

## **REPORT OF THE JOINT CRC/RCA ADVISORY COMMITTEES TOPIC #4 - INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT**

On Saturday morning, June 9, 2018, five joint advisory committees of the RCA and CRC met to discuss the current reality of interfaith engagement and to imagine future collaborative efforts. “Interfaith engagement” includes all intentional efforts to get to know people of different faiths, to understand them, be hospitable to them, and to show the love of Christ to them.

These are the common themes that were heard in their reports. The groups discovered that as we approach interfaith engagement, there are differences in our understandings of terms like witness, “evangelism,” “conversion,” and “coexistence.” Even as we struggle to seek clarity on these theological differences, we affirm our shared foundation of Scripture and Reformed creeds and confessions.

Those who participated expressed their joy in working together, wrestling with the topic, expressing various opinions, and the worthwhile nature of, and time spent, in this work together. Each group recognized that in the globalized context of today, there is an urgent need for interfaith engagement. Therefore, as Reformed Christians who are called to love God and love our neighbors, we offer the following reflections from the interfaith advisory groups.

We confess that our human sinfulness defaults to fear and suspicion of the “other.” Our fear has kept us captive to ignorance, isolation, and seclusion throughout our society. Yet we are assured of our calling as witnesses for Christ in the world. Therefore, we affirm the biblical mandate to “seek the welfare of the city where [God has] sent you” (Jeremiah 29:7) and to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). We acknowledge that interfaith engagement prioritizes this work toward the common good of all humanity: eradicating hunger, ending war, preserving the environment, making education more available, and much more.

Therefore, in a spirit of reconciliation and unity between the RCA and CRC, we encourage the two denominations to move forward in their partnership on interfaith engagement. Some possibilities imagined by the groups include the following:

1. Provide training and learning experiences, such as field trips to religious centers in our communities, especially for the pastors and leaders in the denominations to equip them for congregational conversations.
2. Provide and promote learning trips for congregations and youth in scriptural reasoning, interfaith engagement, etc.
3. Provide combined funding to make resources available to local congregations.
4. Encourage congregations and individuals to share space, work together, and celebrate events with other religious groups in their communities.
5. Seek to go beyond simply teaching in order to provide opportunities and experiences.
6. Develop a theology and practice of missions as being a guest.

7. Develop ways of creating space for doubt, questions, and fear that will result from interfaith engagement.

Trusting the work of the Holy Spirit, we encourage everyone to be intentional in reaching out to our neighbors, and to build relationships across our cultural and religious divides. May we build these interfaith relationships with an atmosphere of mutual respect and humility as we seek to understand, listen to learn, and share and receive hospitality.

#### **ADDENDUM:**

Here are some questions that emerged in different advisory groups:

- How do we help people be faithful to Jesus while endeavoring to understand people of other religions?
- How do we work with non-Bible-based faiths?
- Are we willing to accept other faiths and let God sort things out?
- What can we learn from others?
- How can we help churches understand their communal histories with all their sins and seek forgiveness with those we have offended?
- How does the political situation globally influence our discussion?
- What causes separation?
- Who makes the final decision?
- How can we continue to build relationships? (RCA/CRC and beyond)
- Where do we go from here?

## REPORT OF THE JOINT CRC/RCA ADVISORY COMMITTEES APPENDIX TOPIC #4 - INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT

*Handout that was used in the committees that met about topic #4*

### **Key Questions Concerning Interfaith Engagement**

*Adopted from "Frequently Asked Questions," by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) of the CRCNA.*

<https://www.crcna.org/eirc/interfaith-mandate-engagement/frequently-asked-questions>

#### **1. What is interfaith engagement (engaging people of different faiths)? How is interfaith engagement different from ecumenical relations?**

Interfaith engagement includes all intentional efforts to get to know people of different faiths, understand them, be hospitable to them, and show the love of Christ to them. It differs from Christian ecumenical relations which are attempts by different Christian traditions and denominations to understand each other and work together. In interfaith engagement we seek out our neighbors; in ecumenical work we seek out our brothers and sisters in Christ.

#### **2. Why is it important for Reformed Christians to engage people of different faiths?**

We are human before we are Christian and share with all human beings the dignity of being image bearers of God. Christians have a twofold calling: 1. We are to bear witness to the Gospel and call all people to be reconciled to God in Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; II Cor. 5: 18-21). 2. We are to "seek the peace and welfare of the city (and neighborhood, and nation) in which we live." (Jeremiah 29:7). We cannot do either faithfully without honest engagement, especially today when people of different faiths live right next door.

#### **3. How does the Bible inform our engagement with people of different faiths?**

The Bible teaches (Lev. 19:33):

- God the Creator is present to all people (Ps. 19; Ps. 104; Rom. 1, 2; Acts 14, 17)
- All people respond to God's revelation in creation (Rom. 1, 2; Acts 14, 17)
- God's people must resist all idolatry and false religion (Ex. 20: 3-4; I Peter 2:9-12)
- God's people are to show compassion, mercy, and justice to the "aliens" among them (Lev. 19:33)
- God's people are called to concern and prayer for the welfare of all people. (Jer. 29:7; Rom. 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-17).

#### **4. What is the relationship between evangelism and interfaith engagement?**

Evangelism is the "announcing" or "preaching" or otherwise making publically known the "good news of Jesus Christ". God's Word incarnate in Jesus Christ has gone out and will not return to the Lord until it has accomplished the purpose for which he sent it. (Is. 55:1-13) Those who receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord live in community around the world across time. In some places in the world, Christians are a majority and in others places, Christians are a minority. Wherever Christians live, they live a new life in Jesus Christ, knowing they are saved eternally and knowing here in this world by the Holy Spirit they are being sanctified, that is, renewed, reformed, and transfigured in how they live in love with God and with their neighbors. Our lives in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, find evangelical

expression in all that we feel, think, say, and do. This is the witness to which Jesus calls us and for which he has commissioned us (Mt 28:18-20).

Interfaith engagement is an opportunity to learn about who others are, what their faith is, how their religious practice manifests and deepens their faith. In other words, interfaith engagement enables us to know others better and as we know them better, we are able, as we care for one another, to come together and work side by side towards common goals: eradicating hunger, ending war, sharing natural resources, making education available more fully and more completely, preserving the environment, and much more.

Called to give witness to Jesus Christ in all that we feel, think, say and do, we are always evangelizing, announcing the good news of Jesus Christ, in every moment of our lives, including interfaith engagement. There are many ways of doing this.

How does one evangelize in interfaith engagement? Perhaps the best way is to follow Jesus' example: by the Holy Spirit, expressing love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23) as we get to know, love, and live with our neighbors of different faith. If by the Spirit, we truly live the fruits of the Spirit, our neighbors in various ways will be drawn to the light that we have not hidden under a bushel. (Mt 5:15)

**5. Do we have to ignore our differences when we participate in interfaith engagement?  
Must we only focus on those things upon which we agree?**

If we live by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, by God's grace the fruits of the Spirit will find expression in our all our relations, including interfaith engagement. As in any relationship, we begin by discovering what we share in common. In time, as we get to know each other better by working side by side to solve shared challenges in our communities, trust grows and we are able to share deeper differences, especially as these differences have bearing upon our work for the shared good of the community. As we discover these differences and work through them in interfaith engagement, it is important to lean on God (his Word, his salvation in Christ, his loving faithfulness) and remain humble before God and others, for "we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." (2Cor 4:7)