

APPENDIX D

A Statement of Ecumenical Consensus

Visible Marks of Churches Uniting in Christ

Received Ecumenical Statement
Approved by the 211th General Assembly (1999)
Declared Made by the 212th General Assembly (2000)
(G-15.0302c)

VISIBLE MARKS OF CHURCHES UNITING IN CHRIST

Entering into Churches Uniting in Christ means that the participating churches will express their relationship with one another through the following visible marks:

1. *Mutual recognition of each other as authentic expressions of the one church of Jesus Christ.* Specifically, this means that the participating churches will publicly recognize the following in one another:

- faith in the one God who through the Word and in the Spirit creates, redeems, and sanctifies;
- commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and as the incarnate and risen Lord;
- faithfulness to the Holy Scripture, which testifies to Tradition and to which Tradition testifies, as containing all things necessary for our salvation as well as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith;
- commitment to faithful participation in the two sacraments ordained by Jesus Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper;
- commitment to the evangelical and prophetic mission of God and to God's reign of justice and peace;
- grateful acceptance of the ministry which the Holy Spirit has manifestly given to the churches.

2. *Mutual recognition of members in one Baptism.* This also implies a recognition of the ministry which all believers share in the common priesthood and from which God calls those members who will be ordained.

3. *Mutual recognition of ordained ministry.* Specifically, this means that the participating churches will publicly recognize that one another's ordained ministries are given by God as instruments of God's grace, that these ministries seek to be faithful to Jesus Christ, and that these ministries possess not only to inward call of the Spirit but also Christ's commission through his body, the church. Such recognition is seen as part of an effort to realize mutual reconciliation of ministry by 2007 (as described in section 5 of the 'Report of the Eighteenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union').

4. *Mutual recognition that each affirms the apostolic faith of Scripture and Tradition which is expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and that each seeks to give witness to the apostolic faith in its life and mission.*

5. *Provision for celebration of the Eucharist together with intentional regularity.* This recognizes that the sacrament is at the heart of the church's life. Shared celebration at the Lord's Supper is a sign of unity in Christ. As Christians gather in all their diversity at one

Table of the Lord, they give evidence that their communion is with Christ, and that they are in communion with one another in Christ. When Christians are unable or unwilling to partake together of the one Eucharist, they witness against themselves and give a visible demonstration of the brokenness of Christ's body and the human community.

6. *Engagement together in Christ's mission on a regular and intentional basis, especially a shared mission to combat racism.* The church engages in Christ's mission through worship, proclamation of the gospel, evangelism, education, and action that embodies God's justice, peace, and love. The commitment made by the members of Churches Uniting in Christ includes all of these, so that hearts and minds may be changed. The participating churches will also recognize, however, a particular and emphatic call (for reasons outlined in section 6 of the 'Report of the Eighteenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union') to 'erase racism' by challenging the system of white privilege that has so distorted life in this society and in the churches themselves.

7. *Intentional commitment to promote unity with wholeness and to oppose all marginalization and exclusion in church and society based on such things as race, age, gender, forms of disability, sexual orientation, and class.*

8. *An ongoing process of theological dialogue.* Such dialogue will specifically attempt:

(1) to deepen Churches Uniting in Christ's understanding of racism in order to make an even more compelling case against it;

(2) to clarify theological issues identified by the members of Churches Uniting in Christ in order to strengthen their shared witness to the apostolic faith;

(3) to provide a foundation for the mutual reconciliation of ordained ministry by the members of Churches Uniting in Christ.

9. *Appropriate structures of accountability and appropriate means for consultation and decision making.* While some provision must be made for effecting the marks of the new relationship and for holding churches mutually accountable to the commitments they have made, the structures developed for these purposes should be flexible and adapted to local circumstances (as discussed in section 9 of the 'Report of the Eighteenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union'). Apart from such ongoing structures, the members of Churches Uniting in Christ may want to assemble from time to time in order to consider pressing issues and to bear witness together on matters of common concern.

The relationship expressed through these visible marks is not structural consolidation but a unity in diversity among churches that, though many, understand themselves to be one community in Christ. From the moment of inauguration, the life of these churches will be visibly intertwined as never before. From the moment of inauguration, their relationship, with God's help, will not be one of friendly coexistence and consultation but of binding community that actively embodies the love of Christ which ties them to one another.

