

WORLD MISSION COUNCIL MAY 2018

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the report.
2. Give thanks for the life and witness of Mission Partners who have died; and acknowledge with gratitude those who have completed their period of service overseas.
3. Note that Mission Partners work not only in good and joyful but also in difficult and challenging situations and commend their work and witness; and urge congregations and presbyteries to continue in their prayerful support for our Mission Partners.
4. Encourage those interested in serving as Mission Partners to approach the Council to explore opportunities.
5. Encourage congregations and presbyteries to read and study the report, use the resources, and learn more about the life of churches in other parts of the world, and the links with the Church of Scotland.
6. Condemn all forms of religious discrimination, including Antisemitism and Islamophobia, and encourage local communities to build bridges, and to become friends, with neighbours from other faith traditions.
7. Commend the Programme for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) for its positive work in bringing Christian and Muslim communities together across Africa.
8. Encourage the Council to consider supporting and facilitating an interfaith group of religious leaders to learn from the experiences of PROCMURA's work.
9. Welcome the intention of the Council to consider a return youth interfaith visit from Rwanda to Scotland.
10. Give thanks for Christian Aid's work to alleviate poverty amongst people of all faiths, and encourage the whole church in its ongoing engagement with and support of Christian Aid.
11. Note the International AIDS Conference in July and encourage all parts of the church to remain aware of the prevalence of the virus, and supportive of all efforts of our partners in supporting those living with HIV.
12. Instruct the Council to work with the Church and Society Council and the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office to encourage the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments to ensure that educational material produced through overseas aid collaboration with Pakistan promotes peaceful co-existence, and tolerance of people from different faith communities.
13. Encourage congregations and presbyteries to study *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* and to consider adopting the principles contained in the statement in developing opportunities for interfaith dialogue.
14. Encourage congregations and presbyteries involved in twinning to explore interfaith issues with their twinning partners, and reflect on how this can inform their mission and ministry in Scotland.

Report

MISSION FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. SETTING THE SCENE

Wisdom is the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

Proverbs 4:7 AV

No peace among the nations
Without peace among the religions.
No peace among the religions
Without dialogue between the religions.
No dialogue between the religions
Without investigation of the foundations of the religions.

Hans Küng, *Islam, Past Present & Future*
(Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), p. xxiii.
(Quoted in: <http://forumpublicpolicy.com/vol2011no3/archive/morgan.pdf>; accessed 20.2.18)

'Get wisdom', says the writer of Proverbs, and with it get understanding. Understanding 'the other' is essential for building dialogue and developing good relations between religions. Theologian Hans Küng contends that peace amongst the nations will only come when faith communities know each other better and work out how to live companionably, ethically and compassionately, and share our world in harmony. Interfaith involvement is not an add-on or accessory, but a key part of living out Christ's call to love our neighbour as ourselves and to pursue life in fullness for all. Across the world, partners are living out their calling to witness to their faith in very different environments from our own, and often living alongside other faiths - in harmony, or uneasily, or in anxiety, or in fear. Our Christian partners have different attitudes, forged from their own history, particular traditions, and experience, and these need to be considered as we engage with them as part of the world church.

Küng's quote has deep resonance with the life and experience of the Rev Ebe Joseph, General Secretary of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has suffered decades of ethnic and religious conflict. In 1984, Ebe Joseph was one of more than 80 Tamil Christians who were trapped inside a burning building. Outside was a furious mob of Sinhalese wanting to kill the Tamil people inside. Ebe owes his life to the Buddhist caretaker; he says: 'He had the courage to stand

near the gate and he prevented them coming in. At one point he told them, "If you want to enter you will have to kill me". Because the man was Sinhalese and a Buddhist, the mob moved on. The police later rescued the group, but for 12 tense hours they were refused entry at every place they sought refuge. Finally, they found a welcome - at a Hindu temple. Later a visitor came to the temple looking for 'a minister'. It turned out to be the Muslim beggar who slept on the veranda of the church, where Ebe would give him tea. He had been going from camp to camp looking for his Christian friend. Now it was the beggar who offered to bring Ebe tea.

That was how Ebe first got involved with interfaith peacebuilding. 'Those two days of experience with the Sinhalese Buddhist, the Hindu temple and the Muslim beggar gave me the impetus to look at other religions in a more open and more positive way,' he says. After working in partnership with a Buddhist monk to improve life for children in a refugee camp of more than 350,000 people, Ebe began reaching out to key religious leaders across Sri Lanka. To the surprise of many Sri Lankans, religious leaders from across the country, including the largest and most powerful denominations, responded. Now with over 25 years of experience building trust and learning about one another, those faith leaders are part of a new effort to offer religious and spiritual resources to heal the bitter memories of the people of Sri Lanka, and work to restore relationships between the communities, and to try to rebuild their country. 'The Church has members in both communities—the Tamil and Sinhalese communities together—and therefore we can bring those communities into dialogue with each other and to envision their future.'

Another very personal story comes from the Rev. Keron Khellawan, of the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago, who shares with us his familial experience: 'I grew up with my mother being an elder of the Church and my father being a practising Hindu. From my home I learnt the harmony that can exist, for both parents respected each religious persuasion...this was viewed as somewhat sacrilege by other Christians and even some Hindu leaders.' He notes that Trinidad and Tobago is a multi-religious society, 'a proverbial "Pelau" or mixed pot of food', with no one denominational body exceeding twenty-two percent of the total population. 'There is no doubt that being a Reformed Church in the context of Trinidad and Tobago there is a mandatory requirement for interfaith engagement and, on a personal note, being a Minister within my Church and having my family and community blended on religious lines, I must redefine my

Christian mission and evangelism in a new way so as not to create discord but rather bring peace.'

Having read Luke 18: 9-14, of two men at prayer, former Moderator, the Very Rev Dr Russell Barr, shared his experience of two men going to pray. He had been paying a pastoral visit to a woman in his congregation who was in hospital recovering from major surgery. On the way out of the hospital, he had paused for a few moments in the hospital chapel where he happened to meet the woman's surgeon. After a moment of chat, the surgeon asked if he had come to pray for the woman who was Dr Barr's parishioner and the surgeon's patient. On answering yes, the surgeon said, 'So have I,' and, rolling out his mat towards Mecca, he knelt to pray. Dr Barr reflected, 'Two men went to pray, and one of the significant factors in my own spiritual journey has been the growing awareness that there are fellow travellers on the road.'

