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"The greatest thing is to be found at one's post as a child of God, living each day as though it were our last, but planning as though our world might last a hundred years."

C.S. Lewis

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CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

Christian Jewish Consultation: Fostering positive relationships

Edited from report submitted by Daniel Machiela, December 2009

On December 14, 2009, I attended my first meeting of the **Canadian Christian Jewish Consultation (CCJC)** in Montreal at the offices of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC). The general tenor of the meeting was a positive one, though it did have its points of tension. The meeting was well represented by the CCCB (Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops), the CCC had representation from the Lutheran, United, Anglican, and Christian Reformed churches, and the CJC had four members present, though no members representing the more conservative branches of Orthodox Judaism, or strictly secular Judaism.

I learned that these meetings are in large part about fostering positive relationships between individual members, and thereby (it is hoped) their larger religious communities. The consultation provides a helpful line of communication and serves as a visible token of mutual respect between the Christian and Jewish communities in Canada. The day opened with a time of personal sharing comprised of things like news of new grandchildren, sad family deaths, and frantic Hannukah parties.

Two presentations comprised the bulk of the day, one by an Orthodox rabbi (Chaim Steinmetz) from Montreal and another by a priest (Antony Gabriel) from the Antiochene Orthodox Church in Montreal. Both presentations focused on the place of Jerusalem and Israel in the thought and worship of these two communities.

Rabbi Steinmetz's presentation reviewed the historical development of Zionism (its rejection or adoption in various communities at various times, why it is challenged or adopted, some of the recent Jewish anti-Zionism movements, and the difference between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism), the two facets of Israel/Jerusalem as a "homeland" and "holy land", and how these two facets have alternately conflicted or united.

Steinmetz spoke directly to the current conflict in Israel, and how pro-Palestinian

voices often discount the "wartime" realities under which the Israeli government must currently operate. This is a tricky and multi-faceted issue.

Father Gabriel gave a brief talk, intermitted by a mouse scampering around the room (!), speaking about how, for him, Jerusalem is an otherworldly reality, and how we should all strive for peace and harmony.

Tension increased as the Jewish members of the consultation expressed hurt over the United Church's funding and co-sponsorship of a talk by Marc Ellis, a Jewish professor of Judaism at Baylor University, who has critically questioned Zionism and has actively tried to re-define classical Judaism without the physical land of Israel. Ellis is not respected in the religious Jewish community in Canada. Jewish members of the community considered this a direct slap in the face by the United Church. They seemed less upset about a talk by Ellis per se than by the fact that Ellis was represented as "the" voice of "Judaism", was officially endorsed, and that a counter (i.e., majority) voice from the Jewish community was neither acknowledged, nor asked to respond in kind.

Tension with the United Church continues from earlier this year when documents boycotting the State of Israel were proposed for adoption by the United Church.

A discussion ensued of what the Christian consultation members can really do in such instances. The consultation members are not official spokespeople for their respective churches, nor are they necessarily connected to the higher echelons of power therein. Frustration is evident and answers are elusive.

One Jewish member voiced the desire to be more proactive in making fresh, positive suggestions on how to proceed around this issue in the future, rather than repeatedly responding to unacceptable and naive statements by the various churches.

Dialogue between Muslims and Christians is necessary

Report by Jim Payton, CRC representative and Christian co-chair of the NMCLC

The **National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee** (NMCLC) began in 1996. Christian members of the committee are nominated by the various churches of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). Muslim members are appointed by their respective Muslim organizations.

As NMCLC members, we recognize the importance for faith communities to come together with one another in an honest and open dialogue. It is also indispensable for our faith communities to enter into dialogue with secular groups, associations and governments working for a better world. Religious and spiritual communities, united in mutual respect and partnership, need to engage the burning issues that face today's world. Dialogue and engagement are necessary.

The NMCLC serves as a forum for the exchange of faith-related concerns between Muslims and Christians. We do this through official representatives of both faiths. Our committee meets five or six times a year to discuss themes of common interest. Areas of sensitivity or conflict are explored in a mutually respectful dialogue.

The committee cannot speak in the name of the organizations; however we may urge the representatives to return to their respective

bodies with a recommended agreement or policy. At our regular meetings we plan for upcoming events and discuss or present issues of concern for Muslim and/or Christian groups.

