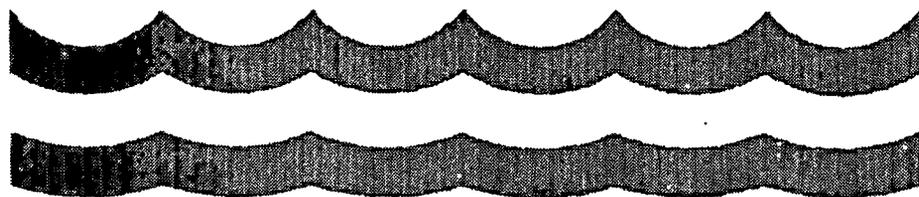
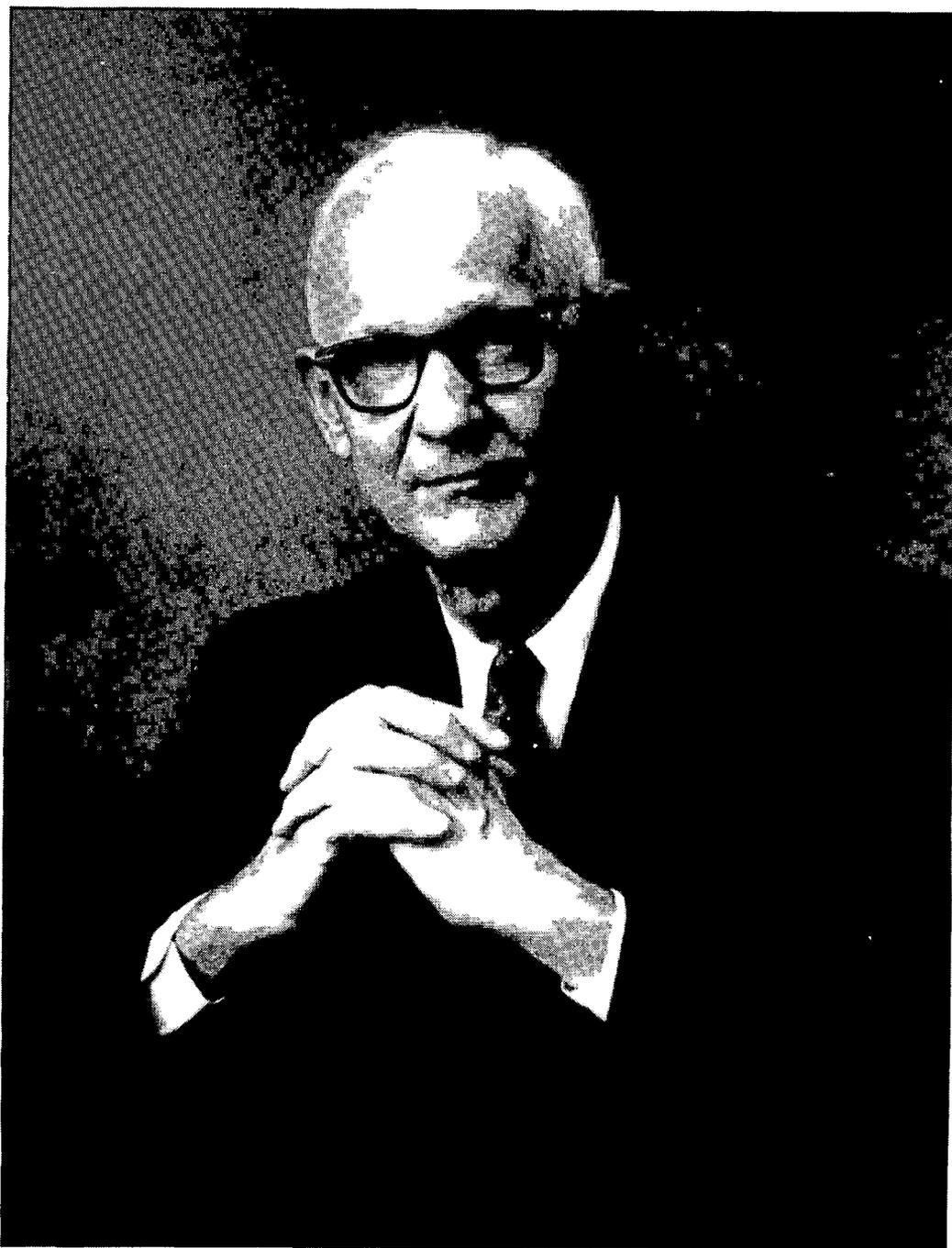


# The North Carolina Council Of Churches



**WE COME TOGETHER BY  
WORKING TOGETHER:  
The First Fifty Years of the  
North Carolina Council of Churches**

By Sister Evelyn Mattern, S.F.C.C.  
May, 1985



**Dr. H. Shelton Smith**

## AN ECUMENICAL PRAYER

O God of Grace, how merciful thou art! For through thy beloved Son, the Word made flesh, thou hast bound us together in a fellowship of love that overleaps the walls of nation, race, and class. Thus with one accord we exclaim: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Thanks be to God for the Church, the Body of Christ. Wherein sectarian strife and human dissidence have dishonored the Body, fill us with shame and sorrow. The new manifestations of a schismatic spirit are grievous to behold. Restrain, we entreat thee, those who would fragmentize still further the household of God. Do thou hasten the day when Christ's prayer for the oneness of his followers will be fulfilled.

For this Council of Churches, we most heartily thank thee. Bless its member bodies, and grant unto them a growing commitment to the ecumenical movement in North Carolina.