2. INTRODUCTION

The WMC offers this report to the whole church as an opportunity to listen to, learn from, and share with our partners around the world, experiences and challenges of living out our common calling in a diverse array of contexts. Seeking peace for our world, through building peace with our neighbours, of whatever faith, is an essential aspect of living out our faith in the twenty-first century. Dialogue with people of other faiths can help us to grow in common understanding and empathy, help defuse violence brought through misunderstanding or wilful malevolence, and encourage us to seek to work together in areas of common cause. Could we live in a world where we no longer need terms such as 'interfaith'; where interaction with one another, regardless of differences, would be accepted as the norm, just as in Rev Keron Khellaway's family and community in Trinidad? Healthy relationships are formed where differences are appreciated and accepted. Often joint tasks or common causes can be the catalyst to building good relationships: doing practical work together can encourage quantitative leaps in interfaith interaction and understanding. This is often where we find the world church most active.

Twenty-five years ago, the Council's predecessor body, the Board of World Mission and Unity (BWMU) reported to the General Assembly on the evolving situation relating to living in Scotland with growing numbers of people representing a rich tapestry of faith traditions. *The Church of Scotland's*

calling is as part of the World Church, and in partnership with indigenous Churches. Some of these Churches have a wealth of insight and practical experience in relating to people of other faiths. We have much to learn from them. (World Mission and Unity, Reports to the General Assembly 1993, II p. 570-1). The 1993 report acts as a foundational text outlining the necessary theological virtues of humility and openness in a time of growing religious pluralism. It established an understanding that went beyond a grudging acceptance of a shifting religious landscape: *It is not enough simply to accept that we now have new groups among us, but that we must seek the good of those groups as we would seek our own. We must not let such terms as "multi-faith" or "multi-cultural" obscure the fact that behind the outward differences we are one people, children of one God.* (Reports to the General Assembly 1993, p571)

This year's report aims to draw the General Assembly's attention to the voices of our international friends and partners in relation to living together in a world of people of different, or no, faith. The Council is pleased to work with the Church's Interfaith Officer and to co-operate with other Councils and Committees of the General Assembly in pursuing its work in this, as well as other, areas. The report will highlight the Council's ongoing interfaith engagement in the following sections:

1. Attentive Accompaniment – the 'why' of living and working on interfaith engagement
2. Presence and Practical Action in witness and service
3. Solidarity
4. The Path Before Us - what we can do.

3. ATTENTIVE ACCOMPANIMENT – THE 'WHY' OF LIVING AND WORKING ON INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT

For the Church of Scotland, the life and work of Stella Reekie resonates with many of the issues which were brought to the fore in the wake of the Holocaust, and throughout the post-colonial context which shaped the prevailing zeitgeist of the second half of her life. Stella Reekie (1922-1982) was a pioneer of interfaith work in Glasgow and arguably a source of inspiration for Scottish interfaith work more generally. Working with the Red Cross in the 1930s and 40s, Stella Reekie was one of the first civilians to assist with relief

following the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Witnessing the scale of death and destruction there, Stella saw the horror that can emerge from pernicious ideologies that judge one group to be superior to another or dehumanise people on the basis of difference. A Deaconess in the Church of Scotland, Stella was known for setting up the International Flat in Hillhead, Glasgow, funded by the Church of Scotland, and establishing the first interfaith group in Scotland, 'Glasgow Sharing of Faiths'. The Well and Interfaith Scotland are direct descendants of that pioneering work.

As a former missionary to Pakistan, Stella worked with those who had mostly come from India and Pakistan and settled in Scotland, helping these new Scots to integrate into their new surroundings. She realised how important it was to establish understanding and respect not just between cultures but also between different faiths. Stella's life spanned and reflected some of the key turning points in history that have encouraged and inspired Christians to rethink their relationships with other faith communities. The meaningfulness of the platform for dialogue provided by the International Flat are summarised in Stella's own words: *When we meet together, we find that we have so much in common, and, although our faiths are not the same, we can learn to respect one another because of the differences that we can discover together. By doing this we can build a much happier set of relationships within our own city and can make sure that Christianity is better understood by others* (Adamson, Jessie, Ramsay, Kay and Craig, Maxwell. Stella. Glasgow: South Park, 1984). Wisdom and understanding going hand in hand.

All over the world, Christians live, minister, witness and serve in multi-faith societies and communities, sometimes where they are the majority, and oftentimes when they belong to a minority faith community. For our partner churches, and increasingly for the church in Scotland, interfaith dialogue is not an academic or theoretical exercise but a normal, daily experience where people of different faiths interact and discover what they share in common and learn to respect these differences. Dr Nicol McNicol, an eminent missionary in India, captures how the Christian can approach those from other faiths. Speaking at a World Mission presentation during the General Assembly of 1932, he emphasised the necessity of looking on the people of India not as Hindu or Muslim, 'but as men and women, and of having a thorough and sympathetic understanding of their religions, and approaching them not in a superior or dominating way, but with the Christian gift of

friendship.' (in St. Colm's Students' Journal, May 1932. St Colm's Archive, National Library of Scotland.)

3.1 Voices from the mission movement

In 2013 the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) produced its first ecumenical mission affirmation in over 30 years. The new statement, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* brought together all the WCC members with those from the Pentecostal tradition, to seek direction for a renewed understanding and practice of mission and evangelism in ever-evolving religious and cultural contexts. It seeks to help us commit ourselves together to fullness of life for all, led by the God of Life, and inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit. This new understanding, which has been developing over the past thirty years, includes encouragement to engage with other faith traditions:

The Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways and we do not fully understand the workings of the Spirit in other faith traditions. ... Dialogue at the religious level is possible only if we begin with the expectation of meeting God who has preceded us and has been present with people within their own contexts. God is there before we come (Acts 17) and our task is not to bring God along, but to witness to the God who is already there. ...Evangelism and dialogue are distinct but interrelated. Although Christians hope and pray that all people may come to living knowledge of the Triune God, evangelism is not the purpose of dialogue... Religious freedom should be upheld because it flows from the dignity of the human person, grounded in the creation of all human beings in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). Followers of all religions and beliefs have equal rights and responsibilities.

Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes, WCC, 2013 (p34,35)

It is worth remembering that when the western Churches initiated the mission movement to take Christianity to the colonised peoples, they took with them their western forms of faith and worship, and rather too infrequently allowed the local culture to shape and adapt Christianity within its own context and mind-set. It is important, though a challenge, to remember that western Christianity is often still seen as being tied into notions of 'the west' in places like the Indian sub-continent and the Middle East. For example, United States President George W Bush's reference to a crusade against

parts of the Arab world raised hackles and led to real problems for Christians in the Middle East.

Already in the International Missionary Conference in Willingen in 1952, the 'younger churches' made clear that, 'We should cease to speak of *missions* and *churches* and avoid this dichotomy.' (David HS Lyon, *In Pursuit of a Vision*, St Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1998. p75). Today, we have moved on to speak of the mission of God in the world, a mission in which the Churches can play their part. God's mission can involve all kinds of people from any background or faith, and it is not confined to any institution. David Lyon, having served in India before returning to Scotland to be General Secretary of the Overseas Council, embodied this message in his ministry and service, and recognised that the whole people of God was broader than the Church. He often noted how Gandhi made this point by quoting the words of Jesus, 'Not everyone who calls me "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my heavenly Father.' (Matthew 7:21). Lyon comments, 'it would be an insensitive person who would not...recognise that the purpose of God is being fulfilled, even though the church itself may often fail.' (Lyon, p 281).

Christianity was born into a pluralist context; and Christian communities, and then churches, continued to live in diverse contexts for centuries. Whilst Christianity spread to the West and developed in various environments, some more isolated than others, it is important to remember that as an expanding global faith Christianity never existed in a vacuum. Instead it has been shaped and affected by the other religions and world views since the time of Paul and the Apostles. Openness did not come to be the natural course of interfaith interaction. Reformed Christianity emerged when European Christianity was more isolated from other faiths, and treated the other as dangerous and apostate. Though there were few Muslims, the Ottoman Empire was threatening (Calvin and Luther saw an Ottoman conquest of Europe as inevitable, and an indication of divine wrath with the continent); the Jews who lived in Europe were marginalised, mistreated, and periodically expelled or ghettoised, to underline who still had power and was in control; and few people had travelled to encounter the eastern religions. It is also worth examining our own historic role in colonialism in pursuit of foreign mission. This can help us approach, critically, the relationships we have with partners who know that history and are witnesses to its effects and its legacy today. It can also help us understand some of our instinctive and deeply rooted reactions to other

faiths: do we see Islam as a natural competitor or even inherently hostile, because of the attitudes of reformers which have been passed down the generations? The WCC's Together towards Life process can help us understand better how we might be responsible evangelists, and consider what impact our mission might have on those from other faith traditions.

3.2 Voices from the Middle East

Not all churches or Christian communities were isolationist and exclusivist. There were still places where co-existence was, and remains today, more common. The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) reminds us that Christians in Syria and Lebanon have been in interfaith relations since the 7th century when Arab Muslims conquered the region with a new form of monotheistic religion. Engaging with Muslims has therefore been part and parcel of the life of the church there ever since. Relations between Christians and Muslims have been more or less cordial according 'to the tolerance of the ruler, and the wisdom of Christian communities and their leaders.' Today, Christians face two levels of interfaith relations in Lebanon and Syria: with mainstream institutional Islam, where there is a positive working relationship, understanding and an openness to dialogue; and with those sections of society which have become more radical and exclusive, where there are tensions.

The need to foster dialogue among the followers of different religions and to bolster the values of tolerance and peaceful co-existence were topics explored between the Moderator, King Abdullah of Jordan, and Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammed in a meeting in Amman in January 2018. In further meetings, including an extensive and moving visit to the Baptismal site by the Jordan river, Prince Ghazi developed the thesis explored in the letter, 'In A Common Word Between Us and You,' sent to the churches in 2007, and signed by representatives of every denomination and school of thought in Islam. It argues that the most fundamental common ground between Islam and Christianity, and the best basis for future dialogue and understanding, is the love of God and the love of the neighbour. 'Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world.' (www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document/ - accessed 20 Feb 2018).

In Egypt, where there has been brutal violence unleashed on the Christian community from extremist Islamist groups, the

churches have been in the forefront of seeking dialogue and opening channels of communication. The Council of Protestant Churches has regular meetings with Islamic leaders. The Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo (ETSC) of the Presbyterian Church in Egypt has created a Centre for Middle Eastern Christianity which runs seminars and workshops, drawing participants from a wide spectrum of society. In 2017 it introduced a certificate programme in Arab Christianity in collaboration with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. This has been an exciting venture, especially since the lecturers included a Muslim scholar, two Orthodox bishops and a Jesuit priest, along with the Protestant Centre Director, Dr. Wageeh Mikael. The present class will graduate in May. It has 30 participants, 50% are women, and participants include a Coptic priest, a Presbyterian pastor, and a Muslim sheikh, in addition to four University professors, all women, one of whom is Muslim. The programme covers the history of the Church in the Middle East, the Church's contribution to Middle Eastern culture and the works of several Christian theologians. It emphasises the historical rootedness of the Christian community, while seeking to be open to all who live in the land today. The course is not just academic, but gives the students an opportunity to be together and build relationships, seeking wisdom and understanding from each other. The class share meals together on Fridays and Saturdays, cooking for one another. Our Mission Partner, Colin Johnstone, has accompanied the students in their journey, offering them friendship and hospitality.

