

ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS COMMITTEE

To the Venerable, the 136th General Assembly:

It is once again a pleasure to report on the work of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) for 2009-2010 and to bring its recommendations. The committee met face to face on two occasions as well as doing some of its work by telephone conferencing and electronic communication.

INTER-FAITH INITIATIVES

Following on last year's report, the committee has taken some time to see how we might both document inter-faith initiatives in which Presbyterians across the country are involved and provide resources to assist in encouraging Presbyterians to be involved in such initiatives.

Several resources are available which the committee recommends.

The Parliament of World Religions has provided one of the broadest forums for inter-religious dialogue in recent years. The most recent Parliament was held in Melbourne, Australia in December 2009. Information and resources can be found on their website at www.parliamentofreligions.org.

Inter-religious dialogue and co-operation has been a significant part of the work and witness of the World Council of Churches for decades. On their website, www.oikoumene.org/gr/programmes/interreligiousdialogue.html, four projects are listed which can be helpful for local initiatives: inter-religious trust and respect, Christian self-understanding, churches in situations of conflict, and current dialogue.

The Canadian Council of Churches has taken a lead role in organizing the World Religions Summit to be held in parallel with the G8 and G20 meetings in Canada in June 2010 and have encouraged local interfaith initiatives, particularly interfaith meetings with local Members of Parliament. The Canadian Council of Churches has also recently established a Christian Interfaith Liaison Committee and on its website provides an Interfaith Resource Kit, www.ccc-cce.ca/english/faith/inter.htm.

The Presbyterian Church (USA), has developed an Interfaith Relations Toolkit specifically designed for local initiatives in interfaith dialogue and action. It can be found at www.pcusa.org/interfaith/toolkit/guides.htm.

A video series by John Esposito, *Great World Religions: Islam* is particularly helpful in relation to understanding Muslim neighbours. Information on the series can be found at www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jle2/images/flyer3sm.jpg.

The work of Karen Armstrong provides excellent background material, particularly for the relation of the Abrahamic faith traditions: *A History of God: the 4000-year quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*, *The Battle for God, Islam: A Short History*, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* and *Muhammad: A Prophet for our Time*.

This is by no means an exhaustive list but these are resources that we would recommend as being helpful and as good starting points.

Recommendation No. 1 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That congregations be encouraged to use the above resources and to be engaged in local community based interfaith activities.

Recommendation No. 2 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That congregations and presbyteries be requested to submit stories of experiences in interfaith initiatives and activities to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee.

The committee will continue to seek ways to highlight and share stories of Presbyterian involvement in interfaith initiatives through denominational media and elsewhere.

ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH VISITORS TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Each year the committee invites both ecumenical and interfaith visitors to the General Assembly to bring input from our colleagues and partners and to learn more about our church and the issues before us.

KAIROS PALESTINE DOCUMENT

Clearly our work does not cover all ecumenical and interfaith engagement of the church. We work in collaboration with other agencies and committees of the General Assembly including Justice Ministries, particularly in relation to its work with KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives and Project Ploughshares, and other ministries of the Life and Mission Agency.

Over the past year, we have sought a closer dialogue with several entities within The Presbyterian Church in Canada concerning a number of issues that come together around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In December, a group of Palestinian Christians representing a wide spectrum of churches and church-related organizations in Israel-Palestine issued an animated and prayerful call for an end to the occupation of Palestine by Israel. “A Moment of Truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering” also known as the “KAIROS Palestine Document” has raised the challenge of the urgency for peace with justice to “Christian brothers and sisters in the churches around the world”. Modelled on the KAIROS document in South Africa in the 1980s, the document has been endorsed by the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches who has invited member churches around the world to find effective means to launch peace building strategies that will accelerate the ending of the occupation. The document has also been endorsed by several churches and many church leaders from around the world including Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu.

