



Annual Report to WCRC Executive Committee Meeting

In this time: May 2021 - May 2022

CANAAC, like the other regions of the WCRC, has over this period found itself slowly emerging from extended periods of lockdown, mask wearing, and other restrictions which have all impacted every aspect of daily life. a result of the COVID virus.

In the United States, there were significant outbursts of national dissonance seemingly focused on the matter of one's human rights being violated by those who took on an anti-government / anti-vaxxer theme. This was displayed both at the highest levels of government as well as within state politics and local communities. Ironically, in all this rhetoric there was no apparent concern for those who were most vulnerable in a number of ways and for whom the vaccine was an only hope.

In Canada, the "Freedom Convoy" which left western Canada and descended on the capital Ottawa created significant issues at both the level of disturbance of lives locally and nationally with protests against lockdown and vaccine policies widespread across the country. Of great concern was the unsettling threat of this convoy to democracy across Canada. Indications all pointed to what appeared as a sinister motive which was to bring down the government. The ripple effect of this effort also resonated in the US and across Europe where like-minded individuals took energy from this.

On the other hand, in the Caribbean, shortages of vaccines left island nations like Jamaica among others almost impotent to help their citizens, resulting in high numbers of deaths from COVID being reported. Food insecurity in Cuba and the ravages of its political regime saw waves of mass demonstrations take place in the street at the same time. It is difficult to speak to the matter of vaccine utility in Cuba as the government has been tight lipped about the effectiveness of the several vaccines it reported it developed.

During this time as well, the Canadian landscape of church and community was rocked by the large numbers of human remains found at former sites of residential schools for Indigenous children. It is estimated that there could be remains of several thousand bodies already found and in recent weeks more sites have been identified. While these schools were mainly held by the Catholic and Presbyterian denominations, the impact of these findings has fueled a deeper schism on the way church is viewed by a growing number of young people and others who self-label as unbelievers.

Added to all this were troubling signs within a number of our member churches across the region arising in some cases from what appears as power struggles within church politics or divisions due to differences in ideology and/or absent consensus on acceptance of the whole people of God.

In all of the foregoing, the matter of mental health for the communities of faith was also under siege. Member churches report a sense of hopelessness among youth and evidence of this with incidents of teen suicide.

The picture which emerged during the time under review is not rosy even beyond first glance. Member churches across the region rose nonetheless to reframe a way of doing and being church in the midst of all the challenges, finding ways to engage, never ceasing to bring the Word and Sacrament to the people of God largely in virtual worship.

Celebrations

- Emergence of an alternative form of worship - virtual church which is gaining traction across the region. Member churches report it will remain as a form of worship going forward.
- A slow but progressive return to an in-person engagement both within the church and community. This is very significant as it allows in-person support for the mental health issues in youth and young adults arising from the isolation and other ravages of a time of COVID.
- Use of technology by CANAAC to share reflections from both clergy and lay across the region during the weeks of isolation. This has tapered off as we look to identify what are other ways to reach out to our member churches going forward.
- Use of WhatsApp to stay connected with all members of our 2018 General Assembly. This has allowed opportunities to both celebrate and grieve with members, as well as a space of sharing by members of activities taking place in both the WCRC and member church spaces.
- The number of virtual opportunities afforded the convenor to be in attendance at various synodical and other meetings of member churches which was hitherto not possible.
- Appointment of Rev. Michael Blair as general secretary of the United Church of Canada.
- The recent ordination into the ministry of Word and Sacrament of our General Assembly colleague Rev. Joshua Narcisse, PC(USA).
- The richness of the regional presentation done by our member churches in our presentation for the "COVID and Beyond" series in July.
- Several opportunities for our convenor to engage with CWM and CANACOM within the Caribbean region whether in meetings or leading working groups - lockdown and domestic violence, what does this look like across the region, and how open is the church to engage in the conversations youth want to have on issues like domestic violence from the perspective of youth.

Looking outwards

- Engagement with church youth leaders in Cuba on the matter of human rights and broad areas of justice. Join their conversation for a call for a youth gathering.
- Work more closely with member churches in Canada to identify ways to enlarge the issues emerging from the residential schools pain across the region.
- Host a webinar on resilient families with partners across the region.
- Early discussions with the Steering Committee on General Assembly 2023.
- Be available to be led by the Spirit in the work we do.

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