As we labor together as Communion, open our eyes to the new fields that are white unto harvest. Sensitize our ears to the anguished cries of families without food and clothing, of abandoned or abused children, of industrial workers suffering from brown lung, of victims of crime and violence, of prisoners without hope, and of all who feel forsaken.

Liberate us from cowardly fear, and deliver us from moral complacency in these confusing and perilous times. Grant us wisdom to discern the right and fortitude to do it. For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Amen.

Offered by Dr. H. Shelton Smith  
at Closing Session of House of Delegates  
October 18, 1977  
Shiloh Baptist Church, Greensboro

The history of the North Carolina Council of Churches is the story of persons, religious leaders struggling to respond in faith to the signs of their times. Sometimes the signs could be clearly read; at other times they had to be discerned through a glass darkly. The records show that the leaders would prefer to be measured in terms of the full-heartedness of their responses rather than the accuracy of their discernment, in terms of their deeds rather than their words.

### THE PEOPLE

It would be hard to overestimate the influence of H. Shelton Smith on the founding and development of the North Carolina Council of Churches. A native of Browns Summit, North Carolina, and graduate of Elon College, Smith served as an army chaplain in France in World War I, where he learned "more about the seamy side of life and more about human nature than [in] any other experience I ever had."<sup>1</sup> In the twenties he worked as Director of Leadership Education with the International Council of Religious Education in Chicago. In that capacity he organized ecumenical, interracial camps in many parts of the country but never in the South. After a brief teaching experience at Columbia University Teachers College in New York City, the beginnings of a brilliant career opened up for Smith at Yale University Divinity School. When Duke University asked him to set up a religious education program in 1931, Smith felt called to return South, however, because of "the ecumenical concern, the racial concern, and the concern for academic excellence in a region that sold down the river in a terrible war their best people and suffered for a century as a result of it."<sup>2</sup>

While writing numerous books and articles and establishing the graduate program at Duke as one of the best in the country, Smith found time to gather other far-seeing religious leaders like Episcopal Bishop Edwin A. Penick and Methodist Bishop Paul B. Kern to discuss the possibility of a state Council of Churches.

Smith found in his home state that interdenominational cooperation "was virtually nil, and therefore I felt we were missing in this part of the country... a great opportunity to pool resources in a world that was rapidly changing." From 1931 to 1935 he talked to individuals and groups about his vision of an "interdenominational agency to deal with problems of social justice, racial



Episcopal Bishop Edwin A. Penick

relations... or problems that confront the churches."<sup>3</sup>

Smith served as first president of the North Carolina Council of Churches and first unpaid executive secretary after its initial meeting for formation in 1935, and then he moved quietly to the sidelines. Over the years when help was needed with raising money or with bringing again the race question to the forefront of the Council's agenda, Smith moved forward, but his main contribution was a continuing, supportive association with executive directors and denominational leaders significant to the Council's history.

Minutes and correspondence from the early years of the Council read like *Who's Who in North Carolina*. Moravian Bishop J. Kenneth Pfohl told Smith, "Before the Council was organized, I didn't know five leaders of other denominations. I've been here as a bishop, traveling all over the state. I didn't know five. Now I know fifty, thanks to the Council." Pfohl, Kern, and Penick all served as presidents. Penick also chaired the early

committees on race relations and chaired as well the N.C. Commission on Interracial Cooperation, which worked closely with the Council in the forties and in fact shared an executive director.

Liston Pope, author of *Millhands and Preachers*, the authoritative study of the churches' role in the Gastonia textile strike and later dean of Yale Divinity School, served as acting secretary at the first 1935 Open Forum on Interchurch Cooperation to consider a state Council of Churches. Prominent black leaders like Harold L. Trigg worked with both the Council and the Interracial Commission in the early years. Burlington United Church of Christ pastor, James H. Lightbourne, Sr., served as treasurer in the forties, and his son James H. Lightbourne Jr., served as president in the seventies. In the fifties and sixties, names like Senator Frank Porter Graham, the Reverend Robert Seymour, the Reverend W. W. Finlator, the Reverend Otis Hairston, Senator McNeill Smith, the Reverend Edwin McNeil Poteat, and Bishop George Whittecar are woven into minutes of meetings, correspondence, and *Church Council Bulletins* as they will someday be woven into North Carolina history books. The fifty years of the history of the North Carolina Council of Churches are in many ways the history of the state during the same period.

### THE TIMES AND TASKS

According to its 1935 prospectus, the North Carolina Council of Churches was founded to promote Christian fellowship, to serve as a medium of interchurch advice, and to associate the North Carolina communions in joint service. Principles for its formation insured the autonomy of the denominations, their selection of their own representatives in proportion to their numerical strength in the state, and the North Carolina Council's independence from other councils of churches. The stage for activism was set when the principle was established that the Council would pursue interests "not only... of religious education, but also other interests in the life of the church, including missions, social service, evangelism, and the like." Specific areas of service mentioned were: the personal "spiritual awakening" required if "the collective ills of society are to be transformed"; outreach to the unchurched; cleaner movies; a reawakening of zeal for the foreign missions; preaching "the pattern of the Kingdom" in the "acquisitive society" of

the Depression years; making the spirit of Christ effective "in this temper-upsetting area" of race; peacemaking when "millions go hungry while our expenditures for militarism rapidly mount." In one way or another, most of these areas of service—as well as others—have been addressed by substantive projects in the Council's history.

The first two projects in 1936 aimed to encourage ministers to observe World Peace Sunday and to promote celebrations of the four hundredth anniversary of the English translation of the Bible. The first two committees established were directed to work on race relations and temperance.

Because of an early interest in it by the N.C. Sunday School Association, the newly formed Council involved itself from the beginning with various forms of religious education. Its first paid executive was Baptist Trela D. Collins, also the executive secretary of the Sunday School Association.