Appendix 1

OFFICIAL TEXT

Report of the Eighteenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union

I. INTRODUCTION

So if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation:
Everything old is passed away; see, everything has become new!
All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ,
and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is,
in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself,
not counting their trespasses against them,
and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

So we are ambassadors for Christ,
since God is making his appeal through us;
we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
(2 Cor. 5:17-20)

I don't feel no ways tired,
I come too far from where I started from.

Nobody told me that the road would be easy,
I don't believe He brought me this far to leave me.
(“I Don't Feel No Ways Tired,” an African American Gospel song by Curtis Burwell,
published by Sagas Music, Inc., © 1978. Used by permission.)

We, the member churches of the Consultation on Church Union, gathered in St. Louis, January 20–24, 1999, for the Consultation's Eighteenth Plenary, confess that we have not always been certain of the road toward visible unity in Christ, or patient with the pace of our journey. We carry the burdens of challenges unmet and opportunities missed. But we also confess that—thanks be to God!—we do not go the journey alone, and that as we have traveled together we have grown in love for one another. We walk the road as well with a confidence given us by Holy Scripture. “There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6). The unity we seek to manifest is not our choice but God's gift. As we seek to bear witness to the gospel and do justice together, we do so as a response to this gift we have received.

Sadly, all of us must confess that, while God has given us unity, we have allowed ourselves to be divided as a result of participation in the racial injustice of our society. We repent of the complicity of many of our churches in the societal systems which perpetuate white skin privilege, which shows that we have neither loved one another nor given glory to God. We have also allowed some theological differences to become church-dividing issues. These sins we confess before God and our brothers and sisters.

We believe that the recommendations found in this statement are faithful to our gospel mandate. But even if we are agreed, we know that there is much work yet to do. We know that we must yet exercise great patience and forbearance with one another as we work toward deeper recognition and reconciliation. We must honor each other and God by at times setting aside our own best interests for the sake of the best interests of our brothers and sisters. We

know that we must set aside those things which hinder our responsibility to do justice and our ability to proclaim the gospel of our Lord to a world in much pain. We must do the difficult work of honoring God before ourselves, and each other as ourselves.

The words of the African American gospel song cited above give profound witness to the sustaining power of God as we travel roads often unknown and uncertain. We who have been partners in the Consultation on Church Union know much about uncertainty, hesitancy, and even despair. But we also know that we are always accompanied by a God whose unending love for us will never leave us alone in the struggle.

II. BACKGROUND

In 1988 the Seventeenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) approved the document *Churches in Covenant Communion: The Church of Christ Uniting* as a plan for the formation of a covenant communion of churches, and commended it to the nine member churches for three official actions to:

1. approve this document as the definitive agreement for joining with other participating churches in covenant communion, including the acts sufficient to enable it;
2. declare their willingness to enter into a new relationship with the member churches of COCU and other churches that similarly approve this agreement;
3. begin to identify for themselves such steps and procedures as may be necessary to prepare for the reconciliation of ordained ministries and for entering into covenant communion as set forth in this document.

In designing the “process of covenanting,” the Seventeenth Plenary said that “After the participating churches have considered and acted upon the proposals of the Consultation contained in the two documents, the *COCU Consensus* and *Churches in Covenant Communion*, the Consultation on Church Union will carefully examine the actions of the churches on these recommendations, and determine next steps accordingly.”

This has been the work and focus of the Eighteenth Plenary of COCU meeting in St. Louis. We received reports from all nine member churches, noting that seven of the member communions (African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, International Council of Community Churches, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church) took official actions to approve the covenanting proposal, along with the identification of several issues and concerns that would need further attention in the process of covenanting.

The Presbyterian Church (USA), at the General Assembly level, approved the covenanting proposal. In the process of seeking to implement the necessary changes in the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, the presbyteries disapproved the required amendments concerning the ministry of oversight because of concerns about episcopé, covenanting councils, and the role of the ruling elder.

