A true understanding of the community or fellowship that undergirds our movement is the surest antidote to this isolationism. The community lived by Jesus and his disciples, and given to all by God at Pentecost informs us that it is neither good nor natural for one to go alone; that diversity and variety are blessings from God; that true community in God means open hearts and minds, giving and helping hands, and offering intercession for every child of God.

Geography

The Community Church Movement began in Christian congregations with a desire for unity. Churches in the U.S. Northeast and Midwest became ecumenical congregations long before the word or the idea became common. As the non-native population moved west, frontier communities found themselves with too few loyalists to one denomination or another to form a church. In the areas these emigrants had departed, small congregations merged, many taking the temporarily fashionable label of “union” churches. (The label was not related to labor-management struggles but to the fact that denominational connections were left behind as Christians gathered in a united congregation.) In yet other areas and especially among African-American congregations, pressing local needs and the opportunity to open doors of welcome free of the manipulations of ecclesial bureaucracies suggested a new direction.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries unique ecumenical ministries were launched in a number of locations across North America. Some were idiosyncratic in their structure and mission; these did not last. Others were well focused on spiritual and material human need, and though often struggling with financial difficulties, these survived. An element common to their vision was the conviction that doctrinal rigidity must give way to human compassion.

A little noted event was the emergence in the mid 1800s of the Catholic Community Church Movement among those who celebrated the Roman rite but who desired ecclesial freedom. This happened in the settlement of St. Anne in Kankakee County, Illinois. The movement spread into the states of Wisconsin and Michigan and the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Their work and witness made the Community Church Movement international at an early stage and made it more inclusive of the Christian family.

Today community churches and ministry centers express their faith in a bewildering variety of ministries and styles, and on all the inhabited continents. Many of these churches and centers, seeking an ecumenical and inclusive fellowship have allied themselves with the visible expression of the community church movement, the International Council of Community Churches.

Organization

Each member church and ministry center that belongs to the Council owns its own property and determines its own governance, forms of ministry and priorities. But by its entry into covenantal relationship in the Council each congregation and ministry center bears witness to regional, national, and international concern.

The Council meets in Annual Conference each year. All members of community churches and centers have access to the conference. At the conference's business sessions all have voice. However, only the two delegates elected by each active church and center may vote. The Annual Conference is the determinative voice in all matters of policy in the life of the Council: setting policy, electing leaders, voting a budget, and voicing theological and social concerns for the edification and consideration of members.

Between Annual Conferences two elected boards meet regularly "by electronic means." The Board of Trustees concerns itself with the relationships among the churches and ministry centers, and encourages the sharing of ideas, techniques and what might be termed "best practices" among the congregations. The Board of Directors acts as the business arm of the Council, concerning itself with matters of Council finance, and overseeing the work of the Executive Minister and other staff. An elected President chairs both boards. The Executive Minister serves as administrator.

Life of the Spirit

The Community Church Movement is a spiritual movement and the Council would never have come into being were it not for the work of the Holy Spirit. At the heart of the Movement and the Council have been two sister concerns: worship and dialogue.

The strong thread of democracy with its attendant emphases of local governance and freedom of individual conscience means there is freedom to worship as a congregation and individual choice. Yet there is commonly employed the forms and means known to most Christians: proclamation of the Word, prayers of the people, hymns, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist. Still, while we may practice what is common to many or most, we are not comfortable stopping here. A leader in the Community Church Movement said early on: "A church can be called a Community Church only if all forms of religious expression are permitted." So community churches have been leaders in learning new hymns and songs of praise; employing a wide variety of musical instruments and welcoming interpretive movement and dance in their worship; and employing aids to assist worshippers with auditory, visual and other disabilities.

The variety of worship life in the Community Church Movement bears witness to the riches of a broad and diverse Christian heritage. We may immerse at baptism like Baptists, but also sprinkle, as do Presbyterians. Some celebrate the Eucharist with a liturgical richness comfortable for Catholics; others come to the Table of the Lord with a Zwinglian simplicity. We hold clergy in esteem and so seem like Episcopalians, yet hold the laity to be the priesthood of believers and so resemble Quakers. Our congregations hold dear the right to call their own pastors and so some see us as Congregationalists. Our singing and preaching might give a Methodist a warm heart. A pietist will shout "Amen" as the preacher soars; a contemplative person will silently and

inwardly assent to a compelling point. Within the variety is a unity of loyalty to the Christ and a reliance on the Holy Spirit for direction.

