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CCT 2017 Executive Report  
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Christian Churches Together was created to provide an inclusive space where the major Christian traditions in our country could build bridges of understanding and engage in respectful dialogue. The difference between CCT and other ecumenical bodies is that it includes the voices of traditions that historically have stayed apart from each other. From 2001 to 2016 CCT has provided unique opportunities for engagement on the topics of hunger, poverty, racism, and issues related to these major topics. We are able to have these conversations in an atmosphere of respect and mutual admonition. During the last two years the political and religious situation in our country has shifted dramatically. We have seen an increase in tensions and disagreements between Christians of progressive and conservative persuasions. Many who in the past were amicable to the possibility of engaging with those with whom they disagree, now are not so sure.

The current divisive environment in our country forces us to consider what the right path towards promoting peace and unity is. Would engaging only those that look, think and behave like us help us to bring about healing and unity in our nation?

Organizations like the National Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals offer opportunities for dialogue but these efforts are limited to certain traditions; CCT expands the scope of relationships. A search for understanding and cooperation must be inclusive of all traditions; it must be inclusive of the experiences of all Christians, after all, it is Christian unity what we are fostering. The values of the gospel compel us to take risks and seek that which is elusive in society. We can't afford to stay bunkered down in our safe and comfortable theological and religious constructs. Progressive, center, and conservative Christians must take risks for the sake of peace, justice, and unity.

Since its inception CCT has emphasized the nurturing of relationships, through deepening friendships and focusing on spiritual practices (prayer, liturgy, and sharing of testimonies). We are different from other Ecumenical bodies in that our dialogues have not focused strictly on historical theological divisions. We have carried out a continual theological conversation on the topics of hunger/poverty, racism, immigration, and criminal justice.

Last year we focused our activities on the areas mentioned above. A key element of the ministry of CCT is my work as executive director. My responsibilities include: organizing and providing leadership to the Annual Convocation, the CCT Latino Network, and the CCT Mission Network. I serve as ambassador of CCT's vision at church conferences, assemblies, synods, etc. I also work closely with several of our participant organizations advocating in Congress for legislation that reflect our values in the areas of hunger/poverty and racial justice. My participation in all of these events (more than 30 last year) served to embody and articulate the values, principles and consensus of the churches.

In 2017 we began a process of evaluating CCT's vision and purpose. This process was in part initiated because of the lower than usual interest in the 2017 annual convocation. The steering committee decided that after 10 years of existence it was appropriate for CCT to take a closer look at our mission and purpose. A working group worked on this last year and the steering committee will receive their report at its spring meeting.

The three events held in 2017 were:

**CCT Latino Network-** Fifteen senior Latino/a leaders met in Orlando, FL, in April of 2017. They spent two days looking at the issue of immigration reform, sharing best practices (pastoral and advocacy), and in fellowship. At times these conversations were tense, reflecting today's current socio-political situation.

**Annual Convocation-** The annual convocation was held in Anaheim, CA, on September 20-22. Approximately sixty people representing 33 of the 39 participant communions/organizations attended the convocation. The general theme was "*A Conversation on Healing the Divisions in Church and Society*". The key sessions included the following topics: How to have a civil dialogue that can build up church and society; What must the U.S. Church do to be a faithful Instrument of Racial Justice and Reconciliation in our country?; The role of CCT in the current ecumenical landscape and, Renewing (perfecting) the narrative of CCT. At the final session the majority of the participants expressed their strong support of the work of CCT. They committed themselves to encourage their communions to strengthen their participation and support of CCT.

**CCT Mission Network-** The network had their first gathering on December in Grand Rapids, MI. Eight senior mission staff represented their communions. These eight leaders represented protestant and Evangelical/Pentecostal denominations. The main topic of conversation was the new reality of reverse missions. *Reverse mission* refers to the large number of Christians coming to the USA from countries around the world and the impact they are having in American Christianity. The participants are committed to meeting again and reaching out to their counterparts in the communions that were not present. They will also reach out to Orthodox communions and the USSCCB; as their participation in this network it is very important.

In order to carry out the work of CCT it is critical that the communions/organizations maintain their financial support. Since its inception, CCT has been able to operate with a very modest operating budget. The financial contribution expected from the communions/organizations is minimal in comparison with the commitment of the churches/organizations to similar bodies.

The reality is that even when these financial contributions are minimal, some communions often fail to fulfill their pledge.

The founding leaders had high hopes that CCT would offer new opportunities for the Church in our country to grow closer together. The genius of CCT is that it offers the opportunity for all the major Christian traditions to come face to face, to listen and learn from each other. Christian Churches Together has a unique vocation. I recognize that the vision of CCT has yet to be fully realized. There are several reasons for this and this is not the appropriate place to expand on those. Nevertheless, I must emphasize that in order for the CCT vision to flourish we would need a deeper commitment from the communions and their leadership. We hope that the process of evaluating our vision and purpose will reveal new ways to deepen the level of engagement, increase the participation of the communions, and renew the commitment to be in relationship across our theological, social, and political differences.

Christian Churches Together can be a powerful instrument of the Holy Spirit to heal the divisions of the church in our country. We must choose if we want to perpetuate polarization or if we are willing to take risks and commit to a search for Christian unity that transcends our human limitations. God is always ready to empower the Church to be a faithful witness of the transformational power of the gospel.