

Kinnamon installed as NCC executive: "Unity is not synonymous with agreement"

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Church-unity advocate Michael Kinnamon, affirmed unanimously this month as the National Council of Churches' next general secretary, does not expect that being the chief ecumenical voice for 35 communions will be a placid job over the next four years.

"Unity is not synonymous with agreement," Kinnamon said to NCC general assembly delegates meeting November 8 in a New Jersey hotel outside New York City.

As a consequence of "being in Christ," the Disciples of Christ minister continued, "we can fight like cats and dogs, and still sit at the same table. . . . Getting to know one another builds trust."

Kinnamon, a longtime seminary professor, also said during an exchange with delegates that his vision for the NCC is that of "churches in life together"—not simply denominations taking cues from New York or Washington offices.

Kinnamon, 58, who will take office on January 1, succeeds Bob Edgar, who lifted the NCC out of a financial hole. Recently NCC leaders have made cuts in staffing and expenses in order to operate in the black and not dip into the NCC's now-healthy reserve funds.

Asked whether the council will partner with churches on race and immigration issues, Kinnamon noted that a working group on racial justice did not exist when he became chair four years ago of the NCC's new Justice and Advocacy Commission. "I accept my failure to make that work as effectively as possible," he said, promising to revitalize the council's historic stand on racial justice. "This is a gospel-grounded community that knows that racism and sexism are a denial of God in one another."

Kinnamon was installed November 8 in a ceremony at Manhattan's St. Varten's Armenian Orthodox Cathedral along with the new NCC president, Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, ecumenical officer for the Diocese of the Armenian Orthodox Church of America. Aykazian succeeds Michael Livingston in the two-year post.

Assembly delegates at the annual meeting passed by voice vote, with six abstentions, a resolution urging the House of Representatives to approve a resolution recognizing the slaughter of Armenians in 1915 as a genocide. The House leadership decided this fall not to bring the resolution to a vote because of objections from the Bush administration, which said it would harm sensitive relations with Turkey.