At a crossroads of cultures, and as a spiritual centre for the three Abrahamic traditions, the Holy Land is a multi-faith setting which demands dialogue. Interfaith engagement is manifested in a wide array of approaches: bilateral, multilateral, leadership-driven, broad-based, scholarly, and practical. Contemporary interfaith initiatives have occurred between and among Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities. Interfaith dialogue often takes the form of intellectual or theological reflection, including joint study of the holy scriptures of different religious traditions. The Council itself seeks to support diversity and build common understanding in its practical engagement in this region, employing staff from all the local religious groups in the institutions it runs in Israel. The staff come from diverse faith traditions and there is an ethos of co-existence and mutual respect. Unusually for Christian schools in Israel or Palestine, most pupils in Tabeetha School are Christian, and this is something the school values and wishes to preserve. There are also significant numbers of Muslim pupils, as well as

smaller numbers of Jewish students, and students from other faiths and none. The interfaith character of Tabeetha is also something the school prizes. The Moderator witnessed this first hand in January 2018 while there on a visit and was pleased to note that Tabeetha 'makes its own difference in offering lessons that will help blend cultures and traditions so that understanding comes, whilst not shying away from very clear Christian roots.'

3.3 Voices from Asia

In Asia, our partners' daily reality means relating to people from other faith traditions. From their experience, we can learn lessons that might offer us insights into living in our own context. In the Diocese of Peshawar, the Church of Pakistan, whose territory includes areas heavily influenced by jihadist groups like the Taliban, initiated Faith Friends which organises joint activities that include Hindus and Sikhs as well as leaders from the Shia community and the majority Sunnis. Over time the members of the group built up their understanding of each other and became more understanding of the different faiths represented in the overwhelmingly conservative Sunni Muslim province. A realisation grew that people of different faiths were all part of 'one Pakistani nation', and that inter-religious and intra-faith harmony were essential for the community to grow and develop. This growth in understanding and tolerance, and the strength of the new relationships, were seen after the suicide bombing of All Saints Church in Peshawar in September 2013, and the attack at Army Public School in December 2014, when leaders of faith communities were able to join together in condemning these terror attacks and initiate joint responses to support the victims.

The Church of North India (CNI) recognises that India is a multi-faith, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious country. Such diversity expresses the richness of India as a nation, but also poses challenges. The India Peace Centre has been working with those from different faith traditions for the past three decades on matters of common concerns such as gender justice, human sexuality, HIV and AIDS, human rights (Dalits and Adivasis), environment and ecology, communal harmony, and peace. The Peace Centre recognises the gospel imperative for seeking to improve relations between faiths as Jesus says 'Love thy neighbour' in Mark 12:31. It sees loving one's neighbours as only possible when one respects them for who and what they are and strives to become good Samaritans. The Director, Kasta Dip, highlights that being a home to many religions, and having

diverse expressions of faith and life, is what makes India a beautiful and tolerant place to live. While freedom of religion is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution of India, elements within local communities have been persecuting religious minorities. Some see this posing a threat to the secular nature of the country: society is becoming divided on the lines of religion, caste and gender. It is in this context that the church, as a minority faith community, lives out its faith, witnessing to Christ. The CNI sees interfaith action as a way to promote and encourage love and harmony among all people, but the expectations from other communities and people of other faiths remain a challenge.

The United Mission to Nepal (UMN) works in partnership with local Christian churches and organisations and focuses its work on poor and marginalised communities in that country. Although it represents a minority faith community, it has been like yeast in its mission to serve in Nepal. There are, though, challenges faced by the UMN: attacks from Hindu fundamentalists, and difficulties in dealing with the government and government officials. The local Christian leadership reported that each had a fear of the other. These leaders asked and encouraged UMN to become involved and help develop the Interfaith Peace Network. This has provided a space for Christian leaders to express their Christian identity openly amongst other faith communities and, by accepting differences without compromising the tenets of their faith, they have been able to work in cooperation. Our Mission Partner, Joel Hafvenstein, CEO of UMN, reports that as people have worked together communities have built trust and good relationships.

3.4 Voice from Africa

Mutual respect is key. It is not that we all become the same or agree on everything, but that there is opportunity to disagree while remaining in relationship. It is not always straightforward, and as the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCURA) told us: 'although interfaith relations is appreciated, it is also perceived by some Christians as "compromise" and by some Muslims as "new Christian conversion strategies"'. They also added that Christians and Muslims in Rwanda understand that, in their relationship, they may not necessarily agree with the religious beliefs and traditions of the 'other' but they have to live together in peace despite these differences, and understand that the 'relationship between Christians and Muslims is not intended to convert the "other" neither does it encourage syncretism. However, it respects the missionary element of both religions

to propagate the Gospel (Christians) and for Muslims to carry out *Dawah*.'

Nigeria has an estimated population of 180 million people. The north is predominantly Muslim, while the Middle Belt and the South are predominantly Christian. The Nigerian Constitution says that Nigeria is a secular state, but over the years, there has been growing involvement of the state in religious matters. Tensions were heightened between 2000 and 2001, when eleven of the 19 States in the North adopted the Sharia Law. Today, the commonest fear amongst Christians is of Islamisation in Nigeria. Christians in the North in particular tell how they have been increasingly subjected to discrimination, persecution and targeted killings. The situation became terrible with the emergence of the Boko Haram terrorist group whose manifestly declared intention is the imposing of a particular brand of Islam upon Nigeria. On the other hand, Muslims are suspicious of Christians and their agenda for Nigeria. All these developments have significantly polarised Nigerian communities into Christians versus Muslims, one ethnic group versus another ethnic group, north versus south, indigenous versus settlers, and majorities versus minorities. To ameliorate the situation, interfaith dialogues and engagements have become the principal platforms projected for peace building and reconciliation of hurting or devastated communities. These are ways to seek to prevent or reduce religious tensions, reduce stereotypes, heal wounded hearts, and painful memories. Although efforts have been made at different levels by different groups to mitigate the challenges of the pluralist environment through interfaith engagement, including the establishment of Nigerian Interreligious Council (NIREC) by the Federal Government, those in the Presbyterian Church in Nigeria see a lot more needing to be done to build positive links between the faith communities and develop greater trust and cooperation between them.

