
ECU-DIALOGUE

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The Power and Promise of Peace *The World Council Focuses on the U.S.*

Sara Lisherness, Director, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program

“May you each feel the renewal of God’s Spirit within — the power and promise of peace which passes all human understanding.” With these words Deborah DeWinter, World Council of Churches program executive for the U.S., closed a meeting of scholars gathered on Palm Sunday weekend at the invitation of the committee responsible for implementing the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) in this country. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) hosted the group in Louisville, Ky, on behalf of the WCC. The scholars, from ten denominations and eight countries around the world, are studying at U.S. theological institutions under the WCC Scholars Program.

U.S. Focus in 2004

The United States is the global focus of the Decade this year, and the ten participants reflected upon its theme, “The Power and Promise of Peace,” through each presenting a paper. They covered topics relevant to the liturgical season: the meaning of the passion and suffering of Christ and the power of violence (the cross) and the call to overcome violence (the resurrection). The scholars’ spirited discussions also reflected upon their experience of living in the U.S. and the views they have developed on cultural customs that contribute to or diminish violence, the “Americanization” of the world, the war in Iraq, and what it means to follow Christ’s call to be peacemakers while living in the world’s most powerful nation. During their brief time together, the small group forged a community that was a safe place for honest, open dialogue and strengthened a common commitment to overcome violence and work for peace.

Why a U.S. focus

The Scholar’s Gathering is one of many events that are planned for the Decade’s U.S. focus. The WCC has developed a calendar, found on its web site, that identifies many denominational and ecumenical events.

Many people have asked, “Why choose the U. S. as the focus of the Decade to Overcome Violence for 2004? Isn’t the need more urgent in other areas of the world?”

The United States was selected in part because:

- Americans have struggled with violence throughout the life of our nation. We have built a culture deeply stained with violence yet we also have a rich history of non-violent movements. Americans continue to be divided regarding the resort to violence to achieve social and political ends.
- The United States has enormous global influence — economic, political, cultural, and military — for good and for ill.
- The prominence of churches in the United States permits them to play important roles both in buttressing the status quo and in promoting social change. They have worked to eliminate injustice and violence (while also confessing their complicity) but have often done so independently and sporadically — and sometimes at cross-purposes. The Decade may be an occasion for greater cooperation.
- Especially at local and regional levels in the U.S., there is increasing interfaith cooperation and dialogue that can involve people from independent Christian churches and from the substantial number of other faith traditions, including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus.

How churches can cooperate

The question perhaps is not *why* a U.S. focus, but *how* the ecumenical community in the U.S. can participate in the Decade in meaningful, transformative ways. How can the PC(USA) join with brothers and sisters around the world committed to being agents of reconciliation and peace? Presbyterians have long worked for reconciliation and peace in extensive and diverse ways, yet the Decade is unique in providing opportunity to expand and enrich our work by nurturing broader commitment with the larger church.

Additionally, the PC(USA) has developed the Interfaith Listening Project as one way of developing mutual respect and understanding between faith communities. (See <www.pcusa.org/listeningproject>)

Some strategies for involvement in the Decade include:

- 1** Engage in prayer and Bible study that grapple with overcoming violence. Consider hosting a class on a weeknight and inviting other churches to participate.
- 2** Identify a form of violence prevalent in your community and commit to addressing it. One concern shared by churches around the world is domestic violence. (See <www.pcusa.org/phewa/; click Resources, then PADVN.)
- 3** Work with others to advocate for and support peacemaking efforts in regions of the world impacted by war or other forms of civil conflict. (See <www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/; click Act Now.)
- 4** Organize an event or celebration that launches the Decade in your community.
- 5** Coordinate efforts toward interfaith dialogue and understanding in your community.

Overcoming the subtle and overt forms of violence that permeate our own lives is a daunting task, but it is one from which we, as people of faith, do not shrink. We know that, at the beginning and the end of our work, our faith in Jesus Christ is the true “power and promise of peace.”

Resources:

Use DOV resources on the web to help implement your involvements. Visit <www2.wcc-coe.org/dov.nsf>.



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A New Web Site ECU-DIALOGUE readers are invited to use the new interfaith relations pages on the PC(USA) web site, available from mid-June at <www.pcusa.org/interfaith>.

