

# Current status with the National Council of Churches USA

The purpose of this document is to keep all of us informed as to current Christian Science involvement within **NCC (USA)**. As of May 2015, The Mother Church has been listed with an official 'observer status' with the National Council of Churches.

**Announcement of Observer Status**, on the blog posted on June 12, 2015:

## #219. NCC Welcomes Mother Church 'Observer Status'

For those of you who have been reading this blog for several years, you would know that The Mother Church has been in dialogue with the National Council of Churches USA (NCC). The driving force of the conversation has been a mutual interest in getting to know each other and finding the most mutually beneficial way to work with each other. The news is good! We have found not only sincere friendship in this relationship, but an acknowledgement of the work of Christ in our midst. Both the leadership of NCC and the Christian Science Board of Directors are comfortable with an agreed upon "Observer Status" for The Mother Church that will enable us to continue growing in our love and understanding of each other. We are able to affirm, with other Christians, the importance of maintaining the freedom to follow Jesus most fully within our own denominations, as well as engaging in the fellowship that guards against insularity.

While we continue to listen, learn, and share at the level of the NCC Governing Board, there are specific advantages to the status of an observer relationship.

1. We can continue to provide, for those who still do not know Christian Science beyond the surface, an opportunity to learn at a pace most comfortable to them.
2. We can maintain the unique voice of The Christian Science Monitor to represent our Church's interest in justice, peace and progress while the NCC continues to speak out on these issues through the statements of its member congregations.
3. While we have experienced sincere conversation on the subject of Christ-healing among individuals and at the Convening Table level at NCC, the great potential of this ecumenical opportunity remains largely untapped.

The Observer Status allows us to bring our gifts to the conversation where the doors are already open, but it also gives us space to be patient while Christ is at work, opening more doors.

And to clarify the distinction between the Governing Board and the Convening Tables, there are several other observer communions ('denominations') who are represented by active members of Convening Tables. As members of those tables (see their description in our 'browse' page), our Christian Science representatives have been participating as active members for several years. While we do not vote or influence the decisions of the Council itself, we do contribute ideas and participate as equal members on our Convening Tables.

For the privilege of knowing these Christian brothers and sisters as friends, of sharing our best understanding and experiences of Christ-healing, and of learning from their examples

of Christian unity, we are counting our blessings. How grateful we are for the promise of greater fulfillment of Jesus' prayer for unity (John 17:21)!

### **Current activity**

As Committee for Ecumenical Affairs, Shirley Paulson attends semi-annual Governing Board meetings of the National Council of Churches, representing The Mother Church as 'Observer'.

Convening Tables are open to membership from interested Christians who are both members and non-members of NCC. Four members of the Christian Science Ecumenical Team are serving on those Convening Tables as follows:

- \* Theological Dialogue and Matters of Faith and Order  
– Shirley Paulson
- \* Interreligious Relations and Collaboration on Topics of Mutual Concern  
– Maryl Walters
- \* Christian Education, Ecumenical Faith Formation, and Leadership Development  
– Deanna Mummert
- \* Joint Action and Advocacy on Issues of Justice and Peace  
– David Corbitt

### **The history of Christian Science involvement:**

In 2008, Shirley Paulson was invited by the NCC General Secretary, Michael Kinnamon, to attend NCC Board of Governors meetings, as a representative of the Christian Science Church and in the role of a guest. She has attended all Board meetings since that time. In November, 2011 she was appointed by the Christian Science Board of Directors as Head of Ecumenical Affairs for The Mother Church, and in the Spring of 2013, the Committee on Publication took on the ecumenical work of The Mother Church. (Shirley's title became Committee for Ecumenical Affairs.)

The NCC Commissions were open to Christians of any denomination who would like to participate, so in 2009, Shirley was invited to participate on the Faith & Order Commission of the NCC. (See blog #1.) In 2010, Marceil DeLacy and Maryl Walters also began to participate on other Commissions. (See blog #9.)

In 2011, The Mother Church held a few informal dialogues with NCC. For the first one, Michael Kinnamon brought a delegation of NCC staff and communion members to meet with two Christian Science Board members and six other Christian Scientists. (See blog #33.) Later in the Fall of 2011, the full Board of

Directors went to the National Council of Churches' headquarters then located in New York. (See blog #41.) In the summer of 2012, Michael Kinnamon spent a day at The Mother Church, meeting with departments and giving a talk to the local members later in the evening.

The Christian Scientists who attended those first meetings also began to function as an 'Ecumenical Team,' working together to support the increasing questions from the public about Christian Science in an ecumenical context. They were invited to serve on the NCC Commissions (as they were called then), and in a variety of other forms of dialogue.

The end of 2012 was a watershed time for the National Council. They recognized a need for major restructuring and began the careful, prayerful, deliberate process of re-thinking every aspect of the Council meaning and life. Peg Birk, an interim General Secretary, served the Council for 18 months while it made its transition to a smaller governing board and focused purpose. (See blog #93.)

In 2013, the Ecumenical Team wrote a 'Self-Understanding of Christian Science' document in response to the growing number of questions from NCC participants who wanted to understand how Christian Scientists understand themselves today. (See blog #71.)

When the newly structured National Council of Churches convened for the first time in its new form in March, 2014, Jim Winkler had been appointed General Secretary. The council offered a single gathering for all interested Christians, and this new annual meeting was called 'Christian Unity Gathering' (CUG). It focuses on a single topic each year (see blog #164), so that all parties are working in sync with each other. All of the Convening Tables also met at the CUG to organize themselves for the first time. Christian Scientists, who had served on the previous 'Commissions' also began to serve on all the newly organized 'Convening Tables'.

In December 2014, a meeting took place between Christian Scientists and NCC representatives at The Mother Church to discuss the meaning of our relationship with each other. Those who attended were the Christian Science Board of Directors (Robin Hoagland, Margaret Rogers, Lyle Young, Scott Preller, and Skip Phinney), representatives from the Committee on Publication (Russ Gerber, Shirley Paulson, and Debbi Lawrence), Jim Winkler (NCC General Secretary), Tony Kireopoulos (Associate General Secretary), and seven members of the NCC's Ecclesial Relations Committee (Don Ashmall, Herman Harmelink, Paula Dempsey, Kathryn Lohre, Vasken Kouzouian, Al Moss, Charles Wood).

In May 2015, both the leadership of NCC and the Christian Science Board of Directors agreed upon "Observer Status" for The Mother Church, which

encourages both NCC members and the Christian Science Church to continue growing in our mutual love and understanding of each other.