

# Ecumenical Connection

A publication of the Illinois Conference of Churches

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## Highlights from Twenty Years of Ecumenical Efforts

*Sister Joan McGuire*

Over twenty years ago, I became the Director of the Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs for the Archdiocese of Chicago and a representative of the Archdiocese on the Illinois Conference of Churches. I was asked to share some highlights of my ecumenical efforts. My sharing may be appropriate for I think I am the longest standing member of the representatives of the ICC and probably the oldest.

Through both a dialogue of life in my family of Protestant and Catholic first cousins and a dialogue of truth in my education within my Dominican family, I brought "ecumenical readiness" and a love for all things ecumenical to my position in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

There are two significant areas of concern, one internal and one external, which make up my day-by-day ecumenical efforts. The first is providing formation and education to Catholics on the relation of the Catholic Church to other churches and to other religions. This is done through special programs for seminarians, permanent deacons and parish leadership. The second is developing and sustaining relationships with leaders of other churches and helping to make connections with them. In both these internal and external areas I am also trying to identify and bring together "those in the pew" who have a "charisma" for unity. I judge I have been more successful with the external efforts as the following specific highlights indicate.

On my arrival in the office in 1987 three national Lutheran Churches had just merged into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I co-chaired a Lutheran/Catholic Covenant between the Archdiocese and the Metropolitan Chicago Synod that was signed on Pentecost 1989. This very positive experience, not without controversy, increased my commitment to deepen relationships between our two churches. The commitment is kept alive, most fruitfully, by the women's organizations of both churches through their annual joint retreat day.

Ten years later, the Archdiocese and the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Chicago made a Pilgrimage of Love to Constantinople and Rome in 1999. Under the spiritual leadership of Archbishop Francis Cardinal George and Metropolitan Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Chicago, a Catholic and Orthodox delegation experienced the worship and holy sites of each

other's ancient and current traditions. Two highlights were spending a day on the island of Halki with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the audience in Rome with Pope John Paul II.

Another highlight was to co-chair a series of Catholic/Evangelical conversations. Participants included professors from the University of St. Mary of the Lake (Mundelein Seminary) and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield. One of our first conversations was on observing and discussing Eucharistic worship.

In addition to these bilateral relationships I find most significant the foundation of a multilateral ecumenical organization of nineteen Chicago area churches. It began with the desire of the Archbishop of Chicago to have an ecumenical component to the Archdiocesan millennium celebration. Representatives of a number of judicatories planned a common service and authored a beautiful Ecumenical Millennium Prayer.



Sister Joan McGuire, OP - Archdiocese of Chicago



photo: Belvidere/Boone County Food Pantry

[www.elca.org/hunger](http://www.elca.org/hunger)

## I know there is hope for me

A letter from Jay Iguchi

UNITED STATES - I was born in Korea but am now a United States citizen. In 2004, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and at the same time my husband and I unexpectedly lost our business. Soon after that, the bank foreclosed on our home, and we had to use our entire savings to pay my medical bills.

A friend of mine told me about the Belvidere/Boone County Food Pantry in Northern Illinois. At first, I was ashamed that I had to visit the pantry. But I had no choice. I decided to go, and for the first time in a long while I had hope. I realized there were people who cared for me and cared about what I was going through.

During my first visit to the pantry, I was treated with great respect. I left with a lot of quality food products, and I have been using the pantry for one-and-a-half years now. Some day, I hope we will be stable enough to stand on our own financially, but until that day comes, I know there is hope for me.

Now I volunteer at the pantry. I want to give back to the community because I want others to feel less burdened when things go badly in their lives. The Belvidere/Boone County Food Pantry gave me not only hope but the strength to go on.

Jay Iguchi  
A resident of Boone County, Illinois

Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger help support the Belvidere/Boone County Food Pantry and many other ministries like it through the ELCA Domestic Hunger Grants Program.

## Reconnecting and Renewing - A Letter from Rev. Terry L. Clark, co-chair of the Illinois Conference of Churches

Interdependence was in the sociology vocabulary which I learned in college. Frankly I was drawn to this helpful tool to understand not only human relationships but also the larger world God had created so wonderfully complex. It made sense that reality was intentionally connected and was out of balance when disconnected. I quickly learned that being totally independent eventually led to being dysfunctional and eventually to death.

However, it was the words of Jesus in his priestly prayer for his disciples (the Church) which brought theological insight for me into God's will of interdependence. "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." (John 17:11b) "Being one" means we are in relationship that is grounded in God and our relationships which reflects Christ's desired life and mission for his disciples.

