

STUDY GUIDE
for
Odyssey Toward Unity

A resource for councils of churches
to understand their purpose and role
within the ecumenical movement

prepared by

Partners in Ecumenical Development

of the

Massachusetts Council of Churches

October 1995

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INTRODUCTION

Odyssey Toward Unity, published in 1977, was prepared by the Committee on the Purposes and Goals of Ecumenism of the Massachusetts Council of Churches. It was written in part as a response to questions raised by local councils of churches concerning their identity and purpose. If your local council of churches has ever wondered, "**What does it mean to be a council of churches?**" or "**What should we be doing as a council of churches?**" or "**What is the difference between a council of churches and an interfaith organization?**," then Odyssey Toward Unity can help you begin to answer those questions, as well as others which may arise about ecumenism.

PURPOSES OF ODYSSEY TOWARD UNITY

1. To focus on the meaning and task of ecumenism in light of biblical witness.
2. To articulate the theological basis, purpose, and goals for councils of churches.
3. To identify the distinguishing signs of life and witness in councils of churches.

PREPARATION OF "STUDY GUIDE"

The "Study Guide" was prepared by *Partners in Ecumenical Development (PED)* of the Massachusetts Council of Churches. Its purposes are to **provide local councils of churches with resources to:** 1) address issues of leadership development and spiritual nurture; 2) provide information, ideas, experiences and learnings related to issues of Christian unity; 3) grow in ecumenical understanding and effectiveness, thereby fulfilling the ecumenical task; and 4) enhance the quality of regional and local ecumenism.

AIM AND USES OF "STUDY GUIDE"

The "Study Guide" is intended to guide councils of churches in reading and discussing Odyssey Toward Unity. The material is laid out for six 90 minute sessions including purpose, suggested format, and questions for discussion. However, the

material can be modified for 60 minute sessions. The "Study Guide" could be used either for a six week series or for a one evening forum to discuss a specific chapter of Odyssey.

Councils of churches may find it helpful to devote more than one session on Chapters II, IV & V due to the amount of material. Odyssey could be used for discussion in a variety of settings including a retreat with Executive Board members, with delegates at a meeting, in ecumenical programs for member churches (e.g. Lent or Week of Prayer), or topics for round table discussion on Cable T.V.

SUGGESTIONS FOR COMPANION ACTIVITIES

A council of churches might want to culminate the study and discussion of Odyssey with ecumenical worship. It also could include a "service of renewal and dedication" to the ecumenical vision of Christian unity among the churches as a joyful sharing in common faith, life, and witness.

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR DISCUSSION

Convenor: Welcomes participants, opens and closes each session with prayer, describes purpose for each dialogue session, reviews the format for the evening, and leads the process using the study guide suggestions.

Moderator: Guides the small group discussion as outlined in the study guide, gives instructions, keeps the discussion moving within the time frame, makes sure that everyone has an opportunity to participate, and presents summary reports of group discussion in plenary.

Small Groups: Form groups between 4-8 people depending on the total number of participants. Be sure that each small group is diversely represented by denomination with attention to striving for a balance of clergy & lay, male & female, and racial & ethnic individuals. Designate a moderator for each small group.

Plenary: A time for dialogue involving the total group. A variety of questions have been suggested for discussion. You do not have to discuss all the questions.

Supplies: Name tags, newsprint, magic markers, masking tape, paper, pens, copies of Odyssey, Bibles, reference books (e.g. concordance, prayer books, and confessional statements, constitutional documents or denominational policies which articulate understandings of "Christian Unity.")

SESSION I (Chapter 1)

"Biblical Foundations"

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION: (25 minutes) CONVENOR

- A. **Welcome: (20 minutes)** Welcome all participants. Open the session with prayer. Ask people to introduce themselves, identify their local church and denomination, and share their earliest memory of an ecumenical encounter which opened the door to a wider vision of the Church beyond their own local church.
- B. **Purposes and Format: (5 minutes)** Review the purposes for the study of Odyssey Toward Unity (Refer to first two sections of **INTRODUCTION** to "Study Guide"). Review format to be followed by your study group.