Site features

- Updates on activities
- An “About Us” section to introduce the work and mission of the interfaith relations office
- “Tools for Understanding” to identify useful resources for Presbyterians
- “Links of Interest” to sites of other religious traditions and materials with information such as religious calendars, data on pluralism in the United States
- Information on this year's Interfaith Listening Project
- A “Faith and Culture” section to explore the many complex issues — and delicious recipes! — at the intersection of religious practice and cultural expression

Becoming part of a network

Those wanting to be part of a network of Presbyterians interested or engaged in interfaith relations are invited to use the “Connect” feature.

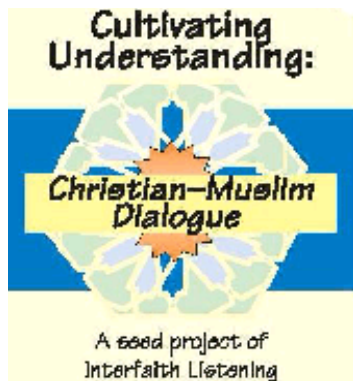
The Interfaith Listening Project

It May Be Headed Your Way!

Interfaith Listening planners have drawn up an initial list of the presbyteries and people who will be hosting ten Christian-Muslim teams between September 23 and October 7, 2004.

These teams will be made up of a Christian and a Muslim who have been in relationship in their own countries. They have been invited to talk with us about relating to one another in their particular, and sometimes challenging, contexts.

Unexpected alterations may occur in scheduling. If all goes as anticipated when the list was drawn up at the end of April, however, the teams will fan out across the country to visit in the following presbyteries:



- Egypt team to Western New York, Des Moines, Transylvania, and Ohio Valley
- Ethiopia team to Twin Cities Area, Shenandoah, and Peace River
- India team to Pittsburgh and Shenango, Miami, and Muskingum Valley
- Indonesia team to Sierra Blanca, Grace, and Northern New York
- Jordan team to Elizabeth, Newark, New Brunswick, and Wyoming
- Lebanon team to Great Rivers, Lake Michigan, and New Hope
- Niger team to Mackinac, Cimarron, and Missouri Union
- Pakistan team to Southern New England, Albany, New Covenant, and Cayuga-Syracuse
- Philippines team to San Jose and Palo Duro
- South Africa team to Central Florida, New Castle, Eastern Tennessee, and Western North Carolina

For more information, go to <www.pcusa.org/listeningproject>, or contact Sherri Auld by phone at 1(888)728-7228 x5313 or by e-mail at <sauld@ctr.pcusa.org>.

“When God gives us courage to engage in the giving and receiving — the listening and speaking — of dialogue, Jesus is present....[and] we are enabled to be truly ourselves in authentic relationships.”

– Presbyterian Principles for Interfaith Dialogue, 211th General Assembly (1999)

30th Annual Seminar for Clergy and Laity October 26 – November 3, 2004, Geneva, Switzerland.

The primary destination of this annual travel study event is the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, home to the administrative offices of the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the Conference of European Churches, and other ecumenical agencies. In addition to meeting with ecumenical colleagues at the center, participants will enjoy a full-day excursion to the Orthodox Center in Chambesey and the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey.

The cost for the seminar is \$1,100 per person, with shared room. (The supplement for single accommodation is \$200.) This cost covers all meals (except Sunday lunch), a half-day guided walking tour of Geneva, a full-day sightseeing tour to Gruyeres and Chateau de Chillon including a fondue/raclette lunch in a traditional Swiss restaurant, and a bus pass for local transportation.

Contact Toni Roppel for applications: phone 1(888)728-7228 or e-mail <troppe@ctr.pcusa.org>.

Lisa Yablonsky, WCC Intern

by Theo Gill, WCC senior editor in Geneva

Lisa Yablonsky says that she knew nothing of the World Council of Churches (WCC) until she was a college senior. Months later, in the fall of 2003, she joined the WCC's public information team as a one-year intern in Geneva. "I still feel a little uncomfortable when helping inform the press about what the council is doing," she confesses. "There is so much to learn, and it's hard to grasp what the WCC is, without actually having been here engaging in the dialogue."

Lisa Yablonsky, who is 22 years old, grew up in the Community Presbyterian Church of Ringwood, NJ. She has positive memories of the town's ecumenical prayer service at Thanksgiving and of attending an annual, inter-presbytery youth conference in Lake George, NY. At Penn State University, she became active in State College Presbyterian Church, leading a Logos study group for 6- to 10-year-olds, working with Habitat for Humanity and the church's hunger program, and participating in domestic mission trips.

"Last year, I was facing graduation and searching for a job," Lisa recalls. "That's when Diana Malcom, a minister at the State College church, gave me a packet of information about WCC internships. I didn't take it seriously at first, but Diana kept encouraging me to apply."