At these meetings, the presenters are sometimes visitors and invited guests (e.g., Islamic History and Law professor from York University) or the presenters are committee members with expertise who provide the information we need. Our dialogue can become lively but is always (we hope) carried on under an umbrella of respect, thirst for knowledge and sensitivity.

NMCLC has occasionally hosted dinners to which the members of the CCC and the Muslim organizations are invited. At these dinners, we honour Canadians who have been involved in interreligious activity and building peace.

We have also sponsored one-day conferences in 2008 and 2009. These conferences brought together Muslims and Christians for lectures, workshops, discussion, conversation, and a shared meal. These activities have drawn good attendance from both Muslims and Christians, from youth to elderly.

Harold Roscher took time to show drummers how to drum the beat with conviction

Drumming for Climate Change

Submitted by Louisa Bruinsma, CRC Rep on the KAIROS Board of Trustees

Despite -35 degree temperatures, several family groupings from Fellowship Christian Reformed Church and students involved with the Micah Centre from The King's University College joined 160 churches throughout Canada to "beat to the same drum" in support of the UN efforts in Copenhagen, Denmark towards formulating a climate change policy.

Bells and drums have been used throughout time to warn people of danger and to call people to action. The World Council of Churches invited churches around the world to drum or ring bells 350 times at 3 p.m. (local time) on Sunday, December 13, 2009 to warn of the impact of climate change. The count of 350 was chosen since 350 parts per million represents the safe upper limit for CO2 in the atmosphere. (Currently, numbers stand at 390 per million.) KAIROS

(of which the CRCNA is a member) extended the call to join in the beat.

Selected readings from Scripture (Deuteronomy 30, Exodus 23, Isaiah 24, Psalm 104, Psalm 146) and from "Our World Belongs to God" were followed by the drumming by 22 participants: children as young as age two, their parents, young people and students from The King's University College.

Harold Roscher, Director of the Edmonton Native Healing Centre, took time to show drummers how to drum the beat with conviction, and, after the 350 drum beats were completed, invited participants to beat together with him while he sang a Mikmaq song about the need to respect people, for people to help one another, and to do this according to the Creator's intentions.

Anna Beukes' 6-year old twins were keen drummers. (continued on page 3)

Poverty is about Dignity and Rights

Edited from report submitted by Chandra Pasma, November 2009

The **Canadian Social Development (CSD) Program Committee** of KAIROS met on October 28 and 29, 2009.

The **Kairos Gathering** received positive feedback, especially the day on poverty. Highlights include a good atmosphere, great dialogue, and good connections. One regret is that while so much of the day was about networking, there was no follow-up to allow people to build on those connections. Stephen Allen and Mary Boyd will offer some options for future collaboration in a letter to participants and recommend participating in the Dignity for All campaign.

Future planning included a review, led by John Mihevc, of documents and questions that had been provided to each committee. Our committee raised concerns that poverty seems to fit better under Dignity and Rights than under Sustainability. We identified multiple ways in which striving towards just and sustainable livelihoods is an important part of Kairos' work, but where it seems that poverty has been left as a peripheral issue. Our committee stresses that poverty significantly impacts people's dignity, and is closely related to the issue of rights – not only because of the right to economic security and the resources necessary for basic well-being, but because lack of respect for other rights often contributes to the creation and maintenance of poverty.

Finally, while we express a deep appreciation for the biblical grounding of Kairos' work and its thorough, yet accessible research, we wonder if these are not best understood as principles of the work rather than as strategies. Our committee identifies outreach to youth, diverse and accessible communications products—including greater use of electronic and social media—and materials for churches as three of the most important

strategies for the next five years.

The **Dignity for All** Campaign “calls for vigorous and sustained action by the federal government to combat the structural causes of poverty in Canada” (www.dignityforall.ca). The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Anglican Church and the United Church in Canada have already signed on to the campaign. The Presbyterian Church and the CRC are following internal processes to sign-on. Peter Noteboom will follow up with the CCC about signing on, and Alfredo Barahona, the Kairos CSD committee staff person, is going to follow up with Kairos about signing on to the campaign.

The possibility of getting the Kairos Anti-Poverty Network involved in the campaign was discussed. However, this is challenging because the network has been disbanded and much of the contact has been lost since Jill Carr-Harris left. Still, Alfredo is going to send a letter to regional chairs encouraging them to get involved.

