National Council of Churches and Church World Service
2008 General Assembly

Denver, Colorado, November 11-13, 2008

General Assembly Special Meeting

Tuesday, November 11, 2008

The General Assembly Special Meeting was called to order by President Aykazian at 1:43 p.m.

Mrs. Arpi Kouzouian, Chair of the Nominations Committee, presented the following persons as proxies:

African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church:
Ms. Joyce Reed representing Mr. Jason Spigner
Bishop Dennis V. Proctor representing Bishop Louis Hunter

Alliance of Baptists:
Ms. Sue H. Poss representing the Rev. Stan Hastey

American Baptist Churches in the USA:
The Rev. Mary Armacost Hulst representing Dr. Arlee Griffin
The Rev. Brian Henderson representing Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins
Dr. Michael Sayler representing Dr. Reid Trulson

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ):
Ms. Lorna Owens representing Rev. Ron Diggs
Mr. Bill Nottingham representing Mr. David Vargas

Christian Methodist Episcopal Church:
Mr. Hollis E. Booker representing Dr. Evelyn Parker
Rev. Mark J. Hill representing Rev. Cryeeta Collins
Mr. Alvin R. Scott representing Dr. Elnora Hamb

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America:

Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos representing H.E. Archbishop Demetrios of America

Orthodox Church in America:
Ms. Juliana Mecera representing Fr. Leonid Kishkovsky

Presbyterian Church (USA):
The Rev. Jon Chapman representing Ms. Linda Valentine

United Methodist Church:
Mr. Lonnie Brooks representing Ms. Stella Roberts
The Rev. Dr. Scott Schiesswohl representing Ms. Kathryn Williams
The Rev. Motoe Yamada representing Ms. Karen Noel

► **The proxies were seated by unanimous voice vote.**

Mrs. Kouzouian presented the following additional names for Communion Delegations:

African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church:
1. Ms. Shirley Welsh

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church:
1. The Rev. Dn. Paul Cherian
2. H.G. Dr. Zachariah Mar Nicholovos
3. H.G. The Most Rev. Matthews Mar Barnabas
4. Ms. Asha Thomas
5. The Rev. Fr. Dr. P.C. Thomas
6. Mrs. Susan Varghese

Presbyterian Church (USA)
1. The Rev. César Carhuachin
2. The Rev. José L. Casal
3. Elder Elsie L. Dursi
4. The Rev. Dr. Arlene W. Gordon
5. The Rev. Dr. Leslie R. Hyde
6. The Rev. Jin S. Kim
7. The Rev. Carlos L. Malavé
8. The Rev. Aimee C. Moiso
9. Dr. Lewis S. Mudge
10. The Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II
11. Elder Kathleen Owens
12. The Rev. Gradye Parson
13. The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Todd Peters
14. The Rev. Daniel Rift
15. The Rev. Oommen K. Thomas
16. Mrs. Linda Valentine

17. The Rev. Robina M. Winbush

► The additional names were seated by unanimous voice vote.

► The following persons were named Parliamentarians for the meeting:

Gradye Parsons, Dennis Frado

First Reading of the General Assembly Constitution and Standing Rules.

Gradye Parson explained that the Constitution had been redrafted to reflect the cooperation of the National Council of Churches and Church World Service, and to clarify the role of the general Assembly "and how it witnesses to our common community in Christ." The NCC Strategic Plan has been partially incorporated in the revision.

Key changes include the role of the presiding officers of the General Assembly, now proposed to be co-moderators, one from the NCC and one from CWS. A Committee on Collaboration replaces the NCC-CWS Table. Criteria for membership and delegation size has been left for future Assemblies to decide. Gradye Parson invited delegates to bring amendments to the Constitution today.

Gradye Parson moved the acceptance of the Constitution for a first reading, with a recommended second reading and final action by communions to be scheduled for Wednesday, November 12.

►The First Reading of the Constitution was accepted by unanimous voice vote.

►President Aykazian declared the Special Session of the General Assembly adjourned.

General Assembly Open Plenary

November 11, 2008

President Aykazian called the regular session of the General Assembly to order.

Opening Worship

Opening Worship was led by the Colorado Council of Churches.

Opening Address

The Rev. Dr. Gary Dorrien, Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York, addressed the General Assembly on the topic, "Remembering 100 years

and Anticipating the Future." The full text of Dr. Dorrien's address can be found at **http://www.ncccusa.org/ga2008/dorrien.html**

Opening Procedures

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27. The Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II
28. Elder Kathleen Owens
29. The Rev. Gradye Parson
30. The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Todd Peters
31. The Rev. Daniel Rift
32. The Rev. Oommen K. Thomas
33. Mrs. Linda Valentine
34. The Rev. Robina M. Winbush

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Committee of Reference

►President Aykazian appointed a Committee of Reference to be Chaired by President Elect Peg Chemberlin and including Dennis Frado and Raymon Hunt.

Approval of the Agenda

► The agenda for the 2008 General Assembly was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Approval of the Minutes

► The minutes of the 2007 General Assembly were approved with the following corrections:

Correcting the spelling of the Rev. Aren Jebejian's name.

Correcting the reference to Father Sousa as a member of the Armenian Church.

Report of the National Council of Churches General Secretary

The General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, used a PowerPoint presentation in the delivery of his report. A pdf version of the report can be found at **http://www.ncccusa.org/ga2008/GSreport2008.pdf**

Report of the Executive Director of Church World Service

The Executive Director of Church World Service, the Rev. John McCullough, reported on the mission and ministries of CWS. A copy of his report is attached to the official copy of these minutes.

Report of the pre-Assembly event, New Fire: Young Adult Ecumenical Days

Leaders of the New Fire: Young Adult Ecumenical Days reported on the pre-Assembly event, which generated a high degree of enthusiasm. A news report on the event can be found at **http://www.ncccusa.org/news/081125newfirewrap.html**

Worship

Worship to close the opening session was led by Stewards and other young adult participants in the General Assembly.

Recess

The plenary session was recessed at 6 p.m.

Wednesday, November 12, 2008

Worship

Worship in the Baptist Tradition was coordinated by the Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley, General Secretary of American Baptist Churches USA. The Rev. Mary Armacost Hulst, President of American Baptist Churches and former pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Denver, preached.

Bible Study

Dr. Rodney Sadler, Jr., Associate Professor of Bible at Union Theological Seminary-PSCS, Charlotte, N.C., led an "exegetical perspective" on the theme Scripture for the General Assembly.

Panel Discussion

A Panel Discussion on "Phobias that keep us from living the life in Christ together" included the following paraphrased observations:

Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos: (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America)

There is a growing reluctance to engage the other among Orthodox bodies that is based on irrational fears. We do have the approach to inter-Christian dialogue that is subject to misunderstanding, particularly sacramental communion. We can share sacramental communion only with those whose existence is common and true, all of which characterizes an orthodox way of life. If sacramental communion is the ultimate expression of love for the Orthodox, it does not mean that love for the other can be neglected. Some of this attitude springs from fears that are no longer relevant in the American context. Elsewhere Orthodox are oppressed minorities. Today much of our dialogue is secondary to fear of engaging our sisters and brothers.

In addition, there is the factor of the immigrant experience. Orthodox pastors are sensitive to the minority status -- ethnic, cultural, and religious – of our faithful. We experience an erosion of numbers due to intermarriage.

Orthodox fundamentalism is a movement toward traditional discourse. The rise of monasticism has tended to focus on one strand of monasticism in Orthodox World – some are attracted to it because of its novelty in the U.S. There is a need for a return to more traditional forms to accentuate an Orthodox identity.

