INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONSHIPS COMMITTEE REPORT
Emmy Lou John, Chair

At our meeting in Atlanta  Dr. J. C. Park spoke of AT/ONE/MENT as a theology of peace, quoting from Eph. 2:15b. I wish to include a few other verses, starting at 14. “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to you who were near.” I believe that God is continuing to call us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. To remove barriers and dividing walls and to preach peace through our lives as best we can; to work towards a world where there are fewer divisions between neighbors.

The Inter-religious relations committee is excited about the events that are still in the planning stages to be offered to the participants coming to the World Methodist Conference in Houston next year. It is this committee’s responsibility to assist in developing and sharing various methods of “grass roots” dialogue with their neighbors.

On August 31, through the facilitation of Jeremy Bakker and the leadership of Dr. Robert Hunt, Perkins School of Theology, we will be offering a day of learning about various religions and touring their sacred spaces. The particulars of this event, which will offer Continuing Education Credits, are being worked on by Dr. Robert Hunt. He is professor of Christian Mission and Interreligious Relationships and is director of The Center for Evangelism and Missional Church Studies. Dr. Hunt is also director of Global Theological Education at Perkins. Dr. Hunt works with students to help them growth in cultural intelligence and cross-cultural competence. Students gain firsthand experience in building intercultural relationships, resolving cultural conflicts, and guiding intercultural ventures. We are hopeful that a few of these understandings will be taken home from our field trip enabling the participants to venture on an inter-religious journey with their neighbors.

The time line will be from 9 am to 3 or 5 pm depending on what religious houses of worship we will visit. A “lecture” about the various religions and cultural contexts will be given on the bus as we move from place to place. We are working on the logistics of enabling more than one bus to participate.

Our second offering is a panel on how to go about entering into inter-religious relationships with your neighbors. At present Bishop Sunday Onuaha, Methodist Church of Nigeria, and Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, United Methodist Church, Wisconsin Conference are scheduled. Both Bishops bring hands on experiences of working on issues with their Muslim neighbors.

In 2009, Bishop Onuaha was chosen to lead the Nigerian Inter-Faith Action Association (NIFAA), which is the largest Christian-Muslim collaboration in Nigerian history. His area is interfaith medical collaboration, humanitarian service and peace. He will also be offering a workshop.
Bishop Jung led the Northern Illinois Annual Conference in active dialogue and joint actions with the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago. This has developed into cooperation between mosques and churches that focus on common challenges and annual dialogue dinners.

We are still looking for a woman with first hand inter-religious experiences to join this panel. Please see me with your suggestions.

The Inter-religious Committee is looking forward to sharing the diverse religious cultures of Houston and the World with the Conference attendees. We are hopeful that the field trip and the panel will enable them on their journeys of walking in Jesus’ footsteps and working towards a more peaceful world.

I wish to thank Barby Bowser, Bishop Ivan Abrahams, Jeremy Bakker and Dr. Hunt for their able assistance in developing these offerings.