The Voice of the United States Churches at the 9th Assembly

Over 500 representatives of member churches in the United States will be in Porto Alegre to participate in the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in February, 2006. Over 60 are delegated representatives who will be responsible for coming to consensus on matters of policy and direction for the next seven-year period.

Common morning and evening prayers, as well as daily Bible study in small groups, will ground the Assembly in spiritual reflection. Deliberation will be stimulated by plenary presentations on church unity, economic justice, overcoming violence, Christian identity, religious plurality, Latin America and the Assembly theme – “God, in your grace, transform the world.”

The Mutirão will offer workshops and seminars, cultural events and exhibits to all participants. It will provide an opportunity to deepen substantive reflections on the theme of the Assembly and the plenaries presented in the first half of the event. Delegates are encouraged to participate in the Mutirão offerings and to bring these reflections into the decision-making process. As an integral part of the Assembly, the Mutirão workshops are intended to supplement and accompany the Assembly deliberations. A schedule of the mutirãos can be found at: http://www.wcc-assembly.info/en/mutirao/schedule.

The Stewards Program is the beginning of a long process that encourages young people to continue the journey of ecumenism. Many young adults will be there as stewards providing assistance to the gathering. As a community of young people from different churches, countries and cultures, stewards bring their faith, backgrounds and visions to an ecumenical experience of togetherness and friendship. Being a steward is a challenge that fosters involvement and participation and may change lives.

Participants will join “ecumenical conversations” for sustained discussion on a variety of topics related to the life and witness of the church today. Conversations will focus on the changing religious, ecumenical, political, social and economic landscape in which churches and individual Christians are called to act. The conversations aim at offering meaningful presentations of the issues, encouraging an exchange of experiences and identifying emerging challenges. The fruits of these discussions will influence the future programs of the WCC.

The members of the Board of the US Conference for the World Council of Churches will be present providing feedback and input from the perspec-
Local Peacemakers Honored at Annual Meeting in Chicago

The US Decade to Overcome Violence committee honored five individuals and organizations from the Chicago area for their peacemaking efforts during the US Conference for the World Council of Churches Annual Meeting and Pre-Assembly event, 10-12 October 2005.

“Blessed are the Peacemakers” awards are given to persons, congregations and groups that exemplify creative and courageous peace and justice-making efforts in the world. These special awards are given on behalf of the US Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) Committee, made up of church and ecumenical representatives from throughout the USA.

Following a presentation by DOV Coordinator, Rev. Hansulrich Gerber, the US DOV committee co-chairs, Dr. Jean Martensen and Dr. Tom Paxson, assisted by young adult DOV consultant Ms. Corina Thompson, presented the “Blessed are the Peacemakers” award to the following recipients:

- Michael Terrien, founder of the organization Play for Peace;
- Melineh Kano, Program Director of Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Ministries of Illinois;
- Committee for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel;
- Interfaith Worker Justice; and
- The Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America.

The recipients expressed gratitude and excitement at the awards, mentioning that such recognition provides an excellent way for spreading information about their organizations and work. Further information about each of the awardees is available on the DOV website www.overcomingviolence.org.
Youth leaders expressed their energy and determination to carry forward the ecumenical vision in the US, and challenged church representatives to take their contribution seriously, in a preparatory gathering for the World Council of Churches’ (WCC) 9th Assembly in 2006.

The young adults, some of whom are currently attending the 9th Assembly, formulated “living letters” to bring back to their churches during a special event “Shift your space – transform the world” held in Chicago, 8-9 October 2005.

For two days, the young people and students “shifted their spaces,” ideas and perspectives through conversations that crossed boundaries and covered the whole globe. The diverse group represented most of the WCC member communions in the US as well as international guests from eight countries.

“We ask the church leaders to step out in faith and act in partnership,” said Michael Neuroth, coordinator of the youth event, in a presentation during the US Conference annual meeting of WCC member churches which followed the youth event.

“We recognize that greater youth participation is a reality which all of us must faithfully work toward. Our message is one of thankfulness, equal partnership, and desire to contribute our talents toward the future work of the WCC US conference,” he said.

“As young adults, people often tell us that we are the future of the church. The future is now. We share your passion, energy, faith and hope,” underlined Ray Ranker (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America). “We want to be equal partners at the board tables, where decisions are made, at the round tables, where we deliberate, and at the communion table, where we join in fellowship.”

Jay Williams (United Methodist Church) added, “We stand as young people already engaged in ministries of peacemaking and justice in our local communities, in our schools, on our campuses, at our jobs, and in our churches. And as young people, we yearn for spaces where we can regularly connect our faith and our service through our communions and ecumenical connections. We seek to channel our peacemaking efforts through the church, and not solely secular civic organizations.”

During the two-day meeting, which included common prayer, fellowship, presentations and discussion on ecumenical and social issues, the young adults identified close links between their peace and justice work and that of the WCC. They upheld, in particular, the vision for a culture of peace promoted by the WCC’s global initiative, “Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation & Peace 2001-2010.”
The 10-12 October 2005 annual meeting and Pre-9th Assembly event of the US Conference co-hosted by the ELCA in Chicago, provided WCC member church delegates, church representatives and ecumenists the opportunity to be briefed on preparations for the 9th Assembly, to discuss key issues of concern to the ecumenical movement, and to participate in special services of common prayer using liturgies prepared for the upcoming Assembly.

For US Conference moderator Rt. Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky of the Orthodox Church in America, the pre-Assembly was “a milestone on the way to Porto Alegre”.

Theologians Inspire & Challenge
Brazilian theologians Dr. Victor Westhelle, a professor of systematic theology based in Chicago, and Dr. Marcelo Schneider, a specialist in ecumenical social ethics, led plenaries on the key Assembly themes and the expectations of the Brazilian churches, while WCC staff detailed the program arrangements. Dr. David Radcliff, Executive Director of the New Community Project, a faith-based nonprofit organization focused on justice concerns and stewardship of the earth, provided a challenging theological reflection on the 9th Assembly theme, “God, in your grace, transform the world.”

Common Prayer in Spirit of 9th Assembly
Special worship leaders, Dr. Stanley Ralph of First Presbyterian Church of Jamaica, Queens, NY, and Rev. Dr. Glauce Vasconcelos-Wilkey of Seattle University, led services of common prayer in the spirit of the Assembly while also remembering those who have suffered as a result of the hurricanes on the US Gulf Coast. Guest preachers included the Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson, WCC President from North America, and Rev. Terence R. Gray, Pastor of St. Mark A.M.E. Church, Orlando, Florida, who are attending the 9th Assembly.