The Imperative of Compassion

A natural outgrowth of the vibrant life of the Spirit in the Council has been a strong sense and impulse toward compassionate action. The compassionate impulse was expressed in the Council's first statement of purpose: "The Council is deeply concerned about the social and economic suffering of human beings throughout the world." Compassion has led the Council to involve itself in efforts to meet human needs in the areas of food, housing, education, and equal rights. The conviction is widespread in our Movement that religion and social concern are of one piece and any separation of the two is unneeded and unwise. An early and longtime leader of the Council the Rev. Dr. Dorothy Sutton Branch, wrote: "While ultra-conservative elements have felt such 'worldly endeavors' are not part of church programming, social welfare must be a part of what the church is all about." An attendee at the founding conference of the Council the Rev. Dr. Marion C. Bascom stated the natural unity of social and spiritual concern. "People need food and housing and jobs before their spirituality can come to fruition."

The Movement's and Council's sense that the work and witness of the Church has been needlessly damaged by competitive and redundant denominational efforts in many areas has meant that the Council has not developed its own mission work. Besides the desire for unity, the Council's reticence to "own" mission programs, was prompted by an intense practicality that questioned any need to do separately what was being done well by other Christians. Instead, the Council has supported and worked with numerous ecumenical mission efforts. In the beginning J. Ruskin Howe set basic guidelines for the Council's endorsement of mission efforts: First, there are to be "...no barriers of class, creed, and sect"; secondly, there must be "...no wasteful overlapping of competitive denominational programs." Other guidelines have emerged such as evidence of good stewardship, transparent accounting and an emphasis on self-help. Finally, the Movement's and Council's strong affirmation of the dignity and equality of each individual does not allow community churches to support programs which enable dependency by neglecting to offer partnership to persons in the work of becoming self-determining and self-supporting.

One of the most powerful examples of the Council's compassionate concern, ecumenical emphasis, and valuing of individual dignity is its partnership with World Neighbors. Born in 1951 by many of the same persons who founded the International Council of Community Churches, World Neighbors has created agricultural, educational, and health programs around the world in twenty-one countries on four continents. Its programs are based on principles inherent in the Community Church Movement: affirming the dignity of the individual, partnering with local persons, enabling self-help, utilizing local resources, and networking. Working entirely without United States government aid, World Neighbors has won the trust and respect of the people it has helped and of the societies in which they live. The Council's long partnership with this great work is indicative of its commitment to practical compassion.

Returning again to words of J. Ruskin Howe, we find a summation of the Council's awareness of the imperative of compassion: "In the final sense, *our parish is the world*, for as Community Churches we are committed to the high Christian goal of helping to make the whole wide world a community of righteousness and justice and peace."

The Work of Reconciliation

From its beginnings the community church movement has felt itself called to work in answer to Christ's prayer "That they may all be one" (John 17:20). Hearing with all seriousness and urgency the call of Jesus to "first be reconciled..." (Matthew 5:24), the Council has seen its primary ministry as one of reconciliation. We seek to heal the divides of human society, especially the divide of racism. For this reason the churches, clergy and laity of the Council became active in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. The same impetus was behind the Council's active witness, through such as the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, for the ending the odious system of apartheid in the Republic of South Africa. Today the Council continues to strive for human reconciliation and dignity worldwide.

The Council has always been an impetus for ecumenical activity. Having found the joy of unity with diversity, the Council has naturally participated in conciliar efforts aimed at healing the scandalous divisions in the body of Christ. Allowing the Holy Spirit to work through a life of shared prayer, open dialogue, and common decision making so that the church might be reconciled, renewed, and reformed, - the essence of the conciliar effort- has seemed faithful and pragmatic. Of course, given its concern for reconciliation in human society, the Council has insisted that conciliar efforts must include a common commitment to strive for justice and mercy.

In pursuing its reconciling work the Council was admitted, in 1974, as the two hundred seventy first member of the World Council of Churches. Two years later, in 1976, the Council joined as the tenth member communion of the Consultation on Church Union, later to be known as Churches Uniting In Christ. One year later the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA welcomed the Council as a member. The Council was a founding member of Christian Churches Together. Each of these conciliar and cooperative bodies seeks to draw Christians together for reflection, study and action.

By far, the most effective ecumenical efforts of the Council are those of its churches and ministry centers in their own local and regional settings around the globe. Local ecumenical groups coordinate interchurch worship services on a regular or seasonal basis; operate food pantries and other feeding programs; offer clothing and other necessities to those in need; provide counseling services; sponsor tutoring and mentoring services for children and youth; and meet the needs of "the least of these" in many other ways. Because of our commitment to both reconciliation and justice local community churches are at the heart of such groups.