My inspired faith in the ecumenical nature of Christ's Church arises from Jesus' passion in this prayer for his followers. The Holy Spirit continues to move me toward this vision of oneness in Christ as I attempt to practice daily the Great Commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. ...A second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39) Genuine interdependence is grounded in God's love and is experienced fully when we live and stay in love with God daily.

I thought you should know the primary reason why I accepted the invitation to serve as Co-Chair of the Leadership Team for the Illinois Conference. As a member of the previous Design Team which through ardent prayer and lively discussion sought God's direction for the ICC, I do believe God is leading us to a new day in reconnecting and renewing our ecumenical relationships. Since I have learned we are one of the few state-wide ecumenical bodies in the U.S.A., I believe we are being called by God and strengthened by the Holy Spirit to lead the various communions of Christ to a new day of being one in Christ in our local communities as well as across the Land of Lincoln.

With the Leadership Team, Bishop Gary Wollersheim and I invite you join us in the journey to of reconnecting and renewing our relationships with each other in the ICC. To accomplish this venture we have already begun with welcoming Pamela Tackett as our new Administrative Coordinator. In a few weeks she has accentuated our communication with you through a new format of a more frequent newsletter, a new exciting, interactive website and a revised attractive brochure which can be downloaded from the ICC website. We want you to know more about ICC and how we can help you spread the news to individuals, groups, and local congregations in your judicatories. With her faith in Christ and many technological and communication skills, Pamela is available to assist you.

Lastly, we are offering ourselves to you for speaking, preaching, and participating in worship as well as discussion groups. Whatever way we can reconnect and renew our relationship with you, we want to do as disciples of Jesus Christ and as representatives of the Illinois Conference of Churches. We ask for your prayers as we enter this new thing with Christ. We claim Christ's promise as our hope for his commission: "With God all things are possible." (Mark 10:27)

Shalom in Christ,

Rev. Terry Clark



# Restoring Balance Through Right Relationships

Article written by Sylvia Morrison. Article published in *Sign of the Times*, Sept-Nov '09, [www.cpt.org](http://www.cpt.org)  
Sylvia can be contacted at [sylviam@cpt.org](mailto:sylviam@cpt.org)

*Christian Peacemaker Teams is a program of active peace-making sponsored by: Church of the Brethren, Friends United Meeting, Mennonite Church Canada, Mennonite Church USA, Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, Congregation of St. Basil (the Basilians), Every Church a Peace Church, On Earth Peace, and Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. For additional information on the Christian Peacemaker Teams, visit their website at [www.cpt.org](http://www.cpt.org).*

Our relationships have been impacted severely by dynamics of power, position, social location, socialization, privilege, and oppression. Therefore, if we are to have right relationships with each other, we need to become aware of our privilege and places of oppression, figure out what our role is, and with God's grace address those dynamics.

We talk about "right relationships" because we call ourselves peacemakers. If we are going to be peacemakers, then we need to begin with ourselves. We want to make peace in the world? My world begins here, from my head to my toes and what's within that.

How do you start to make peace with yourself? You need to learn about who you are. Learn your history. Learn your places of privilege and on whose backs you are standing. Who is being oppressed as you are benefitting from that privilege?

We all have privileges and we also, in many areas of our lives, experience oppression in terms of race, sex, gender, class, economics, age, size, ability - the list is endless. It's important to be aware of that, because if we are not aware, then we are not conscious of what dynamics are present in our relationships and how those dynamics impact the ways in which we interact with each other - how we are being kind or not kind; how I might say something very offensive, thinking that I am giving you a compliment, because I am not aware of my places of privilege or oppression, and you.

Even as I want to make peace in the world, if I am not aware of who I am and what I bring into a space, there is something inside of me that wants war. Feel what happens to you inside when someone challenges you to acknowledge your privilege. Can you feel the enormous surge of force moving through your body - the fear that is masked as defensiveness or hostility? Hear your voice - how it changes, how it becomes harsh or shrill. Be aware of your mind racing to defend its position, to justify or attack or blame. It happens in all of us. Be aware of it. If you were to become conscious in that moment, you would realize that, as much as you are a peacemaker, something inside of you is at war.

So, what do you do? You're now aware of this; it's happening to you, what do you do? Stop. When you feel that force that says, "Defend your argument, justify your position," stop, and do not move into defensiveness. Breathe deeply and fill your lungs with air, life-giving oxygen. And then as you exhale, feel the shaking in your body and ask yourself, "What am I afraid of? What am I afraid to lose?"