Lisa is one of six interns serving until September 2004. She and Rachel Medema, of the Reformed Church in America, are the only two from a single country; others have come from Zimbabwe, India, Denmark, and Belarus. The WCC provides studio apartments and an introductory French course. As part of their internships, they gather weekly in an "ecumenical forum" hosted by the Rev. Freddy Knutsen of the WCC's office for youth and young adults. Speakers from the WCC and related ecumenical organizations are invited to address the forum, and these sessions often climax in stimulating discussion. In April, Knutsen led the interns on a field trip to Rome where they met with Vatican officials.



During their early months of service, the interns witnessed important developments in the life of the WCC. Konrad Raiser retired as general secretary following 11 years in office and Samuel Kobia, a Methodist from Kenya, became the first WCC general secretary from Africa. Interns assisted in preparations for worldwide gatherings of the Faith and Order commission (summer 2004) and the commission on World Mission and Evangelism (2005). And just as the interns arrived in Geneva, the decision was being made to hold the Ninth Assembly (February 2006) at Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Lisa Yablonsky's assignment in public information carries a responsibility for interpreting the nature of WCC assemblies and consultations. At first she felt her greatest challenge lay in anticipating questions from reporters who want to identify concrete results produced by ecumenical conferences.

"The World Council of Churches," she observes, "is a group of churches talking with each other to see what is possible. What are they able to do together, or do with the help of partners like relief agencies and other non-governmental organizations? Ecumenical meetings are not so much about doing something as facilitating the work of others, whether those others are churches or coalitions for social justice. An ecumenical conference does not, by itself, produce an international treaty or authorize a substantial monetary grant for needy people. Instead, it usually functions as a starting point, a recognition of churches' responsibility to take certain actions, an invitation to partnership."

Lisa expresses appreciation for the importance of international networking, but she sees the local church as the primary agent of Christian ministry. "I am beginning to get a sense of how churches interact globally. None of us is alone in the world.... But the more I hear about how the World Council's ideas are fleshed out, the more I realize how dependent the world church is on local work by congregations. When I began studying the WCC, I was upset at how slowly progress seems to be made.... But now I think that the World Council has to move slowly, simply

because we cannot presume to know what's right in a particular situation. Finding out requires consultation with people who are directly involved. And that takes time."

Dialogue is a key concept for Lisa. "In college," she says, "professors encouraged us to take part in the dialogues happening around us every day. Sometimes it was difficult for me to discern even what those dialogues were. But from my vantage point as a WCC intern, I can see that I have been given an opportunity to take part in a world-wide discussion of the role of youth in the church. I am able to draw on my own experience, to listen very carefully to what is being said by others on the basis of their experience, and to make a real contribution to the shape of a new dialogue."

One thing she has learned from listening to other interns is the strength of Christian student movements in other parts of the world. "Rachel and I hope to visit youth conferences while we're in Europe and to address more clearly how they might work in the United States."

Lisa respects the capacity of dialogue to "open doorways to other traditions and faiths." Still, she has found that her ecumenical involvement has served to heighten her regard for the particular contributions of Presbyterianism. "Other worship traditions don't necessarily speak to me," she admits. "It's one thing to accept other churches, but it's also important to recognize our differences. One of the goals of the ecumenical movement should be to lift up the strengths of each denomination.... Our aim should be to live in close proximity, harmoniously, while each preserving our individual identity."

In the long term, she looks forward to returning home, "ready to be involved in the church at the local level where people are working for change."

Africa as a Venue for Reflection

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches 24th General Council

By Kathy Reeves, Associate for Ecumenical and Mission Partnerships

"That all may have life in fullness" (from John 10:1-17): this will be the theme when Reformed and Congregational Christians from around the world gather on the campus of the University of Ghana in Accra for the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) on July 30 - August 13. Official delegates and visitors will name issues, offer insights, and reflect biblically on what fullness of life means and how our witness as a global Reformed family can make a difference for life.



Every day will begin with worship, followed by Bible study. Plenary presentations will consider Africa, gender justice, and justice in the economy and the earth. A new executive committee will be elected to guide WARC until its next General Council, seven years away. A real highlight of the meeting, however, will be a day-long pilgrimage to the Elminah and Cape Coast "slave castles."

Monolithic dungeons set directly on the seacoast and constructed with stones imported from Europe, these forts were built to hold captured Africans until ships arrived to carry them across the Atlantic. Between 1540 and 1850, an estimated 15 million Africans were transported to the Americas. Today the castles, maintained as historical sites, are ready to receive pilgrims.

