

GB-2605

Council on Christian Unity, Inc.,
d.b.a.

Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry

2025 Report to the General Board
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)Rev. Paul S. Tché
President

Introduction

The year 2025 has been one of significant depth, breadth, and responsibility for Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry. CUIM's work has carried the Disciples' presence into national and global ecumenical bodies, major communion assemblies, bilateral theological dialogues, and interreligious tables.

These engagements are not isolated appearances. They reflect a sustained, integrated vocation: to embody the Disciples' vision of unity while collaborating with ecumenical and interfaith partners toward a more just and peaceful world.

CUIM's mission is expressed through three enduring "missional marks": full visible unity of God's one Church to the world; a just and peaceful world for all people and creation; and one human community with shared gifts to one another. These marks provided coherence to our work in 2025, shaping what we prioritized, where we invested our presence, and how we interpreted events across the year.

The Disciples' historic calling to be a movement for Christian unity remains not only relevant but urgently needed. In a moment when the church's public witness is strained by polarization, conflict, and the pressures of institutional survival, CUIM's work insists that unity is not nostalgia—it is a faithful, lived response to Christ's prayer for the church and the world.

Theological framing

The work of Christian unity and interfaith engagement is not institutional diplomacy. It is ecclesial vocation. CUIM exists to help Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) embody the unity for which Christ prays—a unity that is visible, practiced, and accountable.

As Disciples, we do not begin with unity as a strategy; we begin with unity as a gift already given in Christ, and therefore as a responsibility. The Restoration Movement’s earliest confessional instincts still matter: Thomas Campbell’s first proposition in the Declaration and Address insists that “the church of Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one,” and Barton W. Stone’s conviction that “Christian unity is my polar star” remains a guiding image for our life together.

CUIM’s mission statement makes this Table-centered theology explicit: “Christian unity begins at the Lord’s Table,” and we are “called to pursue full eucharistic participation with all Christians,” with the conviction that “there should be no barrier for all Christians to gather at the Table.” That Table is not ours to guard; it is Christ’s to extend—and it forms us into a people capable of reconciliation.

This Table identity also frames our interreligious vocation. CUIM’s interfaith teaching describes the Disciples as “a people of the table,” and names the Lord’s Supper as a spiritual grammar that shapes how we understand encounter: the Table is a meeting place where God’s inclusive love nurtures Christian community while also opening us toward the larger world—and it reminds us, with humility, that “the table is not our own.”

As a result, we do not pursue unity through erasing difference, nor through theological minimalism. We pursue unity through disciplined listening, shared prayer, and deep theological honesty—holding truth and relationship together—so that the church’s unity is not merely proclaimed but made visible in practice and witness.

I. Major Accomplishments of 2025

1. Sustained Global Ecumenical Presence

In 2025, CUIM maintained a visible, trusted, and theologically grounded presence within the World Council of Churches (WCC). Our participation was not ceremonial; it was substantive, contributing to conversations shaping the future of global Christianity.

Engagements included:

- WCC Central Committee (Johannesburg)
- WCC Ecumenical Week & Life and Work Centenary (Stockholm)
- Sixth World Conference on Faith & Order (Wadi El Natrun, Egypt)

These gatherings confronted the realities of war, theological fragmentation, ecclesial polarization, climate crisis, and the credibility of Christian public witness. The Faith & Order Conference, in particular, reaffirmed that serious theological dialogue remains indispensable to visible unity. In the anniversary year of Nicaea, the church was invited to ask again: Where now for visible unity?

Dr. Kristine A. Culp continues to serve in elected leadership within the Faith & Order Commission, strengthening the Disciples' theological voice within global Christianity. Rev. Teresa "Terri" Hord Owens serves as a member of the WCC Central Committee. I continue to serve as an advisor and Christian World Communion representative to the Central Committee, ensuring sustained Disciples presence in global discernment.

2. Leadership in Interreligious Engagement

In 2025, I began serving as co-convener of the Interreligious Convening Table of the National Council of Churches.

This leadership role reflects both opportunity and responsibility. The Convening Table gathers Christian leaders engaged in sustained Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, and other interreligious relationships across the United States. It serves not only as a networking body, but as a space for coordinated discernment, theological reflection, crisis response, and shared public witness.

The context for this work remains urgent. Rising antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Sikh violence, and religiously fueled political rhetoric demand disciplined, faith-rooted response. Interreligious engagement is not optional goodwill; it is essential to social stability and Christian integrity.