Secondly, we need to build relationships with our neighbors, the folks next door, people on public transportation. Look at them; look at people. In this part of the world we have been socialized to not look at people because it is called staring. But how are you going to see me if you do not look at me? And if you don't look at me, what are you saying to me? You are not saying that I don't exist. When we do not acknowledge each other's presence, we are making each other anonymous and that anonymity breeds isolation. When I ride public transportation, I look at the person next to me and say, "Hello," and that changes the energy in that space, because we all want to be acknowledged. God knows that. That's why God didn't make just one person. God knows that we need each other so it's important that we build relationships with our neighbors. Become interested in people - not in a way that interrogates them about their lives and their experiences, but in a way that invites conversations where I'm getting to know you and you're getting to know me. We're talking about right relationships. How can I be living in my neighborhood and not know who lives next door?

Thirdly, we can move into relationships in our community. Learn about your community. Find out what's great in the community where you live. Sometimes we talk about everything that needs to change and we do not talk about what's great in that community. There must be something great or why are you there? Even if you are the only great thing in the community, talk about that, celebrate that, as with your great self, you talk with others and then figure out together what needs to change. It is possible.

Be willing to receive gifts from others. Peacemakers love to give, because we want to live sacrificially, and we want everyone else to know how we are following in the footsteps of Jesus. So we want to give. We want to give of ourselves; we're willing to give our lives, our time, and our skills. But ask yourself, "Am I giving because I'm feeling superior to someone else? Am I giving in the same spirit that Jesus gave, or am I giving so that the receiver knows that I have it and they don't."



Sylvia Morrison, Undoing Racism  
Coordinator, Christian Peacemaker Teams

If that's the case, then start receiving. Take from people what they want to give to you. It's a blessing.

Finally, as we build relationships in our communities and start working on the issues present there, then we can make the connections for peacemaking with the rest of our world. We move out into far-away places and we learn from our partners in those parts of the world. And I really mean learn from them. Sit with them, eat with them, have conversations with them - not interviews, conversations; not interrogations, conversations. Become interested in their lives and tell them about yours. It's a relationship.

Be consistent in self-reflection. Constantly ask yourself why you are doing what you do. Is it because I feel guilty? Because I want to be faithful? Because it's part of my PhD studies? Because it makes me feel good? Because I am following the radical Jesus? Because of fear? What is that fear about?

Be willing to change. We all have changes to make in order to attain balance in our relationships. As we reflect and continuously ask ourselves these questions, we must be willing to change. Are you willing?

Know that you are a child of God regardless of who you are, where you come from, your position of privilege or oppression; you are a worthy child of God. There are times when shame, and guilt and fear get in the way of our relationships being balanced. Trust the Spirit. You are Spirit. You live in a physical body but you are Spirit, and Spirit wants to engage with Spirit. As we recognize that we are one with the universe, with God, and that we are worthy, we will be able to walk without fear, we will be able to change, and our relationships will be balanced.

# National Workshop on Christian Unity - April 19-22, 2010, Tampa, Florida

*You are witness to these things: What Witness Will the World Receive?*



The National Workshop witnesses to the Church's calling to become more visibly one. Tampa 2010 will witness to how well we receive one another. Will it be a witness the world desires to receive?

Registration information available online at [nwc.org](http://nwc.org).

Five Plenary Speakers, Twelve Seminars, 300+ Ecumenists

## Seminars on Tuesday & Thursday

Ecumenism 101

Ministry: A Retrospective on the Impact of Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry (Lima 1982)

Racism as an Impediment to Ecumenism  
The Origin of the Modern Ecumenical Movement

– The 100th Anniversary of the Edinburgh Conference

Interfaith Relations: Current Status from a Christian Perspective

Ecumenical Consultation on Ethical Decisions

A Tale of Two Pontiffs: Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Between John Paul II and Benedict XVI

Preaching Ecumenism

The Holy Spirit and Christian Unity  
Christian Churches Together Domestic Poverty Initiative

Just Faith Curriculum

New Fire Movement (Young Ecumenists)

## Anticipated Fees

Registration: \$175 (\$150 before March 15)

Hotel Lodging: \$129/night + tax

Cultural Event: \$45

Network Fees: Varies accordingly

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<http://tamparegency.hyatt.com>

## Plenary Speakers

Monday Evening Opening Sermon

The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church

Tuesday Keynote Address

Archbishop Wilton Gregory, Archdiocese of Atlanta, Chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Committee, Roman Catholic

Wednesday Bible Study

The Generation of the Eucharist in the New Testament. The Rev. Dr. Bruce Chilton, Bernard Iddings Bell Professor of Religion at Bard College, and Rector of the Church of St John the Evangelist

Wednesday Plenary on Local Reception

The Rev. Dr. William Rusch, The Divinity School, Yale University, and New York Theological Seminary

Thursday Closing Luncheon Speaker

The Rev. Dr. Thomas Best, former Director, Faith and Order Commission, World Council of Churches

