

**Response of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
to the Faith and Order Document 198,  
*The Nature and Mission of the Church (TNMC)***

**1. Introduction**

*1.1 Disciples historical, theological, and cultural identity*

1. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a church of approximately 700,000 members in 3,780 congregations associated in geographical regions of the United States and Canada. It originated at the turn of the nineteenth century when the Americas were “the New World,” during an age of revolutions in Europe and colonial lands. At first of primarily Irish-British heritage, the church today embraces the wide, rich mix of peoples of diverse backgrounds in North America.

2. From the beginning, the Disciples found their voice in a deep concern for the unity of the whole church to which the New Testament witnesses. In an age of egalitarian political values undergirded by an Enlightenment era advocacy of reason and popular education, the Disciples added their perspective to others in the church seeking an end to divisions among Christians. These founding Disciples believed that such divisions are a “horrid evil . . . which destroys the visible unity of the body of Christ.” Further, “the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one . . .” [Campbell, Thomas, *Declaration and Address*, St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1955, (first published in 1809), pp. 47, 44] The Disciples matured into a church deeply dedicated to and involved in local and global efforts towards making visible the unity of Christ’s Church. Thus, it has been said that ecumenism is in the make-up of Disciples genes.

3. Over the decades, Disciples participated in the formation and work of councils of churches, locally, nationally, and internationally. They have been involved in composing and responding to documents of the ecumenical movement, including the statements coming from the Faith and Order Commission such as *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (BEM)*, have been active in the world-wide movement of United and Uniting Churches and in the gathering of Christian World Communions, and have engaged in bilateral ecumenical dialogues with such bodies as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Within the broader Disciples tradition, they have engaged with sister churches worldwide through the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council.

*1.2 Reception Process and Approval of Response to TNMC*

4. The Council on Christian Unity has overseen a process of consultation and deliberations leading to this response to this document. On the Council’s behalf, its President, Robert Welsh invited numerous church leaders to share their input. A team of representatives developed a draft response, which was shared at a session during the church’s biennial General Assembly in July 2009, and revised in light of the discussion. The Board of the Council on Christian Unity has reviewed and approved this statement for formal submission to the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC as the response of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

## 2. Overall statement on the document

5. The Disciples wish first to express gratitude to the Faith and Order Commission for its ongoing work, for this document, and for the invitation to respond for the sake of our shared commitment to church unity.

6. Our church's journey with others along the path of ecumenical reflection leading to *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM), *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (NPC), and now this document (TNMC) has contributed greatly to our life as church. The Commission on Theology of the Disciples, for example, has developed ecclesiological studies such as *The Church for the Disciples of Christ: Seeking to be Truly Church Today* (1998) which take into consideration and benefit from insights from Faith and Order materials as well as from other ecumenical bodies.

7. While understanding that we have much to learn from other churches, we feel that we have much to contribute to the larger Church. Along the way, we have rejoiced that Faith and Order discussions in particular have enabled this mutual sharing and growth and have, at so many points facilitated opportunities for further ecumenical engagement by seeking to articulate common convictions, identify challenges, and clarify diverse positions.

8. We note with gratitude various ways in which TNMC has sought to build upon responses to prior documents. The fresh attention given to the Mission of the church in conjunction with continued reflections on matters of Word, Sacrament, and Order, is a significant advance over BEM.

9. In making our response we wish to strike two notes of concern about the text and response process. First, it would be strengthened by a clear statement, following the questions which end paragraph 8, of what will be done with the responses: if a further text, eventually one perhaps analogous to *BEM*, is foreseen, that should be clearly stated—anticipating such a resource would be a powerful motivation for churches to engage in the process.

10. Second, readers of TNMC may well ask, “In addition to churches sending their official response, what can they actually do now, and not least at the local level, to further the cause of Christian unity?” This text deserves the widest and most serious consideration; it is more likely to gain the attention it is due if it included *specific suggestions for concrete actions* to be taken here and now by the churches.

