

Edgar to leave NCC post by end of 2007: Gives chance for "seamless transition process"

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Bob Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, will not seek a third four-year term as the top administrator of the ecumenical organization. Edgar's current term ends December 31, 2007. A third term would have been unprecedented in the NCC's history.

"I care deeply about the council and have invested my best self in the work," Edgar said this month. "The council has been returned to financial stability and has reclaimed its place as a prophetic ecumenical voice heeding Christ's call to serve the least among us."

Edgar, 63, a United Methodist minister, is giving the organization a chance for "a seamless transition process," said a spokesperson for the New York-based council.

The former Democratic congressperson and president of Claremont School of Theology said he wrestled with his decision for nine months. In the end he decided that "two terms seemed enough, both to me and the executive committee."

Edgar inherited a \$6 million deficit when he arrived in 2000 and, after cutting budgets and increasing revenues, has left the agency with nearly \$8 million in reserve funds.

"I'm really known as a salvager, and I've left the council better than I found it," Edgar said October 3 in a phone interview from St. Louis. "The council is healthy enough that foundations that said they would never give the council money because we were going out of business have turned around and given us resources."

A more broadly ecumenical body, Christian Churches Together in the USA, is to be launched publicly next year. With its unprecedented membership of Catholic, evangelical, mainline Protestant, Eastern Orthodox and historic racial and ethnic

churches, the organization will focus on moral-social issues that have the broadest consensus.

Under Edgar, who encouraged the independent formation of CCT-USA, the NCC has raised its public profile on a host of progressive issues acceptable to most of the organization's 35 Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, historically African-American and peace churches.

Edgar has been especially vocal in his opposition to the war in Iraq and to the Bush administration's policies on torture and domestic spying in the war on terror. He said he has tried to focus the NCC's mission on "attainable goals" in fighting poverty, boosting the minimum wage and protecting the environment.

A search committee for a new general secretary will be named this fall and will begin its work in early 2007, said Michael Livingston, the current NCC president. "During Bob Edgar's watch, we have worked to build unity among our diverse families of faith and a strong witness within the wider society," he said.

Meanwhile, saying he is "too ornery and too young" to retire, Edgar plans to mull over his options for the next 15 months. "The opportunities are there, and I'll explore a number of them," he said. "Obviously I hope to find some place where I can continue to have a bully pulpit where I can focus on the issues I care about—issues of justice and peace and poverty and the environment." -*Religion News Service*