### Minutes from Biotechnology Reference Group Meeting

### Held on Tuesday, September 23, 2014

**Present:** *In person:* Anne Mitchell (Chair), Emanuel Kolyvas, Rose Janson, Stephen Allan, George Tattrie, and Rebecca Ivanoff. *Via conference call:* Nick Caric, Peter Noteboom, Richard Crossman, and Jim Reid

**1a. Welcome:** Anne welcomed everyone, both in the room and on the phone, to the Meeting

**1b. Opening Worship:** Manny lead the worship:Psalm 104, v 1-35

**2. Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes:** The minutes from the last meeting and the agenda for this meeting were approved without amendment.

**3. News and Priority Updates from Member Churches:**

Nick Caric spoke about how he had facilitated a discussion on biotechnology with about 30 people at an annual meeting for pastors, and importance of this in creating awareness about these issues.

**4. We are more than our Genes: A Workshop on Christian Faith and New Genetic Technologies**

In order to help promote the Faith and Genetics curriculum, we have decided to host a workshop on November 1st. If this workshop goes well, we hope to replicate it in different cities.

The proposed Agenda for the November 1st workshop is:

9:00 Doors Open: coffee and snacks available

9:30 Opening Reflection and Warm-Up on Genetic Technologies and Faith

10:00 Genetics, Faith and Human Dignity (session one)

10:45 Break

11:00 Four Conversations: A Dialogue Cafe

* Genetic Technologies, Information and Personal Identity
* Genetic Technologies and Research on Human and Non-Human Subjects
* Genetic Technologies and the Engineering of Future Generations
* Genetic Technologies and Social Justice

12:00 Lunch

12:30 A Ripple:   
Planning to Widen the Conversation  
Feedback on the conversation and learning resources

1:30 Closing Circle and Reflections

2:00 Adjourn

Rebecca, Peter, Anne, George, Manny, and Stephan all plan to take part in supporting this event. Nick is going to check his schedule to see if he too can attend.

Our goal is to have 2 or 3 people from many different denominations.

**“Who the workshop is for:** This workshop is for people from all Christian traditions interested in exploring genetic technologies and how they intersect with faith perspectives on a day-to-day basis whether in health care, medical research, engineering future generations, or social justice, for example. This workshop is designed for people who have a curiosity about theology, ethics, and genetic technologies and want to be more aware of what is going on and watching how best to respond. If we say the church is a place for discernment, we want to create the space for thoughtful reflection.”

We discussed that when promoting the workshop we need to make it clear that you don’t have to be a trained geneticist to attend, but only to be curious. We need to find ways to show people that they are curious about these issues. These are important issues to many people. Like the psalm we heard at the beginning of this meeting, these issues are related to our caring for all of God’s creation.

It was suggested that a cover letter be written to go out with our flyer to different congregations. In this cover letter perhaps some of the queries contained in some of the scenarios in the curriculum could be included.

When participants register, we would like to give them a one pager that gives them brief summaries of the case studies with a link to the online version of the curriculum to read before hand if they are ambitious. We would still give them a hard copy of the book at the workshop.

In order to make sure all participants have time to read over these items before the workshop, it was suggested that we have a cut off date for registration some time after Thanksgiving.

At this point we would have a conference call with BRG members who are going to be involved in the workshop to discuss who is doing what.

***Action Items:***

* Rebecca and Peter to create a cover letter for flyer. Anne and Stephen can comment on this by Thursday, September 25.
* Rebecca to resend out the workshop flyer to BRG members
* Rebecca to ask Jesse to fix typo online.
* Conference call with Peter and Rebecca and other supporting people after this meeting so we can work out roles.

**5. Ethical Reflections on Faith, Science and Technology:** We right now have three contributions in hand: Manny’s from the Orthodox perspective, another from Jim from Reformed (needs to be written up in a 2000 – 3000 word article), and Ursula’s from a Quaker perspective. For Ursula’s piece we have the transcript of the audio, but it needs editing down to 2,000 words.

We are looking for further perspectives on faith, science and technology. This is a very broad topic, so we need to make it clear that we are limiting these issues to the work that the BRG is working on. We are not interested in physics, astronomy, for example but on biotechnologies, synthetic biology, etc.

We discussed what kind of priority having putting together a publication of these contributions was. It was suggested that we should not rush into producing a hardcopy but should also look into creating a location on our webpage were the contributions could be published with the authors’ permission. These are personal perspectives by individuals in different denominations and this should be made clear that they may not represent the views of the national bodies.

We reviewed the one-page proposed template for these reflection pieces, prepared by Peter.

**Action items:**

* Stephen to look into if other ecumenical bodies are doing something like this.
* Anne to attach Peter’s revised draft to these minutes.
* Suggestions for a re-draft:
  + Revise the content part (…Faith and science with respect to what the biotechnology reference group is dealing with, such as…..)
  + Strengthen who the audience is
* Once this draft is created, each of us send out an invitation to for writers to be posted in our various locations.

**6. CCC Biotechnology Webpages:**

The webpage is a place that allows us to meet a goal of the BRG to create a space where we learn together. How can we get new information up onto the website? Should we create a template of how we want to present issues that we post on the site? How do we deal with copyright issues? How do we decide on what goes up? Where the information is coming from?