This document has become an important focus of discussion and action within the global ecumenical community in relation to Israel-Palestine. This discussion intersects with our involvement with the Canadian Christian Jewish Consultation, the Muslim-Christian Liaison Group, our partnerships with Palestinian Christians, our participation in the WCC, including the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Israel and Palestine (EAPPI) and other interfaith, ecumenical and international relationships. The Presbyterian Church in Canada has always recognized the complexity of this situation and has tried to take a balanced approach in its response to this conflict, consistently affirming the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security while defending the legitimate rights of the Palestinians to live in security and calling for an end to the occupation. As such, the 116th General Assembly affirmed the United Nations’ Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 as containing the broad principles on which the ending of the occupation and a peace agreement would be based (see A&P 1990, p. 398). This is also the position of the Government of Canada. However, implementing these resolutions has proved elusive and the situation in Israel-Palestine has continued to erode. This most recent document from Palestinian Christians reflects their frustrations but also their tenacious hope that a peaceful and just resolution can be found. In consultation with other agencies, the committee has agreed that it is important for the church to study this document and to develop a response.

Recommendation No. 3 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That the document “A Moment of Truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering” be sent to congregations, presbyteries and appropriate committees and agencies of the church for study and discussion with replies submitted by January 31, 2011.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

This year, The Rev. Mark Lewis completes his service with the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee. The committee is deeply appreciative of his contribution as chair and as representative of The Presbyterian Church in Canada on the Canadian Christian Jewish Consultation among other responsibilities.

GLOBAL COMMUNIONS

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The World Council of Churches (WCC), according to its own constitution, is “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. The World Council of Churches was founded in 1948 with its first Assembly in Amsterdam and is the world’s largest ecumenical organization, which now includes almost 350 denominations from every part of the globe. The WCC faces enormous challenges as it witnesses to the good news in a world where economic downturn and disparity and the ravages of war continue

to mar God's good creation. Assemblies are held every six or seven years and between Assemblies its work is carried forward by the Central Committee which is representative of its member churches and regions. We are grateful that The Rev. Will Ingram of our church was elected as a member of the Central Committee at the 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2006. He is also a member of the WCC Relations Committee which brings together those involved in WCC commissions and committees from Canadian member churches.

The Central Committee met August 26 to September 2, 2009 at which time it elected The Rev. Dr. Olav Fyske Tveit, an ordained pastor in of the Church of Norway, to take up the role of General Secretary of the WCC in January 2010 following The Rev. Dr. Sam Kobia of the Methodist Church in Kenya. Dr. Tveit had served the WCC previously as a member of the Faith and Order Commission and as co-chair of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum and had been very active in ecumenical and inter-faith relations in Norway. The Central Committee also decided that the next Assembly will be held in Busan in the Republic of Korea in 2013.

The WCC's "Decade to Overcome Violence" (DOV) seeks to address the challenges of militarism and violence, in the world. A global ecumenical peace convocation is being planned for May 2011 in Kingston, Jamaica. Delegates will be named from our denomination.

Several other documents have been circulated for member churches to consider. A response to the "Statement on Eco-Justice and Ecological Debt" has been prepared and forwarded to the WCC. A response to "Called to be one Church" reflecting on ecumenism in the twenty-first century is being prepared. The Public Issues Committee has produced statements on a broad range of concerns of the WCC including:

- Just finance and the economy of life
- Sexual violence against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo
- Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories
- Caste-based discrimination
- Right of conscientious objection to military service
- Genocide in the context of the Darfur crisis
- Seeking a nuclear weapon-free world
- Situation facing the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma
- The responsibility of churches for communities enduring anti-Christian violence
- Misuse of the Blasphemy Law and the Security of Religious Minorities in Pakistan

The full texts of these documents and other material can be found online at www.oikoumene.org.

A Common Word

A Common Word between Us and You is an invitation from a large and representative group of Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals gathered at the Royal Academy of The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan for Christians and Muslims to come together in the search for meaningful peace on the basis of what they hold in common, love of God and love of neighbour. The invitation was made to the World Council of Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in which we are members and came to us through these bodies. In collaboration with the Committee on Church Doctrine, a response was prepared which was approved by the 135th General Assembly (A&P 2009, p. 276-79, 23). This response has been forwarded to the Aal al-Bayt Institute and has been acknowledged. It has been posted on the Common Word website, www.acommonword.com.

WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) links more than 75 million Christians in over one hundred countries whose churches have their roots in the sixteenth century Reformation. The churches in the WARC are Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed and United most of which are located in the global South. The WARC held its last General Council in 2004 in Accra, Ghana and continues its work between assemblies through its Executive and in a number of regional gatherings, including the Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC) in which The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a member.

Uniting General Council

From June 18-27, 2010, WARC will meet in a "Uniting General Council" at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, USA, to merge with the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) under the theme "Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace". The Council is hosted by the North American

members of the two bodies, including The Presbyterian Church in Canada, with a lead role being taken by the Christian Reformed Church in North America. We are deeply grateful to The Rev. Stephen Kendall, a member of the Executive Committee of the WARC, for his important contribution to the planning of this Uniting Council. There will be significant Aboriginal participation in the Council including an important role in the opening worship service, a plenary session and Pow Wow on June 22nd, and two workshops offered on the theme, the first focusing on processes of truth and reconciliation and the second on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Delegates from The Presbyterian Church in Canada include: The Rev. Cheol Soon Park, The Rev. Mary Fontaine, The Rev. Dr. Robert Faris and Ms. Anne Athanasiadis. The Rev. Stephen Kendall will also be a delegate in addition to his participation as a member of the Executive Committee of WARC and the North American Planning Committee.

As with past General Councils of WARC, a Global Institute of Theology will be held prior to the Council beginning on June 4th. Students will meet first at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago and then move to Calvin College in Grand Rapids. Students and faculty from our theological colleges are invited to attend. There will also be Women and Youth Pre-Councils June 14-17th with significant participation from The Presbyterian Church in Canada members. Finally, a consultation entitled “Reformed Mission in an Age of World Christianity” has been organized by Calvin College June 15-17th. Further information on the Council and related gatherings can be found on-line at www.reformedchurches.org/index.html.

Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth

The WARC General Council held in 2004 in Ghana approved a call to member churches entitled “Covenanting for Justice in The Economy and the Earth”, which has become known as the Accra Confession. The 133rd General Assembly endorsed the Accra Confession (A&P 2007, p. 263, 20) and invited the church to act on it. A working group of WARC member churches in Canada and the United States produced a study guide which the 134th General Assembly encouraged congregations and presbyteries to use in examining more deeply the implications of the document with respect to economics and investments. (A&P 2008, p. 263, 39). The North American working group also developed an on-line interactive resource called “Globalization we can grasp” which draws heavily on material already produced and available through the several WARC member churches in the United States and Canada. The 135th General Assembly encouraged congregations and presbyteries to use this resource. (A&P 2009, p. 279-80, 24)

The “Covenanting for Justice” initiative has been engaged and developed in all of the WARC regions and will continue to be a focus in the new World Communion of Reformed Churches. A Caribbean and North America Region colloquium reflecting on the Accra Confession and the Belhar Confession was organized by the North American Working Group and the Presbyterian Church (USA) at Stony Point, New York, January 15-17, 2010, at which there was The Presbyterian Church in Canada participation. The Belhar Confession developed out of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s and is being considered by several North American WARC member churches (Presbyterian Church (USA), Christian Reformed Church in North America, and the Reformed Church in America) as a confessional statement.

A series of regional theological consultations was organized by the Theology and Ecumenical Engagement department of WARC with a focus on “Communion and Justice”. What does it mean that the new global Reformed body coming into being at Grand Rapids will be called a “Communion” and what are the implications of “Justice” for the nature of that Communion? The Presbyterian Church in Canada was represented at the CANAAC consultation held at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary October 9-13, 2009.

Material related to Covenanting for Justice is available on the WARC website at www.warc.ch. Covenanting for Justice will continue to be an important part of the agenda at the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids.

CANAAC

The Caribbean and North America Area Council of the WARC has been actively seeking to work more closely with a parallel organization, the Caribbean and North American Council for Mission (CANACOM). There is some overlap in membership although not all members of CANACOM are members of CANAAC. CANACOM emerged out of the mission relationships between Caribbean churches and their northern partners while CANACC emerged as an area council of WARC. A joint meeting was held in Guyana in February 2008, at which our representatives were The Rev. In Kee Kim and Ms. Janette McIntosh. Janette was asked to join the Continuation Committee from

this meeting representing CANAAC and was invited to attend the CANACOM meeting in Trinidad October 31 to November 5, 2009. She was much more than an observer and was actively involved in the meeting including making a presentation on the “Covenanting for Justice” work of WARC/CANAAC in which she made use of resources from aboriginal communities in Canada. We are deeply grateful for Janette’s contribution to this process and enthusiasm for finding ways to help the two organizations work more closely together for the benefit of all.

