

## **ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

Interim Report, May 2020

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee provides this report for its activities between the 145th General Assembly and March 1, 2020. The committee met in person on September 30, 2019 and by video and phone conference on January 27, 2020. The committee, through volunteers and staff, facilitates the ongoing relationships between The Presbyterian Church in Canada and several national and international ecumenical and interfaith councils and groups. The committee provides materials and encouragement to congregations and their members to participate in local and regional opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith prayer, dialogue and cooperation.

This report will highlight some of the many ways people and organizations within The Presbyterian Church in Canada are engaged in the work of the church through ecumenical and interfaith relationships.

### **PROJECT PLOUGHSHARES**

Project Ploughshares is the peace research institute of the Canadian Council of Churches. Working with churches, governments and civil society, in Canada and abroad, the institute seeks to advance policies and actions to prevent war and armed violence and build peace. Rooted in the Christian ethics of peace, reconciliation and justice, Project Ploughshares grounds its research in careful analysis of facts presenting its policy statements and findings to governments, churches and non-governmental organizations in reasoned, public-policy language.

Two areas of significant work are autonomous weapons systems and Artificial Intelligence and surveillance. Information and reports are available at [ploughshares.ca](http://ploughshares.ca) and by contacting members of this committee.

### **SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

The Canadian Council of Churches' Sexual Exploitation Working Group is quite active. Its meetings connect frontline agencies working on sexual exploitation across Canada to share updates. The Rev. Deborah Stanbury of ARISE Ministry represents The Presbyterian Church in Canada on this working group and serves as one of the co-chairs.

The Sexual Exploitation Working Group continues to work on a theological rooting document that expands upon and unifies some of its past work and expresses a spirit of ecumenism and joint commitment to the ongoing work of ending sexual exploitation in Canada. The working group seeks to be helpful in sharing information related to the upcoming evaluation of Bill-36, The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act. This group is being intentional in reviewing *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* and the Calls for Justice therein. The group is having ongoing conversations about how to highlight and respond to these Calls for Justice in our work together and in the churches we represent. The International Affairs Committee report has a more indepth study on human trafficking (see p. XXX of their interim report.)

### **ECUMENICAL SHARED MINISTRIES**

The Life and Mission Agency recently updated the Handbook for Ecumenical Shared Ministries. This is a good resource for congregations considering how they might move into formal sharing of buildings, ministers and ministry opportunities across denominational lines. The Moderator of the 145th General Assembly, the Rev. Amanda Currie, visited Pinawa Christian Fellowship with the Rev. Rob Murray. Pinawa is a shared ministry across four Canadian church denominations. The committee will be studying the new handbook in the coming year to determine how it can assist congregations in our common ministry of witnessing to the gospel in word and deed.

### **GLOBAL AND NATIONAL COMMUNIONS**

#### **World Council of Churches (WCC)**

The World Council of Churches is a global fellowship of churches, denominations and fellowships from more than 110 countries representing more than 500 million Christians. The WCC is the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement whose goal is Christian unity. The 11th Assembly will be held from September 8–16, 2021 in Karlsruhe, Germany, under the theme of “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity”. Our delegate will be the Rev. Amanda Currie. The Rev. Stephen Kendall, as our ecumenical officer, will be an advisory delegate.

### **World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)**

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is comprised of 100 million Christians in Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting and Waldensian churches. The WCRC, working with its 233 member churches, is active in supporting theology, justice, church unity and mission in over 105 countries. Ms. Hilary Hagar serves on the WCRC Executive Committee.

The WCRC focuses its work on transformative reformation in economic, social, gender and ecological justice matters. It remains in consultation with member churches who do not ordain women and with nongovernmental organizations on economic and ecological reforms.

### **Caribbean and North America Area Council (CANAAC)**

The Caribbean and North America Area Council is the regional expression of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in the region of the Caribbean, United States and Canada. There are 22 member churches in CANAAC. The Rev. Matthew Sams serves on its Steering Committee.

CANAAC actively engages in issues of racial and gender justice within churches in its geographic region. The lessons of colonial and corporate globalization histories are key to understanding the work of the council. One member ought not impose its theology and practice on another but rather mutual learning and reflection are important. The building up and strengthening of honest, humble and Christ-centred relationships amongst all members is the key to the council's ongoing effectiveness.

### **Canadian Council of Churches (CCC)**

The Canadian Council of Churches is the broadest and most inclusive ecumenical body in Canada, bringing together representatives from Anglican, Evangelical, Free Church, Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic member denominations. The purpose of the CCC is to serve God's mission in the world, to give expression to the unity which is offered to the world through Jesus Christ, to witness to the continuing renewal of the Church by the Holy Spirit, to promote the growth of ecumenical and missionary obedience among all Christians and to facilitate common action by the member churches.

The CCC celebrated its 75th anniversary this past year. In October a worship service was held on September 26, which marked the first gathering of the council in 1944. Later in October, a cross-country video conference was held that focused on "Christians Together in Canada Today".

As an example of the work of just one of the groups within the CCC, here are some highlights from the Christian Interfaith Reference Group. CIRG's work includes new guidelines for public religious ceremonies. The Interfaith Chaplaincy Committee for Corrections Canada reports high levels of satisfaction from offenders and chaplains on services provided. Discussion is ongoing on whether and how a national interfaith organization would operate. Current practice is to have smaller, regional, interfaith organizations.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is well represented on the committees and commissions of the CCC.

### **Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC)**

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (l'Alliance évangélique du Canada) is the national association of evangelical Christians in Canada. Since 1964, the EFC has provided a national forum for Evangelicals and a constructive voice for biblical principles in life and society. The Rev. Dr. Dan Scott serves as observer for The Presbyterian Church in Canada at the EFC.

The 'Council of Presidents' of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada met in Montreal on October 24–25, 2019. The council is composed of about 44 denominational representatives, heads of 35 institutions of higher education and the leaders of 75 ministry organizations.

The theme was "Evangelicalism in Canada: Past, Present and Future" and hosted by Ms. Karen Stiller. Amongst others, speakers included Dr. Bruce Hindmarsh, the James M. Houston Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College and author of *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism: True Religion in a Modern World* and Dr. John Pellowe, Executive Director of the Canadian Council of Christian Charities (CCCC), speaking on research presented to the Canadian Senate on the public benefits of religion. Time was taken to talk in affinity groups about how well (or not)

evangelicals are engaging in God's mission in Canada as well as networking with ministry peers over meals and breaks.

## **DIALOGUES AND CONVERSATIONS**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is involved in various ecumenical and interfaith dialogues and conversations. The three active groups are:

- Christian Reformed Church of North America, The Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Reformed Church of America
- Canadian Interfaith Conversation
- Christian Muslim Liaison Committee

The committee has had initial conversations for bi-lateral conversations with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee encourages members, congregations and organizations within The Presbyterian Church in Canada to continue and to develop new relations with worship communities in your neighbourhoods. Existing relationships foster quicker and smoother responses to events within communities. New relationships allow us to reflect on who we are, what we believe and on Christ's call to serve.

Matthew Sams  
Convener