

## ACSWP Winter meeting at Stony Point Conference Center, Stony Point New York

January 24-28, 2007

### Attendance:

**ACSWP Members:** Gloria Albrecht, Donna C. Bradley, Dianne L. Briscoe (vice-chair), Charles Easley, B. Gordon Edwards (chair), Esperanza Guajardo, Ronald J. Kernaghan, Lewis Mudge, Larry Palmer, William Saint, and Jack M. Terry.

**ACSWP Staff:** Christian T. Iosso, coordinator; Belinda M. Curry, Associate, and Bonnie M. Hoff, senior administrative assistant and recorder.

**Liaisons and Staff—***Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC):* Terry Alexander; *General Assembly Council (GAC):* Curtis Kearns, executive administrator; Charles Wiley, associate, theology and worship (via conference call); *Washington Office:* Catherine Gordon, Associate for International Issues; and Leslie Woods, associate for domestic poverty and environmental issues; *UN Office (PUNO):* Joel Hanisek, representative to the UN; Jonathan Crooms, seminar program intern; Ricky Velez-Negron, senior administrative assistant; and the *Office of the General Assembly (OGA):* Vernon Broyles, volunteer representative for public witness.

**Guests---Stony Point Conference Center:** Bill Pendar, Director; and Rose Chan, conference center intern; **First Presbyterian Church of New York City:** Rev. John Walton, pastor.

**National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC) Staff:** Robert W. Edgar, General Secretary; Antonios Kireopoulos, Associate General Secretary for International Affairs and Peace; Eileen W. Lindner, Deputy General Secretary for Research and Planning, and Editor, "Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches"; and Marcel A. Welty, Associate for Research and Planning.

**Media:** Toya Hill, Presbyterian News Service.

**Other:** James Berkley, Institute on Religion and Democracy.

### Meeting agenda:

- To review on-going projects, leading up to the 218th G.A. in San Jose, CA.
- To receive briefings concerning the work of the National Council of Churches (NCC) and the Presbyterian U.N. Office.
- To review the range of capabilities of current staff, evaluating personnel assignments of staff and committee members while prioritizing new assignments.
- To carefully assess our short-term goals and establish time-lines for on-going projects.

**Wednesday evening:** The meeting began with worship and prayer led by Rev. Gordon Edwards, chairperson. Greetings were extended to ACSWP by Stony Point Director, Rev. Bill Pindar and Rev. Rose Chan, a volunteer in mission.

Evening business focused on a conference call with The Rev. Dr. Charles Wiley, Associate for Theology and Worship. Dr. Wiley described the upcoming conference on "End of Life Issues" being held at Duke University, March 12-14. End of Life Issues is an on-going project of ACSWP, chaired by Rev. Ron Kernaghan, attempting to update the 1981 PCUS study paper on

the Nature and Value of Human life. Dr. Lewis Mudge is an ACSWP member on the writing team.

Dr. Wiley also discussed the Confessions treatment of Racism, which included a review of the South African Belhar Confession, and the development of a new Social Creed in conjunction with the NCC. (The new Social Creed is not a doctrinal creed but a statement of social ethics based on a Trinitarian framework.)

#### **Thursday:**

The committee traveled into New York City to visit the National Council of Churches and the UN offices of the PC(USA). At the NCC office, the committee was welcomed by The Rev. Marcel Welty who distributed copies of the 2006 NCC Policy Statement on Biotechnologies. This study addresses several issues before the Nature & Value of Human Life resolution team. The Committee was very fortunate in the short time they were there to meet with the General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Robert Edgar, who told of the recent work of the NCC, including the progress on "living wage," environmental, and internal financial issues, and of the strong witness on peace and human rights concerns. The NCC was a key leader in forming the "Let Justice Roll" coalition that supported referenda in six states to raise the minimum wage. Tribute is due the Council and that program's leader, the Rev. Dr. Paul Sherry, past President of the United Church of Christ. The NCC environmental program has been growing in influence, including advocacy for ecologically sound re-development in New Orleans. Edgar said that this environmental program and others have been strengthened by foundation as well as church-provided monies: "mainstream" foundations are again valuing the "mainline" voice of the Council, which is also using Internet and other means to reach younger people. On the Iraq and possibly Iran hostilities, the Council has stood in opposition from the first and has also stood strongly for US respect for human rights against all torture and un-Constitutional rendition and detention. Edgar noted the presence of an observer from the Institute of Religion and Democracy (of whom the NCC had not been previously advised), and he repeated his suggestion that the IRD join the NCC in working on an issue of mutual concern, such as hunger, homelessness or poverty. He also affirmed the balanced budget of the NCC defending it against criticism of IRD. In closing, Edgar reiterated the primary commitments of the NCC to the issues of: Peace, Poverty and Planet Earth.