As co-convener, my work has focused on:

- Strengthening trust among Christian leaders engaged in interfaith dialogue
- Coordinating communication in moments of public crisis
- Deepening theological clarity about why interreligious engagement flows from Christian identity
- Ensuring that the Disciples' voice remains steady, relational, and bridge-building

Additional interreligious engagements in 2025 included:

- Sikh–Christian Dialogue (Cincinnati)
- Jewish–Christian Dialogue (Swarthmore, PA, and Chicago)
- Religions for Peace USA Retreat (Bethesda, VA)

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) continues its long-standing participation in the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign, which connects, equips, and mobilizes faith communities to counter anti-Muslim hatred, discrimination, and violence. Dr. Peter Makari serves on its Executive Committee, reinforcing visible Disciples leadership in national interfaith work.

Through these commitments, CUIM’s interreligious work embodies our conviction that the Table forms us into a people capable of encounter, humility, and courageous public witness.

3. Communion Gatherings

CUIM represented the Disciples at major global communion assemblies and ecumenical gatherings, reinforcing bonds of trust and shared theological accountability:

- Mennonite World Conference & Anabaptism@500 (Zurich)
- World Communion of Reformed Churches General Council (Thailand)
- United Church of Christ General Synod 35 (Kansas City)
- United Church of Canada General Council 45 (Calgary)
- ELCA Churchwide Assembly (Phoenix)
- Global Christian Connexion (Kenya)
- Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions (Istanbul)

At the Mennonite World Conference commemoration in Zurich, participation in the ecumenical reception and worship procession at the historic Grossmünster marked not only 500 years of Anabaptist witness, but also the healing of historical divisions and renewed ecumenical friendship.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches General Council provided space to address injustice, climate crisis, and ecclesial identity amid global change. Across these gatherings, the Disciples’ unity-centered identity remains recognized and valued among partner communions navigating institutional pressure and cultural transition.

4. Strong U.S. Ecumenical Engagement

CUIM remained deeply engaged in the U.S. ecumenical landscape:

- National Council of Churches Governing Board (Washington, DC)
- NCC Impact Week (New York City)
- NCC 75th Anniversary & Governing Board (Boston)
- Christian Churches Together Annual Forum (Philadelphia)
- Churches Uniting in Christ Coordinating Council (Bethlehem, PA)
- National Workshop on Christian Unity (Chicago)

Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan continues to serve faithfully on the NCC Governing Board alongside Rev. Terri Hord Owens, representing the Disciples of Christ.

In 2025, I was elected to serve on the Steering Committee of Christian Churches Together as a representative of the Historic Protestant family. This role strengthens CUIM's capacity to serve as a bridge across Catholic, Evangelical/Pentecostal, Orthodox, and Historic Protestant communities.

5. Bilateral Dialogues

Bilateral theological dialogues remain foundational to CUIM's ecclesial vocation:

- Disciples–ELCA Dialogue (Chicago and online)
- Disciples–Catholic International Dialogue (Grand Rapids)

These dialogues model disciplined theological engagement rooted in relationship rather than polemics. In this anniversary year of Nicaea, conversations focused on baptism, Eucharist, ministry, confessional expression, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

They witness to the Disciples' conviction that unity grows through patient listening, theological honesty, and shared prayer.

6. Visible Moments of Ecclesial Transition

CUIM was present at significant moments of ecclesial leadership transition:

- Inaugural Mass of Pope Leo XIV (Roman Catholic Church, Vatican)
- Installation of Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry (ELCA)

Such presence signals partnership, mutual accountability, and shared Christian witness. Showing up in these moments affirms that ecumenical relationship is lived not only in dialogue rooms, but also in public acts of recognition and support.

7. General Assembly and Peter Ainslie Lecture

At the 2025 General Assembly in Memphis, the Polar Star Congregations Initiative was formally launched, linking congregational life with CUIM's global and national commitments.

During the CUIM–Disciples of Christ Historical Society Dinner, the 32nd Peter Ainslie Lecture was delivered by Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, titled, “Signs of Wholeness in Our Fragmented World.”

Dr. Pillay also conveyed greetings from the WCC during the Assembly's ecumenical evening, reinforcing global partnership and shared witness.

8. Polar Star Congregation Initiative

The Polar Star Congregations Initiative invites Disciples communities to live more intentionally into their calling as a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

The purpose of the Polar Star Program is to:

- Encourage and assist congregations in developing competence as loving, unifying communities
- Increase awareness of CUIM within congregations and Regions
- Link local congregational practice with the broader denominational and global work of Christian unity and interfaith engagement

Polar Star operationalizes CUIM's missional marks by rooting unity, justice, and relational encounter in congregational life.