The entire day of the pilgrimage will be a liturgical reflection on the history and legacy of the African slave trade. "The pilgrimage will be a powerful symbol in the life of the General Council," says Doug Chial of the General Council coordination team and a member of the PC(USA). "Slavery as such has not disappear-ed from the earth and millions of people today, in Africa and else-where, are subjected to economic enslavement." Pilgrims

will struggle with the call to ensure that our legacy is one of breaking every chain of injustice so that all may have life in fullness.

“As African churches deepen their conviction that God cares for them as whole human beings and is working to overcome the forces of death in every form, they are poised to engage in mission for life in fullness.”

– Reformed World, Dec. 2002

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will be officially represented by delegates elected by the 214th General Assembly (2002): Ruth Berry, Julie Walkup Bird, Will Browne, Anna Case-Winters, Ruy Costa, Clifton Kirkpatrick, Delrio Ligons-Berry, Marian McClure, Neal Presa, Mary Newbern Williams, and Robina Winbush. In addition to sending delegates, the PC(USA) will be involved in Accra through the General Council visitors’ program as well as through participation in the young adult stewards program and as “adjunct WARC staff.”

Resources:

See <www.warc.ch> for downloadable resources.

Vigor in Christian-Jewish Relations

Study Centers and Local Work

Jay T. Rock, Coordinator for Interfaith Relations

The multidimensional nature of the relationship now enjoyed between Christians and Jews in the United States and the maturity of this relationship are among the most notable interfaith developments of the past forty years. As a feature of this development, we can celebrate a growing movement away from primarily *national* collaboration, dialogue, and education and toward *local* efforts. An important source for such dynamism is the study centers for Christian-Jewish relations that have grown up around the country.

The history of collaboration

Although there are still difficulties — most notably tensions in African American-Jewish relations and differing approaches to Israeli-Palestinian peace — for the most part Jews and Christians here experience an ease and mutuality of relationship that is historically very new. This reality is built in part on a long history of Jewish-Christian work in the U.S. on social and communal issues.

- Sharing of facilities and mutual assistance in the establishment of synagogues and churches in many cities and towns during westward expansion in the 19th century
- Working together on resettling refugees and addressing related issues from the 1890s into the present
- Jewish involvement in the founding of the NAACP
- Some Christian efforts to focus U.S. attention on German Jews during the 1930s
- Joint civil rights work in the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s



In the last 15 to 20 years, our relationship has matured. Jews and Christians work together in Washington, D.C., and in many states on a wide array of domestic policy concerns, including religion in the public schools and the systemic issues that keep people poor and homeless. The issues on which Christians and Jews agree and work together greatly outnumber those on which they do not.

We have also developed extensive and interconnected Jewish-Christian networks around the country, which allow a discernible move beyond tolerance toward greater mutuality. We see joint responses to hate crimes and hate speech. Local interfaith service efforts and programs are burgeoning. Local work on issues of justice and peace, including Israeli-Palestinian peace, continues in many places.

Theological approaches

Significant work has also been done to address how our communities understand one another theologically. The theological statements of the churches (from 1987 through 1999) and the reevaluation of Christianity by Jewish scholars in *Dabru Emet* (released in 2000) are milestones in this process.

In addition, joint congregational studies between churches and synagogues, briefings for teachers about the traditions of the other, and programs in schools and communities have been part of the expansion of educational efforts.

Between 1972 and 1999, 16 National Workshops on Christian-Jewish Relations were held around the country to bring people together and foster understanding. These national workshops no longer seem to be sustainable. Nevertheless, an array of vital and energetic Christian-Jewish dialogues and activities are going on locally.

Present-day centers

Centers for Jewish-Christian study and dialogue now occupy a very important place in maintaining and deepening relations. At least 24 such centers in the U.S. provide a variety of program events and educational materials to deepen and expand relationships.

Presbyterians may be especially interested in the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies (ICJS) which has, for the last 14 years, offered a variety of educational programs from its base in Baltimore, Md. This institute and its director, Presbyterian minister Christopher Leighton, have developed innovative projects dealing with seminary education and building understanding in congregations and schools. The institute sponsors an ongoing Jewish and Christian Educators' Study Group and was also the sponsor of the National Jewish Scholars Project that produced *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*, a landmark statement from Jewish scholars that opens the door to renewed conversations among Jews and Christians on a variety of topics.