II. PRESENTATION: (5 minutes) CONVENOR

A. The Bible as Entry Point to Ecumenism:

1. The Bible is the story of the depth of God's love for humankind. The theme of God's reconciling love is the biblical framework for understanding "ecumenism." In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians confess that they have been drawn into union with God and in relation with all Christians who share faith in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. Yet the churches remain divided and unreconciled to one another. Thus, ecumenism is a movement to dwell in the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as churches seek to be reconciled to one another in their faith, life, and witness. The bottom line for Christians simply is this: ***How can we be people of reconciliation if we are not reconciled to one another?***
3. Odyssey Toward Unity: "Ecumenical commitment is not an occasional option for the Christian; it is a perennial obligation. Ecumenism rests on the firm foundation of the Gospel of reconciliation." (p. 6)
4. One way of giving visible expression to Christian unity is by participating in ecumenical Bible study. The biblical story of God's reconciling love beckons Christians to embrace the story and make it their own, and to find new ways to walk together as God's people.

B. "Reconciliation" as Context for Ecumenism:

1. Chapter 1 provides a glimpse of the biblical witness to "reconciliation" which undergirds an understanding of ecumenism as developed in subsequent chapters.

2. Odyssey Toward Unity: "Ecumenism is the variety of efforts within and among the Christian churches to give visible expression to their unity in Jesus Christ, in response to the Holy Spirit, through diverse acts of reconciliation to heal all their divisions, and through common witness and service to the world." (p. 13)

III. STUDY/DIALOGUE SUGGESTIONS: (60 minutes)

A. Introduction: (5 minutes) CONVENOR

1.Purpose: To introduce participants to the theme of "reconciliation" in the biblical story as a connecting point for understanding ecumenism.

- a. Present purpose and format of session.
 - b. Select moderators for small groups and give written instructions for dialogue.
2. Assign one biblical passage to each small group to discuss.

Group 1: Jonah 3:1-4:5

Group 2: Romans 5:6-11

Group 3: Luke 15:11-24

Group 4: Acts 11:1-18

Passages for additional groups:

Luke 18:9-14; James 2:1-9; I Corinthians 1:10-13

B. Small Groups: (30 minutes) MODERATOR

1. Ask one person to read the assigned passage aloud.
2. Invite people to share one word or phrase which caught their attention.
Write it on
newsprint or blackboard.
3. Ask another person to read the passage again.
4. What appears to be the meaning of reconciliation as depicted in this Scripture

passage?

5. Ask another person to read the passage again.
6. Can you depict concretely what reconciliation would look like or feel like in our time?

C. Plenary: (20 minutes) CONVENOR

1. Invite moderators to share brief summaries of their dialogue.
2. Invite the group to read Chapter 1 silently guided by two questions:
 - a. What do you see as connecting points between "reconciliation" and "ecumenism"? Give examples.
 - b. What questions remain concerning the relationship between "reconciliation" and "ecumenism"?
3. Use these questions to lead a group discussion.

D. Conclusion: (5 minutes) Announce the topic, date and time of next session. Close with prayer.

SESSION II (Chapter 2)

"A New Look at the Ecumenical Task"

I. INTRODUCTION: (5 minutes) CONVENOR

- A. **Welcome**: Greet all participants. Open session with prayer.
- B. **Purpose**: To enable participants to understand the nature, scope and reasons for Christian unity as an ecumenical mandate of the Gospel.
 1. Present purpose and format of session.
 2. Select moderators for small groups and give written instructions for dialogue.

II. SMALL GROUPS: (55 minutes) MODERATOR

A. Bible Study: (20 minutes)

1. Ask one person to read aloud the passages:

I Cor. 3:5-9, 21-23; 12:12-13.

2. What phrases capture your imagination?
3. Ask another person to read the passages again.
4. What appears to be going on in the early church?
5. Ask another person to read the passages again.
6. Does Paul depict a basis for unity?

B. Contemporary Ecumenical Text: (15 minutes)

1. Invite someone to read aloud the following text:

"Administered in obedience to our Lord, baptism is a sign and seal of our common discipleship. Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity. We are one people and are called to confess and serve one Lord in each place and in all the world.... Therefore, our one baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship."
(Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Section II, D, 6, p. 3, WCC, 1982.)

2. What does it mean to be baptized into Christ?
3. How are we to live out our baptism ecumenically?
 1. What connection does this passage have to the biblical passages and to the working definition of ecumenism on page 13 of Odyssey?

