



Pennsylvania Council of Churches

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Fall 2005

Dear Friends in Christ,

Grace to you, and peace, during this season of Pentecost. This letter comes to you as a reminder and a prayer, from the Pennsylvania Council of Churches and its constituent and associated church bodies.

First: a reminder that the 2006 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins on Wednesday, January 18 (The Confession of St. Peter) and continues through Wednesday, January 25 (The Conversion of St. Paul). These two feasts of the Christian Year make auspicious bookends to a week of praying for unity! It is not too early to begin planning.

Second: a prayer, that as Christ's Church, we will together devote ourselves to this opportunity for study, discussion, worship and especially prayer—prayer to God for the gift of unity in God's own truth. The World Council of Churches invites Christians to "a profound awareness that unity is a grace, and that we need to continually ask for this gift." (See "Introduction to the Theme," <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/wop2006contents.html>)

The theme for the 2006 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity comes from Matthew 18:20—"Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Materials for the week of prayer and study, and for an ecumenical worship service, come to us this year from Ireland, where the importance and urgency for peace-making are primary, and woven into the history and fabric of everyday life.

A secondary theme for the worship service is from Matthew 18:21-22—Peter's question and Jesus' reply about how often we must forgive—seventy times seven!

Together, these themes from God's Holy Word offer rich opportunities for Christians to gather and celebrate the considerable progress towards unity which God has brought already, and to join with open hearts in prayer together, that the unity for which our Lord Jesus prayed will be made more and more manifest, as we, with all of creation, "wait with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." (Romans 8:19)

We close with a prayer from St. Aidan, monk of Iona and Bishop of Lindisfarne (d. 651), and used as the closing prayer in worship materials prepared for 2006:

Open our eyes to your presence.
Open our ears to your call.
Open our hearts to your love.
May we open our arms to others.
May we open our hearts to strangers.
May we open our doors to callers.
That we may be open to you, Lord,
Open this day and forever more. Amen.

[Flame in my heart—St. Aidan for Today, David Adams, SPKC. Copyright permission requested by the preparers of materials for the 2006 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity materials.]

May Aidan's prayer be ours, in January, and always!

In Christ,

[The list of church body executives signing the letter follows on page two.]

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The Rev. Gary L. Harke, executive director
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The Rev. Ralph E. Jones, bishop
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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. David R. Strobel, bishop
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod
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The Rev. Dr. Marja Coons-Torn, conference minister and president
Penn Central Conference
United Church of Christ

The Rev. Alan C. Miller, conference minister
Penn Northeast Conference
United Church of Christ

The Rev. Dr. W. Darwin Collins, regional minister
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Moravian Church in America, Northern Province

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Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod
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The Rev. Karen K. Gallagher, conference minister
General Conference of the Schwenkfelder Church

The Rev. Gregory R. Pile, bishop
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