

# Ecumenical group decides to sit out presidential race: Christian Churches Together

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Christian Churches Together in the USA—the nation’s broadest and newest group devoted to ecumenism—says it will stay out of the presidential campaigns but hopes to convey its top concern—combating domestic poverty—to the president-elect before his or her inauguration.

The fledgling pan-Christian organization, which formally launched in January 2006 in Pasadena, California, held its annual four-day meeting last month in Baltimore. Attendees spent part of that time at Bread for the World offices and touring the sites of S.O.M.E. (So Others May Eat) in Washington, D.C.

High-level representatives from several Christian “families” and national Christian organizations make up the CCT—including evangelical, Orthodox, Catholic, historic Protestant and ethnic churches. Because decisions are made by consensus rather than through parliamentary procedure, leaders have forged ahead carefully and continue to use personal discussions to develop trust among the theologically diverse participants.

Richard Hamm, CCT’s new executive administrator, said the presidential race had sparked intense discussions about national politics during the January 8-11 meeting, with many desiring to shy away. “A couple of churches in the mix have gotten bit by being seen as endorsing a candidate or party,” he said. “They’ve had one too many photo ops and been stung by that.”

But several CCT members advocated for the group to “seize the moment” and raise its profile by meeting with presidential candidates now. “I think some spade work is necessary,” said Angelique Walker-Smith, executive director of the Greater Church Federation of Indianapolis. “It’s too late to cold call after the president is elected.” Others said it was too soon for CCT to step into partisan politics. “We’re still building

trust and understanding with each other,” said A. Roy Medley, general secretary of the American Baptist Churches USA.

Cardinal William Keeler, one of the early founders of CCT and its outgoing chief Catholic representative, said each member church may approach the presidential campaign in its own way. Keeler, a former archbishop of Baltimore, pointed out that CCT participants must first do a better job of acquainting their churches with the low-profile CCT. “People in the pews don’t even know that it exists,” Keeler said.

Seven new churches and Christian organizations were admitted to CCT, which now has 43 participating bodies. The additions: the American Bible Society, the Church of the Brethren, the Elim Fellowship, Habitat for Humanity, the Mennonite Church, the Polish National Catholic Church and the Vineyard USA.

Hamm, who headed the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) from 1993 to 2003, was installed as CCT’s first full-time administrator. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, served as moderator of the group in its formative stages. He was succeeded last month by Leonid Kishkovsky, director of interchurch relations of the Orthodox Church in America.