11. These could be added following the questions at the end of TNMC, paragraph 8, and reinforced by a new paragraph 124 at the end of the text (for example: “124. Even as the churches pursue their careful work of common reflection towards visible unity, they are called to make visible the degree of agreement and mutual recognition which already exists among them. This could be done by taking practical, concrete steps, and not least at the local level, to make their unity visible. As far as possible Churches should be guided by the “Lund Principle” (cf. the Faith and Order World Conference in Lund, Sweden, 1952): the norm is that churches should do things *together*, except when conscience requires them to act separately.

## 3. Responses to the four questions posed in paragraph 8, p. 12 of *The Nature and Mission of the Church*

3.1 *Are common ecclesiological convictions and differences correctly identified?*

12. When the affirmations of the main text and the areas of remaining differences are taken together, the study document can be said to represent in the main and substance a very helpful exposition of widely shared ecclesiological convictions and concerns. Matters about which Disciples have reservations are noted below, as are several suggestions for further ecumenical consideration and for revisions of the text itself.

### *3.2 Do these reflect an emerging convergence on the nature and mission of the church?*

13. A judgment on the extent and firmness of “convergence” reflected in the study document depends primarily on the uses for which it is envisioned. That is, will TNMC be primarily an effort to bring the churches closer together on the issues of “Nature and Mission.” Will there be an intentional effort to structure a teaching guide for the congregations? Will this document be the basis for a common effort for the churches to come to understand, claim, and live out the affirmations set forth in this text or revised edition of it?

### *3.3 What concerns would we raise?*

14. Although called a “study document,” the main text of TNMC is formulated as doctrinal declaration, and cast in terminology by and for Christians who are exceptionally well-schooled in church theology. This form of presentation is an honorable (small “t”) tradition, and appropriate for and typical of formalized ecumenical accords.

15. However, the document’s readers would benefit from editorial efforts to signal a self-conscious awareness of the nature and limits of this form of doctrinal discourse, which differs in many ways from the voice of the faithful often expressed in images, symbols, stories, and in the “ordinary language” of Scripture and in the daily course of Christian living, whether in liturgy or catechesis, even homiletic proclamation. This form is also in contrast to the more straightforwardly descriptive language of the materials in the boxes noting differences among the churches. Disciples would affirm that the form and idiom of the presentation needs to be attended to if the document is to find educational, and receptive life, among the people and many clergy of the churches.

16. The point of concern is not simply that of the main text’s accessibility to a wide church audience, though that matter is important. For Disciples, “reception” is understood, and undertaken, as a process involving the advice and consent of the entire community of the faithful, and not first only that of church leaders with formal theological training. Thus the fruitfulness of the reception process for such a study is itself greatly dependent on the intelligibility and explanatory force of the materials.

17. In addition, Disciples can find expressed through the wording of the main text a large number of shared faith convictions which are expressed as appropriately, and perhaps as well or better, in other forms of language to be found in Scripture and Tradition. Aids that would facilitate coming to such findings would be welcome, among them, perhaps, preliminary remarks on diverse forms and modes of theological discourse, brief explanations (or vernacular substitutions) of Latin and technical terminology, a glossary, and/or supplemental advice about using the study.

18. There remains also the more basic issue whether the terms “convergence” and “common statement” call for full agreement on the *wording* of the statement. The initial paragraphs of the main text may serve to illustrate the point at issue. Disciples affirm, and welcome, the emphasis

given here to affirm the Church's origin, nature, and calling in relationship to the full life of the triune God. The necessity, and usefulness, of Latin formulations familiar to perhaps only few churches (e.g., "*creatura verbi et creatura spiritus*"), however, is far from evident, and may even contribute to an off-putting response amongst the churches' people.

19. Also welcome are references to select events, themes, and passages of Scripture, as grounding for and/or as illustrative of points being made. Indeed, attention to biblical warrants for traditions is, to Disciples, vitally important. Here, however, the frequent use of "thus" and "therefore" is made in a simplistic and misleading way, as if the theological claim that is advanced is specifically derived from or logically deduced from Scriptural quotations.

20. As a specific suggestion, we would propose to insert the following sentence before the final sentence of paragraph 3.9: "The Church exists not for itself but in order to participate in and further God's redeeming and transforming mission in the world."

21. These observations suggest that it would be helpful to insert, perhaps between paragraphs 10-11, a "box" in which are discussed some of the several key differences among and within the churches with regard to the language-uses and method(s) for constructing a Scripturally-based theology.