There is a fear that dialogue is a betrayal of doctrinal purity and canonical exactness. This is much different than when the canons were formulated. There is a fear that dialogue and ecumenical engagement will lead to an endorsement of ideas we don't agree with. Unfortunately in some cases fears are not unfounded when statements by ecumenical bodies are made by majority votes over Orthodox objection.

There is a need for the addition of curricula at Orthodox institutions of higher learning. Orthodox faculties regularly participate in ecumenical dialogue. The problem endures with parish clergy.

Orthodoxy in west and traditional homelands is beginning to come to terms with a new world. Kin our dialogue Orthodox would be well served to admit this coming to terms, but partners should respect the otherness. Respect for otherness the first step toward love in action.

Sharon Watkins. (Christian Church – Disciples of Christ)

Disciples began among scattered Christians far from home and we let Christian Unity be our polar star. In the 20th century there was not a council of churches we did not love. 21st century Disciples try to capture the same: we are disciples, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world as part of the one body of Christ we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us.

It turns out that we have phobias. Our actual living of unity has not been as good as our claim of unity. Disciples have a fear of uniformity. Fear someone is going to tell us how to act. A fear of hierarchy. Instead of our premium on all believers, a fear someone will tell us how to worship, a fear of a test of fellowship. A fear that in unity someone will tell us how to think.

There is a deep seated fear of human and institutional authority. Unity is so much a gift in Christ that we cannot create it by undoing our differences. It may mask a phobia we hardly dare to name – a fear of submitting to any authority at all, even the authority of God.

Bishop Ronald M. Cunningham (Christian Methodist Episcopal Church)

They will know we are Christians by our love. CME came into existence as a result of movement from slavery to freedom. We are an outgrowth of Wesley's Methodism. For us, 41 men gathered in Jackson, Tenn. in 1870 to form the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America. We changed our name to Christian Methodist in 1954.

Jesus prayer so agonizingly and gloriously expressed in John 17: that they might all be one.

►Fear of Change. Think of the changes in a church is five or six families of different origins said they wished to unite with your congregation to live out their Christian witness in the light of your congregation. How would the core values of your community be affected? Where are all these white folks coming from? Scourge of silent racism that lives in many of us that is unknown to us and only raises its head when something elicits a response. What would you really do? We must talk it out but we must make it incarnational. Still in US Sunday morning is still be most segregated hour we experience.

►Fear of loss of sacred traditions. I shall not be moved. Ours is the best understanding of God. Divergent social political economic and political realities. My country right or wrong. Identified with left, the right, resented being called liberal and shuddered at being called conservative. As of Tuesday, serious cracks in the solid South. Losing on our 401s our 403bs and our stocks.

►Our inability to reconcile our different worship expressions which were forged out of our existential living conditions. Unless you have been oppressed by the color of your skin you have no idea what it's like to be stopped for DWB.

Our worship is what makes us who we are but it must point us to who we can become.

Mark Hanson (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)

Denominational jitters

1. The fear of our dying. Not death we so much fear as the process of dying. Post-denominational age means we have either missed our death or we are in hospice care and don't have very good chaplains. Aging. Predominantly white in a richly pluralistic culture. We have come to believe in the premature announcement of the death of denominations and we are beginning to act like we are dying. The process of dying depletes ecumenical imagination. We ask our ecumenical partners, what have you done for us lately? In baptism we have already died, the only death that matters that leaves us free to face every other death for the sake of life. Free to engage in ecumenical imagination for the sake of life.

2. Fear of tension that diminishes our courage making us miss avoidance. (We are friendly and all get along means the Minister has just arrived or is retiring) Book of Acts: creative tension. We are so tension avoidant that we resist creating it. And we will not more richly manifest our unity in faith without creating tension.

3. Fear of God's promised future. Preoccupied with our dying makes us nostalgic for the past that never existed, and the nostalgia disparages the present and closes us to the future.

New Business

President Elect Peg Chemberlin, Chair of the Reference Committee, presented items of new business:

Robert Welsh, Christian Church (Disciples). Nothing the enthusiastic response to the New Fire event, Robert encouraged the NCC to seek staffing for Young Adult Ministries.

Angelique Walker-Smith, National Baptist. Noting the wide number of ecumenical associations each of us has, Angelique suggested development of an ecumenical calendar that records meetings and activities in all these ecumenical groups.

Rebecca Todd Peters, PCUSA. Rebecca invited persons to gather over lunch to discuss the economic crisis.

Betty P. Vattakunnel, Mar Thoma. Betty called for the condemnation of violence against Christians in India and elsewhere.

John Thomas, UCC. John proposed a message from the General Assembly to Regional Ecumenical Organization partners to acknowledge with gratitude their keen interest and expressions of hope that have come to us in the U.S. since presidential election, and to communicate that we are also concerned about them, and assure them of our global solidarity

in response to their own deep convictions and interest in our own parochial politics at the moment.

President Aykazian announced that the newly elected Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church in America is Bishop Jonah of Texas, who was ordained bishop only two weeks ago.

Stewards Presentation

The Rev. Garland Pierce and Senior Steward Jonathan Hall introduced the young adult stewards for this year's meeting:

Alexandra (Sasha) Arjannikova, United Methodist Church, Albuquerque, N.Mex.
Cassandra Chamallas, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Arlington, Mass.
Laura Hilton, United Methodist church, Pleasant Hill, Mo.
Rebekah Houff, Church of the Brethen, Elgin, Ill.
Andrew Hudson, Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), Statesville, N.C.
Jack Lewis, United Church of Christ, Webster Grove, Mo.
Kathryn McAbee, Presbyterian Church (USA), Falls Church, Va.
Juliana Mecera, Orthodox Church in America, Crestwood, N.Y.
Jennifer Tyler, United Methodist Church, Evanston, Ill.
Michael Wetherington, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Jonathan Hall, Senior Steward; Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), St. Louis, Mo.
Laura Strietelmeier, Senior Steward, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Toledo, Ohio

President's Report

President Elect Peg Chemberlin moderated the meeting as President Aykazian gave his report.

President Aykazian expressed his appreciation to General Secretary Kinnamon and the staff.

Tuesday, he said, was a historic day for U.S. and world, as 130 million Americans exercised their rights to vote and emphasized the significance of the American story. He expressed his hopes for a better and brighter future for this country and for the world. He said he is committed to working with the new administration on priorities.

Among the successes in his first year, the President said, were visits to different member churches; a visit to the Middle East to show our solidarity with churches in the Holy Land; and work with neighbors of many faiths.

Among his concerns are poverty at home and abroad, racism, the remaining effects of Hurricane Katrina, the genocide in Darfur, which he said is a shame for humanity, a dark spot on the forehead of humanity. "The extent of man's inhumanity to man that has left a legacy that we have yet to fully confront."

He also expressed his concern about the continued worldwide epidemic of HIV/AIDS, which he said is heartbreaking.

Some 26,500 – 30,000 children die each day due to poverty, according to UNESCO, President Aykazian said.

Today another era had unfolded, a second cold war has begun, and we cannot be indifferent, he said. We have to act and have to act now. NCC is not an organization, it is a vision, and it is a mission. Let us strive together to make peace and security a reality in this world.

In Edinburgh in 2010, a special centennial anniversary of the Ecumenical movement will be observed. The General Assembly in 2010 will be a celebration of the U.S. anniversary of mission, Archbishop Aykazian noted.

Administration and Finance

The Rev. Dr. Cheryl Wade, First Vice President of the NCC and Chair of the Administration and Finance Committee, gave the report.

She reported that the FY 2007-2008 audit report was an unqualified report with no exceptions.

