

July 6, 1971

On Saturday, June 12, 1971, I attended the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ held at Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland. Also attending this session, as delegates from our Church, were Dr. Ralph E. Weisser, Arthur Block and Fred Long. The experience of attending such a meeting was both beneficial and frustrating. Beneficial from the standpoint that it afforded to me the opportunity to observe first hand the workings of the Hierarchy of the United Church of Christ and frustrating because it was apparent to me that a vocal minority of delegates are successful in influencing and controlling the direction that the Church is taking.

The conclusion that a minority group is making the decisions which are determinative of the course of action being taken by the Church with respect to any given problem is predicated primarily upon my observations at both plenary sessions and focus group meetings. It is apparent and obvious that there are within the overall Church structure a group of people who have substantial amounts of time to devote to meetings and gatherings of this nature. In most of these situations, it appears to me that these people speak more from the standpoint of personal feeling and belief than from an informed standpoint of the desires and feelings of their local Church groups.

A specific illustration of the exercise of this control was evidenced by the passage of an amendment to the by-laws of the Central Atlantic Conference. In accordance with this amendment, nominations from the floor by members of the Board of Directors of the Central Atlantic Conference will no longer be permitted at subsequent annual conference meetings. The measure adopted would provide that each Association will designate a nominee for a Board position. This amendment was apparently the product of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Central Atlantic Conference at which time nominations were made from the floor, with the nominees apparently being successful in their election to office. It seems to me that this device is not only a deprivation of a basic constitutional and procedural right, but also results in a situation where the majority of any given Association constituency may be deprived of a degree of representation to which they would otherwise be entitled.

One of the most interesting comments which came to my attention occurred during attendance at a focus session, wherein one of the preachers indicated that well before the commencement of the annual meeting, he arranges with his congregation a series of meetings during which the various topics to be brought before the annual meeting are thoroughly discussed. He indicated that this is the only way that he is aware of the feelings of his congregation and accordingly can vote in accordance with those feelings. I would strongly recommend that this council consider the adoption of such a procedure. Such a procedure would obviously dictate the selection of delegates (and alternate delegates) well before the annual meeting is to convene. I would also recommend that substantial consideration be given to a more formalized selection or election of delegates from our Church, with the possibility that these delegates would serve for several years in succession. I feel that it is only through such a device that a continuity of action may be maintained and that our delegates will be sufficiently well informed to vote.

It is to be noted that the foregoing comments are solely the opinion of a writer and are not necessarily intended to include the feelings of any fellow delegates.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Richard W. Single, Sr.", written over a horizontal line.

Richard W. Single, Sr.