

serving **SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ECUMENICAL COUNCIL**

# Together

celebrating Christian unity . . . respecting diversity

Volume 10 Number 1

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## Ecumenical Hope

### Executive Director's Report

This has been a season of learning for your executive director. My travel muse was working overtime last Spring and in the process I was given some insights into humanity's religious response to the world. In four months Faith and I were in nine countries on three continents. All this is a bit difficult to summarize in eight short paragraphs, but here are some highlights.

As you probably know I feel Christian ethics must be reflected in the political expression of personal or corporate values. Everywhere we went we found grassroots joy and hope in Barack Obama's election, not only for the USA but for Brazil and Tanzania and France as well. We have been overseas many times the last nine years; suddenly there is light in people's eyes when they discover we are Americans. It feels like the USA has a renewed opportunity for leadership in a world desperate for attainable visions of a sustainable future. That is a religious word as well as a political statement.

Some places are more committed to a sustainable future than others. We spent Easter Week in Palestine/Israel on a trip to support Arab Christians living on the West Bank and in Israel. For ten days we went from one interview to another with these extraordinary keepers of humanity's best values. Palestinian Quaker Jean Zara challenged us to be "midwives of each other's hopes....We need to be in dialogue with life; we cannot dialogue with dogma." There is no shortage of dogma in the Holy Land but not much dialogue these days compared to what we heard on our visit there some 20 years ago.

On this trip we quickly realized that the real casualties on



*Rev. Albert Cohen, Executive Director*

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**More inside!**

all sides of the conflict are the souls of the participants of all ages lost in hatred, suspicion and fear of “the other”.

We spent two days in Jordan immediately following and were struck by the sudden change just by crossing the Allenby Bridge over the Jordan River to a free society relieved of travel restrictions and check points and the signs of military control. Suddenly we felt we had dropped into an island of sanity right in the middle of the hate and murder we left behind. But all is lost if we do not take up the charge to be “midwives of each other’s hopes”. That is the bottom line we are taking from this special experience.

Our daughter Heidi was with us in Israel; then three weeks later we joined her in Nairobi, Kenya, where she, a Quaker, has been a Catholic Lay Missionary focused on a ministry with girls orphaned by HIV/AIDS. We worshipped with the local Silent Meeting and met some of her charges, struggling for an education which they know is the key to their future. At 4 o’clock in the afternoon the streets of Nairobi are crowded with children in school uniforms making their way home from school, perhaps a legacy of British occupation, vacated not so many years ago.

The future of the rest of God’s creation took our attention on a five day safari nearby on the Serengeti Plain in Tanzania where we spent most of a week in the midst of (literally) millions of wild animals who make their home there. Throughout Africa, as well as globally, the pressure of human population on available land, on nearby forests, and on the animals themselves for food has put all wild places on the endangered list. Hopefully humanity is slowly getting the picture that this Garden of Eden in which we have been placed is a complicated organism which requires the interaction of millions of small (and large) components. Protecting the open spaces which



are left should be a high priority for public policy everywhere.

The most direct examination of the religious scene came to us in a week-long seminar at the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France. The seminar was entitled “The Liturgy as Ecumenical Chance and Challenge.” There 43 pastors and lay leaders from 20 countries and 12 faith traditions gathered for lectures and discussion exploring the ecumenical fellowship we enjoy manifested in the liturgies we celebrate. Ten lecturers explored six basic worship forms: Anglican, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Pentecostal and Reformed. The lectures are posted at [www.ecumenical-institute.org](http://www.ecumenical-institute.org)

I am grateful for the opportunity to take a look at what is happening in the world and let that overview affect my priorities here in Southern California. We have plenty to be concerned about between Los Angeles and Sacramento. On the other hand one reason we are in such a mess might be a whole series of short sighted decisions precisely because we lost, or never had, the overview. I would be glad to pursue any of the above with you if you would like to discuss my take on what I saw and heard. Let’s be in touch.