Cultural Event, Wednesday Evening

At the Florida Aquarium

C A D E I O – Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers  
The Very Rev. Robert Flannery, President  
618-457-4556, [rbflan@globaleyes.net](mailto:rbflan@globaleyes.net)

E C C O – Ecumenical Colleagues

E D E I O – Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers

The Rev. Canon David L. Veal, President,  
806-799-2069, [veald@sbcglobal.net](mailto:veald@sbcglobal.net)

L E R N – Lutheran Ecumenical Representatives Network

Dr. Rocky Piro, President  
206-542-1314, [REPiro@aol.com](mailto:REPiro@aol.com)

U M E I T – United Methodist Ecumenical and Interreligious Training

Rev. Betty Gamble, Coordinator  
212-749-3553, [bgamble@gccuic-umc.org](mailto:bgamble@gccuic-umc.org)

## 2010 NATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

Fr. Donald Rooney, National Chair,  
Roman Catholic Church

Mr. Art Geissler, Secretary  
The Episcopal Church

Rev. Thomas Prinz, Treasurer  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Dr. Christopher M. Agnew, Past National  
Chair, The Episcopal Church

Rev. Norman Theiss, Incoming National  
Chair, Evangelical Lutheran Church in  
America

Rev. Russell Meyer, Local Chair  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Raphael Allen  
African Methodist Episcopal Church

Ms. Clare Chapman  
United Methodist Church

Fr. Robert Flannery  
Roman Catholic Church

Sr. Dr. Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA  
Roman Catholic Church

The Rev. Canon Daniell C. Hamby  
The Episcopal Church

Rev. Betty Gamble  
United Methodist Church

Rev. Lisa Lewis-Balboa  
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

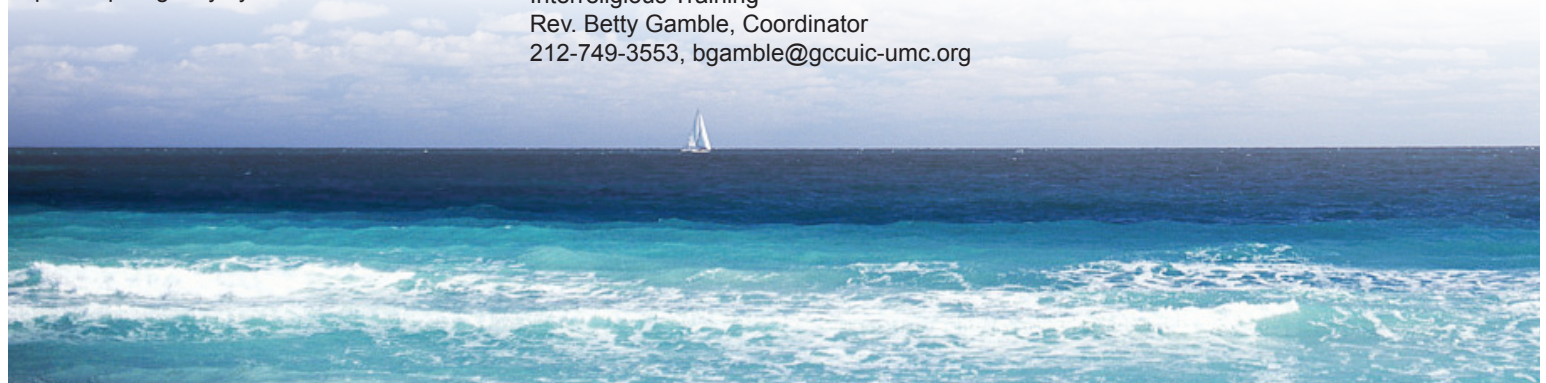
Ms. Diane Lowe  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Fr. James Massa  
Roman Catholic Church

Rev. Dr. Paul Masquelier  
Presbyterian Church USA

Rev. Donald McCoid  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Canon David Veal  
The Episcopal Church



## Illinois Conference of Churches Leadership Team Met December 1, 2009 at Three Hierarchs Greek Orthodox Church, Champaign

The Leadership Team of the Illinois Conference of Churches (ICC) met on December 1 to begin planning for the 2010 calendar year. In attendance were Bishop Gary Wollersheim, Rev. Terry Clark, Rev. Robin Barrow, Rev. Dr. John Charleton, III, Rev. Fr. Michael Condos, Very Rev. Robert Flannery, Mr. Robert Gilligan, Rev. Linda Harrod, Rev. Kevin Kessler, Rev. Catiana McKay, Rev. Robert Pearson, Rev. Robert Sherman, Mrs. Marianne Stowers, Ms. Pamela Tackett.

