

**National Council
of the Churches of Christ
in the USA**

***Interfaith Relations
Commission
Handbook***



**Interfaith Relations Office
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National Council of Churches Interfaith Relations Commission Handbook

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Additional historical documents for the Interfaith Relations Commission are available at:
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**Welcome to the Interfaith Relations Commission
of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA**

I am pleased to welcome you to the Interfaith Relations Commission.

The Interfaith Relations Commission is part of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. The Commission is an institution with its own identity and its own tasks. It is, at the same time, one of the five constituent commissions of the NCCCUSA. These five commissions are Faith and Order, Interfaith Relations, Education and Leadership Ministries, Communications and Justice and Advocacy.

The NCCCUSA constitution and the information about the member churches of the Council are available for your information at <http://www.ncccusa.org/pdfs/nccconstitution.pdf> and <http://www.ncccusa.org/members/index.html>. You can find specific information about the work of each Commission and other ministries housed at the NCCCUSA in the appropriate sections of the Council's website. The Interfaith Relation Commission's own web-section is at <http://www.ncccusa.org/interfaith/ifrhome.html>

The NCCCUSA is pleased to have you joining in this shared ministry of interfaith relations.

Dr. Antonios Kireopoulos
Senior Program Director for Faith & Order and Interfaith Relations

What is the NCC?

"The National Council of Churches is a community of Christian communions, which, in response to the gospel as revealed in the Scriptures, confess Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as Savior and Lord.

These communions covenant with one another to manifest ever more fully the unity of the Church.

Relying upon the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the communions come together as the Council in common mission, serving in all creation to the glory of God."

--from the Preamble to the NCC Constitution

NCC at a Glance

Since its founding in 1950, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA has been the leading force for ecumenical cooperation among Christians in the United States. Its 35 member communions represent a wide spectrum of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African American and Living Peace churches, and include 45 million persons in more than 100,000 local congregations in communities across the nation.

NCC Member Communions

NCC member communions reflect the diversity of Christianity in the United States. They also vary greatly in size and in the geographic distribution of their congregations, their style of worship, even the architecture of their buildings.

Each participating denomination brings distinctive faith traditions to the Council's common table. Protestant and evangelical traditions are represented by churches of British, German, Scandinavian and other European origin, historic African American churches, and immigrant churches from Korea and India. Orthodox member communions have roots in Greece, Syria, Russia, the Ukraine, Egypt, Armenia, India and other places where Eastern and Oriental Orthodoxy have long histories.

Reflecting the rich variety of its members, the NCC believes that genuine unity demands appreciation and respect for diversity, and strives to embody this belief in its programs, decision-making and staffing.

The Lund Principle (so called because of its adoption at a Faith and Order meeting in Lund, Sweden in 1952) is a basic operating principle of the ecumenical table. It reads: "We will act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel us to act separately."

List of Member Communions (35)

African Methodist Episcopal Church
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
Alliance of Baptists
American Baptist Churches in the USA
Diocese of the Armenian Church of America
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
Church of the Brethren
Coptic Orthodox Church in North America
The Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Friends United Meeting
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Hungarian Reformed Church in America
International Council of Community Churches
Korean Presbyterian Church in America
Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
Mar Thoma Church
Moravian Church in America (Northern Province and Southern Province)
National Baptist Convention of America
National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.
Orthodox Church in America
Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in the USA
Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
Polish National Catholic Church of America
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.
Reformed Church in America
Serbian Orthodox Church in the U.S.A. and Canada
Swedenborgian Church
Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of America
United Church of Christ
United Methodist Church

NCC General Assembly and Governing Board

Approximately 300 representatives of the member communions come together annually as the General Assembly, the NCC's highest policy-making body. A smaller Governing Board, which meets several times a year, acts on behalf of the General Assembly in many matters.

NCC Program Commissions

Working together in the Council, the communions carry out a wide range of ministries. Though it was formally established in 1950, the Council continues the work of more than a dozen previously existing interdenominational organizations, many of which have roots that go back a century or more. Most of these ministries are carried out under the guidance of the Council's five program commissions, whose participants are drawn not only from the NCC's member churches, but from a total of more than 50 churches representing a broad spectrum of American Christianity, from Evangelicals to Roman Catholics to Pentecostals. The commissions are:

Communication Commission
Education and Leadership Ministries Commission
Faith and Order Commission
Interfaith Relations Commission
Justice and Advocacy Commission

Work not falling into one of these program areas is led by various offices within the NCC.

Statement of Faith

From the Preamble to the NCC Constitution

"The National Council of Churches is a community of Christian communions, which, in response to the gospel as revealed in the Scriptures, confess Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as Savior and Lord.

These communions covenant with one another
to manifest ever more fully the unity of the Church.

Relying upon the transforming power of the Holy Spirit,
the communions come together as the Council in common mission,
serving in all creation to the glory of God."

Pertinent Sections from the Strategic Plan of the National Council of Churches USA 2008-2011

At its November 2006 meeting the General Assembly approved a Strategic Plan for the years 2008 – 2011. The portion of the plan relevant to work of the Interfaith Relations Commission is reproduced here.

OVERARCHING GOAL

That the churches, as an expression of their commitment to seek visible unity through the NCC, will aggressively promote in the next quadrennium a vision of authentic common life as an alternative to that prevalent in contemporary American culture.

COMMISSIONS IN THE WORK AND STRUCTURE OF THE COUNCIL

Goal 1: To ensure that the commissions are accountable to the member communions through the GB and to the integrating goal set forth in this Strategic Plan.

Strategies:

- ▶ The programmatic work of the NCC, including that of its various working groups and committees, will, unless otherwise indicated by the GB, be subject to the oversight of one or more of the commissions.
- ▶ The GB will ensure that the agendas of the commissions are not greater than the staff and organizational resources of the NCC.

- ▶ While each commission sets priorities for its own work, taking account of its particular history and constituency, the commissions can be mandated by the GB to undertake particular projects for the good of the Council.
- ▶ The EC will ask the commissions to make the overarching goal of this Strategic Plan a priority concern of their work for the quadrennium.
- ▶ While recognizing that the commissions have different histories and missions, each commission will be asked by the EC to review its standing rules in order to ensure that they are consistent with the Constitution and Bylaws of the NCC.

Goal 2: To increase collaboration between and among the commissions.

Strategies:

- ▶ Chairpersons of the commissions will continue to serve on the EC, which is an obvious venue for collaborative planning, and will gather (with staff, when appropriate) during meetings of the GB to discuss possibilities for shared projects.
- ▶ Commission chairpersons and staff will look for opportunities for various commissions to meet jointly.
- ▶ Leaders of the commissions will work with the NCC Development Office to raise funds, which includes identifying new possible sources of funding.

Goal 3: To consider expanding the current structure of five commissions.

Strategies:

- ▶ The GB will determine a process and criteria for establishing new commissions.
- ▶ After the process and criteria for establishing new commissions are determined, GB will consider whether or not to establish a new Commission on Mission and Evangelism, a stream of the ecumenical movement now missing in the NCC.
- ▶ After the process and criteria for establishing new commissions are determined, the GB will consider whether or not to establish a new Commission on International Affairs in order to strengthen the Council's international ecumenical relationships, to articulate the international concerns of U.S. churches, to work cooperatively with CWS and WCC to ensure an effective, coherent witness, and to strengthen the churches' capacity to affect U. S. foreign policy.