The founding constitution of the International Council of Community Churches declared the Council's determination to be a God-employed tool for unity:

The Council approaches the task of the church in terms of the community's need. Believing that a united community requires a united church, the Movement is committed to Christian unity and works toward a united church, a church as comprehensive as the spirit and teachings of Christ and as inclusive as the love of God.

Post-denominational

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the Community Church Movement and its council is the claim to be post-denominational. The understanding behind this claim is that since the seventeenth century we have lived through a period of church history in which much of church life has been defined by the structural divisions known as denominations. The Denominational Age is passing as this divisive approach to diversity recedes.

The Post-denominational Age has been born of the beliefs that the Church's unity transcends the many human-made divisions and that diversity is a blessing to be cherished and celebrated. Post-denominationalism is a new period in history, just beginning, wherein Christians have realized that they need one another (I Corinthians 12: 12-26); that each has gifts to share for the enabling of a more faithful life in Christ (Romans 12: 4-8); and that the Church itself needs to be a reconciled community if it is to witness convincingly to God's reconciling work in creation (John 17: 20-23).

The International Council of Community Churches is post-denominational in two aspects: in local expression and as a Movement. In these two aspects it points to a new and exciting era in Church history.

I. The Ecumenical Parish

Starting in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth there were congregations which found themselves to be, by accident of demographics or by the intentional work of federation or union, multi-denominational or inter-denominational. In this century some other congregations intentionally sought to be ecumenical congregations, such as First Community Church of Columbus, Ohio and Metropolitan Community Church in Chicago. These Churches have shown what the Christian parish can become when God's people choose to step outside previous restraints in their fellowship, outreach and mission.

The ecumenical movement is succeeding though its success is measured best, in a change of attitude in the people of God, rather than in the great mergers among similar denominations that some of an earlier generation expected and promoted. In the last half century the ecumenical perspective has led to the blurring, even the erasing, of many of the boundaries that have divided the Christian Church in America. Many Christians now see themselves as Christians first; their identity as people of faith is not limited to denominational labels. As one Christian leader has announced, in the twenty-first century "the denominational loyalty button is out of order and perhaps permanently broken." Research shows that fewer than half of Americans in recent generations remain with churches of their parents' denominations.

How have many minds and hearts been changed to effect such change of behavior? People have come to know themselves as Christians and as spiritual seekers desiring more than what has been given them. Not content with hand-me-down answers that do not fit experience nor suit the soul, they seek spiritual answers that are relevant and sustaining. The search for spiritual truth has opened them to participation, fellowship, and questioning within the wider Christian Church. For such believing seekers the boundaries have vanished. As Robert Wuthnow observed in **The Restructuring of American Religion** (1988), "No longer are the barriers separating different denominations strong enough to keep from crossing over them." People are comfortable crossing

the boundaries, moving from one communion to another, from one faith community to another to meet their spiritual and communal needs.

What is wanted by the generation of believing seekers? In general they feel a discontent with past claims of authority and hunger for convincing answers and new formulations of spiritual truth. They also have a strong desire for community, an environment in which relationships are authentic and people are free to speak their thoughts, beliefs, doubts, and wonders without fear of suppression or condemnation. Further, their concern is less with details of doctrine than with integrity of action. It is unlikely that Francis of Assisi first uttered the words “preach the gospel always; when necessary use words.” But no matter what the source, the thought is thoroughly embraced by many believing seekers.

The International Council of Community Churches seeks to assist emerging ecumenical parishes of the post-denominational era as the people of God feel their way toward the oneness prayed by Christ and engineered by the Spirit. The existing and emerging ecumenical parishes are a local expression of the community church movement.

II. A Communion

The International Council of Community Churches is a communion of churches, rather than a denomination. In declaring itself as a communion, the Council is not taking an anti-denominational stance. The Council affirms the great contributions of denominations to church history and for human good. But, the Council has felt itself called to take a post-denominational form that witnesses to an emerging age in church history.