General Business was approved and discussed. Specifically, budgetary items were a focal point as the balance sheet, current cash flow, and 2010 budget were reviewed. The audit results were shared and all findings were positive for ICC policies and procedures.

New software has been purchased for the ICC office for web development and graphic design, and the new website was launched in December. Using the new software, a brochure was designed and mailed out to each judicatory along with a reminder for 2009 contributions and a 2010 pledge card. In addition, the ICC leadership will be exploring grant opportunities for outreach and ecumenical programs.

Discussion was held regarding the recent 2009 Annual Assembly, and plans are underway for the 2010 gathering. Conversation also focused upon ways to publicize the 2010 assembly in order to gain more representation from our judicatories. The 2010 Assembly has been moved from the last Friday of the month to the last Thursday. The date for the 2010 Annual Assembly will be September 23 at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Springfield, Illinois. The theme of the Annual Assembly will be "Standing Apart – Standing Together" ... developing harmony and peace within our churches and communities. Several names were mentioned as potential speakers. Rev. Catiana McKay is chairing the event.

Plans are also underway for the 2010 Bi-Annual Statewide Gathering on March 19-20, 2010 at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois. The focus of the gathering is "Seeing with New Eyes – Persons Who are Poor Teaching Us."

The Public Policy Team presented information about legislation tracked during the 2009 legislative year. A full report can be viewed under the Public Policy article in this newsletter.

The next Joint Teams meeting was set for February 9, 2010 at the Grace United Methodist Church in Springfield, Illinois. A listing of other ICC meetings is available on the website. For a full accounting of the minutes, visit [www.ilconfchurches.org](http://www.ilconfchurches.org) and select the "News" tab.



## Ecumenical Advent and Lessons held at Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, December 13, 2009

by Pamela Tackett

On December 13, 2009, I was blessed to participate in an interfaith service of scripture and song led by clergy and musicians of Springfield area churches. Rev. Msgr. Carl Kemme, Diocesan Administrator, presided over the service. Lessons were presented by Rev. Tasha Blackburn, Associate Pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church; Rev. Father Peter Harman, Pastor, Cathedral Church of the Immaculate Conception; Rev. Richard K. Irwin, Pastor, First Christian Church; Rev. Dr. Reg Mills, Pastor, Central Baptist Church; and Dr. Roger Ross, Senior Pastor, First Methodist Church. Music was led by the Springfield Ecumenical Choir, with Nichol DelGiorno directing and playing organ, and Tina Nicholson accompanying on oboe.

The lessons focused on Genesis 3:9-15; Jeremiah 33:14-16; Isaiah 40:1-5, 7-11; Isaiah 7:10-14; Mark 1:1-18; Luke 1:26-38; Micah 5:1-4a; and Luke 1:38-45. The service closed with the Lord's Prayer followed by a closing prayer, blessing, and postlude. A reception was held in the Atrium immediately following the liturgy.

The Cathedral originally opened in 1928. For 80 years the Cathedral served as the mother church of the diocese, but it was beginning to show its age. On September 28, 2008, the last Mass was held before it underwent comprehensive renovations. During renovation, a new Atrium was also constructed. The fully restored Cathedral was dedicated on December 2, 2009, at 2:00 p.m.

Should you have ecumenical service information to share or an event you would like the Illinois Conference of Churches to attend, please contact Pamela Tackett at 217.522.7099 or by email at [pamela@ilconfchurches.org](mailto:pamela@ilconfchurches.org)

# Illinois Conference of Churches Public Policy Team Sets 2010 Initiatives

At our recent Leadership Team meeting, the following legislative initiatives were approved for the 2010 Illinois Conference of Churches Annual Assembly year:

- Abolition of the death penalty will be a higher priority than last year
- Medicaid will be on the radar screen; especially if there is an opt-out for federal health care reform
- Ensuring the safety net for state programs and services that serve the most vulnerable
- Concerns for those incarcerated; especially the youth who have barriers to employment because of prior convictions
- Monitoring operational issues that impact the Church
- Meeting with Governor Quinn regarding ICC legislative and public policy concerns

Members of the Public Policy Team include: Mr. Robert Gilligan, Chairperson, Mr. E. Garnet Fay, Rev. Kevin Laughery, Rev. Linda Harrod, Public Policy Coordinator, Rev. Gary McCants, Rev. Chris Pierson, Rev. Dan Schwick, Mr. Beau Underwood, Rev. Terry Weavil, and Rev. Michael Winters.