The invited delegates to read the NCC annual report which can be found on line at **http://www.ncccusa.org/pdfs/NCCannualreport2008.pdf**

Cheryl urged delegates to help work toward the goal of 100 percent of the member communions providing financial support for the NCC.

Peg Chemberlin asked for a motion to receive both the report of the president and the Administration and Finance Report.

►The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Frank Sharry Address

The Rev. Joe Roberson of Church World Service introduced, Frank Sharry, founder and Executive Director of America's Voice, who addressed the General Assembly on the issue of immigration reform. Sharry's address is paraphrased as follows:

Immigration is one of the defining issues of our generation.

You are called to this issue the same way I am called to this issue, from my experience of working with refugees and immigrants to the point at which it has become a personal calling. Just in the past few years what we've seen is what calls us to stand up for those who have no voice.

Four hundred people a year are dying along the Mexico-U.S. border because they are crossing the dessert to get jobs in the United States. The humanitarians who erect water stations along the way are arrested. Anti-immigrant legislators are scoring political points. Employers get away with supplying fake green cards. This is the situation in the waning days of the Bush administration.

In New York a Chinese immigrant came forward to get green card that he had been mistakenly denied earlier and he was arrested, taken from his wife and died in prison. Immigrants are the largest detention program the federal government runs. Four-thousand people who were simply "driving while brown" have exported – it is a non-violent form of ethnic cleansing.

Why is there such an anti-immigrant attitude in the U.S.? All you have to do is turn on the radio to hear about the villainy – immigrants are criminals, they are "them" out to take from "you," and therefore they are not worthy. Twelve million people in our country are living without the protection of our laws.

Anti-immigrant forces are strong and triumphalist. However, many went down to defeat at the last election. But each day we see the fear of mothers and fathers who leave their house knowing they might be arrested and never see their families again. Fourteen thousand immigrant children have lost their parents because of U.S. law enforcement.

Undocumented immigrants in U.S. are not fleeing political persecution in a classic sense, but one told me, "I had to leave my country, it was not a choice."

For most of the seventies and eighties there was an open border. In the nineties there was a backlash. In California, Governor Pete Wilson saved his seat for one election cycle by taking an anti-immigrations stance. Nine-eleven accelerated the trend, creating fears that maybe Mexicans are secret jihadists.

You are on a similar journey that I'm on. These are the people invited in to do our dirtiest work and now out of political expediency being told you are the problem. It's not whether immigrants are worthy of us, it is whether we are worthy of our ideals.

Head, Heart, Hands

Head: I am not for open borders. I am for smart borders and smart policies that are consistent with our national interest. The argument to build a wall has been prettied up as "attrition through enforcement," and a majority of the Republican Party says we will enforce the law so stringently that people will stop coming and go home – a if the expulsion of 12 million people would be some kind of victory for the U.S.

Immigrations moving for economic opportunities is not a new trend in the U.S. Now we have a global version of that. Immigrants are going to every gateway city. There's no legal line to get into.

Sure we should have reasonable enforcement, sure we should get tough on employers. The only way to do that is make sure the 12 million people here get on the path to citizenship. Amnesty? Or a whole lot of common sense. Family reunification. Does it make sense to have spouses separated seven years because the quotas are too tight? Let's see if we can reduce those backlogs, showing we really believe families are the cornerstone of civilization. This is a practical argument we can win.

Heart: We hear the argument put so: This is not about race, this is about the rule of law. Translation: "We've never had so many Mexicans in our life. These are bad people who don't belong here. They may be taking care of your children and nursing your mother but they don't belong here." What's next? Mass deportation or earned citizenship? Welcome or exclusion? Fear or hope? It's a moral issue. We haven't mobilized and the other side has.

Hands: When 25 years from now we look back on this dark chapter, we're going to read the story of how faith communities led the way. Lindsay Graham is a strong advocate of this view. The rule of law only works when it's a just law.

The argument that "it's not about race, it's about the rule of law" is not working for me anymore. We need advocacy alerts from CWS. We need urgency. We need volume. We need velocity. We now have a president-elect who "gets it," and we may get legislation that says you are not them, you are us. Us plus them makes a better us.

Break

President Aykazian asked for a motion to request the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches and the Executive Director of Church World Service to send a letter on behald of the General Assembly congratulating Bishop Jonan on his election as Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church in America.

►The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Church World Service Report

Bishop Johncy Itty, chair of the Church World Service Board of Directors, reported.

The ministry of Church World Service is guided by Matthew 5:1-16, Bishop Itty said. Salt and light and how we are called to be light and beacons and hope.

The church family you see in simple context, The Church World Service logo offers an outstretched arm of hope. Its mission statement invokes Christians working together with partners to eradicate hunger and poverty and promote justice around the world.

In the past year, Church World Service benefitted from 1600 CROP Walks, responded to natural disasters, and issued microcredit loans to persons determined to help themselves. We are mindful to keep before us a careful missional strategy. Pray that in this new journey as a united family we can discern the Lord's work with fervor in a climate of peace. We cannot do everything but there are many things we can do.

►The motion to receive Bishop Itty's report was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Resolution on Immigration and a Call to Action.

José Luis Casal, National Council of Churches Secretary, and Dr. David A. Leslie, Executive Director, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, co-chairs of the drafting committee, introduced the Resolution on Immigration and a Call to Action.

David noted that the resolution has been approved by the National Council of Churches Governing Board and the Church World Service Board of Directors.

Several delegates rose to offer amendments to the resolution. President Aykazian ruled that because the resolution had already been approved by the NCC and CWS, no further edits were appropriate.

Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos rose to a point of order, contending that it was improper to ask for the adoption of a document without allowing edits.

The chair ruled that given the fact that both boards had discussed and approved the resolution, the General Assembly must consider the document as it is and vote it up or down.

Bishop Demetrios moved to appeal the decision of the chair that amendments not be offered.

►The motion to appeal was passed by an uncounted vote of hands.

David Leslie, on behalf of the drafting committee, moved the adoption of the resolution.

Jessica Christ, ELCA, moved an amendment on page 4, line 126, adding a sentence, "and yet the immigration of immigrations and others in North America began a massive displacement of indigenous peoples with consequences that continue today."

►The amendment was accepted by voice vote.

Despina Prassas offered an amendment in Section 106-109, page 3, to tighten up the language. "Ultimate authority belongs only to God and not to the State." What is "ultimate authority" and "law of God"?

David Leslie accepted the amendment on behalf of the committee.

Henry Geysler ELCA offered an amendment in lines 206-208, item 4, to add after "communions" the words "providing information about current law and " including the formation of strategies.

►The amendment was accepted by voice vote.

Rebecca Larson moved an amendment on line 79, to delete the word "deafening"

►The amendment was accepted by voice vote.

Lonnie Brooks, UMC, moved an amendment on line 44, and 249, to delete the word "indiscriminate."

►The amendment was accepted by voice vote.

Susan Humphrey, ELCA, offered an amendment on line 187 and 192 to replace "Task Force" with "Task Group."

►The amendment was accepted by voice vote.

►The Resolution on Immigration and a Call to Action was adopted by voice vote.

