

ABCUSA COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN UNITY AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS

Report to the Board of General Ministries

Raimundo C. Barreto, Chair
Nov. 4, 2021

Once again, I am grateful for the opportunity to report to this Board on behalf of the CCUIR. The ABCUSA Committee on Christian Unity and Interfaith Relations acts on behalf of the denomination to engage in interfaith and ecumenical relationships through partnerships that include the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and other efforts for the visible manifestation of our oneness in Christ. This report mostly updates the CCUIR work since our last meeting in June.

As I announced back in June, some of the CCUIR activities and documents can be found on our webpage on the ABCUSA website. You can explore them through the following link:
<https://www.abc-usa.org/ccuir/>.

On behalf of the CCUIR, I present the name of Angela Russell, BGM General Director, NW Region, to replace Jim Wolfe, ABCUSA-President Elect, who will retire from CCUIR year-end 2021.

The CCUIR has also nominated the Rev. William Young, Pastor of Covenant Baptist United Church of Christ, Washington DC as its representative in Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), since our current representative, Rev. Trisha Manarin, Executive Minister, DCBC, cannot continue due to time restraints.

This remaining of this report summarizes the several updates reports the CCUIR received in advance of its November meetings.

The National Council of Churches:

The CCUIR has continued its activities representing our denomination in ecumenical and interfaith dialogues convened by the National Council of Churches.

On Sep. 10, Raimundo Barreto attended the Fall meeting of the NCC Interreligious Convening Table, where updates from the several interfaith dialogues held through the NCC were shared.

The Christian-Buddhist Dialogue last met in April 2021, when participants mainly discussed the pandemic impact on Buddhist and Christian communities and anti-Asian racism. The lack of in-person meetings is a challenge for this dialogue. Participants reported that some Buddhist spaces and statues were vandalized. NCC representatives were impressed by the work Buddhists are doing and shocked by all the reported vandalism. As a response, the NCC put out a resolution condemning Asian American and Pacific Islander Hate.

Hindu-Christian Dialogue participants shared similar experiences while also expressing concern with the impact of the pandemic on India.

The Jewish-Christian dialogue discussed the circulation of anti-Jewish right-wing messages in some Christian circles. Dialogue participants also reflected on the impact of Covid on Jewish and Christian communities, exploring how these communities of faith can unite our voices to resist anti-Jewish hate in Christian circles.

The Muslim-Christian Dialogue held two meetings in the previous year focusing on Covid and its responses within Christian and Muslim communities, which were mentioned in my previous report to this body. In those gatherings, participants of the dialogue heard from Christian and Muslim agencies responding to the pandemic. The discussion about the pandemic also included concerns with intersectionality, migration, and race, among other things which affect the pandemic impact and potential responses in different contexts. Participants also discussed the need to raise awareness about the importance of vaccination.

The Sikh-Christian Dialogue discussed police reform, the dangers of Christian nationalism, and the distorted perception of the U.S. as a white Christian nation. Religious violence and mass shootings (and how they impact faith communities) were also topics of concern. The need to seek solidarity among communities of different religious persuasion was underscored. The particular was as AAPI violence affects the Sikh community was exemplified by the Old Creek shooting, which forced some Sikh men to stop using their turbans.

Rev. Chakravarthy Zadda, Senior Pastor at FBC of Waukesha, WI, has been the ABCUSA representative in the National Hindu-Christian dialogue since 2019. His report indicates that this national dialogue started in 2018 has quickly grown into a robust dialogue with a number of good partners and participants. The main convening partner with the NCC is the Hindu Vedanta Society of South California. While there were plans for an in-person meeting in Los Angeles in 2020 to discuss themes such as Hindutva (Hindu principles, and how they are applied to social life), fundamentalism in Hinduism and Christianity (and how it is manifested as religious nationalism and racism in India and the United States), and how we can accompany Hindus in the US and Christians in India during times of tension, due to the pandemic, the dialogue met remotely, spending time instead “in prayer, lifting up God’s compassion for all humanity,” while discussing “the current state of the Coronavirus Crisis and its impact on the respective communities particularly in the US,” exploring “what are the resources the faith communities could offer to help the communities and also pray for one another during this crisis.” Some of those prayers, which can be used by anyone, are available on the NCC website, including one offered by ABCUSA Emeritus General Secretary Roy Medley, which can be found on this link: <http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/?s=ps+27>.