ACSWP then heard from Dr. Antonios Kireopoulos concerning international peace programs of the NCC. Dr. Kireopoulos, a lay member of the Greek Orthodox Church, summarized work on genocide, multi-lateral diplomacy, development and international health, and Middle East concerns, where he noted the enormous pressure on the Christian community from the occupations and invasions

The briefing concluded with remarks from Presbyterian Minister Eileen Lindner, Associate General Secretary, who had shepherded the Biotechnologies policy through the last two NCC General Assemblies. Dr. Lindner spoke to the importance of the work on the Social Creed, noting her doctoral work on the larger Social Gospel movement, and spoke about the general state of the Council. Because of Robert Edgar's success in strengthening the finances and public witness of the Council, the next General Secretary is expected to focus more on ecclesial relationships, though these are generally good.

After several questions, the Committee re-boarded vans for the Church Center at the UN.

#### **UN Office Briefings and Reception:**

The committee spent late morning and afternoon at the UN Offices of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The new Presbyterian representative to the UN, The Rev. Joel Hanisek, and his staff

arranged an interesting array of speakers covering the humanitarian work of the UN and related Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

- 1) The Rev. Christopher Ferguson, representative of the World Council of Churches (a minister of the United Church of Canada), spoke to the range of WCC projects, including those dealing with the large phenomenon of increasing globalization.
- 2) Matthew Heaphy, Esq., of the UN Association of the USA, spoke to coalitional efforts to encourage final US acceptance of the already-substantial role of the International Criminal Court --a court which tries those responsible for genocide and anchors international human rights standards.
- 3) Father Joseph Donnelly of Caritas International then spoke of the strong role Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) had playing in focusing attention and funds on Africa and the AIDS crisis, and on many concerns sometimes resisted by particular governments. Thus the NGO's—of which the PCUSA is among the most established—have a key role to play for the voiceless and in terms of accountability.
- 4) Two officials from the US delegation, Ms. Emily Bruno and Ms. Peggy Kerry, both expressed appreciation for the Church's participation in the mission of the UN. Ms. Bruno spoke very ably concerning the complexities of the Sudan/Darfur and Chad situations. In response to a question from ACSWP staff, she emphasized internal dynamics in Chad and not simply "spill-over" from Darfur, although some of the scorched earth dynamics are similar. She spoke of the diplomatic constraints on US humanitarian intentions with the UN, African and Islamic contexts. Ms. Kerry commented on the important role of NGO's, even with countries that do not allow such independent bodies on their own territory. She encouraged support for the UN as a pragmatic and policy asset for the United States in both its peacemaking and development roles, while noting that the member nations often behave according to their own perceived interests.

**A Reception:** In the early evening, committee members attended a reception for Presbyterian UN, NGO and country mission staff persons, plus many supporters of the Church's UN work. Among the Presbyterian UN staff, for examples, were an expert in determining the structure of economic sanctions on nations "in breach" of UN resolutions and international law, and the man who developed the measurability criteria for the Millennium Development Goals, a major work of coordination among agencies. One of the ministers present had performed the wedding for the former Secretary General and his diplomat wife.