Young Adults Present Prophetic “Living Letters” to the Churches
Seminarians, students and youth delegates at the 8-9 October Pre-Assembly “Shift Your Space – Transform the World” meeting expressed their determination to carry forward the ecumenical vision in the US and have challenged church leaders to take their contributions seriously. During the event they formulated “living letters” to bring back to their churches.

Peacemaker Awards
The US Conference participants turned again to the vision of a culture of peace promoted by the WCC’s global initiative, “Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV): Churches Seeking Reconciliation & Peace 2001-2010.” Peacemaker awards were given by the US DOV committee to a number of groups and individuals based in the Chicago area.

Much attention was given to situations of conflict in the world, in Iraq and elsewhere. John Thomas, general minister and president of the United Church of Christ, upheld the reconciling ministry that the churches must nurture: “As we prepare for the 9th Assembly, we pray that this much-anticipated gathering of Christians will bear witness to the reconciling love of God in our violent world.”
Changing religious context
A panel on “Ecumenism in the 21st Century” offered short presentations from a variety of perspectives, including Evangelical, Roman Catholic, youth and Hispanic, and invited participants to consider the way in which ecumenism is changing in the US as religion enters new areas of public life.

Speakers described the complex evolution of religious life in North America with more “denominational mobility” among young people, alongside strengthened denominational identities. Evangelical and Pentecostal groups are also growing, posing new challenges to traditional ecumenical bodies.

Focus on Africa
The US Conference also paid particular attention to the situation of Africa as part of their preparations for the WCC 9th Assembly, which gathers under the theme “God, in your grace, transform the world.”

Using the metaphor of an ecumenical “journey of hope,” WCC Director of Management, Dr. William Temu, reported that the WCC’s “Africa Focus” had “galvanized churches and ecumenical organizations throughout the continent in practical actions to empower Africans to transform their own situations. In that sense, it is an inspiring example for all the churches which will gather at the 9th Assembly.”

US Conference Announces Dates for 2006 Meetings
The Board of the US Conference will be convening a post-9th Assembly business meeting 11-12 May 2006 in San Jose, California following the National Workshop on Christian Unity, which convenes 8-11 May. A more festive and celebratory meeting of member churches and ecumenical friends in the United States designed to ‘bring home’ the spirit of the 9th Assembly will take place in New York City 26-27 October 2006. A Special Event fundraiser will take place on Thursday, October 26th. A post-Assembly information tour will take place from April 17-25 with details to be announced. Watch the US Office website for further details: www.wcc-usa.org.
Guest-speaking at the recent International Conference on Violence and Christian Spirituality to an assembled group of world-renowned theologians, WCC General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia highlighted the importance of taking a spiritual approach to the Decade to Overcome Violence.

“I believe that prayer and contemplation is the foremost discipline in overcoming violence,” Kobia said. “The goal is not to eradicate violence, but to overcome the spirit, the logic and the practice of violence.”

Kobia pointed out that Church unity is an instrumental tool in the continuing spiritual and physical endeavor to stop violence. He also highlighted the importance of inter-faith dialogue in this struggle, referring to the “growing vision” that “God’s oikumene includes not just Christians, but people of all living faiths.”

Kobia also discussed the complexity of the problem the religious community faces. The line between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” violence, Kobia said, is being blurred at local, regional and international levels, with civic groups and national governments asserting the right to defend themselves against “any insurgent” and to “fight against what they identify as state terrorism.” Kobia affirmed the need to recognize the many “forms” of violence, and to seek to supplant it through “reconciliation and peace.”

The conference was for many a key moment in the Decade to Overcome Violence. Hosted in Boston, MA, by Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, in cooperation with the WCC and the BostonTheological Institute, the conference brought together religious leaders from a broad spectrum of faiths and cultural traditions, and affirmed the need for unity among Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Pentecostal churches.

Kobia’s remarks during his speech echoed the pre-conference statement of Rev. Nicholas C. Triantafilou, president of Holy Cross, who emphasized the importance of the event for Orthodox churches. Triantafilou cited the conference as a way for the community to actively participate in the initiatives of the WCC and of the UN.

“By extending invitations to the world’s foremost authorities in the critical study of peace and violence, the Orthodox Christian community views this program as an opportunity to contribute directly to The Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010) initiative of the World Council of Churches and the Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010) directive of the United Nations,” Triantafilou said.

The keynote address of this year’s conference was given by His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios of America. Other guest-speakers at the event included Dr. Marc Gopin, Director of the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University; Dr. Ioannis Petrou, Professor of Social Ethics at the University of Thessalonike’s School of Theology; and Dr. John Witte, Jr., Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Study of Religion at Emory University in Atlanta.

Other figures who addressed the event’s attendees included Dr. Tarek Mitri, Inter-Religious Relations and Dialogue, World Council of Churches; Dr. Antonios Kireopoulos, Assistant General Secretary for International Affairs and Peace, National Council of Churches; Rev. Dr. Diane C. Kessler, Executive Director, Massachusetts Council of Churches; Dr. Philip Mamalakis, Asst. Professor of Pastoral Theology, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology; Dr. David Little, T.J. Dermot Dunphy Professor of the Practice of Religion, Ethnicity and International Conflict, Harvard Divinity School; Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou, Associate Director, Institute on Religion and World Affairs, Boston University; and Rev. Dr. Fernando Enns, Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Heidelberg, Germany.
The Decade to Overcome Violence Celebrates its Mid-Point at the 9th Assembly

2006 Focus on Latin America:
The Assembly will mark the launch of the DOV Focus on Latin America for 2006. A new project, the Storytelling Tree, will be proposed in which workshops will be organized to teach people to use a new software called Confectionary to write their own multimedia stories and make contributions to an ever-growing story of people everywhere overcoming violence.

DOV Plenary: Youth Overcoming Violence
On Saturday, February 18th, the DOV Plenary will take place. The theme will be Youth Overcoming Violence. It will focus on the efforts of youth in overcoming violence on different levels and will include issues of religion and violence, structural violence, small arms, and children in armed conflict. People from Brazil, the Middle East, the United States and Uganda will contribute.

Ecumenical Conversation: “Churches responding to new threats to peace and human security”
This Ecumenical Conversation will seek to address new threats to peace and human security by reflecting on the current growth of militarization in societies, and sharing examples of ways in which churches are involved in challenging this growth within the context of the Decade to Overcome Violence.

