The New Inter-Religious Relationship Standing Committee Report

London World Methodist Council Meeting, Sept. 2013

By Emmy Lou John

THE Purpose of the Council as stated in the Constitution begins with these words:

“The Council is a worldwide association of Methodist, Wesleyan, and Uniting and United Churches. It engages, empowers, and serves the member Churches by encouraging Methodist unity in witness, facilitating mission in the world, and fostering ecumenical and inter-religious activities.”

In the new By-Laws of the WMC Article 7 F. 5 states that there is a standing committee called Inter-religious Relationships.

The Minutes of the Durbin meeting contain information on the discussion of this new committee: Resolution 6.1

“The Council requests the General Secretary, in consultation with the chairpersons of the Standing Committees for Ecumenics and Dialogues, Evangelism and International Affairs to appoint a working group to draw up guidelines for a future equivalent body to advise the Council on multi-religious relationships and to bring these to the next appropriate meeting of the Council for implementation.”

It was approved.

The minutes further relate the discussion that the committee: “…will work to advance genuine open and loving relationships between member churches of the Council and peoples of other religions, by exchanging news, information, ideas and resources relating to inter-religious concerns.” This was adopted. (By-law 1 Goals, c. Fostering Ecumenical and Inter-Faith Activities)

The three fore mentioned Standing Committee chairs met briefly in Durbin but have been unable to form a working group up to this point.

As each of us as individual members of the WMC we were invited to select a committee. Four of us opted for the Inter-Religious Relations Comm. Therefore, we have met here in London and we offer some questions and points for you to consider.
In our deliberations we took the Beatitudes as our scripture and in particular the notion of peacemaking for the world. That drew us to this quotation from a speech given by Hans Kung. “There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions.”

As Christians we want to be confident in our faith and therefore, not see other religions as threatening.

We know that our sisters and brothers in the Evangelism Comm. are working on ways to share our faith with confidence and grace. The other WMC Standing Committees are assisting us on our journey to deepen and express our faith with wisdom and love.

I refer you back to the Hans Kung quote about peace among the nations and the Council’s resolution relating to Inter-Religious Relationships. We invite you to consider how member churches might be resourced in our different contexts to build peace in our world.

The contexts we identify are:
- Christians as a minority
- Christians as a minority who are marginalized
- Christians who are marginalized and persecuted
- Christians who are now a minority who were once a majority
- Christians in the majority but not always confident in their faith
- Christians in a majority

and there are other variants. More than one of these contexts may exist in one country at the same time.

We also ask you to consider the following questions:
- How can we make progress towards genuine, open and loving relationships between Christians and people of other [various/different] faiths?
- How can we exchange news, information, ideas and resources relating to inter-religious concerns between member churches of the WMC?
- How can we use our local context for wider theological reflection?
- Where and when is witness and evangelism appropriate?
- How can we be prayerful, but take urgent action with all involved in tension and conflict?

It is clear that we must do all we can with minimal resources to facilitate the work of this committee. It is important to draw widely from experience and wisdom of you the WMC members. Using electronic media will enable this to happen more easily.
The World Wide Web and other media makes information available and accessible to us images and stories that we may not have come into contact with before.

Therefore, we recommend that as much as possible be done electronically to further the work of this committee. This will be especially so when resources are made available that will encourage loving and genuine open relationships that we seek. Once stories come back of relationships developed and peace building initiatives, however grand or small, we can post these on the WMC web site to educate and encourage one another. This has the added advantage of counteracting the all too often negative portrayals of inter-religious encounters as conflict.

Again I wish to share with you: “There will be no peace among nations without peace among religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions.”

Committee: Chris Elliot, Jenny Spouge, Nicola Vidamour, Emmy Lou John