One way of addressing these issues would be to create a location with links websites link such as CBAN, ETC group, that have good information that has a long shelf life.

**Action Item:**

* Brainstorm list at the next meeting. Put on the agenda and bring ideas!

**7. 70th Anniversary Assembly – November 17 – 21, 2014 at Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre –** [**www.qoa.ca**](http://www.qoa.ca)

Business Meeting scheduled for Tuesday morning and afternoon the 18th Thought is to have links between bodies of the CCC who we can fit together. We are all invited to be involved in shared time. Peter is committed to finding resources for travel, registrations, food and accommodation. $2400 from BRG and Church activities fund in CCC. If you need funds send Peter and email.

On Tuesday the 18th or Wednesday the 19th we would like to have our business meeting in the morning with the last hour of the allotted time to meet with one of the commissions. After lunch, we would like to finish our own meeting and then have an hour with the other commission. The BRG **links** the JP and F&W Commissions, but we haven’t met with them and asked how we can provide this linkage. The other day (either Wednesday or Tuesday) could be used by us as a retreat to have more open dialogue without a strict agenda.

**Action Items:**

* Do preparation on what we are going to do with each commission, create an agenda
* Have a discussion via email and then face to face on November 1st after the workshop.

## 8. Watching Issues/Events and Updates:

## Template Adoption: Brief fact sheets of issues we have been reporting on. Stephen said he wanted to develop a bit of a template. The idea of the fact sheets would be very brief. Modeled on the ecumenical healthcare network have worked on for issues such as pharmaceuticals, homecare… all in 350 words with graphics.

## How would we use these sheets? To discuss later. Do they represent the views of the council? Stephen will send a link or pdf of one of these factsheets.

## Synthetic biology: Anne read the minute from CYM approving the synthetic biology principles and suggested actions. CFSC meeting is end of October where Anne will talk about how Synthetic biology fits in with their agenda.

## Stem Cell Research: this was held over, as Moira was not present to report.

## Nanotechnology

* The August 1st Issue of The Scientist has an article on nanotechnology. An update on what is happening to nanotechnology and disease control and cancer. See: <http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/40569/title/A-Matter-of-Size/>

## Genome Canada:

## <http://www.genomecanada.ca/en/>

## Genome Canada is hosting a conference in Ottawa called “Genomics: the Power and the Promise”, November 24-26, 2014 (Ottawa Convention Centre, Ottawa, Canada). We want a representative there. Who? Can someone from outside BRG go?

## GE Animals and Cloning~~:~~ This issue has been dropped from our list as of April 1, 2014.

## GMO labeling: Rose reported. There is no mandatory labeling in Canada. Eight polls show what Canadians want labels. National standard for voluntary made by no one is using it. EU, Brazil, Japan, etc all have laws on this. US labeling campaigns have been very active, such as referendum in California. In Canada a 2001 private members bills defeated, as one in 2008. Canadian government established a committee for voluntary labelling. Lucy Sherat of CBAN said labelling is not a priority at this time. What is more important is to stop the organisms from being approved as labelling does not addresses environmental issues, social issues of literacy needed for labelling, etc. We need to address larger problem patented seeds and environmental consequences of salmon. Approval of the first GM food animal is salmon. Pressure to approve GMO apple and first perennial (alfalfa) and 24D animals.

## Rose suggested that we should learn about these issues as churches and intervene. We should be advocating a moratorium on all new approvals, as it needs more public discussion and debate. Another thing we can do is to become more informed in these issues, such as by reading “Will GM Crops feed the world?” or to watch “GMO OMG”.

## Can we watch this movie over one of our lunches? Rose to look into to whom we can write regarding a moratorium. What are the health risks of these issues? What are the social impacts of these issues?

## Consumer and Genetic Privacy: Nothing new to report.

## Mitochondrial Testing: Nothing new to report.

**9. Other Business:**

**a. Environment Canada Document:**

We have received an email from Environment Canada. The email will be attached to these minutes. Just of it that Nagoya protocol is coming into effect soon, and Environment Canada want to have a discussion on it to create a plan to implement the protocol in Canada. This document attached to the received email has been developed to advance this discussion.

We want to have a discussion with them, but what would that look like? What information do we need to learn before setting up a meeting? We need to have resources to look into this. We need a bright young intern to do some research on this.

**Action Item:**

Anne to talk to Peter about drafting an email in response.

**b. Book Recommendation:** Stephen has been reading a book from the Council for Responsible Genetics (CRG) called *Genetic Explanations: Sense and Nonsense* edited by Sheldon Krimsky and Jeremy Gruber. He ordered it direct from the CRG. Stephen will circulate one chapter. The book explores how the way genetics research works today is reductionist and explains how the full picture is missed by this way of doing research.

Manny asked, “Should we have a reading club and all read one book a year to discuss with our group and also our congregations?” This is something for us to consider.

**10a: Closing Prayer**: We closed with a moment of silence and a sharing led by Stephen Allan about his friend and award-winning radio journalist, Bob Carty, who passed away recently.

**10b: Next meeting:**

November 1st after Workshop

November 18th at General Assembly