

CCUIR Report

Gratitude to the members of the committee, Matt Toupin, Shawna Simmons, Annie Fields, Jeff Woods, Chakravarthy Zadda, Angela Russel, and Wungreiso (Wung) Valui, for all the work they have done throughout the past year.

Gratitude also to the work done by Jeff Woods, Roy Medley and Laura Austin who has volunteered to serve on the Jewish-Christian dialogue of the NCCUSA.

CCUIR has an exhibit at the upcoming Biennial. The booth is contained within the area of the larger Office of the General Secretary display area.

The CCUIR celebrates those who have dedicated their lives to advance Christian unity and interfaith relations. We are grateful for the outstanding nominations for the 2023 Mowbray Ecumenical Award. The CCUIR dinner is scheduled for Friday evening as a part of the Biennial Mission Summit. Several members of CCUIR are helping with the program. The keynote address will be delivered by Dr. Paul Hayes, the 2011 recipient of the Edwin T. Dahlberg Peace Award (an award given to an individual or church for outstanding work for peace and justice). Dr. Luis N. Rivera-Pagan will also address the participants as the 2023 Luke Mowbray Ecumenical Award. The Luke Mowbray Ecumenical Award was established in 1974 at the request of Edna Mowbray, in memory of her late husband to recognize their commitment to achieve Christian unity. Luke and Edna Mowbray were faithful members of First Baptist Church in Pratt, Kansas. They were dedicated American Baptists who helped other farmers during difficult times. The Award's purpose is to give recognition to a member of an American Baptist church who has made an outstanding contribution in ecumenical work at the local, state, national, or international level as either a volunteer or paid professional. CCUIR members are encouraged to sit at different tables to interact with the guests.

Dr. Luis N. Rivera-Pagán is the Henry Winters Luce Professor of Ecumenics and Mission Emeritus at Princeton Theological Seminary, raised in the First Baptist Church of Rio Pedras, Puerto Rico, and has spoken in conferences in many countries around the world. He is a prolific author, known, among others, for his book, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (1992), a classic in the history of Christianity in the Americas. He was also the editor of *God, in Your Grace . . .* the Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 2006. His writing on a prophetic theology of peace and his own work for peace and justice inspired a group of Latin American Baptists who met in Rome at the Global Conference of Baptists for Peace in 2009 to create the Continental Network for Peace (RECONPAZ), a Latin American ecumenical organization which engages multiple spiritualities to promote justice, peace, and solidarity. We will honor his faithful Journey of involvement in ecumenical work and movements of human solidarity around the world, from the Puerto Rican protest in Vieques, in the early 1970s to his participation in a WCC delegation that visited the Chernobyl region after the nuclear disaster of 1986, and his support of Salvadorean theologian Jon Sobrino when he was censored by the Vatican for his denunciation of the systemic violence inflicted on the poor in Central America.

Among other things, the work this committee does is significant for the interfaith it provides with other Christian organizations and denominations, and with other faith traditions. Jeff Woods spoke at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington DC, attended the Unity Gathering of the NCCUSA, which celebrated the 75th anniversary of the NCC and announced Bishop Vashti McKenzie, of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, as the new General Secretary of the National Council of Churches that occurred at. He and Roy have represented the ABCUSA in the Burma Advocacy Group.

Chaks participated in the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit – 2023 at Washington DC in Jan 31 – Feb 1, 2023 and reported progress being made about concerns regarding Hindu Nationalism in the U.S. and India.

Raimundo and Chaks will be attending the BWA gathering in Stavanger next month. While Chaks will be sharing a presentation on Hindu Nationalism at the meeting of the Religious Freedom Commission of the Baptist World Alliance, Raimundo will speak on Baptist ecumenical engagement in the WCC as part of a forum on the theme. They both intend to meet with Baptists from India at the BWA to help identify actions that can be taken that do not further threaten religious leaders. Following the BWA, Chaks will be going to Germany to make connections with international mission agencies in Europe. Chaks will seek to connect agencies in Europe to address these issues with the help of the National Council of Churches in India and the European Baptist Association.

Some missionaries and evangelists in the past and present have complicated the situation by disrespecting religious symbols and sacred spaces, calling them idols, and disregarding their meaning, going into temples and breaking their idols and saying that their idols are human made. They have maligned the character of the Christian church.

Laura Austin participated in the Jewish Christian Dialogue which met in Providence, Rhode Island on November 16 and 17, 2022 at Brown University-RISD Hillel. The agenda included discussions on hurtful language and respectful discourse training; the dangers of the rise of Christian Nationalism in the US; a round table discussion with Jewish students regarding their college experiences; an explanation of the various forms of Zionism and Jewish Nationalism in Israel today; and an examination of the Evangelical Lutheran writings on preaching and teaching "With Respect for the Jewish People".

Roy Medley that lifted up the Muslim League Forum for Building Bridges between East and West at the UN headquarters in New York where he was a participant. The identification of the rise of religious nationalism globally by Roy was evident throughout the CCUIR discussion. Among other things, he highlighted the work of the Baptist Joint Committee on Religious Liberty in addressing Christian nationalism with us and other supporting Baptist bodies and an upcoming event organized by Religions for Peace on June 27 to discuss the Rise of Hindu Nationalism in the United States.

The National Council of Churches has formed a Theological Task Force to write a policy statement on Religious Nationalism. Raimundo has been involved in developing the writing of that document. This document expands the previous work of the National Council of Churches on the policy statement of 2021 titled "The Dangers of Christian Nationalism in the United States." The basis of religion nationalism is religious identity, which is used to foster the exclusion of individuals and communities from citizenship, political representation, and a role in determining public policy. The sweeping influence of religious nationalism and right-wing populism throughout the world is shaping international dialogue and can be seen in places as distinct as Russia, India, Hungary, Brazil, and the United States. Religious nationalism is transnational in that ideas and movements generated in one nation often have profound effects elsewhere. It is not isolated within nation-states. For instance, Christian nationalism is a worldwide, interrelated phenomenon. Hindu nationalists are active in the US in some destructive ways, influencing US policy and academic study. Some expressions of religious nationalism have supra-nationalist ambitions, indeed designs for world-wide domination.

Raimundo will be attending the WCC Central Committee meeting in the coming days as well as the BWA meeting in Norway immediately following the Biennial.

We are grateful for Carol Blythe, who is retiring from her service on Shoulder to Shoulder. The Committee is looking for a replacement for that service.

In response to the discussion about the atrocities of boarding schools for indigenous peoples in and the conversations the Committee had with Rev. Benjamin Jacuk last November, Jeff Woods has checked in with Jeffrey Haggray who indicated that ABHMS will investigate the involvement of their organization in this historic issue.

Respectfully,

Raimundo Barreto