How does a communion such as the International Council of Community Churches differ from a denomination? Notable among the structural differences are:

- As a communion the invitation to join the Council in Christian fellowship is simply that spoken by the Christ: “Follow me.” There is no required creedal statement for a church or individual.
- A church votes itself into membership in the Council based on its acceptance of the Movement’s purposes and the Council’s constitution.
- A church joining the Movement and the Council may keep any denominational affiliation and continue any related activity.
- As a communion of churches and ministry centers the Council depends on the voluntary contributions of churches in the Movement to support the shared mission. The announced “standard” of a minimum contribution toward the work of the Council is both modest and offered to the Council on an “honor” basis among member churches and ministry centers. The standard for annual gifts from member churches and ministry centers is one percent of the member’s annual budget exclusive of benevolence and capital allocations.
- Honoring local autonomy and sensitive to possible misuse of reports, the Council requires no reporting of statistics, such as membership and finances.

- The services and fellowship of our communion are open to all churches, whether or not they are in membership or provide financial support.
- The licensure and ordination of clergy is the work of the local church, responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and is done in cooperation with the Council.
- The Council practices the mutual recognition of ministers, and a denominational minister coming to serve a community church may keep her or his denominational standing without any prejudice.
- Realizing that there are many excellent efforts made in Christian education, and that there is no need for wasteful duplication and destructive competition, the Council has no educational institutions of its own. It chooses to urge utilization and support of those efforts and schools that demonstrate an ecumenical awareness.
- Believing that partnering and networking are the best means for providing services and meeting the needs of the churches and centers, the Council has not developed large program agencies. The emphasis on partnering, networking, volunteerism, and utilizing local leadership, wisdom, and resources engenders a vibrant sense of community.
- As a communion of churches and ministry centers, the Council depends on local churches and ministry centers to support the wider conciliar work.
- The polity of the Council is participatory democracy, rather than arrangement of power in a hierarchical pattern, or concentration of power in one person, group of persons, or bureaucracy.

The above says much about how the Council differs as a community of congregations and centers, but there are also significant differences from denominational life in the local gathered communities of faith.

- The community church derives its being, identity, and purpose from the expressed needs and aspirations of the local community. There is no imposition of form or purpose from “above” or outside the local community.
- The Council upholds, promotes, and protects the freedom of the local congregation, not seeking to coerce for a corporate agenda, but creating an atmosphere of freedom leading to local responsibility and spiritual creativity.
- The communion encourages liturgical diversity so that the religious experiences and needs of all may be honored.
- As a Christian communion believing in the rightness and value of ecumenical parishes, we practice the mutual recognition of members and encourage members to honor their denominational heritage.

Finally, our Council is committed as an expression of the Christian unity movement to its own cessation upon the time the Church of Christ is brought into a truly inclusive and uniting fellowship.

The Challenge

When our Council was first formed a leader phrased the challenge before us:

We have the particular responsibility to demonstrate that neither creed, color, class, nor any other barrier that humanity may build can keep people apart when they have the Spirit of Christ. That is our unique mission. We prove that though minds may differ in interpretations, hearts can beat as one in love. The Community Church Movement can well be the revolution that completes the reformation that started centuries ago. We can learn to pray "Our Father" and have a real family of God.

All those who desire to be about the work of creating the ecumenical parishes and building the inclusive Church of tomorrow are invited to become a part of the Community Church Movement and the International Council of Community Churches.

Seeking Christian unity is a difficult endeavor requiring comfort with diversity and a willingness to stretch the limits of comfort. It also requires a strong identity and great maturity as well as a "non-defensive" openness. Freedom is not the easy way. To borrow a phrase from George Bernard Shaw: Liberty means responsibility. That's why most...dread it." In the end the matter is put to us by Joseph Conrad: "The question, he said, is this: Are you going to say a hearty yes to your adventure?"

IN OTHER WORDS



What Is a Community Church?

“In general a Community Church may be described as a congregation in which denominational loyalties have been made subservient to the local religious program, in which toleration of religious opinion is coupled with earnest faith in Jesus Christ, and in which Christianity is thought of as involving a program of character-building and community service.”

-- Orvis Jordan, first president of the first national organization in the Community Church Movement, The Community Church Workers in the USA, founded 1923, from a leaflet titled “What Is a Community Church?”

A Community Church “takes its pattern from and fits its program to the needs of the total community. It seeks to guide the fullest growth of all persons and groups in the way of Christ; is immediately concerned with its own community, but has within its perspective both the world mission and the world fellowship of the Universal Christian Church.”

-- Adopted by the delegates to the organizing convention of the Ohio Association for Community Centered Churches, 1945; quoted by Robert Taylor in a 1965 article of The Christian Community titled “The Council, An Idea In Action.”

