

REPORT OF THE CARIBBEAN AND NORTH AMERICAN AREA COUNCIL

Lisa Vander Wal, steering committee convenor

Since the executive Committee meeting of May 2015 in Lebanon, the steering committee has met via teleconferencing, email, Facebook and in person in Guyana in April 2016.

Joint Gender Justice Event with AIPRAL in Matanzas, Cuba

The CANAAC region was well represented at the gender justice event in Cuba in January 2016. Individuals from Trinidad, Guyana, the Dominican Republic, the Cayman Islands, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Canada and the US were among the event participants.

This event highlighted the gender justice challenges facing the churches and individuals in our region as well as the wider global context. As the CANAAC participants met together during the event, intersections between gender, race and economic circumstances were particularly noted as contributing to injustice. We noted the many resources which already exist pertaining to these issues, and our desire is to share them among the member communions in the region.

Leadership Challenges

One of the challenges which CANAAC has faced since the general assembly of 2014 has been effective gathering of the steering committee in order to conduct the business of CANAAC. The committee of six persons elected in 2014 is the minimum size allowed by our by-laws. Still, despite the small size, it has been difficult to convene the committee due to scheduling conflicts, technological difficulties, and the reality of several of the members carrying multiple leadership commitments. This has resulted in hampered progress toward the goals set out in 2014 as well as general frustration with this lack of progress.

Other factors are worth noting in this regard. First, CANAAC faces a lack of monetary resources. Member churches have reduced giving to CANAAC or have stopped giving altogether. This is likely due in part to a perception that CANAAC is not performing a helpful function for these member churches. Secondly, CANAAC leaders are trying to do the work of CANAAC without staff support. Each of us on the steering committee are already very committed within our own churches, and with continuing communication challenges and without staff support, it is difficult to move forward toward fulfilling the goals we have set forth. Finally, it has been noted that there is a disconnect between the structures of the WCRC and the regional councils. We hope that this is an issue which can be discussed among the regional council leadership and the leadership of the WCRC.

Meeting of the Steering Committee in Guyana, April 10-12, 2016

The steering committee convened in Guyana in April with a two-fold agenda: to meet with Guyanese member communions and to plan for the next general assembly. This assembly will be held in Guyana September 23-29, 2016.

It was extremely helpful to meet with leaders from the Guyana Congregational Union, the Guyana Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church of Guyana. We learned of the challenges of these member communions, including a lack of pastoral leadership in the churches, poverty, racial dynamics, suicide within the Guyanese context, to name a few. We were very pleased to discover the readiness of the Guyanese churches to help plan and facilitate the general assembly in September. Finally, it was encouraging to be invited to attend a forum to introduce the Accra Confession that was being held at one of the Guyanese churches. This arose as a follow up to the gender justice event in Cuba.

The agenda of the 2016 General Assembly will largely be focused upon preparing delegates for the WCRC 2017 General Council in Leipzig, Germany. Since attendance at the 2014 General Assembly was low, we will be diligent toward communicating a desire to have full participation from each of the member churches in September. Additionally, we will strongly encourage the member churches to send delegates to the general assembly who will also be delegated to the general council so that they will be well prepared to be strong representatives from the CANAAC region at the general council meeting.

Communication

As already mentioned, communication continues to be a challenge between CANAAC and the churches within the region. Letters sent to heads of churches requesting contact information and information about current initiatives and challenges continue to yield little response, which hampers our ability to communicate to and resource our member churches. We understand that this is due in part to outdated contact information for heads of churches, and we are working to rectify this in cooperation with the WCRC.

The continued lack of a CANAAC website is being addressed through contracting with an outside consultant for website development. We are working with Phil Tanis and Allan Buckingham to determine the most effective ways to link the website to the WCRC site and to coordinate administration of the website.

Building relationships

Steering committee members have been reaching out to heads of churches in order to gauge the desires and concerns each has with respect to CANAAC. This is a work in progress.

Youth

CANAAC sent representatives to the Young Adults in Mission (YAM) 2015 Work Camp, sponsored by CANACOM, July 9-26, 2015, in Cuba with the theme "God Is Always on Line." This was reported to be a successful event.

Justice

Human trafficking continues to be a justice concern across the region. Several of our churches engaged the “Broken for You” Lenten campaign, and as noted above, our goal is to share resources among the member churches which have already been developed. Additionally, we have noted concerns regarding race (“Black Lives Matter” within the US and the concerns of First Nations people in Canada and Native Americans in the US), suicide, poverty and migration which will be lifted up for future conversation in our justice agenda.