INTERFAITH RELATIONS COMMISSION

Goal 1: To strengthen churches through their engagement in Interfaith Relations.

Strategies: The IRC will:

- help churches to understand how interfaith relations deepen Christian commitment;
- develop the website and links to interfaith resources;
- create new interfaith materials;
- serve as a resource for the development of interfaith-sensitive Sunday School curricula;
- expand communication from the Commission and the NCC regarding interfaith relations.

Goal 2: To expand and deepen interfaith conversation

Strategies: The IRC will:

- maintain national Jewish-Christian dialogue table and encourage similar local dialogues;
- create a new Muslim-Christian dialogue table and encourage similar local dialogues;
- create or engage in a dialogue of top religious, political, corporate and media leaders;
- expand relationships and dialogue to religions beyond the Jewish and Muslim traditions;
- engage with other religious leaders in seeking peace, fighting poverty, and being environmentally responsible.

Goal 3: To strengthen and engage in the interfaith formation of Christian leadership.

Strategies: The IRC will:

- encourage more member churches to have representation on the Commission;
- continue to work with the American Academy of Religion to showcase conversations about a Christian theology of interfaith relations;
- expand leadership training events, e.g., "God is One;"
- take interfaith dialogue training program to local communities and train leaders to use it;
- provide interfaith educational tours and experiences;
- serve as a resource for seminaries.

Interfaith Relations and the NCC: A Brief History

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA began Christian-Jewish relations work in 1973, funded by a grant from the Lilly Foundation. Christian-Muslim relations work began in 1976 with seconded staff supported by the United Presbyterian and the United Methodist Churches, and an office at the Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam of Hartford Seminary.

The Christian-Jewish Relations Committee met regularly, and built relations with the religious Jewish bodies through the Synagogue Council of America, and with an array of other Jewish institutions. The Christian-Jewish Relations Office was staffed sometimes through part-time assignment of NCCC personnel, sometimes through contracted staff until 1987, when the Presbyterian Church (USA) seconded a staff person to the position. Direct giving of NCCC churches provided the primary support for the work of the office.

The Christian-Muslim Relations Committee met in various locations around the country in order to foster regional Christian-Muslim dialogues, and to do its other work, such as developing resources for Christians engaging in this relationship. The Christian-Muslim Relations Office was staffed entirely through secondments (by United Methodist Church and PCUSA) through 1991, and its programmatic work supported by the giving of the churches.

In 1989-90, the two relational committees were brought together into an Interfaith Relations Working Group, which in 1991 became the Interfaith Relations Commission. The formerly separate offices were combined into the Interfaith Relations Office, and placed within NCCC headquarters in New York. By 1993, two seconded staff (one from the PCUSA, and one from the Episcopal Church USA (with initial help from the American Baptists and UMC)), and a half-time secretary were carrying out the interfaith program work. Program funds came from the churches, along with a planned spending of reserves each year. Staff secondments came to an end in 2000 and 2003, from which time the NCCCUSA has supported an Associate General Secretary and administrative assistant for Interfaith work. With the NCC restructure in late 2007, the position evolved into the Senior Program Director for Faith & Order and Interfaith Relations. While the Senior Program Director facilitates the work of both these commissions, it now offers the opportunity for critical collaboration between both of these important commissions of the Council.

The new Interfaith Relations Commission expanded the scope of relationships to include the Buddhist and Native American Traditional communities. In the 1996-1999 quadrennium, the Commission, with the help and consultation of the Faith and Order Commission, member and non-member communions, individuals of other faiths, etc., drafted the NCCC Policy Statement on Interfaith Relations and the Churches, which was adopted by the NCCC General Assembly in November, 1999. The Commission continues to coordinate ecumenical national dialogues with communities of other faiths in the U.S., to work with its member communions in providing resources for interfaith engagement, and to facilitate ecumenical sharing and theological reflection on interfaith issues.

**Interfaith Relations and the Churches:
A Policy Statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.**

In November 1999 the NCC General Assembly approved the document "Interfaith Relations and the Churches" as its policy statement on Interfaith Relations

Preamble

"As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). As disciples, we seek to testify to the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, to embody that love in the world, and to respond to the leading of God's Holy Spirit. We seek God's grace in our common effort to understand ever more fully how to live as the body of Christ in this religiously plural and culturally diverse time and place.

We speak out of a changing experience of religious diversity in our country. Events in the United States and across the world have made us more aware of the significance of the world's religions and their influence on politics, economics, and cultures. We speak out of what we have been learning in our shared ecumenical life. At home and abroad, the work of building Christian unity and our efforts for peace and human development are increasingly intertwined with questions regarding our relationships with those of religious traditions outside the historic Christian church.

Historical, Political and Social Context

The Americas have always been religiously plural. For millennia, their indigenous peoples have practiced their religions, diverse yet all based on respect for and connectedness with the earth and all of creation. Christians of various backgrounds made up the bulk of the settlers from Europe. But Jews were also among the original colonists and participated in the American Revolution. Muslims and practitioners of African religions arrived with those brought from Africa, most as slaves. Immigrants who came from Asia in the 19th century to work in American industry and agriculture brought with them a variety of Asian religious traditions.

The USA's history has not always been marked by tolerance or inclusivity. Religious liberty and freedom developed here only slowly, despite the protections of the First Amendment to the Constitution. Early visions of that freedom were (and unfortunately still are) often infected with triumphalism and racism. We must confess that Christians participated in attempts to eradicate indigenous peoples and their traditional religions. We must acknowledge the complicity of many of our churches in slavery, a system in which most African Americans were prohibited from practicing Islam or African traditional religions.

Today the spectrum of religious tradition and practice in the United States is wider and more complex than ever before. Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Native American traditions, Baha'i, and other faiths are now part of the American landscape. Many factors have contributed to this increased diversity. These include changes such as the U.S. Immigration Act of 1965 and subsequent immigration policy, increasing global inter-connections, the growth of American-born religious movements, and the increasing willingness of Americans to make religious commitments outside their tradition of birth.

This increased religious diversity is a result of the changed cultural and ethnic makeup of our communities and our churches. For many of our congregations, interreligious and intercultural relations are an integral part of community and family life. Many church members have children, parents, sisters and brothers, spouses or other relatives who belong to another religious tradition. People of other faiths confront, as do many Christians, discrimination in access to housing, job opportunities, or political and social position. In their efforts to address community problems, provide hope for a better society, and work for justice, Christians find themselves working side-by-side with men and women who practice religions other than their own.

Interfaith relations also play a prominent role in our international concerns. In many parts of the world, religion plays an important role in politics, in economic and social development or the lack of it, in communal strife or reconciliation. We see the growth of fundamentalism among Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Hindus. We note the central role religion often plays in a community's understanding of justice, moral good, and its own identity and we see the involvement of religion for good and for ill in the struggles in many places in the world. News reports often reinforce our stereotypes and provide an erroneous base of information from which many form lasting impressions of other religious traditions and those who practice them.