Photo above: Cohen with Rev. Merethe Roos and Rev. Jerund Middtun of the Lutheran Church of Norway  
Photo below: Faith Sand and Cohen with Rev. Samuel Yonas Deresa, pastor of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church



## 2009 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

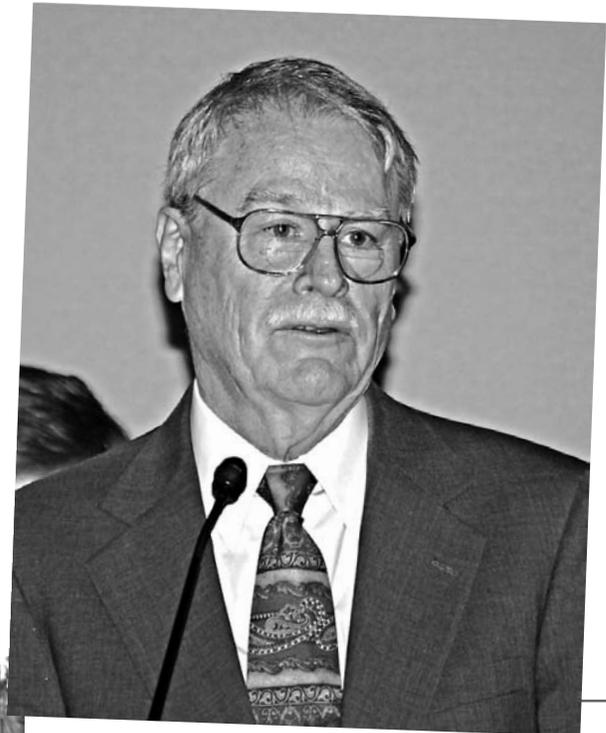
2009 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity  
Celebrates the Light of Christ

The annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity worship service was held in January at First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Altadena. Father John S. Bakas delivered a message entitled "Reflect the Light" in which he called us all to remember the Christ light, its power over darkness, and our call to be light bearers in the world. Father Bakas gave each of those who attended a small mirror to remind us that "our common service and our offering of good works to a suffering humanity which seeks for justice and redemption is what truly unifies us and takes us from ancient collisions to today's coalitions for the common good for a united witness."

The Gene Boutilier Award for Distinguished Ecumenical Service was presented to the Rev. Dr. Rod Parrott whose ecumenical service has spanned forty years. During his thirty years at the Disciples Seminary Foundation in Claremont, Rod was involved with SCEC's Faith and Order Commission, including many years in leadership of that group. The award honored Dr. Parrott, who has recently retired, for his "ecumenical vision and the scholarship that he brought to the religious community of Southern California."



**Fr. Alexei Smith, Roman Catholic Archdiocese; Fr. Dajad Yardemian, Armenian Church of North America; Fr. John Bakas, Greek Orthodox Church**

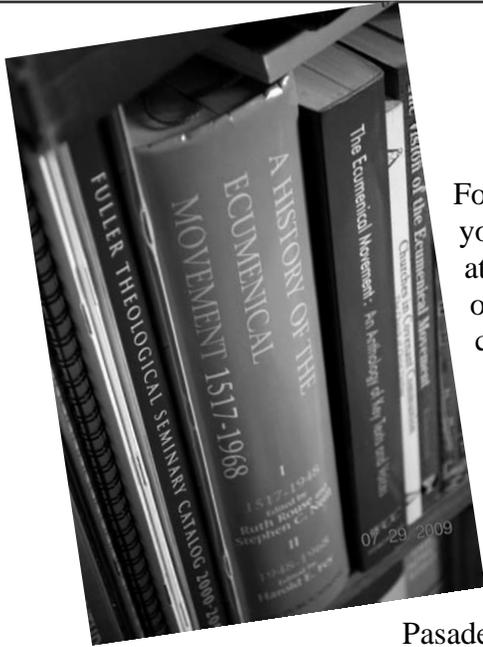


**Rev. Dr. Rod Parrott given the Boutilier Award for Distinguished Ecumenical Service**

photos by Wayne Halleen



**left to right, Mr. Terry Read, Community of Christ; Rev. Patricia O'Reilly, ECPAC, Ecumenical Council of Pasadena Area Churches; Pastor Henry Johnson, IMAGP, Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Greater Pasadena**



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## Immigration Concern

The National Workshop on Christian Unity is an annual event that brings the various traditions of the Church together who seek to fulfill the high Calling of Jesus for unity. Following Vatican II, Roman Catholic Bishops in the United States issued a call to various church leaders for such an annual event and it continues.

