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Participants. Conveners were Benjamin L. Hartley (United Methodist Church), Kirsten S. Oh (UMC), and Ray F. Kibler III (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America); with other participants W. Scott Axford, Final Report drafter (Council Of Christian Churches Within The Unitarian Universalist Association), Kyle R. Tau, clerk/recorder (UMC), Reginald D. Broadnax (American Methodist Episcopal Zion Church), Donald W. Dayton (Wesleyan), Barry A. Ensign-George (Presbyterian Church USA), Gayle Gerber-Koontz (Mennonite), Alexander S. Santrac (Seventh Day Adventist), Matthew A. Shadle (Roman Catholic), David T. Simmons (The Episcopal Church), and Christian T. Collins Wynn (American Baptist Churches); not all of whom were able to be involved in each of the Sessions.

Meetings. Subgroup Two met six times: **1)** Baltimore, 5-6 May 2016 and **2)** 1-3 December 2016 (both at Doubletree BWI); **3)** California, 11-13 May 2017 (Azusa Pacific University); **4)** Maryland, 8-9 November 2017 (Sheraton Silver Spring); **5)** Atlanta, 10-12 May 2018 (Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur); and **6)** Washington, D.C., 15 October 2018 (College Park Marriott, Hyattsville, Maryland). These meetings were sometimes coincident [**1), 4), 6)**] with the National Council of Churches' annual Christian Unity Gatherings (which include the various Convening Tables [Theological Dialogue and Matters of Faith & Order, Interfaith Relations, Christian Education and Faith Formation, Joint Action and Advocacy]).

Study and Response. The Subgroup's work is summarized under Four Questions (**Q1. – Q4.**):

Q1. What in the two World Council of Churches documents [WDW, XW] is commended to the Churches?

The World Council of Churches' July 2014 statement "[Who Do We Say We Are?](#)" seeks to hold the doctrine of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church in the one hand, and "the manifest plurality of churches" in the other (**WDW**, paragraph 72). This experience in seeking unity in the midst of diversity within the church "provides a reference point for understanding, appreciating, and acting upon what it means to be church in the context of religious plurality" (72). As the document states, "We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God. . . . We appreciate this tension, and do not attempt to resolve it" (42). The Christian Church should be hospitable and open to dialogue, and yet it must "safeguard the essential integrity of the expressions of [Christian] faith in language and liturgy" (80). Note that this is different from general "multiculturalism" as commonly expressed. Nor is this a theological ambivalence (Hollinger) that tends toward a muting of genuine religious difference. When does such a theological ambivalence lead to an implicit relativism and cease to be the Faith once delivered to the Saints (Jude 3c)? It can be easier to engage in generic talk of God or sacred texts, than to affirm the particularity of the Person of Jesus Christ as prerequisite to all Christian understanding. Particularism in true dialogue is a challenge across many religious traditions. Perhaps the American experience of having multiple religious traditions in one nation can be helpful for the global project.

WDW gives clarity to a few often-used terms, some of which have been traditional points of conflict. "[Evangelism](#)" tends to have in view a *result* (to gain a convert), and can be connected with the negative connotations of "[Proselytizing](#)," under which some missionaries sought out not only non-Christians, but also Christians already in another church. **WDW** reflects a concerted effort to recast evangelism in terms of witness (81). "[Witness](#)" bears less of the burden of proselytizing, and can be defined as introducing others to the Kingdom of God, through Christ, with the possibility of planting a seed or leaving an invitation. "[Dialogue](#)" represents mutual interaction, conversation, and inquiry— preferably using the Principles and Recommendations detailed in the World Council of Churches' June 2011 "[Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World](#)." The Recommendations are: study, build, encourage, cooperate, call, pray. The Principles are: Act in God's love, service, and justice; Imitate Jesus Christ; Practice Christian virtues; Engage in ministries of healing; Reject violence; Honor freedom of religion; Pursue mutual respect; Renounce false witness; Build relationships.

100 **Q2. Why should Christians engage in Interfaith work at all?**

101
102 **WDW** answers, “[T]he risen and living Christ can move and be met beyond the bounds of the
103 Church’s institutions and proclamation. In these ways, our belief in Christ opens us to seek God’s
104 presence through the Spirit within other traditions than our own” (34). Further, **WDW** affirms the
105 Divine mission in the world which God created (75), with God’s Church acting as “the springboard
106 for proclamation and evangelization” (75). Indeed, God wills all to be saved (94) and therefore
107 the Church “cannot set limits to the saving power of God” (42). Mere human beings, even given
108 God’s will to save all, do not know definitively who is finally “in” or “out.” The Church is called
109 to preach the Gospel, but the results are God’s. The Body of Christ is called, gathered, and sent—
110 for the sake of others and for the sake of the world. The horizon of the Kingdom of God is indeed
111 the world, “the realm that the church is called to serve” (76). In the New Jerusalem, all nations
112 come (Revelation 21:24), with all sorts and conditions of the People of God at last face to face. It
113 is just this awareness of God’s presence in the wider world and its communities which calls
114 Christians to engage in interfaith work.

115
116 The Wisconsin Council of Churches’ 17 November 2014 statement (in response to the attack on
117 the Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin in 2012) proved to be a wonderful resource. It develops
118 an understanding of “neighbor” as “someone who is related to us by virtue of our placement in the
119 world, not by virtue of our relationship to Christ” in the context of Jesus Christ’s Great
120 Commandment to love God and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37,39). It commends
121 three norms for Interfaith involvement: Humble listening/ Openness, Prophetic witness/ Christian
122 fidelity, Compassionate collaboration/ Solidarity for the common good. And it makes a further
123 distinction for relations within and without the Church: Article One of the Nicene Creed gives
124 Creation and with its fellow Creatures; and then Article Two lays the foundation for Christian
125 unity.

