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"There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan."
C.S. Lewis

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Every Square Inch

Reports on Christian Reformed Representation in Canadian Ecumenical Ministry

Transforming Lives and Communities Worldwide

Volume 2, Issue 1

Canadian Council of Churches Active and Engaged

By Peter Slofstra, CCC Board member

The Governing Board of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) met in Ottawa this spring from May 19 through 21. During three days of meetings, representatives of 23 denominations in Canada experienced a workshop on human trafficking, sent three delegations to meet with local politicians, joined with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada to hear a presentation by the Minister of Indian Affairs, Chuck Stahl, and worshiped together in First Baptist Church, one of the oldest Baptist churches in Canada.

In its engagement with the government, the CCC continues to challenge politicians to work at meeting the Millennium Development Goals, especially after hearing that we're falling short, especially in the area of poverty. These eight goals, that 192 member states of the United Nations and 23 international agencies have agreed to achieve by 2015, are:

- eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- achieve universal primary education
- promote gender equality and empower women
- reduce child mortality rate
- improve maternal health
- combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- ensure environmental sustainability
- develop a global partnership for development

At the recommendation of Project Ploughshares, the CCC also sent a letter to the Prime Minister urging him to speak out for nuclear disarmament.

The most difficult discussion at this year's CCC meeting centred on an internal matter: our budget deficit. We struggled to find a way for all the church houses to contribute their fair share and placed this matter back into the hands of the executive who will come with a recommendation in the fall.

Unique to the CCC are its various commissions, such as the Commission on Justice and Peace, the Biotech Reference Group, and the Commission on Faith and Witness which

wrote and launched a book about suffering called *The Bruised Reed: A Christian reflection on Suffering and Hope*, an accomplishment we celebrated with wine and cheese! I highly recommend this book for small groups and as a gift to anyone suffering.

The CCC also helped plan a "World Religions Summit" in Winnipeg that ran concurrently with the G8 and G20 Summits in June. 80 religious leaders (Aboriginal, Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Shinto, and Sikh) from G8/G20 nations approved an inter-faith statement calling on leaders to address poverty, care for the earth and invest in peace.

Misplaced Faith: A Root Cause of Economic Crisis

- submitted by Kathy Vandergrift

What does faith have to do with a sustainable economy? That question was explored by the Commission on Justice and Peace (CJP) at its last two annual meetings in Ottawa. The CJP brings Canadian churches together to reflect biblically on the meaning of peace and social justice in our time and co-operate in a public witness on these matters in Canada, under the umbrella of the Canadian Council of Churches. Faith, the CJP concluded, is a primary cause of economic and environmental issues – a misplaced faith. Speakers with expertise in global economics and ecology explained to church and political leaders how the dominant belief in economic growth as the way to success leads to poverty and exploitation of natural resources. (cont'd page 3)

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.

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.

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.

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.

- Submitted by Louise Bruinsma

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

Misplaced Faith: A Root Cause of Economic Crisis (cont'd from page 1)

At the time of the first forum in 2009, it seemed like this lesson might be learned from the economic crisis of 2008. World leaders, such as the head of the World Bank, publicly acknowledged that the basic assumptions behind the policies of the last two decades had been wrong. By the time of CJP's second meeting in May, 2010, however, the optimism of fast recovery following quick fixes of stimulus spending were replacing discussion of fundamental values. Within the Canadian Council of Churches community, however, a more realistic assessment concluded that a fundamental shift in values is the only solution. Only by giving priority to care for creation and the well-being of all people will we make progress towards genuine sustainability. (cont'd on page 4)

One of the openings at the first meeting was recognition by members of parliament from all parties that they need voices from church communities to remind them of the moral and ethical aspects of economic decisions they make. Moral clarity, said MP John McKay, is what political leaders need on the big issues like sustainable development. At the same time, CJP and other faith-based groups who raise fundamental questions about economic direction find less public space these days for discussion of basic values.

At the 2010 meeting, CJP also considered the specific role of churches in a post-recession context. Churches across Canada continue to pick up the pieces of damage from the recession by providing social services to those who suffer most, such as the increasing number of families who rely on food banks and community agencies for help. Equally important is the prophetic voice of faith communities, publically nam-

ing injustices that need redress, such as those left behind in recovery, and speaking up for priorities that are forgotten in narrow public policy debates on increasing the Gross National Product (GNP) or reducing taxes at all costs.

While it is relatively easy to reach agreement within church communities that a Christian witness on care for creation and for other people is important, it remains difficult to have effective influence on public policy formation in Canada. That challenge occupies much of the attention of CJP and those within the CRC who participate in its work. Human trafficking is one area where the work and voice of the churches continues to have an impact, including the June passage of a law that increases penalties for child-trafficking.

Giving an ecumenical voice to the Biblical call for justice and peace is

an on-going challenge, made more difficult by decreasing resources within many of the Canadian churches who actively participate in this work. In this context, the CRC makes a significant contribution to this part of the work of the Canadian Council of Churches.

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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.