22. The Trinitarian language introduced at this point would represent an excellent case study. While Disciples confess "the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit" and baptize by the Matthean baptismal formulary, the wider range of Biblical language relating to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit is in our judgment permissible, often valuable, and freely employed in worship, teaching, and discussion. The use of gender inclusive language in referring to God is one matter of importance in this regard. By the same token, faithfulness to apostolic teaching and respect for and continuity with Tradition are not, in our judgment, *bound* to a particular set of metaphysical-theological terms developed over the course of Christian history.

#### 3.4 *What Further Steps towards Unity can we take, and how might this text be further developed?*

23. As Disciples of Christ – as people for whom unity is our "Polar Star" – we are encouraged by the degree of mutual recognition which has been achieved among many churches. Yet we urge churches, wherever possible, to move beyond *mutual recognition* to a deeper stage of relationship, that of *mutual accountability*. For us, mutual accountability means recognizing that our own actions as a church have consequences for all churches whom we recognize as members of the one Body of Christ. It means considering the effects upon other churches of what we might want to say - even "purely internally" - and do as a church.

24. We have sought to live this out in our network of national and international relationships, most closely with the United Church of Christ, with whom we share a single organization for overseas ministry and witness, with the other churches in the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, and with our partners in national and international dialogues. We affirm the commitment of all WCC member churches in 2007 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, that they should "pray for one another, share resources, assist one another in times of need, make decisions together, work together for justice, reconciliation, and peace, hold one another accountable to the discipleship inherent in baptism, and maintain dialogue in the face of differences, refusing to say 'I have no need of you' (1 Cor.12:21)." (Reference to the Porto Alegre Ecclesiology Statement "Called to be the One Church," §7). We feel, then, that further work on the theme of mutual accountability would strengthen TNMC and would encourage the churches to *live out* together their belonging to the one Body of Christ.

#### 4. The Church in History

25. This is an important discussion. The theme of “*in via*” and related terms like “pilgrim people,” are invaluable components of the Church’s self-understanding. They are critical for holding together the Church’s thanksgiving for the gifts of God which create, sustain, and empower it and its properly humble awareness of the manifold ways it very imperfectly manifests those gifts and falls short of its God-given calling. Further, the self-awareness that the Church is an earthen vessel is vital in efforts to distinguish confidence in the ultimate triumph of God’s will “on earth as it is in heaven” from Christian self-righteousness and arrogance. Differences among the churches with regard to the propriety of speaking of the Church as in some ways or at certain times “sinful” for neglect, misuses, or distortions of its God-given (“divine”) origin, nature, and calling are very serious differences indeed. Disciples welcome the inclusion of material relating to the Church in history.

26. The sections on “Justification and Sanctification” of the Church provide the possibilities of an enriching perspective on the Church. Further clarification and exposition of this theme offer a promising way ahead for greater convergence on this matter.

27. Likewise important are the references in this section, and elsewhere, with regard to the Tradition of the Church. Throughout our history as a people, Disciples have placed special emphasis on the vital, faithful living out of the “apostolic faith” at the core of ecclesial and individual Christian identity. For this core reality, in its breadth and depth, the term “Tradition” (capital-T) has grown in significance among us over the course of many decades of ecumenical engagement. In Tradition, we affirm, Christians participate in shared convictions, unity, loving relations, and desires of union with God and one another, and all these matters along with much else of Christian faith and faithful service *endures*, even as “common statements” of formal doctrinal accord and various forms of organization and program vary from time to time and place to place. At the same time we experience Tradition as being *in via*, as a living memory and force which shapes the present, but is also transformed and understood anew as each generation lives out the Christian faith within its own time and place.

28. For this reason, there is good cause to develop the discussion of Tradition more fully and, equally or more importantly, to enrich the discussion at other points in the document with references to this dimension of the Church. The treatment of “the sacramentality” of the Church is one place that invites such reflections. There are, as it were, “pre-conscious” or “unconscious” levels of life together as Church, which are in certain respects prior to and beyond the formalization of doctrine, ritual, and organization. Within these levels are ties and desires of the heart—“loving one another as Christ has loved us,” but also loving the world in ways in keeping with “as God so loved the world.”