The Public Policy Team encourages Public Policy leaders to contact Mr. Robert Gilligan at 312-368-1066, or via e-mail at [rfgcci@aol.com](mailto:rfgcci@aol.com), or Rev. Linda Harrod at 217-522-7099, or via e-mail at [lharrod@ilconfchurches.org](mailto:lharrod@ilconfchurches.org). Please let us know if you have further ideas, issues, concerns, or strategies about how the ICC might improve our grassroots lobbying efforts to better engage in the public policy debate in Illinois and at the Federal level.

## LSSI's Bitner, Schwick Named to Commissions on Human Services, Elimination of Poverty

The Rev. Dr. Denver Bitner and the Rev. Daniel Schwick of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) were each recently named to serve on a state commission. Bitner, president of LSSI, was named to the Illinois Human Services Commission by Governor Pat Quinn. Schwick, director of church and government relations, was named by House Speaker Michael Madigan to serve on the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty. Schwick also serves on the Public Policy Team of the Illinois Conference of Churches.

The new Human Services Commission, formed last November, will make recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly about improving the delivery of high-quality human services to Illinois citizens. It will address issues such as "the process for determining fair, adequate and timely reimbursement; efficient management of publicly funded programs and services; and projects for future human services needs in Illinois." Its first meeting is January 20.

"I am pleased to be a member of this commission," says Bitner. "Its creation acknowledges that continued support of human services is vital to the health and safety of the citizens of Illinois. LSSI will continue to advocate for policies that promote continuity of care for the very vulnerable clients we serve."

The goal of the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty is to come up with ways to cut the number of Illinoisans living in extreme poverty by 50 percent

by 2015.

"It's an ambitious goal, but doable," says Schwick. He notes that his participation in the commission "recognizes LSSI's long-term commitment to walking with those who tend to be on the fringes of our society, including those who are very poor."

Based in Des Plaines, LSSI is a statewide, not-for-profit social service agency of the three Illinois synods of the ELCA. For more information, visit [www.LSSI.org](http://www.LSSI.org).

## Spotlight on Denominations African Methodist Episcopal Church

*As a new feature of our newsletter, we will share information about each of our member denominations - what makes us unique and special in our faith. If you have comments or suggestions, please contact Pamela Tackett at [pamela@ilconfchurches.org](mailto:pamela@ilconfchurches.org)*

4th Episcopal District  
Bishop John R. Bryant  
Email: [4thadministrator@sbcglobal.net](mailto:4thadministrator@sbcglobal.net)  
Web: [www.fourthdistrictame.org](http://www.fourthdistrictame.org)  
National Website: [www.ame-church.com](http://www.ame-church.com)



The African Methodist Episcopal Church has a unique and glorious history. It was unique in that it is the first major religious denomination in the Western World that had its origin over sociological and theological beliefs and differences. It rejected the negative theological interpretations which rendered persons of African descent second class citizens. There was a theological declaration that God is God all the time and for every body. The church was born in protest against slavery - against dehumanization of African people, brought to the American continent as labor.

The Mission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is to minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, and environmental needs of all people by spreading Christ's liberating gospel through word and deed. At every level of the Connection and in every local church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church shall engage in carrying out the spirit of the original Free African Society, out of which the AME Church evolved: that is, to seek out and save the lost, and serve the needy.

*Information taken from African Methodist Episcopal Church website [www.ame-church.com](http://www.ame-church.com)*

# Getting to Know Neighbors of Other Faiths

## *A Theological Rationale for Interfaith Relationships*

### God and Human Community

As Christians, we affirm that God loves all of creation and that all people are created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). Through God's love, all people are related to one another as children of God. This common humanity and relatedness are gifts from God to the human race. Relating to other people of other faiths strengthens community and encourages human flourishing.

### Hospitality to the Stranger

Scripture offers many examples of ethical and pastoral incentives for interreligious relationships. The stories of Abraham and Sarah, Jethro, Ruth, and others, remind us to welcome and treat kindly those from outside our own religious communities. The virtue of hospitality to strangers is amplified in Jesus' ministry as he befriends the Samaritan woman and shows in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) that caring for those outside of one's own community is important. In the letter to the Hebrews we read, 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.' (Hebrews 13:2)

### Loving God and Neighbor

Indeed, Jesus goes beyond hospitality to suggest that the whole of the law and the prophets are summarized in the commandment to love God and to love one's neighbors (Matthew 22:36-40). Loving others means respecting them, listening to them, and treating them as we would want them to treat us (Matthew 7:12). Loving means not only the authentic sharing of truth as we see it, but a deep listening to others. Loving one's neighbors take priority over proclaiming right doctrine or performing formal worship, it becomes the first and guiding commandment for Christians. (See Matthew 5:23-24 and 12:12).

