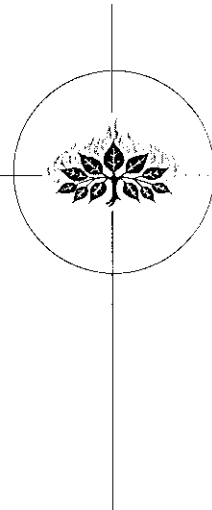


The Presbyterian Church in Canada L'Église presbytérienne au Canada



MODERATOR OF THE 135TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
The Rev. A. Harvey Self, B.A., M. Div.

August 21, 2009

Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought
PO Box 950361
Amman 11195
Jordan

Dear friends,

I write to you on behalf of the 135th General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, which met in June, 2009 in Hamilton, Ontario, and convey to all the members of the Institute, our sincere greetings.

During the course of our meetings, the following recommendation was presented to the Assembly and adopted,

That the above statement be adopted as The Presbyterian Church in Canada's response to the open letter from the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought entitled "A Common Word between Us and You", and that it be forwarded to the Institute, with copies sent to the World Council of Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

And so I am pleased to forward to you, the text of our response to A Common Word Between Us.

A Common Word

A Common Word between Us and You is an invitation from a large and representative group of Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals gathered at the Royal Academy of The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan for Christians and Muslims to come together in the search for meaningful peace on the basis of what they hold in common, love of God and love of neighbour. This invitation was issued in the first place to Pope Benedict XVI one year after his address at Regensburg University in Germany in October 2006. The invitation was also extended to other branches of the Christian church including the World Council of Churches and World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Both of these bodies responded in a very positive manner to this invitation and the WCC invited its member churches also to respond. Last year, the committee recommended that our church make a response to *A Common Word* and the 134th General Assembly mandated the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee jointly with the Committee on Church Doctrine to prepare a response to the content of *A Common Word Between Us and You* for submission to the 135th General Assembly (A&P 2008, p. 39).

The following represents the work of these two committees:

Response to A Common Word

We give thanks for this initiative, and welcome and heartily endorse the call from Muslim religious leaders to Christian religious leaders to unite in a common pursuit of peace and justice on foundational principles of our two faiths: the love of God and love of neighbour. As Christians, we believe that God is the creator of all that is, and loves all people equally. The Bible witnesses to God's love for us, made evident in covenant faithfulness that, in turn, calls us to love God and

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Clerks of Assembly: The Rev. Stephen Kendall, The Rev. Donald Muir, The Rev. Dr. Tony Plomp

neighbour. And so, in obedience to Jesus Christ we regard all people as our neighbours, not just those who are close to us.

In a broken, divided and violent world, this appeal from Muslim leaders has a terrible urgency to it. Therefore, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, and as The Presbyterian Church in Canada and as a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches, we respond with enthusiasm and without hesitation to this timely call. We pledge ourselves not only to find ways to co-operate and to co-exist peacefully with other faiths but to pursue ways to promote reconciliation between Christians and Muslims – and with Jews who are also people of the Book and who, we believe, ought to be a vital part of our common pursuit of peace and justice.

We recognize that both Christianity and Islam are global faiths. This means that Christians cannot be identified with Western nations any more than Islam can be identified with the Middle East. Indeed, the majority of the world's Christians now live outside Europe and North America in a diversity of social and cultural contexts. Most of the world's population now live in religiously pluralistic societies.

We recognize that Canada itself is an increasingly diverse country whose population reflects the cultures and religious practices of its indigenous peoples as well as the many immigrant groups who have made it home over more than four hundred years. In Canada, no one religion or religious institution can be identified with the state although we would not want to deny the profound influence which Christianity has played in shaping its modern character. As Christians in our Canadian and global contexts, we believe that we must use every avenue available to us to promote peace, justice and reconciliation. We have learned much as Christians and as Canadians in the current healing and reconciliation process between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. We celebrate that there have been formal and informal interfaith dialogues and initiatives in Canada for many decades.

We resonate with much that is in this current invitation because of the common ground which Muslims and Christians have already found. In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, we are guided in our relations with our neighbours of other faith traditions by our confessional statement, *Living Faith*, adopted in 1998:

Some whom we encounter belong to other religions
and already have faith.
Their lives often give evidence of devotion
and reverence for life.
We recognize that truth and goodness in them
are the work of God's Spirit, the author of all truth.
We should not address others in a spirit of arrogance
implying that we are better than they.
But rather, in the spirit of humility,
as beggars telling others where food is to be found,
we point to life in Christ. (9.2.1)

As Christians, we believe that peace is the gift of God (Numbers 6:26), a sign of God's blessing and of God's gracious covenant (Isaiah 54:10, Ezekiel 34:25). The true source of peace in its varied forms of tranquillity, harmony, prosperity, wholeness and material well-being is God, the God of peace (Leviticus 26:6; Psalm 29:11). Yet peace is never without its moral conditions. It is associated with truth and with faithfulness to God (Esther 9:30, Zechariah 8:16). Above all, it is closely conjoined with righteousness or justice. Thus the psalmist sings: "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Psalm 85:10). Righteousness and justice issue in peace (Isaiah 32:17).