An extensive report from the Episcopal Church to the Eighteenth Plenary clarified the action of its 1994 General Convention, which declared that the Episcopal Church was “not ready” to enter into covenant communion and expressed a number of reservations about both the *COCU Consensus* and *Churches in Covenant Communion*. This report also named five guiding principles that inform the future participation of the Episcopal Church in the COCU process.

With this background, we sought in St. Louis to discern where God would lead us. Several broad affirmations quickly emerged from our careful examination of the churches’ actions and our prayerful dialogue:

1. the desire to effect a new relationship among the churches of the Consultation in the near future, by giving visible expression to all marks of communion that are now possible;
2. the desire to move, within that new relationship, to an even fuller realization of life together in Christ;
3. the desire to make a commitment to racial justice as a central sign of our life together.

The following recommendations seek to flow from our churches’ actions, the work of this Plenary, and these fundamental affirmations.

III. RECOMMENDATION

The Eighteenth Plenary meeting of the Consultation on Church Union recommends to the participating churches that, by formal action, they agree to enter into a new relationship to be called Churches Uniting in Christ, and that they together inaugurate this new relationship through public declaration and liturgical celebration during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in the year 2002.¹ The Churches Uniting in Christ will, with God’s help, visibly express a unity in many things that are essential to the church’s life (as outlined in section 4), even as the members of this community will seek to grow in unity among themselves and with other churches.

The Eighteenth Plenary prayerfully hopes that all of the participating churches in COCU will be able to enter into the new relationship in 2002. If, however, there are churches unable to do so, they would be invited to be partners in continuing relationship to realize fully that unity for which Christ prayed (see section 5) and would be encouraged to express as many of the following marks of relationship as possible. Still other churches may be invited to relate to the Churches Uniting in Christ on this basis.

IV. VISIBLE MARKS OF CHURCHES UNITING IN CHRIST

Entering into Churches Uniting in Christ means that the participating churches will express their relationship with one another through the following visible marks:

4.1 *Mutual recognition of each other as authentic expressions of the one church of Jesus Christ.* Specifically this means that the participating churches will publicly recognize the following in one another:

- faith in the one God who through the Word and in the Spirit creates, redeems, and sanctifies;
- commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and as the incarnate and risen Lord;
- faithfulness to the Holy Scripture, which testifies to Tradition and to which Tradition testifies, as containing all things necessary for our salvation as well as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith;
- commitment to faithful participation in the two sacraments ordained by Jesus Christ, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper;
- commitment to the evangelical and prophetic mission of God and to God’s reign of justice and peace;
- grateful acceptance of the ministry which the Holy Spirit has manifestly given to the churches.

4.2 *Mutual Recognition of members in one Baptism.* This also implies a recognition of the ministry which all believers share in the common priesthood and from which God calls those members who will be ordained.

4.3 *Mutual recognition of ordained ministry.* Specifically, this means that the participating churches will publicly recognize that one another’s ordained ministries are given by God as instruments of God’s grace, that these ministries seek to be faithful to Jesus Christ, and that these ministries possess not only the inward call of the Spirit but also Christ’s commission through his body, the church. Such recognition is seen as part of an effort to realize mutual reconciliation of ministry by 2007 (as described in section 5).

4.4 *Mutual recognition that each affirms the apostolic faith of Scripture and Tradition which is expressed in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds and that each seeks to give witness to the apostolic faith in its life and mission.*

4.5 *Provision for celebration of the Eucharist together with intentional regularity.* This recognizes that the sacrament is at the heart of the church’s life. Shared celebration at the Lord’s Supper is a sign of unity in Christ. As Christians gather in all their diversity at one Table of the Lord, they give evidence that their communion is with Christ, and that they are in communion with one another in Christ. When Christians are unable or unwilling to partake together of the one Eucharist, they witness against themselves and give a visible demonstration of the brokenness of Christ’s body and the human community.

4.6 *Engagement together in Christ’s mission on a regular and intentional basis, especially a shared mission to combat racism.* The church engages in Christ’s mission through worship, proclamation of the gospel, evangelism, education, and action that embodies God’s justice, peace, and love. The commitment made by the members of Churches Uniting in Christ includes all of these, so that hearts and minds may be changed. The participating churches will also recognize, however, a particular and emphatic call (for reasons outlined in section 6) to “erase racism” by challenging the system of white privilege that has so distorted life in this society and in the churches themselves.