“A Community Church is one that seeks to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Persons coming from different denominational backgrounds and religious traditions learn to worship and work together, learn to emphasize those beliefs which are held in common and not let other differences be disruptive of the unity for which Christ prayed...More so than in any other church, a member in a Community Church has the right and the responsibility of individual conscience. More so than a church in any other movement, a member-church in our Community Church Movement and Council has self-governing rights and responsibilities, autonomy, freedom to structure its own worship, work, and witness...A Community Church seeks to meet both spiritual and material needs of persons both within and without its membership, persons elsewhere in its community. In ever widening circles, the community of a Community Church is the whole world... Because of the ecumenical and other type inclusiveness practiced by a Community Church within its membership, it has much to offer ecumenical inclusiveness on national and international levels. More so than a church in any other movement, a Community Church can promote unity without uniformity.”

-- J. Ralph Shotwell, Council Executive Director Emeritus, in a series of articles in The Christian Community titled “The Inclusiveness We Seek.”

“A Community Church is an inclusive fellowship of all people, for all people, and governed by all the people through representation.”

-- Weldon Keckley a past president of the Council and longtime pastor of Bethany Union Church.

“The Council seeks to realize Christian unity in local, national, and world relations. Believing that ecumenically minded churches can best fulfill the mission of the church in the community and in the world, the Council is committed to Christian unity and works toward a fellowship as comprehensive as the spirit and teachings of Christ and as inclusive as the love of God.”

-- The Council’s Constitution.

“The ecumenical nature or spirit of the Community Church, in the sum total of its provisions, gives the institution the admirable possibilities and hopefulness of moving into that unity for which Christ prayed. He prayed “That they all may be one.” Is not this the will of God, the high objective, the fondest hope of the Community Church Movement?”

-- Joseph Evans, President of the Biennial Council of the People’s Church of Christ and Community Centers of the United States of America and elsewhere, when it merged in 1950 with the National Council of Community Churches to form the International Council of Community Churches.

What Do We Believe?

“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. Toleration, as Gamaliel taught, is no dangerous principle.”

-- Orvis Jordan, first president in the first national organization and first editor of the first journal in the Community Church Movement.

“ A Community Church believes our statements of faith will be as personal and as varied as our individual experiences of God. Therefore, no one among us would assume to suggest that his or her statement of faith, or that of his or her church, must become a norm for other believers or other churches. As the Spirit itself is free and creative in each of our hearts, so our expression and description of that Spirit’s work can neither be inherited from the past nor dictated by any ecclesiastical authority in the present. We believe in the living Christ at work in the heart of the individual believer. We believe in tolerance of another’s point of view and in respect for the sincere conviction of every human being. We think and let think. The Community Church recognizes in the historic creeds progressive efforts to put into words the meaning of God’s eternal truth revealed in Jesus Christ. It does not, however, ascribe finality or infallibility to any human dogma. It affirms the right of each generation, each individual, and each church to restate

in fresh contemporary terms the essence of its Christian faith. A Community Church, by its democratic and life-centered character, is adapted, as no authoritarian church can be, to making itself a vital and functioning member of the living organism which is 'the body of Christ' at work in the world today."

-- J. Ruskin Howe, first president of the current Council.

"We accept the church as the covenanted community of any number of persons gathered under covenant with God and one another that is entered into voluntarily and out of the primary religious experience of each individual. We recognize that the content of the covenant may be determined by consensus and may vary from one church to another...The Council welcomes any church that seeks to make itself an instrument for discovering and putting into practice the will of God in community life and in the worldwide Christian witness. It acknowledges and affirms that the spiritual unity of Christendom exists as the body of Christ in the One Holy Church without favoring or opposing the necessity of organic union. It witnesses that the One Holy Church is the people of God in the place where they are. It proposes to be an all-inclusive racial and ethnic fellowship at the national level and commends this same spirit and practice to its member churches at the local level."

--The Council's Constitution

"A Community Church maintains that the basic tenets which Christians hold in common are far more positive and effective than those that tend to divide."

--Herbert Freitag, an editor of *The Christian Community*, in a degree thesis.
"The Community Church Movement."

"Sincerely believing that the basic tenets Christians hold in common are far more positive, unifying, and effective than those that would tend to divide, members of a Community Church agree to differ, resolve to love, unite to serve."

--M. H. Lichliter, Pastor, First Community Church, Columbus, Ohio, 1924

"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

-- Richard Baxter, Christian reformer and peacemaker, 1615-1691.

ECUMENICAL AFFILIATIONS

Called by God to seek unity in the body of Christ, the International Council of Community Churches works for unity through several major ecumenical affiliations. Contributions to support these affiliations come only through designated gifts from churches, ministry centers, and individuals. Contributions can be sent through the Council office—ensuring full reportage—or directly to the organization.

