



Rejoice Always
Pray without ceasing

Give thanks in all circumstances.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

General Assembly, National Council of Churches and Church World Service
November 10-12, 2009, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Minutes of the General Assembly

Tuesday, November 10, 2009

Convening Celebration and Welcome Lunch

All delegates and registered guests were invited to the convening celebration from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. There were remarks from the co-moderators of the General Assembly, H.E. Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, President of the National Council of Churches, and Bishop Johncy Itty, Chair of the Board of Directors of Church World Service. The NCC General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, and the CWS Executive Director and CEO, the Rev. John L. McCullough, brought greetings. The Rev. Dr. Ramon E. Hunt, chair of the General Assembly Planning Team, outlined expectations for the General Assembly.

General Assembly Opening Worship

The Keynote Speaker was the Rev. Dr. Margaret Aymer, Professor of New Testament and Chair of Biblical Studies at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Ga. Dr. Aymer chose the title, "Uncommon Sense." Her reading text follows:

Rejoice. Pray. Give Thanks. What an utterly absurd, patently illogical, Pollyannish theme for a Christian gathering in the year of our Lord 2009! Church World Services, do you mean to call the church to rejoice when one in every ten residents of this country is jobless? Are we to rejoice when life-savings have been lost to the gambles of the greedy and unchastened, bonus-hungry tycoons of Wall Street? Are we to rejoice when hunger continues unabated, even in this, the last remaining superpower? Are we to rejoice when those we have elected to govern care more about re-election than the poor, the sick and the undocumented? Or should we rejoice because we are at war on two fronts—Iraq and Afghanistan? Should we rejoice that Darfur still needs addressing and that the world seems all but to have forgotten Honduras? Should we rejoice that human trafficking continues seemingly without any real hope of ending? Church World Service, you who aims to eradicate hunger and to promote peace and justice around the world, have you really called us to this place at this time in history to rejoice?

And do you call us here to pray, National Council of Churches? When pastors admit to praying imprecations and curses on the life of the President of the United States simply because they disagree with them, shall we then pray? When ministers of the gospel, in the name of Jesus Christ, declare that enormous hurricanes like Katrina, Rita and Ike, or unusually late hurricanes like Ida, are caused by people having sex rather than by our wanton destruction of God's good creation through the unnatural warming of the planet and thus the oceans, shall we then pray? When our brothers and sisters of a religion called peace fear for their safety because of the corrupt and deadly kind of prayers that lead to the massacre at Fort Hood, shall we then pray? Or shall we dare to pray to God when we cannot even make our budgets,

fulfill our fiscal commitments, with staff cuts in every denomination regardless of theological location? Shall we dare to pray to God when this nation is facing the largest set of Christian schisms since the south split away from the north over their right to enslave others made in God's image, and to justify it with the countless scriptures of the Bible that are pro-slavery? Shall we pray when "young minister" now means a person more than halfway to the Bible's promised three score years and ten of life, and when really young ministers cannot afford to enter our churches, or preach the gospel, or work together in common mission to the glory of God because they are tens if not hundreds of dollars in debt? National Council of Churches, in the midst of this religious turmoil, have you really called us here to go to the God of all justice, the God of heaven and earth, in prayer?

Indeed, people of God, do you gather together in this place to give thanks? When one out of every 125 people that look like me are HIV positive, not on the African continent but in the state of Georgia in the United States of America, and we are much more willing to speak publicly about our common risk for flu than for HIV that infects a new resident of the United States every nine and a half minutes, are we really here to give thanks? When the global exploitation of the poor is still a lifestyle that some Christians celebrate as evidence of a lack of faith among the poor and the disproportionate blessing by God of the rich, are we really here to give thanks? When the undocumented and the working poor still subsidize our middle-class lifestyles, and yet face ridicule, disenfranchisement and criminalization from those who stand on their backs, are we really here to give thanks? Or are we to give thanks that, despite the recognition of the Nobel committee in Oslo, nothing our president has said or done has as yet stopped nuclear proliferation, or brought peace to the war-addicted land of Jesus' birth? Are we to give thanks that, as a nation we care more about whether the Yankees' players are overpaid than about the fact that the average worker in this nation makes POINT four percent of the median salary of CEOs; which still makes the average worker in this country richer than 93% of the people of the planet? Are we to give thanks that, in 16 days, we will be complicit as people of faith in the national hallowing of gluttony, on a day in which we will each consume more meat than many people around the world consume in a year? People of God, do you really gather us here in General Assembly to give thanks?

Common sense would say, in the face of the world today, rejoicing is naive. Common sense would say, in the face of the world today, prayer is ineffectual. Common sense would say, in the face of the world today, giving thanks is learned powerlessness. Common sense would ask: what kind of theme is this anyway? Come on, people of God, face reality.

You know, the little assembly of illicit Christians hiding in a patron's house, listening to Paul's letter to Thessaloniki read aloud may have felt exactly that way, for they lived in dire times. What must they have thought of Paul's call to rejoice always when they lived in a slaveocracy, dominated by the political, economic and military might of the Roman elite and its clients? How were they to rejoice always when 3% of the population of the Mediterranean controlled the land, its riches, and even its people? How were they to rejoice always when the "peace and security" that Rome promised came at the point of a sword and the boot of a soldier?

*And what about prayer? How were they to pray constantly when every prayer they made to the God who raised Jesus from the dead put those who were Gentiles at odds with the gods of their family and their city? How were they to pray constantly to the one true God when every meal, every association, every gathering of persons included sacrifice to some other god or goddess? How were they to pray constantly through Jesus Christ, the son of God, in the face of the biggest, richest propaganda machine in the Mediterranean world that built temples, erected signs, even minted coins that proclaimed that the emperor of Rome was *divi filii*—son of God?*

And for what should they give thanks? Only one chapter previously Paul has to bolster their faith because some among them are dying. Of course they are dying! The life expectancy among them would not have

been more than 30 years and only about 5% of the entire population would have reached 50 years. So then, for what should they give thanks? For the standard fare of the working poor: barley bread, wine, salt and perhaps some onions? For slavery and poverty? For the constant, grinding presence of premature death? Rejoice? Pray? Give Thanks? Yes, some in Thessaloniki must also have shaken their heads, thinking come on Paul, face reality. This makes no common sense.

And indeed, sisters and brothers, the truth is this: rejoice, pray, give thanks makes no common sense; it makes Uncommon sense. For, as children of a living God, redeemed by the Christ, inspired by the Spirit, I am here to remind you that we are not called to be a people of common sense. We are called to be a people of uncommon sense; and as a people of uncommon sense, Paul charges us: rejoice, pray, give thanks.

In a world full of injustice, malnutrition and death, Paul charges us to rejoice. Hear me: Paul is no Pollyanna. He knows that death has already started to affect the Thessalonians. Further, Paul will face far worse challenges to his ministry than the death of his parishioners. In the course of his ministry, Paul will face challenges to his honor and to the integrity of his ministry, challenges to the relationships between him and his churches even the challenge of arrest and imprisonment, trial and execution. Paul will know sorrow, frustration, anger and injustice. Yet, just as Paul begins his ministry in 1 Thessalonians with uncommon sense-- always rejoice—so too, at the end of his ministry, imprisoned and unable to go to his beloved churches, he will reaffirm that uncommon sense to his beloved Philippians: Rejoice. Again I say, rejoice.

You see, Sisters and brothers, Paul is not calling us to some milquetoast, “I’m okay, you’re okay,” everything is fine bogus Christian witness. Paul is calling us to live as a people of joy. Joy is not a conjured up feeling, a painted on clown face intended to make your congregation or denomination “get happy” or at least feel good enough to give money so that the doors of the church remain open. Joy is not a panacea that will draw people to the church because it is “The Happiest Place on Earth”; nor is it the magic bullet designed to slay the corporate dragon of Madison Avenue with its ever-changing sources of promised happiness. Joy is far more grounded in reality than the “don’t worry, be happy” myopia that led us into the current economic crisis on a tidal wave of useless, paper futures. Instead, JOY is based upon the sure affirmation that even when we mourn, we do not mourn as those who have no hope.

For, the uncommon sense of the rejoicing church is not that this world shall never mourn. Nor is the uncommon sense of the rejoicing church that the CHURCH shall never mourn. Rather, the uncommon sense of the rejoicing church is that despite what looks like a hopeless dead end; a hopeless morass of war and famine, disease and strife out of which we will never climb; a hopeless denominational split from which we will never recover; a hopeless loss of status and importance in a world that frankly thinks of the gospel as one more myth to be debunked and serialized by Dan Brown: despite all of the reasons not to hope, WE HAVE HOPE. We have hope not because we know how to fix what is broken, to heal what is diseased, to mend what is torn or to resurrect what has died—but because WE KNOW THE ONE WHO DOES. The uncommon sense of the rejoicing church confesses that our joy rests not in our human ability to change the grief of the present; but in our steadfast hope in the One who holds the future.

