

ITEM B.110
ACTION ITEM FOR GAC BUSINESS

<i>FOR GAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE USE ONLY</i>					
	A. Evangelism		D. Vocation		G. PC (USA), A Corporation
X	B. Justice		E. Stewardship		H. Executive Committee
	C. Spirituality		F. Audit		I. Personnel Committee
	P. Plenary				

Subject: Comment to Overture 50 to 218th GA (2008)

Recommendation:

That the GAC approve the following comment to the 218th General Assembly on Overture 50:

The action that the overture recommends to the Assembly is both consistent with General Assembly policy, and part of a stream of significant Christian responses to the invitation made in A Common Word.

In adopting the Study on Islam in 1987, the 199th General Assembly urged “the dissemination and use by local congregations and other groups of ... materials in Islam and interfaith relations, which present a wide theological approach and viewpoint concerning Christian and Muslim relations” and recommended “coordinating the development and distribution of additional resources for study and reflection as they become available.” That Assembly also called on seminaries and church-related colleges and campus ministries to promote programs on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations, and suggested that “Presbyterians ... take every opportunity to come to know and become friends with their Muslim neighbors” (Minutes of the 199th GA, 31.327). The Office of Interfaith Relations, created in part in response to the recommendations included in this study, has worked consistently since 1988 to provide resource materials and support such efforts.

“A Common Word Between Us and You” is an invitation to such understanding from a remarkably diverse group of Muslims worldwide, including 16 notable Muslim leaders in the United States. In welcoming the document, Stated Clerk Clifton Kilpatrick said, “I urge Presbyterians to read this letter from the Muslim community, to continue to build honest, searching, and respectful relations with Muslims in our local communities and in our nation, and to seek opportunities for common action where compatible means and ends exist.” Responses to it have also been made by a wide variety of Christian leaders and institutions (see <http://www.acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en&page=responses>). The Presbyterian Church (USA) is actively involved in the process of crafting an ecumenical theological response to “A Common Word” through the Interfaith Relations and Faith and Order Commissions of the National Council of Churches of Christ (USA). This response, after appropriate review by the churches, will be issued by the NCCCUSA at its fall meeting in 2008, and will then be available for study along with A Common Word. The Office of Interfaith Relations will ensure that a guide for use of the two documents will also be ready by that time.

Overture 50 *On Response to an Invitation to Interfaith Dialogue***RECOMMENDATION**

The Presbytery of Baltimore overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) to support *A Common Word Between Us and You*, an invitation to dialogue and cooperation from 138 Muslim clerics, and to commend this document to our congregations, governing bodies, and seminaries for study and consideration as a primary source for engaging in substantive interfaith dialogue with the goal of greater understanding and cooperation among members of the Abrahamic faith traditions as the pathway to a new era of global peace and justice.

RATIONALE

On 11 October 2007, 138 leaders and scholars of the global Muslim community issued the document, *A Common Word Between Us and You*. The document is historic in that it is the first time in the history of Islam that its leadership has asked Christians, as the document puts it, "... to come together with us on the common essentials of our two religions ... *that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God ...*" [page 15, italics in the original, the word lords is lowercase], and that "the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us, for our common ground is that on which hangs *all the Law and the Prophets* (Matthew 22:37-40), referring to our duty to love God and neighbor."

The invitation to dialogue acknowledges that "Finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not simply a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders ... our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake."

It is now the responsibility of Christians to respond to this invitation in the recognition that, as the statement, *A Common Word Between Us and You* points out: "together Christians and Muslims make up 55% of the world's population" and, "If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace."

Attachment

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

A Common Word Between Us and You

[Summary and Abridgement]

[For the full text please see: <www.acommonword.org>]

Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.

The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity. The following are only a few examples:

Of God's Unity, God says in the Holy Qur'an: *Say: He is God, the One! / God, the Self-Sufficient Besought of all! (Al-Ikhlās, 112:1-2)*. Of the necessity of love for God, God says in the Holy Qur'an: *So invoke the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself to Him with a complete devotion (Al-Muzzammil, 73:8)*. Of the necessity of love for the neighbour, the Prophet Muhammad r said: *"None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself."*

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ u said: *'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. / And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. / And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.*" (Mark 12:29-31)

In the Holy Qur'an, God Most High enjoins Muslims to issue the following call to Christians (and Jews—the *People of the Scripture*):

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (Aal 'Imran 3:64)

The words: *we shall ascribe no partner unto Him* relate to the Unity of God, and the words: *worship none but God*, relate to being totally devoted to God. Hence they all relate to the *First and Greatest Commandment*. According to one of the oldest and most authoritative commentaries on the Holy Qur'an the words: *that none of us shall take others for lords beside God*, mean 'that none of us should obey the other in disobedience to what God has commanded'. This relates to the Second Commandment because justice and freedom of religion are a crucial part of love of the neighbour.

Thus in obedience to the Holy Qur'an, we as Muslims invite Christians to come together with us on the basis of what is common to us, which is also what is most essential to our faith and practice: the *Two Commandments* of love.