While predominantly Christian, Ghana has a significant Muslim minority, mostly in the north. The Christian presence in the North keeps increasing whereas Muslims are getting more spread across the country. This means that Christians and Muslims socialise and interact with each other more, share office and market space, live together as study mates in schools or come together to pursue common ideas in a political party or a social group. Whereas these encounters help break down some stereotypes and fears of people of other faiths, it comes also with the real social challenges of a pluralistic society. In a survey on interfaith marriages

conducted by the Presbyterian Interfaith Research and Resource Centre in 2013, whereas 7% of the Christian youth respondents indicated that they had ever considered getting married to a Muslim, as many as 35% of their Muslim counterparts said they were open to marrying a Christian. A challenge here is how such couples will handle religious issues in their relationship and families. Christian leaders are also wary that marriage could be being used for missionary purposes. Presently there are cordial relationship between Christians and Muslims on the whole, but issues like marriage and educational provision through faith schools can create anxieties.

4. PRESENCE AND PRACTICAL ACTION IN WITNESS AND SERVICE

Today we are entwined in the global community in a deeper way than ever before. We are 'all in it together' and need both wisdom and understanding. If we are serious about peace we need to look at ways in which faith communities can offer solutions to the conflicts we see around the world today. Jesus did not allow people to accept the status quo of societal divisions blindly – the Good Samaritan story can expose the hypocrisy of some within our own religion, while also showing that good can come from elsewhere. In our work today, we are called to act with all people of good will to address the issues within our societies and wider world. While we do this by supporting those needing help around the world, calling for justice in the face of violence or persecution, it is also about challenging ourselves to see the ways in which, like Jesus, we can see that good can come from outside our worldview or challenging ourselves to see things from alternative perspectives.

Poverty, injustice, gender inequality, unequal wealth distribution, ecological devastation caused by climate change, trafficking, abuse, terrorism, human rights violations, and the need for human development, education, child protection, and refugee support are all pressing issues that people from all faith traditions can relate to and act on. Governments, and international institutions have recognised that addressing these issues is not just for politicians, but requires the engagement of civil society. These issues also have a spiritual dimension, and it is the responsibility of religious communities to work together wherever possible to seek new visions for world security and help gain support for the principles of respect and justice in world affairs. The Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq, who created the World

Development Index, declared that human destiny is a choice, not a chance: *Human security, in the last analysis, is a child that did not die, a disease that did not spread, an ethnic violence that did not explode, a woman who was not raped, a poor person who did not starve, a dissident who was not silenced, a human spirit that was not crushed. Human security is not a concern with weapons. It is a concern with human dignity.*

Human dignity is a central concern for the followers of Jesus, and other faith communities. No faith tradition, and certainly not the Christian churches, can avoid addressing these issues if we are to take seriously the Good News that we are called to embody and proclaim. Living in a world where there are many different ways and levels of interfaith engagement gives opportunity to share with each other and see how our partners' contexts differ from our own, and to reflect on whether our view of interfaith relations is distinctly western, and whether this is something we should address.

Stella Reekie's commitment led her to seek the best and most culturally appropriate help for new migrants. She established connections with the leaders of these communities to create services that directly connected to people's needs. She coordinated English lessons, homework clubs and cooking clubs. It was crucial that sharing and working together were at the heart of these services and gatherings – a trust in the equality of all participants. Stella's attitude, her dedication, and her openness to others was mature and humble and contain values and principles that can be applied to the life and work of the Church today. It is imperative for us to reimagine Stella's legacy so it can inspire us today.

4.1 Experience from Europe

One example of this approach comes from the Jacobsbergskyrkan Church of Equemeniakyrkan (The Uniting Church in Sweden). The ministry and leadership team seek to take a similar approach to that of Stella Reekie 40 years ago: reaching out to new immigrants with practical support, friendship and kindness, offering language classes, food and accommodation, and help with accessing government services. Some of these new Swedes also come to worship. A weekly language café is held for people of all faiths and none to come and practice Swedish, and sometimes English (which is a major component of Swedish education). Swedish people have welcomed new migrants into their homes to live in the heart of their family life. Equemeniakyrkan strives to be a church for all aspects of life where the encounter with Jesus

Christ transforms individuals, communities and the world, whether an historic or a new Swede.

The Moderator attended a service there in November 2017 where there was a baptism of a young Afghani man, and people from several nationalities were welcomed into the membership of the congregation, supported by friends who will continue to accompany them during their faith journey. He noted: 'The ministry and leadership team seek to provide an intentional, faith-offering community where encounters with Jesus are spiritual, practical and communitarian. Friendships form, stories are shared, people learn from each other. The Uniting Church in Sweden strives to be a church for all aspects of life where the encounter with Jesus Christ transforms individuals, communities and the world. I have been privileged to see Christians being Christians, with successes and failures, but with open-minded, open-handed and open-hearted faith continuing to reach out to an anxious but searching world.'

In Italy, the Protestant Churches have created Mediterranean Hope which supports migrants arriving in Italy and also lobbies for political change to the system. Working with the Roman Catholic Community of St Egidio, it has pioneered the opening of humanitarian corridors which enable people to bypass people smugglers as they travel, offered a welcome to those arriving in Italy, and sought to humanise the government process of registering people as they arrive on the Island of Lampedusa. Volunteers offer a smile, a kind word, something to drink and eat, some clothes to those being processed through an impersonal military and government machine. There is a desire to treat those passing through humanely – to challenge both those who want to demonise them those who see them as saintly victims. The Council is pleased that Fiona Kendall has recently started working as a Mission Partner with Mediterranean Hope to support their legal and advocacy work for those seeking a new life in Europe.

4.2 Experiences from Asia

Apna Ghar (Our House) is a shelter in Pakistan for victims of the misuse of the blasphemy laws, abduction, rape, and forced conversions. The original blasphemy laws date back to 1880 when India was under British rule. Between 1980 and 1986, a number of clauses were added to the laws by the military government of General Zia-ul Haq who wanted to 'Islamicise' them. Today, Pakistan's blasphemy laws are increasingly used to fuel a climate of religiously motivated

violence. They have a great deal of support at the grassroots. On many occasions once mere allegations of blasphemy are made, persecution starts. Those accused, their families, and their homes, neighbourhoods and places of worship, have been attacked, and sometimes even burned to the ground, and people killed. Since 1987 Pakistan's National Commission for Justice and Peace has recorded 633 Muslims, 494 Ahmadis, 187 Christians and 21 Hindus accused of blasphemy offences. The latter three groups comprise only 3% of Pakistan's population, but half of all the charges, highlighting how members of religious minorities are affected disproportionately. The Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) was formed by Churches and Christian NGOs in 1992 to be a place where Christians could come for legal aid and support when accused in blasphemy, or other cases, and to have shelter from their persecutors. CLAAS has launched a new international Coalition Against Misuse of the Blasphemy Laws, which includes the Church of Scotland, with the aim of bringing an end to the way Pakistan's blasphemy law is currently being abused.