Workshops in the Mutirão program of the Assembly:
There will be 20 workshops as part of the Mutirao for the Assembly. Conducted by participants from all over the globe, they illustrate the far reach of the DOV and the very local nature of the peace efforts the DOV celebrates. Topics include:
• Children Affected by Armed Conflict
• Global Priorities: Military Spending vs. Human Needs
• DOV: Historic Peace Churches’ Involvement and Alternatives to Violence
• Overcoming Violence in Families
• Healing Grace through Congregations
• Building a Just Peace in God’s Household - Living Non-Violently in a Violent World
• Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

DOV Exhibit: The exhibit will be located adjacent to the plenary hall and will act as a central meeting place for networking and impromptu presentations. It will feature a display of materials reflecting the efforts of churches in overcoming violence. The presentation will be primarily through artistic expression.

Walk for Peace: Evening prayer on Tuesday, February 21st will prayerfully recognize and celebrate the mid-point of the Decade to Overcome Violence. Participants will join the vigil and march, called Walk for Peace. It will be coordinated by local, Brazilian churches to celebrate the Decade to Overcome Violence. Over 4,000 people are expected to join in as a stream of prayerful supporters of peace walk through the streets of Porto Alegre. The theme will be light with different stations along the march at which candles will be lit to indicate the light of peace overcoming the darkness of violence and guiding others on the path to peace. Rev. Sam Kobia and Rev. Hansuli Gerber will be joined by Nobel Peace Prize laureates, Rigoberta Menchu, Adolfo Esquivel and Archbishop Tutu in praying and speaking out for peace.
The UN Office of the World Council of Churches hit the ground running in the New Year hosting a 3-day seminar on UN Reform in preparation for the 9th Assembly.

Held from 11-13 January 2006 the seminar brought together a small group of key people from member churches and partner organizations to stimulate discussion about the UN Reform agenda in the aftermath of the World Summit 2005 in September. It was also an opportunity to hear from the WCC-UN office and those organizations following the processes closely.

Participants in the seminar included Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) Commissioners and experts on UN related issues from member churches and partner organizations, as well as people that are working in the Public Issues Committee at the WCC 9th Assembly.

The group worked together to develop a draft statement, which is to be presented to the Public Issues Committee of the WCC General Assembly. The draft statement dealt primarily with reform in three main areas of the UN, namely security, development, and human rights.

At the seminar’s midpoint on Thursday 12 January there was a public plenary on the issue of UN Reform held at the UN building during which the President of the UN General Assembly, Jan Eliasson, was a keynote speaker and panelist. Responding for the WCC were Rev. Dr. Konrad Raiser, Ms. Salpy Eskidjian Weiderud, and Mr. Lopeti Senituli.

Historically, the World Council of Churches’ Commission of the Churches on International Affairs and the United Nations have had an important relationship. Church representatives actively participated in the formulation of the UN Charter. CCIA became one of the first international Non-Governmental Organizations to be granted consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council.

With 347 member communions, the WCC - CCIA is a critical advocacy arm of the global Church. At this crucial time in the history of the UN, as it considers a series of wide ranging reforms that may better enable it to respond to the needs of the world’s peoples 60 years on from its inception, it is crucial that the Churches are involved in this process. The UN seminar helped to prepare and equip churches at the 9th Assembly for deciding how best the WCC can influence and accompany this critical reform process.
WCC UN Office Welcomes Katherine Nightingale

Katherine Nightingale recently joined the World Council of Churches United Nations office as one of the organization’s official representatives to the United Nations. Having started in September 2005, Nightingale, an Anglican from the United Kingdom, took over from Dr. Hans Heijs and will spend a year representing the WCC at the UN on issues of disarmament, economic justice, UN reform and some aspects of conflict and security.

Nightingale joins the WCC UN office from WCC partner organization Christian Aid where she worked on advocacy and policy within the Latin America, Caribbean and Global Division focusing on Conflict, Governance and Human Rights issues in Colombia and Haiti. She worked with UK and European organizations to lobby the UK government and the European Union to uphold human rights in Colombia, attending the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

Similarly she worked to strengthen the UK agencies working group on Haiti, to influence the UK government regarding the deteriorating situation in Haiti in the aftermath to Aristide’s departure, and worked with EU agencies to enable the voice of Haitian civil society to be heard in the European Commission. Prior to that post, Nightingale worked on Iraq in the Media Team at Christian Aid and also spent time working in the Global Advocacy and Policy Division. She holds a Masters Degree in International Relations.

During her time in the UN office, Nightingale is looking forward to furthering the work of the WCC as it engages with the UN Review summit on the Program of Action on Small Arms. She will be following the Financing For Development agenda that seeks to hold the World Bank and IMF accountable to the UN and to take forward a comprehensive agenda for development. She will seek to cover the regional areas of Latin America and the Middle East, particularly with respect to the UN Security Council.

Alongside The Rev. Dr. Laurence K. Bropleh, the WCC’s permanent representative to the UN, Nightingale organized a 3-day seminar on UN reform 11-13 January 2006 to feed into the WCC’s thinking on the issue at the 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre. And as part of a strategy of communication and information-sharing, the UN office has begun a pilot project to share information on conflict, security and humanitarian issues on a regular basis with the wider WCC constituents working on these areas.

As a young adult herself, early into her work Nightingale took part in the WCC’s Pre-Assembly ‘Shift Your Space: Transform the World’ Young Adult Event in Chicago in October. Meeting with over 50 inspiring young adults from around the United States, Nightingale was able to share some of the work of the WCC UN office and take part in discussions challenging current trends in international politics, economic inequality, the ecumenical movement, and church structures.

Passionate about actively working for a changed world, she is looking forward to the year ahead as a true opportunity to support and strengthen the work of the WCC as it seeks to be prophetic in ‘speaking truth to power’ at the United Nations.
DOV Website Revamped!
Easier access to updated resources and information as well as lots more news and stories are some of the bonuses you’ll find on the newly re-designed DOV website. Pay a visit today! www.overcomingviolence.org

Focus on Asia 2006
“Building Communities of Peace for All” was the theme of the 12th Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia taking place in Chiang Mai, Thailand, April 1-6, 2005. Asia is a vast continent, plural in many ways, the forms of violence, interpersonal and collective, physical, psychological, sexual and deprivation, vary from place to place. Churches, organizations and networks are creatively responding to prevent and overcome violence and to build peace with justice. 2005 will be an opportunity to highlight this work, affirm creative action and encourage close cooperation.