It is this hope that makes the command to rejoice—to practice the discipline of joy—a command of uncommon sense. For, we are called to bear witness to a world in need of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But, if our witness is a hopeless happiness, we will be seen for what we are: charlatans selling so much snake oil that leaves the dying world no better. However, if we dare we may bear witness not to our ability but to joy borne out of our common hope in the power and presence of the Triune God, past, future and even today—speaking order in the midst of storm, breathing life into dry bones, kneeling like a mammy over her baby, toiling over a lump of clay. If we dare, we may bear witness to our joy, borne out of our confession that although this world may have tribulation, Christ has overcome the world. Sisters and

brothers, in the midst of agony we are called to be a people of joy, not denying pain but bearing witness to our hope. Use uncommon sense, says Paul. Always rejoice.

And yet, sisters and brothers, the uncommon sense of the church does not end with the discipline of rejoicing. For, in a first-century pagan world in which Jews were considered the “atheists” because they didn’t believe in the gods; and Gentile Christians, an illicit, immoral and godless gathering of superstitious and misguided fanatics who had the nerve to hold up a crucified Palestinian Jew as the “son of God,” Paul charged the Thessalonian assembly: Use uncommon sense—pray constantly.

Just as constant rejoicing should not be confused with a Christian witness of uncritical happy talk, unceasing prayer should not be confused either with unconsidered liturgical ritual sameness or with long-winded breathless goopy love talk punctuated every third word by Father, Lord or Jesus. Nor should unceasing prayer be confused with our childhood Christmas lists or our grown-up Facebook Mafia wars lists, as if God were Santa or a glorified hit man. Paul has time neither for our worship wars nor for the selfish desires of our hearts. You see, in Paul’s day, prayer to the God who raised Jesus from the dead could get you arrested and jailed; burnt at the stake; thrown to the lions; or crucified. The confession “Jesus is Lord” or for the radical act of taking the Lord’s Supper together, as Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women together was a capital offense. For the Thessalonians, the act of prayer was not an attempt to find the right formula to get God to act as you desired: prayer was neither an ecclesial growth hormone nor a heavenly shopping list. Prayer, sisters and brothers, was a radical proclamation of loyalty to a power far superior to that of Rome or its gods. Unceasing prayer, even at the cost of one’s own honor, family, people, even one’s own life, was an act of bearing witness and pledging allegiance to a patron and a power greater than any of those of this physical world.

Fellow Christians, we miss how radical prayer to the living God is when we submerge ourselves in the worship wars. We miss the courage that prayer entails when we turn our so-called prayers into weapons of mass deception. We miss the power of the witness of a praying church when we use our prayers to vilify those created imago Dei rather than to glorify the Creator of those walking images of God. Prayer is not about what God must do or whom God must stop. There is no sin in asking, but if we mistake our freedom to petition God with prayer itself, we miss the point entirely. Prayer is the church’s uncommon sense declaration of radical loyalty to the Triune God of heaven and earth.

When we understand this, we begin to realize that the uncommon sense of unceasing prayer is the discipline of relinquishing control, of opening our clenched fists from around all of our dearly held fundamentalisms and traditions, whether we are progressive or conservative. The uncommon sense of unceasing prayer is the discipline of relinquishing our vision of what should be and waiting expectantly for the revelation of what will be. The uncommon sense of unceasing prayer is the discipline of giving over what we want to say and listening for how God might be trying to speak.

This, sisters and brothers, is liturgy—the work of the people to listen for the power of the one who is, to be caught unexpectedly, mid breath by a phrase from an ancient creed echoing in our being as if for the first time. This, sisters and brothers, is extemporaneous prayer—the work of the people to listen for the ways in which God goes off-script and challenges us to follow all over again. The uncommon sense of unceasing prayer requires loyalty: loyalty not to a book but to the incarnate Word of God to whom the book testifies. The uncommon sense of unceasing prayer requires loyalty: loyalty not to a weekly experience of Pentecost, but to the ways in which that Spirit burns through us so that we cannot help but to translate the good news of the Power of God in a language we have never before spoken to an oppressed people longing for a glimpse of the promised reign of God. The uncommon sense of unceasing prayer requires loyalty: loyalty to the God of our static translation “I am that I am” but to the radical fluidity of the God who is named “I will be whatever I will be.”

You see, common sense would say, "in the face of hatred masked as prayer, it is better to keep silent." Common sense would say, "God may be watching us but only from a distance, and possibly only with one eye. But the uncommon sense of unceasing prayer of the Christian Church declares though God be heard as hatred, though God be felt as silence, yet will we be loyal to the God who is breath and word and love. Common sense would say, why should we pray to God when the church is in decline. But, the uncommon sense of unceasing prayer proclaims that even if the church should shatter into a million pieces and every door of every Christian church building be shuttered, yet will we remain loyal in our prayer to God. For our ancestors remind us that the God of David's kingdom is also the God of Jeremiah's grief and the God of Isaiah's exiles. That God, although all appear hopeless, shall not be thwarted by humanity's hatred nor silenced by humanity's fear. The uncommon sense of the church is though in our humanity, we have faults, fractures and failings, yet God falters not, and to that God will we pray unceasingly. Church of God, says Paul, if you believe that God is, practice uncommon sense: pray unceasingly.

There is yet a third aspect of the uncommon sense of the people of God: in all things, give thanks. Paul issues this third challenge not from some idyllic fantasy island but out of the grinding poverty of the first-century, where the wealthy dined on the finest food and the hoi polloi—the many—died of malnutrition, disease, and the effects of marginal subsistence and systemic oppression. In this context that Paul charges the Thessalonians: Use uncommon sense: In all things, give thanks.

We twenty-first century western Christians know very little about gratitude. We not only take for granted that we will we have food on the table, but we create reality TV shows about eating less and losing weight. We not only demand that the roads be navigable but we threaten that if they damaged SOMEONE had better find the collective funds to fix them, quickly, or face the wrath of the electorate. We grumble about our mistreatment when a server takes five minutes longer than we think she should to bring us food that we did not have to plant, cook, harvest, ship, purchase, wash, prepare, plate or serve ourselves. We fret about our misfortune when a flight is a half-hour delayed, never considering what it would require of us to get to Minneapolis in November from places as far away as Seattle and Atlanta had we no pilots, no flight crews, no ground crews, and no airplanes. We repeat, with rote obedience, "Give us this day our daily bread," and most of us have never wondered from what source that daily bread will derive this day or whether we will have it at all. The truth is that when we claim we are giving thanks to God for all of God's benefits, we are really giving thanks to God for all of our privilege, all of our power, all of our access to the things that we have.

This is the power of the prosperity gospel. This is the power of the name-it-and-claim-it theology of the capitalistic western world that we are systematically exporting throughout the global south. This is the power of a reified, and unchastened Deuteronomistic theology that hallows our Western and Northern privilege, injustice and the unequal distribution of resources as evidence of God's blessing, God's favor, God's benefit.

Perhaps this is why we are struck speechless when we find that all of our power and privilege alone cannot bring peace, stop the spread of nuclear weapons, put a halt to the AIDS pandemic or overcome wage disparity. Perhaps, the reason we cannot understand gratitude is that we think we can do it all by our selves, and when we cannot, we conclude that nothing can ever be done. For, if we cannot provide all that is needed, we with our God-hallowed privilege, who could possibly save us? So, far too many of us who proclaim the Christ move between gratitude for what God has allowed us to do and despair at what we cannot do. This is the common sense of the world.

Perhaps we only learn gratitude when we know what it is to want. Perhaps we only learn gratitude when we know what it is not to be able to fix things by ourselves. One of the places I volunteer is a little AIDS Service Organization called AIDS Alliance for Faith and Health. We have a day program called Common Ground. Originally designed as a respite for those dying from AIDS who were too well to stay home all day

but too sick to work, Common Ground is now the first stop of men and women with HIV disease, most of whom are also poor, many of whom are drug addicted, many of whom are marginally housed, and some of whom have been recently incarcerated. In the Common Ground program, these men and women are given a place of spiritual community, led by Christian and non-Christian people of faith, in which they are affirmed as whole people of God, and from which they are helped to move from where they are to where they need to be: housed, medicated, in recovery, working, and so on. For many of my friends—our clients—the meal that is served at Common Ground is their only hot nutritious meal of the day. For these brothers and sisters, gratitude isn't a polite ritual, an antiquated doctrine that does not take into consideration modern understandings of self-actualization, personal responsibility, and Washingtonian self-elevation by one's one bootstraps. Gratitude is an acknowledgement that someone, that some POWER, has provided for them far more exceeding abundantly above all they could ask or think—in family, in community, in support, and yes, in food.

Sisters and brothers, in these days of the shrinking budget and the graying church, this uncommon sense may be the hardest to practice of all! Do we really trust God enough to notice and to give thanks for the things that God is doing over which we have no control? In these days when the body of Christ has AIDS, do we really trust God enough to give thanks for the ways in which God restores to wholeness all of God's people, bringing people to sing of hope even in the face of incurable disease? In this time of nuclear proliferation, when we cannot yet see actions, can we yet trust God enough to give thanks that God is inspiring in world leaders words of peace? In this iPhone world of atomized, customized, individualized, personalized faith, do we really trust God enough to give thanks for those things that have no downloadable apps: communities that care enough to fight; diversities of faith in the same Lord; the wondrous mystery that the whole body cannot be a foot, or an ear or—thank the Lord—an "I"?