(www.pakistanblasphemylaw.com)

The Christian Study Centre in Rawalpindi, Pakistan initiated a unique project of interfaith peacebuilding in the 1990s. It has now been copied by others. In a two year project, the Centre sought to promote interfaith harmony and peace in areas where project partners played a key role in addressing conflict. One story related to a problem which arose when the government of Pakistan, for security reasons, did not grant permission for the yearly procession from the historic Sikh Gurdwara Janam Asthan. Many foreign Sikh delegations come to Pakistan especially to celebrate this special occasion. The Sikh religious leaders approached Mr. Abdul Hameed Rehmani, a member of the peace committee established by the Christian Study Centre. He knew that if permission was not granted, the Sikh community would be hurt and it would cause tension among the Christians, Muslims and Sikh communities living in Nankana. So, Mr Rehmani and Peace Committee members met with the local government and community, and Muslim leaders offered their accompaniment to protect the procession. The group leaders reported, 'The Sikh community greatly honoured the Muslim leaders by giving them a place with the Sikh leaders at the front of the procession. The Muslim community provided all possible support to the Sikh community, and the Muslim leaders enjoyed food with the Sikh community and also the love and honour given to them by the people standing on the road side to welcome the procession.' This set a good example of what

the bond of friendship and peaceful co-existence means in day-to-day life. Wisdom and understanding.

Arunima Hospice, of the Diocese of Calcutta, Church of North India has been a pioneer in offering hospice care and support to People Living with HIV (PLWH) in West Bengal (estimated 119,000 with 25,000 receiving antiretroviral therapy). The Hospice offers quality in-house care, nutritional support, counselling, home-based care and outreach services, whilst also promoting awareness-raising and challenging stigma and discrimination in the community. It looks for innovative ways of developing and in recent years has collaborated with the TB prevention programme and with an advocacy programme for female sex workers. The Hospice aims to build an inclusive community, to create job opportunities through skills training and self-help groups as well as empowering PLWH to campaign for their own socio-economic rights.

Escalating violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State in late August 2017 forced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes, including many Rohingya people. There are just over one million Rohingya, who are mostly Muslim, and are sometimes described as the world's most persecuted minority. Denied citizenship in Myanmar since 1982, which has effectively rendered them stateless, many Rohingya fled to Bangladesh, fearing for their lives. Many also remain displaced in Myanmar. Christian Aid has launched an appeal to support local partners on the ground in providing urgent shelter kits and ensuring access to safe water and sanitation. The situation is a sensitive one, not least for the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar, itself a small minority in the Buddhist society. The sensitivity of the issue was shown when Pope Francis visited Myanmar in November 2017 and did not mention the Rohingya by name for fear of a backlash against the 650,000 Roman Catholics in Myanmar. Last year the WMC sent an emergency grant to the Church of Bangladesh to support its work with the refugees trying to survive in Bangladesh, not knowing whether they can ever return home.

4.3 Experience from the Middle East

The National Evangelical Church of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) highlights how from its very foundation it took up a call to share the gospel and love of Christ through providing educational opportunities, and medical and social services. 75% - 80% of the students in its high quality schools are non-Christians. The 10 schools in Syria and Lebanon serve around 10,000 students from different backgrounds and religions (Sunni, Shiite, Druze, Alawite, as well as Christians from

different denominations). With the Syrian crisis, the Church started five education centres for refugees in Lebanon, supporting 400 students, almost all of them Syrian Muslims. Their home for the elderly serves adherents of different faiths, and their relief programme reaches out to the needs of people from any faith. The Synod wrote, 'In all this, we learned that the creation of God is One. All are God's children. No one "can separate them from the love of Christ". By serving others we ourselves are being transformed to a different level of humanity. It was a mutual blessing for the Church and the served ones. We are convinced that growth is God's, but planting is our duty regardless of the results.'

5. SOLIDARITY

5.1 Experiences from Africa

As we approached the Year of Young People, the Council took the opportunity to work with the Programme for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) to send an interfaith team of five Christians and five Muslims from Scotland to visit Rwanda to see the positive practical work being done with support from PROCMURA. Partnering with the Alwaleed Institute, an Islamic Studies centre which is part of Edinburgh University, Al Makhtoum College in Dundee, the Pollock Trust and Interfaith Scotland, the trip built up the capacity of young people to become interfaith leaders both locally and internationally. It gave opportunity to explore issues of religion, international relations and how faith informed and influenced their lives. The programme aimed and, from the reports of the participants, managed to inform them and prepare them for incorporating an interfaith perspective in all they will do in whatever opportunities life will afford them, and showed them how they can make a positive contribution to Scottish society. The group held an event during Scottish Interfaith Week in November 2017, and are helping to organise an International Interfaith Conference for young people in 2018 as part of the Scottish Government's Year of Young People.

One of the Rwandan participants, Salim Niyigena, wrote afterwards: 'During the week we spent together, we had long conversations about variety of topics, about our social lives, our faiths...it made me understand better what people practising other religions or faiths do, their beliefs, cultural variations ... most importantly it made me understand more that people should be more accepting and welcoming regardless of their beliefs because after all we believe in one God.' Gigha Lennox, a Church of Scotland youth worker in

Edinburgh, was also on the visit and wrote, 'We built relationships on conversations of faith, beliefs and practice, exploring our differences and considering our shared values of love, peace and justice. We were truly unified on our shared ambition to see more of all of these in our society and our world, brought forth from our shared experiences learning of Rwanda's painful history, yet strong unity and inspiring interfaith relationships.' Bringing young people together is a key way of helping overcome difference and build cohesion and mutual understanding. Mahrukh Shaukat, a development worker at Amina, a Muslim Women's Resource Centre in Glasgow, was also on the visit. She reported learning many lessons in Rwanda: 'We have been sharing ideas, beliefs and core values. Although it is a country with a history of genocide that seems to a lot of people the worst of humanity, we have also seen the incredible level of forgiveness, communal working, and compassion which has been amazing because we have been able to see both the worst and best of humanity in one context, not across different continents... it has made us firmly believe what we can achieve in the future, and that humanity does have the best chance.'