Much effort was directed in the late thirties and early forties to placing Bible teachers who offered elective courses in public schools, particularly the high schools. 816 high schools students received credit in Bible Education in 1936-1937; 15,000 received it in 1941-1942. It was a burgeoning field and required its own Council staff person in the late forties. When in 1947 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the McCollum-Champaigne case against the promotion of religion in public schools, few schools discontinued their programs but the movement began to take a lesser role in the Council.

In 1939 the Council hired Ernest J. Arnold, a Presbyterian minister fresh from Yale, to be its executive secretary. Arnold stayed for ten years and set a vigorous pace for pursuing prison reform, war relief, youth ministry, and race relations as Council tasks. The first issue of the *Church Council Bulletin* in 1940 then lists current activities: fellowship at the annual convocation, prisoner rehabilitation, a public library service department, information exchange, the promotion of Rural Institutes, church music conferences, joint ventures in cooperation with the N.C. Commission on Interracial Cooperation, the weekday religious education program, a series of Christian life assemblies, a visual aids department, a radio ministry, and conferences for student workers.

The second issue of the *Church Council Bulletin* includes a chart showing "Admissions to N.C. Prisons" (8,000 out of 19,000 were for alcohol abuse) for the year, and

subsequent articles treated probation, juvenile training schools, and rehabilitation. Setting the tone for the Council's approach to legislative issues like fair sentencing and alternatives to prison many years later, the argumentation is pragmatic. Arnold writes in 1941 about probation, "It costs only a fraction over 11 cents a day to supervise a probationer while it costs almost \$1.00 a day to keep a prisoner in one of our road camps."

Similarly, 1940-1941 correspondence shows the Council wanting to start on a prisoner rehabilitation program but holding off in order to encourage the state to do it first. A county-by-county survey of the religious preference of 5,500 persons in the prison system in 1939 was presented to denominational leaders who agreed to respond to the needs of the prisoners. A news release for December notes the Council requesting local ministerial associations to distribute Bibles, offer church services, assist in rehabilitation, and protect "prisoners and members of their families against unsympathetic attitudes of the general public."

#### PEACE

World War II brought challenges to religious groups nationwide. A 1940 letter from Arnold to Shelton Smith prefigures the role of the Council during and after the war: "Today there is a division of opinion among the people of North Carolina as to what part we should play in the present world conflict. I believe, however, there is a general agreement among the serious minded Christians to the effect that we cannot isolate ourselves from the human suffering throughout the world. If we do so we deny our faith and hasten our own spiritual declination." Subsequently, the Council engaged in a range of activities from spurring the denominations to ministry at army camps to co-sponsoring the Carolina Institute on International Relations that brought speakers of A.J. Muste's calibre into the state. The Council's Post-War Planning Committee offered practical advice to churches: "Overcome the bitterness and hatred engendered by the atrocities committed by our enemies by publicizing the accounts of deeds of kindness and assistance, often sacrificial. When you hear such accounts, send them to local papers, church magazines, and give them over the radio." Frank Porter Graham addressed the 1945 annual meeting by saying, "Today we

are on the threshold of another revolution presaged by the invention of the atomic bomb, which may make as great changes as did man's adjustment to machinery. We must do something or man's discovery may destroy him off the face of the earth. The mind of man too often runs ahead of his conscience."

Overseas relief commanded much of the Council's effort after the war and well into the fifties. In 1947 North Carolina received an award for sending more food and clothing than any other state to refugees in Europe through Church World Service. "Fill A Ship with Friendship" was the 1948 motto for the endeavor, and in that year CROP efforts also began in the state. For several years, a Church World Service-CROP person worked on the Council staff, and for a few years he also worked with migrant ministry. Appeals for aid to war-torn Europe emphasized the plight of persons then much as, in the seventies, similar appeals would be made on behalf of Vietnamese and other refugees sponsored through the assistance of a Council staff person. In both cases, funding came from the National Council of Churches in response to volunteer efforts by members of local churches.

#### FARMWORKERS

In 1942 Church Women United (then called United Church Women) began as a department of the Council, and it soon took much initiative in fund-raising and other efforts. Miss Frances Query, for many years staff person for Weekday Religious Education, served briefly twice as the Council's interim director. During her tenure the plight of migrant farmworkers in North Carolina began to be looked at, and Church Women United took up migrant ministry with fervor. Much of the fifties and early sixties found executive director Morton Kurtz in the eastern or western part of the state, meeting with local ministerial associations in answer to their requests for day care services, literacy courses, health services, or summer ministers to labor camps. With dollars and green stamps Church Women United purchased ten Harvester stationwagons, some equipped as chapels, during those decades.

In cooperation with the Home Mission Council of the National Council of Churches, the North Carolina Council sponsored two staff persons for migrant farmworkers in 1951, ten in 1956, and 47 in 1962. It organized

in 1951 that spurred into existence in 1955 the Governor's Committee on Migrants. Public policy issues like health insurance, sanitation, transportation for school children, and welfare funds began to be looked at. Despite Governor Sanford's support, the 1962 N.C. General Assembly defeated bills that would have given the state Board of Health binding authority over labor camps. As would be done many times by staff persons over the next twenty years, the executive director reported that the 1961 survey of 108 labor camps in twenty counties showed that only 48 passed the minimum standards set by the state Board of Health.

In 1969 the Council was asked to administer federal Office of Economic Opportunity monies for East coast farmworkers, and the Migrant Project—as it was then called—began. By 1972 the project employed hundreds of persons and had federal and other resources worth well over \$3 million, but none of these could be used for religious ministry. For this and other reasons the project became an independent agency, the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Association, in that year.