29. There is also much sharing to be found in and through the everyday practices of faith and faithfulness, e.g., caring for and honoring persons through life’s passages. In the *Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*, a foundational statement on our church order, Disciples have affirmed the centrality of love for our life in this way: “We rejoice in God, maker of heaven and earth, and in God’s covenant of love which binds us to God and to one another.”

30. Awareness of this dimension of Tradition has relevance to other topics broached in the document. It is significant, for example, in the discussion of apostolicity and apostolic succession. The faith of the apostolic church is maintained over time in obedience to Scripture and in continuities of teachings and orderings of ordained ministries, but it is carried as well through the

faithfulness of the entire community of believers. For Disciples, the quality of communal interrelatedness—the hospitality, caring, equality, and mutuality among the many members of the one body—is a key element of the Church’s life and mission. Indeed, these elements of church life define and direct the Church’s mission as an expression of mutual love.

31. In addition, it is to be noted that greater attention could and should be given to the delight, the comfort, the longing, and the empowerment which comes to believers because of the beauty, the glory of God. At present, TNMC focuses primarily on Christian affirmations of teachings (the truth of God) and obedience to ethical commitment (the will of God). The heart’s desire to live in and by the experience of God’s beauty, God’s glory, is a theme worthy of further reflection, and the inclusion of sensitive reflections along these lines could result in an enriching of the Christian life for both individuals and communities.

## **5. The Eucharist**

32. For Disciples, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in worship on each Lord’s Day stands at the center of our life as a church. It lies at the heart of Disciples faith and piety. We have been heartened to see that some Protestant churches, accustomed to a monthly or quarterly observance, are now moving toward the weekly celebration of Communion. We commend this practice to all churches, as reflecting continuity with the faith communities of apostolic times, and in keeping with the centrality of the Lord’s Supper in the faith and life of the Church.

33. In the practice and teaching of the Disciples, the Lord’s Table not only feeds the Church with grace, the Table challenges the church to “feed” the world, to care for those who are poor, for those who need physical as well as spiritual food. As Jesus told his disciples to provide food for those who had gathered around him, so his spiritual bread is received by us at the Table. As it is clear that Jesus calls us to feed the hungry of the world, so the fellowship of the Table calls us to treat all who respond to Jesus with loving care and concern. So the challenge of Matthew 25: 31-46 comes to life at the Table. We feed the poor, give drink to the thirsty, provide medical care for the sick and injured, visit those in prison—which in context clearly also calls us to seek justice for those in need. The Table is not a place for solitary, private piety, but is instead a spiritual call to live as Jesus wants us to live: lives of active love.

34. When the Disciples emerged as a church on the American frontier, the number of properly ordained ministers was not nearly sufficient. For those early Disciples, access to the abundant grace at the Table was essential for the church to be truly church, and so, believing we were following the example of the New Testament church, Disciples began the practice of recognizing the authority of the churches to appoint from among their members those who were blessed with the gifts and graces for Table service. Usually these were those already chosen as Elders in the congregation, but it was also believed that the church was permitted to appoint any person the congregation deemed worthy to pray and preside at the Table.

35. In this practice Disciples made not only a response to the absence of ordained clergy, but a profession of the significant gift of the priesthood of all believers also. Still today, across the world, it is Disciples practice that ordained ministers serve together with congregational elders at the Table, and in principle that Disciples congregations may allow the congregational elder(s) or a congregational appointee to preside at the Table. For the Disciples long ago and today, access to the gifts of God for the people of God is too precious to be limited to those occasions when ordained clergy are available to serve.

36. Likewise, the Disciples also believe that the Lord's Table is truly the Lord's Table, and we are but his servants at his Table of abundant grace. It is our Lord who told his followers to eat the bread and drink the wine of blessing. Therefore, it is the practice of the Disciples in most places to invite all who are spiritually hungry to receive God's signs and gifts of grace. This is also a profession that the bread and wine are signs of our unity in Christ.

37. The Church has its unity in the Christ. And with this conviction the Disciples hold dear the witness in the Gospel of John to the prayer Jesus prayed in the hours with his disciples as his death neared, that his followers would abide in unity with him and with God the Creator. In light of these convictions, the Disciples today consider denying followers of Christ access to the Table repugnant, and counter to the unity for which our Lord prayed. Likewise, "the fact that not all Christians share the communion" is considered not merely "a matter of continuing concern" (box, p. 48) but a scandal, a wound within the Body of Christ.