C. Dimensions of Christian Unity: (20 minutes)

1. One of the four classical marks of the Church as stated in The Apostles' Creed is that it is ONE in addition to being HOLY, CATHOLIC, and APOSTOLIC. Odyssey stresses that the quest for Christian unity is of the very essence of the Church's nature and mission summed up by two

phrases: **"NO VISIBLE UNITY, NO VIABLE WITNESS!"** (p. 16); **"NO VITAL MISSION, NO VALID UNITY!"** (p. 21)

2. What dimensions of Christian unity are depicted by these phrases? Can you confirm the validity of these insights in your ecumenical experience?
3. What kind of Christian unity is envisioned? What is the dynamic between unity and diversity? Are there, and should there be, limits to diversity?

III. PLENARY DISCUSSION: (30 minutes) CONVENOR

A. Reports: (5 minutes) Invite moderators to report two insights from their group discussion. List on newsprint.

B. Discussion Questions: (20 minutes)

1. What ecumenical involvements by your church seek to express our common belonging to Christ through baptism?
2. How has such involvement changed your church's understanding of itself and its mission?
3. What steps do you think need to be taken for more visible Christian unity among the churches?

C. Conclusion: (5 minutes) Announce the topic, date and time of next session. Close with prayer.

SESSION III (Chapter 3)

"Stumbling Blocks: An Analysis and Interpretation"

I. INTRODUCTION: (5 minutes) CONVENOR

- A. **Welcome:** Greet all participants. Open session with prayer.
- B. **Purpose:** To appreciate the positive changes, identify the stumbling blocks, and to explore possible ways to lower the thresholds of resistance to fuller ecumenical life and mission together.
 1. Present purpose and format of session.

2. Select moderators for small groups and give written instructions for dialogue.

II. SMALL GROUPS: (40 minutes) MODERATOR

A. Bible Text: Ask someone to read aloud Ephesians 4:1-3.

B. Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. What kind of behavior does the writer of Ephesians expect Christians to exemplify in relating to other Christians?
2. Augustine said: "Every division among Christians ultimately arises from a lack of love." (Christian Classics, Later Works of Augustine - Homily on Epistle of I John, p. 342.)
 - a. Do you find this to be true?
 - b. Is this the situation to which the admonition for unity among Christians is addressed in the biblical text?
1. Ask another person to read aloud the Ephesians text.
2. From this Scriptural perspective, how would you describe the relationship among churches in your youth?
3. Describe your earliest encounter with a Christian from another tradition? Did you welcome this experience or did it represent a stumbling block?
4. What positive changes have you experienced over the years in terms of church attitudes and practices towards other Christian traditions?

III. PLENARY: (45 minutes) CONVENOR

A. Presentation: (5 minutes)

1. Odyssey suggests that progress toward Christian unity will encounter "stumbling blocks" at different stages of ecumenical life. Some institutional obstacles in churches include:
 - a. Divisions in society permeate church life.
 - b. Christians are not of one mind about the social mission of the Church.

- c. Ecumenical indifference combine with denominational loyalty and responsibilities to siphon leadership and energy away from ecumenical concerns.
- d. Ecumenism carried out by individuals becomes a substitute for visible church partnerships.
- e. A "circle the wagons" attitude arises in churches due to declining membership and financial resources.
- f. A service ecumenism arises in churches which look to councils of churches to be service centers in support of their ministries as carried out separately instead of together.

2. The One Church in this Place by William B. Cate. "Non-theological factors in Christian disunity are very real ... in creating divisions in the Christian fellowship." (p. 29)

B. Suggested Discussion Questions: (35 minutes)

- 0. What are some major stumbling blocks to Christian unity as we approach the 21st century? Can you name the ones which are "non-theological"? How is your council of churches seeking to address these issues?
- 1. To what extent do the following realities contribute to ecumenical malaise in our churches?
 - a. psychological fear of change
 - b. acceptance of our divisions as the norm for ecumenical relations
 - c. pride in our particular tradition
 - d. threat of loss of power
- 2. What do you think your council of churches could do to harness the energy of the churches to invigorate the ecumenical movement in our time?
- 3. Does your council of churches suffer from "ecumenical amnesia" by neglecting to educate their

member churches about ecumenism?

4. The **Lund Principle** states: Churches should "***act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately.***" (Lukas Vischer, ed., A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927-1963, Sec. 3, Third World Conference on Faith and Order, 1952, p. 86.)
 - a. To what extent is your council of churches living out the Lund Principle? Give examples.
 - b. What areas have yet to be explored among the member churches in your council of churches?