The Council continued to be active in farmworker public policy issues, however, and a 1969 *Church Council Bulletin* editorial by executive director Dr. Samuel S. Wiley addressed the question, "Should Farm Workers Organize?" Wiley's personal experiences walking the picket line with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers in California inspired him and the Council to support unionization for farmworkers everywhere. Throughout the seventies,

Wiley and others kept the plight of farmworkers in North Carolina also before Council members and the public mind. In 1980 the Executive Board of the Council passed a resolution supporting the development of a model farmworker housing project as an alternative to migrant labor camps, and a separate non-profit board is currently engaged in developing that model in eastern North Carolina.

Other labor questions came under consideration by the Council in the fifties at the



Dr. Samuel S. Wiley, then Executive Director of the N.C. Council of Churches; Rev. Nathan H. Vanderwerf, Executive Director of the Commission on Regional and Local Ecumenism of the National Council of Churches; Mrs. Martha Miller, Executive Director of the Council of Churches of Dutchess County, N.Y.; Cesar Chavez, United Farmworkers. Photo taken during 1973 UFW strike at Coachella, California.

time of the Henderson strike and the national steel strikes. In 1959, lengthy discussion by the Executive Board and the Social Action Committee led the Council to offer its services in Henderson through the local ministerial association. The Social Action Committee voted to support a statement in favor of collective bargaining, much as the House of delegates did twenty years later during the J.P. Stevens boycott.

The labor and race issues eventually moved the Council to hire a full time social action director. What had become an increasingly frequent call during the several

previous years was expressed by retiring president Dr. Cecil W. Robbins in 1961: "The Council should move more directly and more creatively in the field of social action. We need at once a full time person working in the broad area of human relations, particularly in labor-management relations and in race relations." Finally in 1964 the Reverend John H. Crum was hired as staff person for social action. Soon after, Wiley began a fifteen year term as executive director, and the Council started to deal aggressively with what had

been an underlying motive since its founding.

## RACE

Although "the racial concern" had been on Shelton Smith's mind as one of the founding purposes of the Council in 1935, not until eight years later was there passed a "unanimous resolution to invite the Negro churches to enter the Council as full members."<sup>6</sup> The momentous nature of that decision for those times is perhaps best reflected in a letter from Dr. J.H. Satterwhite, the Black president of Hood Theological Seminary in Salisbury, North Carolina, to Ernest Arnold: "I feel certain that the eyes of the nations will watch the progress that we may make in the future."

The integration of local councils of churches and of police departments were signal efforts during those years. But the state Council's Interracial Committee disbanded in 1946 in light of the N.C. Commission on Interracial Cooperation's employing a full time director.

During World War II the connection between peace and justice was made in speeches and *Church Council Bulletin* editorials, such as the one calling for the celebration of Race Relations Sunday in 1944.

The appalling catastrophe of this Second World War makes it necessary for the churches to face the solemn fact that unless the spirit of Christianity is sown in the hearts of men, a Third World War may be only a matter of time. Things cannot be settled permanently unless they are settled right; things cannot be settled in the spirit of the Master. The ideal of human brotherhood is the only basis upon which peace can be built. "Mankind must be *brotherized* or it will be *brutalized*."

Many annual meetings featured talks on segregation like that given by Dr. James E. Shepard, president of the North Carolina College for Negroes in Durham. Shepard's was a resounding plea not so much for the theoretical rights of persons but for the practical adjustment of their situation.

The greatest evil of segregation is not that it sets the Negro in one part of the town, in one compartment of the bus, or in ill-kept and poorly equipped railway coaches—

though these are evils enough. The greatest evil of the system is segregating as African one who is truly American; it is discrimination in work opportunities and unequal compensation for equal work; it is the discrimination which denies the Negro equal educational opportunities and then imposes upon him unequal compensation after.

Especially from the time of the Supreme Court's historic *Brown* decision in 1954, the Council aimed to make desegregation work in North Carolina and anticipated the future by opposing private schools set up to avoid integration. Knowing that the Supreme Court decision was to come, delegates to the 1954 annual meeting voted a resolution to support the public school system and not to sit on the sidelines. "But," the text concluded, "our hope for an ultimate solution of the issue does not lie in the courts, or even in our schools, but in the human heart. It can come only when men and women are willing to follow the ways of Christ in all their relations." Other statements followed in 1955 and 1956. The next year *The Durham Sun* reported that the North Carolina Council of Churches, "the state's only interracial religious assembly," condemned the bombings of churches and ministers' homes.

Extensive correspondence with the Anti-Defamation League in 1958 shows joint efforts of the organizations to convince the Governor and Attorney General to use the State Bureau of Investigation in response to renewed Ku Klux Klan activity in the state. The Council's Human Relations Committee's report for that year took the tack of affirming the progress of recent years, specifically applauding the three North Carolina cities that had initiated school integration; Southeastern Baptist Seminary in Wake Forest, which announced it would open its doors to Black students; the city of Durham, which had established a bi-racial commission on human relations; and Church Women United, which had been quietly organizing local interracial councils for some time.

In a 1959 talk at a Johnson C. Smith Institute on Human Relations, Council director Kurtz noted the need for action as well as words and specified two integrated luncheons in hotels "we didn't think we could have until we tried" and a "Negro bishop speaking to a major integrated group at Duke." In 1960 Kurtz also began attempts to support Billy Graham, himself under attack for integrating

evangelistic crusades.

Fair employment legislation was soon on the Council's agenda. Statements in 1961 and 1962 affirmed that racial progress had been made but challenged the churches to integrate themselves and their own colleges. "We realize that only a few schools are desegregated in our state, that no residential area has an open occupancy policy, and that few health and recreational facilities are open to all races at the local level. We realize that the token desegregation achieved has hardly touched the inherent inequality of our mass segregated society. We know that token desegregation is still segregation."

