

**Report from the Fortieth
Southern Conference UCC
Annual Meeting**

June 3, 5, 5, 2005

Airport Hilton Hotel, Norfolk, Virginia

The Southern Conference UCC Annual Meeting took on special significance because it marked the 40th anniversary of the Conference. Given the Conference' past and its present, the theme of the meeting was quite appropriate: "Building A Bridge of Unity from Diversity.....Embracing Our Future".

The theme of the conference was clearly mirrored in the ministers who spoke to the delegates and visitors: Reverends Yvonne Delk, Rollin Russell, Christine Busch, and Jose "Joe" Malayang. They came from different races and backgrounds, their messages had different cadences and style, but they all delivered a call to unity and hope.

Friday afternoon provided an opportunity to report on the status of the Conference and to announce upcoming events. Sunday morning was an opportunity to come together to worship and to commit to move the individual churches and the Conference forward for the following year.

Saturday was a full day of church business. Encouraging news was brought forth regarding the financial health of the Conference. Through much hard work, the deficit is being rolled back. The delegates also discussed and approved a Capital-Fund Campaign for the Conference. This is something that we will all be hearing more about in the coming months.

The afternoon session was heated, as was expected. Three resolutions were discussed, in great detail, and passed. The fourth was tabled with a commitment to have a committee of 12 meet to try to generate a consensus resolution for next year's meeting. The first resolution that was passed was a friendly amendment to "Getting Our Priorities Right". This resolution affirmed and renewed a "commitment to seek to be ambassadors of God's healing in the world by:

1. Intentionally attending to the care of the earth and the environment.
2. Deliberately seeking to address issues of poverty....
3. Humbly acting as peacemakers in our communal relationships, both internationally and interpersonally.
4. Purposefully work to set the oppressed free from deeply interrelated political, racial, sexual, and economic injustices."

The second: "A Resolution to Renew the Spirit of Unity" received the support of the majority of the delegates. It stated that: "in the spirit of unity, we as the Southern

Conference do not endorse any of the resolutions dealing with marriage to be presented at General Synod 25.... And we fervently pray that the delegates to General Synod 25 will be empowered by nothing less than the Spirit of God to discern a way to hold all of us together.”

An alternative to “A Resolution Affirming That Jesus Is Lord” was put forward and was approved. This powerfully stated alternative went beyond the wording of the original resolution and clarified what it meant to say the Jesus is Lord. It clearly established that by making this statement we are affirming our ultimate allegiance to Jesus and not to our social status, our ethnic group, or our country. We are saying that it is Jesus to whom we own our allegiance. This alternative resolution also passed.

The fourth resolution: “A Resolution Concerning Marriage” was tabled until further study could be undertaken. The resolution called for General Synod 25 not to endorse same sex marriage, but instead to affirm marriage as between a man and a woman. As was pointed out at the meeting, this resolution conflicted with the one that had been passed earlier in the session that established that in a spirit of unity the Southern Conference would not endorse any resolution dealing with marriage.

The day ended with a banquet. The speaker, Christine Busch, brought greetings from our sister Conference in Germany. This was followed by two very meaningful events. The first was the formal establishment of the Yvonne Delk Seminary Scholarship Fund for Woman. The second was the bestowing of the status of Conference Minister Emeritus upon Rolin Russell.

On Sunday, the conference ended appropriately with a worship service: “Celebrating the Vision”. Reverend Jose Malayang, from the home office in Cleveland, brought the message. When he had finished preaching on “Diversity is What Unites Us”, you truly believed that diversity was something to be treasured.

Although there were times of disagreement and controversy during the proceedings, there was an atmosphere of hope that in fact we might all be able to become one. It was an important and religiously significant experience for those of us who had the opportunity to attend. Congregational United Church of Christ was well represented. Irwin Smallwood and Ralph Wenger served as delegates. Bill Smith, Dot Ballinger, and Margaret Byrd were present and made meaningful contributions. Winnie Smith and Ruthann Wenger were visitors and attended many of the meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

Ralph D. Wenger, Moderator