C. Conclusion: (5 minutes) Announce the topic, date and time of next session. Close with prayer.

SESSION IV (Chapter 4)

"Seeking Visible Unity: Councils of Churches"

I. INTRODUCTION: (5 minutes) CONVENOR

- A. **Welcome:** Greet all participants. Open session with prayer.
- B. **Purpose:** To understand ***conciliarism*** as an expression of "the council of churches movement" which constitutes "an institutional expression of the ecumenical movement," sustained by "an enduring covenant among many different church bodies" to walk down the path toward the goal of visible unity (Odyssey, p. 29).
 1. Present purpose and format of session.
 2. Select moderators for small groups and give written instructions for dialogue.
 3. In large gatherings, assign 1 Bible passage to each small group. In smaller gatherings, organize at least 3 small groups and assign 2 Bible passages to each group.
 - a. Mt. 4:18-25 - "We are many, but follow only one."

- b. Mt. 5:21-24 - "Reconciliation is a prerequisite for worship."
- c. Mt. 7:1-5 - "The measure you give is what you get."
- d. Mt. 10:1-4 - "Jesus chose 12 different disciples."
- e. Mt. 20:20-28 - "Greatness is one of service."
- f. Mt. 27:55-56, 61; 28:8-10,19-20 - "Central faith events are witnessed by the community of disciples."

II. SMALL GROUPS: (40 minutes) MODERATOR

A. Bible Text: Ask someone to read aloud the assigned text.

B. Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What does the Scripture passage suggest to you about the character of Christian life as an "enduring covenant" among those who follow Jesus?
2. Ask another person to read aloud the text again.
3. In light of Scripture, discuss how the notion of an "enduring covenant" is articulated in the six points to describe the nature and purpose of a council of churches: Definition; Reflecting Division and Unity; Mutual Recognition; Anticipation of Unity; Being its Members; and Churchly Status (See Odyssey, pp. 30-34).

III. PLENARY: (45 minutes) CONVENOR

A. Presentation: (10 minutes)

1. The word ***conciliarism*** has developed various meanings in the history of the church. It easily can be misunderstood.
 - a. Historically in the early church, ***conciliar*** referred to the gathering of Bishops of Christian churches chosen in apostolic succession as they met in council as guardians of the Church's faith, life, and witness in the world.
 - b. This understanding is shared by the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church.
0. The word ***conciliar*** took on an additional meaning in the 20th century in the council of churches movement. It refers to the process by which churches seek to

relate to one another by gathering together for counsel, dialogue, and cooperation in an ecumenical body.

- a. **The basis of meeting in a council of churches assumes that each church reflects some element of God's light revealed in Jesus Christ.**
 - b. **Yet the relationship among the churches does not assume that churches recognize one another as standing within the apostolic tradition.** (See *Odyssey*, p. 31, footnote 2, quote from "The Unity of the Church and the Churches, and the World Council of Churches;" also known as the Toronto Statement, 1950.)
0. The word *conciliar* also anticipates the nature of the unity sought by the churches.
- a. "The word *conciliar* refers here to the mutual relationships of local churches within the one Church... It is an expression of relatedness among all who call on the name of Christ and a means of mutual edification and correction." (1979 Salamanca Consultation - quoted in *The One Church in This Place* by William B. Cate, p. 41.)
 - b. The word *conciliar* extends to the mutual recognition by the churches of members and ministries. This remains a critical ecumenical issue for the realization of Christian unity. This assumes that the churches' identity is rooted in common confession of faith. This is the reason why "a conciliar body needs a theological basis or statement of purpose to define its reasons for being." (*Odyssey*, p. 37.)
 - c. The continual debate on "the nature of Christian unity" is helpful and healthy to the degree that it pushes churches to be more intentional about their participation as members of a council of churches. **In particular, the churches which are members of councils of churches need to know and communicate WHY IT MATTERS what the churches do together -- how their participation in that**

ecumenical body is a step toward achieving full Christian unity.

4. Some Patterns of "Conciliarism" in Christian Tradition

- a. Acts 15 - The Jerusalem Council: Representatives from local churches gathered in council for prayer and mutual counsel with other Christians to discern the leading of God's Spirit in resolving issues pertaining to the Church's mission.
- b. 4th Century - Council of Nicaea: Bishops representing the churches in every region of the inhabited world (OIKOUMENE) met in council to exercise collegial authority in formulating a framework of faith which many now see as a necessary basis for Christian unity -- the Nicene Creed.
- c. 20th Century - Councils of Churches: Official (clergy and lay) representatives of member churches meet in council as a forum for worship, dialogue, and cooperation to make visible and effective, in so far as possible, the unity they seek in faith, life, and witness.

