

Continued

No. 9118

**REPORT ON IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MUTUAL
RECOGNITION AND RECONCILIATION OF ORDAINED MINISTRIES
OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)**

This report is submitted to the General Assembly in response to its previous action on Full Communion with the United Church of Christ.

In submitting this report, the Department of Ministry, Division of Homeland Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Office for Church Life and Leadership (United Church of Christ) report the implementing activities toward the mutual reconciliation of ordained ministries of the two denominations called for in the 1989 "full communion" action.

I. A Description of Our Work Thus Far

The Office for Church Life and Leadership and the Department of Ministry, Division of Homeland Ministries, convened a work group comprised of members of the staffs of each unit, a conference minister (United Church of Christ), and regional minister Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It consulted with David Taylor of the Consultation on Church Union (COCU).

We initiated dialogue with those who would be key partners in implementing any strategies which would finally be recommended: staff and members of Committees on Ministry (United Church of Christ) and Commissions on Ministry (Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)), and staff of national bodies of both denominations. In addition, we extended an open invitation to any other interested persons or groups. We developed and circulated a Dialogue Paper in both denominations, had meetings with placement (United Church of Christ) and relocation (Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)) personnel, and were able to have other face-to-face meetings. Data was generated which we shared with the Ecumenical Partnership Committee.

We anticipate that our working group will continue to meet, bringing further refinement to the steps proposed in this report. The working group will be in continued contact with committees, commissions, and related staff to implement interim and other steps.

II. The Need for Ongoing Information and Advocacy

It is clear from the feedback, that information about, and advocacy for, the decisions already made by our denominations to be in Ecumenical Partnership is greatly needed. The feedback revealed that implications of the decision to be in Ecumenical Partnership are not widely known or understood, especially as they relate to ministry, and that the nature of Ecumenical Partnership is being confused with other forms of ecumenical reconciliation of denominations. It also indicated that we do not know much about each other generally, and that advocacy for Ecumenical Partnership is far from being pervasive.

To the degree that these observations are true, implementation of recommendations to reconcile ordained ministries is, in some measure, jeopardized. This is especially true if dialogue and debate about the recommendations become confused with debate on the Ecumenical Partnership decision previously made.

The Ecumenical Partnership model of ecumenical reconciliation of denominations, into which we have entered, is distinctive from models of merger or union. The Merger Model forms a new denomination in such a way that the character of each denomination is merged into a new entity, forming a new identity and single structure prior to the merger. The Union Model forms a new denomination with a single structure, honoring each of the traditions coming into union, while allowing for the emergence of a new identity to be formed after the union has taken place. These distinctions help to understand why the formation of the United Church of Christ, for example, is understood to be a union rather than merger.

The Ecumenical Partnership model for ecumenical reconciliation of denominations provides for each denomination to retain its own identity and structure, while reconciling among other things, its ordained ministries. The Ecumenical Partnership model does not predispose itself to either merger or union, but seeks the renewal of each denomination as the Ecumenical Partnership unfolds. It remains open-ended as to where the Ecumenical Partnership will lead. While all models of ecumenical reconciliation of denominations are distinctive, they commonly share a commitment to an ecumenical reformation of the Church in response to the oneness of the body of Christ. They seek to express an understanding of the new possibilities for witness and mission afforded by the new reality.

III. Mutual Recognition of Ordained Ministers

Mutual recognition of ordained ministers means the recognition of each other's ordained ministries as valid and each other's ministers as truly ministers of word and sacrament. We currently have ordained ministers who serve in settings of ministry in the other denomination. Mutual recognition of ordained ministers is acknowledged as a present reality.

IV. Steps to Partnership and Rationales

A. Final recommendations for the implementation of "the mutual reconciliation of ordained ministries" will be developed during 1991-95 for General Synod and General Assembly consideration and action in 1995.

Rationales

Pointing towards 1995 for final recommendations will seem overly ambitious to some and much too slow for others. However, there are numerous issues which need to be addressed and consensus achieved in both denominations before final action can be taken. The following illustrate some of the issues before us.

An understanding of reconciliation needs to be developed which expresses both its corporate and individual character. Ordained ministry is an office of the church, not a possession of individuals. While reconciliation needs to provide for individual ordained ministers, upon their initiative, to serve in both denominations, it needs a corporate expression in which the ordained ministries of the two denominations are seen as one ministry.

Mutually acceptable requirements for ordination and ordained ministerial standing need to be developed. These would provide for an ordained minister of one denomination who wishes to serve in the Ecumenical Partnership denomination to do so. Adequate understanding and affirmation of the Ecumenical Partnership denomination would be required.

Commonly understood policies, procedures and language for "standing" need to be developed whereby ordained ministers of one denomination may seek and serve in the Ecumenical Partnership denomination.

Issues related to the eldership as part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) need to be explored in relation to the Partnership.

Issues related to such things as accountability and discipline, as well as representation and voting privileges, of ordained ministers serving in the Ecumenical Partnership denomination need to be explored and resolved.

Issues of potential cooperation among national structures and among regional/conference/association structures related to ministry and placement/relocation need to be explored.

Issues of geography and regional density of each denomination which impact the mode of implementation in many areas need to be addressed.

Policies need to be developed governing participation by ordained ministers in the health insurance and pension programs of the two denominations.

Issues related to licensed lay ministers.

B. Implementation of any General Synod and General Assembly actions taken in 1995 will need to be phased in during 1995-97, culminating in liturgical acknowledgement of the full corporate reconciliation of the ordained ministries of United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) at the General Synod and General Assembly in 1997. In addition, opportunities for participation in liturgical settings celebrating the reconciliation of ordained ministries will need to be provided to all local churches and ordained ministers.

C. Interim steps toward reconciliation are being developed which express the unique relationship into which our two denominations have already moved. These steps provide for the movement of ordained ministers, on an individual basis, between our two denominations until the liturgical acknowledgement of the reconciliation of our ordained ministries in 1997. These interim steps will be developed collaboratively and implemented voluntarily by Committees on the Ministry (United Church of Christ).

Rationale

The steps outlined above provide for a process covering six years to completely implement the mutual reconciliation of ordained ministries. Nevertheless, Ecumenical Partnership is already in place. In many settings of our two denominations, associations, regions, local churches, and ordained ministers are eager to give expression to the vision of the Ecumenical Partnership. We believe interim steps need to be taken which make it possible for ordained ministers of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), on an individual basis, to serve in the other denomination in a way that gives special evidence of the Ecumenical Partnership.

Issues of standing and its requirements in each church need to be addressed so that the integrity of the ordained ministry of each denomination is maintained while final decisions about reconciliation are being developed.

The time between 1991 and 1997 needs to provide opportunities for conferences, associations, regions, local churches and denominational bodies in each denomination to find ways of sharing life together intentionally. While such interaction does not itself reconcile our ordained ministries, it can foster a climate in which the reception of the reconciliation of ordained ministry can flourish.

FOOTNOTE

The actions taken by the General Assembly and General Synod in 1989 declaring "full communion" between the two churches, received the following paragraphs as commentary on the meaning of full communion:

"Mutual recognition of ordained ministries (ministers of word and sacrament of the United Church of Christ; ordained elders and ministers of word and sacrament of the Disciples) is intended to acknowledge in the ministries of the partner church the manifest blessing of God and the fruit of the Spirit, and therefore to affirm them as true ministries of the one, holy Church of Jesus Christ. Recog-