



THE CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES LE CONSEIL CANADIEN DES ÉGLISES

Highlights and Decisions

The Canadian Council of Churches Governing Board Meeting

May 13-15, 2015 – St. Paul's University, Ottawa, ON

The Canadian Council of Churches is the broadest and most inclusive ecumenical body in Canada. The Governing Board brings together representatives from Anglican; Evangelical; Free Church; Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox; Protestant; and Catholic member denominations to review and coordinate its Committees and Commissions, appoint officers, obtain funds, and determine external relations to other religious and secular organizations and movements.

At this semi-annual meeting of the Governing Board we:

1. **Heard** a summary of major accomplishments during the 2012-15 Triennium and **thanked** outgoing President Jim Champ (Salvation Army), Vice-President Das Sydney (Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec), Vice-President Susan Eagle (United Church of Canada) and Cyprian Hutcheon (Orthodox Church in America) for faithful service.
2. **Voted** for new officers of the 2015-18 Triennium and **installed** them: President Alyson Barnett-Cowan (Anglican Church of Canada), Vice-President Willard Metzger (Mennonite Church Canada), Vice-President Stephen Kendall (Presbyterian Church in Canada), and Vice-President Ronald Fabbro (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops).
3. **Received** a report from General Secretary Karen Hamilton documenting her participation and leadership in the Canadian Theological Students' Conference in Winnipeg on human rights; the Whole Society Conference in Vancouver on bridging the religious secular divide; the North American conference and webinar series on Mission and Evangelism; and 8 stops of Justice Tour 2015 in Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Kitchener Waterloo, Halifax, Montreal and Ottawa on climate justice and ending poverty in Canada.
4. **Attended** the Ottawa stop of [Justice Tour 2015](#) on climate justice and ending poverty in Canada at Christ Church Anglican Cathedral with 130 other participants and **were alerted** by Susan Johnson, National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and Willard Metzger, Executive Director of Mennonite Church Canada to a forthcoming statement for denominational and faith community endorsement and engagement in the coming weeks and months.
5. **Applauded** John Siebert for a decade of inspired leadership as Executive Director of [Project Ploughshares](#) and **welcomed** Cesar Jaramillo as the new Executive Director.
6. **Received** briefing notes on physician assisted death; *Justice Tour 2015* (climate justice and ending poverty in Canada); commemorating Canada 150; and Canada, refugees, Syria then **met** with Members of Parliament and staff from the Office of the Prime Minister, the New Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, the Green Party, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Minister of State of Social Development, and the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.
7. **Noted** the release of the [2015 Federal Election Resource](#) from leading ecumenical and justice charities in Canada.
8. **Accepted** the 2014 audited financial statements and **appointed** auditors for 2015.
9. **Participated** in the President's Workshop on Ukraine and **were blessed** by Metropolitan Yuriy from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Canada providing a comprehensive overview of the situation in Ukraine with comments from Fr. Peter Galadza from the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada; Professor in Conflict Studies Vern Neufeld Redekop from the University of St. Paul; and Cesar Jaramillo from Project Ploughshares on the nuclear backdrop to the conflict.
10. **Worshipped** in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahado Tradition and **were challenged** by Fr. Messale Engeda on the situation in Ethiopia, especially for Ethiopian migrants to South Africa, Yemen and transit to Europe via the Mediterranean, **lamenting** the killing of 21 Ethiopian Christians in Libya.
11. **Approved by consensus** two important resolutions requesting action and engagement by member denominations on the Canadian Churches' Forum for Global Ministries and a Statement on Religious Freedom (see full below).
12. **Adjourned** with a sense of accomplishment and prayerful humility for three years of important achievements and anticipation for three years of new leadership and challenges.

The next meeting of the Governing Board is scheduled for November 25-27, 2015 at [Crieff Hills Conference Centre](#). Visit www.facebook.com/CCC.CCE for more pictures and highlights!

