Standing Committee on Interreligious Relations
Report to the WMC Steering Committee
September 3, 2014
Emmy Lou John, Chair

We have just begun our journey as a Standing Committee of the W.M.C. The Constitution directs us to foster interreligious activities. These activities includes advancing genuine open and loving relationships between member churches of the Council and people of other religions, by exchanging news, information, ideas and resources relating to interreligious concerns.

At the 2013 London Council meeting this Committee raised several questions for the body to consider. One of the major areas of inquire was how member churches might be resourced in our different contexts so that we will be building peace in our world. The Committee has begun collecting videos and web links that will be placed on the new Council’s website later this fall. The Committee will collect, review and post these resources to share what our member churches are doing in regard to interreligious activities. It is hoped that as others share their experiences we will be able to learn new approaches that might be tried in our own context.

Another question asked how can we use our local context for wider theological reflection? A bibliography of resource and will be posted and hopefully added to by the members of this Steering Committee and others in the W.M.C.

We need to continue pondering the practical, ground level, local actions that can help our members to get to know and respect their neighbors and not just to tolerate them. This can be done by learning about and sharing the best practices of our member churches. This needs to not only be done on the website but also via personal contact. Our actions are not to be “high level dialogues” but everyday conversations that lead to building relationships with all of God’s people around the world. Some starting points need to be developed and might include the following:

- This is not a debate, it is a time to get to know about each other, to take turns and listen with respect.
- Know your own religious beliefs and be open to questioning and seeing opportunities for personal positive change and growth.
- These conversations are to be about real living faith, not dogmas.
- Be respectful, we are all created in God’s image.
- Use your conversations to explore possibilities for joint community service, visiting other religious houses of worship, develop a joint time of worship around a non-religious holiday, etc.

In his epilogue to DO JEWS, CHRISTIANS, AND MUSLIMS WORSHIP THE SAME GOD, Martin Marty encourages the reader to continue searching for “answers”. When the answer is “Yes, but” or “No but” it is in the continuing journey of conversation together that some new “bravo” moment will be found or as he writes: “Even so, look at that….” and the journey will go on.
When looking at the time together in Houston in 2016, this committee will be developing a panel presentation that, will continue to explore new ways to provide accessible interreligious materials, means of engagement, and hands on experiences. This might be a time to connecting with a local interreligious group in Houston.

Remember that we in the W.M.C. are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ; who crossed all sorts of borders to reach out to “others” in justice, mercy and love. At times these activities may be difficult but we are encourages to start and continue efforts to get to know our neighbor. We pray that God will be with us on this journey.

In closing I wish to share with you a quote of Emily Green Balch: “We have a long, long way to go. So let us hasten along the road, the road of human tenderness and generosity. Groping, we may find one another’s hands in the dark.”