B. Suggested Discussion Questions: (30 minutes)

1. *Conciliarism* rests upon a framework of existing and anticipated new relationships among the churches.

- a. In your council of churches, what is the basis which holds the churches in relationship to one another? Do you have a statement of purpose?
- b. Is the basis of coming together in council because of, or in the absence of, any articulated theological framework or identity?
- c. When meeting together as a council of churches, in what ways is attention given to mutual understanding and relationship building?
- d. What do you think helps or hinders the opportunity to meet one another" to draw the churches closer

together? What should be kept? What should be changed? Why?

2. Odyssey (p. 31) speaks of "**mutual recognition**" as a process of growth or stages by which churches come to recognize one another as expressing the fullness of the Church of Jesus Christ. It proceeds on the basis of a "minimal mutual recognition" in anticipation of a "complete mutual recognition" by the churches to be culminated in the banquet table of Eucharist celebration.

- a. In what ways do the churches of your council recognize one another as sharing the same dimension of being the Church?
- b. In what areas do your churches need greater mutual recognition?
- c. How might your council of churches be instrumental in this area of relationship building among the churches?

A. **Conclusion: (5 minutes)** Announce the topic, date and time of next session. Close with prayer.

SESSION V (Chapter 5)

"Marks of a Truly Ecumenical Body"

I. INTRODUCTION: (5 minutes) CONVENOR

- A. **Welcome:** Greet all participants. Open session with prayer.
- B. **Purpose:** To discuss the "marks" of an ecumenical body as a means to identify and evaluate the program, witness, and structure of a council of churches.

1. **PLANNING NOTE:** Due to the amount of material covered in this chapter, it is suggested that you consider devoting 2 sessions for participants to fully discuss the nine "marks" of an ecumenical body (one 90 minute session for Small Group discussion, and one 90 minute session for Plenary discussion). The following instructions pertain only to one 90 minute session.

2. Present purpose and selected format of session.
3. Select moderators for small groups and give written instructions for dialogue.

4. Assign one or two different "marks" to each small group.

II. SMALL GROUPS: (30 minutes) MODERATOR

"Marks" of Ecumenical Life & Witness in Councils of Churches

A. **Texts:** Ask two people to read aloud the Scripture text(s), and quote(s) from Odyssey according to the "mark(s)" assigned to your small group for discussion.

B. Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. SHARED WORSHIP

- a. Read Psalm 149:1 (NRSV).
- b. Odyssey - "Our life together is of God, and it must be nourished and expressed in common praise, thanksgiving, repentance, and hearing the Word." (p. 42)
- c. On what occasions do the members of your council worship together?
- d. Can you recall a special ecumenical worship service?
- e. In your council, what elements of worship are your churches comfortable sharing together? What do you avoid? Why?
- f. How many of the elements of worship which you avoid are problematic because of varied liturgical customs? How many are due to unresolved doctrinal differences?
- g. Can you think of ways of reducing discomfort in ecumenical worship without reducing the integrity and legitimate diversity of Christian worship?

2. DIALOGUE

- a. Read Acts 15:1-2, 6-9, 12-13 (NRSV).
- b. Odyssey - "The ecumenical mission is advanced only if we confront our differences in open and honest, even tense and frustrating, dialogue." (p. 43)
- c. What does "dialogue" mean to you?
- d. What is the purpose & process of dialogue in Acts 15?

- e. How is conflict handled in your council?
- f. Does your council engage in dialogue on issues which divide the churches?

3. ECUMENICAL ADVOCACY

- a. Read Galatians 6:9-10 (NRSV).
- b. Odyssey - "As an advocate, an ecumenical body seeks to promote an understanding of and a commitment to ecumenism. This task may require prodding, persuading, even provoking." (p. 44)
- c. What seems to keep the churches in your council doing things on their own instead of ecumenically?
- d. In what ways does your council on a regular basis prod the churches to relate to one another more fully in faith and service for the good of all?

