In this world of divisions and disagreements, the joy of being a part of a United and Uniting together Church, and that’s what we are, is wonderful. Travelling through the length and the breadth of this Church, from Diocese to Diocese and from congregation to congregation, helps one meet the reality of diversity of the church within. And that is its richness. When one ponders as to what keeps this Church, with six different traditions immersed in it and the six churches merged into one, going, the first thing that comes to mind is that the very being of this Church is the response to the call of Jesus Christ himself who said, “that they all may be one; as thou, father, are in me and I in thee” John 17: 21. And the Faith and Order of this Church helps us further.

To begin with, there is one simple question we need to ask: what is Faith and Order and what does it mean to us? And a layman’s answer is that Faith and Order of the Church of North India is the historical statement on the unity of the Church, as contained in Part –I of the Constitution of the Church of North India, on the basis of which six different churches in India, forged their unity and came together as one Church. This is the basis on which the six churches found common ground to be one. This is the point of unity and its aim is also to foster unity among God’s people.

After the First World War (1914-18), “Faith and Order” along with “Life and Work” started as two movements in different Protestant churches worldwide. Of these two, Faith and Order was particularly inspired by the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. These two movements had different foci. The Faith and Order Movement focused on the beliefs, systems and organizational structures of the churches.

In the year, 1910, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA appointed a commission to organize a world conference of various churches on Faith and Order. In 1929 Churches in India also started their own Faith and Order movement by initiating formal conversations between the representatives of different churches. They started to gather in consultations and prepare drafts after drafts on Faith and Order which were published as Plan of Church Union. It took forty years of journey for these negotiating churches to realize their full unity.

Faith and Order movement in the world had a positive impact on the church union movement in India. The urgency for ensuring that the Indians took up the leadership of the Indian church was propelled with the gathering momentum of the demand of Indian independence. India became independent on 15th August 1947. The Negotiating Committee of the seven negotiating churches for constituting an organic unity was working in a post-colonial context. Interestingly, the Baptists who had withdrawn ten years ago re-entered the negotiation again in 1951. The first draft of the Plan of Church Union containing Faith and Order was released in 1951. Not all negotiating churches were satisfied with the proposed form of ecclesial government. Accordingly the Negotiation Committee redrafted the document and released it in 1957 as the second edition. It proposed a unique amalgamation of
the three forms of ecclesial governments, namely, the Congregationalist, the Synodical and the Episcopal.

The Negotiating Committee again had a meeting in 1958 to tackle the issue of unification of Ministry. It also authorized the publication of the third edition of the Plan of Church Union containing Faith and Order. In as much as the churches in other parts of the world engaged with ecumenical initiatives and programmes in their own regions, the negotiating churches in India had reached an agreement for organic union. In 1965 they accepted an agreement on Faith and Order which was published in its fourth edition as The Plan of Church Union in India and Pakistan 1965. The famous Panchmarhi Urgency Resolution issued by the Negotiating Committee to all negotiating churches in March 1965 stated that,

“The Negotiating Committee in authorizing the issue of the fourth edition of the Plan of Union believes that the Churches should now take their decisions to unite or not on this basis with the least possible delay. While realizing that the time required for constitutional procedure varies in different churches, the Committee requests the Churches to deal with this as a matter of urgency and to take all measures to awaken this sense of urgency among their people as a whole. Finally, the Committee would request that the decisions of the Churches regarding the Plan be taken and communicated to the Secretary by March 1969.”

The then UCNI was the first to approve it in 1965. The CIPBC did so in 1966, the Disciples in 1969 and so also the Brethren. The fundamental elements of Faith and Order among the churches who had agreed for organic union had now become the foundation of their unification. Finally the Church of North India (CNI) was inaugurated on 29th November 1970 at Nagpur on the grounds of All Saints Cathedral.

We sincerely need to be thankful to our foremothers and forefathers who responded to the Call and this United and Uniting together Church -CNI came into being and is taking forward the mission of the Lord. At the same time there is a need to respond and look for further unity.

With prayers and best wishes,

Yours in His Service,

Alwan Masih
General Secretary
Church of North India Synod