You see, common sense says that once we get big enough, rich enough, powerful enough, organized enough, strong enough, sure enough, real enough, tough enough—we can let go of God like a set of glorified training wheels and do it all by ourselves. Common sense says that we have the intelligence to run the church by ourselves, do mission by ourselves, create businesses by ourselves, invent worlds by ourselves. Common sense says that we can find the words, the actions, just the right spark to cure hunger and disease, bring peace and justice, work together until we build the new Jerusalem all by ourselves. Yes. We. Can.

But we are a people of uncommon sense, and we bear witness to an unlikely premise. Whether in times of bust or boom, whether in times of extraordinary growth or unforeseen weakness, whether in times of national jubilation or national sorrow, whether in times of rarified harmony or passionate disagreement, whether in plenty or in want, we do not have all the answers; we are not the source of all blessings. We cannot do it alone. Therefore, we give thanks, not because it is a quaint tradition, but because uncommon sense tells us never to forget God's benefits. We give thanks not because we acknowledge that we are not always strong and that sometimes we are very weak indeed. We give thanks because we know that do NOT have all the answers, but we know a God who does.

This is a radical witness to bear to the Home Depot "do it yourself" mentality of the 21st century. For, in giving thanks—real and public thanks—for every day, every breath, every minute of life not promised and never given twice, we acknowledge that we are at best co-creators, co-actors, co-movers, but that motion, action, creation itself is a gift of God, one for which all we can say in complete honesty is THANK YOU.

Sisters and brothers, today, called to a life of uncommon sense. For, uncommon sense says, "Rejoice constantly, not because there is not reason to mourn but because we have reason to hope." Uncommon sense says, "Pray unceasingly, not out of a childish fantasy of who God must be, but out of loyal decision to follow the God who will be." Uncommon sense says, "Give thanks in all things, not because of what we can do, but out of an honest assessment of all of the things that we cannot do without the Triune God."

Rejoice. Pray. Give Thanks. A Pollyannish theme? No, sisters and brothers. This is a testimony to the uncommon sense of the people of God.

Opening Procedures

A motion to adopt the agenda of the November 2009 General Assembly was approved by unanimous voice vote

Roll Call

President Elect Peg Chamberlin noted that 28 out of 35 member communions are registered for this General Assembly.

Report of the Nominating Committee

The following proxies were seated by unanimous voice vote:

Robert Greene for Thomas Swain, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
April Johnson for Sharon Watkins, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Robyn Fickes for Robert Welsh, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Donald Anderson for A. Roy Medley, American Baptist Churches USA
Jennifer Lancaster for Aimee C. Moiso, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Kristyn Ebert-Johnson for Alan Combs, United Methodist Church

Appointment of Parliamentarians

The President appointed Gradye Parsons (PCUSA), Dennis Frado (ELCA) as Parliamentarians for the 2009 General Assembly.

Appointment of Reference Committee

The President appointed the following persons to the Reference Committee:

Peg Chamberlin, Chair
Marianne Nissen
Rafael Medea
Bishop John White
Dennis Frado
Joanne Rendall, Tony Kireopoulos staff

Approval of the 2008 General Assembly Minutes

The minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote.

Joseph Hockett of the American Bible Society brought greetings,

Break

Church World Service Executive Director Report

The Rev. John L. McCullough, Executive Director and CEO of Church World Service made the following report:

Paul the Apostle, in his letter, addresses words of hope to the congregation in Thessalonica. Such are not unusual expressions for the people of God. Last year when I reported to the Assembly about the children of Transdnistria, I too spoke of hope, saying,

We are called to be guardians of the dreams of those children in Transdnistria so that when they awaken from their nap time they will not lose hope. ...[W]e are called to resist the temptation to turn away from the hurts and pains of those who stare at us through glassy eyes. In us they should see hope. And my sisters and brothers in Christ, if we can only decide to work together despite the limitations of our life together to create a warm and inviting environment for God's children, and if we are willing to risk to do even more together than we can ever possibly do apart, then even they will also know the revival of their spirits, and the certainty that God is not only for us, but also for them.

Hope is a verb, meaning it is used to show that an action is taking place or to indicate the existence of a condition. As a verb, hope means: to want or expect something that seems possible or likely. It is not stagnant, nor is it something to be assumed. Hope always points to that something to be attained, so it is little wonder that it is a central theme in Paul's letters, as well as in the ministry of Jesus. Both of them understood the vacuum that exists when people are so overwhelmed or demoralized by the conditions around them that they risk losing hope. Losing hope means no longer wanting or expecting; or coming to terms with the fact that one's expectations are completely unrealistic and unattainable.

In 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 Paul wrote these powerful words, akin to an anthem of the poor, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed..." The poor are caught in the daily pendulum swing between having hope and losing hope; it is a difficult and sometimes dangerous place to be. It is precisely here in this uncomfortable space where Church World Service chooses to accompany the poor.

Americans like a good story. It is what drives us in record numbers year after year to the movies; and what makes for a top selling book. We define "good" as having a happy or satisfying ending. We are less comfortable with cliff hangers that leave us teetering on the edge. Church World Service is as susceptible to this as any other American institution or invention; and perhaps later in this meeting we will finally give into the inclination to help you to leave this assembly with that good feeling. But for now let us a few minutes with those who everyday face the precariousness of being afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down.

It is a challenge..., a challenge to what it means to be called people of faith, and a challenge to what it means to be called church.

Before settling down at night, and each morning when my day begins I check my email. Not because of some addiction, but because experience has taught me how quickly the circumstances of the poor can change. Unexpected events can easily turn one's life upside down and inside out. Earlier this fall I traveled to Pakistan, and understood the tenuousness of my mission. Just before leaving home I checked the email to make sure conditions were still ok. When I got to JFK airport, I checked again; and again just before boarding my flight. Before catching my connecting flight from Dubai to Islamabad, again, I checked the email. It all looked good, but when I landed and was met by staff they reported that there had just been a terrorist bombing of a hotel in Peshawar – one of the most secure in the country. Life on the edge changes quickly. As we drove through the abandoned streets of Islamabad at one in the morning towards my hotel I

understood how vulnerable and frightful life can be in a country in which happy endings is not something to be assumed. I did my best to conceal my anxiety, but to say I was uncomfortable is a gross under statement.

For our 150 staff members and ecumenical partners in Pakistan this is their daily reality. Each time there is a bombing in Mansehra or Lahore we are reminded of how feeble the safety net is for the poor; and we dread writing letters of condolence as was the case when several staff members of the World Food Program were killed in a senseless suicide bombing in Islamabad.

In Kenya, spiraling food, fuel and commodity prices spurred food insecurity in a country still caught up in political instability and a fragile coalition government. The government declared an emergency in January 2009 citing the failed short rains and post-elections displacement as main drivers of the crisis, but the effects of natural hazards being overlaid on grinding poverty intersecting with widespread economic downturn tells the story of how complex poverty really is, and how one dimension is compounded by another. Despite food aid doubling nearly overnight from 1.3 million to 2.6 million people, still the numbers considered to be facing famine were placed as high as 10 million. Caseloads of malnourished children doubled, then tripled; rates of global and severe acute malnutrition climbed steadily. Unseasonable disease outbreaks, water scarcities and resource based conflicts spiraled. Instability in neighboring Somalia sent more than 50,000 people fleeing into Kenya worsening the congestion in the already overcrowded refugee camps in Dadaab. Today, forty-seven million Kenyans are food insecure as a result of drought, and this number could increase by 2 million by early 2010. Poverty, unemployment, food price hikes and effects of drought on small businesses have converged to push the urban poor to live on less than US\$1 or US \$0.50 cents a day. In Kenya there are more than 100,000 child headed households.

How many of us in here expect to spend more than ten dollars today? Do you realize that you are counted amongst the top 20% of the richest people in the world? Of the more than six billion inhabitants, 5.15 billion have no choice but to live on less than ten dollars a day. Of course, wealth is relative as I suspect that there are few if any in here amongst the 793 billionaires who have a daily spending power of approximately \$201,207,243.

In the US we have entangled ourselves in an almost senseless discussion about healthcare. It's a fascinating discussion, given that the United States has the widest gap of personal wealth between rich and poor of any industrialized nation. I venture that there are none amongst us who would not spend even their last penny to save an ailing child, or a dying spouse. Yet, we tolerate a world where an estimated forty million people are living with HIV/AIDS; where every year out of the 350–500 million cases of malaria, there are one million fatalities; one million, eight hundred thousand (1.8) million children die each year as a result of diarrhea, and another 2.2 million children die because they are not immunized. It seems odd hearing us argue that we cannot afford universal healthcare? Sure, I agree, the poor cannot afford to underwrite the cost, and neither can the middle class, but the rich certainly can.

Consider that for a price tag of 40 billion dollars the world community could provide basic education, water and sanitation, reproductive health, and basic health and nutrition for the entire world's population. Sounds like a lot, and it is; but consider, that living in the US there are 360 billionaires, and more than 8.9 million millionaires.

Michael Bloomberg reportedly personally spent more than 100 million dollars in his re-election bid in New York City, and John Corzine spent more than 24 million in a failed bid in New Jersey. Those were choices. Consider though that if each had made a different choice then the number of hungry and undernourished worldwide might not have grown from 800 million to 1.02 billion since our last General Assembly, and that we could have saved many of the 9,125,000 children who have died due to poverty (according to UNICEF, 25,000/per day) since last November 10th.

