

The National Council of the Churches of Christ (U.S.A.)
and
The Council of Churches of Cuba

Joint Statement

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God. (II Corinthians 5: 16-20)

We, Protestant, Episcopal and Orthodox church leaders from the United States and from the ecumenical movement in Cuba, and members of both councils of churches, begin this joint statement by giving thanks for signs of God's reconciling presence in our deeply-divided world. One such sign, we believe, is the history of mutually-nurturing relationships between our churches. These relationships were strengthened when a delegation of Cuban church representatives took part in the 2010 General Assembly of the National Council of Churches (USA) and Church World Service, and are being further enhanced by this visit to Cuba of U.S. church leaders, November 28—December 2, 2011. These times of shared prayer and witness, organized by the councils of churches in our two countries, are expressions of the unity we have in Jesus Christ, a unity far stronger than embargoes and political disputes. Thanks be to God!

We recall U.S. President Barack Obama's publicly-stated intention "to review and revise long-standing U.S. policy toward Cuba" and pray for its speedy and complete fulfillment. We give thanks for the real, but still-too-tentative, steps toward normal relations between our countries, including the lifting of some travel restrictions by the Obama administration in January of 2011.

We have examined together other contemporary developments, specially the current "updating" of Cuban economic policies; and the growing income disparity and high level of unemployment now affecting so many in the United States. Clearly, our countries are in the midst of significant transitions, historical moment marked by both anxiety and potential. Together we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit that our churches may bear witness to God's will for justice in economic life (e.g., Isaiah 3, Jeremiah 6, and Amos 4).

We give thanks, not only for God's presence in the past, but also for God's promises for a different future—a future in which reconciliation proves stronger than alienation (e.g., Isaiah 65:25). With this in mind, we declare the following shared conviction: that the half century of animosity between our countries must end.

So much has changed in fifty years! The histories of our nations (only ninety miles apart) and their peoples are so deeply intertwined! We have no doubt that it is in the best interest of both Cuba and the U.S. to initiate the sort of normalized relations appropriate to sovereign, and neighboring countries. This position is supported by the international community — which has sought the lifting of the embargo twenty times in the United Nations General Assembly — and is an expression of our faith in God's power to unite.

There are, of course, important issues that still need our attention, as is true in any relationship between nations, especially nations with a long history of political conflicts and differences, which cause

unjustifiable human misunderstanding and suffering. Our pastoral commitment, based in faith in Jesus Christ, drives us to work for the resolution of such humanitarian issues.

These humanitarian issues include:

1. The embargo, which is the major obstacle to the resolution of differences, to economic interaction, and to fuller engagement of our peoples and churches;
2. The imprisonment in the U.S. of the Cuban Five (whose sentences have been deemed unjust by numerous human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and the United Nations); and
3. The incarceration in Cuba of the American citizen Alan Gross.

We write this joint statement at the beginning of Advent, a season of hopeful waiting for the coming of our Lord, for the fulfillment of God's promise of "peace on earth and good will to all people" (Luke 2:14). Together, we affirm the importance of living in hope, but also to demonstrate the credibility of our hope by acting to help make it so. We, therefore, commit ourselves to promote, even more vigorously, the relationship between our churches and church and ecumenical councils, and to advocate, even more assertively, for the normalization of relations between our countries. Such commitment, we confess, is a response to the One who has bound us to one another (e.g., Ephesians 4:6) and sent us forth to be ambassadors of God's reconciling love.

To extend our commitments, we pledge to meet again in the year 2013.

Havana, Cuba.

December 2, 2011