In our community institutions and in the public sphere, we increasingly face issues involving interreligious understanding and cooperation. Too often, people of other faiths experience stereotyping based on both religious difference and ethnicity. The interpretation and implementation of religious freedom is a matter of lively debate. The National Council of Churches relates to other religious communities on a broad range of public policy issues and questions of fundamental social dignity. New voices and new issues are challenging traditional understandings of who and what we are as a people in the United States. The churches struggle to understand their relation to this diversity of views and people, taking their part in our society's current efforts to discern a new and more inclusive civic identity.

A Continuing Dimension of the Church's Life

Although this situation in which we live may seem to be new, it has many parallels throughout biblical history. In the stories of the Hebrew Scriptures, God relates to the Jewish people against a backdrop of religious diversity. In early Christian writings, we see that Christianity originated as a Jewish movement often in tension with other Jewish movements of the time. These tensions are often reflected in the Christian Scriptures. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus took place in one of the most religiously complex environments of the ancient world.

The Church of Christ has always lived among peoples of many different cultures and religions. Thus we join Christians of many times and places when we ask, How do we live in faithfulness to the Gospel when our friends and neighbors, colleagues and associates, parents and children are members of other religious traditions or no religion at all?

Interfaith relations and the challenge of ministry in a religiously plural world raise a number of ecumenical questions. Some questions divide the churches in terms of theology, or practice, or a mixture of the two. These include the relationship between evangelism and dialogue, concerns about intermarriage, and issues regarding interfaith worship or common prayer. These issues

warrant further consultation among the churches. As we become increasingly aware that the whole Church of Christ stands together in a common ministry in relation to men and women of other religions, these questions become more urgent.

There are two aspects to this challenge. Theologically, as a fellowship of Christian communions, we ask new questions about our religious identity: How do we understand our relationship to God, to other Christians, and to those of other religious traditions? How do we understand the relationship between these men and women and God? Practically, we ask about Christian discipleship: How can we best live a life of faithful witness and service in a multi-faith context?

Reflections on Theology and Practice

We are indebted to the efforts of Christians from many different confessional traditions and ecumenical bodies who have struggled with these questions. We are instructed by the thinking of the Second Vatican Council, in particular its document *Nostra Aetate* (1965) and subsequent reflections, and the attention given to this issue by bodies such as the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion, the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Our efforts to think and work together in this area of interfaith relations as the National Council of Churches owe much also to the pioneering work of the World Council of Churches. In its *Guidelines on Dialogue* (1979, #12) that body noted that its member churches "will need to work out for themselves and with their specific partners in dialogue statements and guidelines for their own use in particular situations."

Some member churches of the NCCC have developed policies or study documents on interfaith relations or on specific bilateral interreligious relationships. The Faith and Order Commission of the NCCC has studied those elements within particular confessional traditions which might inform their theological understanding of our relations with other religious traditions. In addition, the Ecumenical Networks Commission and many of the member churches maintain ties with local and regional ecumenical and inter-religious councils. Some member communions also have ties to national and international multi-religious efforts. Christians take part in many inter-religious efforts of social ministry and advocacy. We are grateful for, and indebted to all of this work.

God and Human Community

Understanding the churches' relationship to people of other religious traditions begins in the recognition of God's many gifts to us, including that of relationship. All are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). When we meet a human being, no matter what her or his religion, we are meeting a unique creation of the living God. "One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live on all the face of the earth." All are equal in God's sight; each is equally the object of God's love and potentially open to receive "a ray of that truth which enlightens all [humanity]." Because we are all children of the one God we are all related to one another. It is in this sense that we may call all men and women our brothers and sisters. (We also recognize a specific use of this familial language to refer to those within the household of Christian faith.) Community is itself a divine gift which we are called to make real in our lives.

In our Christian understanding, relationship is part of the nature of God. In God's own essence, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in dynamic interrelationship, a unity of three in one. Similarly,

humanity is created in diversity. In the scriptural account of creation, it is the first humans in community who together constitute the image of God. Being made in God's image we are created to live a life of relationship, and called to claim the unity in our human diversity.

We recognize, however, that though we are given this gift of community, we act in ways that break or undermine it. Too often we set ourselves against each other. We become separated from God, and alienated from God's creation. We find ourselves in seemingly irreconcilable conflict with other people. We confess that as human beings we have a propensity for taking the gift of diversity and turning it into a cause of disunity, antagonism and hatred—often because we see ourselves as part of a unique, special community. We sin against God and each other.

This is part of the reality of our human condition. We see it in the ease with which our father Adam accuses our mother Eve: "The woman you gave me for a companion, she gave me the fruit" (Genesis 3:12). Within a generation, the vision of the community for which we are created had become so distorted that Cain can challenge God with the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9).

Scripture suggests that our responsibility extends not only to a brother or sister, but also to the stranger. Hebrew Scripture celebrates the wider community to which humanity is called in the stories of Melchizedek, Jethro, Rahab and Ruth, and the Hittites who offered hospitality to Abraham. In the Torah God enjoins the Jewish people to treat the sojourner as part of their own community. Throughout the Bible, hospitality to the stranger is an essential virtue. We recall both the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it," and the example Jesus gives in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37).

In the churches' long history with people of other religions, as we have struggled to make actual God's gift of community, we have acted both faithfully and unfaithfully. While Christians have suffered persecution at the hands of those of other faiths and from each other, we have much to repent. Christians have persecuted Jews, and crusaded against Muslims. Christians have enslaved Africans and other peoples, and have participated in subordinating indigenous peoples and erasing their religious traditions. Many Christians have accepted or perpetuated the use of their religion to bless the imposition of Western culture and economic domination. Anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim biases, together with racism and ethnic biases have flourished among us.

We can rejoice that Christians were leaders in the anti-slavery movement, and have worked for the human and communal rights of many peoples. Christians have fought oppressive economic and social systems of many societies including our own, and have resisted injustice without regard to cost. Christians also have invited transformation of those ways of living that damage others and undermine the one human community. In many of these efforts Christians have worked closely with people of other faiths.

Our experience, therefore, is a mixture of successes and failures in building loving community and in exercising our stewardship of God's creation in justice and peace. We must struggle to reject or reform all those human actions and systems that destroy or deny the image of God in human beings or that tear down the structures of human community. On the other hand, we must seek to affirm all human impulses which build up true community.

Because God is at work in all creation, we can expect to find new understanding of our faith through dialogue with people of other religions. Such interaction can be an opportunity for mutual witness. However, mutual witness does not always take place in a context of mutual respect. We may fail in our efforts to reflect God's love for all; and even on those occasions when we succeed in the practice of a respectful presence, we do not always find our success mirrored by our conversation partners.

We find ourselves in need of repentance and reconciliation. Again and again we are reminded "of the Christian Church as a sign at once of people's need for fuller and deeper community, and of God's promise of a restored human community in Christ." As we wait for the fulfillment of God's promise, we commit ourselves to work for fuller and deeper community in our own time and place.