In the spirit of “Building Communities of Peace for All” the theme of last year’s DOV annual focus, churches in Asia found creative ways to address violence in their contexts. Stories of communities addressing crime and punishment and violence in economics abound. A recent inter-religious conference in the Philippines and an event on economic justice in Hong Kong were examples of initiatives by churches to engage civil and religious groups in dialogue and cooperative efforts. The Ecumenical Coalition for Tourism also passionately raised the issue of violence in tourism.

For access to the DOV newsletter: visit http://overcomingviolence.org

Militarism
From it’s beginning, a central goal of the DOV has been to “challenge the growing militarization of our world, especially the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.” A recent study by DOV intern, Abigail Pound, called “World Military Expenditures” demonstrated that government military spending is depriving many societies of funding for basic social services and development aid. The DOV calls on churches to begin to play an even greater role in challenging government and neighbors on this issue. In a recent statement, the WCC Executive Committee called on churches to “exercise their unique potential” to address the growing reality of militarism in all levels of society.

For access to the report, log on to the DOV website at www.overcomingviolence.org. For access to the WCC Executive Committee statement on the control of small arms and light weapons visit: http://www.oikumene.org/Statement.1250.0.html.

2006 Lenten Fast From Violence

Since 2002, the US Decade to Overcome Violence Committee has marked the season of Lent by advocating for a Lenten Fast From Violence. Each week in Lent is highlighted by a call to fast from a specific form of violence. The five topics to be focused on this year include: fasting from self inflicted violence, fasting to bring focus to the Millennium Development Goals and the violence they seek to disrupt, fasting from the violence of systems—media, fasting about the breach in public discourse, and fasting from the abuse of the environment. The US DOV Committee invites the involvement of individuals, families and churches in this Fast From Violence and provides special resource materials prepared for each week’s focus topic as well as links to related resources. These may be found by visiting the website for the Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace: www.overcomingviolence.org.

This year’s Lenten Fast from Violence project has been coordinated by Corina Thompson, a young adult working as a DOV consultant in the United States office of the WCC with assistance from Nathan Allen, an intern working in the Ecumenical Affairs office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
Each year for 60 years, the Church World Service Leadership Development program has recruited U.S. seminaries to give full scholarships to World Council of Churches Scholars – graduate students from around the world. Then it has served as a “home base” for the scholars, providing moral support during their stay and connecting them to each other, building a network among these emerging leaders of the global church.

The leadership development program was founded in 1946 as the Ecumenical Scholarship Exchange of Church World Service. Later it morphed into the National Council of Churches’ Division of Overseas Ministries Leadership Development Program. Now, as the CWS Leadership Development Forum, it is among CWS’s several issues- and geographic-area forums.

Most forum members are representatives of agencies that also grant scholarships and/or otherwise support development of leadership for “any work that the church does,” said the forum’s chairperson, Rev. Franklin Ishida, Director for Leadership Development, Program Unit for Global Mission, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago, Ill. “That includes theology but also development, management, health, and education, to name a few.”

John Backer, an employee of the CWS Immigration and Refugee Program, staffs the CWS Leadership Development Forum and, for the past 31 years, has served as the National Correspondent of the WCC Scholarship Program.

Mr. Backer explained that, each year, national committees in countries around the world recommend graduate students for WCC scholarships, forwarding the students’ applications to WCC headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, for review.

Most of the students already have been accepted by an institution of higher or continuing education and WCC Scholars are studying in all regions of the world: Africa, Europe, North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, the Pacific, and the Middle East. The WCC proposes certain students for theological study in the United States, and it is through the CWS Leadership Development Forum that placements for the scholars are secured.

Worldwide this year, there are 370 WCC Scholars. Over the past 60 years, more than 10,000 students have received WCC scholarships for studies worldwide.

In 2005-6, nine scholars from seven countries are studying at seven U.S. seminaries. Three are from Kenya, and the others are from Haiti, Nagaland, India, the Philippines, Serbia-Montenegro, Uganda, and Zambia.

Among them is Renemsongla Ozukum, a Baptist from Nagaland, India, and a Masters Degree student in Ecumenics at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. In 2003-5, she studied at Lexington Theological Seminary in Lexington, Kentucky.

Ms Ozukum joined the CWS Leadership Development Forum for its 2005 annual meeting on December 9 at CWS’s New York City offices. The forum’s value, she said, “is not simply giving me a scholarship. It’s giving me a source of strength and inspiration personally to continue my journey of peace and justice ministry.”

In the midst of her studies, Ms.
World Council of Churches

WCC Assembly Sunday

12 February 2006
Pray and celebrate with the churches of the world!

“God, in your grace, transform the world”

In February 2006, the churches of the world will gather in Porto Alegre, Brazil for the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The Assembly will bring together thousands of Christians from diverse traditions and all regions of the world to celebrate, study and pray together.

“God, in your grace, transform the world” is the theme of the Assembly and the prayer and the vision of the Christians from all corners of the earth who will gather at that time. The theme will lead us in prayer as well as inform our deliberations on issues such as the future of the ecumenical movement, our commitment to economic justice, our witness to overcoming violence and the challenges we face in the midst of religious plurality.

Assemblies are often turning points in the life of the World Council and this Assembly will surely leave its mark on ecumenical history. The Assembly participants will together discuss, discern and envision the challenges and priorities for the World Council of Churches in the coming seven years.

I would like to invite churches, communities and Christians in all places to pray together on Sunday 12 February and during the days of the Assembly which will follow, united in a common faith and common vision, that the Spirit of God will come upon us and guide our work during that time, and to offer solidarity and support for the event and the proposals and vision which will emerge from the gathering.

May the grace of God transform our world!

Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, General Secretary, World Council of Churches

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Facts & Figures

WCC 9th Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February 2006

- The most diverse Assembly in WCC history
- 3,000 participants from virtually every Christian tradition and world faith community
- Over 700 delegates from 347 member churches of the WCC
- Fifth anniversary of the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence
- Hundreds of workshops, presentations, stands and exhibits
- Major themes: Economic justice; Youth overcoming violence; Church unity; Christian identity and religious plurality; Latin America
- Election of the WCC leadership and 150-member central committee
A prayer of transformation

Prayer prepared for WCC Assembly Sunday by the group of youth interns in the World Council of Churches. Additional ideas for prayer, worship and Bible study are available on the WCC 9th Assembly website: www.wcc-assembly.info

Lord, our God Almighty
Transformer and Creator
God of fatherly peace and motherly love
We gather before you with our pleas of despair
From our hearts filled with hope.