5.2 Experiences from Asia

On Easter Day 2016 a suicide bomber killed at least 74 people including at least 42 Christians and injured 200 more, mainly women and children, in a public park in Lahore. Pakistani Taliban's Jamat-ul-Ahrar faction claimed responsibility for the attack, saying they deliberately targeted Christians who were celebrating Easter. One week later, the World Mission Convener, Iain Cunningham, and Asia Secretary, Sandy Sneddon, joined over 200 Christians as they prayed for peace at Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park and, with Muslim and Hindu support, sang together Psalm 20, 'May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.' It was a sombre yet bold occasion, bringing out the best of humanity from different faith traditions to offer support, encouragement and solidarity.

In China the provincial authorities recognised Amity Foundation's expertise by giving them the lead role in promoting a multi-faith approach to social services in Jiangsu Province. In 2016 Amity Foundation organised training on Religion and Philanthropy that included 67 participants from Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups as well as more than 30 government employees. In the concluding plenary, a senior government official recognised the significant contribution made by religious groups in social services and applauded the training workshop that had

enabled five religions to exchange their experience and practice and encouraged and suggested more work be done by the different faith groups on philanthropy and social service, especially poverty relief. This was a major step forward in building positive engagement and allowing more space for Amity's ongoing work.

5.3 Experiences from the Middle East

Dr. Mary Mikhael of the National Evangelical Church of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), reported on one of the projects supported by the Synod, when large numbers of people arrived in Homs from other parts of Syria, displaced because of the fighting. 'Another striking sign is what you see in Homs in the Presbyterian Church and School. Their project, A Space for Hope, was initiated by a team of Church youth in 2014. They wanted to reinforce the spirit of cooperation between youth from different parts of Syrian Society as a way to achieve meaning for life together, in the face of tragic situations. They began with youth, aged 12-18 from different backgrounds, religious, political and social, getting them to participate in sport activities, and other team work, such as handcrafts. In less than a year the team counted 186 males and females who worked as belonging to each other.'

Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR), an Israeli organisation working in both Israel and Palestine, gives expression to the traditional Jewish responsibility for the safety and welfare of the stranger, the different, the weak, the widow, and the orphan. Combining practical grassroots support with political pressure and advocacy, RHR believes that it is a duty, in light of Jewish tradition, to inform the Israeli and Jewish public about all forms of injustice against others and to put pressure on Israeli State institutions to address these injustices and to bring an end to the Occupation of Palestine. From the outset, RHR has campaigned for the rights of the Palestinian people, championed the causes of Israeli women, minorities, and those living in poverty, and sought to educate emerging leaders on human rights in Judaism, and mobilised thousands of volunteers to put the vision of a just society into practice. The Council has partnered with RHR in work with Jahalin Bedouin and, through a previous Guild Project, supported young Bedouin women to study in the Negev. RHR does further work on legal protection of Palestinian communities being threatened by settler violence or land theft, and helps Palestinian farmers work their land free from harassment of settlers or the Israeli military. A key area in relation to this report is RHR's interfaith work, seeking to harness the

teachings and values of Judaism as a means of reconciliation and understanding.

At a meeting between the Moderator and Rabbi David Rosen (Director of the Heilbrunn Institute for International Interreligious Understanding) in Jerusalem in January 2018, Rabbi Rosen emphasised the need to find the divine within every person, and that it is as we demonise the other that we lose the capacity to see the face of God in the other. Rabbi Rosen has written: 'This then is the religious imperative of the Abrahamic dialogue: to work together as a family, together with the other families of the world, to promote the ethical values that we share in a world that seeks both understanding and tolerance...to promote peace and harmony for the benefit of all humankind.' He added that the objective of interfaith dialogue is 'to identify and share universal human values...a recognition of diversity does not compromise anyone's integrity, for only by exploring diversity can we hope to live together...only by celebrating what we have in common and understanding and tolerating our difference can we offer hope for a better future.' (Accessed Feb 2018: <https://www.rabbidavidrosen.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Interreligious-Cooperation-in-the-Family-of-Abraham.pdf>) In a world where too many seek to demonise diversity rather than celebrate it, we all have a responsibility to highlight abuses of any group or individuals targeted. There can be no place for Antisemitism, Islamophobia or threats to anyone for belonging to a particular religious group. It is necessary to explore our diversity and work together within our differences. Wisdom propels us to seek understanding.

The Moderator also visited Gaza. He noted, 'The conditions a people living under siege cope with are numbing.' Visiting Saint Porphyrius – the Greek Orthodox Church in Gaza City - he was warmly welcomed by Bishop Alexios. About 1,200 Christians live in Gaza, where there are nearly two million inhabitants. In 2014, 1,000 Palestinian Muslims fled Israeli shelling of their neighbourhood and found shelter and a welcome in Saint Porphyrius. 'We opened the church in order to help people. This is the duty of the church,' Bishop Alexios said.

House of Grace in Haifa started with a couple, a vision and \$2000. The late Kamil Shehade and his wife Agnes opened their family home to prisoners released on parole in 1982, providing a warm, informal environment and a supportive framework, encouraging their guests to re-evaluate their lives and start living up to their potential. As it has developed, they

have taken over space in the Greek Catholic Church, and renovated its interior for worship, while serving people from all faith communities. Released prisoners greatly need assistance and, without that help, many would find their way back to prison due to a lack of a proper rehabilitation programmes and support from official institutions and their communities. House of Grace is the first rehabilitation hostel for released prisoners in Israel dedicated to remoulding their future and creating a healthy relationship with the community.