**Friday:** The morning began with worship, and then the Committee sought to ground its process in historical review. This included a moving presentation by the Rev. Vernon Broyles III of corporate social witness in the former Presbyterian Church in the United States, illustrating the shift to an embodied spirituality of the church in relation to the mission work in the then-Belgian Congo by Presbyterian missionaries Sheppard, Lapsley and Morrison. That history shows that the Church's mission is first and foremost to tell the Good News of Jesus Christ, but that in so doing it also discovers that it is necessary to identify human rights abuses and work to eliminate human suffering. Rev. Broyles also spoke of the importance of the General Assembly's stance in presenting the moral positions of the larger church to congregations, such as one of his early congregations during the struggle for desegregation. As the Church works through difficult and controversial issues it is helpful to remember that the Church is not simply a voluntary organization. Each elder or minister is bound by their vows to the Body of Christ which translates into mutual accountability.

Revs. Chris Iosso and Lewis Mudge spoke to the basis of social witness policy in the Confessions of the Church. Dr. Mudge had served as secretary to the Committee that revised

what became “the Confession of 1967,” during the preceding year of church-wide study and discussion. Dr. Mudge also identified the preparatory role of Rev. John Mackay as he had come to understand the international mission context prior to becoming President of Princeton Seminary, several of whose faculty had considerable influence on “C-67.” If Rev. Broyles presentation reflected much of the excellent *Church & Society* journal called Presbyterian 101, the later orientation reflected part of the 1993 General Assembly statement, *Why and How the Church Makes A Social Policy Witness*, in which “discernment” is a major theme.

The Committee then focused much of the rest of the day on personnel matters, including an informal staff review, a review of members’ interests and talents, interfacing their interests with those of the staff. Some of this discussion arose due to the loss of a staff position in May of 2006. Because the discussion dealt with personnel issues spread over the past two years and extending through the next two, the committee expressed the need to meet with new GAC leadership at its June meeting.

Late in the afternoon, several sub-committees met: Advice & Counsel dealing with material going to the next General Assembly, Interpretation & Communication dealing with the website and a possible print/cyber successor to *Church & Society*, and Budget & Personnel reviewing GA monies assigned to the several task forces and study teams.

#### **Friday Evening: Discussion of Short-Term Priorities**

Using the categories of the Confession of 1967 (9.43-47), the Committee outlined current social justice concerns. The categories of Poverty, Peace, Family and Racism are also priorities of the GAC’s Mission Work Plan. The Committee added environment, reflecting the Brief Statement of Faith’s lifting up that concern. In some cases, care for the areas in question may involve using existing policies, especially bringing in recent policies such as Globalization, Immigration and Changing Families. In other cases, overlapping or linked concerns can be addressed through current work. Overall, the discussion focused more on domestic concerns, after a previous day spent more on international concerns. Some of this domestic focus reflected members’ personal callings from earlier that day; members also considered many domestic issues to have been literally short-changed in the past few years.

The Committee’s desire to combine concerns also seemed to reflect the review of staff and members’ capacity to take on only a limited number of new projects beyond those already in process. Thus the discussion, like the discussion of the impacts of staff changes and realignment reflected both the changes within the church and the changes occurring domestically and internationally. While the Committee can claim to have been clearly “on target” about the Iraq War, Global Warming, and the need for positive action on many other policy areas, the Committee also placed its concern for the wide range of issues in the context of discerning “what God is yearning for,” in the words of a discernment resource used earlier in the (second long!) day. The Committee may develop new ways to involve presbytery Peacemaking, Hunger, Restoring Creation and other mission networks in the prioritization process as well. The brief summary below indicates some of the range of thinking by the Committee members on short horizon issues; longer term work is projected for the up-coming meeting, now slated for Louisville.

#### **Poverty:**

Current work of ACSWP: Homelessness, Pay Equity and Social Creed.

Other projects that impact this area have to do with Immigration, Voter’s Rights and Education issues.

**Peace:**

Current work of ACSWP: Policy statements of the War in Iraq, Israel/Palestine (and work of MRTI and concerns of GAC), Human Rights update for Columbia, the Nature & Value of Human Life.

Further work may be needed regarding: militarization of security and domestic surveillance, detainee rights and war on drugs...

**Family:**

Current Work of ACSWP: Homelessness, Pay Equity, Serious Mental Illness, Disabilities.

