

Ecumenical Connection

ILLINOIS CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES

Volume 3, Issue 3

December 2008

Reflections on the 2008 Annual Assembly, Champaign



Rev. Msgr. Albert Hallin, Judicatory Representative for the Catholic Diocese of Peoria and Guest Rev. Budd Friend-Jones at the Annual Assembly Worship Service.

As the Leadership Team discussed the who and what of this article, it was noted that perhaps a reflection done sooner would have been easier (at least the remembering). However, I am convinced that time and distance make it easier to think about the event dispassionately—if it is possible for someone

involved in the ecumenical movement to be dispassionate.

Arriving later than I had initially planned, I found many people already there in fellowship and intentional conversation. I was 'lucky' enough to have been selected as a table facilitator, so I spent some time just catching up on those with whom I would be in conversation about the day's subject. And I found I had two of the presenters at my table. What a blessing for the rest of us.

As a facilitator, I found myself listening intently to find questions to raise at my table, and yet the presentations challenged me to just listen and hear what I was

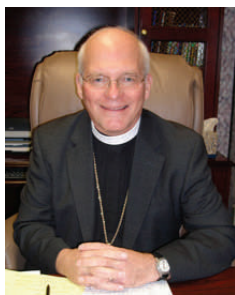
being taught. And being taught I was. Was it new, I found it didn't matter — I was, as Fred Craddock notes, hearing the "...twice told tale..." The Good News of Jesus Christ in the guise of a discussion about who Christ is for us today.

And that is perhaps the point which requires time and distance. Some time to ponder and distance from which to study the facts and surmising that went on. As in most things theological, the answer is illusive.

As the creed states, a belief in the church catholic (universal) and apostolic is critical to Christianity and Christians. My sense of being the Body of Christ was

(continued on p. 2)

January 20, 2009



Bishop Gary Wollersheim, ELCA, Northern IL Synod, ICC Leadership Team Co-chair

I am deeply affected by the historical significance of the election of Senator Barack Obama as President of the United States. I have lived through some significant events in my 58 years such as the assassinations of President Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon,

the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the terrorist's attack of September 11. But I don't think that many experiences will make the impact on me like the Inauguration of the 44th President of the United States.

(continued on p. 5)

Our Mission

We seek to be an inclusive community of churches that celebrates and makes visible our sacred bonds of unity in Christ. We will do this by:

- ❖ Promoting an honest sharing and understanding of both our common and divergent theological convictions; and
- ❖ Making public, prophetic witness to Christ's love for all people, particularly by addressing poverty and racism.

Inside this issue:

EXPANDED HEALTH CARE FOR ALL	3
2008 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY—GOVERNANCE	4
DEATH PENALTY DANGER—WAITING	5
IN GOD WE TRUST	7

Ecumenical Connection



Rev. Terry Weavil, Moravian Church, Forum Panelist



Very Rev. Robert Flannery and Bishop Gary Wollersheim, ICC Leadership Team Co-chairs, presiding over the Assembly.



Rev. Dr. Desmond Francis, Episcopal Church, USA, Forum Panelist



Rev. Ruth Clendenin, PCUSA, Forum Panelist



ICC Members participating in the Forum Table Discussions



Rev. Don Jones, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Forum Panelist



ICC Members participating in the Forum Table Discussions—"Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today?"



ICC Members participating in the Forum Table Discussions



Rev. Terry Clark, United Methodist Church, Forum Moderator

Reflections on the 2008 Annual Assembly...continued

pushed around, again not particularly because of anything new, but rather in the passionate way each presenter lived in the place and in the history and tradition of the subject. It was a reviving time for me.

Around a table speaking in faith were Methodists, Roman Catholics, Moravians, Episcopalians, United Church of Christ, Presbyterians and Disciples of Christ (and that's just at my table). And we ate and had fun being together. The church united in Christ.