## **6. Ministry**

38. Disciples appreciate how much of the gain of bilateral and multilateral ecumenical discussion leading first to BEM and now to TNMC has found its way into this discussion. Remaining differences among the churches are duly noted, and on the whole, well-stated.

39. Vital to the Disciples in the midst of on-going ecumenical discussion of the threefold ordering of ordained ministry is emphasis on the equality of dignity, honor, and worthiness of believers and with it the equality and complementarity of their diverse ministries in the one ministry of the Church itself. This sharing and this equality of interrelatedness among the faithful run counter, in our judgment, to claims and practices of a hierarchical order of the Church, which by definition entails relationships of subordination and superordination. We recognize the legitimacy of the observation, that some churches without bishops are in practice more authoritarian than hierarchical ones. We would say that all forms of church order are subject to misuse, and every church is called to ensure that the arbitrary exercise of or abuse of power has no place in the life of the church. Clearly too, the church must ensure that every office of the church, every area of ministry, requires open accountability to the larger church.

40. Behind many aspects of the discussion on ministry stands the issue of authority. Much could be gained ecumenically by greater mutual awareness of how authority is understood and exercised in the various churches. As the TNMC process continues, we hope it will take account of the current Faith and Order studies on "Tradition and Traditions: Sources of Authority for the Church" and "Moral Discernment in the Churches."

41. The TNMC takes forward the long ecumenical discussion of ministry as exercised in personal, communal, and collegial contexts (see BEM, Ministry, paragraph 26). We feel this discussion would be clearer if concrete examples were given in paragraphs 95-98.

## **7. Mission**

42. Disciples note with appreciation the clear resolve to deal in substance and at considerable length with the mission of the Church "as sign and instrument of God's intention and plan for the world." The many efforts to acknowledge the multi-dimensionality of mission—worship, evangelism (as sharing God's good news), and active work in the reconciliation, healing, and transformation of the world—are welcome.

43. This theme, mission, is rightly identified in the Introduction (paragraph 4) as one requiring particular sensitivities to the actual situations of people, their particular social and cultural settings, and the wide variety of challenging realities of the Church in the twenty-first century. The discussion of these matters at some points, however, leads to certain questions and suggestions:

44. (a) For Disciples, it is important that while “mission” deserves extended treatment in its own right, it is not sufficiently integrally related to the account of the nature of the church in TNMC. Care must be taken that mission is not treated as a matter to be “added on” at the end to Word, Sacrament, and order, nor is it merely an “activity” of the church. It is clear, as Matthew 25:31-45, for example indicates, that to engage in mission, caring for those in need, is to care for and respond to Jesus himself. Disciples urge that TNMC strongly affirm that mission “belongs to the very being of the Church.” Thus mission is *intrinsic* to the Church and its life and, further, since the Church is one, the churches *should engage in mission together, ecumenically*.

45. In exploring this theme TNMC could well draw upon material from “Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today,” a preparatory paper for the recent World Conference on Mission and Evangelism (see Section 6, “Called to witness in unity,” paragraphs 68-75).

46. (b) Explication of how the church’s mission is bound up with the oneness, catholicity, holiness, and apostolicity of the Church’s nature would seem appropriate. More careful attention to the prayer of Jesus in John 17 could be very useful in this regard. In addition, for Disciples, celebrating the Eucharist is an occasion of particular import for awareness of “the oneness” which impels and empowers Mission.

47. (c) Although there is some recognition of the growing, special need for interfaith engagement, this is a reality of our time that deserves further highlighting, and, at various places, improved phraseology or clarification. One such place is the discussion of the Church as “the people of God (pars. 18-19).” While here, of course, it is right and proper to embrace this grand theme of Scripture, the exposition as a whole does not seem altogether free from an air of condescension and a stance of supercessionism toward the Jewish faith.

48. (d) The discussion of evangelism in the context of the world’s religions also seems in need of further refining. The statement that “there is no contradiction between evangelization and respect for the values of other faiths” is, we believe, at heart correct. Its abruptness here, however, is unsettling, inasmuch as serious studies of the history of evangelism reveal too many instances of Christian disrespect for those of other faiths.