4. EVANGELISM

- a. Read II Corinthians 5:18 (NRSV).
- b. Odyssey - "A primary function of the Church in all its manifestations, including ecumenical, is the task of evangelism -- bearing witness to the saving power of God, and calling people to repentance, faith, and discipleship." (p. 44)
- c. Is your council involved in evangelism? In what ways? If not, what prevents cooperation in this area?
- d. How might a council of churches carry out an evangelism strategy in the community?
- e. What would it mean for a church to be "ecumenically accountable" in its approach to evangelism? The MCC document, Ecumenical Accountability (p. 10), suggests churches should share the Gospel without "undue emphasis on" or "denigration of" a particular denomination. What do you think?

5. SOCIAL MISSION

- a. Read Isaiah 1:16-17 (NRSV).
- b. Odyssey - "The ecumenical enterprise loses part of its reason for being if it

abandons a strong social witness, one of today's fundamental forms of mission, for the sake of a weak unity.... We seek unity for faithfulness in mission." (p. 46)

- c. Is the social mission of the Church expressed by the churches through your council? In what ways?
- d. What aspects of social witness are avoided? Why?
- e. Do you agree or disagree with the Odyssey quote? Why?

III. PLENARY: (45 minutes) CONVENOR

"Marks" of Ecumenical Polity in Councils of Churches

A. **Reporting: (10 minutes)** Invite each small group to take 3 minutes to share some key points about the "mark(s)" of a council of churches assigned to them for discussion. List on newsprint.

B. Presentation: (5 minutes)

1. Ecumenism is the yearning for visible unity in faith, life, and witness among the Christian churches.

2. "Ecumenical polity" (governance) requires a structure and process by which the churches can give visible expression to the unity given by God in Christ. It provides a vehicle to grow into the fullness of Christian community as communion with God and with one another.

3. Odyssey articulates four characteristics of an ecumenical body which enhance mutual accountability among the member churches: Cooperation; Representativeness; Effective Organization; and Conciliar Interdependence.

C. Suggested Discussion Questions: (25 minutes)

1. COOPERATION

- 0. Reflecting on the LUND PRINCIPLE (Odyssey, p. 23, footnote 3), in what areas do the churches **act together as one Christian body** through your council?
- 1. In what areas do they choose to go it alone? To what extent is hesitation or refusal to cooperate a matter of conscience? Give examples.

2. REPRESENTATIVENESS

- a. What are the procedures to insure representative deliberation and decision making by the Board?
- b. How does your council seek through its organizational structure and programs to be representative and inclusive of its member churches? Does your council need to strive for broader representation?

3. EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION

- a. How is the effectiveness of a council of churches to be measured?
- b. How would you measure the effectiveness of your council's impact in the community?

4. CONCILIAR INTERDEPENDENCE

- a. In what ways does your council express interdependence in its relationship with other councils of churches and ecumenical bodies?
- b. Does your council of churches encourage representatives to attend programmatic ecumenical events offered state-wide, nationally, or internationally?
- c. In what areas might the state council of churches help your council of churches in its program life and witness in relating to the local and universal dimensions of ecumenism?

5. SUMMARY

- a. Review the nine marks of ecumenical bodies. List on newsprint.

Shared Worship	Cooperation
Dialogue	Representativeness
Ecumenical Advocacy	Effective Organization
Evangelism	Conciliar Interdependence
Social Mission	

- b. Which ones do you think are strengths of your council?

c. Which ones do you think are areas which need to be given serious attention? Offer suggestions.

D. Conclusion: (5 minutes)

1. Announce the topic, date, and time of final session.
2. In preparation, ask participants to read Chapter 6. Encourage them to do one of the assignments as indicated in Section II, B, 1 - to write a farewell letter, prayer or poem, or draw a picture. Write assignment instructions on index cards for each person.
3. Close with prayer.

SESSION VI (Chapter VI)

"In Conclusion"

I. INTRODUCTION: (5 minutes) CONVENOR

- A. **Welcome**: Greet all participants. Open session with prayer.
- B. **Purpose**: To sum up learnings about the purpose and significance of councils of churches, and to foster new appreciations for the need of Christian unity while being sensitive to the fact that we live in a religiously pluralistic society.
 1. Present purpose and format of session.
 2. Select moderators for small groups and give written instructions for dialogue.

II. SMALL GROUPS: (30 minutes) MODERATOR

A. Introduction: In the closing chapter, we have a "Declaration of Ecumenism" which seeks to summarize the meaning of ecumenism and the significance of councils of churches.

B. Activity and Discussion:

1. Invite participants to take the first 10 minutes to reflect on Chapter 6 or make a response in one of the following ways if they have not already done so prior to this session:
 - a. Write a farewell letter: Assuming you are leaving the community, write a brief letter of encouragement to the council of churches

based on what you learned from Odyssey.