A second meeting took place on December 18, 2020 via Zoom. While the impact of Covid-19 continued to dominate the conversations, topics like the angst related to the presidential election and policy concerns for the new Administration in regard topics like racism and immigration were also part of the agenda. Among the main concerns, the dialogue partners asked themselves the question, “how can religious communities contribute effectively to our society’s healing and reconciliation?”

Rev. Zadda was also one of the ABCUSA representatives attending (virtually) the NCC Christian Unity Gathering on Oct. 11-12, 2021. The CCUIR is deeply thankful for the work he and other ABCUSA representatives are doing through those dialogues.

The World Council of Churches

We have received a letter from Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, acting WCC general secretary, with news from the council, including the following:

- 1) The reception of two new members: (a) Faith Apostolic Mission – South Africa – Founded in 1908, the church has around 1.3 million members in 1,802 local congregations across 35 districts. It is a member of the South African Council of Churches and the Pentecostal World Fellowship; and (b) First African Church Mission in Nigeria – Founded in 1891, the church has over 1 million members in 1,000 local congregations across 36 dioceses. It is a member of the Christian Council of Nigeria and the All Africa Conference of Churches.
- 2) COVID-19’s devastating impact, particularly on “on women, the young, the poor, people employed informally, and those working in contact-intensive sectors.”
- 3) “Across all regions, representatives shared a wide range of social, political, and economic concerns that increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Division at the heart of society and a lack of hope were the biggest concerns worldwide.”
- 4) Prayers for the journey towards and beyond the 11th WCC Assembly in September 2022.

Last June, Dr. Raimundo Barreto participated as a speaker in the Teaching Ecumenism in the Context of World Christianity, organized by the WCC-led Bossey Ecumenical Institute. This conference, held on June 2-4, 2021, examined the status of the ecumenical commitment to overcoming the pain of division among churches across different traditions and cultural contexts and the walls that separate humanity in light of the increasing awareness of the diversity of Christianity we have witnessed around the world in the last few decades. His plenary presentation on the topic “World Christianity and Global Justice: Rising Ecumenical Demands and Possibilities” will appear in the forthcoming issue of the *Ecumenical Review*.

Baptist World Alliance

The BWA is planning a series of Webinars to be rolled out over the next six (6) months. These webinars will be hosted by the Commissions on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity and Mission (Holistic Mission Guide). The first webinar, organized by the Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity, will be held on November 9 at 8:00 am Eastern Standard Time on the theme: “Christian Unity: What Difference Does it Make?” For more information and registration details please click this link: <https://www.baptistworld.org/christian-unity-webinar/>. The BWA is asking its member bodies to help disseminate this information.

Since last June, Dr. Raimundo Barreto has been chairing the BWA Roundtable on Racial Justice. After several meetings, the roundtable is preparing a document for the BWA Executive Committee, which aims to inform the BWA instances on racial justice in the coming years.

Other Updates

Emeritus General Secretary Roy Medley updated the CCUIR on the New Revised Standard Version, which has now been completed. It has been adopted by the NCC as an authorized update to the NRSV in the lineage of the KJV, and the RSV. This has been a six-year labor in conjunction with the Society of Biblical Literature, which counted with the participation of fellow American Baptist, Dr. Leann Fletcher-Snow of Berkeley Divinity School, who served as a section leader in the extensive review process. In total, over 116 people were involved in bringing the update to completion. In Dr. Medley's words, "In undertaking this effort, the NCC, Friendship Press and the Society for Biblical Literature intended the update to be the world's most meticulously researched, rigorously reviewed, and faithfully accurate modern English-language Bible translation available to date." We are thankful for his leadership as President of Friendship Press (NCC publishing house).

On Oct. 13-16, I attended the *II Seminar on Ecumenical Theology in Latin America*, organized by the Catholic University of Parana in Brazil. Its main objective was to advance sustained dialogue aimed at overcoming differences and building mutual understanding among different ecclesial traditions in the context of our time's religious and socio-cultural plurality. My talk focused on the topic "Ecumenical Coexistence in the 21st Century: World Christianity and Ecumenism."

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Respectfully submitted,

Raimundo Barreto