4.7 *Intentional commitment to promote unity with wholeness and to oppose all marginalization and exclusion in church and society based on such things as race, age, gender, forms of disability, sexual orientation and class.*

4.8 *An ongoing process of theological dialogue.* Such dialogue will specifically attempt:

1. to deepen Churches Uniting in Christ's understanding of racism in order to make an even more compelling case against it;
2. to clarify theological issues identified by the members of Churches Uniting in Christ in order to strengthen their shared witness to the apostolic faith;
3. to provide a foundation for the mutual reconciliation of ordained ministry by the members of Churches Uniting in Christ (discussed in section 5).

4.9 *Appropriate structures of accountability and appropriate means for consultation and decision making.*

While some provision must be made for effecting the marks of the new relationship and for holding the churches mutually accountable to the commitments they have made, the structures developed for these purposes should be flexible and adapted to local circumstances (as discussed in section 9). Apart from such ongoing structures, the members of Churches Uniting in Christ may want to assemble from time to time in order to consider pressing issues and to bear witness together on matters of common concern.

The relationship expressed through these visible marks is not structural consolidation but a unity in diversity among churches that, though many, understand themselves to be one community in Christ. From the moment of inauguration, the life of these churches will be visibly intertwined as never before. From the moment of inauguration, their relationship, with God's help, will not be one of friendly coexistence and consultation but of binding community that actively embodies the love of Christ which ties them to one another.

V. MARKS OF THE FULLER UNITY WE SEEK

Our relationship to one another, now entering into a new level of visible commitment, is not fully complete. We seek for the future an intensity of our life together marked by the sharing of gifts that will be even deeper than that which we will share as Churches Uniting in Christ. We seek a process by which the ordained ministries of each participating church can become one ministry in Jesus Christ in relation to all, a process of reconciliation that has already begun and yet seeks its fulfillment. We acknowledge that up to now we have not been able to find ways of completing this process that are agreeable to all. The ministry of oversight needs special attention so that churches with corporate or personal oversight and those with oversight in the historic succession of bishops can be reconciled in a way that invites universal recognition. In order to further that end, *this Plenary instructs the Executive Committee to convene in the near future a meeting of representatives from the nine churches in COCU to clarify the meaning of reconciliation of ministry.* Such clarity may help the churches as they consider the inauguration of Churches Uniting in Christ. It is our hope that life together in Churches Uniting in Christ, will disclose new approaches to this question of reconciliation. The full reconciliation of ministries, as well as resolution of any remaining

challenges, is a goal we seek to accomplish and proclaim by the time of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2007.

We dare to hope that our ever-expanding circle will include the Reformed Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America which have been official advisory participants. We seek dialogues in ever widening circles, including discussions with the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, the churches of the Pentecostal, Holiness, and Baptist traditions, and the other historic black churches.

In a still larger circle, we seek to be in conversation with representatives of Judaism and Islam and other living faiths, as well as in cooperation with all persons and movements of good will and human affirmation. We see a potential for many concentric circles in varying degrees of agreement and affiliation with us. We seek to be a sign and means of God's will for the unity of humankind, as together we pursue justice, peace, and the sustainability of the created order as an expression of that reconciliation made real in Christ Jesus. Thus we long for the total reconciliation of the whole human family, even as we also confess that in the end of time there will be no longer the need for any temple made by human hands, when God will be all in all.

VI. THE PLEDGE TO COMBAT SYSTEMATIC WHITE PRIVILEGE AS A HALLMARK OF CHURCHES UNITING IN CHRIST

The sin of racism is the most divisive issue confronting Churches Uniting in Christ. The Plenary names a struggle for racial justice as a primary hallmark of this new relationship for several reasons.

First, the continued reality of the sin of pride, represented by white skin color privilege, is based on power plus prejudice. It is difficult for African American churches, congregations and members to be fully convinced of the sincerity of the call of their European American counterparts for unity as equals, if the latter are not willing to actively struggle to dismantle the obstacles to social, political and economic equality presented by systematic white skin color privilege, and to give up some of the perquisites they enjoy under it.