Jesus Christ and Reconciliation

The revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ is the center of our faith. Incarnating both the fullness of God and the fullness of humanity, Jesus Christ initiates a new creation, a world unified in relationship as God originally intended. We believe that Jesus Christ makes real God's will for a life of loving community with God, with the whole human family and with all creation. Through Jesus Christ, Christians believe God offers reconciliation to all. "In Christ God was reconciling the world to [God]self" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

It is our Christian conviction that reconciliation among people and with the world cannot be separated from the reconciliation offered in Jesus Christ. Jesus, addressing the crowds and the disciples on the mountain (Matthew 5:1 and 7:28), teaches that any who would offer their gift at God's altar, must first be reconciled to their brothers and sisters in the human family (Matthew 5:24). The hope of a cosmic reconciliation in Christ is also central to Christian scripture: "The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the Children of God" (Romans 8:21).

Jesus Christ is also the focus of the most vexing questions regarding how Christians understand their relationship with men and women of other religions. Christians agree that Jesus Christ incarnated--and incarnates still--the inexhaustible love and salvation that reconcile us all. We agree that it is not by any merit of our own, but by God's grace that we are reconciled. Likewise, Christians also agree that our discipleship impels us to become reconciled to the whole human family and to live in proper relationship to all of God's creation. We disagree, however, on whether non-Christians may be reconciled to God, and if so, how. Many Christians see no possibility of reconciliation with God apart from a conscious acceptance of Jesus Christ as incarnate Son of God and personal savior. For others, the reconciling work of Jesus is salvific in its own right, independent of any particular human response. For many, the saving power of God is understood as a mystery and an expression of God's sovereignty that cannot be confined within our limited conceptions. One question with which we must still struggle is how to define the uniqueness of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ in the light of such passages as "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6); "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12); "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was

pleased to reconcile to himself all things" (Colossians 1:19-20); and "as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

As Christians we recognize that Jesus is not central to other religious traditions. For men and women in other communities, the mystery of God takes many forms. Observing this, we are not led to deny the centrality of Christ for our faith, but to contemplate more deeply the meaning of St. Paul's affirmation: "Ever since the creation of the world, (God's) eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things [God] has made" (Romans 1:20). Christians disagree on the nature and extent of such "natural revelation" and its relation to salvation. No matter what our view on this may be, we can be open to the insights of others.

We recognize that scripture speaks with many voices about relationship with men and women of other religious traditions. We need to devote further attention to issues of interpreting scriptural teaching. But as to our Christian discipleship, we can only live by the clear obligation of the Gospel. When Jesus was asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" he, referring to his Jewish tradition, answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:25-27). Love of God and love of neighbors cannot be separated. We rejoice in our common conviction that Jesus calls us to ministries of reconciliation.

The Spirit of God and Human Hope

The presence and power of the Holy Spirit fill us with hope. The realities of religious fragmentation and conflict could become a cause of despair, especially in a world of broken community, racked by division and hate based on color, language, ethnicity, and class. We are pained when our religious traditions do not empower us to build community. Yet we have hope because of the Holy Spirit, who hovered over the waters when the earth was void and without form (Genesis 1:2), who brings order out of chaos, and can reshape our warped societies.

We believe that our relationships with people of other religious traditions are being shaped by the Spirit who, like the wind, "blows where it chooses" (John 3:8). Though we do not always understand the Spirit's purposes, we need never be without hope, for neither we nor the rest of creation are ever without the Spirit of God.

In this time of constant change, a sometimes bewildering variety of technologies, cultures, religions and languages impinges upon our lives. The ways in which we should witness and act to bring about reconciliation in our torn world are not always clear. But the Spirit enables us to discern how to nurture the loving community of persons which is God's intention for creation, and gives us the strength to keep working toward it.

Our experience of the transforming power of God's love overflows in joyous anticipation of a renewed and reconciled humanity. As the Body of Christ, we are called to live out this new reality and to be a sign of the restored community to which all people are called. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we witness in word and deed to this hope.

This witness will be as varied as the many circumstances in which we meet men and women of other faiths. We meet them in our families and among our friends and colleagues; at the corner store and the doctor's office, in community action groups, and at work. We meet in boardrooms and schoolrooms, facing common agendas and concerns. Since God is the Lord of history, we can be open to the presence of God's Spirit in these encounters. They invite us to faithful service and witness.

We are aware that our churches are part of the body of Christ throughout the world. Our encounters with people of other faiths here in the U.S. are informed by the experience and reflection of our sisters and brothers living among men and women of many religious traditions in many nations. We stand in solidarity with each other, taking a role in international dialogue and seeking in our own circumstances to be faithful to the gospel.

We do not always agree, however, on how best to love our neighbors. Commitment to justice and mutual respect is the paramount consideration for some. For them the practice of Christian love is the most powerful witness to the truth of the Gospel. Others, while not denying the witness of faithful lives, believe that love demands the verbal proclamation of the Gospel and an open invitation to all people to be reconciled to God in Christ. Still others understand evangelization as our participation in God's transformation of human society. As we seek to respond to God's call to love our neighbor, we all must seek to avoid ways of interaction which do violence to the integrity of human persons and communities, such as coercive proselytism, which "violates the right of the human person, Christian or non-Christian, to be free from external coercion in religious matters." We pray for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that through our life with all men and women, of every religion, color, language, and class, we will be instruments of God to build that time in which "steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Psalm 85:10).

Clearly, a basic aspect of our relationship to people of religious traditions other than our own must be to engage in the struggle for justice, as the prophet Amos challenges us: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (Amos 5:23-24). Our actions must be based on genuine respect for all men and women. "The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy" (James 3:16-17). And beyond respect, we are called to love all people so that, by the working of the Holy Spirit, we may "above all, clothe [our]selves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Colossians 3:14).

Marks of Faithfulness

In the light of our reflections on Christian discipleship, we can discern ways to approach the challenges of our multi-religious society. We will serve faithfully, meeting others with open hearts and minds.

All relationship begins with meeting. The model for our meeting others is always the depth of presence and engagement which marked Jesus' meeting with those around him. In our everyday lives, we will meet and form relationships with men and women of other religious traditions. At times these may be difficult relationships, based on bitter memories. However, we have been

created for loving community and will not disengage from trying to build bridges of understanding and cooperation throughout the human family.

True relationship involves risk. When we approach others with an open heart, it is possible that we may be hurt. When we encounter others with an open mind, we may have to change our positions or give up certainty, but we may gain new insights. Prompted to ask new questions, we will search the Scriptures and be attentive to the Spirit in new ways to mature in Christ and in love and service to others. Because those we meet are also God's beloved creatures, this risk is also opportunity. Our knowledge and love of God can be enriched as we hear others proclaim to us how God has worked and empowered their lives.

True relationship respects the other's identity. We will meet others as they are, in their particular hopes, ideas, struggles and joys. These are articulated through their own traditions, practices and world-views. We encounter the image of God in the particularity of another person's life.