In 2008 there were 42 million displaced persons, but in 2009 that number now exceeds 45 million; and due to climate change we may be on the verge of adding another 25 - 50 million climate refugees. And, already billions of people have been victimized by 31 wars and conflicts just in the first nine years of the 21st century. We can make better choices.

Let me tell you a story: Men and boys gathered near me under the sparse shade of a tree, and listened intently as the eldest among them retold their story of displacement, the result of ethnic and religious violence now threatening to consume their country. He said it was a long, hurried, and frightening journey from the Swat Valley, a sojourn from homes filled with memories and comfort; and businesses providing some measure of financial independence. Houses now stood empty and silent, or perhaps destroyed; businesses pillaged of all that had any worth or value. Sometimes walking hundreds of kilometers, sometimes pressing into mini-buses writhing under the weight of life's possessions they could carry, he spoke of the travails of a community of seventy persons, half of them children, now compressed into the space of a three room apartment – most having no place to sleep other than on the bare floor.

He pointed to the crudely constructed cement building; pointed, as if we could, but still should not see into the room where the women and girls sit holding onto what little privacy they can muster, what modesty they can preserve from this curse of war that violates everything they consider to be sacred; pointed to tell us that their story is different from that of the men. He violates no cultural taboo, and honors their privacy, but the image is cast: ...of the needs of older women, of a younger woman with a new born child, of body sores – because of the scarcity of water, and the daunting prospect of so large a community surviving on two bags of government rationed flour now that they have no more money left to purchase food. No money, yet the men are still expected to walk every day, to register, to somehow pay government fees, bribes, only to suffer the indignity of being treated as if Pakistan is no longer in their blood, no longer in their soul, as if they are no longer Pakistan.

He invited me, a stranger, to go inside, to share a cool drink, to share a piece of bread, to share in their traditional hospitality. The young boys danced in excitement as they keep pace with their elders and witnessed the unfolding ritual. I could feel the Spirit stirring even though the women remained in seclusion, even though the air remained disturbingly still in the room where the men would sleep at night. As the young boys and now some young girls grew brave and inched closer, the intensity of their glare revealed their questions as to the meaning of this stranger's visit, of whether it will make any difference for them, today, in the moment, or ever.

Reminiscent of miracles from ages past, a refreshingly, cool green colored drink is passed to each of the men. I couldn't imagine from where this cool drink could have come. The children moved closer in this unity, this communion that we shared, watching this outpouring of the generosity of the poor, this blessing with which we were blessed.

Paul wrote to the congregation in Corinth, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had too little did not have too little." [II Corinthians 8:13-15] Alone these words may not seem to mean very much, but set in the context of life under the shade of a sparse tree, or in the generous sharing from one's meager existence they take on a quality that can awaken even the deepest apathy. We too have told stories, about our fathers and mothers in this mission of Church World Service, to which we too feel called. Fathers, who huddled atop tractors under shade trees, and mothers, who sat in knitting circles lamenting the troubles of their world and feeling the stirrings of the Spirit to help hurting and broken families reclaim their dignity and rebuild their lives and communities. Are they the ones about which it was said, the one who had much did not have too much; or are they the ones who had too little [but] did not have too little?

As I slowly sipped the green drink, I was refreshed by the humility of the moment, and was impressed by this humility ...of the poor. I wanted the feeling to last, but never to finish the drink. I wanted the taste to linger;

and as I shared my cup with the children I also wanted them to be inspired to reach beyond the place where they found themselves and savor the same taste.

Nothing happens in life without having connection to something else; everything happens as a result of other things, having consequence, and some affect. Paul wrote, "I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it a question of fair balance..." He writes about the balancing act between poverty and wealth.

It is a challenge..., a challenge to what it means to be called people of faith, and a challenge to what it means to be called church.

Paul went on to write:

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted the churches in Macedonia, for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. [8:1-2]

It is this same grace that characterizes the humble beginnings of Church World Service, and with which we have danced for over six decades. It is this grace that makes us different – I don't know about better. Yet, it is the thing that has inspired our efforts to commune with and honor the poor, to accompany them on their journey and to acknowledge the delicate balancing act each of us performs: on the one hand one's own personal experience poverty of spirit and substance; and on the other, our capacity to gift others through the generosity of sharing whatever we have.

It is this same grace that should characterize our ecumenical life as we gather in Assembly, for during our severe ordeal of affliction, we pray that our abundant joy and our extreme poverty too will overflow in a wealth of generosity.

When we talk to our neighbors under shady trees or even here in Assembly:

- *Let us talk about the truth of grace, that each of us has enough of what it takes to navigate even the most difficult times of life; that no one has too much to give, and no one too little to offer.*
- *Let us demonstrate how our humanity is enriched when we balance the respect and dignity we want for ourselves with that which we offer to others in return.*
- *Let us remember that every day we too make choices, and live with the consequences of those decisions.*

*As Church World Service we pray that the churches will always choose hope over hunger, because like the poor who are **afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed,** we too have hope. Like the poor, we have learned to **Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstance,** because we too want or expect something that to us seems possible or likely:*

*We believe there is enough food that no one should go hungry,
enough water that no one should thirst,
and enough love that all children should reach their potential.*

We believe in the right to peace with justice and a place people can call home.

We need your help.

National Council of Churches General Secretary Report

National Council of Churches General Secretary brought the following report:

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! And welcome to this General Assembly. May God grant that our time together builds up the body of Christ and bears witness to the Spirit's reconciling, yet unsettling, presence.

Prayer for John Muhammad

The first thing I want to tell you is that the organizational health of the National Council of Churches is good.

- *I am blessed with an outstanding group of colleagues who remain inspired by a vision of the church united, renewed, and fully engaged with the world.*
- *Our five program commissions have high levels of participation and continue to produce valuable resources, from church school curricula to Faith and Order studies.*
- *Our work in such areas as ecojustice, immigration reform (about which we will hear more tomorrow), and health care reform seems to be widely appreciated; and, thanks to support from the United Church of Christ, we have a renewed emphasis on racial justice and human rights. (Our new staff person in this area, NaKeisha Sylver Blount, will be on Thursday's panel dealing with the elimination of gun violence.)*
- *We are developing new ways to communicate our work more effectively, including an online version of EcuLink.*
- *Past problems with administration seem to have been overcome as evidenced by the completely "clean" Management Letter we received in conjunction with the recent audit.*
- *And, while we did run a deficit for the last fiscal year, due to the fall in the stock market, we have greatly strengthened our development staff in order to increase revenue, especially from individual donors and foundations.*

Having said all this about organizational health, I want to stress that the NCC is not, fundamentally, an organization. According to our own self-understanding, set forth in the first paragraph of the Constitution, the National Council of Churches is a covenant that you, the communions, have made with one another to express the unity that is our gift in Jesus Christ, and to engage in common mission to the glory of God. Thus, the real issue for us to confront is not the organizational health of the Council but the spiritual health of the churches in this country.

In my worst moments, I fear that the existence of the NCC has simply given us a good conscience about our continued disobedience to the mandate of the gospel that we may all be one. We give lip service to the importance of unity, and we cooperate when it seems expedient; but ecumenism remains an add-on to our "real" ministry as Methodists or Baptists or Orthodox or Presbyterians or Anglicans or Lutherans. I will certainly never deny that God has worked through our communions in amazing ways; but I also insist that attitudes of unrepentant self-sufficiency make it more difficult for God to use us – and, thus, the world often does not see in us a sign of God's reconciling power.

This is one thing I hope will happen in this General Assembly: that we, as churches, will truly assess our own commitment to the ecumenical vision that gave birth to the NCC and CWS. If you think my own assessment is too negative, then by all means push back – but please wrestle during this time together with the

question: Are we, as churches, passionate about growing, with the help of God, in knowledge and love of one another?

There are four other things that I also hope will happen during our assembly here in Minneapolis:

First, I hope that through this assembly a number of relationships will be strengthened. The most important is the relationship of the churches to one another; but I also hope that we will strengthen the already-greatly-improved relationship between the National Council of Churches and Church World Service. We may be distinct bodies, but we are, at the same time, inseparable parts of the one ecumenical movement – for which I give thanks to God.

Then there is the relationship between the NCC and state and local councils of churches. Even closer collaboration between national and local manifestations of ecumenism is surely called for in this age when networking is replacing centralized institutions. And what about the relationship among generations? If you are chronologically advantaged, make it a point to meet some of the stewards or New Fire participants – and vice versa.

You get the idea. Ecumenically-minded Christians are in the relationship business. I urge you to see this assembly as an opportunity, an invitation, to deepen a number of them.

Second, I hope that here in Minneapolis we, representatives of our communions, will rediscover our common outrage at the way neighbors continue to be treated, in this country and around the world. Dr. King often declared that followers of Christ should be “maladjusted.” You may remember his words: “I never intend to adjust myself to the evils of segregation and discrimination... I never intend to adjust myself to religious bigotry. I never intend to adjust myself to economic conditions that take necessities from the many and give luxuries to the few. I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism...”

At this General Assembly, I hope we will call upon ourselves not only to be maladjusted but genuinely outraged at the state of our society, at the state of our world.

