

Christian Interfaith Reference Group Of the Canadian Council of Churches Terms of Reference

1. Preamble

The Constitution of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) mandates that interfaith engagement be part of the work of the Council (see By-Laws Section VIII, A, 4b and 4c).

Historically, the CCC relates to several national interfaith bodies, including the Canadian Christian Jewish Consultation and the National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee as well as the World Conference of Religions for Peace. Prior to the creation of the CIRG, a small Interfaith Liaison Committee met to help member churches listen to and understand each other's approach to, and work in, interfaith relations.

The experience of the Faith & Witness and Justice & Peace Commissions has shown that the work of both touches upon and is affected by interfaith relations. Some examples include the Governing Board's visits to a local mosque and a local synagogue; the faith groups' letter on Darfur, June 2006; the church leaders' letter against anti-semitism (December 2003); and the pamphlet giving guidelines for Religious Ceremonies Involving More Than One Faith Tradition.

2. Mandate

The work of the Interfaith Reference Group will involve both ecumenical engagement about religious diversity, and continued ecumenical engagement with different religions, consistent with the principles of the CCC. The foundational work will be in-house engagement with the participation of the member churches focusing on interfaith matters. The group may make contact with different religions, build relationships, and build foundations for addressing common concerns.

The Reference Group will write its own three-year plan to coincide with the triennium of the Council.

a. Information

- i. Share information about what the churches are doing regarding interfaith work and how they are doing it

- ii. Encourage one another in interfaith endeavours and offer feedback to each other
- b. Education
 - i. Encourage study of the diversity of religions in Canada today and of the internal diversity that each one of them experiences.
 - ii. Help the Canadian churches to overcome stereotyping of people on the basis of religion and past experience.
 - iii. Create a space for interfaith education in which existing educational resources could be shared and new ones could be generated.
- c. Theological Reflection
 - i. Provide a space for an ecumenical reflection on interfaith relations.
 - ii. Discuss member churches' theologies of religion, and engage in theological reflection on religious diversity in Canada.
- d. Relationship-building
 - i. Establish channels through which mutual knowledge between Christianity and other religions in Canada may develop.
 - ii. Monitor the Council's relationship to existing national interfaith groups.
 - iii. Support the CCC in interfaith actions and responses arising from current issues.

3. Guiding Principles

- a. The Reference Group's work is rooted in and respectful of Forum. We look for the ways in which the churches can speak and act together.
- b. Education and information are the key components of the Reference Group. This means mutual education about the work and views of member churches, and about interfaith relations as they are developing in Canada.
- c. The work of interfaith understanding is necessary, and it is important to proceed ecumenically as much as possible. The Reference Group is a

resource to help member churches communicate with different religions both locally and nationally.

4. Membership

- a. Each Member and Associate Member church of the Canadian Council of Churches may appoint at least one representative with attention to maintaining balanced representation of member churches. Appointments are generally for one triennium, renewable, in accordance with the practices of member churches.
- b. The Reference Group will include a representative from each Commission, Justice & Peace and Faith & Witness.
- c. Other individuals may be called upon by the Reference Group, to assist in particular tasks, to augment particular skill sets needed for the work, and to facilitate connections with key organizations and institutions.
- d. The Chair will be selected internally.

5. Resources

- a. Budget provision will be included in the annual budget of the CCC.
- b. Staff time will be dedicated to the Reference Group. Each Commission will give a portion of its staff time.

6. Accountability and Relationships

- a. The Reference Group will report directly to the Governing Board of the Canadian Council of Churches, to which it is accountable.
- b. The Reference Group will work collaboratively with each Commission.

9. Meetings

- a. At least one face-to-face meeting will take place each year. Other meetings and ongoing communication will be arranged by the group.
- b. Travel and accommodation expenses of representatives, other than CCC staff, will be borne by the respective member churches.