- b. Write a prayer or poem: Express your hopes for Christian unity as you have come to understand it from Odyssey.
- c. Draw a picture: Depict your hopes for Christian unity among the churches, or how your council of churches might reflect your hopes in its organizational life and witness.

2. Invite participants to share letters, poems, and pictures with one another.

3. Summarize the common themes on newsprint.

III. PLENARY: (45 minutes) CONVENOR

A. Presentation: (5 minutes)

1. The history of the ecumenical movement is a vision of visible Christian unity where the churches, like scattered sheep, are brought together into one sheepfold by Christ, the Good Shepherd. We already can affirm that baptism expresses "unity of belonging" to one community which shares a common faith in the reconciling love of God in Christ. We also declare, through our baptism, that the Church is called to "unity in mission" as a sign of reconciliation in the world fractured by political, economic, social, racial and religious divisions.
2. If one of the perennial questions of Christian faith is Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?", then for the ecumenical movement a recurring question is, "What is the nature of the unity we seek?" In an age of religious pluralism, an emerging question is, "To what end and in what forms will the Christian community relate to the interfaith community?"
3. Odyssey uses certain phrases to articulate the classical vision of Christian unity which has undergirded the ecumenical movement. In our time, the churches continue to search for new language and images drawn from Scripture to express the nature of Christian unity.

B. Biblical & Ecumenical Witness: (10 minutes)

Invite participants to read aloud the following selections as the basis for the discussion questions in Section C.

0. Odyssey (1977) - reflects the legacy of ecumenical self-understanding of Christian unity from the 5 Assemblies of the

World Council of Churches from 1948 to 1975.

- a. the gift of God's reconciling love in Christ
- b. the task to be reconciled as churches
- c. unity with diversity
- d. unity and mission
- e. conciliar fellowship
- f. mutual recognition

1. World Council of Churches, 7th Assembly, (1991) - The Unity of the Church as **Koinonia**: Gift and Calling (Sec. 2.1)

"The unity of the church to which we are called is a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to all people to the gospel of God's grace and serving the whole of creation. (Quoted in Ecumenical Trends, June, 1993.)

2. Faith and Order Conference, Santiago de Compostela, Spain (1993) - Towards **Koinonia**/Communion in Faith, Life, and Witness (Sec. 1.1 - "The Biblical and Theological Understanding of *Koinonia*," par. 23.

"In putting this emphasis on *koinonia*, we have not chosen a new notion or concept. Communion between God and humanity is a fundamental theme of Holy Scripture. By creating human beings in God's image, God has created them to live in communion with him, in communion with each other, and as responsible stewards of creation."

3. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (1993) - Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (Sec. 1 - "The Search for Christian Unity," *The Church as Communion*, par. 13.)

"The **communion** (*emphasis added*) in which Christians believe and for which they hope is in its deepest reality, their unity with the

Father through Christ in the Spirit."

4. I Corinthians 12:12-13 - "For just as the body is one and has many members, and **all the members of the body, though many are one body** (*emphasis added*), so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body"
5. Ephesians 2:19-20 - "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of **the household of God** (*emphasis added*), built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone."

A. Suggested Discussion Questions: (30 minutes)

1. Which of the above themes or images communicate your hopes for Christian unity? Why?
2. Odyssey challenges all councils of churches to evaluate its programs with the ecumenical criterion: "***Does it advance the cause of one Church in common witness?***" (p. 51)
 - a. Which programs or activities in your council of churches clearly communicate this intention to the general public?
 - b. What might your council consider doing, that it is not doing now, to make visible "one Church in common witness?"
3. In Mark 12:31, one is reminded by Jesus that the commandment to love God also is accompanied by the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." Thus, the Christian community cannot ignore its neighbors who may belong to another Christian denomination or to a different religious community. Their religious tradition bears the marks of distinct beliefs, rituals, and practices.
 - a. Given God's love for us in Christ, what does love require of us toward neighbors whom we perceive to be different from us?
 - b. To what end might your council of churches express a common witness in the area of interfaith relations which keeps faith with its own ecumenical purpose?
 - c. In what forms might a council of churches relate to interfaith communities?

4. It has been said that the reality of religious pluralism gives renewed impetus for unity among the Christian churches.

- a. Some refer to Jesus' warning in Mark 3:25 that "if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand."
- b. Discuss the relationship between Christian unity and religious integrity.