126
127 **Q3. What contribution is offered to the pending review of the 1999 NCCCUSA Interfaith Statement?**

128
129 Interfaith work must be based in the centrality of Jesus Christ as the way Christians profess and
130 understand God. Starting-points are important— such as beginning with the Trinity, as opposed
131 to starting from our varied human religious experiences. Participants in interfaith dialogue ought
132 not to present a Christianity so diluted as to be unrecognizable to the vast majority (past and
133 present) who practice it.

134
135 The 1999 NCCCUSA “Interfaith Relations and the Churches” document’s basis in Creation
136 (paragraph 19, “God and Human Community”) may in this sense be insufficiently particular for
137 Interfaith work, while its affirmation that “relationship is part of the nature of [the Triune] God”
138 (paragraph 21) may be a better place to start. The document’s move from “conversion” to
139 “witness” is a helpful one and worthy of further development.

140
141 Also, the context matters: that is, it matters whether one is doing Christian Interfaith work in a
142 *majority* (as in the West) or in a *minority* (as in the Middle East) context. No one living in
143 Christian cultures notices its assumptions as keenly as its non-Christian minorities— just as
144 Christians living in non-Christian cultures are naturally much more sensitive to the pressures on
145 their very existence.

146
147 One fruitful Biblical text is Acts 3:1-4:3 (Saints Peter & John healing outsiders and proclaiming
148 salvation to be had in no other Name than Jesus’). And yet, it being impossible to “set limits to
149 the saving power of God” (**WDW**, 42), there are signs of God’s power elsewhere, too— perhaps
150 unnamed, perhaps different manifestations of the Holy Spirit. The much-burdened category of
151 “salvation” itself benefits from nuance: it could mean peace in this world, or faith-enabled life in
152 the next world, or something not *just* limited to “conversion.” Other helpful texts are: Acts 17
153 (Saint Paul on Mars Hill, Athens), Mark 7 (the Syro-Phoenician woman), Luke 15 (the good
154 Samaritan), Matthew 8 (the Roman centurion), and Luke 24 (the Emmaus Road strangers).

156 **Q4. What counsel is offered to the Interfaith Relations Convening Table for its continuing work?**
157

158 The Interfaith Relations Convening Table, anticipating its role in the pending review of the
159 National Council of Churches' 10 November 1999 statement, "Interfaith Relations and the
160 Churches", invited the Faith & Order Convening Table (on 9 November 2017 during Session
161 Four) for colloquy. In response to this conversation, the Faith and Order Convening Table
162 commends **XW**, which gives a short and very practical list of how Christians should then conduct
163 themselves (**Q1.**), as well as the Wisconsin statement (**Q2.**). These lists are actually quite helpful,
164 and if they seem obvious to those already engaged, they may yet be leaven in the loaf (Galatians
165 5:9) of those who are much less so.

166
167 The Faith & Order Convening Table commends the multilateral approach which has characterized
168 its ecumenical work for decades (since 1927). Recognizing the value of other bodies' continued,
169 direct dialogues (Hindu-Jewish, Muslim-Buddhist, *etc.*), the fairly-new Interfaith Relations
170 Convening Table could take up a topic submitted by the participants (or perhaps by the
171 NCCCUSA), and then discuss responses from the various religious traditions. For example, the
172 Faith & Order Commission issued documents on such as "Unity in Mission" (Paulist Press, New
173 York: 2013), "Salvation and Justice" (*Ecumenical Trends*, XLI, 9-11: Graymoor Ecumenical &
174 Interreligious Institute, New York: 2012), and "The Authority of the Church in the World."
175 Perhaps the Interfaith Relations Convening Table could examine "What is peace?", "Who is my
176 neighbor?", or "Where does conscience interact with truth?" Striking commonalities (and
177 unexpected groupings of differences) would surely emerge, to general edification.

178
179 **Concluding comments.** It is *because of* our devotion to Jesus Christ, that we *engage others*: practicing
180 hospitality (Romans 12:13*b*); seeking to discern the work of God both within and without the Church, in
181 the world God created, and among our neighbors; and bearing faithful witness to the authentic Gospel as
182 we receive it. Genuine participation in inter-religious dialogue requires that Christians honestly articulate
183 the particularities of Christian belief and practice. There is a recurring principle: that Christians act as
184 committed and informed *Christians*.

185
186 The very Nature of the Triune God— a Communion of distinct-and-related Persons— is a multiplicity as
187 well as a unity. That Nature is the basis for God's ongoing creation of, search for, and establishing
188 relationship with, *other persons*. This in consequence summons Christians to the fullest understanding of
189 our shared but varied *human* nature. It is the very human nature created in the Triune God's own divine
190 image.

191
192 There are differences, and even schism, *within* Christian traditions (and/or denominational bodies) as well
193 as *between* them (as treated in the unfinished 2012-2013 Faith & Order project on *internally*-dividing issues
194 [and the effect of various structures in resolving or furthering them]: *q.v.*) The quest for unity among
195 Christians in the midst of such irreducible differences ought to inform our approach to the differences
196 among Christians and their Interfaith neighbors. Finally, through all of this, Christians should bear in mind
197 that there are divisions and schism within those *other* religious bodies, too, as well as within our own.

198
199 And, ... who knows (Esther 4:14*d*), ... whether we are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?
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201
202 Washington, DC, 15 October AD 2018. (Reviewed for dissemination, Herndon, VA 31 May AD 2019.)