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES TOGETHER IN THE USA (CCT)

...is a new forum growing out of a deeply felt need to broaden and expand fellowship, unity, and witness among the diverse expressions of Christian faith today. CCT is inclusive of the diversity of Christian families in the United States — Evangelical, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Pentecostals, historic Protestant, Racial and Ethnic churches. www.christianchurchestogether.org Address: 12104 Meadow Lane, Louisville, KY 40243-2026

CHURCHES UNITING IN CHRIST (CUIC)

...a covenantal relationship among the African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Episcopal Church USA, International Council of Community Churches, Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church to combat racism, celebrate the Lord's Supper and to engage in other forms of mission together. www.cuicinfo.org Address: PO Box 13383, Birmingham, AL 35202

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST, USA (NCC)

...is a cooperative fellowship of 33 Christian denominations and communions in areas of Christian education, ecumenical witness, theological reflection, and moral witness. 110 Maryland Ave NE Suite 108, Washington, DC 20002 (212) 870-2138 www.nccusa.org

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC)

...over 300 Christian bodies around the world witness to the universality of Christian fellowship, build bridges through interfaith dialogue, engage in Biblical and theological research, and witness for humanitarian and human rights concerns. 150 Route de Ferney CP 2100, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland. www.oikoumene.org

ICCC Endorsed Missions

The International Council of Community Churches researches and recommends for endorsement mission agencies, programs, and institutions worthy of support by Community Churches. We critically consider a program or agency's commitment to answer Christ's mandate to love, as well as their furtherance of reconciliation in the body of Christ and in human society. All programs and agencies are periodically reviewed by the Council Office and related committees.

Recommendations for endorsement should be sent to ICCC, PO Box 846, Longmont, CO 80502. Phone 815-464-5690, Email ICCCNOW@sbcglobal.net, website www.icccnow.org.

For endorsement as an approved mission agency or institution by the International Council of Community Churches the agency or institution must meet the following guidelines as set forth by the International Council of Community Churches approved by the Board of Directors.

International Council of Community Churches Guidelines for Endorsed Missions

1. Must seek to fulfill the mandate of Christ to meet human needs and further the unity of the human family.
2. Must be interdenominational, ecumenical, or non-sectarian in legal standing and philosophical perspective. Must be racially inclusive with no barriers of class, creed, or sect.
3. Must have no wasteful overlapping of competitive denominational programs.
4. Must have evidence of good stewardship.
5. Must have an emphasis on self-help with an affirmation of the dignity and equality of each individual.
6. Must have clearly presented goals: for example target starving people, enhancing individual technical skills, working on community development, general literacy, etc.
7. Must submit evidence the project is needed.
8. Must submit an annual report to the ICCC showing financial standing and project activities.
9. Must be willing to send a representative to the ICCC Annual Conference at least every three years to be a resource for mission information.
10. Must provide a contact person to work with the ICCC and member churches.

Endorsed Institutions

The following educational institutions have been endorsed by the Board of Directors, International Council of Community Churches. Financial contributions to these institutions can be sent directly or through Council House.

ALICE LLOYD COLLEGE

100 Purpose Road, Pippa Passes, KY 41844. Private, coed, 4-year college serving Appalachia's heartland. High moral and academic standards required. All students work part time (888) 280-4252. www.alc.edu

BEREA COLLEGE

101 Chestnut St., Berea, KY 40404. Emphasis on work/study program which enables many Appalachian young people to secure an education. First college in Kentucky to open its doors to black students (859) 985-3000. www.berea.edu

CHRISTIAN CENTER INSTITUTE OF HAITI

Attn. Ruth Applewhite Mission, San Francisco Christian Center, 5845 S. Mission St. San Francisco, CA 94112. Christian Center providing poverty stricken student's academic, vocational and Christian training. Sponsored by the WCF, ICCC (415) 584-5515. Fax: (415) 584-3175. www.sfchristiancenter.org

COLGATE ROCHESTER DIVINITY SCHOOL/BEXLEY HALL/ CROZER SEMINARY

1100 S Goodman Street, Rochester, NY 14620 (585) 271-1320. www.crds.edu

HARTFORD SEMINARY

77 Sherman Street, Hartford, CT 06105 (860) 509-9500. www.hartsem.edu

HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL

45 Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138 (617) 495-5761. www.hds.harvard.edu