- *Forty-six million Americans, 9 million of them children, have no health insurance. Be outraged!*
- *Before the end of today, 276 people – 57 of them children and teens – will be shot by a gun. Be outraged!*
- *There are about 3,000 homeless people in Hennepin County, the site of this assembly, and more than 9,200 in Minnesota, a third of them children. Be outraged!*
- *Approximately 11 million people living in the United States are undocumented immigrants with uncertain futures, as the debate on immigration policy reform continues unabated. Be outraged!*
- *The people of Cuba suffer under a 50-year economic embargo by the United States, which nevertheless engages in full economic relations with countries like China that have a record of human rights abuses exceeding Cuba’s. Be outraged!*
- *While Americans debate the reality of global warming, the rise in sea level due to melting glaciers and thermal expansion of the ocean has forced the 11,000 inhabitants of Tuvalu – a tiny Pacific island between Hawaii and Australia – to abandon their homeland. Be outraged!*
- *The World Bank estimates 1.4 billion people in developing countries live in extreme poverty. Be outraged!*

- *In the developing world, every minute a woman dies of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. Be outraged!*
- *And, in the face of such realities, the church of Jesus Christ is often more preoccupied with its own survival than with the survival of God's good creation. Be outraged!*

Third, I hope that at this assembly we will begin to think "outside the box" about the future of the ecumenical movement. Lean economic times have surely forced us to think in new ways about our life together; but it shouldn't take a financial crisis to see the monumental shifts in church and society going on around us.

I hope that conversation about the ecumenical future will take place here, at tables and in hallways, but that we will also anticipate next year's special assembly in New Orleans when we will assess where we have come ecumenically, since the seminal Edinburgh mission conference of 1910, and where we might be headed. Please mark that in your calendars – November 9-11, 2010 in New Orleans – where we will be joined by a host of ecumenical partners for celebration, assessment, and visioning.

Finally, I hope that at this assembly, through God's grace, we will reaffirm – rediscover – the spiritual foundation of the ecumenical movement which also means of CWS and the NCC. In lean financial times, because we cannot revel in our institutional strength, we may actually see more clearly our dependence on the one Creator.

The assembly's theme: "Rejoice always...pray without ceasing... give thanks in all circumstances" – is a wonderful text for stimulating such reflections. On first reading, this passage from I Thessalonians can sound human centered, as if the most important thing about our faith is what we do: "We urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them...Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances." It doesn't take much reading between the lines, however, to see Paul's overwhelming God-centeredness. He urges us to give thanks in all circumstances, for example, because life itself is a divine gift. Remember his pointed questions to the Corinthians: "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" We are called to admonish, encourage, help, be patient, rejoice, pray, and give thanks as a response to the One who has created, called, and sustained us – the One who through Jesus Christ has bound us in a single body as a sign to the world of God's coming Reign. Can we, at this assembly, commit ourselves more fully to pray for one another, to share resources more fully with one another, as a response to what God has done in our lives?

Sisters and brothers in Christ, all around us are signs not of reconciliation but of fragmentation – including a recent less-than-ecumenical overture to dissident Anglicans on the part of the Roman Catholic Church. And in the face of such developments, the ecumenical church is openly mocked for its impotent witness. One recent op-ed column in the New York Times noted that the ecumenical movement has borne real theological fruit, "but what began as a daring experiment has decayed into bureaucratized complacency – a dull round of interdenominational statements [on various topics] only tenuously connected to the gospel."

There is much about these words that offends, but much that also cuts to the quick. For far too long, the church has been a visible witness to conflict, not reconciliation, a sign of division not oneness in Christ. My deepest hope for this assembly is that we will show and proclaim to the world a more excellent way.

New Business

The following items of new business were presented:

Dennis Frado: reduce spending on nuclear weapons and increase spending on human needs.

Stewards

Garland Pierce introduced the 2009 class of young adult stewards:

- Rebekah Houff, Church of the Brethren, Elgin, Ill. (Senior Steward)
- Andrew Hudson, Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) (Senior Steward)
- Sylvia Bull, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Minneapolis
- Gregory Griffey, Alliance of Baptists/United Church of Christ, Winston-Salem, N.C.
- Marcus Harden, Church of the Brethren, Tallahassee, Fla.
- Michael Heller, Presbyterian Church (USA), Omaha, Neb.
- Orenthious Hill, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Tallahassee, Fla.
- Ali Holness, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Washington, D.C.
- William Miller, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Madison, N.J.
- Tracey Pérez, United Methodist Church, Alamo, Tex.

New Fire presentation and worship

David Fraccaro, coordinator, said the New Fire gathering has tried to bring greater awareness to all the young adult manifestations of the ecumenical movement. “We are stronger together. Our unity is good for the world. Ecumenical movement begins at its core with relationships. We are trying to inspire new young adult leaders.”

Worship was led by the Rev. Robyn Fickes.

Wednesday, November 11, 2009

President Vicken Aykazian introduced Peg Chamberlin to introduce Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota.

Governor Pawlenty greeted the General Assembly. His summarized remarks:

I come to thank you and express appreciation for the work that you do and the ministries you represent. Peg is an incredibly optimistic and inspiring voice for Minnesota.

Welcome visitors to Minnesota. I'm glad you're here in November and am glad our weather is cooperating. The unity of churches and the unity of believers is an extremely powerful force for good and progress and disunity in the church can cause corrosive effects and fallout. We have individuals in our state who reach out to the people of Minnesota in love and prayer and inspiration.

The story is told about President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Cabinet was meeting and the president asked Bill Moyers to kick off the meeting with a prayer. Moyers began praying softly and LBJ interrupted him: “I can't hear you down at this end of the table.” Moyers responded, “With all due respect sir it wasn't you I was talking to.”

For those of us in public life it's important to stop and thank God. Our founding fathers felt it was important to build a nation based on faith in God and this was written into documents like the Declaration

of Independence, and in the first sentence of the Minnesota constitution, "We the people of Minnesota, grateful to God for our civil and religious liberties ..."

The First Amendment is intended to protect people of faith from government and not government from people of faith.

Peg Chamberlin, we'll be cheering you on as you take over the reigns of this organization we know you'll lead it as you always do with diligence and we're proud of you.

Worship was conducted in the Taize style.

Bible Study

The Bible Study on the Assembly theme was led by the Rev. Dr. Charles Amjad-Ali, the Martin Luther King, Jr., Professor of Justice and Christian Community and Director of Islamic Studies Program at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

Dr. Amjad-Ali spoke from this text:

Gracious God who has created us, saved us and sustained us, be with us this morning, give us the wisdom and intelligence to study and explicate your scriptures, and to apply them to our lives so that we are better witnesses to the love and reconciliation you have shown and achieved for this world. Amen

The theme of this conference has been built around three commands as Paul writes to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. They have implications for our faith, discipleship, gratitude and even liturgy.

These imperatives are:

- 1. Rejoice Always;*
- 2. Pray without ceasing; and*
- 3. Give thanks in all circumstances.*

As these imperatives stand they sound like a wonderful exhortation, and appeal to our sense of righteousness, faithfulness and sanctification. However, in themselves they do not reflect the critical context in which they were penned by Paul. We must make sure that they are not read in a banal way expressing empty optimism and meaningless positive reinforcement, for Paul is writing largely a pastoral letter to those who are suffering and facing persecution, this then is the reason for these exhortations. In this sense this bible study attempts to do what Michel Foucault talks about when practicing criticism, i.e., "to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult" [i] and making banality unacceptable.

I have just come from Pakistan and I am a witness to a church which is undergoing just this kind of a persecution. So when I was asked to do this bible study I clearly saw that these three imperatives cannot be seen, or understood, or deciphered as some isolated feel good mantra, but have to be placed in the context of the high level of difficulty and persecution, which is clearly the context of Paul's exceedingly affectionate, emotional and praiseful letter.

To give some context, Thessalonians is the earliest existing letter by Paul written somewhere between 51-52 AD, it is also the earliest letter to the Gentiles. The Thessalonian Church was almost exclusively gentile who "turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" as Paul states it in 1 Thess 1:9. The letter was written following Timothy's pastoral visit to Thessalonica in the context of their persecution to show

support and solidarity with them, as well as to encourage and strengthen them. So Paul writes to them in chapter 2 verses 19 to 20 that "... what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy!"

It is therefore an affectionate letter based on the good news that Timothy brought back to Paul about the character, practice, and sustaining faith of the Thessalonians under persecution. Timothy's visit here reminds me of the World Council of Churches long standing program of what they call the Living Letters Visits which follows Paul's reference to the Corinthians in II Corinthians 3: 2-3.