Chandra shares about upcoming events for the campaign, including the Dinner for Dignity on February 5. The dinner brings together low income Canadians, politicians and social justice advocates in conversation about poverty in Canada. Each church is asked to designate its own invitees.

Alfredo reviews the MESA (Movement for a Solidarity Economy in the Americas) conference. Though good attendance included a group from Korea, there is no obvious funding for future conferences, especially as the Americans appear to be half-hearted participants. While the partners from the south have urged the northern churches to continue this forum, it is not clear how this will be financially feasible.

“...poverty significantly impacts people's dignity, and is closely related to the issue of rights...”

Drumming for Climate Change

“They understood that this was contributing in a strong and meaningful way to the discussion. They got it,” she said. “This was a way of communicating a strong message to our political leaders.” Anna admits to feeling a bit of despondency about the world in which her children will grow up. But ending the ceremony with the strong confession of the song *He's got the whole world in His hands* gives her new hope for the future.

For further information on the Bell Ringing event, check www.bellringing350.org. The KAIROS website (kairoscanada.org) indicates which churches in Canada have signed in support of this action.

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**Transforming Lives and
Communities Worldwide**

Our Mission

As people called by God,
We gather to praise God, listen to him, and respond.
We nurture each other in faith and obedience to Christ.
We love and care for one another as God's people.
We commit ourselves to serve and to tell others about Jesus.
We pursue God's justice and peace in every area of life.

Our Vision

The Christian Reformed Church is a diverse family of healthy congregations, assemblies, and ministries expressing the good news of God's kingdom that transforms lives and communities worldwide.

www.crcna.org

Doctrine: What makes us unique? What makes us open to others?

Edited from meeting notes submitted by Dr. M. Elaine Botha, September 2009

The **Faith and Witness Commission** of the Canadian Council of Churches met in Toronto on March 1-3, 2009. The Commission began with a discussion on the Scriptural basis for ecumenical discussion of doctrine. This discussion set the stage for the doctrinal dialogue throughout the meeting.

Tim Purvis presented a paper on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in Canada which prompted discussion on the themes of predestination, status of the Creeds, liturgy, tradition, and doctrine as identity.

Each church house had an opportunity to answer the question *"What are those shared convictions without which your church's mission and existence would be seriously impaired, or even impossible, at this time and place?"* The bullets below reflect a brief phrase summary of each church house's response:

- Quakers—unity in the Spirit
- Mennonites—the church being faithful to its mission
- Orthodox—Christ is the way, truth, salvation; Tradition that conveys that Christ is Truth
- United Church of Canada—Relationships with God and the other and creation
- Christian Reformed Church—three

creeds of the church, sovereignty of God and supremacy of Christ

- Presbyterians—absolute centrality of Christ as the Word of God incarnate
- Catholics—kerygma, God's revelation (Scripture/Tradition), mission of the Church
- Lutherans—Trinity, highlighting that the centre of the life of faith is relationship
- Salvation Army—regeneration of the soul with the implication that outreach goes everywhere because the message is for everyone
- Anglicans—four convictions: Holy Scriptures as revealed word of God, Nicene Creed as sufficient statement of Christian faith, Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the historic episcopate, locally adapted.
- Baptists—the declaration that Jesus is Lord

Common themes emerged from this discussion. Christ is central to salvation and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper symbolize and celebrate Christ's centrality. The creeds contain succinct and shared summary of the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Tradition

—whether big "T" or little "t" tradition—plays a role. Relationships—the community of faith—are important, both within the church and within the church's cultural context.

Elaine presented the doctrinal position of the Christian Reformed Church. The church houses' doctrinal position papers will be compiled with an introduction by Richard Schneider, drawing attention to common habits of the mind. Paul Ladouceur will write a paper on relativism in light of doctrine.

A resolution is made to complete this compilation as a tool to assist clergy and the Governing Board. These doctrinal papers not only name, but go underneath, the differences. A missional dimension will also be included. This compiled document reflects that the church houses have heard each other.

The Faith and Witness Commission heard reports from its committees: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, National Advisory Group on Emergency Planning, Christian Interfaith Reference Group, and the Biotechnology Reference Group.