[i]RESOLUTION ON IMMIGRATION AND A CALL FOR ACTION

ADOPTED BY THE BOARDS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES USA (9/22/08) AND CHURCH WORLD SERVICE, AND ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES USA AND CHURCH WORLD SERVICE (11/12/08)

"In a world fragmented by fearfulness, Christians proclaim a divine love that casts out fear (I John 4: 18) and binds even those the world calls enemies (Matthew 5: 44). In a society still divided by race and increasingly divided into haves and have nots, Christians affirm a vision of community in which every neighbor is valued as a child of God (Genesis 1: 27) and all neighbors have enough (Luke 6). In a world fractured by suspicion of those who are "other," Christians have heard a command to welcome strangers (Genesis 18, Hebrews 13:2), even as Christ has welcomed us (Romans 15: 7)."[ii]

NCC Policy Base[iii]

UNITED STATES IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION POLICY
Adopted by The General Board on March 21,1952
THE CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION
Adopted by the General Board of the National Council of Churches USA on February 27, 1962
IMMIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS
Adopted by the Governing Board on May 14, 1981

INTRODUCTION

This resolution and call to action about the issue of immigration from a faithful Biblical perspective is a collaboration of the member communions of the National Council of Churches USA and Church World Service, with local and regional ecumenical bodies of the United States. Millions of people are on the move around the world: some by choice, some under duress, but most out of dire, life-or-death necessity. All desire to make a better life for themselves and their families, as have millions of immigrants to our shores from past eras. Many perceive this country as the best or only choice available to them. How our nation responds to this growing challenge is clearly one of the great moral issues of our time.

As we witness the consequences of an outdated and ineffective immigration system, we are compelled to stand in solidarity with those impacted by our nation's policies. The current U.S. immigration process separates family members, many who have waited decades to be reunited, and hurts productivity as those wishing to work in this country,

also endure lengthy backlogs. Such a system leaves many facing the choice between feeding their children and crossing a border illegally. Reaching a point of desperation, many risk their lives to cross the desert, where hundreds of them die every year.

Thousands of immigrants have been arrested in mass raids and hundreds of thousands have been detained or deported, with little or no access to legal counsel. Children have been detained in detention centers lacking proper educational or religious services, and at least 83 people have died in such facilities due to inadequate medical treatment. Such "enforcement" measures leave children without parents, families separated without knowledge of loved ones' whereabouts, and those who arrived as infants deported to countries they never called home. Many immigrants who endure detention and deportation are lawful permanent residents; many seek asylum from persecution; and still others simply seek the better life the United States promises.

Unfortunately, when these issues are discussed, polarized sides have blamed immigrants for the nation's problems, rather than uniting to enact policies that are beneficial to all persons. Anti-immigrant sentiment has become such an accepted norm throughout the United States that some local laws bar immigrants from receiving social services and deny funding to charitable organizations that do not check immigration status prior to administering services. Local police act as immigration officials, resulting in racial profiling and a widespread fear of reporting crimes, which compromises community safety, yet law enforcement turns a blind eye to employer exploitation of immigrants.

These issues stem from underlying, global causes of migration, such as war, environmental exhaustion, poverty, and inequitable trade and development policies that are often ignored. This presents us with a noble challenge – to work together to address the underlying global causes of migration at the same time we improve the ways we answer the knock at our church doors.

Our calling to participate fully as people of faith in the democratic process is clear to us as Christians whenever concerns about morality, social justice and compassion meet at a crossroads with decision-making that may lead either to healing, or further fracturing of our society and the world. In this context the Church asserts its freedom and responsibility to express theological understandings about moral questions. At the center of our engagement of social questions is the Church's mandate to "proclaim, in word and deed, the good news of Jesus Christ in the midst of a fractured world."[iv]

We admire the Christian witness that has been an inspiration to us and the world, yet also confess that the Church has not always lived up to its own principles. Too often we have heard a silence from the Church in debates having implications for human welfare and social and economic justice. We recall with regret past controversies in our society regarding war and peace, genocide, slavery, women's suffrage, workers' protections, civil and human rights, and economic and social injustice, where the Church has fallen short of its calling to preach, teach and be a blessing in the world. The Church's historic silences or complicity was not necessarily always deliberate; often it could be attributed to misinformation or ignorance, or to a focus on other pastoral concerns; but regardless, the silence is sin. Today (as in all other times) the Church is called to rise in unequivocal defense of the stranger, the sojourner, the widow and orphan, and our most vulnerable neighbors.

As we consider the causes and realities of human migration, we together affirm these shared religious convictions[v] concerning God's creation and commandment to love one another:

1) God created human beings in God's image, and as such each person is a precious and sacred reflection of the Creator.[vi]
2) The land on which we live is not ours, but God's. God made all of us stewards of creation, and called us to act with justice, mercy, and wisdom.
3) God's people are a pilgrim people. Throughout Biblical history, the people of God have been sojourners, refugees, and migrants~~,~~. God protected them as they moved, multiplied, and maintained the earth. The Bible teaches us to defend, protect, and honor the rights and humanity of the sojourner, stranger, refugee, and immigrant.
4) Our sacred instructions to welcome the stranger remind us to show hospitality to immigrants.[vii] God's Word reminds us of the rich blessings we receive from God and of our obligations to share these blessings.
5) The Church, when it welcomes the stranger, provides an uplifting moral and spiritual witness.[viii]

While we respect and adhere to the laws of the U.S. Government, ultimate authority belongs only to God and not the State. As we seek to love our neighbors and welcome the stranger, we also seek laws that are humane and just, as are the laws of God. In light of the highest political ideals grounded in justice, equality and freedom:

1) We embrace the deeper theological conviction that we are not separate and distinct from other human beings, but are a part of the same interconnected, interdependent, human family. We reaffirm previous National Council of Churches USA policies that call on the United States to do its share to alleviate human suffering in other lands by admitting refugees and immigrants and providing sanctuary to persons needing to relocate.[ix]

2) We acknowledge the ease with which we as human beings are prone to fear people who we consider "other", yet, our faith challenges us to overcome such natural fear of those who are not like us. This fear of the "other" has had tragic consequences in the United State and the world. This nation fought with itself to overcome a legacy of slavery, struggled in every generation against racial, ethnic, gender, and religious discrimination, and today may again succumb to fear, xenophobia, and racist impulses directed against new immigrants.
3) We are reminded that the United States is a nation of immigrants and other displaced peoples, and has been so since its inception; this reality enriches our culture and strength as a country. And yet the immigration of immigrants and others in North America began a massive displacement of indigenous peoples with consequences that continue today.
4) We recognize that there is an urgent need for increased awareness about trafficking in human beings, and about the economic and sexual exploitation of migrants. We recognize the need for effective enforcement against human traffickers and smugglers, and the defense and protection of victims of such crimes.
5) We recognize that government may have legitimate, morally justifiable reasons for denying immigration to certain persons.
6) We recognize that as religious leaders and educators we play an important role in helping the public understand immigrants and immigration policy.

CONTEXT OF THIS RESOLUTION:

These concerns and understandings lead us to respond when we see human beings, made in God's own image, driven from their homes by necessity, violence, poverty, hunger, political or religious oppression, and when migrating people find only more trouble and pain when they arrive at our doorstep.

As Christians we acknowledge and lift up the compassionate, committed, and creative ministry that goes on every day as the Church defends and protects migrants.[x] We know of the energy and resources devoted by the Church to respond in loving and helpful ways to the needful knocks at the Church's doors. The Church, working though Church World Service, the National Council of Churches USA, local and regional ecumenical bodies, member communions and congregations, continues to respond faithfully to a call to minister to immigrants and refugees, in the name of the One who came to bring healing to a broken world.

We understand our call to care for the most vulnerable among us, and in our current context, these most vulnerable include millions of undocumented neighbors who live and work in our midst. We also affirm the importance of family unity for citizens, visa holders, and documented and undocumented immigrants, as a priority throughout the U.S. immigration system. Our nation's official treatment of immigrants continues to be a grave affront to the mandates of Christian faith, which does not abide bad treatment of the stranger, the visitor, or those who seek asylum from persecution.

Our faith-inspired legacy calls us to reexamine our immigration policies and services in light of the current situation, and to work for swift federal reform that is humane, just and sustainable.