IV. CONCLUDING WORSHIP: (10 minutes) CONVENOR

- A. Ask participants to gather in a circle for prayer around a table prepared with an open Bible and candle. Light the candle and say: "Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'" (John 10:12)
- B. Invite participants to offer sentence prayers of petition for God to bring healing to a divided church and to a divisive world.
- C. Conclude with the petitions and benediction recorded in Ephesians 3:14-21.

REVISED SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON ECUMENISM FOR COUNCIL OF CHURCHES' SPONSORED STUDY GROUPS

The following books may be ordered from the Massachusetts Bible Society (617-542-2224). The World Council of Churches publications also may be ordered by calling (800) 523-8211.

Best, Thomas F. and Gunther Gassman (eds.). On the Way to Fuller Koinonia. WCC, 1994. Official report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order held in Santiago de Compostela, Spain in August, 1993 which uses the biblical notion of koinonia as a framework to articulate what the churches perceive as essential dimensions of Christian unity.

Best, Thomas F. and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (ed.). Costly Unity. WCC, 1993. Current ecumenical discussion of ecclesiology and ethics, koinonia, covenanting, and conciliarity.

Cate, William B.. The One Church in This Place. Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the

Northwest Theological Union, 1991. Discusses the significance of local Christian unity within the theological framework of the ecumenical movement and advocates for local ecumenism as the context to renew the church for ministries of healing and justice to create inclusive communities.

Consultation on Church Union. Churches in Covenant Communion: The Church of Christ Uniting. Princeton, N.J.: COCU, 1989. It presents the concept, elements and process of covenanting to be considered by the nine member churches of COCU, plus liturgies for inaugurating the covenant relationship.

Consultation on Church Union. The COCU Consensus: In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting (revised ed.). Princeton, N.J.: COCU, 1984. Sets forth the theological basis for unity among nine Protestant denominations.

Crow, Paul A., Jr. Christian Unity: Matrix for Mission. Friendship Press, 1982. A recent, simple and solid primer on ecumenism by a leading ecumenist of the day.

Evans, G.R., Lorelei Fuchs S.A., and Diane C. Kessler (eds.). Encounters for Unity. The Canterbury Press, 1995. A collection of personal stories from 37 ecumenical leaders about their ecumenical experiences and the decisive encounters which shaped their ecumenical understanding and commitments. Each story concludes with a prayer and themes for discussion.

Gassmann, Gunther, and Lukas Vischer (eds.). Documentary History of Faith and Order. Vol. I, 1927-1963 (ed. Vischer). St. Louis Bethany Press, 1963. Vol. II, 1963-1993 (ed. Gassmann).

Faith and Order Paper No. 159. WCC, 1993. A fine reference work of key documents which represents the collective wisdom of ecumenical theological reflection among the Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic communions.

Keshishian, Aram. Conciliar Fellowship. WCC, 1992. Discusses the ecclesiological dimension of the ecumenical movement as expressed by the term "conciliar fellowship" as understood by Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

Kinnamon, Michael. Truth and Community. WCC and Eerdmans, 1988. An acclaimed book which presents the theological foundation for ecumenism, examines the principle of unity in diversity, and discusses its limits in maintaining an ecumenical identity.

Raiser, Konrad. Ecumenism in Transition. WCC, 1994. Discusses the theological foundations of the ecumenical movement and raises questions about a paradigm shift in ecumenical understanding.

Roman Catholic Church, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism. Vatican City, 1993. Articulates a theology of *communio* as the basis for Christian unity and provides definitive guidelines for ecumenical formation within the Roman Catholic Church and ecumenical cooperation, dialogue, and witness with Christians from other churches.

World Council of Churches. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. WCC, 1982. The Lima text, the agreed statement of 100 theologians of all major church traditions, marks a fifty year process of study.

World Council of Churches. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990. Faith and Order Paper No. 149. WCC, 1990. Analyzes the official church responses to the "BEM document" and suggests themes to be explored in future ecumenical discussions.

World Council of Churches. Church and World: The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community. Faith and Order Paper No., 151, 1990. A study guide for discussion groups to reflect on these two dimensions of the one ecumenical movement.

World Council of Churches. Confessing the One Faith, Faith and Order Paper No. 153, 1993. A study document to enable the churches to come to understand, accept, and confess the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) as an adequate expression of apostolic faith and basis for Christian unity.