

What is the Kentucky Council of Churches?

By Fr. Tony Bickett, Ecumenical Officer

For sixty four years, the Kentucky Council of Churches (KCC) has served churches in the Commonwealth of Kentucky as a means of bringing greater unity among Christians. All four Catholic Dioceses in the state are full members of the Council. The KCC brings Christians together throughout the state for common witness and service. Since 1947, Kentucky Christians have worked together in an effort towards fulfilling the prayer of Jesus "that they all may be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:21, NRSV)

It was on December 11, 1947, when delegates from six Protestant denominations met to organize the Kentucky Council of Churches. Since 1947 the number and variety of member churches has grown steadily. In 1982 all of the Catholic dioceses of Kentucky became full members after some time of less formal participation. Today, there are 12 major Christian traditions represented among the members. The most recent new member tradition (2010) is the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship.

Some of the major contributions of the KCC over these years include: A Task Force on Hunger spawning food banks, encouraging church involvements with the challenge of homelessness, and advocating improvements in public welfare programs. Since 1974, the Council has played an important role in the development of volunteer agency coordination around natural disasters in Kentucky. Intentional dialogues among the member traditions have led to some important agreements about how we will speak, work and worship together. In advocacy work, the KCC pursue a day when everyone will have access to affordable, quality health care. Another area of concern has been anti-racism and immigration issues.

The Kentucky Council of Churches seeks to be a witness to the unity of the body of Christ. The members of the Council are drawn to be a Christian community of hospitality to all, developing and supporting deep relationships and to hold each other accountable to the ongoing mission of unity. The KCC serves as a Christian voice of conscience and a voice for the voiceless. The KCC extends an invitation to all churches in Kentucky that profess Jesus as the Christ to join them in their work.

The preamble of the KCC constitution states, "In the providence of God, communions and congregations in the Commonwealth of Kentucky that profess Jesus as the Christ, covenant together to manifest more fully the unity of the Church. As communions and congregations, we profess that the ecumenical calling to Christian unity is essential to our own identities, and we therefore commit ourselves to shared life and ministry together in the Kentucky Council of Churches, a conciliar structure that shall serve as a community of communions for us. Our unity is both a gift and a challenge, calling us to interdependence as intimate as the members of a single body (I Corinthians 12), the branches of a single vine (John 15), the stones of a single house (I Peter 2)—a unity that preserves the dignity of our diversity and which gives us a common ministry for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation under the leading of the Holy Spirit. We welcome others to join our household of faith to share in our common life."

Today the KCC is one of the most active Councils in the United States. The history of the Council is still being written. The Council invites all Christians to join them in writing the next chapter in their history. You are invited to be one of its authors! You can learn more by visiting there newly launched website at: <http://www.kycouncilofchurches.org/>