*Although this letter to Thessalonians has often been read for eschatological and apocalyptic purposes and there is indeed an eschatological element in it, such a reading however ignores the critical centrality of the persecution that Paul highlights both vis-à-vis the Thessalonians and his own ministry and mission while discussing this eschatology. So there are at least fifteen references to persecution in this short epistle with the clear assumption that the Christians will inevitably be persecuted, therefore Paul says in chapter 3 verses 2-4 that "... we sent Timothy ... to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith, so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions. Indeed, you yourselves know that **this** is what we are destined for. In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out..."*

Looking at these texts we have to ask why certain churches face persecution, dislocation, and threats to life, to property and to their freedoms, while others go merrily without that challenge which Paul assumes, and Christ assumes, to be the case for every Christian as Mark notes in 8: 27-38. Persecution is clearly because of perceived threat and because of the challenge a group poses to the status quo ideology and traditions. We must always ask ourselves whether we have compromised the gospel and whether we have always discerned the spirit and critical prophecy, or have we tested everything, or held fast to what is good and abstained from evil? The question is whether we have been so domesticated to the society around us that it doesn't feel threatened by us enough to cause us persecution or to be judged as "maladjusted" to quote Martin Luther King, Jr., who called upon "... all [people] (original men, sic) of good will to be maladjusted because it may well be that the salvation of our world lies in the hands of the maladjusted." [ii]

Last winter I was part of the WCC's Living Letters team to Pakistan. This October I was in Pakistan for ten days to lead a discussion on the issue of Christian ministry and mission in the context of growing Islamic fundamentalism and parenthetically the persecution of the church. What I have to report briefly is that in the last four months since the end of July, quite a few Christians have been burnt, their churches, houses and property destroyed and burnt and a number of them are being tried for blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammad and/or against the Qur'an the punishment for which is death. These are not persecution carried out by the state or part of its agenda but rather by some miscreants who also use fanatical religious sophistry and use the existing laws which were introduced during the heyday of Islamic resurgence especially as supported exogenously by the US and Saudi Arabia to fight the USSR in Afghanistan.

So the Christians do not face persecution from the state, but they are persecuted heavily nonetheless. What is truly ironical is that this persecution of the Christians who are seen, on the one hand, both as irrelevant and untouchable because of their dalith heritage; are seen on the other hand as the representative of the US Empire (and by extension the West) and its hegemonic and evil power. The Christians thus bear the brunt of all that the West does wrong vis-à-vis Islam; this is the external element behind their persecution. Internally, the state has been coerced and pressurized by the radical Muslim forces to the point that till very very recently their actions went mostly unchallenged and unchecked especially when it came to their oppression and persecution of the minorities, including Christians. These radical Muslims also see the Christian persecution as utilitarian since they get a high international publicity

in the media, without even the loss of their suicide bombers. So while the state itself may not persecute the minorities and Christians, it doesn't care enough or have enough will to challenge and prosecute the perpetrators of crimes against the Christians.

Ironically during the recent times, similar acts have been committed against Christians in India in Orissa, Rajasthan, Andra Pradesh, etc. The publicity of these events are however minimal in the West even though at times the persecution of Christians, burning of their churches, even raping their nuns, have happened more frequently and on a larger scale in India than in Pakistan. We in the West have ostensibly picked up the Christian persecution but not always that carried out in India. This to me shows that we are not just concerned about the Christians but more worried about the Muslims and thus becomes part of our over all prejudice against them.

So we face the challenge of ensuring to encourage and stand in solidarity with all the Christians and say with Paul in chapter 3 verses 8-9, "For we now live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly..." But in all this we must remember what Paul says in the verse just before the verse of the theme of this assembly, "See that none of [us] (you) repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one and another and to all." (1 Thessalonians 5:15). Following this we are reminded of the full list of our vocational imperative to "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances... Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess. 5:19-22).

Now "May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound," and may "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" and strengthen you in the face of persecution and may the Spirit keep remind you to Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances," and make sure that we "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good.

i. Michel Foucault, "Practicing Criticism," in Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 155

ii. See, the famous commencement address of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., entitled, "The American Dream," given at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania on June 6, 1961, cf. James M. Washington, ed., A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 208-216, esp. p. 215-216.

Immigration Working Group Presentation

David Leslie, Jose Luis Casal reported on the work of the Immigration Working Group. Additional information is available at www.nccusa.org/immigration

Wednesday Afternoon

The Report of the Ecumenical Networks Standing Committee by David Baak was received by unanimous voice vote.

Report of the Committee on Collaboration by Jennifer Riggs

General Assembly Dates

The next General Assembly will be held November 9-11, 2010 in New Orleans. The 2010 General Assembly will be a Centennial Gathering marking the 100 years since the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910.

Thereafter, General Assemblies will be biennial as follows:

November 13-15, 2012 (place to be determined)

November 11-13, 2014 (place to be determined)

General Assembly Constitution and Standing Rules

The Committee on Collaboration is referring this proposal to the General Assembly Constitution Standing Committee to bring recommendations and proposals to 2010 Assembly.

Robina Winbush asked if the General Assembly is being asked to receive the report along with the new dates? Jennifer Riggs said that constitutionally the NCC and CWS boards make this decision and they have approved the new dates.

The report of the committee on collaboration was received by voice vote, with at least one negative vote and one abstention.

Constitution and Bylaws Committee, Gradye Parsons

Gradye reported that changes resulting from decisions of the Collaboration Committee will be worked into the constitution and brought to the General Assembly in 2010 for approval.

Greetings by Dick Hamm, Christian Churches Together

Dick Hamm said that the aim of CCT is to break down the walls of hostility that were erected mostly in the 20th century among so many manifestations of the one church.

Other observers introduced by Michael Kinnamon were

- Tony Ritchie, Church of God, Cleveland, Tenn.
- Ed Kaufman, representing Mennonite Church USA.
- Shirley Paulson, Joan Weinert, Marciel DeLacey, representing the Christian Science Church.
- Jonathon Goode a Presbyterian Pastor, representing Habitat for Humanity International.
- Jerry Reirson, representing the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches

Michael also noted that Mar Thoma Bishop Theodosius is celebrating the 20th year of his Episcopal ordination

Committee on Reference

Peg Chamberlin presented a proposed message to the member churches from the General Assembly to support the efforts of the Global Security Priorities Act. The proposal came from Dennis Frado.

The resolution was adopted by voice vote, one no, no absentions

Message to the Member Churches from the NCC/CWS General Assembly

Whereas, 25,000 children around the world die every day from preventable causes, and

Whereas, a recent study by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace cited a Defense Department estimate that at least \$52 billion was spent in 2008 on nuclear weapons and weapons-related programs,ⁱ and

Whereas, international health experts estimated in 2005 that an additional \$5.1 billion a year in global assistance for proven child survival interventions could save the lives of 6 million young children each year,ⁱⁱ and

Whereas, practical ways must be found to reduce unproductive military spending and increase effective spending on human needs, and

Whereas, House Resolution 278, the Global Security Priorities Act, introduced on a bi-partisan basis on March 24, 2009, calls for deep reductions in U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals, saving at least \$13 billion annually, with some of the savings from these reductions directed toward a well-targeted international effort aimed at addressing the Millennium Development Goals of reducing child mortality and eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and

Whereas, the United States and the Russian Federation are now engaged in serious negotiations to extend strategic arms reduction agreements and to consider paths to further reductions as well as strengthening verification measures, and

Whereas, bipartisan defense experts agree that this resolution would enhance U.S. security by reducing the nuclear threat as well as address vital issues of the well-being of poor children at a time of global economic crisis, and

Whereas, more than two dozen churches and other religious organizations endorsed the Global Security Priorities Act in 2008, and

Whereas, the Global Priorities Campaign, an international, interreligious initiative that is facilitating practical ways to reduce military spending and increase spending to meet human needs, was bestowed a "Blessed Are the Peacemakers" award in 2008 by the U.S. Conference of the World Council of Churches for its efforts to promote this resolution and related initiatives, and

Whereas, Members of Congress are being encouraged to co-sponsor this Act and have been asked to do so on November 2, 2009 by the chairman of the committee on International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops,

Therefore, be it resolved that, the 2009 General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and Church World Service,

Commends the bold leadership shown by Representatives James McGovern and Dan Lungren in introducing the Global Security Priorities Act,

Calls upon its member communions to urge their members to contact their Members of Congress urging them to co-sponsor the Global Security Priorities Act and support subsequent Congressional and international measures of a similar nature,

Calls upon its member communions to consider additional ways it may sustain the efforts of the Global Priorities Campaign toward these ends, and

Calls upon the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches to transmit this message to the member communions.

Chris Epting, motion of information sharing

Chris noted that on August 21, 2009, Hyatt hotels in Massachusetts fired 98 workers. He said he was simply informing the General Assembly of this action and he invited participants to follow developments.

Thursday, November 12, 2009

Following worship, Jimmy Hawkins presented a slide show on Church World Service.

Martin Robra brought greetings from the World Council of Churches

Bishop Itty stepped into the chair as Peg Chamberlin presented the report of the Committee on Reference.

Committee of Reference

1. Message of the General Assembly regarding the tragedy of Fort Hood tragedy.
Motion: to approve the message.

The motion to approve the message was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Message of the General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and Church World Service to the People of the United States

November 12, 2009

This week the annual meeting of the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC) and Church World Service (CWS) convened in Minneapolis, Minnesota. As we assembled, other members of our communions participated from around the country with members from other communities of faith in the memorial service held for those men and women who were tragically killed at Fort Hood Army Base.

Tragic loss of life is never either excusable or fully comprehensible. Our collective grief weighs heavily upon individual lives, families, local communities, and in our national consciousness. At times like these the command to love and tend to the neighbor can seem difficult.

These tragic losses take place amidst the strain that all local communities of faith are already encountering today. The toll in these communities from the economic crisis, the effects of war, extensive gun violence, the discourse around health care, and comprehensive immigration reform, are a few serious sources of strain today that have implications for all communities of faith. We live in times of crises that are significant and palpable causes of anxiety.