Second, there can be no authentic Christian community in Churches Uniting in Christ if, by their unquestioning acceptance of the unjust gains granted by an unjust system, white members of this community continue their tacit complicity with this unjust social order that denies the fullness of life to black members of the community. Because systematic skin color privilege militates against the most basic principles of the gospel of justice, in the final analysis there can be no authentic communion in Churches Uniting in Christ with the unchallenged existence of this demonic principality in our midst.

What we should seek to promote in Churches Uniting in Christ is not simply a doctrinal Christianity, but a lived, existential faith. Such a faith demands lived marks of faithful mutual accountability. In this context, such signs of accountability must be more than pious declarations; they must be concrete actions with the express purpose of dismantling white privilege. *Specifically, we commend to the churches the actions recommended in "A Call to Christian Commitment and Action to Combat Racism" approved by the Eighteenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union. We also recommend adoption of a jointly-sponsored analytical study of the workings and effects of systematic white skin color privilege in America.*

Compensatory justice is another approach to racial injustice that might be considered. Predominately white churches are beneficiaries of capital formation that is often based upon wealth that is the direct result of centuries of slave labor and other forms of economic exploitation based upon race. The resulting injustices call for compensatory justice, which includes sharing assets for the empowerment of African American communities and institutions for their continuing contributions to the church and society. *We therefore recommend that the churches convene a meeting of persons responsible for racial justice ministries in their respective communions in order to explore implications of the injustice and suggest future actions, and subsequently meet together with members of Churches Uniting in Christ for further actions.*

As a group of churches struggling to be one true community, Churches Uniting in Christ must address the continuing effects of oppression upon African Americans simply because that is the most glaring condition of evil that confronts us today. In the final analysis, however, our concern must be the eradication of the oppression and marginalization that is visited upon any of our brothers and sisters. Ultimately, we must be able to proclaim that Churches Uniting in Christ is a Christian community not simply because we declare it to be so, but because we demonstrate our faith by actively struggling to love our neighbors as God has loved us. This can only be done by engaging in concrete and sacrificial actions aimed at making a world in which all God's children might have life, and that more abundant.

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL LIFE

Living into our unity in Churches Uniting in Christ will call for initiative and creativity at every level and particularly at the congregational level. Our success in making visible the unity God has given us will depend on such initiatives becoming part of our way of being church. In Churches Uniting in Christ we will take on the discipline of including our partners in the way we think of the church and the way we do mission. For example, we suggest:

- that the history, theology, and polity of all the participating churches be taught in our seminaries and that candidates for ministry show knowledge of the other churches;
- that major decisions about the mission of a congregation or judicatory involve conversation with other congregations or judicatories of Churches Uniting in Christ;
- that a common lectionary be used whenever possible so that pastors and laity can more easily share in study and proclamation of the Word;
- that the congregations of Churches Uniting in Christ in each place meet in conjunction with the inauguration of Churches Uniting in Christ to determine their joint involvement in the assault on racism;
- that procedures emerge in every place for regular sharing of the Eucharist;
- that services of ordination involve the presence and participation of persons from other Churches Uniting in Christ;
- that youth and young adults of the churches be engaged in ecumenical formation and empowered to offer ecumenical leadership through common projects and participation

in ecumenical organizations.

Congregations and judicatories will encourage both creativity and constant care to make our unity a reality by such means as:

- regular joint mission projects;
- shared worship, pulpit exchanges, church representatives present for Baptisms, installation services, and in key decision making groups;
- frequent assessment of our joint struggle against racism in church and society;
- educational programs that teach about all the participating churches and about Churches Uniting in Christ;
- participation by delegated members in the life of the congregation of a partner church.

This Plenary *requests the Executive Committee to provide a newsletter which highlights creative local activities in which congregations can engage as we live toward the inauguration of Churches Uniting in Christ.* It is hoped that members of Churches Uniting in Christ will be informed by the witness of the many federated, united, union and yoked congregations (Ecumenical Shared Ministries) which seek to live out many of the visible marks listed in section 4.

