

5. Report of the Delegates to Christian Churches Together

Baptism was the focus at the annual form of Christian Churches Together, held in October in Savannah, Ga. Representatives from Christian Churches Together's five "families" of churches—Catholic, Orthodox, historic Black, Evangelical/Pentecostal, and mainline Protestant—engaged in theological dialogue, spiritual reflection, worship at Savannah's historic churches, and a pilgrimage to the nearby Historic Baptismal Trail of the Gullah Geechee people.

The trail, located in Riceboro, Ga., leads people to a stream where baptisms used to take place for almost a century, beginning in the 1840s. Living in the low country of the Atlantic coast, the Gullah Geechee are descendants of formerly enslaved people who have maintained their language and their ties to Africa.

Throughout the forum, participants learned about each other's histories, traditions, and worship, and talked and prayed together on the theme "Water that Unites and Water that Divides: Baptism and the Journey to Unity and Reconciliation." Among the many issues discussed were questions like these: How have our doctrinal interpretations and practices of baptism been used as a source of healing, hurting, or dividing? How have water bodies such as the Atlantic Ocean been a source of both life and death throughout history, and what is our Christian response?

The membership of CCT stretches across Christian traditions in the US, and the examination of beliefs and practices related to baptism was deep and meaningful. Presentations ranged from the academic to the experiential.

The forum benefited from being hosted by area people, churches, cities, and land: in Savannah, the Cathedral Basilica of St. John the Baptist, St. John Episcopal, First African Baptist Church, and St. Paul's Greek Orthodox Church; in nearby Riceboro, the city council, First Zion Baptist Church, and the Gullah Geechee community; and a chief from the Yamassee Tribe, representing the people on whose land the conference met.

Before the forum began, heads of communion or their representatives met to share informally about what's happening within their denominations.

CCT focuses on relationship-building and mutual understanding instead of theological consensus, on learning from each other over agreeing with one another. The organization's "charisms" are summarized as loving relationships, learning theologically, and leading actions.

Christian Churches Together brings together the widest possible table of US-based Christian communions and organizations. The ecumenical group has a goal to increase its 33 member groups to 40.

David Steele, General Secretary
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