Gracious God, your church has experienced the pangs of birth and its infancy on the shores of the Mediterranean.
Be with your church as it continues its growth across the world into adulthood and full unity.

With the church still in its adolescence
We pray for your gift of transformation.
Revive in us a spirit of community
Mould our thoughts into ones of love.
Instill in us a sense of your peace.

Give us the courage and resilience to accept transformation
For ourselves and for others
For the ones who suffer and the ones who execute it
For the victims and the perpetrators
And for all your people.

In a world filled with violence and hatred
Give us the courage to sow love and harmony.
In a world rampant with discrimination and inequity,
Nurture in us the seeds of unity and grant us the foresight to see and resolve our divisions.

Prepare our hearts, minds and hands to reap your harvest. Amen.

Join us! How you can participate in WCC Assembly Sunday

There are many ways in which church communities and individuals can be involved and support the WCC Assembly, even if they cannot be present in Porto Alegre. Be creative! Use the time for public events, prayer and worship, educational and cultural programmes. Other ideas for action include:

- Pray for the WCC and the churches of the world on WCC Assembly Sunday, 12 February 2006
- Follow the Assembly and its work on the Assembly website and watch the daily video clips and webcasts (www.wcc-assembly.info) every day starting 15 February
- Organize a meeting or discussion on the Assembly theme: “God, in your grace, transform the world”
- Share information about WCC Assembly Sunday with others. Distribute copies of this brochure
- Support the work of the WCC with a collection or a financial donation using our website or in consultation with your church or National Council of Churches
Ozukum also has plunged herself into U.S. church life, helping with her congregation’s women to women ministry, children’s ministry and choir. She took part in a Habitat for Humanity “build” in Lexington, Florida, and delivered a “Living Letter” at a WCC U.S. Conference annual meeting.

There, “Ren pled with the United States to be a source of peacemaking now, just as American Baptist missionaries from the United States brought Nagaland another way of being through the Christ child,” said Rev. Deborah DeWinter, WCC Program Executive for the United States, based in New York City. “At that meeting, we focused on Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his philosophy of non-violence, which led Ren to write a thesis on its applications by the Naga Church.”

“The scholars who come for training also bring something to the hosting institution and to the U.S. churches,” Rev. Ishida said. “From Ren, we’ve experienced another part of the Indian subcontinent, and received her expressions of her faith journey.”

Now the CWS Leadership Development Forum has enlisted Ms Ozukum to help plan the WCC scholars’ annual conference, April 7-9, 2006, at Lexington Theological Seminary, KY.

The forum also is an important network for participants themselves, said Dr. Rita M. Pullium, Vice President of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, based in New York City. “It’s a place for sharing common goals and issues.”

In addition to Rev. Ishida, Dr. Pullium, Rev. DeWinter, and Mr. Backer, the CWS Leadership Development Forum includes Br. James E. Teets, The Episcopal Church; Ms. Lisa Katzenstein, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church; Rev. Garland Pierce, National Council of Churches U.S.A., and a representative from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

That today’s WCC Scholars are future leaders of the global church was illustrated by chance later on Dec. 9, the same day as the CWS Leadership Development Forum met. Stopping by CWS’s offices was Rev. Didier Crouzet, responsible for international relations for the French Reformed Church. He was a WCC Scholar at the Pacific School of Religion in 1979-80.

Mr. Backer said the forum is in the process of seeking U.S. seminary placements for 10 WCC applicants for 2006-7.

A Time to Dance, a pre-professional dance company from New York City, will be performing at 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The group is known for its expressive, full-body dancing style that includes elements of ballet, jazz, Horton, modern, and African. Composed of young-adults aged 15-24, the dance ministry connects theology and prayer with artistry, and explores the way in which movement can be an expression of faith.
Nine international scholars representing the Methodist Churches of Haiti and of the Philippines, the Orthodox Church of Kenya, Anglican Church of Kenya and of Uganda, Baptist Church of Nagaland, India, Pilgrim Wesleyan Church of Zambia, and the Serbian Orthodox Church, will meet for the third annual WCC Scholars Gathering scheduled for 7-9 April 2006 in Lexington, Kentucky.

Hosted by the Lexington Theological Seminary, which is affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the gathering will share the theme for the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, “God, in your grace, transform the world.” As in the past two years, the international scholars will reflect on the themes and objectives of the WCC’s Decade to Overcome Violence.

Daisy L. Machado, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Lexington Theological Seminary, will address the gathering, and discussions on the Decade will be facilitated by Rev. Hansulrich Gerber, Coordinator of the WCC’s Decade to Overcome Violence together with Ms. Tara Tautari, who heads the Scholarships Program for the Council. The planning team for the 2006 gathering includes the Rev. Renemsongla Ozukum from India, a 2005 graduate of Lexington Theological Seminary currently studying at Union Theological Seminary in New York, Mr. John Backer, National Correspondent of the WCC Scholarship Program, Church World Service, Rachel Smith Childress, Registrar and Director of Student Services at Lexington, and Rev. Deborah DeWinter, Program Executive for the United States, World Council of Churches.
Trip of Transformation Team Generates Interest in WCC Among Colleges, Seminaries

By Nathaniel Preus

Met with hospitality and interest from groups of students, faculty, and church congregations along the way, the WCC’s Trip of Transformation team was rewarded for the energy they put into a fast-paced tour of Midwest colleges, seminaries and churches this fall.

The team, whose members came from both the headquarters of the WCC in Geneva, Switzerland and the US office in New York, delivered lectures on the ecumenical movement, lead worship services, taught classes, and took part in discussions at colleges like the University of Dubuque in Dubuque, IA, Macalester College in St. Paul, MN, Luther College in Decorah, IA, and visited local churches, including First Congregational United Church of Christ in Dubuque, IA, and Trinity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, MN.

One of the most striking aspects of the trip was the way in which the team was able to reestablish, or in some cases, create a relationship between the World Council of Churches and the institutions and people they met.

Dr. Guillermo Kerber, who represented the WCC’s Geneva office on the trip, commented on the WCC’s communication policy with these institutions, noting that “most of these college and seminary students and staff had never heard about the WCC but were eager to know about our activities and programs.”

US Office Program Executive, Rev. Deborah DeWinter, who conceptualized the trip, explained that the Trip of Transformation was a “wake up call” and a “crucial step” in bridging the gap between the WCC and its constituency.