Rev. Bob Sherman, ICC Leadership Team United Church of Christ, serving a congregation affiliated with the UCC and PCUSA

Ecumenical Connection

ICC Committed to Expanded Health Care For All

One of the ICC's Public Policy Team (PPT) priority agenda items ratified at the 2008 Annual Assembly is that the "ICC will continue to support expanded health care options for all of our citizens and remain active with the Campaign for Better Health Care (CBHC), despite recent legislative failures at health care reform. Further, member of the ICC will continue their active service on the CBHC's Steering Committee of the Health Care Justice Faith Caucus.

The following information outlines the principles and criteria drawn from as the CBHC determines what is necessary in a health care plan for Illinois. More information is available at their website: <http://www.cbhconline.org>



Health Care Justice Campaign—Principles

- Accessible:** Is accessible for all Illinois residents;
Provides comprehensive benefits, including and not limited to benefits for mental health, in-home care, long term care, dentistry, and vision;
Fosters a network of health care facilities, including public health, community providers and other safety net providers;
Ensures continuity of coverage and continuity of care;
Maximizes consumer choice of health care providers and practitioners;
Addresses the needs of people with special care health care needs and under-served populations aimed at rural and urban areas.
- Affordable (fairness):** Is affordable (fairness) to individuals, families, businesses and taxpayers and that removes financial barriers to needed care;
Provides adequate and timely payments by all payers in order to guarantee access to providers.
- Quality:** Promotes fairness, quality and evidence based health outcomes;
Promotes prevention and early intervention;
Eliminates disparities in access to quality health care;
Addresses the need to have adequate numbers of qualified health care caregivers, practitioners, and providers to guarantee timely access to quality care;
Provides opportunities for consumer, business, provider and others involvement in the oversight.
- Cost Containment:** Is as cost efficient as possible, spending the maximum amount of dollars on direct patient care;
Is easy for patients, providers and practitioners to use and reduces paperwork.

Ecumenical Connection

ICC Committed to Expanded Health Care for All...continued

Health Care Justice Campaign—Criteria

Sharing of Risk—Does the approach increase the sharing of risk among young and old, healthy and sick individuals? Does it move towards a larger risk pool of individuals so that one person is left “on their own and all alone” facing unaffordable health care costs?

Fair to all income levels—Does the approach increase the sharing of cost among individuals? Does the approach ensure that the out-of-pocket costs are reasonable for lower income individuals?

Purchasing Power—Does the approach increase the ability to leverage group purchasing power of health care services?

Comprehensiveness—Does the approach ensure that all covered individuals have access to the same comprehensive package of health care services, including prescription drug and mental health coverage?

Inclusiveness—How well does the plan expand coverage for significant numbers of people? Does it ensure that the plan does not arbitrarily exclude certain groups of people (e.g. immigrants, non-custodial adults)?

Cost Containment—Does the approach contain healthcare costs?

Continuity and Portability of Care—Does the approach assure continuity of care? Is the coverage portable? Does the plan allow for enrollees to choose their providers?

2008 Annual Assembly Governance—In Review

The governance portion of the 2008 Annual Assembly included the body receiving a financial report from ICC Treasurer, Rev. Dr. John Charlton III. Rev. Dr. Charlton noted that the stock market difficulties have affected us, like most other bodies and encouraged the member judicatories to step up and meet the need to keep the ICC functioning at its current level. In addition Rev. Dr. Charlton explained that in response to questions of fairness raised at the 2007 Annual Assembly, the ICC sought help in developing a new member pledge formula and have applied the

new formula to the 2009 budget pledge requests. The 2009 Budget of \$113,360 was adopted.

The Assembly approved ICC team nominations as presented as well as gave the Leadership Team the power to continue filling the team rosters.

Reports were received from the five ICC mission teams. The Leadership Team discussed one of the next big ICC events—the Bi-Annual Statewide Gathering. The Public Policy Team (PPT) introduced their new Public Policy Coordinator, Rev. Linda Harrod. In addition, Public Policy Team Chair, Rev. Gary McCants, discussed the

focus issues for the coming year: racism, meeting with the Governor and/or legislative leaders, Health Care Justice Faith Caucus, abolishing the death penalty, access to prisoners/detainees for faith leaders and encouraging judicatories to get involved with our issues at the grassroots level. The PPT's agenda was adopted by the Assembly.