CALL TO ACTION:

We call for moral leadership that stands firm in the conviction that our nation, consisting of diverse peoples, should remain deeply committed to struggle against racial, ethnic and religious discrimination. We see prejudice as a particularly dangerous and existential threat to our diverse nation, and to human life across the world. Therefore, we commit ourselves to strive together for a society that treats immigrants, who are being threatened in this time, as fully deserving of all the civil and human rights afforded by the U.S. Constitution and international agreements.

THEREFORE, TOGETHER:

We Resolve, as the National Council of Churches USA and Church World Service

To work collaboratively among Church World Service, regional and local ecumenical bodies, and the National Council of Churches in the USA's member communions through a new, "Ecumenical Task Group on Immigration," organized under the fiscal and administrative auspices of the National Council of Churches USA, and supported and jointly led by the National Council of Churches USA, Church World Service, and in leadership-partnership with regional and local ecumenical bodies. The task group's leadership will consist of representatives from participating institutions, but will be accountable to the Justice and Advocacy Commission of the National Council of Churches USA and to the Immigration and Refugee Program Committee of Church World Service, which will cooperatively oversee its progress and receive reports on its activities. The Task Group will preserve collaborative accountability to participating regional and local ecumenical bodies, church agencies, and Church World Service in order to assure effective coordination and resourcing of diverse efforts. The Ecumenical Task Group on Immigration will have an initial life of three years.

The Ecumenical Task Group on Immigration will have a mandate to:

1) Work to formulate a cohesive, coordinated, theologically-based response from the Christian perspective about issues surrounding immigrants and immigration, and to foster effective communication between our churches, in our communities, and with business, governmental, and international leaders.[xi]
2) Collaborate to create, share and widely disseminate religious education curricula, videos and other media that focus on the biblical witness with respect to immigration, refugees, sojourners, and our obligations to the most vulnerable amongst us, particularly materials and best practices from the local and regional ecumenical organizations, which pioneer in appropriate responses at the local level.
3) Foster and share the means to teach about the sociological, economic, military, and legal forces affecting immigrants and immigration policies in the USA and the world, and the appropriate role of humanitarian and development aid.
4) Work with partners to support and resource sanctuary congregations and communions, providing information about current law and including the formation of strategies to raise broad awareness of sanctuary churches and the theological basis for their Christian activism.
5) Through the National Council of Churches and Church World Service, seek the financial support of charitable foundations and committed immigration-reform funding entities to support and extend the immigration reform efforts of the National Council of Churches USA, Church World Service, church agencies, and regional and local ecumenical bodies.
6) Encourage ways churches might engage immigration beyond charity and material support, to include public policy advocacy and engagement with public debates regarding legal and regulatory reform. Help to conceive, coordinate and/or resource public events that raise awareness about the faithful, Christian basis for policy engagement on immigration. Work to educate congregations and the public about specific public policy measures that defend the rights of immigrants and that call for more-humane immigration policies.

As such,

We call on President and Congress of the United States to:

1) Protect legally the unity of immigrant families by making family reunification a priority for both citizens and the immigration process, and by rejecting proposals that separate families, such as the denial of citizenship to children born in the United States and point systems that put family-based and employment-based immigration applicants in competition with each other.[xii]
2) Facilitate generous laws enabling immigration by individuals who seek to work in the United States and their families; ensure full protection of their rights; and allow them to travel to their native countries and return to the United States as they wish, without unnecessary fees or lengthy waiting periods.
3) Adopt new immigration laws that include a humane and just process by which undocumented immigrants can earn their lawful permanent residency and eventually apply for citizenship.
4) Defend and extend internationally agreed-upon human rights to those who are persecuted by increasing assistance to displaced persons worldwide, welcoming more refugees and asylum seekers to the United States, and robustly funding resettlement and integration, and other services for refugees, asylees, and other migrants.
5) Preserve and extend the domestic legal, civil, and human rights of immigrants, both children and adults, regardless of immigration status. These rights include fair wages, educational opportunities, access to social services, equitable treatment under U.S. law, and protections against worker exploitation and other forms of mistreatment.
6) Reform the visa system to increase the number of family-based and employment-based visas, efficiently process visas to reduce the backlog, and increase staff and resources to process applications in a timely manner.
7) End mass immigration raids on places of employment, as well as mass deportations, the deportation of lawful permanent residents, the forced separation of families, and government-sponsored border militarization and wall construction.
8) Implement equitable trade and development policies, including increased humanitarian assistance funding, that protect the way of life of persons who need to emigrate in order to survive; and recognize their international rights to emigrate or to remain in their native country in safe and humane conditions

We call on The Church

And most importantly, as brothers and sisters in faith, we call on fellow Christians in congregations, church agencies, and local and regional ecumenical bodies to:

1) Lead in prayer, teaching, and preaching about the biblical, spiritual and moral basis for compassionate hospitality toward immigrants.
Pray, study and search our hearts and minds with respect to our own attitudes and preconceptions regarding immigrant peoples, and, to provide opportunities for our churches and communities to confront the sins of racism, xenophobia, and ethnic or cultural prejudice against our fellow human beings.
[1]

[1] The 2007-2011 Strategic Plan of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America
All Bible references and quotes found in this resolution are from the New Revised Standard Version translation.

[1] A compendium of policy documents, statements and resources can be accessed at: www.ncccusa.org/immigration/

[1] "THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD", Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches, 2007

[1] A compendium of biblical references that inform our theological basis for addressing immigration concerns can be found at: http://www.ncccusa.org/immigration/bible. A compilation of statements and resources created by ecumenical bodies and member communions can be found at: http://www.ncccusa.org/immigration/

[1] In Genesis 1:26, "***Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.***"

[1] Deuteronomy 10:19 states "You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Hebrews 13:2 urges, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." Paul reinforces this teaching in Romans 12:13, with, "Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."

[1] In "THE CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION" the member communions stated, "We believe that through increased Christian concern in immigration, the churches and their members can make a fuller witness to our faith that, under God, men and nations are responsible to each other and for the welfare of all mankind."

[1] In "UNITED STATES IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION POLICY" the member communions stated, "On the international level, we believe the United States for moral reasons, as well as in the interest of its own economic and political security, should remain steadfast in its purpose to cooperate with other nations in meeting the needs of displaced persons, refugees, and surplus populations."

[1] Deuteronomy 10:19, "***You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt***"

[1] In "CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION" the Communions resolved: "We urge the churches and their members to make the most effective Christian witness they can on migration and related matters, in developing public opinion and in helping those in federal and state governments and intergovernmental agencies to shape migration policies, legislation and practices" Elsewhere in "CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION" the Communions stated: "We urge increased attention by all people in local parishes, in councils of churches, and in the work of church men and women, to keep under constant study, and to make more alive in public concern, the laws which our Government has enacted or should enact to help meet the critical needs of mankind." Also in CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION, the communions stated: "Study and concern should include not only migration matters, but all those undertakings through which our nation does and can lend material as well as moral assistance to other peoples for their economic and social progress."

[1] In "CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION, the churches called for replacement of a previous quota system with one that gave priorities to families seeking reunification. While those changes were made, present governmental proposals would eliminate the longstanding family-unity priority.

General Assembly Constitution and Standing Rules

Daryl B. Ingram Moved that this become the order of the day tomorrow.

►The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Thursday, November 13, 2008

Worship

Opening worship was led by the Malankara Orthodox Church.

Bible Study

Bishop Demetrios introduced Dr. Despina Prassas, Bible Study leader.

General Assembly Constitution and Standing Rules

The President declared the floor open to debating the Constitution and Standing Rules.