HOWARD UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL

Holy Cross Hall, 2900 Van Ness St. NW, Washington, DC 20008 (202) 806-0500.
www.howard.edu/divinity

INTERDENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER (Consortium of Seven Seminaries)

700 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive SW, Atlanta, GA 30314 (404) 527-7794. www.itc.edu

MOREHOUSE COLLEGE

830 Westview Drive SW, Atlanta, GA 30314. Independent, 4 year undergraduate, liberal arts college for men. Part of Atlanta University Center, the largest private educational complex with predominantly black enrollment in the world. (470) 639-0999. www.morehouse.edu

PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

1798 Scenic Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94709 (510) 849-8200. www.psr.edu

PIEDMONT COLLEGE

P.O. Box 10, 1021 Central Ave., Demorset, GA 30535. Church-related, privately endowed liberal arts college, providing intellectual and social tools for students to develop potentials and make contributions.
(800) 277-7020. www.piedmont.edu

PINEY WOODS COUNTRY LIFE SCHOOL

P.O. Box 100, Piney Woods, MS 39148 Academic and vocational programs largely for underprivileged students in grades K-12 (601) 845-2214. www.pineywoods.org

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

3041 Broadway at 121st Street, New York, NY 10027 (212) 662-7100. www.utsnyc.edu

UNITED BOARD FOR CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION IN ASIA

475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 1221, New York, NY 10115. Agency for encouraging interest in and support for Christian colleges and universities in Asia (212) 870-2600 Fax: (212) 870-2322.
www.unitedboard.org

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO DIVINITY SCHOOL

Swift Hall, 1025 E 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637 (773) 702-8200. <https://divinity.uchicago.edu>

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL

411 21st Ave. S, Nashville, TN 37240 (615) 322-2776 www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/

VELLORE CHRISTIAN MEDICAL COLLEGE, INDIA

475 Riverside Drive, Suite 725, New York, NY 10115. Has trained some of the leading medical personnel of the vast nation. First medical school in India to admit women (212) 870-2640.
www.vellorecmc.org

YALE UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL

409 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511 (203) 432-5358. www.yale.edu/divinity

Service & Advocacy Agencies

American Bible Society (ABS)

...furnishes Bibles and related materials at low cost in several hundred languages for people all over the world. ABS also has ongoing work in modern translations. The Council has a special multi-year project to assist the funding of scriptural translations in a West African language. Address: 101 N. Independence Mall East Fl. 8, Philadelphia, PA 19106-2155, (215) 309-0900 www.americanbible.org.

American Leprosy Missions

...serves as a channel of the love of Christ to persons with Hansen's disease (leprosy) and to those with disabilities, helping them to be healed in body and spirit and to be restored to lives of dignity and usefulness within their communities. Address: 1 ALM Way, Greenville, SC 29601, 1-800-543-3135, Fax: (866) 881-9769. Contact: Bekah Schwanbeck, www.leprosy.org.

Bread for the World

...seeks to educate people and the U.S. government about world hunger and poverty. Address: 425 3rd St. SW Ste 1200, Washington, DC 20024, (800)822-7323, Fax: (202)639-9401. www.bread.org.

Christian Center Institute of Haiti, Ruth Applewhite Mission

...provides poverty-stricken student's academic, vocational, and Christian training. Sponsored by National WCF, ICCC. Address: San Francisco Christian Center, 5845 S. Mission St., San Francisco, CA 94112, (415) 584-5515, Fax: (415) 584-3175. rapplewhite2819@yahoo.com, www.sfchristiancenter.org.

Church World Service

...provides disaster relief, refugee assistance and resettlement, and development programs. Address: 475 Riverside Drive Suite 700, New York, NY 10155-0050, (212) 870-2061, Fax: (212) 870-3220. www.churchworldservice.org.

Habitat for Humanity

...a non-profit Christian housing ministry; works in partnership with people in need to improve the conditions in which they live. Habitat challenges people of compassion to provide the initial capital, through gifts and no-interest loans, to build or renovate simple, decent homes for the inadequately sheltered. Construction is a cooperative effort including volunteers and home buyers. Houses are sold at no profit and with a no-interest mortgage repaid over a 15 to 25 year period. House payments are then recycled to help build more houses. Address: 121 Habitat St., Americus, GA 31709-3498, (800) 422-4828. www.habitat.org.

Heifer International

...is a self-help, non-profit organization providing livestock, poultry, training, and related agricultural services. Address: 1 World Ave., Little Rock AR 72202, (855) 948-6437. Contact: Cindy Sellers Roach. www.heifer.org.