True relationship is based on integrity. If we meet others as they are, then we must accept their right to determine and define their own identity. We also must remain faithful to who we are; only as Christians can we be present with integrity. We will not ask others to betray their religious commitments, nor will we betray our commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

True relationship is rooted in accountability and respect. We approach others in humility, not arrogance. In our relationships we will call ourselves and our partners to a mutual accountability. We will invite each other to join in building a world of love and justice, but we will also challenge each other's unjust behavior. We can do both only from an attitude of mutual respect.

True relationship offers an opportunity to serve. Jesus comes among us as a servant. We too are given the opportunity to serve others, in response to God's love for us. In so doing, we will join with those of other religious traditions to serve the whole of God's creation. Through advocacy, education, direct services and community development, we respond to the realities of a world in need. Our joining with others in such service can be an eloquent proclamation of what it means to be in Christ.

Recommendations

In response to the situation of religious plurality in which our churches minister, in light of the convictions expressed above, and in order to live out our faith commitment more fully, we, the General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States, affirm the following guidelines and recommendations.

I. In regard to the life and programs of the Council:

We commit the Council to continue its relationships with people of other religious traditions. In particular the Council should:

1. Maintain relations with national bodies of other religious communities in the United States, in order to foster mutual understanding and regard, examine issues affecting our

communities in the course of our national life, and identify common concerns and appropriate coordinated responses to them;

2. Initiate conversations with people and organizations of other religious traditions in the United States, for example, the Hindu and Sikh communities, and others;
3. Continue to encourage dialogue with Americans of other religions to promote peace and justice around the globe, and in particular with American Jews and Muslims as integral to the churches' efforts for peace in the Middle East (Policy Statement on the Middle East, Nov. 6, 1980); and to encourage interreligious dialogue in other situations in which religion is identified as a factor in conflict situations;
4. Reinvigorate ongoing work with institutions and people of other religions and cultures in public policy advocacy; refugee resettlement and overseas programs; the prevention of family violence and abuse (Policy Statement on Family Violence and Abuse, November 14, 1990); and to initiate work in other program areas as appropriate;
5. Encourage the efforts of existing interreligious entities within the life of the Council, such as the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, the Interfaith Broadcasting Committee, and the Task Force on Religious Liberty;
6. Continue to work through collaborative bodies, including the Washington Interfaith Staff Committee, the U.S. Chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and the North American Interfaith Network;
7. Participate in international efforts to further interreligious relations, especially through the World Council of Churches, and organizations such as the World Conference on Religion and Peace;
8. Affirm that the integrity of our Christian faith and commitment is to be preserved in all our interfaith relationships, and recognize that religious commitments of many traditions, like the Christian, have political implications of which we should be aware. We should recognize and consider the political aspects of the others' religious claims, and be ready to explain the religious roots of our own behavior and policies;
9. Recommit ourselves to pursue religious liberty and religious freedom for all, and to defend "the rights and liberties of cultural, racial and religious minorities" (Religion and Civil Liberties in the U.S.A., October 5, 1955); and call again for "interfaith dialogue on the nature and meaning of human rights" and on "the patterns of inter-religious intolerance and practices that lead to inter-faith conflict" (Human Rights, Nov. 12, 1994), including both intolerance toward Christians and Christian intolerance of others;
10. Condemn all forms of religious, ethnic and racial bias, especially anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, anti-Asian and anti-Native American bias, and other forms of sinful bigotry which turn religious differences into excuses for defamation, stereotyping and violence; and defend their victims (cf. Resolution on Prejudice Against Islam and Muslims, November 6, 1986); and commit the Council and our churches to uproot all that might contribute to such prejudice in our teaching, life and ministries;

11. Continue our efforts to achieve mutuality of understanding and growth toward maturity in relation to Native American people, so that the spiritual heritage, political reality and cultural uniqueness of each group or nation may be respected (Indian Affairs, November 4, 1978); and promote the protection of sacred sites and rituals;
12. Recommit ourselves to the development in public schools of "an intelligent understanding and appreciation of the role of religion in the life of the people of this nation," while also defending the principle that "neither the church nor the state should use the public school to compel acceptance of any creed or conformity to any specific religious practice" (The Churches and the Public Schools, June 7, 1963);

II. We charge the Council, through its Executive Board, to give priority to interfaith relations in order to:

1. Work with the churches to identify or create study resources, organize and facilitate consultations and educational conferences, offer workshops, etc.;
2. Gather information on existing programs, activities, and relationships on national, regional, and local levels;
3. Promote and participate regularly in bilateral and multilateral consultations with other religious communities to explore practical and theological concerns;
4. Coordinate the Council's interfaith work, and report to the NCCC General Assembly at least biennially.

III. In service to each other as a community of communions:

We call on member communions to work together, and with the broader ecumenical community, to equip congregations and Christian leaders to understand and engage with people of other religious traditions, and in particular to:

1. Provide study resources, sponsoring consultations, and organizing conferences to further this aim;
2. Participate in the Interfaith Relations Commission, a forum in which the churches may take counsel, make plans, and undertake joint work in this field;
3. Engage in interreligious relations ecumenically whenever and wherever possible, and share these experiences with each other, the Council, and partner churches and ecumenical bodies around the world.

IV. To member communions and their congregations, to the wider ecumenical community, and to all those of good will who seek further understanding or participation in interfaith relations, we:

1. Recommend study and use of the World Council of Churches' *Guidelines on Dialogue* (1979), the declaration *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council (1965), and other

statements of the churches. These documents offer theological insights and practical suggestions that can undergird efforts to understand and properly engage with people of other religious traditions.

2. Call attention to the statements of our member communions and of the wider Christian community regarding interreligious relations.
3. Recommend ecumenical consideration and study of our divided understandings of the nature of salvation, of appropriate forms of evangelism, of the bases in scripture and tradition for relations with those of other religious traditions, and of the concerns among us regarding interfaith marriage, worship and prayer.
4. Urge member communions, their congregations, and local ecumenical and interfaith gatherings to use the "Marks of Faithfulness" in this policy statement as a statement of commitment for study and affirmation.
5. Commend this policy statement to member communions, congregations and local ecumenical and interreligious gatherings for study, and as a catalyst to reflection and action.
6. Commend this policy statement to other religious communities in the United States for their study, and invite their reactions to it in the hope and expectation of deepening friendship

**The Interfaith Relation Commission:
Mission Statement**

(Adopted in September 2005)

The Interfaith Relations Commission of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA participates ecumenically in building interfaith relationships in order that Christian churches may effectively engage with communities of other religious traditions in relationships, dialogue and cooperation.

In partnership with NCC member communions, the Interfaith Relations Commission will

1. articulate a Christian theology for Interfaith Relations
2. provide educational materials to churches
3. train church members in interfaith relational skills, and
4. create ecumenical opportunities for relations with communities of other religious traditions.

Outcomes of this work include interfaith cooperation domestically and internationally in

- ❖ seeking peace with justice
- ❖ fighting poverty
- ❖ encouraging the proper stewardship of planet Earth.