Christopher Epting, Episcopal Church, asked about the Collaboration Committee. It speaks for the body between assemblies. What is its authority?

Gradye Parson said purpose is to react on behalf of the assembly between assemblies in case of crisis. Actions need to be based in assembly policy or things the assembly has already said.

Susan Humphrey, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, said she understands the NCC and CWS have standing rules because they have articles of incorporation, but asked if this constitution is for this body (i.e., the General Assembly).

Gradye said the Constitution relates only to the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches and Church World Service.

President Aykazian said adoption of the Constitution would require two votes: one by delegates for which a two-thirds majority is required; and one by communions for which a majority is required. Each vote will be taken separately by roll call.

Several delegates rose to comment on the Committee on Collaboration.

John McCullough said the Committee on Collaboration is a continuation of an existing body and the two respective boards of NCC and CWS have assumed financial responsibility for the meetings.

Dan Crist of the Episcopal Church said the General Assembly should be represented by four delegates, not two, to allow for greater and broader participation on the part of the GA.

Dan Crist moved to amend the number of General Assembly delegates from two to four.

Stepping out of the chair, President Aykazian asked how the addition of two representatives would be paid for.

Dan Crist replied: we are trying to enhance the Committee on Collaboration and its work and broaden it, it seems to be we will find the money if we pass it. To raise the financial issue is a red herring. As I see it the others are there by office or because they're already on the board.

John Patarakas speak against the motion. "I have been a member of committee of collaboration since its inception, committee is less about governance and oversight than it is a mechanism for assuring what the name implies, which is the collaboration of the entities. It facilitates the interaction and the life of those two entities, not to sit in governance over."

Shelly Fayad, Episcopal Church, said the higher the number, the higher the likelyhood young people will be involved in the Committee.

John Thomas said we're investing far more in this committee of collaboration than was intended. The primary bodies between assemblies will be the NCC Governing Board and the Church World Service Board of Directors. I oppose the amendment because of cost and because I would not wish to see the committee take on greater role than intended.

►The motion was defeated by nay voice vote.

Arthur Larraby moved to amend line 358, by deleting, "shall be elected by the General Assembly."

►The motion to delete was defeated by voiced vote.

Delegates called the question on the matter of the Constitution.

►The delegate vote on the Constitution exceeded the two-thirds margin. There were uncounted nay votes and one abstention.

►The communion vote on the Constitution exceeded a majority vote as follows:

African Methodist Episcopal Church: Yes
African Methodist Episcipal Zion: Yes
Alliance of Baptists: Yes
American Baptist Churches USA: Yes
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): Yes
Christian Methodist Episcopal: Yes
Church of the Brethren: Yes
Coptic Orthodox Church in North America:
Diocese of the Armenian Church of America: Yes
Episcopal Church: Abstain
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: Yes
Friends United Meeting: Yes
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: Yes
International Council of Community Churches: Yes
General Assembly of the Korean Presbyterian Church in America: Yes
Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: Yes
Mar Thoma Syrian Church of India: Yes
Moravian Church in America: Yes
National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc :
Orthodox Church in America: Yes
Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in the USA: Yes
Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends: Abstain
Presbyterian Church (USA): Yes
Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc: Yes

Reformed Church in America: Yes
Serbian Orthodox Church in the North and South America: Yes
Swedenborgian Church: Yes
United Church of Christ: Yes
United Methodist Church: Yes

►The chair declared that with 25 votes yes, and 2 abstentions, the Constitution has been adopted.

Standing Rules

Dennis Frado, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, moved the adoption of the Standing Rules.

Illana Naylor, Church of the Brethren, moved amendments to the Standing Rules on page 16, line 735, to add in the church and society "to advocate for the elimination of violence, war, poverty and environmental degradation."

►The amendment was defeated by voice vote.

►The Standing Rules were adopted by a unanimous vote of hands.

Lunch Break

Ecumenical Networks Standing Committee Report

David Baak, Chair, reported.

►The report was received by unanimous voice vote.

Special Commission on the Just Rebuilding of the Gulf Coast

Tronn Moller reported on behalf of the Special Commission.

Co-Chairs Bishop Thomas L. Hoyt, Jr., and the Rev. Michael Livingston, said Tronn Moller has been a strong leader on Katrina issues.

►The report was received by unanimous voice vote.

Address by the Rev. Otis Moss III

Bishop Demetrios introduced the Rev. Otis Moss, pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. Mr. Moss addressed the General Assembly on racial justice issues. His remarks are paraphrased:

I am happy and thankful the election is over. We no longer see cameras hanging out in the balcony.

Joshua 1:1

Where do we go from here?

Quoting from James Weldon Johnson: Possessing the promise. Treading our path with the blood of the slaughter, out of the gloomy past.

The election of Barack Obama is a very powerful moment, a very unique moment, but also a very dangerous moment.

Did we ever think that we would ever see this day? Did we ever think that the promissory note would finally be redeemed in 2008? We will never fully grasp it until we feel the mist of the river Jordan on our faces.

What is unique about this moment … is the reaction around the world. As I watched brothers and sisters in Obama Japan shout about the new president, aboriginals in Australia, France and Germany, people in Israedl shouting Barack, which means, praise the Lord.

What disturbed me and what is so dangerous about this moment in American history. Pundits said now all of this racism is over. Every station we turned to said as a result of a person kissed by nature's sun in the Oval office, racism is over. We are in a post wilderness moment but we have yet to move into the promised land. And the most dangerous thing an individual can do is confuse the promised moment with the promised land. It is in the in between that we must be careful. Joshua has a word for us, because this is a post wilderness moment.

No longer can you use the markers to rally the people. A new generation has arisen standing a few feet from the land of milk and honey, a generation with no memory, just the testimony of elders who will fade from the scene. Moses is dead. Moses generation is God.

You remember Moses. The one who had to discipline his own brother when he set up his own ministry, Golden Calf Inc.

Joshua has been elected leader of a new nation, a nation with great economic hardship. No one would have thought this young man could rise to the highest office in the land. The last time this happened, it was Joseph. No more oppression. No more class based imperialism. No more manifest destiny. We can now get beyond the horrific moment of history. All seems to be right with the world.

No more slavery, no more domestic terrorists wearing white sheets, they have come a mighty long way. But they are no longer in the promised land. One of the most dangerous times in history is to live in the in-between moment.

Joshua has the youth and wherewithal to step into the Promised Land, but you can't celebrate when an individual crosses over, you have to make sure that those who don't have the same education level are able to cross over into the promised land. Success is not defined individually, it is defined collectively.

Just because one goes to the white house, we must raise the question about those on the margins of society so they can cross over, too. We still must struggle with human dignity. We must learn some principles to possess the promised land.

Living in a Joshua moment we should never forget the Moses generation. This moment did not just fall out of the sky, this did not just happen overnight, there were people of the Moses generation who sacrificed so that this moment would be possible. As collective history, a history of struggle. We stand on the shoulders of those who have allowed us to be where we are.

Black graduation – when big momma sees her child cross the stage it is because of her work and prayers the child who is walking across the stage is standing on her shoulders.

Obama is in the white house because of Tubman Dubois Washington Ida B. Wells, Jorlita Lee, Marian Wright, Marcus Garvey, Claude McCay a Moses, all who went before us to make the moment possible.

As I was with Moses … in other word, don't forget your history. I promised this moment to Abraham and it is now in your hands.

It takes more than history to possess the promised land. History is not enough to transform a community. It is the connection of history and our faith. When history and faith are wedded together they give birth to hallelujah.

Joshua understands this idea that if I am to move into this moment I must bring someone else with me.