### Reconciliation with God

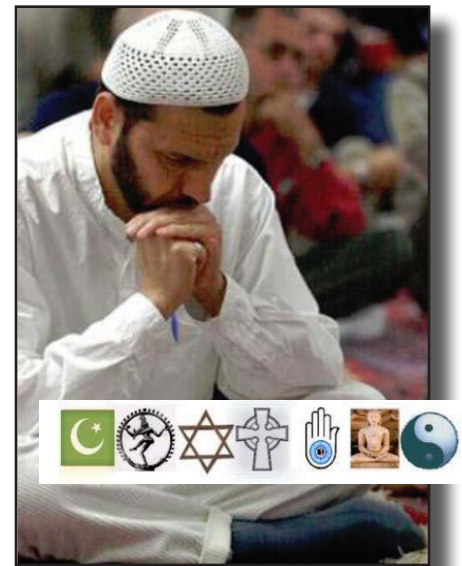
Christians affirm that all people have been already reconciled to God and to others in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18ff.; Colossians 3:15ff.). Every person embodies something of the divine image and therefore may possess some ray of truth, some aspect of the Mystery of God we know to be revealed in Jesus Christ. Christians know God through Jesus Christ, but understand that all human understanding of truth is inherently limited and conditioned. The reality of God, in contrast, is intrinsically unlimited. God will always be greater than any human can comprehend or any religion can convey.

### Christian Witness and Reconciliation with Others

Christians have been sent into the world to testify in word and deed to the God we know through Jesus Christ (John 17:18). Yet Christians have not always embodied God's love in their relationships with people of other religious traditions. A lack of understanding and respect for other faiths has often resulted in fear, distrust, and the dehumanization of people in other religious traditions. Christian witness to God's love seeks to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the world. That means conversing with, listening to, learning from, and living peacefully with those in the world who do not confess Jesus as Lord. Listening and sharing sometimes shows God's love better than declarations of beliefs.

### Peacemakers

As Christians, we are called to be peacemakers in the world. We look for ways to strengthen human life in community. But since Scripture speaks in many voices, it has sometimes been used to discount and divide people of different faiths from one another. Through encounters with people of other religions, Christians hope to find new understanding and to discover fuller and more meaningful ways to live in reconciled communities together.



### Persons and Work of Christ

Through Jesus Christ humanity is invited to speak and respond to God. In Scripture, God not only speaks but listens, not only challenges, but waits. In the death and resurrection of Christ, God brings about the possibility for new relationships between God and humanity and between different human persons and communities. The work of Christ is to break down the walls of separation and alienation between peoples with each other and with God. New possibilities for relationship began in the vulnerability, risk, and faith of Jesus. A new reality is now available for believers in Christ to make ourselves vulnerable and to take risks in our relationship with people of other faiths.

### Spirit of God and Human Hope

Christians affirm that the Holy Spirit, who hovered over the waters when the earth was void and without form (Genesis 1:2), can bring order out of chaos and can reshape warped societies. Relationships with people of other religious traditions are shaped by the Holy Spirit, who, like the wind, 'blows where it chooses' (John 3:8). While we do not always understand the Spirit's purposes, we need never be without hope, for we nor the rest of creation are ever without the Spirit of God.

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Inter-religious relationships are one of God's special callings in our time. While the Church has always lived in a religiously pluralistic world, the rich diversity of different faiths is more apparent now than ever before.

Christians often find themselves face-to-face with neighbors and co-workers, relatives, strangers, and friends who belong to different religious traditions. This presents us with unique opportunities to witness, love, and serve "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). By learning practical ways to encounter people of diverse faiths, we discover opportunities to learn from them, to live in community with them, to develop mutual respect, and to discover areas of commonality.

National Council of Churches U.S.A.  
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## **Highlights from Twenty Years of Ecumenical Efforts, continued from Cover**

The representatives continue to meet regularly to develop relationships and to plan and facilitate the area-wide Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in which the leaders of the nineteen churches participate. Efforts are made to increase bilingual services and in 2009, a Korean Mission Church celebrated the area wide Ecumenical Millennium Committee service with a bilingual Korean/English service. I see the need for our ecumenical formation and education to reach more of our members who do not have English as their first language.

You may be noting that the above highlights focus on spiritual ecumenism, praying together and observing worship in each other's churches. This has not, nevertheless, curtailed the churches' dialogue of witness, which brings me to my ecumenical efforts at the state level with the Illinois Conference of Churches.