Canadian Churches' Forum for Global Ministries

Consensus resolution prepared by

- Andre Lavergne, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
- Jaroslaw Buciora, Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Canada
- Das Sydney, Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec
- Gail Allan, United Church of Canada
- Ronald Fabbro, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Anthony Elenbaas, Christian Reformed Church in North America
- Peter Noteboom, Canadian Council of Churches

Abbreviations

- The Canadian Council of Churches (the Council)
- Canadian Churches' Forum on Global Ministries (the Forum)

That the Governing Board

- 1) mandate the staff and Executive Committee of the Governing Board of the Council to proceed with practical integration of the two bodies (the Council and the Forum) where mutual agreement is evident such as in administration, personnel, event planning, communications and finances.
- 2) request that the Board of Management and staff of the Forum organize a forum on mission, evangelism/evangelization and culture in November 2015 in connection with the next Governing Board meeting of the Council.
- 3) request that member denominations of the Council consider proposing representatives to the Forum.
- 4) mandate the Executive to work with the Board of Management and staff of the Forum, during the 2015-18 Triennium, in shaping by consensus—through consultation and member denomination approval processes—the terms of reference of an appropriate entity (such as a Commission, Project, Program Agency for example) to direct this work.
- 5) request the Executive Committee of the Governing Board to involve the existing Commissions in the consultative process.
- 6) express our gratitude for the initiative of the Forum to bring this proposal before us and commit to working toward greater synergy together.

--Approved by Consensus, Friday May 15, Governing Board of The Canadian Council of Churches

Resolution Regarding the Statement on Religious Freedom (DRAFT) Christian Interfaith Reference Group, The Canadian Council of Churches

BE IT RESOLVED that this Governing Board:

- 1) receive the draft Statement on Religious Freedom (attached), prepared and approved by consensus by the Christian Interfaith Reference Group, at the request of the Executive Committee;
- 2) request the Executive Committee to clarify the nature and status of the statement;
- 3) commend the statement to the member churches for review and response;
- 4) refer the statement to the Commission on Faith and Witness, the Commission on Justice and Peace, and the Canadian Churches' Forum on Global Ministries for review and response;
- 5) direct these responses to the statement to be received through the General Secretariat no later than January 1, 2016.

--Approved by Consensus, Friday May 15, Governing Board of The Canadian Council of Churches

Statement on Religious Freedom (DRAFT)

Christian Interfaith Reference Group, The Canadian Council of Churches

1. For Christians, human rights are grounded in the dignity accorded each human being by virtue of having been made in the image and likeness of their Creator.¹ The intrinsic dignity of every human being includes the divinely given gifts of reason and free will. In exercising this reason and free will, individuals are at liberty to choose or change their religion or belief, and to express it either alone or in community with others, publicly or privately, in teaching, practice, worship and observance.²
2. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms names freedom of conscience and religion first among the “fundamental rights” of the people of this land.³ Even as the Charter describes Canada as a country “founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God,”⁴ we accept the secular nature of the state, and embrace Canada’s pluralistic complexion.
3. In the Canadian context, to be secular means to remain pluralistic. Secularism includes freedom of belief, both in one’s private and public life. Thus there should be no official religion in this country, but neither should there be any form of official atheism.
4. A healthy pluralism, one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such, does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual’s conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of places of worship.⁵
5. We therefore understand that religious symbols and attire can be intrinsic to one’s religious faith. They cannot be removed at a whim, “as if one were taking off a hockey sweater after a game,”⁶ and the state should have no role in regulating their use.
6. Religious fundamentalism is a growing concern, internationally and here in Canada. Placing limits on the religious freedoms of faith communities—especially religious minorities—risks exacerbating feelings of marginalization and exclusion, and may cultivate the very religious extremism such limits seek to avoid. The state should demonstrate impartiality in the crafting and enforcement of the law.
7. As Christians, we consider as allies Canadians of different faiths—or no faith—who also sincerely seek truth, beauty, and goodness. We believe these find their expression in the God of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we do not seek religious freedom that is denied to others. Rather, we support an inclusive secular society, open to all. We believe that freedom of religion serves both as a check against the potentially coercive power of the state, and as a means of promoting the common good and creating a truly just society.

¹ Genesis 1:26-27; see also *Becoming Human: On Theological Anthropology in an Age of Engineering Life* of the Canadian Council of Churches, Commission on Faith and Witness.

² Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18.

³ Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Article 2(a).

⁴ Preamble to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

⁵ See *Evangelii Gaudium*, §255.

⁶ Response to Bill 60 from the Presbytery of Montreal of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, §2.4.