The Maine Sea Coast Missionary Society

...an off-shore mission caring for the needs of small, isolated Maine coast communities including church and pastoral work, assistance to those in sickness and poverty, scholarship aid to students, and errands of friendship, counsel, and encouragement carried out by land and sea. Address: 127 West Street, Bar Harbor, ME 04690, (207) 288-5097. www.seacoastmission.org.

Opportunity International

...an economic development organization operating through 47 indigenous partner agencies in 24 of the world's poorest countries. In response to Christ's call to serve the poor, Opportunity's goal has been to reduce hunger and poverty by creating jobs for women and men in economically depressed communities. Address: 550 W. Van Buren, Chicago, IL 60607, (800)793-9455, Fax: (312)487-5656. getinfo@opportunity.org, www.opportunity.org.

U.S. Fund for UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)

...assists millions of mothers and children all over the world, especially those in remote rural areas and urban shantytowns. The ICCC sponsors special projects. Address: 125 Maiden Lane 11th Floor, New York, NY 10038, (212)922-2644. Contact: Emma Pfister, epfister@unicefusa.org, www.unicef.org.

World Neighbors

...is a people-to-people self-help movement. One village at a time, we work with people to halt hunger, poverty, and ecological deterioration in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. WN does not try to give quick fixes. Our focus is on long-lasting change. We help people sustain and create livelihoods that will not deplete natural resources. Affirming the determination, ingenuity, and dignity of people, WN works as a partner in a process of change that promotes self-reliance. Work of Women (WOW!) is a member organization within WN to foster relationships and help for women in WN project areas. ICCC co-sponsors mission visitations and special projects. Address: 5600 N. May Ave., Oklahoma City, OK 73112-4222, (800)242-6387, Fax: (405)752-9700. Contact: Kate Schecter kschecter@wn.org, (405)418-0487, www.wn.org.

DESIGNATED FUNDS FOR COUNCIL'S MISSION

The mission and ministry of the ICCC are advanced through several designated funds. Churches and Centers are encouraged to consider these in planning their annual mission and benevolence budget.

THE MINISTERIAL EFFECTIVENESS TRAINING (MET) FUND

...provides skill-upgrading and continuing education for clergy, leadership training for laity, confidential counseling for clergy and their spouses on personal, professional, and parish problems. Relatedly, MET-NET provides a supportive network and other services for clergy and spouses, couples, widows and widowers.

THE JOE V. HOTCHKISS NEW CHURCH AND CHURCH RENEWAL (NCCR) FUND

...provides research on, training of personnel for, and loans for the development of new Community Churches and ministries or efforts at renewal in existing congregations. This is a national program of the Samaritans and its primary concern is church growth.

THE ROBERT H. TAYLOR ECUMENICAL REPRESENTATION FUND

...assists with expenses for some representatives of our Council in the work of the wider Christian unity organizations with which our Council is affiliated, such as NCC and WCC. In 1995 the fund was named for the late ecumenical pioneer and Council leader Robert H. Taylor, Pastor Emeritus of Howland Community Church whose vision led the Council into NCC, WCC and COCU memberships.

THE ROLAND R. OST MEMORIAL FUND FOR ECUMENICAL REPRESENTATION

...supports the participation and representation of lay members of the ICCC in ecumenical arenas such as Churches Uniting in Christ (formerly COCU) and the National Council of Churches (NCC). The fund is a memorial to the late Roland Ost, past pastor of Wilson Memorial Union Church in Watchung, NJ who strongly believed in the Council's mission of Christian unity.

THE JORDAN SCHOLARSHIP FUND

...awards grants to members of Community Churches engaged in formal higher education. It is named in honor of the Council's first treasurer and the first Layperson to serve as president, Ralph W. Jordan, and his wife, Helen, a president of the Woman's Christian Fellowship and a founder of the Fund. The Jordan Scholarship Committee is appointed by the Council President; the committee is composed of members from the WCF and the Council-at-large.

RALPH AND VIRGINIA SHOTWELL FUND FOR EFFECTIVE SPEECH

...Established and thus far funded by the Shotwells. Assists clergy and others in developing skills in communication, with emphasis upon expressing the principles fostered by the Community Church Movement.

ROBERT F. THOMAS SCHOLARSHIP FUND

... awards need based grants to members of Community Churches engaged in formal theological study, created to honor Robert Thomas, a man who believed in and supported projects to encourage ministers who were called to further prepare themselves with a seminary education. Fund is administered by a committee.

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