My faith tells me that the spirit of the lord is on me, my faith gives framing to my history.

We are in a post modern moment. Joshua was in a unique moment.

We live in a post modern but we live in a post-soul world. Many of you in this room are soul children. You recall the name Aretha Franklin who learned to sing respect in his father's church. Marvin Gaye, Sam Cooke, sing with gospel group. When you talk about jayzee you are talking

about a generation that is post-soul. If you say anything about amazing grace they think you are talking about a sister. The hip hop generation is a post civil rights generation.

In 1972 hip hop was born due to demographic changes. 1979 world changes we have the first hip hop song that goes national. The sugar hill gang, the same place where Langston Hughes and Zora Neal

The music is fun, but then Reagan gets into office and all of a sudden those who are poor in NY because they were already put out of the church decided they were going to critique Reagan, 1984, the message, grand master flash. They begin to critique what poverty is all about. Because the FCC was dismantled under Reagan, I will sell your music if you take out the critique and replacer it with the n word and the b word. Gangsta rap 1984-86.

The question that must be raised is, what was the church doing? Arguing about where the liturgy is, and in the meantime our children were dying. Suburban community that didn't really understand the village concept, front porches. If you are a child who is coming home from school early, Big Momma's already on the porch and has called your mama before you're even down the street.

Rise of Wal-Mart coincides with the riser of prosperity gospel. Rise of prosperity churches and mega churches simultaneously as wal-mart is on the rise. Our children are catching hell and no one is bringing a word of heaven to them.

Pre-promise children.

Wherever you put your foot will be yours. Victory has already been assured. You can't operate as a victim any more. You are a victor.

During the Civil Rights movement, an elderly woman had her own personal march around the white house. Everywhere she put her foot she said, one day, one day the door will swing wide open in this house. One day people who had to walk through the back stairs will walk through the front door of the White House. I don't know when this moment will come but it will come some say. We must see victory before it happens.

There is so much work for us to do in this post wilderness time.

We as a community of faith, we cannot be satisfied so long as 40 million are without healthcare, so long as we see a drop-out rate of 50 percent, so long as there is illiteracy, we cannot be satisfied as a church. Till maybe one day when we will see justice role down like a river, beat our swords into plow shares, lion with land, every child who is hunger can be fed, when we can literally be a perfect union, that there is a cloud above out heads that one day we will be tall enough to wear.

Break

Report on the Human Trafficking Conference

Pastor Ann Tiemeyer, director of Women's Ministries, reported on the Human Trafficking Conference. The full report of the conference can be found at:
http://www.ncccusa.org/traffickingconference/index.html

Response to A Common Word Between Us and You

Dr. Antonios Kireopoulos reported on the ecumenical response to the message from Muslim leaders. The response can be found at:
http://www.ncccusa.org/news/ecumenicalresponse.html

Chair of General Assembly 2009 Planning Committee

Mrs. Arpi Kouzouian, Chair of the Nominations Committee, presented Dr. Ramon E. Hunt as chair of the General Assembly Planning Committee for 2009.

►The nomination of Dr. Hunt was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Committee on Collaboration

Dennis Frado moved that the General Assembly elect to the Committee on Collaboration the President and General Secretary of the NCC, and that the General Secretary be authorized to the board of directors to appoint two persons representing the General Assembly.

►The motion was carried by unanimous voice vote.

Committee on Reference New Business

The Committee on Reference presented the following actions:

From the Committee of Reference
General Assembly of the NCC and CWS
November 11-13, 2008

Motion to recommend action by the Executive Committees of the NCC and CWS:
Response to the Current Financial Crisis

The United States and indeed the entire global community is in the midst of an economic crisis. The General Assembly of the NCC and CWS, in recognition of the urgency of this crisis, recommends that the Executive Committees of the NCC Governing Board and CWS Board of Directors at their next respective meetings to issue a joint response on the crisis on behalf of the General Assembly. In crafting this joint response, we urge these Executive Committees to consider and implement the following as appropriate:

1) the establishment of a working group composed of Christian ethicists, economists, businesspeople, pastors and other relevant partners meet in 2009 to discuss how we live out the gospel in our economic life.

2) the development or identification of study resources that promote conversation and reflection in local churches about our moral obligations to one another in a world of vast economic disparity and crisis.

3) an invitation to the member communions encouraging them to engage in critical and prayerful reflection on the use of their financial resources.

4) an invitation to member communions and their congregations to deliberate about economic models so that the moral, ethical, and theological assumptions behind them are made clear.

5) Develop efforts to engage Christians in our constituent congregations to contact their members of Congress and other public officials on these issues through the NCC and CWS and their denominational advocacy offices.

6) Background – For Information Only

Response to the Current Financial Crisis

Roughly one million people have lost their homes to foreclosure since the housing crisis began a year ago. Some projections estimate that up to five million people might lose their homes over the next five years. That represents approximately 10% of homes with mortgages nationwide. Simultaneously, the Dow Jones has lost about 35% of its values in the last ten months. The current liquidity crisis is making it difficult to get car loans, home loans and small business loans; and our national unemployment rate has risen above 6% for the first time in five years. These stresses are not just macro-economic trends, these economic statistics represent the painful reality of increasing strains and demands on our personal budgets as well as our community resources and as faith communities, we must step up to address the rising humanitarian needs in our congregations and in our communities.

While this global crisis of confidence offers us significant immediate challenges that we must address as we seek to care for our neighbors, it also has the potential to serve as not just a well-founded and a necessary "correction" to an overly inflated economic reality, but a true "kairos" moment for the human community. Kairos is a Greek word that means God's time and it is often used to refer to times of crisis that represent the potential for a new possibility or new reality. This kairos moment offers us the potential to reclaim the moral foundations of our faith that challenge us to create structures of justice in our society and to care for the least of these in our communities as the foundation for our economy as well as our faith lives and faith communities.

Each of our member communions has traditions and resources for assessing our Christian responsibilities to the neighbor in need. We also share a common gift in the Biblical message: care for the "widow and orphan," prophetic warnings about inequality, corruption and oppression, the example of Paul's collection for the church in Jerusalem, and the example of Jesus himself, who, in one of Paul's images, became "poor yet making us rich."

Economies, markets, and social structures are human creations. They are the means by which human beings order and structure the basic activities of human existence. The economies, markets, and

social systems we create are moral structures that reflect our understanding of what it means to be human and what it means to live a good life. From the perspective of Christian ethics, the values of social justice and sustainability are essential to the formation of a healthy society and are central to any economic system that is meant to serve the common good rather than the needs and desires of the wealthy elite. Economic models of globalization that focus exclusively on growth, trade, and deregulation view the increase of profit as their ultimate goal. The focus on profit and wealth in recent years reflects an unremitting greed that is inconsistent with a Christian understanding of the realm of God on earth.

This emphasis on self-interest and greed has eclipsed our understanding of the common good. What is at stake is our ability to hold the values of individual rights and private property alongside the values of interdependence and sustainability. In holding these sets of values together we might shape the practices of globalization in ways that move our economy in new directions. Economic activity is inherently an expression of moral behavior precisely because it is human behavior. We must develop economic models that are capable of responding to the realities of our global and integrated world in the 21st century.

The current economic crisis represents a kairos moment for North American Christians to rethink the ways in which globalization and economic exchange ought to be ordered. It is time for us to recognize our obligation to examine what values undergird different visions and interpretations of globalization that people hold. Not all forms of globalization and all economic systems and structures are morally equivalent. As a human community, as people of faith, we are all called upon to participate in the creation of the social structures that guide our world, including those structures that shape and facilitate our economic exchange.

►The motion was approved by voice vote.