The Interfaith Relations Commission: Structure and Organization

Representatives of NCC's 35 communions are elected by the NCC General Assembly to the Interfaith Relations Commission. The Commission invites representatives from the Ecumenical Networks Committee of the NCC, the Roman Catholic Church, the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Hartford Seminary, and other experts in interfaith relations from member communions and sending bodies to strengthen its work. The Commission has been in existence as a "commission" for eight of the 33 years that the NCC has been working on Interfaith Relations. Before 1999 there was an NCC Interfaith Relations Working Group and before that two NCC Committees focusing upon Jewish Christian Relations and Muslim Christian Relations.

The Commission exercises special responsibility within the life of the Council for programs, resources and communication integral to the building and maintenance of interfaith relationships, and to theological reflection of these relationships. The Commission works with and on behalf of the churches to strengthen relationships between Christians and people of other faiths through study, dialogue, the development of cooperative programs and the sharing of resources and information. It provides an ecumenical forum for sharing, common counsel and theological reflection regarding interfaith relations, and coordinates its work with other entities of the Council as appropriate.

At the beginning of the 2004-2007 quadrennium the Commissioners formed four Task Groups:

1. Relationships with Interfaith Partners. Task: To build relationships with people and organizations of other faith traditions.
2. Relationships with Ecumenical Partners. Task: To network among churches, councils of churches and ecumenical partners encouraging their work on interfaith relations.
3. Education and Training. Task: To develop an Interfaith Dialogue training program for use in local communities and educational programs for children and youth for use in Sunday Schools and Public Schools that foster interfaith relations. (This task group did not function and was disbanded)
4. Theology of Interfaith Relations. Task: To foster the development of a theology of interfaith relations relevant to the North American context through reflection and writing, theological consultations and workshops and working with seminaries to incorporate a theology of interfaith relations in their core curriculum (where it does not presently exist).

In the second half of the quadrennium the Task Groups changed to the following caucus groups:

1. Interfaith staff who carries special responsibilities on behalf of their communions met separately. On their agenda were programs such as the Jewish- Christian leaders' dialogue table, the Muslim-Christian table and a proposed Buddhist-Christian table, joint educational initiatives such the

interfaith tool-kit and strategizing around questions that arise from our communions' engagement with other religious communities.

2. Communion leaders who represent their communions on the Commission and have responsibility to deepen and expand their communion's engagement in interfaith relations met to strategize together. Those who had led their communions to adopt founding documents, statements, study documents and resolutions on interfaith relations shared their strategies, and those who published educational materials shared them with each other in an effort to help communions learn from each other.

3. Theological educators caucused to plan events such as the AAR group on Christian Theology's Engagement with Religious Pluralism and the Jamestown Missiology Consultation. They produced the bulletin insert "Getting to Know Neighbors of Other Faiths: A Theological Rationale for Interfaith Relationships" for distribution in our churches. This is a theological statement based on our policy document. The bulletin insert is available online at the interfaith section of the NCCCUSA website or at the link: <http://www.ncccusa.org/pdfs/neighbors3.pdf>

The Standing Rules approved by the Governing Board of the NCC govern the work of the Commission. Amendments proposed by the Commission must be submitted to the Constitution and By-Laws Committee of the NCC and approved by the GB.

Interfaith Relations Commission: Standing Rules

A Commission of the THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE USA

Article I

NAME AND AUTHORIZATION

The Interfaith Relations Commission is a Commission of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCC). As such, the Interfaith Relations Commission shares in the responsibilities, powers and privileges set forth in the Constitution and By-laws of the NCCC of which it is a part, and shall act consistent with the NCCC.

Article II

PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Interfaith Relations Commission exercises special responsibility within the life of the Council for programs, resources and communication integral to the building and maintenance of interfaith relationships, and to theological reflection of these relationships. The Commission works with and on behalf of the churches to strengthen relationships between Christians and people of other faiths through study, dialogue, the development of cooperative programs and the sharing of resources and information. It provides an ecumenical forum for sharing, common counsel and theological reflection regarding interfaith relations, and coordinates its work with other entities of the Council as appropriate. *(Article V, Section 5, Paragraph C of the NCC Bylaws)*

Article III

PARTICIPATION

A. Membership

1. Membership on the Commission shall be by recommendation of communions, especially but not limited to the boards and agencies of the communions that have concern for ecumenical and interfaith relations. Recommendations are made to the NCCC nominating committee, which brings names to the annual NCCC Assembly for election.
2. The Interfaith Relations Commission abides by the NCCC Constitution and Bylaws where it states in Section 3.C, "Individuals who belong to communions that are not members of the Council or Related Organizations or agencies may be elected to the Commissions by the Commissions." According to the provisions included in the Bylaws, 30% of its members may

be from non-member communions. Names of commissioners from non-member communions will be reported to the Executive Board as required by the NCCC Constitution and Bylaws.

3. Additional members may be added to the Commission from non-member communions, or to provide particular expertise and/or to represent related organizations or institutions (subject to the limitations of Article III A.2).
4. Representatives from organizations and institutions that do not wish to be "members" of the Commission shall be designated "liaison representatives."
5. The Interfaith Relations Commission makes no distinction in its membership between those from the NCCC member communions and those who are not members of the NCCC, except that the Chairperson/Co-chairpersons of the commission must be from member communions of the NCCC.
6. Interfaith Relations staff of the NCCC serves with voice but not vote. All other members and representatives serve with voice and vote.
7. Commissioners shall generally serve for the quadrennium, and may be re-elected as often as their denominations choose.
8. The Chairperson of the Commission and one additional member representing an NCCC member communion (or one Co-chairperson) will serve on the NCC Executive Board.

B. Financial Responsibilities

1. Participating communions shall be encouraged to contribute financially to the administration and program work of Interfaith Relations. In-kind contributions given to the Commission will be tracked through submission of forms listing travel, meals, and housing expenses incurred by those participating in the Commission, as well as cost donated related to projects.
2. The Commission members will review finances and approve an annual budget.
3. The Commission members will identify strategies for financial support for Interfaith Relations work.
4. The Commission will report regularly to the Executive Board of the NCCC for approval of major policies and for information.

Article IV

OFFICERS

1. There shall be a Chairperson (Co-Chairpersons) of the Commission.
2. The Chairperson/Co-Chairpersons of the Interfaith Relations Commission is (are) elected by the General Assembly on nomination by the NCCC Nominations Committee, with the advice

and counsel of the Commission. The Chairperson/Co-Chairpersons of the Interfaith Relations Commission must be from member communions of the NCCC.

3. The Chairperson or one of the Co-Chairpersons of the Interfaith Relations Commission serves on the Executive Committee of the NCCC Executive Board.

Article V

ORGANIZATION

In order to enable the work of the Interfaith Relations Commission, the Commission and/or the Chairperson/Co-Chairpersons may establish working committees and task forces for particular aspects of the work of the Commission.

Article VI

MEETINGS AND QUORUM

The Commission shall determine the frequency and place of its meetings necessary to fulfill its responsibilities. Generally, the Commission will meet twice each year. A quorum shall consist of one-fourth of the Commission membership, providing at least five constituent denominations are represented.