In 1964 Council social action director Crum was harassed while observing a Klan rally in the process of carrying out a commitment to help local ministers deal effectively with the Klan. He also began lobbying with senators from North Carolina for passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. As executive director Wiley editorialized in *The Church Council Bulletin*, the Council was trying "to make the incarnation real in human society." An ecumenical first was the 1966 Statewide Churchmen's Conference on Civil Rights co-sponsored by the Council, the Roman Catholic diocese, and the North Carolina Association of Rabbis and Jewish Men. Five hundred persons attended. In his annual report to the Council, then president Bishop George Henry said of Crum's work against racism, "He has spoken in many places, bringing to bear Christian principles where it is often very easy to substitute expediency, a wait-and-see policy, indifference or even selfishness. He certainly has fulfilled the hope of many of us in the establishment of this office." In the next year the Council inaugurated its first Black president, Dr. Samuel Duncan, president also of Livingstone College in Salisbury, N.C.

## LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Almost from its inception the Council found itself dealing with state agencies and public policies. Early on it became clear that federal and state legislation affected much that the churches did and cared about. In 1941 occurred the Council's first involvement with a legislative bill, one having to do with a "training school for delinquent negro girls." Later, principles for legislative action were drawn up by a committee, and a variety of legislative proposals were occasionally monitored. State issues addressed in the forties, fifties, and sixties included criminal



Former N.C. Council of Churches President Mrs. Mildred Fry; Executive Director Rev. S. Collins Kilburn; National Council of Churches staff person and former resident of North Carolina Mrs. Peggy Shriver.

justice and capital punishment, adoption laws, day care, privileged communications between ministers and parishioners, migrant farmworkers, welfare benefits, alcohol education, repeal of miscegenation laws, and school desegregation. Federal legislation included gun control, fair housing, federal protection for civil rights workers, and "a negotiated settlement in Vietnam."

Until the 1970's, however, legislative efforts were a minor part of the Council's program. When the Reverend S. Collins Kilburn replaced Crum as social action director, they became a major part, the largest single program of the Council in fact. Registered as a lobbyist, Kilburn organized a statewide network to monitor and influence legislation and wrote *The Raleigh Report* to keep his church constituency informed on state issues like tax reform, prison conditions, welfare benefits, and the Equal Rights Amendment. He gave nearly full time to the legislative process, describing his work as one-half trying to influence the "political structures," one-half trying "to help church people grasp the moral dimensions of the legislative battles." When Kilburn became executive director of the Council in 1979, the role of lobbyist was continued by the Council's new program associate, Sister Evelyn Mattern. She also brought to the Council her hands-on experiences working with prison ministry, migrant farmworkers, peace, and Central American concerns.

## WOMEN

The role of women in the Council has taken different forms in different eras. Church Women United, which was formed as a department of the Council in 1943, assumed its own separate identity in 1963. In many ways it pioneered Council work, employing the first summer ministers to migrants, integrating its own local councils, and inviting Roman Catholic women to join in 1967. Twice, a woman, Ms. Frances Query, served as acting director for the Council, but not until 1981 did the Council elect its first woman president, Mrs. Mildred Fry, a former president of both Church Women United and United Methodist Women who had for years served the Council in various capacities. Eight years of active lobbying for the Equal Rights Amendment has established for today a lively constituency of women who serve on the Executive Board and relate to many current Council committees, including the Equal Rights Committee.

## AGAIN, PEACE

In recent years, the peace issue has again come to the fore of the Council's priorities. During the Vietnam War both social action directors, Crum and Kilburn, assumed prominent roles in organizing the religious community statewide and in the Southeast. A 1967 statement by the Council's Commission on Christian Social Action asked the question, "What can Christians do to influence American foreign policy in general?" but with particular reference to Vietnam. While faulting the church for not being universal enough, "transcending all national boundaries, all racial barriers, and all political conflict," it noted nevertheless that "by the grace of God, Christians have it within their power to make peace." As prerequisites for that, it called for more learning, more hard thinking, and more openness. It advised listening to the younger overseas churches, founding arguments against communism on fact rather than fear, and supporting the United Nations. Finally, it called for a unilateral ceasefire in Vietnam and a negotiated settlement with all parties.

A 1961 report to the annual meeting from the Committee on National and World Affairs prefigures positions that would be taken twenty years later. Speaking of the Cuban revolution, it said:

The developments during the past year in Cuba are merely symptoms

of conditions of poverty and frustration which exist in many parts of Latin America. A special concern should be the study of the extent to which the peoples of Central and South America, which have for more than a century been independent nations, are undergoing such economic and social difficulties as, in fact, to be slipping backward. The committee recommends to the Council that member churches be urged to study the conditions not merely in Cuba but in all other Latin American countries with the view to learning how we can better assist them to solve the problems of dislocated markets, extreme poverty, underdeveloped natural resources, health hazards, and overpopulation.

In 1982 the Executive Board, critiquing U.S. foreign policy in Central America, stated:

The evidence shows that the underlying cause of the conflicts in El Salvador and Guatemala is the desire of the people to be free of military dictatorship, to have freedom from terror for their families and enough land and food to sustain them . . . . The dominant challenge is internal: perennial conditions of wretched poverty and the denial of basic human rights . . . . The primary issues are justice and the participation of the population in shaping the society.

Also in the 1980's the Council's Peace and Security Committee picked up the nuclear disarmament question where it had been laid aside *in lieu* of focus on the Vietnam War. Earlier, after Sputnik, the executive director's column in the *Church Council Bulletin* noted that "it would be the height of folly for us to become hysterical now and concentrate every energy upon a desperate arms race."