From the Committee of Reference
General Assembly of the NCC and CWS
November 11-13, 2008

Resolution: To Commend a Renewed National Religious Call
For Public Support of the U.N. Human Rights Covenants

Whereas December 10, 2008, marks the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations; and

Whereas the United Nations International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights strive to guarantee the rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration; and

Whereas more than 150 nations have ratified these Covenants, and President Jimmy Carter asked the U.S. Senate to approve them in 1978; and

Whereas several leaders of national religious communities joined in a similar call prior to the 30th anniversary in 1978 of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations; and

Whereas the United States has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights but has yet to ratify International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and

Whereas we are daily reminded that people suffer because their human rights are unfulfilled or violated throughout the world as well as in the United States; and

Whereas our religious faith calls us to affirm the dignity and worth of every human being and to struggle for justice for oppressed people everywhere;

Therefore now we,

The General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCC) and Church World Service (CWS) commend the following proposed measures to the General Secretary of the NCC and the Executive Director of CWS for appropriate action:

Call upon all members of the religious community, our nation, and our leaders to observe Human Rights Week, December 10-17, 2008, as an occasion to renew our national commitment to the advancement of human rights; and

Urge the President of the United States to declare December 10, 2008 as Human Rights Day and December 10-17, 2008, as Human Rights Week throughout the United States; and

Call upon the U.S. Senate to ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and

Urge our churches to work together with synagogues, mosques, temples and religious and other organizations to initiate a coordinated effort to inform the American public about and acquire favorable public support for these human rights covenants.

►The motion was approved by voice vote.

From the Committee of Reference
General Assembly of the NCC and CWS
November 11-13, 2008

Resolution Calling for an End to the Persecution Against Christians in India

The General Assembly of the NCC and CWS condemns religious persecution wherever it takes place. We have as part of our ecumenical family member churches with roots in India. In solidarity with our Indian brothers and sisters, the 2008 General Assembly:

- condemns the religious violence and atrocities being perpetrated against Christians and other minorities in India;

- calls on the government of India to take necessary action to stop such violations of human rights;

- urges the US government to take legislative and diplomatic action concurrent with these concerns; and.

- requests the General Secretary to convey the concerns of U.S. churches reflected in this action to the appropriate public officials.

►The motion was approved by voice vote.

Statement from Young Adult New Fire Participants, November 5, 2008:

We are young adult ecumenists, called by Christ to relationships of prayer and accountability with one other. We represent a wide variety of Christian traditions, including those who are not members of the National Council of Churches/Church World Service, all gathered in affirmation of our common baptism. We are committed to reaching out to more of our brothers and sisters in Christ to establish a wider and deeper fellowship that expands the ecumenical circle beyond those gathered here.

We moved from a day on Saturday of ecumenical formation, history, and training, placing ourselves within the context of the greater ecumenical movement, to a day on Sunday that included dialogue, both with each other and with seasoned ecumenists that led to deeper relationships being built. Monday saw us send each other forth, commissioning us to take the relationships forged here into the larger ecumenical movement in our contexts. Throughout our time, worship fueled the fire of what we did together. A highlight of this was an opportunity on Sunday to worship with a local congregation, First Plymouth United Church of Christ. We pushed our boundaries, shared our vulnerabilities, and grew together as brothers and sisters part of something larger than ourselves. By deepening our relationships as ecumenical groups and individuals, we solidified the relationships that will keep this fire burning, and brighten it into the future.

We understand that our present unity in Christ is not the end goal, but the beginning of engagement with the world.

We have a deep commitment to conversations and relationships with our fellow Christians, including those with whom we most deeply disagree, and those who have not yet been part of our conversation.

We hope to use these deepening relationships with one another to share resources and knowledge that will enable us to act cooperatively on diverse issues in diverse contexts.

As young adults committed to the ecumenical movement, we seek to achieve this vision through the following commitments:

We will issue invitations to new partners in order to increase the diversity of our

corporate body to better reflect the reality of the Body of Christ throughout the global church.

Our ecumenical organizations will engage in critical self-reflection to determine where God is calling us and how our particular vocation and gifts can enhance the ecumenical movement by responsibly sharing resources of time, funding, staff, and knowledge.

We will use the new web site Faith Connects Us, a ministry of the US Conference of the World" Council of Churches to bring together all of these resources in a central and widely accessible location.

We will also deepen our relationships through prayer partnerships and new technologies to connect us across distances to maintain these relationships that make these commitments possible, such as Facebook, blogs, and Skype conferences.

We invite you, our fellow ecumenists, to join us in this vision by extending invitations to young adults within your communions, and by praying with us and for us as our generation seeks continued renewal of Christ's church through the fire of the Holy Spirit.

The 40 participants of New Fire included representatives from over 17 denominations and mem17er churches, over a dozen universities, seminaries and divinity schools, and numerous young adult ecumenical initiatives and organizations including: The Ecumenical Young Adult Ministries Team of the National Council of Churches, The Young Adult Task Force of the US Conference for the World Council of Churches, The World Student Christian Federation, ECHOS Commission on Youth of the World Council of Churches, The Council for Ecumenical Student Christian Ministries, National Catholic Young Adult Ministries of America, Student Christian Movement of Canada, The National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program, The Young Adult Ecumenical Forum, Ecumenical Advocacy Days, Christian Churches Together, and The Ecumenical Water Network and Church World Service.

Tribute to Father Eugene, GOARCH, who closed the meeting with a prayer.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
The Rev. José Luis Casal, Secretary

Transcribed by Philip E. Jenks

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[ii] The 2007-2011 Strategic Plan of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America
All Bible references and quotes found in this resolution are from the New Revised Standard Version translation.

[iii] A compendium of policy documents, statements and resources can be accessed at: www.ncccusa.org/immigration/

[iv] "THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD", Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches, 2007

[v] A compendium of biblical references that inform our theological basis for addressing immigration concerns can be found at: http://www.ncccusa.org/immigration/bible. A compilation of statements and resources created by ecumenical bodies and member communions can be found at: http://www.ncccusa.org/immigration/

[vi] In Genesis 1:26, "***Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.***"

[vii] Deuteronomy 10:19 states "You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Hebrews 13:2 urges, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." Paul reinforces this teaching in Romans 12:13, with, "Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."

[viii] In "THE CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION" the member communions stated, "We believe that through increased Christian concern in immigration, the churches and their members can make a fuller witness to our faith that, under God, men and nations are responsible to each other and for the welfare of all mankind."

[ix] In "UNITED STATES IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION POLICY" the member communions stated, "On the international level, we believe the United States for moral reasons, as well as in the interest of its own economic and political security, should remain steadfast in its purpose to cooperate with other nations in meeting the needs of displaced persons, refugees, and surplus populations."

[x] Deuteronomy 10:19, "***You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt***"

[xi] In "CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION" the Communions resolved: "We urge the churches and their members to make the most effective Christian witness they can on migration and related matters, in developing public opinion and in helping those in federal and state governments and intergovernmental agencies to shape migration policies, legislation and practices" Elsewhere in "CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION" the Communions stated: "We urge increased attention by all people in local parishes, in councils of churches, and in the work of church men and women, to keep under constant study, and to make more alive in public concern, the laws which our Government has enacted or should enact to help meet the critical needs of mankind." Also in CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION, the communions stated: "Study and concern should include not only migration matters, but all those undertakings through which our nation does and can lend material as well as moral assistance to other peoples for their economic and social progress."

[xii] In "CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION, the churches called for replacement of a previous quota system with one that gave priorities to families seeking reunification. While those changes were made, present governmental proposals would eliminate the longstanding family-unity priority.