Article VII

STAFF

- A. The Director of the Interfaith Relations Commission will also serve as Associate General Secretary of the NCCC for Interfaith Relations.
- B. As Director of the Interfaith Relations Commission s/he will engage in:
 1. Building Relationships: The Director will strengthen and maintain relationships with national and regional leaders of the major religious communities in the United States, and provide ways for those leaders to build relationships with leaders of the member communions and other ecumenical leaders. In most cases member communions will look to the NCCC to sustain interfaith relations collectively, rather than having individual denominations engaged in bi-lateral relations. In cooperation with the communions and with ecumenical or inter-religious councils and agencies, the Director will encourage ecumenical programming related to interfaith dialogue. The Director will also maintain close relations with staff and others in the churches, in the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies, who are working to further interfaith relations and cooperation.
 2. Promoting Theological Inquiry: The Director works with communion staff and leadership, and with the NCCC Faith and Order Commission, to facilitate ecumenical discussion of theological and missiological issues. The Director assists particular communions in articulating the theological and ecclesiological bases for their particular approaches to

interfaith relations. The Director is encouraged to write about new models and ideas for interfaith relations and to publish such articles in journals, ecumenical publications, books, etc.

3. Providing Consultation: The Director consults with ecumenical, inter-religious and church leaders in the US regarding interfaith relations, and handling conflicts as particular issues arise. The Director advises the General Secretary of the NCCC around matters of interfaith relationships, cooperation and sensitivity. The Director is a senior staff member of the NCCC, and attends NCCC program staff meetings, as well as formal NCCC meetings (such as the General Assembly, Executive Committee, etc.) as needed.
4. Facilitating Communication: The Director works closely with NCCC Communications staff and web-master, and others, to disseminate as widely as possible information about educational opportunities and resources in interfaith relations. The Director facilitates the sharing of resources and information among member communions and more widely. The Director is responsible to assure that information about the NCCC, its churches and relevant program efforts is made available to leaders of other religious traditions.
5. Staffing the Interfaith Relations Office and Commission: The Interfaith Relations Commission sets the priorities and parameters for NCCC work in interfaith relations. The Director works with the Chairperson or Co-Chairpersons of the Commission to arrange Commission meetings, and to provide the Commission with the information and advice it needs to do its work. The Director is also responsible for the administration of the Interfaith Relations Office, including development of budget and financial reports, management of programs and projects, and maintenance of files and of the names and addresses of supporters and interested persons. The Director works with the NCCC Development Office to help identify and develop funding proposals for particular projects.

Article VIII

AMENDMENTS

A two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at any meeting of the Commission shall be required to adopt or amend these Standing Rules. The call for such vote shall be preceded by at least seven days' written notice of the substance of the proposal to members of the Commission. Any amendment to these Standing Rules must be approved by a vote of the Executive Board

Interfaith Relations Commission: Activities and Initiatives

Summary of Meetings (2004-2007)

February 2004: Washington DC, NCC Offices

Local Partners: Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington (<http://www.ifcmw.org/>), Washington Theological Consortium (<http://www.washtheocon.org/>) and The Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy (<http://www.cctpp.org/index.htm>).

Learning/Dialogue Event:

"Compelled to Relationship" – presentations by practitioners of ten faith traditions on why our faith traditions compel us to relationship and discussion, organized by the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington and held at Wesley Theological Seminary and at the Interfaith Conference offices

September 2004: New York City, NCC Offices

Local Partners: Interfaith Center of New York (<http://www.interfaithcenter.org/>), New York Interfaith Disaster Services (<http://www.nydis.org/NYDIS/index.php>) and Union Theological Seminary (<http://www.utsnyc.edu/>)

Learning/Dialogue Events:

1. "Religion-Related Violence and Resources for Healing from the Religious Communities: An Interfaith Dialogue" featuring leaders of the New York's Religious Communities on the 3rd Anniversary of September 11.
2. "Mission, Evangelism, and Interfaith Relations" by Paul Rajasheker
3. "Gardens of Forgiveness" (<http://www.gofnyc.org/>) by Lyndon Harris

February 2005: St. Petersburg, FL: Center for Continuing Education, Eckerd College

Local Partners: Eckerd College, CAIR Florida, HOPE Florida

Learning/Dialogue Events:

1. "Learning from Asia's Pain: Reflections on the South Asian Tsunami" by Shanta Premawardhana and Vince Isner.
2. "Relationships with the Jewish community in the context of the divestment question" by Jay Rock
3. "Human Rights and the Islamic Community" Dialogue with leaders of CAIR Florida (Ahmed Bedier) about the status of Muslims in the US and HOPE Florida (Warren Clark) about the situation of Sami Al-Aryan

Action: Took statement on justice for Sami Al-Aryan to NCC – GB.

September 2005: Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Divinity School

Local Partners: Hyde Park and Kenwood Interfaith Council, Interfaith Youth Core (<http://www.ifyc.org/>)

Learning/Dialogue Events:

1. "Thinking Together: A New Paradigm in Theologizing" with Hyde Park Theologians (Bob Cathey, Susan Harlow, John Pawlikowski, Rick Rosengarten, Harold Vogelaar and Jay Rock)
2. Meeting with leaders of "The Mosque Cares" (<http://www.themosquecares.com/>) and attendance at Jumma Prayers at Bond Chapel.
3. Meeting with leaders of Hyde Park and Kenwood Interfaith Council and Interfaith Youth Core.

February 2006: Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary

Local Partners: Fuller Theological Seminary, Muslim Public Affairs Council

Learning/Dialogue Events:

1. "Ecumenical and Evangelical trajectories in Christian Theological Reflection on Interfaith Relations" Shanta Premawardhana and Veli-Matti Karkkainen
2. Theological rationale for NCC's engagement in Interfaith Relations (policy statement) – Terry Muck
3. Meeting with MPAC and visit to New Horizons (Muslim) School

September 2006: Montreal, Canada: St. James United Church

Local Partners: World's Religions After 9/11: A Global Congress

(<http://www.worldsreligionsafter911.com/default.asp>),

Canadian Council of Churches (<http://www.ccc-cce.ca/english/home/index.htm>)

Learning/Dialogue Events:

1. Session at the Congress: "Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Perspectives from Various Christian Traditions," Lyndon Harris, Lydia Veliko, Tom Ryan, Michael Ellis, Tony Richie. These presentations are available on the webpage: <http://www.nccusa.org/interfaith/ifrhome.html>
2. Session at the Congress: "Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Perspectives from Various Religious Traditions," Jane Smith (Christian), Daniel Brenner (Jewish), Thillayvel Naidoo (Hindu), Muhammad Shafiq (Muslim), Manohar Singh Grewal (Sikh).
3. Presentation on "Christian Zionism" (<http://www.christianzionism.org/>) – John Hubers

Actions:

1. Took resolution to NCC GB that we create a task group on Christian Zionism
2. Took resolution to NCC GB on the 400th Anniversary of Jamestown and the need to reflect on the Missiology of Jamestown

February 2007: Arlington, VA, Arlington Temple United Methodist Church

Local Partners: Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington (<http://www.ifcmw.org/>), Eastern Mennonite University – Center for Justice and Peacebuilding (<http://www.emu.edu/cjp/>), Council for America’s First Freedom (<http://www.firstfreedom.org/>)

Learning/Dialogue Events:

1. Presentation and discussion on educational videos: “Three Faiths, One God” and “Jews and Christians” (<http://www.nccusa.org/interfaith/ifrhome.html>) – Auteur Productions (Jerry Krell and Meyer Odze). Panel: Marc Gopin (Jewish), Yahya Hendi (Muslim) and Bob McLaughlin (Baha’i)
2. “Peacebuilding, Religious Freedom and Interfaith Relations” Ruth and Earl Zimmerman (Eastern Mennonite University) and Isabelle Kinnard (First Freedom Council)

Actions:

Agreed to recommend the two videos as educational resources for our churches.