Further work may be needed regarding displaced children, unequal education opportunities, No Child left behind.

**Racism:**

Current Work of ACSWP: Voting Rights/Electoral Reform, Smithfield Consultation Process, Immigration, Application of recent policy regarding Police Shootings, For-Profit Private Prisons.

Further work may be needed regarding: Katrina as a focus of urban abandonment and environmental damage. Confessional concerns to reflect the ethical position of the Church. Racism and educational opportunities.

**Environment:**

Current Work: Homelessness, Globalization, Energy Policy, Equal housing opportunity.

The above summary is of current projects. Long-term work projects will be discussed at the June meeting in Louisville.

**Saturday Morning:**

The meeting was opened with worship, led by Charles Easley, GAC vice chair.

Reports were then heard from related entities of the Church:

- ACSWP was pleased to welcome the Rev. Curtis A. Kearns, Jr., Executive Administrator of the General Assembly Council, who provided an overview of the re-designed GAC structure.
- Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns: report given by The Rev. Terry Alexander
- The Washington Office: reports from International Concerns Associate Catherine Gordon and Domestic Concerns Associate Leslie Woods.
- UN Office/Peacemaking: Joel Hanisek participated in the meeting subsequent to the UN Office Briefings; though that office functions as part of the Peacemaking Program.

Reports were received of on-going work on the following projects: Serious Mental Illness, Social Creed, Pay Equity, Voting Rights/Electoral Reform, Homelessness, and Smithfield.

**Human Rights:** A motion was approved by consensus that a subcommittee prepare a two-page summary of what ACSWP hopes to achieve by doing a human rights report, why it is being done, and have some description of methodology to be followed with a ¾-page outline of proposed content. Members of the group: Bill Saint, Catherine Gordon, and Joel Hanisek with Belinda Curry coordinating.

Vernon Broyles, Volunteer Representative for Public Witness, Office of the General Assembly (OGA), reported on the Stated Clerk's interfaith work for Middle East peace and for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). He recommended that the committee review the Clerk's and his own statement on the potential Iraq war "surge," found on the Clerk's website.

Esperanza Guajardo, liaison to the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) reported on the upcoming trip to the Yucatan in relation to the impacts of immigration on Mexico itself. She also spoke to cultural proficiency issues and to discrimination affecting Arab

Americans, Islamic and Christian.

The meeting then recessed in order to change locations from Stony Point to NY City, reconvening Sunday morning at 8:30 a.m. at First Presbyterian Church in Manhattan.

**Sunday Morning:** First Presbyterian Church, New York City

The Committee convened with prayer by Gordon Edwards, then dealt with five main items.

1. The Committee reviewed the work to be done by the drafting team on Nature & Value of Human Life. Lewis Mudge spoke to the theological elements of "common grace" and "belonging to God;" others spoke to the role of conscience in the covenant community. The Committee also spoke of issues and possible case studies that would illustrate application of principles, as is done in the 1981 original.
2. The Committee returned briefly to the short-term priority list, with staff speaking to the possible use of Katrina as focus for domestic concerns and linkage of Iraq war difficulties to potential confrontation with Iran on the international side. It was proposed that the June meeting would also do some long term planning.
3. As part of that long-term planning, it was agreed that a letter would be sent to the middle governing bodies to share priority concerns and invite response and sharing of information on presbytery/synod priorities. One member termed this, scanning the environment with key stakeholders. The goal would be to send out the letter with consultation with Gary Torrens with a goal of receiving input prior to the June meeting.
4. The Committee discussed elements for a draft booklet that would explain each of the Social Creed's recommendations. An update on the Social Creed process would be provided to the GAC March meeting.
5. The newly printed up policy statements from the 06 General Assembly would also be provided to the GAC. Discussion followed on the role of theological and ethical reflection in the Council and the possibility that ACSWP and the Theology and Worship program area could develop a process for the GAC in this regard.

The Pastor of the Church, the Rev. Jon Walton, visited the meeting and spoke with the group.

The Committee adjourned in time for the 11:00 am worship service.