"*Dabru Emet* breaks new ground in Jewish-Christian relations by offering to Christians a series of simple statements about the Jewish understanding of Christians and Christian-Jewish relations. It therefore also offers a new foundation for Christian-Jewish discussions."

– Background paper to WMD action of Jan. 2002

Recently, these centers have come together to form the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations, with headquarters at the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning of Boston College. The Council provides for cooperation among its member centers and "hopes to promote further research and publication on the history, theology, and contemporary realities of Jewish-Christian relations."

More information: On ICJS, visit <www.icjs.org> on the web or write to 1316 Park Avenue, Baltimore, MD, 21217. E-mail <cjlearning@bc.edu> for information about the councils and the centers around the country.

Background on Christian-Jewish Relations New Opportunities

National Jewish-Christian relationships have recently opened up two opportunities for building stronger ties and deeper understanding between Presbyterian Christians and Jews in the United States.

1 Defining the focus

At the initiative of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), and with the cooperation of the interfaith relations office of the National Council of Churches, lay and clergy leaders of five churches and a number of Jewish organizations came together in Washington, D.C., this May to review the history of our relationship, begin a discussion of tensions over Israeli-Palestinian public policies, and identify a wide range of possible issues to discuss and joint actions to take.

This meeting renewed the annual national gatherings of Christian and Jewish leadership held from 1992 to 2002. Such gatherings are especially significant for bringing together leaders of the Jewish religious bodies (congregational and rabbinic) and of the so-called "secular" or "defense" agencies (the AJC and Anti-Defamation League) with an ecumenical group of "mainline" church representatives.

The conversation at the recent meeting was cordial, careful, and remarkably free of emotionally-overcharged disagreements. A significant number of Jews and Christians agreed that to focus primarily or solely on Middle East policies and tensions would not be as productive as to seek a dialogue that would address an array of issues — including Israel but also matters on which there has been agreement and a history of joint work.

These national discussions can be expected to have some effect upon local conversations and action proposals.

2 *Open Doors, Open Minds study*

Presbyterians in local churches are being invited to join their neighbors in local Reform synagogues for a newly-planned study called *Open Doors, Open Minds*, distributed by the Union for Reform Judaism. Local Reform leaders have already received a study book with seven suggested sessions, including two sessions focusing on the land and people of Israel. A brief PC(USA) addendum, prepared by the inter-faith relations office, will provide interested Presbyterian congregations with more background on some issues and additional study suggestions.

Resource: *Open Doors, Open Minds* material is available at <www.pcusa.org/interfaith> by mid-June. Limited print copies are available upon request for those unable to download and print PDF-formatted files using Acrobat Reader.

Other Resources and Events

NAIN / NAEIS Conference

The North American Interfaith Network and the National Association of Ecumenical and Interfaith Staff meet jointly in New York City on July 24-27, 2004.

The conference will have four major workshop tracks:

- professional development (including a panel of fundraisers and non-profit advisors)
- public policy and the United Nations
- ecumenical and interfaith (looking at common-

alities and tensions)

- an interfaith film festival showcasing faith-inspired films

For information and registration, contact

IMPACTCoalition at (866) 433-2283

or <NAIN2004@cs.com>.

Registration of \$295 was payable until May 31 and has increased thereafter by \$50.

Islam and Christianity

PC(USA) Congregational Ministries, phone (888)728-7228 x5080. Available Spring 2004.

This study introduces basic tenets of Islam to Christians, including small group discussions on scripture, monotheism, Jesus, the five pillars of Islam, Muhammad, the requirements for holy living. Students can expect to grow in their own faith in Jesus Christ.

Creating Interfaith Community

2003 United Methodist Women's study. General Board of Global Ministries. Order from UMC Service Center, 1(800)305-98857. More information at <<http://gbgm-umc.org/missionstudies/interfaith/p-contemporary.html>>.

- *Creating Interfaith Community*, adult study by retired NCC interfaith director Marston Speight with leader's guide by Jack and Glory Dharmaraj (# 03286). Focuses on the U.S.

- *Seven Friends—Seven Faiths*, by former PC(USA) curriculum writer Martha Bettis Gee. Children's storybook about celebrating faith holidays, together with attractive photo cubes (#03287). Teacher's guide designed for 6-12 year olds and an intergenerational experience (#03288).

- *Who Is That Kid Next Door?* by Kelly Martini (#03289). Youth book with leader's guide engages interfaith issues, readers' personal faith journeys, and the quest to live with others.