In 1958 the Public Affairs and World Affairs committees of the Council jointly sent to the President, the Secretary of State, and North Carolina Congressmen entreaties for "immediate steps toward the cessation of the testing of nuclear bombs" and for "universal, inspectable and controlled disarmament." In 1964 the Reverend Dr. Robert E. Seymour, chair of the Council's World Affairs Committee, headed up North Carolina's

delegation to the National Council of Churches' Program of Education and Action for Peace. And seventeen years later, executive director Kilburn announced a new three-year effort to focus on peace, especially the disarmament question. Kilburn also coordinated the 1983 effort to get the Nuclear Freeze resolution passed by the N.C. General Assembly. It did pass the House.

The Council's vigorous pursuit of social action over the years has led to some discussion of the relationship of it to the ecumenical endeavor, and it has prompted occasional dissent within the Council's membership as well as sometimes vigorous protest from the secular community. In a 1960 *Church Council Bulletin*, Mrs. Ruth G. Wilson, a Church Women United member who had served as Raleigh's first City Councilwoman, spoke colorfully of the relationship between religion and government in a way appropriate to the North Carolina Council:

Christ was born amidst governmental activity and atmosphere and at a time of a most important governmental function: taxation! Then, believing in the virgin birth and the fatherhood of God, could not God in his divinity have caused the birth of His son at another time and place if it was not proper for him to come into the world at that time and place? Did not God, therefore, intend that Jesus should have dominion within the whole area of life; political as well as personal, social, economic, ethical and religious?

The Council's early anti-Vietnam War position generated some internal disputes that led to executive director Wiley's reminder in an editorial that an earlier study, "When and to Whom the Council Speaks," had concluded that committees have a right to proclaim a position in their own name even though the entire Council has not adopted it. Wiley's irenic spirit flowed, moreover, into several more editorials on how true community needs the oars of both liberals and conservatives so that it does not row in circles. Additionally, in 1969 occurred a pastors' conference on "Personal Religion and Social Action."

The Council's positions on race, peace, migrant farmworkers, the ERA, capital punishment, and other issues have

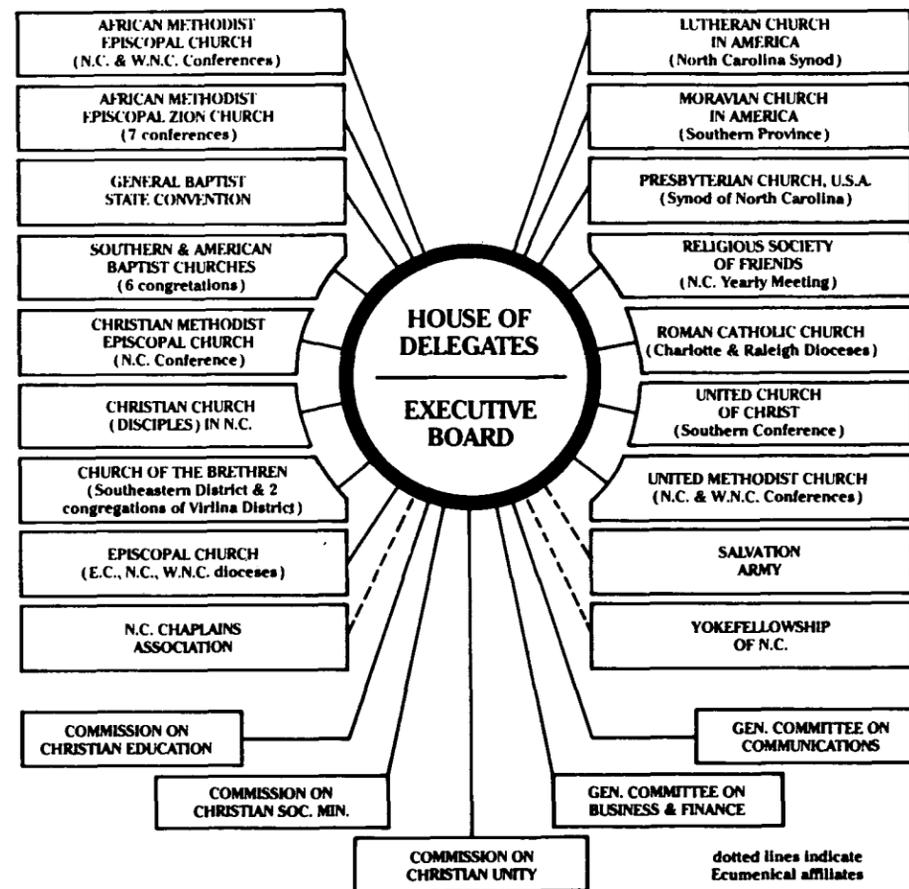
generated both alarm and applause from outside quarters, but the single event to garner the most publicity was the Tobacco Study Committee's 1983 hearings and subsequent report asking the question "Is Tobacco a Moral Issue?" Many farmers, industry representatives, and public officials found fault with the question's even being raised in North Carolina. The Council's response to such criticism is expressed in an earlier president's report to the 1966 annual meeting by Bishop M. George Henry of the Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina:

It might be well to end my report by encouraging those who often get criticism for their part in the Council's program. If there were no conflict between a council's program and the world around it, either of two conditions exist: either the council has been overcome by the world's position (and so makes no impact), or the Kingdom of God has come. If the world were indifferent to us, we would probably be dead or innocuous. If there is opposition, then possibly God's truth has been brought to bear on man's sin.