During extreme crises, we rightly seek both reasons for their occurrence and justice in the alleviation of their pain. Religious communities of good will in this country are endeavoring together to comprehensively engage these crises, and are therefore singularly and deeply pained by the deaths at Fort Hood.

Suspicious disseminated by media or through well-meaning conversation in public discourse can lead us to become insular in our immediate communities where we isolate ourselves from the larger, local community to which we belong. Anger and suspicion of the unknown individual can lead some to stigmatize an entire community of faith. As a consequence, we may disparage the faith of the co-worker or neighbor whom we know as a colleague or friend.

When we tend to our neighbor's pain, we have the opportunity to be transformed by acts of love and awareness. Our common future must be shaped by an uncommon response today.

We commend and encourage all Christians and religious communities of good will to reach out to one another through personal dialogue, local awareness building, national advocacy advancements, and other means of fostering relationships of trust and mutuality. These are the uncommon responses in the present that will help to shape our collective tomorrow, and openness to how God is calling us into this future.

2. Letter of appreciation from GA regarding the pastoral care offered to families of the Fort Hood tragedy.

The motion to refer action on the letter of appreciation to the National Council of Churches General Secretary and Church World Service Executive Director and CEO was approved by unanimous voice vote.

3. Message on the urgency of Health Care Reform

The motion is to approve the message.

Asked to whom the message would be sent, Brenda Girton-Mitchell said colleagues in ecumenical movement, public policy offices in Washington, send a copy to the administration saying our faith community stands behind the need for reform.

Bishop Demetrios: referring to line 58 "where as the member churches of the NCC and CWS recognize..." asked that "communions" be substituted for "churches." And in lines 76-77, delete "not just for the middle class and the wealthy." The suggestions were accepted as friendly amendments,

Mary Ann Vischer of the Swedenborgian Church expressed concern that the proposed national health care structure doesn't work for 100 percent of the people. She said she hoped the body will continue to know there will be people unable to afford the insurance.

The motion, with annotated suggestions was passed by unanimous voice vote.

Message of the General Assembly of the

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and Church World Service

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE: THE URGENCY OF HEALTH CARE REFORM

November 12, 2009

Policy Base: "Health Care Concerns: Policy Statement" Adopted by the General Board of the NCCUSA September 10, 1971; Reaffirmed by the General Board of the NCCUSA May 1989.

Inspired by our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Christian community for centuries has played a pivotal role in health care provision and advocacy in every culture and land in which the church has known life. Remembering that "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people," (Matt. 4:23 NRSV) the church has sought the health and wholeness of the community. Through the ecumenical expressions of the National Council of Churches and Church World Service, Christians of many traditions have been actively engaged in health care activities and advocacy for well over a half century in the United States. It is therefore from a long history of deep involvement that we make bold to speak in this moment.

With over 46 million Americans lacking health care coverage and millions more having inadequate care, the nation has come to a moment of reckoning with the health care crises. If all God's children in this land are to live the lives for which they were created the present patchwork system of health care will have to be rewoven into a durable fabric capable of addressing our deepest fears and meeting our highest hopes. Reform worthy of the name will provide affordable, sustainable, accessible, quality care to all Americans.

We are encouraged by the progress that has been made toward the formulation of the health care policy Americans need. Yet, in the fractious climate of the present debate we note that striving for the common good is too often displaced by special interest. Our intention to contain costs and increase quality and accessibility is thwarted by irreconcilable disputes over methodological difference. For the well being of our society and the health and life of all its members we must forge the national will for reform into a consensus building process to ensure the enactment of landmark legislation which will bring hope and promise to the peoples of this land.

Whereas, *tens of thousands die each year because they were denied access to health care; and*

Whereas, *there are over 46 million Americans without access to health care and many millions more being underserved and underinsured; and*

Whereas, *a working majority of Americans are at risk but none more so than the vulnerable: the poorest of the poor, the sickest of the sick, and our children; and*

Whereas, *children could be worse off under health care reform unless the children's health insurance program is preserved, enrollment processes improved, and minimum enrollment eligibilities set; and*

Whereas, *the Christian church recognizes that it must take up Christ's burden, advocate that all persons have access to accessible, quality health care, and in so doing ensure that the sick and infirm are made well;*

Whereas, there is a nationwide movement calling for health care reform, a movement in which the church has been a vibrant part;

Therefore be it resolved that the General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and Church World Service

Urges the Congress and the White House to work with renewed resolve to make strides in reforming the health care system that imperils the lives of so many Americans;

Calls upon public officials to develop health care reform that builds upon successes of the past, particularly upon the national children's health insurance program (CHIP), Medicaid, and Medicare;

Commits to continue to work together and with all people of goodwill to advocate for the vulnerable, and ensure that health care reform is not just for the middle class and wealthy, but for us all;

Invites the member communions and congregations and Christians throughout the land to pray and work for this moment in our national life so that we might better exhibit the marks of true community among our people.

Prays that all Americans will, with sober reflection, embrace the challenge that now lies before us to demonstrate love of neighbor and commitment to the common good by seeking the establishment of health care reform that places dignity and well being at the center of our national life eschewing narrow self-interest and partisan rancor. The urgency of human need demands that we not pass by on the other side but, rather resolve together to contain costs, trim waste, promote ease of access and assure quality and continuity of care so that the blessings of life might be truly national in scope and mark us as whole and undivided people.

4. Message of appreciation regarding Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's visit to the United States.

The motion to approve the message was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Message of Appreciation from the General Assembly of the

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and Church World Service

November 12, 2009

In light of the recent (6th) apostolic visit of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox Christian Churches to the United States of America, the member communions of the National Council of Churches of Christ USA and Church World Service express their appreciation for and solidarity with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has demonstrated leadership in ecumenical and interfaith relations, being widely recognized as 'the Green Patriarch' in his singular and steadfast eco-justice advocacy, and most recently leading the 8th International Symposium on the Environment in the Mississippi River Delta. We furthermore affirm His All Holiness' identification of all Christians as 'ambassadors of divine reconciliation' toward all people, and his call to his own Diaspora flock to the 'duty of ecumenical peacemaking'.

5. Message of Affirmation of the (West Virginia churches) statement on mountaintop removal

The motion to affirm and refer the message was approved by unanimous voice vote.

The West Virginia Council of Churches statement reads:

West Virginia Council of Churches September 11, 2007

As people of faith, called upon by our covenant with God and each other to safeguard and care deeply for what God has created, we cannot stand by while our mountains are being devastated.

The destruction caused by mountain top removal mining, as presently practiced, is unprecedented and permanent. We believe the 1977 Surface Mining Reclamation and Control Act was intended to put an end to the abuses of surface mining, not to further them. Therefore, we deplore recent changes to the rules governing this law that may actually serve to promote mountain top removal.

We have, in the past, called for the strictest possible enforcement of SMCRA and the Clean Water Act. We strongly renew that call for enforcement, believing that if the law is fully enforced, the terrible damage of large-scale mountaintop removal will end.

Creation is a revelation of God, brought forth by God's Word. When we spend time with the wonders of Creation, we observe and learn about the beauty and marvelous attention to the smallest details that fill God's work. Jesus often went into the wilderness to pray, and there is something special about the closeness many feel to God when contemplating such grandeur.

Psalms 24:1 reminds us that "The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; and the world, and they that dwell therein." According to Genesis 2:15, humans have been made stewards of all that God has made.

We are called to be responsible and faithful in caring for all that God has faithfully given.

Our West Virginia mountains are a wonderful example of the beauty of Creation: a temperate rainforest, full of unique plants, trees, flowers, and creatures, the diversity of which is unduplicated in our nation. The mountains are home to deer, black bears, bobcats, frogs, turtles, snakes, and a remarkable variety of birds.

As Genesis 9:9-11 says, "God's covenant is with all living creatures." For generations these mountains have also been home to people. The mountains have provided a rich assortment of foods, medicinal plants, abundant clear and pure water to drink, materials with which to build homes, and glorious beauty to nurture the spirit. The mountains are full of blessings for which to thank and praise our God. These mountains, for many years, have also contained coal, a source of energy now used for electricity.

Mining coal has employed thousands of men and women since the early Twentieth Century. For most of that time, the mining took place underground. Miners faced daily hazards in earning their living and gaining needed income for their families. But still, for the most part, the people were able to maintain harmony between their livelihood and their mountain environment. But with the advent of surface mining, the relationship changed. Obtaining the coal has become a trade-off for the destruction of the surrounding land and forest.

Mountaintop removal mining, in particular, blasts the tops from our mountains and obliterates healthy streams, filling them with waste material. The damage done is permanent and irreparable. Once the top of a mountain has been removed, it cannot be put back. The streams cannot be replaced, and the native hardwood forests and diverse under-story do not grow back. The animals, birds, and people are deprived of the welcoming environment that once nurtured their minds, bodies, and spirits and provided food, water, and shelter for them.

Hundreds of thousands of acres of our beautiful state, God's gift of Creation, have already been affected. In addition to the direct and immediate harm to the environment, toxic chemicals from coal waste impoundments can leach into the water table and contaminate water supplies. The possibility of failure of slurry dams constitutes an ever-present and growing threat to the community below. Floods worsened by runoff from the denuded mountains are becoming a routine occurrence. Some children sleep in their clothes, fearful that rain will force them to flee during the night.