Garnet Fay of the ICC Public Policy Team and current Board President of the Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, addressed the Assembly regarding the goal of abolishing the death

(continued on p. 8)



Ecumenical Connection



President-Elect Barack Obama

January 20, 2009...continued

I believe it is all about hope. Hope, in the future of America based upon the belief and practice that all people are created equal. Hope, that we are finally ushering in a new era where a person: "will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (from Dr. King's speech). Hope, that we can stop emphasizing our differences whether it is red state or blue state; Jew or Gentile; black or white; male or female; gay or straight; and begin to see that God has woven us

together in one great tapestry (or for Lutherans – a quilt!).

Now I know that on January 20, 2009 racism will not magically disappear in America or anywhere else in the world for that matter. But yet this historical event is a sign of progress; yes we can. It marks a light at the end of the tunnel, and it is a cool drink in a long, long journey.

So, at our next Northern Illinois Synod Council meeting,

we will again have a session of anti-racism training, as we have been doing every January for many years. But this year we will be a little less pessimistic about our progress and a little more optimistic about the future. For we have a lot to hope for and a lot to give thanks about.

*Bishop Gary Wollersheim
Northern Illinois Synod
ELCA and Co-Chair of the ICC
Leadership Team*

Death Penalty Danger: Waiting by Patrick D. McNany, ICADP Past President

Ask the man in the street about the death penalty in Illinois and you're likely to get one of two answers: (uninformed) "Illinois got rid of the death penalty some time back;" (informed) "Illinois has reformed its death penalty and it's working pretty well."

Both of these answers are wrong. The problem with Illinois' death penalty is a third answer, often given by people who know (or should know): "We're working on an answer to the problems with the death penalty. When we get it, we'll do something about it."

The right answer for members of Illinois Conference of Churches and the truly informed is: the death penalty remains a seriously flawed system, unable and/or very unlikely to be reformed, expensive in dollars as well as legitimacy, and therefore should be abolished NOW.

Where Are We Today?

Our death penalty system has been found to have severe flaws and that was the reason that Governor Ryan granted commutations to all 164 death row inmates sentenced under the pre-2003 system. The Death Penalty Commission that studied the system and found the flaws made 85 basic recommendations to make the system minimally fair. The legislature passed a reform bill in 2003 that adopted 35 of these recommendations. Nothing has been done since.

They also appointed a Capital Punishment Reform Study Committee to review the reforms and costs of the system and report back to them in November 2008. Because of snags in getting started and keeping funding over the five years, their mandate has been ex-

tended until December 31, 2009.

One more current circumstance: there is a governor's moratorium on signing any death row execution warrants until he or she is satisfied that no innocent person might be executed. Since death row was emptied in 2003, no death sentence imposed has exhausted its legal remedies, so the moratorium currently is something of a mirage. No death warrants sit on the Governor's desk.

That's where we are legally, so to speak.

Why Abolish NOW?

There are those who wouldn't ever abolish the death penalty. They say it is an important and legitimate function of any criminal penalty system. The first principle that should support

this position is deterrence. But as many studies have shown, deterrence has never been proven on a consistent basis over time and unless the evidence is clear, consistent and lengthy, deterrence can't support the taking of life.

The second principle is just desserts: killing deserves death; it's the only thing that satisfies a system of true justice. But this argument usually boils down to murder victims' families who want to see the killer suffer the same pangs as their family loved one. The problem with this principle is twofold: no one can agree on which murders are deserving (and making all murders punishable is unconstitutional); and harm to individuals cannot be the basis of public policy, only a societal good.

The people in the middle, who say the system is flawed and

(continued on p. 6)

Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (ICADP)

ICADP Mission Statement:

Believing that the death penalty is morally wrong and is an ineffective, unnecessary and discriminatory response to the problem of crime, we seek to abolish it by the development and maintenance of programs that will:

educate the public about the death penalty; provide information and assistance to lawyers in capital cases and others interested in the issue; monitor legislation affecting this issue; and provide support for the men and women on death row as well as their families.

