

Obama hears concerns of NCC leaders

by [John Dart](#) in the [November 30, 2010](#) issue

The day before elections some 20 Christian leaders met and prayed with President Obama at the White House and discussed a host of concerns, including Middle East conflicts, domestic poverty and incivility in political life.

The gathering probably didn't count as a Democratic Party faith outreach event. No photos were taken during the low-key 40-minute meeting, which occurred as the last flood of political appeals was hitting the next day's voters.

Obama's travel plans to East Asia prevented him from speaking at the annual meeting of the National Council of Churches November 9-11 in New Orleans, so the meeting of Christian leaders was arranged for All Saints Day.

Leaders from the NCC and member communions thanked the president for the passage of health-care reform. Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the NCC, said that the church leaders were not presenting him with a list of their needs as much as asking what they could do for him.

Although Katharine Jefferts Schori, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, asked that the Obama administration "end the travel ban and restrictions on religious work in Cuba," she put that request into the context of gratitude for the president's work "on behalf of so many people on the margins," according to Episcopal News Service.

Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, said some participants commended Obama's efforts to broker peace between Israelis and Palestinians while emphasizing the need to preserve Jerusalem as a shared city for all and to protect the right of Christians in the region, reported ELCA News Service. "I spoke about the need to create jobs that will lift people out of poverty," including jobs that are environmentally friendly, Hanson added.

John McCullough, president and CEO of Church World Service, put the appeal into an international context: "As families in the U.S. find their household budgets more and more strained, families in the developing world are hurting too."

NCC leaders, who represent Orthodox, historic African-American and mainline Protestant denominations, raised other concerns, including the onslaught of misleading and attack-mode campaigning for public office.

In that light, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, offered Bible verses that speak against "disorder and wickedness." At the close of the meeting, Obama asked for prayer, which was led by Bishop Thomas Hoyt of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

The NCC's Kinnamon, summing up the day for Religion News Service, said: "On a day when you would imagine he could be quite distracted [by the midterm elections], he was very focused on the things that were being said and responded with questions and with comments of common concern."

The meeting, brokered by NCC president Peg Chamberlin, a former adviser to the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, marked the first time a delegation from the ecumenical organization had met with President Obama, and the first time since Bill Clinton was president that such a delegation had been invited to the White House.