Our commitment to the members of Churches Uniting in Christ by no means precludes joint ministry with other churches. The member churches do recognize, however, a special calling to share life and to engage in mission with one another.

VIII. IMPLEMENTATION

The member churches of the Consultation on Church Union will need to respond to the recommendations made in this report in ways they deem appropriate. We recognize that eight of the participating churches have already given formal approval to most of the “visible marks” listed in section 4.

In order to inaugurate the new relationship, the Plenary instructs the Executive Committee of the Consultation on Church Union:

1. *to convene meetings of representatives of all the participating churches in order to (a) share plans for receiving recommendations, (b) prepare together for inauguration of Churches Uniting in Christ at national, regional, and local levels and, (c) designate persons responsible for further implementation.*
2. *to ask the churches for the funding necessary to prepare adequately for the January 2002 inauguration.*
3. *to make provisions for an appropriate liturgy of inauguration of the new relationship.*

IX. STRUCTURES OF MUTUAL

EMPOWERMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The new relationship established by the churches invites them into a new common life of worship, witness and service. This common life will need to be served, in its local, regional and national expressions, by structures of mutual empowerment and accountability. These will encourage and coordinate the manifold ways in which the new relationship among the churches takes visible form. They will enable common decision-making, and mutual testing, as the churches enter new expressions of their common life. As we envision the future, we are committed as churches to ensure that youth and young adults take their place in leadership and decision-making structures to carry forward our vision of unity in Christ.

We understand that the following principles should guide the formation of these new structures:

- Diversity* The structures of mutual empowerment and accountability may differ from one place to another, according to the local church and cultural situation. The aim is to provide forms appropriate to the local situation and to the specific tasks in which the churches in that place are involved.
- Inclusivity* The structures should reflect the diversity and richness of the churches engaged together in common life. These may, in a particular place and expression of common life, include not only the churches within Churches Uniting in Christ but also their wider partners. The aim is to ensure that all the churches are accountable to one another in their common life and witness.
- Visibility* The structures should enable Christians and the churches to recognize and claim the new relationship which, in fact, now exists among them. Certainly the churches are not helped by the creation of new bureaucracies. The aim is to provide them sufficient means to enable the faithful and continued expression of their new relationship.

In light of these principles *we recommend an Implementation Strategy Conference be convened as soon as possible to clarify the nature of the structures that will best serve the member churches in this new relationship. This conference would include the Executive Committee and other key leaders of member communions.*

X. WIDER RELATIONS

From its beginning, the Consultation on Church Union has set its quest for the visible unity of the church within the framework of the wider ecumenical movement. As Churches Uniting in Christ comes into being, it affirms and celebrates its place among the family of United and Uniting Churches around the world. It hopes to share with these churches what it is learning, through its own experience of union, about the nature of Christ's church and its witness to the world. Churches Uniting in Christ acknowledges gratefully the links which its constituent churches have to various of the Christian World Communions, and its churches' participation in national, regional and local ecumenical bodies.

The Consultation on Church Union has included several churches which are engaged

among themselves in bilateral, or more extensive, expressions of common life, such as the discussions among the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and Christian Methodist Episcopal churches, the discussions among those churches and the United Methodist Church, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)—United Church of Christ Partnership. Churches Uniting in Christ welcomes these continuing relationships, and the growth which they bring in the understanding of particular aspects of Christian faith and life, as an enrichment to the body as a whole.

Some churches have particular relationships with churches which are not members of Churches Uniting in Christ, such as the proposed concordat between the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the relationship of full communion among the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. These are welcomed too, with anticipation for the gifts which they may bring. Churches Uniting in Christ understands itself to be in a continuing search for greater visible expression of the unity which is ours in Christ Jesus. We yearn for a yet wider and deeper community to be traveling that road. Recognizing the particular growth in understanding and shared life achieved by some among us with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Reformed Church in America, we feel the time has come to issue a formal invitation to those churches to join us on our journey, and we recommend that the Executive Committee consider how that can be swiftly done.

We acknowledge gratefully the faithful support offered to our search for visible unity by the Roman Catholic Church and hope that, as we explore new dimensions of our common life, we may find new opportunities for cooperation and mutual enrichment.