Visit ICADP's website:

<http://www.icadp.org>

There you will also find remarks from Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos as he accepted the 2007 Cunningham-Carey Award this past November.

Faith is often a softer voice left unheard in the debate over the death penalty. Yet it may prove to be the most powerful of all voices as Illinois determines whether or not to finally abolish the death penalty.

Ecumenical Connection

Death Penalty Danger: Waiting...continued

might be able to be fixed, want to keep working at reform. This is a respectable position IF there is a strong probability of getting it done.

The problem with this position is the facts are against it.

First, the legislature will always seek the cover of doing nothing on controversial issues. Because the death penalty is perceived as very controversial, they have welcomed both the moratorium and the Study Committee as a reprieve from action. "We'll wait to see if the reforms are working and then (maybe) we'll do some more reforms."

That might be O.K. if a) the system could be reformed; and b) the legislature would be willing to pay for it. Neither of these is true.

The Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (ICADP) has been tracking capital punishment in Illinois for eight years. We have put out annual reports since 2003 (see our website) on the number of death penalty cases active each calendar year across the state and their outcomes. We also track those cases where judicial fairness issues are apparent, e.g. coerced confessions, mistaken eye witness testimony, serious mental illness in defendants and the like. These issues are the kind which the Governor's Commission studied and addressed in their recommendations.

Obviously, where the reform legislation of 2003 didn't adopt the recommendations,

there are still major gaps in fairness. But even where the problem was addressed, such as coerced confessions, issues of fairness continue. To give an example, Kevin Fox was charged with murder of his own child in Will County in 2004 and made a confession to police. He repudiated it shortly thereafter as coerced, but it was only after DNA from the crime scene confirmed his innocence that charges were dropped. There are other examples contained in our reports.

But the essential message that appears from these case reports is that capital punishment can never really be fully reformed because discretion lies at its heart. There are 102 State Attorneys in Illinois reflecting its 102 counties. Their choice of murder cases for capital trial rest on a broad constitutional mandate that the law cannot touch. As hard as we try to make that choice conform to a common standard, we will always fail. This discretion is reflected in bias across cases in a number of ways: selecting cases more frequently where the victim is white; selecting more cases in rural vs. metro areas of the State; or selecting murder cases where the defendants have serious mental illness problems.

Then there are costs. If Illinois were to reform its death penalty statute and rules to the point of narrowing the problems to only prosecutorial discretion, the costs would be enormous. Even with today's limited reforms, already Illi-

nois spends a great deal more on its death penalty cases than many other states. According to only the crude standard of costs which we have, the State spent over 16 million dollars on capital cases in 2007. And that doesn't reflect the costs not covered by these Capital Trial Litigation Funds, such as the cost of four highly trained attorneys at each hearing over several (often many) years.

Costs are also measured in outcomes. Cook County, the home of 85%+ of all capital cases, sent only one person to death row in 2007 and has sent none as of early December 2008. How can we justify that type of costs and effort with those paltry results? Of course, we can't. And when the legislature looks at the system broadly, as they must (and SOON), they will have a judgment to make: is it worth it? The answer is staring them in the face: NO.

What Can We Do Now?

So what can members of the Illinois Conference of Churches do? They can study up a bit more on the path of the death penalty in Illinois (see our website for lots of details). And they can call their legislators and sit down with them and urge them to act NOW. True, members may want to start with the basic idea that the death penalty is immoral, as most churches teach. But they should go on to the practical notion that the system just isn't working and there is nothing that will fix these basic flaws.

In God We Trust

I am writing this on the day that the House of Representatives voted 228 to 205 to defeat the bill proposing the 700 billion dollar emergency rescue (bailout) of the nation's financial industry. The stock market responded to this news with a 777 point decline.

