

Churches Together on target for launch: Church of God in Christ considering membership

by [John Dart](#) in the [May 3, 2005](#) issue

The fledgling Christian Churches Together—a painstakingly crafted amalgam of U.S. mainline Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, racial/ethnic and evangelical/Pentecostal churches—will organize formally behind closed doors early in June and publicly celebrate the milestone in September.

Its goal has been to have 25 Christian organizations committed to the CCT-USA by this spring. The June 1-3 steering committee gathering at a Jesuit retreat house in Los Altos Hills, California, might exceed that goal, with 27 or 28 representatives, said Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, a Reformed Church in America executive, who chairs the committee.

If there is a weak spot in the five categories of churches and Christian organizations, Granberg-Michaelson said, it is in the racial and ethnic group. A broad Hispanic coalition and a Korean-American church have joined, but as of early April none of the African-American Methodist or Baptist denominations had signed on. “We hope they will at least send observers,” he said.

However, the general board of the Memphis-based Church of God in Christ, the fastest growing black Pentecostal denomination, is scheduled to consider joining at a late May meeting in Atlanta, said Bishop George McKinney of San Diego, a CCT-USA steering committee member.

At a meeting of the denomination’s general board the first week of April, McKinney said he “strongly recommended” that COGIC join the CCT-USA. “I’m optimistic; I think there is real need for this organization,” said McKinney, who is also a pastor and author.

The Pentecostal beliefs and conservative cultural views of some denominations have not deterred them from seriously considering the CCT-USA initiative. In Africa and Latin America, some Pentecostal churches work in coalitions with Catholics and mainline Protestant churches.

Besides McKinney, two other Pentecostal clergy are on the steering committee: Bishop James Leggett of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church and Jeffrey Farmer, president of the Open Bible Churches. Farmer said he was “extremely excited” about CCT-USA when he was interviewed last year by *Charisma* magazine. “It’s an historic thing, and this time it appears it’s going to happen,” Farmer said.

The most recent founding member is the Episcopal Church, whose Executive Council in February voted for participation. It may be “too soon” to know exactly how the groundbreaking organization will fare, said Bishop Christopher Epting, ecumenical officer for the Episcopal Church.

“But CCT-USA could have the potential of moving beyond the old, institutional structures and bureaucracies of the ecumenical movement and tapping into the new energies of a spiritual ecumenism which would realistically reflect the entire Christian landscape today in this country and beyond,” Epting told Episcopal News Service.

Granberg-Michaelson, whose denomination bridges both ecumenical and evangelical approaches, said participants in the meetings since January 2003 have spent much of their time praying together and getting acquainted with one another’s traditions. Such trust-building sessions are crucial, he said, before the CCT-USA is to even contemplate making consensus statements on moral and social issues in the years ahead.

“All the major Orthodox churches have become CCT-USA participants,” Granberg-Micholson said. “The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) can’t make that decision until [the summer of 2006], but it is very clear that the Presbyterians will join.”

Under the direction of Todd Bassett, national commander of the Salvation Army, plans are under way to launch CCT on September 18 in the nation’s capital with a celebration at Washington National Cathedral.