One area where the team had particular success at doing this was in connecting with young adults interested in the ecumenical movement. Along with requests for more information and for return visits from several institutions, the WCC received immediate interest from students at the University of Dubuque and Luther College.

A group of students from Luther College are currently attending the 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and two Luther students have signed on for winter and summer internships at the WCC office in New York City.

Niki Mosier, a sophomore at Luther College who attended a class session lead by Rev. DeWinter at Luther in September, and who is among the contingent from Luther attending the Assembly, says she became interested in the Assembly when DeWinter mentioned the WCC’s emphasis on youth leadership.

Mosier said she was particularly interested in the WCC’s Decade to Overcome Violence and its initiatives to end violence against women and children.

Dr. Kerber and WCC Central Committee member Jen Nagel in discussion with a student at Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota.

“T’m really interested in issues of nonviolence and I thought [the assembly] would be a really great way to learn more about what other areas of the church, besides the ELCA, are doing to work for nonviolence,” Mosier said.

Rev. Mike Blair, Campus Pastor at Luther College, reflected that the Trip of Transformation team’s strength was in showing a personal side to the ecumenical movement.

“They really put a face on the issue of translating global issues into local action,” Blair said. “It’s easy to think about the
WCC as a distant large-scale bureaucracy… but it was clear that the strength of [the WCC] is building relationships that connect people.”

Part of that personal side to ecumenism that the team brought included the participation of the team’s three young adults, Jessica Ralph, a member of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., Kent Yoder, a Mennonite, and Trisha Nolan, a member of the Presbyterian Church (USA) who coordinated the Trip of Transformation.

Ralph, who performed liturgical dances and taught classes at several of the institutions they visited, captured students’ imaginations by connecting spirituality with her artistry in dance.

“Jessica’s performance really put a new twist onto my previous notion of what makes dance powerful,” said Jason Groth, a junior at the University of Dubuque. “Her emotional appeal to the audience is what made the piece

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Nathaniel Preus Initiates Communications Internship

Nathaniel Preus, a senior at Luther College in Decorah, IA, recently completed a one-month long internship at the US Office of the World Council of Churches in New York City. Preus is the first of two Luther College students who accepted internships proposed to several institutions of member churches by the WCC’s recent Trip of Transformation team.

Preus’ responsibilities at the US Office focused primarily in the field of communications, including reporting and editing for the Winter ’06 issue of the Ecumenical Courier. He also served as a reporter at the WCC United Nations Liaison Office for the 11-13 January UN Reform Seminar where the President of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Jan Eliasson, addressed a prominent group of international ecumenists who were gathered for the occasion. They have been monitoring the UN’s internal reform efforts.

Currently finishing degrees in English and French at Luther College, Preus plans to travel after he graduates in the spring, and to ultimately pursue a career in journalism. He anticipates further opportunities to do more religious writing and looks forward to the possibility of future work in the ecumenical community.
powerful and captivating. It not only kept attention, it also enhanced the expression of the movements.”

The Trip of Transformation team’s visit to Dubuque also generated a response among staff and faculty, who expressed interest in maintaining a relationship with the WCC.

“It’s our hope actually, our university’s hope across the board to solidify our relationship with the WCC, and to get our students thinking that, hey this is something you can do after you graduate,” said Doug Scott, interim director of multicultural services at University of Dubuque.

Susan Smith, University of Dubuque Vice President for Enrollment Management, Marketing, and University Relations, commented that the University of Dubuque shares a theme with the WCC, in that the institution is also in the midst of a “transformation.”

“We are a college that is essentially coming back to life... and as we’re coming back to life we’re doing it in a very diverse way, linking every aspect of our lives with the national community of diversity,” Smith said. “So we are looking to partner with organizations like the WCC so we can learn things about the global environment, and about ways people in the global community are working to improve education, and especially faith-based education.”

In hopes of establishing relationships as promising as the ones at University of Dubuque and Luther College, the WCC is planning to expand on this pilot initiative.

The US Conference for the WCC will be discussing the implementation of future “Teams of Transformation,” which would travel to other areas of the United States annually in an effort to build more cross-institutional connections, and strengthen connection with young adults and ties with member churches. Plans are already underway to use this model to bring home the spirit and substance of the 9th Assembly currently taking place in Porto Alegre, Brazil. For more information and team reflections on the Trip of Transformation, please visit: http://www.wcc-usa.org/news/news-container/browse/1/article/1119/trip-of-transformation.html.

Taking it to the Streets – The World Council of Churches Road Trip

Jean-Nicholas Bazin and Dawn Ross, from the World Council of Churches Income Monitoring and Development team, joined with their colleague from the New York office of the US Conference for the World Council of Churches, Caroline Hennessy, on an 8-day road trip to visit with member churches and traditional funding partners in the United States.

The visits were a chance to catch up, share information and ideas and answer questions. Topics ranged from the upcoming Assembly participation to programs and funding to arranging future meetings to ensure close cooperation. All partners received the team warmly and appreciated the initiative. Some of the churches facing challenges were happy to have visits from friends that would hear their concerns as well as their achievements. Some visited hadn’t received WCC staff in recent history and so the occasion was used to forge new ties with new personnel and a time of discovery and realizing new possibilities.

Visits were coordinated to the following partners: United Methodist Church, American Baptist Churches in the USA, Presbyterian Church in the USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, United Church of Christ, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Episcopal Church in the USA. In all, the team visited New York City, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Louisville, Kentucky, Indianapolis, Indiana, Cleveland, Ohio and Chicago, Illinois.

The World Council of Churches exists on relationships. These visits provided staff with the opportunity to meet many denominational staff that they had previously known only through correspondence and to put a face to the name.

Everywhere the team went, a proactive and energetic relationship was reaffirmed. It was often heard, “We feel the increased presence of the WCC in the USA through the US Office.” Mission accomplished!
Neuroth Advances Youth Leadership for WCC in Chicago, Organizes Advocacy Days 2006

Michael Neuroth, a graduate of Princeton Seminary, joined forces with the WCC this summer to organize the pre-9th Assembly youth event “Shift your space - transform the world.” The event brought together students, seminarians, and youth delegates from across the country and resulted in the formulation of a statement to the US Conference on the importance of youth participation in all aspects of the life and witness of the World Council of Churches.

“The event brought together two things that I’m very passionate about,” Neuroth said. “Ecumenism and young adult involvement in the church.”