## THE STRUCTURES

The goals of church unity espoused by the North Carolina Council of Churches are perhaps better expressed by its structures than its words. At any given time in its history, half of its commissions and committees have promoted ecclesiastical concerns as well as social action efforts. Religious education, evangelism, the needs of rural churches, conferences of interchurch cooperation, the formation of local church councils, the needs of ministers and pastoral workers, church architecture and beautification, support for chaplains in public institutions, leadership education, youth councils: all have been the focus of Council efforts at one time or another. Cooperation between the Council and local churches and ministerial associations has made the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity an annual January event in many parts of North Carolina. In 1984 and 1985, the Council sponsored two consultations on the World Council of Churches' landmark Lima document, "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry," and will participate with the denominations in forwarding the

# North Carolina Council Of Churches Chart Of Relationships



16 communions represented  
25 judicatories & 8 individual congregations  
approximately 6050 congregations with 1,350,000 communicants

## Participants In Our Common Ministry & Mission

- African Methodist Episcopal Church
- African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
- General Baptist State Convention
- Southern and American Baptist Churches (six congregations)
- Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
- Church of the Brethren
- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in North Carolina
- Episcopal Church
- Lutheran Church in America
- Moravian Church in America
- Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.
- Religious Society of Friends
- Roman Catholic Church
- United Church of Christ
- United Methodist Church

results to the World Council.

Various modes of communication have also been tried. In the forties the Council operated a press service, "News of the Churches," that sent out weekly press releases on five or six denominational or interdenominational events. For most of its history it has sponsored a radio program, and in the mid-sixties produced a weekly television program. At that time it boasted the "only statewide religious network program in the U.S.A." Since 1940 it has published a newsletter, *The Church Council Bulletin*, that goes to all local member churches. A legislative newsletter, *The Raleigh Report*, is subscribed to by church members as well as other concerned citizens.

In 1963 Council president and Lutheran Synod President George R. Whittecar noted the "two growing edges of the ecumenical movement" as happening at the top levels of church organization (the World Council of Churches, for example) and at the local level "where people who hold membership in various churches live side by side as neighbors." He placed the state Council of Churches "between those two growing edges. We draw insights gained through theological discussion at the top levels, and we are drawn together by the practical imperatives of working together as Christians." Regularly there have been calls to try to root the Council more deeply in the life of the state's denominations. The formation of local councils was an effort of the forties. Friends of the Council meetings occurred throughout the state in the fifties in order "to bring ecumenicity to the grass roots." The sixties put the Council on a relatively firm financial footing when the denominations began to provide the main part of its budget. The mid-seventies saw a series of area ecumenical planning conferences for judicatory heads.

Periodic looks at the structure—as in 1949, 1953, 1967, 1976—examined representation and participation as well as funding, communications, and division of labor. Celebration occurred each time another denomination added its name to the Council roll. In 1977, the same year that Roman Catholics joined the North Carolina Council of Churches, it won the National Council of Churches' Ecumenical Service Recognition award and comprised 27 judicatories from 17 communions as well as ten local congregations.

From the beginning the larger ecumenical

organizations inspired and supported the North Carolina Council, although the latter remains autonomous. Founder Shelton Smith's earlier experiences had brought him into contact with the Federal Council of Churches, forerunner of the National Council. Speakers from that body and from the World Council of Churches have frequently graced meetings of the North Carolina Council, and active members of the latter have often been delegates, through their denominations, to National and World Council meetings and committees. The North Carolina Council celebrated the beginnings of the World Council in 1948 and the formation of the new National Council in 1951. When the National Council has been angrily attacked for its programs—as in the sixties and in the eighties—the state Council has come to its defense in North Carolina. In 1958 a *Church Council Bulletin* editorial by executive director Kurtz thanked both the National Council and Billy Graham for "detailing the sins which are poisoning our national life." Concerned about materialism and racism, Kurtz continues in a 1960 editorial: "hyper-fundamentalism is very much alive. And don't think that if the National Council of Churches were to go out of business that its critics would be satisfied; they are the same breed that attacks Billy Graham... because he has made his meetings ecumenical and interracial."

In a 1985 interview, executive director Kilburn reflected on the past and potential for future fruitful collaboration among the ecumenical bodies:

We do not make the policies or programs of the National Council and cannot answer for all of its activities. We do have important ties of kinship and belong to the same fabric of ecumenism, sharing the same general purposes. Sometimes we can collaborate in ways that are mutually beneficial. Our refugee resettlement program of a few years ago was a joint effort. We have had a close relationship with Church World Service—CROP, the relief arm of the National Council. In May of 1984 we linked with the National Council in hosting a visit of church leaders from the Soviet Union. Then we participated in the National Council's travel seminar which took 260 church people from the

United States to visit Christians in the U.S.S.R. That was a profound ecumenical experience for me.

I could say similar things about the World Council of Churches. Participating in its programs has enriched my appreciation of Christianity as a world wide movement and has made me a better ecumenist here in North Carolina. We are separate organizations, but we belong to one great movement.

From its earliest days, Southern Baptist congregations and people—members of the state's largest denomination—participated in all phases of the Council's formation, but the Baptist State Convention never joined. In 1942 a resounding call to join, written by a retired professor of Bible at Wake Forest College, was published in the Baptist *Biblical Recorder*. W.R. Collum noted that at Council meetings "it is apparent that Baptists are about as much in evidence as any other group." His argument ran: We need them, they need us, the world needs the common call for cooperation. But sadly, although the executive board of the Baptist State Convention approved a resolution favoring affiliation with the Council, the measure was defeated by the full convention. Individual Baptist congregations have been and are active members, however. The first executive director was a Baptist, as was the 1977-1979 president, the Reverend R. Eugene Owens.