The Messiah, according to the Book of Isaiah, will be called "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:2), and will usher in an age of peace when swords will be beaten into ploughshares, spears into pruning hooks,

when nation will not lift up swords against nation and they shall not learn war anymore (Micah 4:3; Isaiah 2:2-4). Appropriately, there is a sculpture at the United Nations Building in New York inspired by the Micah passage of an iron worker beating a sword into a ploughshare.

We believe that the birth into our world of Jesus Christ, the Saviour, truly God and truly human, actually brought peace. This is echoed in the songs of Zechariah, of Mary, of the angels and of Simeon in Luke's gospel, chapters 1 and 2 which have been used liturgically as canticles since ancient times. According to the Benedictus, the task of Jesus the Messiah is "to guide our feet in the way of peace" (Luke 1:79); according to the Magnificat, without justice there is no peace (Luke 1:46-55); according to the Gloria in Excelsis, the birth of Jesus the Messiah fills the heavens with glory and pours out peace on the earth; and according to the Nunc Dimittis, Jesus, the Messiah is "the consolation of Israel" and thus the bringer of peace. The Messianic hope of peace finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ, particularly in his teaching about loving one's enemy: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven;" (Matthew 5:43-44).

For Christians, peace constitutes the good news that the apostles proclaimed, not as an ideal but as a reality promised and given in Jesus Christ, just as love for one another is founded upon the peace which God grants in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the Apostle Peter declared that God has no favourites between one nation and another, but that those who fear God and act rightly are acceptable to God, no matter to what nation they belong (Acts 10:34-35). Christian preaching consists, as Peter went on to say, in proclaiming "the good news of peace by Jesus Christ who is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36).

Living Faith states the following concerning World Peace:

Christ, the Prince of Peace,
calls his followers to seek peace in the world.

We know that nations have fought in self-defence
and that war, at times may be unavoidable.
But the tragic evil that comes with war,
the slaughter of men, women, and children
must rouse us to work for peace.

We protest against the world arms race
that diminishes our ability to fight
hunger, ignorance, poverty and disease.
We fear nuclear war
and the devastation it would bring.
We affirm that God is at work when people are
ashamed of the inhumanity of war
and work for peace with justice.
We pray for peace
to him who is the Prince of Peace. (8.5)

As Christians, we confess and repent that we have not always taken this message of peace to heart. On the foundation of the love of God and love of neighbour, we commit ourselves unreservedly to peace-making. Jesus taught: "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Those who make peace between warring parties, Jesus insisted, reflect the character of God who is the God of peace.

Peace is not possible without reconciliation. Central to the Christian faith is the belief that Jesus Christ is our peace and that he has made peace, peace with God and peace with neighbour, by his death on the cross (Ephesians 2:13-18). If reconciliation between Christians and Muslims is not to be mere rhetoric but a living reality, then the fears, suspicions and age-old resentments that exist on all sides must be faced, discussed and resolved.

Among other things, reconciliation will involve Christians examining themselves and acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Christians must rid themselves of the bigotry and animosity that is often directed to and felt by Muslims and cultivate a greater understanding of Muslim beliefs and religious practices – and urge their fellow citizens to do the same.

Similarly, reconciliation will involve on the part of Muslims a willingness to cultivate a greater understanding of Christian beliefs and religious practices. Reconciliation mandates we must all work to end acts of violence against members of all religions and their places of worship. Mutual respect for each other's faith, commitment to religious freedom, including the freedom of the individual to convert to another faith, freedom of public worship, and religious toleration are essential.

Again we rejoice in the call of Muslim religious leaders to Christian religious leaders to join in a common pursuit of peace and justice based on the foundational principles we share: love of God and love of neighbour. As an Abrahamic faith, we as Christians look forward to our continuing involvement in dialogue with Muslims and Jews where our mutual love of God and neighbour can be expressed and deepened. We cling to our common hope, noted above, of a world where "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Micah 4:3; Isaiah 2:2-4). "The God of peace be with you all. Amen." (Romans 15:33).

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Kendall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephen Kendall
Principal Clerk
skendall@presbyterian.ca

cc: The Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, General Secretary, World Council of Churches
The Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, General Secretary, World Alliance of Reformed Churches
The Rev. Bob Faris, Ecumencial and Interfaith Relations Committee