Neuroth has since taken on a full-time position as conference coordinator of Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2006. The Advocacy Days conference, entitled “Challenging Disparity: The Promise of God – The Power of Solidarity” is to meet in Washington, D.C. March 11-13 and is expected to draw hundreds of grassroots religious activists who will lobby congress and the state department on issues of international and domestic policy.

“They came and focus on an area like Latin America, economic justice, or environmental justice,” Neuroth said. “Then using the material they’ve learned in the conference, they try to send a message from the ecumenical community to the powers that be, the president, the state department, and congress.”

The largest gathering of the ecumenical community in Washington, Advocacy Days is sponsored by the WCC and roughly 35 other organizations and churches, including Catholic organizations. As Neuroth explains, coordinating Advocacy Days 2006 is a big task, one that requires carefully balancing the interests of a variety of groups.

“It’s a lot of responsibility and it’s a big challenge, because it is essentially a partnership, and a lot of the partners want to take it in different directions,” Neuroth said. “But it’s a great event.”

Apart from his work with the World Council of Churches and with Ecumenical Advocacy Days, Neuroth is in the midst of a vocational journey that has afforded him a wide range of experiences. The long list includes a stay in Fort Collins, CO, where Neuroth worked on a farm for the homeless, a summer in Chicago, where he worked for the Parliament of the World’s Religions, and trips to India and Japan as a seminary student, where he studied Christian and non-Christian faith traditions.

As a young person and as a student, Neuroth explains that he had always had an interest in other faiths, and in interfaith dialogue.

“As a young adult, I had many opportunities to witness ecumenical gatherings,” Neuroth said. “Through these events, such as Martin Luther King Day and Yom Hashoah [Holocaust remembrance] services, I discovered the richness of theological diversity found in ecumenical and interfaith partnering, and in this found a new foundation for my personal faith and hope for the future of the Church.”

Neuroth’s appreciation for what he calls the “hope and vision” of the ecumenical movement continued into his years as an undergraduate student at Xavier University, where he studied liberation theology and interfaith dialogue. Since becoming a professional, Neuroth has continued to have a personal stake in his work.

Sara Critchfield, Associate for Communications and Young Adult Development at the United Church of Christ and participant in the “Shift your space” and Advocacy Days events, commented that Neuroth “has provided incredible leadership” to the ecumenical community.

“In this year’s Advocacy Days event, he has prioritized increased young adult and seminarian participation by re-designing the website for more effective outreach, appointing a young adult task force to provide support, and rallying participating organizations to designate funds for student scholarships,” Critchfield said. “[Neuroth] proves what an important role young adults can play in revitalizing and providing leadership for social justice movements.”

The US Conference for the World Council of Churches commends Neuroth for his already substantial achievement in his vocation, and for his work to develop and support young-adult activity in the church. The WCC looks forward to Neuroth’s continuing contribution and leadership in the ecumenical community.

For more information on Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2006, visit: www.advocacydays.org.
Symposium Sees a Future for the Ecumenical Movement, Though Not in the Form of Councils and Institutions
By Philip E. Jenks, NCC News Service

The Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church joined with other church leaders in a special symposium Saturday (Oct. 22) to predict a vital future for the ecumenical movement, although not necessarily in the form of councils and commissions.

“Being church means being ecumenical,” said His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Great House of Cilicia) and two-term moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee. “Being ecumenical means being part of that ecclesial body represented by the Lord Jesus Christ.”

But “the ecumenical movement is facing many challenges,” Aram said, among them the search for “a new identity, a new self understanding.”

Institutional ecumenism, Aram said candidly, “is in stagnation. The challenge is, how can we go beyond institutional ecumenism and make it a healing reality.”

The ecumenical movement is no longer “a private club for conference-goers and church hierarchs,” he said. “Laity are asking where we are in ecumenism.”

The Symposium on the Ecumenical Movement in the 21st century, sponsored by the Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the U.S. Office of the WCC and the National Council of Churches USA, was held in honor of Aram’s pastoral visit to the U.S. Other church leaders sounded similar views of the ecumenical future.

Ecumenists have formed councils and other structures “to meet the needs of a particular moment,” said the Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, General Secretary of the WCC. “Yet none of these institutions – not even the World Council of Churches – is eternal.”

Councils of churches “may become too clerical, too dependent on leaders ordained by member churches” and “lose the energy provided by active laity including students, youth and women’s fellowships,” Kobia said in the symposium’s keynote address.

As tensions arise between peoples of different religions, Kobia said, the ecumenical vision must change. “It is precisely on the question of how Christians relate to people of other faiths that we currently require a new round of multilateral theological engagement,” he said.

“Look at it another way,” Granberg-Michaelson said. “As ecumenical institutions continue operating in present patterns, they become increasingly more marginal in the global community.”

He cited the “Micah Challenge” – little known among mainline ecu-
menists – as “a prime example” of the changing global ecumenical community.

“Comprised now of 260 such community development organizations, (Micah Challenge’s) purpose is to provide a means of multi-country, international advocacy around the issues of global poverty,” Granberg-Michaelson said.

“My conviction is that (the) future must be shaped by a creative and inclusive ecumenism, rather than a protective institutionalism, by compelling spiritual vision rather than predictable organizational momentum, and by deep change rather than incremental change.”

The Rt. Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky, moderator of the U.S. Office of the WCC and ecumenical officer of the Orthodox Church in America, led a panel discussion on challenges facing the ecumenical movement. The panel included the Rev. Dr. Diane Kessler, executive director of the Massachusetts Council of Churches, and the Rev. Francis Tiso, associate director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat for Ecumenical and Religious Affairs.

Kessler reminded the group that ecumenism is no longer highlighted in most seminaries, yet “when people encounter the ecumenical movement, they get excited.”

She called for “renewed attention to simple acts of ecumenical hospitality with an eye toward that significance. We till the soil where ecumenical ministry can grow and flourish. Neglect can leave negativity which is hard to dispel.”

Tiso stressed the pastoral aspects of ecumenism. “I invite you to notice how central to Diane’s response is pastoral ministry,” he said.

The symposium was presided over by the Rev. Deborah DeWinter, Program Executive for the United States, WCC.

The symposium opened with morning prayers in the tradition of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Rev. Professor Robert Wright of General Theological Seminary in New York led the group in a meditation.

Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, prelate of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the Eastern USA, brought greetings to the assembled hierarchs, clergy, laypersons and other church leaders. The Rev. Dr. Bob Edgar, General Secretary of the NCC, also brought greetings.