49. In view of the affirmation in paragraph 110 of “respect for the values present in other faiths,” it is important that the references to “the Lordship of Christ” and similar doxological confessional phrases elsewhere in this document should not give the impression of Christian triumphalism at odds with caring for others, seeking and finding possibilities for mutual good will and common cause, and, in short, genuine respect. Christian respect for others extends as well to persons without Christian or other religious affiliation, countless numbers of whom are unaware of the genuine goodness of God’s gospel of love in Christ because of Christians themselves have too often failed to make the message known to them other than in confused or distorted, even injurious, ways.

50. (e) The document, in our judgment rightly, affirms the Church’s calling to mission as concern for the dispossessed, poor and needy, and indeed resistance to oppressive powers and



principalities of this world as well as active engagement in behalf of justice and reconciliation (for example, §112).

51. All too frequently in the presentation of these matters there emerges a more or less quite distinct—and misleading or mistaken—asymmetrical relationship, and a distancing between the Church as a people engaged in such services of mission and “the others” who are the objects and beneficiaries of these services. The document should also, of course, seek in every way to avoid any hint of viewing Christian mission as a condescending Christianity offering charity to “inferiors.” Thus, as Disciples we would affirm the “Convictions” stated in the document “Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today”: “In entering into relationships in mission, we commit ourselves to guard against misuse of power and to strive for just relationships” (paragraph 77, g) and “We recognize that it is important not to create dependency. Partnerships must lead to interdependence” (paragraph 77, h).

## 8. Ethical Engagement

52. Together with other churches we recognize, like mission, engagement in the world is central to the Church's identity. Engagement of this sort is not something to be added on after Word, Sacrament, and order, nor is it merely an optional activity of the Church. It is *intrinsic* to the Church and its life; since the church is one, the churches are called to a *common, ecumenical* engagement in wrestling with and offering a witness to, the ethical issues of the day. TNMC might well draw on earlier ecumenical work in these areas such as *The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community* and *Ecclesiology and Ethics* (see the text “Costly Commitment”, §17).

53. Recognizing the number and complexity of ethical issues facing Christians, the churches and the world today, we understand the more general approach taken toward “the ethics of Christians as disciples” in paragraphs 114-118. We understand that certain ethical issues threaten to become new sources of tension, if not division, among churches. And yet we are convinced that TMNC would be strengthened by showing a more concrete awareness of some specific aspects of “the world situation” with regard to poverty, oppression, and injustices of many sorts. Here we mention two issues which have emerged as particular concerns among Disciples; both have serious implications for our understanding of the nature of the Church and its mission.

54. (a) The world's current economic crises, coupled with environmental disasters affecting food production and exacerbating poverty, call for a stronger statement on the key ethical issue of poverty. Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* provides an opportunity for a renewed exploration of these issues related to the mission of the church. TNMC might well explore the challenges posed in this area, and how common action on poverty could lead the churches to a deeper understanding of their own nature and mission in the world.

55. (b) For Disciples, it is important in that TNMC should address quite directly, and as fully and carefully as possible, the variety of issues relating human sexuality and gender. These include understandings of faithful Christian identity as male and female in terms of our human creaturehood and personal-social identity; issues related to ordination; and concerns related to mission and its ethical reach.

56. It may be helpful to approach this complex of issues by reflecting on theological anthropology and developing, within that framework, an account of important common convictions. This could well use as a starting point the “Ten Common Affirmations” proposed from the recent Faith and Order study on “Theological Anthropology” (see *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*, paragraph 127). Differences within and among churches could be

identified and set forth in a “box,” or boxes, as is the practice in TNMC. This reflection could also be enriched by the recent Faith and Order study on “Ethnic Identity, National Identity, and the Unity of the Church.”

57. Quite frankly, unless TNMC addresses ethical issues as an integral element of the mission and nature of the church with specificity and issues a gospel-based call for direct engagement by the churches and the ecumenical church, TNMC would be vulnerable to a charge of irrelevance. The needs of the people in the world, the needs for the churches to be given guidance and direction in facing the challenges of the twenty-first century, are at the core of being a Church in mission.

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September 21, 2009