



## **‘A New Way Forward’ Proposed for CUIC**

March 11, 2010 – The heads of churches and ecumenical officers of the member communions represented in Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) met in Baltimore, Maryland, on February 17 for what proved to be a significant and hopeful moment of recommitment to CUIC’s original vision in giving expression to the visible unity of the church.

This meeting grew out of a plenary session of CUIC in 2008 when the member churches determined that, in the face of the decision of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AME Zion) to sever its relationship with CUIC and in light of concerns expressed by other member churches that CUIC had not been fully committed to addressing issues of racial justice, CUIC would take time to grieve this breach in our covenant, to understand how racism operates both within our CUIC relationship and the wider church, and to seek reconciliation with the AME Zion before moving forward in this relationship.

The tone of the entire conversation during this gathering was set as Bishop Warren Brown, President of the Council of Bishops of AME Zion Church, expressed his belief that the AME Zion bishops will be considering an action to return to full participation in CUIC and that “we might all move forward together.”

The primary decision reached at this meeting was to recommend a proposal to the CUIC member communions at a plenary session in mid-January 2011 calling for re-affirmation of the “eight marks of commitment” originally approved in 2002 as the basis for our relationship within CUIC, and identifying overcoming racism and seeking racial justice as the core commitment for CUIC’s life together in the future.

In light of this basic recommendation, three initiatives were approved for the coming biennium (2011-2012):

- to convene a Consultation on the intersection between the reconciliation of ministries and race;
- to partner with the other ecumenical organizations to foster efforts around a significant issue where race plays a strong role (e.g., the penal justice system, public education, health care, etc.); and,
- that ecumenical officers convene the heads of churches annually so that they can deepen their relationship with each other, particularly in the context of our racial justice commitments.

It was agreed that the first issue taken up by CUIC would be in working together to develop educational materials for all of our churches in understanding the history of Haiti in light of racism that has impacted its development as a nation and has implications today for the current relief and rebuilding efforts following upon the earthquake in mid-January 2010.

The Rev. Michael Livingston, Executive Director of the International Council of Community Churches (ICCC), moderated the meeting. Bishop John White, ecumenical officer for the African Methodist Episcopal Church, served as chair of the steering committee that prepared for this gathering of heads of CUIC communions.

In reflecting on the day-long conversation, Bishop White expressed the hope of all participants in this meeting in stating, “This has been a very positive and productive meeting. Indeed, it is the first time since 2002 that the heads of these communions have been together to explore the promise of this relationship of unity for our common witness in the future. I look forward to the implementation of our decisions today and to God’s blessings upon CUIC.”

The gathering began with an opening worship led by the Rev. David Wickmann, President of the Moravian Church Northern Province, and concluded with a service of worship and celebration of the Lord’s Supper that was led by Bishop Sharon Rader, Ecumenical Officer of the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church.

*Heads of churches and ecumenical officers attending this meeting were Bishop John Bryant and Bishop John White (AME), Bishop Warren Bryant (AME Zion), the Rev. Sharon Watkins and the Rev. Robert Welsh (Disciples), Bishop Thomas Hoyt and Bishop Ronald Cunningham (CME), Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori (Episcopal), The Rev. Michael Livingston and the Rev. Herman Harmelink (ICCC), the Rev. David Wickmann and the Rev. Hermann Weinlick (Moravian), the Rev. Gradye Parsons and the Rev. Robina Winbush (PCUSA), Bishop Sharon Rader and the Rev. Steven Sidorak (UM), and the Rev. Geoffrey Black and the Rev. Lydia Veliko (UCC). Bishop Mark Hanson (ELCA), who was on an ecumenical journey in Europe, was represented by The Rev. Sherman Hicks.*

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