DOXOLOGY

Anticipating the hope and joy of our new relationship as Churches Uniting in Christ, we offer to the Triune God our gratitude and praise.

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor and power and might.
Be to our god forever and ever! Amen.”
Revelation 7:12

Endnote to Appendix 1

1. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is a symbolically appropriate time for such a celebration, especially since the national observance of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s birth also falls during this week. Local and regional celebration could come later if more suitable in the local context.

Appendix 2

CALL TO CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT AND ACTION TO COMBAT RACISM

The following is a call to action from delegates to the Eighteenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) to the nine member-churches. Common witness and service are two marks of an ecumenical body. The COCU member-churches have chosen to live this

commitment especially by focusing attention on the need to combat racism within and among the member-churches, in all churches, and in society.

The experience of the Consultation on Church Union makes clear that the unity of the Church is God's gift expressed in creation and redemption. This unity is given not only for the church but also for the whole human community and all creation. It is the gift of God's own life offered to all humanity. For this reason the church is called to be a sign and instrument of the communion and justice God intends for all people.

This truth informs COCU's search for visible church unity in particular ways.

- It implies that there is an irrefutable link between the churches' search for unity in faith, sacraments, and ministry and the struggle to overcome racism in the churches and the human community.
- It implies that authentic unity is inclusive and requires racial justice within the life of the churches and of society.
- It implies that our prophetic witness against racism and all the powers of oppression is a primary test of the faithfulness of these churches.

In combating racism, the Eighteenth Plenary Session of the Consultation on Church Union calls upon the nine member-churches to commit themselves to a unity that is liberating and reconciling, a unity offered in the Gospels, yet not fully expressed in the life and structures of these churches. It is in this context that the COCU churches, seeking to become Churches Uniting in Christ, are making commitments to change ourselves and our society.

Something is seriously wrong with race relations in the United States. One of the most prominent and pervasive evils in our national heritage and cultural routines is racism—that is, biased assumption about the genetic or cultural inferiority of certain racial-ethnic groups, and/or subordinating practices that exclude persons or deprive them of their full humanity because of their racial-ethnic identity.

Racism so permeates our customs and institutions that none can fully escape participation in it. Indeed, no member of a dominant group can fully avoid benefiting from it, and no member of a subordinate group can avoid the intention of oppression. Racism is finally about power—the abuses of power by a dominant group intent upon preserving its economic, social, political, or ecclesiastical privileges and the resulting deprivations of opportunity imposed on a subordinate group.

Unless significant initiatives are taken to counter current conditions and trends, racism—especially white racism—will continue to corrupt our national and ecclesiastical aspirations for a society that truly incarnates “liberty and justice for all.” We, therefore, appeal to the peoples of our nation and our churches for a renewed commitment to combat the sin of racism and white privilege. The moral integrity and credibility of both our nation and our churches are at stake in this struggle. For the churches in COCU particularly, our quest for visible unity is irrelevant—in fact, fraudulent—unless that unity embodies racial solidarity and produces a vital public witness for racial equality and fairness. The churches seek to embody this commitment together, through the Church of Christ Uniting envisioned by the

COCU member churches.

From the perspective of the Christian gospel whose mandate is reconciliation of all God's children, racism is demonic and sinful. It denies the image of God given each person in creation, and in the new creation each person enters by baptism.

How then shall the member-churches of the Consultation on Church Union, yearning to become Churches Uniting in Christ, combat racism? How shall we make our vision of church truly catholic, truly evangelical, and truly reformed, visible through our struggle against racism?