There are many people across the country and in Illinois who are hurting in the wake of this news. Jobs are lost. More homes are foreclosed. Businesses, large and small, are declaring bankruptcy, pensions are threatened and much more. Several communities across the territory I serve, Northern Illinois, are struggling, notably: Galesburg, Rockford, Freeport and others. This is a scary time for all of us.

Hopefully by the time you read this, there will be a plan approved by Congress that will address these complicated issues. I doubt there will be a quick fix, it took years to get us into this mess, and it will probably take a long time to get us out again.

I think Americans will need to respond to this economic crisis with a change in lifestyle. This will call for more frugality, simplicity, prudence and generally good stewardship of what God has entrusted to us. I do believe the economy

will recover because of the resourcefulness, ingenuity, and character of the American people.

But here is the point, when all is said and done, where are we going to put our trust? Should we put our trust in the stock market? Should we put our trust in our elected officials? Should we put our trust in an economic system? No, as Christians, **we put our trust in God.** We believe that God does and will provide for our daily needs. We recognize that compared to most of the world, even in an economic crisis, we are wealthy. And we are reminded of the words of Scripture: "to whom much is given, much shall be required", so we respond to God's graciousness with continued generosity.

In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches about the impossibility of serving two masters, God and money. He paints a picture of what this means:

25"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father

feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

27Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

28"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Let us seek first God's kingdom.

In Christ,

Gary Wollersheim, Bishop
ELCA, Northern Illinois Synod,
Co-Chair, ICC Leadership
Team

Disaster Relief Funds Available

The ICC has a modest amount of funding available to provide relief for pressing, unmet needs caused by the last floods here in Illinois.

If you know of a specific need, please contact the ICC office and we will work to meet that need.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2009

For more information:

<http://www.geii.org>

Order forms for WPCU 2009 materials are available at the ICC Office

In addition the WPCU 2008 Daily Scripture & Prayer Guide, Ecumenical Celebration of the Word of God and Prayer Cards are also available through the ICC Office



ILLINOIS CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES

2160 S. 6th Street, Suite D2
Springfield, IL 62703

Phone: 217-522-7099

Fax: 217-522-7105

awilson@ilconfchurches.org

lharrod@ilconfchurches.org

www.ilconfchurches.org

Save the Dates!

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2009—January 18-25, 2009

ICC Joint Team Meeting, Springfield—February 17, 2009

Illinois Christians Encountering Racism Training—February 21, 2009

National Workshop for Christian Unity, Phoenix, AZ—April 27-30, 2009

ICC Leadership Team Meeting, Andover, IL—May 27, 2009

ICC Leadership Team Conference Call—September 9, 2009

2009 ICC Annual Assembly—September 25, 2009

ICC Publications

on the Web

Public Policy Profiles

ICC Resolution: Abandon the

Death Penalty

ICC Baptism Study

ICC Ecumenical Bible Study

Log onto our website at:

<http://www.ilconfchurches.org>

Click on "Publications"

2008 Annual Assembly Governance...continued

penalty in Illinois. Garnet encouraged everyone to contact their legislators and let them know that taking a position for abolition is not risky, but, in fact, in line with their constituents' views.

Chair of Illinois Christians Encountering Racism (ICER), Mr. Teamous Newberne, reported for ICER. He noted an upcoming training in February 2009. In addition he made a plea to the Assembly to consider joining the team as ICER has lost several members in the recent past.

The Forum Team report consisted of a request to carefully complete the evaluation

in regards to this year's forum. Most of the changes implemented in the 2008 forum were taken directly from last year's evaluations.

Representatives of the Bi-Annual Statewide Gathering Team requested that participants consider serving the ICC on their team.

Following team reports, the following announcements were made:

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2009 is January 18-25, 2009.

The National Workshop on Christian Unity is April 27-30, 2009 in Phoenix, Arizona. The 2009 ICC Annual Assembly will be Friday, September 25, 2009.

The Assembly concluded with Closing Worship.

Thank you to all who were able to attend and make this year's Assembly and Forum a success. Please, as you mark your calendars for next year's Assembly, consider asking your judicatory executive or other ecumenically-minded colleagues to join us in September 2009.