

GROWING Together

10th Anniversary Series

CHRISTIAN UNITY – NEXT STEPS

Santiago 1993

In August 1993, the World Council of Churches (WCC) held the 5th World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela (“St. James of the Star Field”) in northwestern Spain. Previous conferences were held in Lausanne, Switzerland (1927), Edinburgh (1937), Lund, Sweden (1952, and Montreal (1963).

Santiago is a famous pilgrimage city, and has been for over a thousand years. It is dedicated to the memory of St. James the Apostle. In 1987, the Council of Europe designated the Road to Santiago, already mapped in the 12th century, a “Primary European Cultural Route.”

Last summer, several hundred Christians, among them Orthodox, Reformed, Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican and others, gathered in Santiago, “pilgrims” together on the road to fuller Christian unity. Preaching at the closing worship, WCC Central Committee vice-moderator Nelida Ritchie likened the Conference to a pilgrimage: “It is *on the way* that we recognize our needs and the needs of others, perhaps like past pilgrims moved by the desire to give mutual aid. It is *on the way* that we discover our difficulties in matching our step to the pace of our brother and sister.”

The Santiago theme, “Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness,” pointed the way to deeper communion or fellowship (koinonia) between the churches. In that light, the final message of the conference laid out strong orientations for the ecumenical movement in the years ahead. Three of them stand out:

“No turning back!”

“We say to the churches: there is no turning back, either from the goal of visible unity or from the single ecumenical movement that unites concern for the unity of the Church and concern for engagement in the struggles of the world.”

Mutual accountability

“The churches have made some progress in implementing the 1952 Lund principle that they should ‘act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately’. But they must go further. Unity today calls for structures of mutual accountability.”

Conversion to the center of faith

“But beyond all particular challenges, the churches and the ecumenical movement itself are called to the conversion to Christ that true koinonia demands.”

After Santiago, many questions remain regarding the future direction of the ecumenical movement. Differences over the goals and methods of ecumenical work and theology have led to intense debates. Firm hope was expressed at the conference that “we are being led through such tensions into a deeper and broader koinonia in the Spirit.”

The results of Santiago, in the form of recommendations for study and action, are en route to member-churches. It is the churches themselves, in response to God’s grace, who must be the main agents of Christian reconciliation, healing, renewal and unity.

What can we do at the congregation/parish level? We are the church, called to be and do everything in our reach — through prayer, education, awareness, and action — to foster church renewal, unity, witness. For example, some congregations have started to invite neighboring churches to participate in their baptisms – a sign of recognition and celebration of our common baptism —.

Prayer was central at the meeting in the pilgrim-city of Santiago de Compostela. We might do well to make our own, in the months ahead, the official prayer for the Conference, part of which follows:

“O God, Holy and Eternal Trinity,
We pray for your Church in all the world.
Sanctify its life; renew its worship;
Empower its witness; heal its divisions;
Make visible its unity ...”

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For reflection and discussion

- Discuss the three quotes from the Santiago message, and apply them to your local/regional situation.
- * Where, how and to what do you believe the Holy Spirit is leading the churches today?

GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five monthly Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ’s faithful.



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