Roman Catholics, always a small minority in the state, became more ecumenically oriented after their own Vatican Council II in the early sixties. Collaboration between the Catholic diocese and the Council occurred during a series of civil rights conferences then. In a 1964 *Church Council Bulletin* appeared an announcement that the first Roman Catholic church in the U.S.A. had joined a local Council of Churches in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In 1967 the first Roman Catholic observer was invited to an annual meeting of the North Carolina Council of Churches. A 1970 sketch of the Council's program noted that membership was "open to Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox bodies." And seven years later, as a result of the patient efforts of executive director Wiley and others, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Raleigh was received into the Council, soon to be followed by the Diocese of Charlotte. The roster of mainline denominational

membership in the Council was now complete.

### THE MOTIVATION

Not much "theory of ecumenism" comes down to us in the records of the North Carolina Council of Churches. Though there have been many fine speeches given at meetings over the years, it is perhaps the asides offered in reports, editorials, and correspondence that say the most about the motivations of Council participants who had, for the most part, to assume tasks in addition to heavy commitments within their own denominational structures. Occasionally, in fact, a president or executive director will see fit to chide members for more interest in denominational structures than in the "whole Church." For example, in 1977 Wiley editorialized on his recent attendance at fourteen judicatory meetings and concluded that "local congregational or denominational demands should not preempt giving time and energy—as well as earnest prayer—to the interests of the larger Church which finds expression when we meet across denominational lines to serve Jesus Christ and humankind in His Name. The whole Church and its interests are really more important than the limited concerns of its parts."

This view of the ecumenical endeavor as the whole Church assembled has prevailed over the years. As Shelton Smith says it, "If there is one Body of Christ, these sectarian divisions are wrong." Or as president Reverend Kelsey Regan said it in 1952:

The genius of the conciliar movement is the will to intelligent cooperation in areas of mutual concern where we can accomplish more together than we can alone. The only adequate motivation for that will to cooperation is an overarching and inclusive loyalty and devotion to Christ and His Kingdom which will carry us beyond our provincial interests.

Or as executive director Kurtz said in 1957: "No local church is complete in itself nor dares to limit itself in vision to its own self interest. We are all one in Christ." Or president Whittecar in 1963:

We must always be aware of the one thing that holds us together—our common faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Our program is

not cut out for us by the urgency of particular social reforms that stir us to action, nor the pressures of those who say "Why don't you Christians get together?" Rather it is the leading of the Holy Spirit toward the understanding and conviction that those who belong to Jesus Christ belong together.

The exciting, early hand-to-mouth days of the North Carolina Council of Churches are over, as is the heyday of the ecumenical movement in this country. What remains to dot the map nationwide and to cover it in some places of the world are councils of churches where in the course of their day-to-day activities and local or global problems, church leaders and church members come together across all sorts of lines and say "How shall we say this?" or "How shall we do this?" It is not presumptuous to say that God dwells among them. It is safe to say the North Carolina Council of Churches is made up of them. As Shelton Smith sums it up:

If this had not been of God, in some sense, we couldn't have succeeded, because we had everything against us except key individuals in their denominations . . . . You have in all denominations certain prophets, creative minds, reaching out, wanting to cross hands, wanting to share beyond their boundaries. That's what's created this worldwide movement. It'll never die.<sup>7</sup>

### ENDNOTES

- 1) Quoted in *Advance*, September 1944, the National Journal of the Congregational Christian Churches.
- 2) 1982 interview with Evelyn Mattern.
- 3) Quoted in an unpublished history of the North Carolina Council of Churches by David Stricklin, 1982.
- 4) Quoted in Stricklin, 1982.
- 5) *The Church Council Bulletin*, November 1945.
- 6) Reported in *The Charlotte Observer*, September 22, 1943.
- 7) Quoted in Stricklin, 1982.

**APPENDIX**  
**North Carolina Council of Churches**  
**Executive Secretaries/Directors and Presidents**

**Executive Secretaries/Directors**

1936 H. Shelton Smith (interim)  
1936-39 Trela D. Collins  
1939-48 Ernest J. Arnold  
1948 Frances C. Query (acting Executive Secretary) with interim committee of S.C. Harrell, Everett B. Witherspoon, and E.J. Arnold  
1948-49 Carl Rollen Key  
1949-51 Frances C. Query (elected to fill unexpired term; elected Director May 9, 1950)  
1951-64 Morton R. Kurtz  
1964-79 Samuel S. Wiley  
1979- S. Collins Kilburn

**Presidents**

1935-36 H. Shelton Smith  
1936-37 Walter L. Lingle  
1937-38 W. Walter Peele  
1938-39 Paul B. Kern  
1939-40 J. Kenneth Pfohl  
1940-41 W.A. Stanbury  
1941-43 Edwin A. Penick  
1943-45 John R. Cunningham  
1945-47 E.L. Hillman  
1947-49 Stanley C. Harrell  
1949-52 Clyde A. Milner  
1952-54 Edwin Kelsey Regan  
1954-55 Cecil A. Jarman  
1955-56 Mark Depp  
1956-58 Richard H. Baker  
1958-59 W. Arthur Kale  
1959-61 Cecil W. Robbins  
1961-63 Harold J. Dudley  
1963-65 George R. Whittecar  
1965-67 M. George Henry  
1967-68 Samuel E. Duncan  
1968-70 Thomas A. Collins  
1970-72 James H. Lightbourne, Jr.  
1972-73 Charles E. Dietze  
1973-75 Cecil Bishop  
1975-77 Vernol Robert Jansen, Jr.  
1977-79 R. Eugene Owens  
1979-81 Richard F. Amos  
1981-83 Mildred Fry  
1983- James W. Ferree