September 2007: Dearborn, MI, Christ Episcopal Church

Local Partners: Interfaith Partners of Dearborn, ISNA, Islamic Center of America,

Learning/Dialogue Events:

1. Conversation with national and local Muslim leaders and leaders of Interfaith Partners (prior to the Commission meeting, Christian partners and Muslim partners met to plan for the Muslim Christian Dialogue Table).
2. Community iftar dinner at the Islamic Center of America

Ongoing Initiatives

1. Jewish-Christian Leaders’ Dialogue Table

Jewish and Christian leaders representing many mainstream Jewish organizations have met at an on-going dialogue table since May 2004. They agreed to meet three times a year. The group agreed to consider carefully the intersection between theology and politics, understanding that while Israel and Palestine are important to our conversation, that conflict neither encompasses all of our Middle East concerns, nor all our social justice concerns.

2. Muslim-Christian Leaders’ Dialogue Table

Immediately prior to the September 2007 Commission meeting an ad-hoc committee from the Commission met with a small group of Muslim leaders convened by ISNA that represented ISNA, ICNA and Mosque Cares as a planning group for a Muslim-Christian Leaders’ Dialogue Table. This

process was set in motion by action of the Commission in February 2006. The February 2008 meeting was the first meeting of this dialogue table.

3. Christian Zionism Task Group

The Commission at its September 2006 meeting agreed to seek NCC Governing Board's action to appoint a task group that will study the phenomenon of Christian Zionism. The Governing Board's action was to ask the president to appoint a task group. While this is now a NCC GB task group, since this was at our Commission's initiative, and impacts our work particularly with the Jewish community, we have a continuing interest in the work of this group.

4. "Christian Theology's Engagement with Religious Pluralism" Special Topics Forums at AAR.

Why are pastors today inadequately prepared to undertake the challenges of their religiously diverse neighborhoods? The problem is not just a matter of seminary curriculum said a group of theologians we consulted. The problem is that Christian theology as a discipline does not take religious pluralism seriously. Seeking to address the concern the Commission sponsored two Special Topics Forum at the American Academy of Religion's 2005 meeting in Philadelphia and 2006 meeting in Washington DC. In 2007, we called an Additional Meeting at which interested theologians discussed whether this format will actually yield the results we desire. The following are the descriptions of our sessions.

2005: Philadelphia -- *Christian Theology's Engagement with Religious Pluralism*

In this forum, scholars of religion and theology discuss Christian theological thinking and the challenge of religious pluralism. What does it mean for Christian theology to take seriously the engagement of Christians with the world of religious pluralism? Does religious pluralism create a new global and local context for theological thinking? How will an engagement with religious pluralism impact theological education in the years ahead?

Chair: Barbara Brown Zikmund, Catholic University of America

Presenters:

Diana Eck, Harvard University

Paul Rajashekar, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia

Damayanthi Niles, Eden Theological Seminary

Tony Richie, Society of Pentecostal Studies

Francis Tiso, US Conference of Catholic Bishops

2006: Washington DC -- *Christian Theology's Engagement with Religious Pluralism: Biblical Texts and Themes.*

In this forum, scholars of religion and theology discuss the challenges religious pluralism poses to Christian theological thinking with a specific focus on difficult biblical texts and themes. How have traditional biblical ideas such as the dualisms between light and

darkness, the divine and the demonic, heaven and hell and the exclusive claims regarding Jesus Christ shaped Christian thinking about religions? How are Christians in the 21st century wrestling with these biblical texts and motifs in their efforts to articulate a theology of religions today?

Chair: Shanta Premawardhana, National Council of Churches USA

Presenters:

Amos Yong, Regent University: "The Light Shines in the Darkness': Johannine Dualism and the Challenge of Christian Theology of Religions Today."

Gerald McDermott, Roanoke College: "Gods, Principalities and Powers in the Bible: Implications for Christian Theology of the Religions."

Marjorie Suchocki, Claremont School of Theology (Professor Emerita): "Transforming Heaven and Hell."

Francis X Clooney, Harvard University: "John 6: 68-69: How My Study of Hinduism Illumines, Contests, and Intensifies Peter's Confession."

Respondents:

Kenneth Cracknell, Brite Divinity School

Wesley Ariarajah, Drew University

5. Consultation the Missiology of Jamestown 1607 and Its Implications for 2007 and Beyond

At the September 2006 meeting, the Commission decided to bring a recommendation to the NCC Governing Board to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Jamestown, VA. One part of that recommendation was to hold a consultation on the Missiology of Jamestown. A sub-committee of the Theological Educators' Caucus is currently working on this project. They are:

Amos Yong, Society for Pentecostal Studies and Regent University School of Theology

Jon Barton, Virginia Council of Churches

Barbara Brown Zikmund, United Church of Christ

The event will be held from May 27-29, 2008 at Regent University School of Theology. Eleven presenters will present papers, and invited participants will engage in the discussions. A book edited by Amos Yong and Barbara Brown Zikmund is the expected result.

6. Interfaith Dialogue Training – Successful Pilot Projects in Columbus, OH and Queens, NY

This is a two-day long training module that is ready to be taken out to local communities throughout the United States. Successful pilot projects were conducted in Columbus, Ohio and Queens, New York in 2005. The focus of the training will be on experiential learning which focuses both on individual learning and group dynamics. How to listen without thinking of what to say next, how to suspend judgment, how to appreciate others' religious tradition, how to be self-critical about your own tradition and how to allow for new insights to emerge from a common experience of

interfaith community are among the practical tools of dialogue that participants will receive. J. Jeffrey Spahn, consultant and trainer to Human Resource departments of major corporations on cross-cultural understanding and dialogue, is the original author of the training module.

7. “God Is One: The Way of Islam” Adult Education Curriculum for Churches – Successful Pilot projects conducted in Hartford CT and New York, NY

God Is One: The Way of Islam by Marston Speight (former director of the Office of Christian-Muslim Relations of the NCCCUSA and retired United Methodist minister) was reprinted following 9/11, with a study guide written by Jay Rock (Director of Interfaith Relations, Presbyterian Church, USA). We encouraged churches to use the book and study guide in their adult education classes. Our goals are three:

- Enhance the knowledge of Islam among Christians
- Improve the attitude of Christians towards Muslims
- Encourage building relationships between churches and mosques in local communities.

We offered a day-long training event for the teachers of the adult education classes taught by Muslim trainers who are associated with Hartford Seminary (Abdullah Antepli and Sohaib Soltan).