Congregations may learn more and seek designation at:

<https://www.disciplescuim.org/polar-star-congregations-2/>

9. Publications

- **Where Now for Unity? A Disciples Reflection on Nicaea 2025, Creeds, and Unity**

By Dr. Kristine A. Culp

This publication invites Disciples to revisit the Nicene Creed in relation to Scripture, history, tradition, the Lord's Table, and lived wisdom. Originating in the Disciples–ELCA dialogue, it offers a thoughtful Disciples contribution to the 1700th anniversary of Nicaea and the ongoing ecumenical journey.

- **Signs of Wholeness in Our Fragmented World**

By Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay

Grounded in the Beatitudes and the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity, this publication calls Christians to embody healing, justice, and peace amid global crisis. Released in July 2025, it extends the theological vision shared at General Assembly into the life of the wider church.

II. A Hope for 2026

Our hope for 2026 is threefold:

1. To deepen theological clarity about what it means to be a confessing and unity-centered church in a polarized age.
2. To connect ecumenical engagement more directly to congregational life.
3. To strengthen collaboration across General Ministries and Regions so that ecumenism is not perceived as distant, but integral to Disciples identity.

We hope to articulate more clearly that Christian unity is not an optional project; it is central to our calling.

III. Challenges Ahead

The challenges before us are real and require candor.

1. Deepening Ecclesial Polarization

Christian communities globally are increasingly shaped by ideological alignment rather than theological discernment. Ecumenical work now unfolds in an environment where suspicion often precedes trust. Some churches are withdrawing from long-standing ecumenical bodies. Others question the value of dialogue altogether.

2. The Fragility of the Ecumenical Movement

The global ecumenical infrastructure built in the twentieth century faces generational transition, financial strain, and declining denominational stability. Many communions are preoccupied with survival. Sustained dialogue requires long-term commitment that is harder to secure.

3. The Politicization of Religion

Interreligious work now unfolds within a charged political environment. Religious nationalism and culture-war dynamics complicate our ability to speak prophetically without being mischaracterized.

4. Financial Constraints

Like many ministries, CUIIM operates within limited financial capacity. International travel, dialogue staffing, and sustained representation require discernment and prioritization. Visibility must be balanced with stewardship.

5. Theological Complexity

Questions regarding human sexuality, ordination, authority, and ecclesiology continue to divide churches. Dialogue partners do not always move at the same pace. Patience is required, but so is theological clarity.

These challenges do not diminish the importance of our work. They clarify it. In many ways, ecumenical and interreligious engagement is most necessary precisely because of these pressures.

IV. A Story of Collaboration

One meaningful story of collaboration is our partnership with Mennonite World Conference during Anabaptism@500 in Zurich. The invitation extended to ecumenical guests, including participation in the worship procession at the Grossmünster, reflected the healing of 500 years of division.

It was not merely commemorative; it was relational reconciliation made visible.

Similarly, our work within Christian Churches Together and Churches Uniting in Christ continues to embody practical collaboration across traditions.

V. What We Ask the General Board to Take Back to Congregations

Please share this message:

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is present at the tables where Christian unity, interreligious cooperation, and global Christian witness are being shaped.

CUIM ensures that the Disciples' historic commitment to unity in Christ, freedom of conscience, and relational faithfulness remains visible nationally and globally.

Ecumenical work is not abstract. It is an expression of who we are.

Conclusion

The scope of CUIM's engagement in 2025 reflects both the complexity of the ecumenical landscape and the trust placed in this ministry.

From Johannesburg to Zurich, from Chicago to Istanbul, from bilateral dialogues to interreligious convening tables, CUIM has served as a steady, relational, and thoughtful presence.

I am deeply grateful for the support of the CUIM Board and the partnership of the General Board.

In closing, we also remember with gratitude the life and witness of Rev. Dr. Mark Toulouse, whose death in 2025 marks the passing of one of the most thoughtful and generous theological voices within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Mark's scholarship, leadership, and deep commitment to Christian unity helped shape the theological imagination of our church for decades. He embodied a rare combination of intellectual rigor, pastoral sensitivity, and ecumenical generosity. His work strengthened the Disciples' voice within broader Christian conversations and reminded us that unity must be grounded in both theological depth and humility.