As Bishop Dean Nelson's (Southwest California Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) representative, I had the opportunity to attend for my first time. This year's setting was in Phoenix, Arizona, with the theme: "Pilgrimage to the Desert." Attending also as Cardinal Mahoney's Officer of Interfaith and Ecumenical Affairs, was Father Alexei Smith, who serves on the Board of our Southern California Ecumenical Council.

The opening worship service was hosted by the Roman Catholics. It was a wonderful worship that included multicultural, traditional, and contemporary music. One of the highlights was to see the various judicatory leaders sitting together in the chancel area, reminding us of Jesus' high priestly prayer to our Father that we may be one.

There were various workshops available for participants to attend ranging from the various dialogues between the traditions of the church, lectures, and issues that face the church today. One of the workshops I attended addressed immigration, which our SCEC Board had set a goal of addressing. The workshop was led by a Roman Catholic layman and the United Methodist Bishop of Arizona, who herself is of Mexican heritage.

One of the ministries that the Bishop lifted up was "The Children of the Desert." In this ministry she and others leave water bottles filled in the desert for the children of immigrants who wander off or who seek entry. My heart was touched and moved as I recalled the words of our Savior, "Suffer the little children to come to me ." (St. Matthew 19:14)

I came back enthused, empowered, and energized with all the challenges and possibilities that are before us. If you would like more information on this annual event, please feel free to contact Al Cohen or myself at [resgreeter@yahoo.com](mailto:resgreeter@yahoo.com)

God's blessings to each of you.

Pr. Kenny Bowen      President of the SCEC Board

## Report from the Faith and Order Commission

### Rev. Dr. Ray Kibler III



Greetings from the Faith and Order Commission! Once a month, seven to a dozen of us meet for over two hours of conversation and lunch toward fulfilling our stated objectives.

These are “to promote prayer for unity” and “to seek one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ.” The first of our specific tasks is to receive, study, and respond to Faith and Order documents, and make these available to local communities.” Therefore, from our recent study of the WCC document, “Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today,” we now are formulating a statement to the SCEC on what this theme means for us in Southern California.

As we are “to engage contemporary and fresh expressions of the church,” at our table not only are representatives of the member communions of the SCEC but increasingly also participants in free and/or independent Christ movements in Southern California. “To encourage seminaries and schools of religion to engage in Faith and Order studies,” we have mentored student members, currently from Fuller Theological Seminary. As asked “to provide theological perspectives on concerns and issues raised by the SCEC,” we produced last year’s “Word to the Churches on Global Warming.” When requested by the SCEC Board, we might address concerns of immigration, the State economy, and additional such issues. We who meet are eager for our conversation each month. Surely you will agree that these are important efforts to undertake. We ask you to continue to pray that, in our Commission’s work, Christ’s mission and ministry are done.

#### The SCEC community

Rev Albert G. Cohen  
Executive Director

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# Why Give to SCEC

What does SCEC contribute to the church and to society?

- We are among the many voices in the churches and society standing for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. We work for reconciliation and the improved relationships in our fractious society
- We are one among the many voices in the churches with a major focus on healing theological divisions which have been a scandal in the religious community for centuries.
- We are a treasure chest of long-standing friendships with a history, largely in the Los Angeles region, of positive contributions to each other across faith boundaries.
- We are a source of information and a brokerage for connections within the religious community and in the society in general.
- We provide links throughout the ecumenical network of world-wide councils of churches at state and national levels in order to share study and action models for the benefit of denominations and congregations.
- Taken together, in an age of hostility and distrust, the conciliar movement is the major expression of the visible Body of Christ on this planet today.
- A cost/benefit analysis reveals that SCEC is a bargain – for the above reasons your gift is well invested, even in these times of economic hardship. Now is just the time when every Christian has a stake in maintaining the broadest possible presence of the church in the world.
- To make a gift go to our web site [www.scec1.org](http://www.scec1.org)

## **Thank you all. You help and encourage our work**

Agency Giving in 2008

First Christian Church Riverside, Seaside UCC Church Torrance, Church Women United

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### DENOMINATIONAL GIVING IN 2008

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