CANADIAN ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH WORK

CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The Presbyterian Church in Canada was a founding member of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) in 1946. We continue to participate fully in the life of the council as an integral part of our ecumenical witness. The CCC is the largest ecumenical body in Canada, now representing twenty-three churches of Anglican, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions. Member churches of the CCC send representatives to a Governing Board; our representatives are The Rev. Stephen Kendall and The Rev. Dr. Robert Faris. A new Executive Committee and Officers were elected for a new triennium in 2009. The new president is The Rev. Bruce Adema of the Christian Reformed Church. The CCC also has two commissions, for Faith and Witness and for Justice and Peace and in recent years, has established a Biotechnology Reference Group and a Christian Inter-Faith Reference Group.

Governing Board

The Governing Board continues with its initiative called “Faith and the Public Square”. It has agreed to hold its May meetings in Ottawa and the agenda for this meeting includes several sessions designed to increase the council’s visibility in the capital including sharing in the National Prayer Breakfast and meeting with individual parliamentarians. For a second year, the meeting has been connected with a forum organized by the Commission on Justice and Peace on the theme of “Faith and a Sustainable Economy”. The Governing Board approved an important brief to the Federal Government on Canada’s role in Afghanistan which emphasizes the need to encourage the international community to give significant new attention to diplomatic efforts to end the war, and to support Afghans in implementing participatory reconciliation programs and responsive governance at district and local levels. The brief can be found online at www.ccc-cce.ca/english/downloads/EcumenicalBriefAfghanistan.pdf.

A major initiative of the CCC over the past year has been its leadership in organizing a Religious Leaders Summit to be held at the time that the G8 and G20 will be hosted by Canada in 2010. This gathering began in 2005 and has met each year since in the country where the G8 meeting is being held. Representatives of the CCC have been attending since 2007. Each summit has called on the leaders of the G8 to fulfill the promises which they themselves have made in relation to a just and sustainable economy and particularly to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. The Religious Leaders Summit in 2010 is being hosted by the University of Winnipeg. The CCC is working in co-operation with a variety of faith communities and organizations to co-ordinate the meeting. A statement has been prepared, “A Time for Inspired Leadership and Action” and responses are encouraged. Communities are encouraged to hold an interfaith dinner with federal Members of Parliament to encourage them to work for the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals. Information is available on-line at www.faithchallengeg8.com.

Commissions and Working Groups

Our denomination is represented on the Faith and Witness Commission by The Rev. Tim Purvis. In addition to overseeing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Canada, the Commission on Faith and Witness (CFW) is involved in several significant projects. The Commission is engaged in a study of the role and development of doctrine in the various traditions represented in the CCC. The National Advisory Group on Emergency Planning continues to connect with various levels of government to insure that faith-based organizations have a role in preparing for and responding to emergency situations e.g. natural disasters, industrial accidents, terrorist attacks, pandemics.

In addition to its organizing the roundtable in Ottawa in May and its work on the Afghanistan Brief, the Commission on Justice and Peace (CJP) has contributed a great deal to the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network (CEARN). CEARN has produced a resource entitled *Let Us Walk Together* which is designed to help Canadians engage with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools and to understand better the legacies of colonization that Aboriginal peoples live with today. We are represented on the CJP by Mr. Stephen Allen, the Associate Secretary for Justice Ministries.

Our representative to the Christian Interfaith Resource Group (CIRG) is Ms. Moira Barclay-Fernie. The CIRG shares information among member churches of the CCC on interfaith work and initiatives. They have considered the interfaith dimensions in chaplaincy and theological education, and are planning an interfaith symposium in 2012 on interfaith marriage. The Biotechnology Working Group (BWG) celebrated ten years of work with a gathering in Toronto in December with two panels reflecting on Medical Applications and Emerging Technologies and Ecology and Agriculture. The Presbyterian Church in Canada representatives on the BWG are Mr. Stephen Allen and The Rev. Dr. George Tattrie.