As CUIM continues its work, we do so standing on foundations laid in part by his scholarship and witness. We give thanks for his life and commend him to God's eternal care.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Paul S. Tch 
President, Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry

Appendix

Beyond Nicaea: A Non-Creedal Church's Witness to Unity

As a Christian World Communion (CWC), the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council (DECC) views the journey toward and beyond the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (Nicaea 2025) as a vital opportunity to advance visible unity through dialogue and a radical commitment to generosity.

For a non-creedal church, this anniversary is not about reaffirming uniformity. It is about deepening communion grounded in grace, love, justice, and peace in the world.

1. From the Unity Movement to a Non-Creedal Witness

The Disciples movement emerged in the 19th century amid deep divisions within American Christianity. Leaders such as Thomas Campbell envisioned a church that was, in his words, “essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.”

From the beginning, the Disciples of Christ rejected the use of creeds and doctrinal formulas as tests of fellowship that kept believers from the Lord's Table. Alexander Campbell argued that while creeds might contain truth, they had become barriers to full participation in the eucharistic fellowship of Christ.

The movement embraced Peter's confession in Matthew 16:16—“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” To this day, Disciples remain a non-creedal tradition, not because we deny the value of creeds, but because we resist their use as tools of exclusion. Our unity is grounded in Christ, not in uniformity of formulation.

2. A Confessing Church of Generosity

Across generations, Disciples have understood unity as relational rather than institutional. Moving beyond our early restorationist roots, we engage ecumenical dialogues recognizing the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as the most widely received confession of faith—a shared baseline for mutual conversation across traditions.

In this sense, the Disciples can be seen as a confessing church of generosity—one that listens, learns, and bears witness alongside others without requiring confessional conformity. This is our way of ecumenism.

In response to the World Council of Churches' question, "Where now for visible unity?", the DECC proposes an approach rooted in compassion and generosity. To embody Christ's message is to listen deeply to the 2.5 billion Christians who confess their faith in diverse contexts—especially in non-liturgical churches that emphasize contextual, experiential, and healing expressions of spirituality.

This posture of generosity acknowledges that differing theological languages and forms of worship are not threats to the Nicene faith but companions to it. Through humility and empathy, we open spaces where recognition, worship, and shared service become living signs of visible unity.

3. Embracing Imperfection: Learning the Grammar of the Gospel

Drawing inspiration from the Theological Presentation by Rev. Chad Rimmer at the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, we find resonance in his call to move beyond the fear of getting it wrong. That fear—whether theological, ethical, or ecological—often paralyzes the Church and holds us captive to the status quo.

Rev. Rimmer's reminder that grace frees us to act even in imperfection echoes the Disciples' conviction that the unity of the Church is already given by God through the Holy Spirit—especially revealed at the Lord's Table. At the Table, we do not create unity; we receive it as a divine gift. Yet, how we manifest that God-given unity in our shared life and witness is an ongoing process of becoming.

To live within the grammar of the gospel means leading with grace rather than law—acting, serving, and discerning together in trust that the Spirit continues to guide, correct, and reconcile us. We are not striving for perfection but responding faithfully to the unity already bestowed. Becoming—as churches and as disciples—is how we live into the unity that is both gift and calling.

4. Becoming a Community of Generous Becoming

This theological posture aligns with the Disciples' framework of generosity in ecumenical engagement. When we accept that neither we nor our partners in dialogue are finished

products, we can receive the faith of others—whether expressed through ancient creeds or contemporary songs—with humility and gratitude.

By leading with the grammar of the gospel, we acknowledge that unity is not achieved by precision but offered through grace. This humility transforms anxiety into participation, inviting all Christians to bring their gifts to the work of transformative justice and reconciliation.

5. The Path Forward: Toward Full Sacramental Unity

At the heart of the Disciples' ecumenical journey is a sacramental vision of unity centered on the Lord's Table. Here, unity is not a goal to attain but a gift already given—where no test of fellowship is required.

The DECC encourages other Christian World Communion to join in this generous framework. Rather than striving for doctrinal uniformity, we can affirm mutual recognition as the true mark of faithfulness.

As the global Church approaches and moves beyond Nicaea 2025, the Creed may serve not as a dividing wall but as a shared confession of hope—a living reminder that the unity of the Church is grounded not in formulas, but in the reconciling grace of Christ.

To worship together and serve together is to bear witness to the unity already at work among us. The 1700th anniversary of Nicaea thus becomes not a commemoration of the past but a sign of God's ongoing work of renewal, calling the churches of Christ into a more generous, hopeful, and reconciling future.