We recognize that miners need jobs, and we support responsible mining practices. We also know that more miners are employed for longer periods when deep mining is done. There used to be over 100,000

miners employed in West Virginia, while now there are perhaps 15,000 direct mining jobs. We still observe that the areas of our state in which coal mining has been the primary occupation remain among the poorest and have the least-diversified economies in the state. Mining families deserve our support and help in making a secure, just economic transition.

We urgently request that state leaders and our Congressional delegation work diligently toward economic diversification for our state. Irresponsible mining practices damage the environment, hurt businesses based on tourism and the natural beauty of the state, and do not help us build a Twenty-first Century economy.

We are also called upon to support others in the coalfield communities whose health is being harmed, and whose ancestral homes are being destroyed, disrupted and devalued. Surface mining may be more cost effective for the coal companies, but it is not more cost effective for our mountain communities. Genesis 1:31 tells us that God looked at everything God had made and found it very good. In obedience, we are obligated to care for God's wondrous Creation that we may one day walk with God in the garden without shame.

Dennis Sparks, executive director of the West Virginia Council of Churches, said, "We have destroyed mountains equal to the area of the state of Rhode Island." He thanked the General Assembly for supporting the WVCC resolution. "Our state is ready to implode, as people are turning to violence against one another."

Membership and Ecclesial Relations Committee Report

Lydia Veliko, chair, reported on behalf of the Committee

The Membership and Ecclesial Relations Committee recommends to the 2009 GA that the Apostolic Catholic Church be elected into membership.

Lydia noted that MERC is charged to review all requests for membership. Dialogue continues with church leaders and the committee. Your role is to discern whether our recommendation is appropriate. While the NCC and CWS boards are informed, only the General Assembly is authorized to act. Two-thirds of the member communions present and two-thirds of the delegates present.

In 2007 the Apostolic Catholic church declared itself a peace church. All life belongs to God and no one has the right to take life for any reason.

There is a need to set aside our membership requirement. We felt the membership size was of lesser importance than the gifts this church brings, among which is its commitment to the marginalized.

The necessary action is to receive the Apostolic Catholic Church with the understanding that we suspend the rules regarding membership size.

Darryl Ingram of the African Methodist Episcopal Church said it is the discretion of the body to suspend the rules and I move to suspend the rules.

Bishop Demetrios: I rise to speak against suspension of the rules. They have served us well, we don't have to suspend them every time.

Dave Neipel, council to NCC, clarified that what the standing rules say is that applicants have 20,000 persons and 50 churches unless special circumstances warrant suspension. This would not be a suspension of the rules but a determination of special circumstances.

The parliamentarian ruled that the motion needs to be a motion to determine this is special circumstances.

Peg: I remove from the floor the motion to suspend the rules and ask for a motion by motion by the committee to consider this special circumstance.

Lydia: We recognize that the church membership numbers falls below our threshold, then we are in fact requesting you to consider this under the standing rules.

Angelique Walker-Smith asked for further clarification on the thinking of the committee. What is not clear is the rationale why this particular case qualifies for special circumstances in the first place. What is behind my question is the possibility of opening a floodgate, this is the future of the whole landscape of Christendom. What is to stop other groups from declaring themselves as communions?

Lydia: Three things we would name that over a course of a number of years brought us to a place where we could recommend this with enthusiasm. Members of the church have been around the NCC and CWS for a long time and there is a sense where it has represented itself to us as a church not just a collection of congregations. State Council of Churches in Florida strongly affirmed the church's strong activity as a communion. We are asked to deliberate one membership application at a time, we have to take that application on its own merits.

John Paterakis. I did not hear anything regarding its characterization of the Trinitarian nature of God.

Lydia: yes they are a Trinitarian church.

Eve Tibbs, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: What is the membership of the church?

Bishop Charles Leigh of the Apostolic Catholic Church: Our total membership is just a wee bit under 10,000. We are not a broad church. All of our people are poor, working poor, or not working any more. The only way that I as a member of their leadership can dispel the feeling of the people that other Christians are taking our jobs are just as Christian as we are. There remains a feeling that we really aren't cared about.

How do you know people are members? Leigh replied, If they are baptized and Christianated (sic) we have a reception and if they are received (sic) they are considered members.

Robina Winbush. I am fascinated that on the screen is witnesses of these things, and this church represents a changing landscape that we have yet to wrap our minds around. With reference to the Bible study and keynote: how do we understand our sisters and brothers. I am intrigued and supportive, and ask MERC to help us think in new ways of the changing landscape.

Bishop Hoyt: the recommendation gives me pause. I wonder what it would mean to have other status in NCC? What are bishops called? What are the requirements for ordination? I am not ready to go ahead at this time.

David Neipel: The GA Constitution speaks only to regular members so either CWS or NCC could amend to allow it but it's not there in their bylaws.

Lydia: We were aware that there might have been different options to consider and observer status was one, other membership categories might be another, ultimately we decided to move ahead with membership.

Father Pappas: As the Bishop was speaking ahead of me I was thinking what he was thinking, recalling the debacle of Metropolitan Community Church, this church is only by the poor for the poor.

Terry Yasuko Ogawa. What I hear is a lot of rhetoric of fear, I want to react to this from a paradigm of hope and not fear. Open the floodgates for people who want to do more ministry for Jesus Christ, Amen.

Michael Kinnamon gave a strong affirmation of this application for membership. We have now a church that has demonstrated its commitment to what we do.

Ken Miller Raymond, Church of the Brethren: I express appreciation first of all to the body that it petitioning for membership. I got to know you last year, it was exciting to me. I do express concern that the tone we bring. I am expressing my appreciation and confidence that you have responded to the concerns we hear raised.

Archbishop Aphrem Karim. I express appreciation for the work of the committee. I cannot in good conscience make a determination on behalf of my church whether we accept or reject their application. Need more time and more clarity.

Bishop Demetrios moved to continue the discussions in executive session.

After the public session resumed, the voting took place and The Apostolic Catholic Church was voted into the membership. The vote by Communions was as follows:

African Methodist Episcopal Church: Yes

African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church: Abstain

Alliance of Baptists: Yes

American Baptist Churches USA: Yes

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): Yes

Christian Methodist Episcopal Church: Abstain

Church of the Brethren: Yes

Coptic Orthodox Church in North America: [ABSENT]

Diocese of the Armenian Church in America: No

The Episcopal Church: Yes

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: Yes

Friends United Meeting: Yes

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: No

Hungarian Reformed Church in America: [ABSENT]
International Council of Community Churches: Abstain
Korean Presbyterian Church in America: Yes
Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: Yes
Mar Thoma Syrian Church of India: Abstain
Moravian Church (Northern and Southern Province): Yes
National Baptist Convention of America, Inc. [ABSENT]
National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.: Yes
National Missionary Baptist Convention of America [ABSENT]
Orthodox Church in America: Yes
Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in the USA [ABSENT]
Philadelphia Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends: Yes
Polish National Catholic Church of America [ABSENT]
Presbyterian Church (USA): Yes
Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.: Yes
Reformed Church in America: Yes
Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America: [ABSENT]
The Swedenborgian Church: Yes
Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch: No
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of America: [ABSENT]
United Church of Christ: Yes
United Methodist Church: Yes

Voting by individual delegates resulted in a vote of 95 yes, 12 no, 8 abstentions.

The General Assembly rose to welcome the Apostolic Catholic Church delegation.

Gun Violence Presentation

Panel: Afrem Kareem, NaKeisha Blount, Michael Livingston, and Sylvia Grace formed a panel to discuss gun violence in the USA.

A substitute motion on Nuclear Disarmament was offered by the Rev. Katherine Shaner, ELCA

Substitution for Lines 257-282 in “Nuclear Disarmament: The Time is Now”

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the member communions of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCCC) and Church World Service (CWS), speaking together through their respective governing boards, hereby reaffirm the goal of the total disarmament of nuclear weapons and commit themselves:

- 1. to ask for commitments toward this end from national, state, and local governmental and ecumenical representatives and agencies.**
- 2. to engage in international anti-violence advocacy efforts including the programs and events of the World Council of Churches such as the *Decade for Overcoming Violence*.**
- 3. to encourage appropriate working groups/committees to designate nuclear disarmament as a central theme for the 2011 Ecumenical Advocacy Days.**
- 4. to develop measurable outcomes that inform faith-based educational materials.**

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the President and the General Secretary of the NCCC and the Chairperson and Executive Director/CEO of the CWS communicate this commitment to the President of the United States and congressional leaders.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the President and the General Secretary of the NCCC and the Chairperson and Executive Director/CEO of the CWS report regularly to the General Assembly regarding their actions toward the end of nuclear disarmament.

Brenda moved the adoption of the resolution with all of the friendly amendments proposed.

The motion to adopt “Nuclear Disarmament: The Time is Now” was carried by unanimous voice vote.

See: <http://www.ncccusa.org/ga2009/ga2009nuclearresolution.pdf>

Adjournment

There being no more business to come before the Assembly, the meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m. .

**Respectfully submitted,
The Rev. José Luis Casal, Secretary**

Transcribed by Philip E. Jenks

ⁱ **Nuclear Security Spending Assessing Costs, Examining Priorities**, Stephen I. Schwartz with Deepti Choubey, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009.

ⁱⁱ **The Lancet** 25 June 2005 (Vol. 365, Issue 9478, pages 2193-2200).