Information about these projects and other work of the CCC can be found on-line at www.ccc-cce.ca.

MUTUAL MINISTRY AND SHARED MINISTRY

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee is grateful for the adoption by the 135th General Assembly of the *Ecumenical Shared Ministries Handbook*. This represents a major accomplishment in our work with the United Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada in ecumenical shared ministries. The Prairie Centre for Ecumenism in Saskatoon has provided a “home” for this work in its Shared Ministries Bureau. In addition to the *Handbook*, the Bureau is creating a database of all shared ministries in the country. They can be found on-line at <http://ecumenism.net/smb/>. The committee appreciates the work of The Rev. Karen Hincke on the task group and the continuing work of The Rev. Gordon Haynes in representing our church.

THE EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP OF CANADA

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has observer status with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) and is represented by The Rev. Dr. Daniel Scott at its annual Presidents Day. The EFC’s affiliates include forty denominations, more than eighty ministry organizations, over thirty higher education institutions and hundreds of congregations. At the Presidents Day gathering in Montreal in 2009, a presentation was made on the church in Quebec by Glenn Smith of Christian Directions. A banquet was held celebrating the 45th Anniversary with recollections from former Presidents Brian Stiller, Gary Walsh and Bruce Clemenger and an address by Geoff Tunnickliffe, the International Director of the World Evangelical Alliance in which the EFC is a member. Next year’s meeting will receive reports from the Lausanne Congress to be held in Cape Town, South Africa in October 2010, in part commemorating the Edinburgh 1910 Mission Conference.

DIALOGUE GROUPS

Canadian Christian Jewish Consultation

The Canadian Christian Jewish Consultation (CCJC) is a liaison committee including the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB), the member churches of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) including The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC). The CCJC is a national dialogue among these communities, and is composed of official organizational representatives. The Presbyterian representative is The Rev. Mark Lewis. The CJC has raised concerns about support from members of the consultation for groups that might be considered to be anti-Semitic or would be hostile to a CCJC partner. As noted above, this is of particular concern as Canadian Christian churches continue to discern their response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This will continue to be a concern as we move forward and will demand honesty and integrity from all members of the consultation.

Muslim-Christian Liaison Committee

The Muslim-Christian Liaison Committee (MCLC) seeks to promote understanding and a forum for a discussion of concerns between the Christian and Muslim communities in the Canadian context. The Rev. Wayne Kleinstaub represents us on this committee and brings a very lively interest and engagement in the relation of the Christian and Muslims in the Malvern area of Toronto. There are several new members on the committee who are bringing some new energy to its work. The MCLC is encouraging young adults to come together for dialogue and is identifying issues of common concern for dialogue. In some cases it has prepared letters of support in situations where a common voice is helpful, such as a letter to a community whose mosque was the victim of arson.

Multi-lateral Dialogue

Since December 2000, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has engaged in helpful, though oftentimes informal discussions with the United Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and the Christian

Reformed Church (North America). This conversation continues to be a useful means by which our respective denominations can network with one another and share in meaningful updates on issues affecting our churches and is normally held in conjunction with the meetings of the Governing Board of the Canadian Council of Churches.

Christian Reformed Church – The Presbyterian Church in Canada Dialogue

The bilateral conversation with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) has continued after the approval of our Affirmation of the Relationship between The Presbyterian Church in Canada and The Christian Reformed Church in North America at the 135th General Assembly (A&P 2009, p. 283-84). We are awaiting approval by the CRCNA General Synod and preparing a fact sheet about both denominations. Current Presbyterian representatives are The Rev. Stephen Kendall, Ms. Terrie-Lee Hamilton and The Rev. Dr. Robert Faris. These meetings have been taking place over a number of years and grew out of the Multi-lateral dialogue in which both churches are participants.

Joint Anglican Lutheran Commission

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has been invited as an observer to the Joint Anglican Lutheran Commission where we are represented by The Rev. Mark Lewis. Its mandate is to monitor the Full Communion Agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada.

The Rev. Dr. Robert Faris
Convener