In view of what we discern that God is calling all the churches to be and to do, and in view of the present impediments to effective responses to that call, this Eighteenth Plenary appeals to our member-churches to make the following nine strategic commitments, and to implement these commitments together:¹

1. *Continue to make a compelling theological case against racism.* Racism must find no refuge in and no solace from the church. It is a denial of the truth known in Christ, who breaks down the humanly constructed walls that partition us into alienated communities of faith (Eph. 2:13–14). The church cannot be “truly catholic” unless it is fully open to all people on an equal basis. The church we seek to become, therefore, must be a model, a prophetic sign of the unity in diversity of God's creation. Christians must hear this affirmation regularly and convincingly.
2. *Identify, name and share information with each other regarding those concrete programs and initiatives in combating racism that are already taking place within our member churches.* A consultative conference should be explored to bring together this information and to take further action in light of these learnings as a good faith first step anticipating the inaugural liturgical celebration of Churches Uniting in Christ in 2002.
3. *Claim Martin Luther King Jr. Day observances and similar appropriate occasions for dialogue leading to systemic change.* Encourage and enable interracial dialogue within and among churches, as well as among members of the whole community. When properly designed, such dialogue can be an indispensable instrument of justice and reconciliation—reducing fears, suspicions and resentments, and enhancing mutual respect and understanding. The connection between the date of Martin Luther King Jr. Day observance and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has important potential in forging the concerns of addressing racism and pursuing our unity in Christ.
4. *Take the discipline of social ethics seriously, because the careful arguments and nuanced distinctions demanded by that discipline can save us from the simplistic exhortations that hinder effective advocacy.* An adequate defense of some preferential forms of affirmative action, for example, depends in part on sound and subtle interpretations of distributive and compensatory justice. Social ethics can bring a necessary depth to a strategy against racism.
5. *Insure that worship is an intentional witness against racism, and therefore reflects*

the fullness of the Gospel. Worship is sometimes an instrument of racial separation and oppression. Not only is the eucharistic table divided by theological barriers, but also by the racial separation within and among the churches. As the member-churches of COCU seek a common table, they must evaluate all liturgical resources and practices and insure their racial sensitivity and inclusiveness.

6. *Maintain a strong program of Christian education on the dynamics of racism and the demands of racial justice.* Educational resources, like liturgical ones, need to be evaluated to insure that they are consistent witnesses against racism and for racial equality, especially in relation to family education.
7. *Engage in rigorous institutional self-examinations, searching for racism embedded in the structures, politics and programs of churches, and set goals for measuring our progress.* This self-auditing is imperative to overcome racial offenses and advance racial reconciliation, while providing targets for change. It is most effectively accomplished in a context of mutual accountability, admonition, and affirmation among the churches.
8. *Renew the churches' commitment to the struggle for equal human rights through advocacy.* In continuing the civil rights agenda, four instruments of justice seem especially relevant for our time: (1) the preservation and enhancement of federal civil rights laws, (2) the continuation of key affirmative action initiatives to address imbalances and deprivations caused by racism, (3) the defense of economic rights, such as adequate housing, health care, nutrition, employment, and other essential material conditions, and (4) reform of the criminal justice system.
9. *Develop resources to address the issues related to racism in the member-churches' capacity and responsiveness to new immigrant and cultural groups.*

As a first step in this “Call to Commitment and Action to Combat Racism,” the delegates to the Eighteenth Plenary Session have covenanted together to actively pursue the commitment of our communions to combating racism in our churches and in our nation as an essential component in our pursuit to become Churches Uniting In Christ.

Combating racism is a formidable task—and eradicating it will appear to many as beyond realistic possibilities. It demands both the conversion of individuals and the transformation of churches. Yet, we have good reasons for hope and persistence in struggle—primarily because God is ever-creating new possibilities for racial solidarity.

The commitment by the COCU churches to overcome racism and live more intentionally the unity and catholicity of Christ’s Church is a promise and a prayer. It will lead us into deeper understandings of the triune God, the redemption offered in Jesus Christ, the nature of the Church and the world as created by God. In this commitment these nine churches, seeking to become the Church of Christ Uniting, will be a sign and foretaste of the unity of the whole people of God.

Adopted by unanimous vote of the delegates of the nine member communions to the Eighteenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union, January 24, 1999, in Saint Louis,

Missouri.

Endnote to Appendix 2

1. These nine commitments are spelled out in greater detail in “Erasing Racism: A Strategy in Quest of Racially Just Unity”—a basic resource document for the Eighteenth Plenary of COCU, published in *MiD-Stream*, Vol. 37, Nos. 3–4, July/October 1998. The Executive Committee commends that paper to the communions for study and implementation.