When I became a member of the ICC in 1987 there were strong social justice ministries, i.e., refugee settlement, farm workers, death penalty, domestic violence and natural disasters. Due to financial and oversight constraints the ICC could not sustain these ministries. Changes in the structure began while I was President and were finalized while I was away for four years. Within the new structure, a Church and Society Commission continued the promotion of social justice and the Unity and Relationships Commission focused on a deeper understanding of faith and order within our churches. As a member of the latter Commission, my efforts centered on the Baptismal Survey published in 2005 and on the development of a standardized baptismal certificate. A disappointment for me was that the certificate did not materialize.

I was a participant in the recent restructuring and am pleased that it reflects our mission and enables the ICC to engage in spiritual ecumenism as we pray and promote praying together as well as the dialogue of truth in our forum and the dialogue of witness through our Public Policy Team and the Illinois Christians Encountering Racism Team. Our March 2010 Bi-Annual State Gathering Mission will enhance the dialogue of life for membership when we come together from across Illinois to meet other Christians from various churches.

Moving from my involvement from the state to national efforts, as a member of the Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers (CADEIO), I co-chaired an Anglican/Catholic sub-committee that published, *Receiving the Vision: The Anglican-Roman Catholic Reality Today* in 1995. Its jointly authored case studies of Anglican/Catholic concerns provide insights that remain relevant to our churches fifteen years later.

Also, on October 1, 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops sponsored the National Celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of the signing by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the World Lutheran Federation of the Joint Declaration of the Doctrine on Justification. A local Catholic Church hosted this national celebration of a statement by two universal church bodies. There were also joint celebrations in local Catholic and Lutheran Churches in 1999 at the time of the original signing and on 2004 for the fifth anniversary. I suggest that these celebrations reflect another trend of a more intentional linking of universal, national and local efforts in current and future ecumenical movement. Globalization?

On the international level, I was a member of the Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order that published their Eighth Report in 2005. My area included the work on Roman Catholic Membership in National and Regional Councils of Churches. The Commission met in Lebanon, North Ireland, Sweden, Italy and Greece. It was a privilege for me to participate in the collaboration between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches and to visit areas where there have been or are both controversies and reconciliations among Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches.

In closing, I would like to indicate another significant trend - the development of relationships with interfaith and interreligious communities and organizations. These enriching and broadening relationships are necessary in our multi-religious world, but I am convinced that we must not be distracted from our primary responsibility to promote visible church unity that "That All May Be One" (John 17:21).

## **Juvenile Justice Initiative 2010**

Three new Illinois laws that impact juvenile justice took effect on January 1, 2010. Public Act 95-1031 states that youth 17 years old charged with a misdemeanor will be under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court Act, Public Act 95-1050 makes changes to the Redeploy Illinois program by authorizing the state to offer the incentives of the program to counties with a low number of delinquent youth committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice, and Public Act 96-0707 improves the process for juveniles with arrests for misdemeanor offenses to clear their records.

In addition, during the Illinois General Assembly's fall veto session the legislature approved a change made by the Governor to Senate Bill 1725, delaying a report on re-entry issues from September 2009 to September 2010. The new Public Act 96-0853 signed into law on December 23, 2009, directs the Juvenile Justice Commission to study juvenile offenders released from state custody but later returned for parole violations. This new law requires the Commission to make recommendations on steps the state can take to help young offenders successfully complete the terms of their parole.

Terry Carmichael, Chair of the Juvenile Justice Initiative said, "The services provided to a youth upon release from prison are one of the most critical determining factors in his future success or failure in the community."

One of the areas of ministry in 2010 the Illinois Conference of Churches is focusing upon is concerns for those incarcerated; especially the youth who have barriers to employment because of prior convictions.

The Juvenile Justice Initiative is a statewide advocacy coalition to transform the juvenile justice system. The JJI advocates to reduce reliance on detention, to enhance fairness for all youth and to develop adequate community based resources throughout the state. Visit the website ([www.jjustice.org](http://www.jjustice.org)) of the Juvenile Justice initiative for additional information about the new laws.

## Upcoming Events

- **February 9, 2010 - 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.**  
Joint Team Meeting - Grace United Methodist Church, 1612 E Capitol Ave, Springfield, Illinois
- **May 25, 2010 - 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.**  
Leadership Team Meeting - First Church of the Brethren, 4714 N. Sheridan Rd., Peoria, Illinois
- **August 31, 2010 - 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.**  
Leadership Team Meeting - Bloomington, Illinois
- **September 23, 2010 – Annual Assembly**  
“Standing Apart – Standing Together” ... developing harmony and peace within our churches and communities  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Springfield, Illinois.
- **November 30, 2010 - 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.**  
Leadership Team Meeting - Plainfield, Illinois

## Article Submissions

If you have information to include in our newsletter, please send an email to: Pamela Tackett, Administrative Coordinator [pamela@ilconfchurches.org](mailto:pamela@ilconfchurches.org)

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