In concluding remarks, Aram I reflected on the pluralistic world in which the ecumenical movement functions. “Our theology, our education, our methodology, our Christian ways of life must be developed to respond” to pluralism, he said. “This is a great challenge. We can no longer live in isolation.”

The Patriarch concluded with a note of confidence.

(Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson)

“The ecumenical movement should be a sign of hope in a world of hopelessness,” he said. “We are on the way toward visible unity.”

(Full text of Kobia and Granberg-Michaelson addresses may be found at: www.wcc-usa.org).

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tive of the US churches. The US DOV Committee will participate in the observance of the mid-point of the Decade to Overcome Violence, celebrating the US churches’ ongoing contribution to the World Council’s special initiative to raise up and celebrate peace making efforts around the world.

Even though the 9th Assembly represents a huge gathering of over 3,500 Christians, it is important to remember that the World Council of Churches is the churches and the people in them. The voices and participation of the millions more who cannot physically attend the Assembly are important, too. So, the World Council is setting up webcasts and daily news updates and posting a daily Assembly newspaper for each day of the Assembly. Links can be found at www.wcc-assembly.org.

We are bringing the Assembly home with us. A DVD with Assembly highlights will be available. If your address is not already on file with the US Conference, email your information to che@wcc-coe.org. All Assembly documents will be publicized and will be downloadable from www.wcc-assembly.org. Also, from April 17 - 25, 2006, Caroline Hennessy, the Director of Development of the US Conference for the World Council of Churches, is organizing a series of presentations in 5 cities. Representatives of the leadership of the World Council of Churches will be on hand to recap the Assembly proceedings and dialogue with assembled guests about where we go from here. A generous amount of time will be allotted to questions and answers.

These post-Assembly presentations will be a great way to extend the good news about the World Council of Churches at an exciting time in its history to new supporters. You can help by volunteering to be a WCC Partner. Partners solicit local congregations and organizations to attend or replicate these presentations, sign up for communications and get involved in the life of the council. Materials and training are available by emailing che@wcc-coe.org.

“Violence is sin, and God calls us to salvation,” says a message from Portuguese-speaking women at a pre-Assembly meeting 11-15 August in São Leopoldo, Brazil.
In Memoriam

“We give you thanks, O God, for all who have fought the good fight, finished their race, and kept their faith, and for those dear to us who are at rest with You. Grant us grace to follow them as they followed Christ.”

William A. Perkins (1926-2005)

A TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM A. PERKINS

“I find the wood from which you are cut important to the whole movement.” These are words used many years ago to describe the contribution to the ecumenical movement made by William A. Perkins – “Bill” to his many friends.

Bill was one of the true ecumenical veterans. He started his long and rich ecumenical journey as a US Episcopal Church fraternal worker with CIMADE in Europe as early as 1949, beginning his work at the WCC from 1953 to 1958, and serving as Associate Secretary in the WCC’s Youth Department in Geneva.

Within the ecumenical movement, Bill was deeply convinced of the importance of the exchange between persons. Bill believed that such exchanges were essential “incarnational” bonds that would nurture ecumenical sharing of resources, and which would in turn lead to action and church unity. “As we share our resources, we share ourselves, and in so doing, transcend our differences and separation,” was a statement Bill used to repeat throughout his life.

This vision brought him back to Geneva in 1978 when he was entrusted with the Study on Ecumenical Sharing of Resources and Personnel. He was called in 1980 to become Assistant to the General Secretary, and later to undertake the responsibility of preparing the Seventh Assembly of the WCC, held in Canberra, Australia in 1991.

During this time, Bill’s true and most powerful gift was in enabling people, sisters and brothers from all over the world, to become full participants and partners in international programs and the ecumenical work in general.

In an article on the quest for Christian unity, Bill Perkins once wrote, “[ecumenism] is not an ‘optional extra’ for Christians and churches, something added onto who we are or what we do. It is the perspective from which to view the world, a wide-angle lens through which we see the Church and each other differently … For me it’s the only way to be a Christian.”

Bill will be remembered by many as a friend and companion and one who cared about others and always struggled to create for them the appropriate conditions for a meaningful participation. He was appreciated by many and will be remembered with gratitude.

Today we give thanks to our Lord for his life and ministry, for his contribution to the ecumenical movement, for his many gifts generously shared, for his patient and passionate commitment to the work of the WCC.

William Tracy Early (1934-2005)

William Tracy Early, known as Tracy Early in his long-standing role as Catholic News Service (CNS) correspondent in New York, died at age 71 at St. Luke’s Hospital in New York on Dec. 16. His memorial service is to be held in early January at New York’s Riverside Church, where he used to frequently worship.

After completing a doctorate in theology at Union Theological Seminary in 1963, he worked for a brief period in the information office of the WCC, and became a freelance writer in 1969. Later, he achieved national and international recognition through his work at CNS, where his prose was read by millions in the U.S., Canada, and many other countries worldwide.

Philip Jenks, now interim director of news and media relations at the National Council of Churches USA, was a friend of Early during Jenks’ time as communications director for the WCC USA, and he remembered Early’s visits to the WCC office.

“He used to stop by the US Office once a month, and … we covered the whole range of the ecumenical movement. I think he just enjoyed catching up on the WCC, which he loved. I understand his last words were, ‘Be of good cheer,’ which is precisely how he would end all his visits to our office.”
Help the World Council of Churches Transform the World!

The 9th Assembly is an opportunity to look back over a rich history and be inspired by the important contributions of the World Council of Churches. From Churches standing together to overcome the violence of the world wars to changing perceptions to end the pandemic of AIDS, the World Council of Churches has been and will continue to be a living witness to the positive power of Christian unity.

This Assembly is also an opportunity to look ahead and plan a future that will afford ever more opportunities to promote Christian unity in faith, witness and service for a just and peaceful world. With over 3,000 voices joined together in prayer, celebration, deliberation and discussion, the Assembly will define new goals for today’s churches, planning new initiatives and forging a future as rich as our past.

The Assembly highlights the need for contributions for all members. As we move into the future with hope and determination, let us continue to add our energy and voice to the ongoing story of the World Council of Churches. Funded entirely through contributions from member churches, global Christian relief organizations and individuals, the World Council of Churches relies on contributions to conduct its essential work.

Let us approach the future with enthusiasm and energy. Join us with a financial contribution to the US Conference for the World Council of Churches. There are many ways to give:

- Donate online using our website: http://www.wcc-assembly.info-en-right-side-menu-donate.html; or
- Make a pledge by completing the enclosed business reply envelope and returning it to the US Conference Office.