5.4 Experiences from Europe

The Ecumenical Women's Initiative (EWI) grew out of the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Women's Solidarity Fund, which was set up to support women in the aftermath of the war in the former Yugoslavia, and to which the Council gave significant support. Working with women's or women-led community support organisations, EWI "supports and empowers women and their role in strengthening interfaith and civil dialogue, and the potential of faith in building peace and reconciliation processes as positive factors in social change." Working with women theologians/women students of theology (from all monotheist religions in the region), EWI has actively changed perceptions of those involved. As in so many parts of the world, religion is an integral part of life in southeast Europe. It is thus crucial to acknowledge its importance for individuals and societies while being aware of the growing influence of nationalism and religious fundamentalisms. Old theological theories continue to constrain women, resulting in a disconnection between feminist theological thinking and grassroots women's activism in the field of addressing gender-based violence within multi-faith communities. As long as underlying societal structures and a culture of violence remain unchallenged, it is crucial to empower the women and girls living inside these structures. In cooperation with its partner organisations across the region, EWI has facilitated interactive seminars to explore the assumption that well-argued dialogue can help bridge and overcome the gap between religious and secular identities. Additionally, the seminars question the justification of religion to support the oppression of women and minorities, and discuss the potential of the peace-building aspect of religion and its important role in preventing and combating all forms of violence.

5.5 Experiences in Scotland

A happy relationship has emerged in the Presbytery of Dunfermline with the local Mosque. The Presbytery approached the leadership of the Mosque after an outburst of anti-Islamic feeling following an incident in London, when members of the Presbytery were concerned that Muslims across the UK would be feeling under threat. The approach was welcomed by the Mosque and a series of informal meetings took place. Members of Presbytery have since visited the Mosque, and members of the Mosque have attended the Presbytery, and have built good relations. The Mosque has held open days in the last two years, and members of congregations across the Presbytery have attended.

In 2017, Dunfermline Abbey held its first interfaith event, inviting members of different faith communities to hear from a young Syrian refugee who is making a home in Scotland, members of a former refugee community who are now established in Scotland, and a Syrian musician. Some of the Syrian community brought traditional baking with them, which they vigorously encouraged everyone to try! As a result of one member teaching English to those moving into the area, parents felt encouraged to bring their children to one of the story and craft afternoons in the church. The Minister, the Rev MaryAnn Rennie, noted that it was a good learning opportunity for church members as they chatted with the parents about where they had come from, and listened to the children communicate in English and Arabic about the things they enjoyed in Scotland, and what they missed from home. This led to the congregation being able to offer support when particular needs were identified: a new mother with no local family was helped with the basics for a baby arriving; and children's garden toys and scooters were given to a family who had just moved into the area.

The Council has supported Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees (SFAR) from its inception. Offering hospitality to strangers is a common requirement of many different faith traditions. All religions teach a form of the Golden Rule (treat others as you would wish to be treated) and that there is an inherent value and dignity to every human being – and that our common humanity transcends national, racial, cultural or linguistic barriers. In many places at a local level faith communities in Scotland have a degree of experience and understanding of the issues. Working with Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Interfaith groups, SFAR offers advice and support to those seeking to help refugees and asylum seekers, as well

as advocacy and projects to assist with integration in Scotland. One practical action was taken by Portobello and Joppa Parish Church, which hosted a weekend club, hosting 75 refugees and asylum seekers in the church and halls. Volunteers helped with the practical arrangements, and there were more than a dozen children with their parents and carers. The Rev Tara Granados reflected on a conversation with one refugee: 'I realised just how much I'd forgotten of my studies of Islam...I was embarrassed...But then he said something that stopped me still, and still nearly brings me to tears. He said, "Wow, you know so much. You know Imam, and Mecca, and prayers we do during the day. How do you know this? It's nice." I was feeling incredibly inadequate, but he was thankful. How unbelievably isolated must you feel to be impressed by so little? How low your expectation of being known and understood? We hear the talk in the news about assimilation and familiarising refugees with Scottish culture. But we hear very little effort to educate Scottish people about refugees. To change ourselves to be welcoming, to be understanding, to attempt to speak their language: be that the language of dress, the language of cultural norms, the language of faith, the language of trauma, of loss, of isolation. The Holy Spirit, resting upon the disciples, elicited a change within them. It prompted them to reach out to those who were different, to take the first step towards the other. Efforts like our fellowship day reach out that hand of welcome, of seeking to understand rather than be understood. And it can be frustrating and messy and hard. But it is clear that God's love is meant for all nations, all peoples, and all languages. May we do the work to learn to speak our neighbour's language so they might too know they are loved by God and by us.' Get wisdom, and get understanding also.

6. THE PATH BEFORE US – WHAT ALL OF US CAN DO

The World Mission Council walks the Emmaus road with partners in many different settings and diverse situations. We follow Christ's call to accompany the church around the world in difficult situations as well as celebrating in good ones. As we interact with partners and support them in their particular circumstances, we seek to support their working and living together in harmony with their neighbours from other faith traditions, and to learn from their experiences. As this report highlights, it is so often in working together and seeking positive outcomes for communities that stereotypes might be diminished and true sharing encouraged, developing

real understanding between faith communities. Wisdom and understanding hand in hand.

Just as we live in a changed world, where historic ideas of mission and evangelism have changed; where traditional missionary work is no longer blindly accepted as good; where young people welcome the religious plurality around them and question stereotyping, so there is a changed environment for interfaith involvement. There are great opportunities to share in the joy of the world church in engaging with neighbours of different faiths, as well as tremendous challenges in supporting those in difficult circumstances. The Council is engaging in this accompaniment in supporting our links around the world and seeking to walk together in different ways, depending on local sensitivities, and embracing of Jesus commandment to love the neighbour, to make friends, no matter the faith, gender, or colour.

Our Christian Faith invites us to embrace the other, and to extend compassion and hospitality to those outside our own faith community. In a globalised world suffering under the burdens of war, structural economic injustice, catastrophic climate change, and other forms of conflict and injustice; it is imperative that we work together as the human family, created in the image of God. Faith is not measured primarily through cognitive belief systems, but by its fruit, namely its out-working in the world. Faith changes the way we live, move, and have our being in the world, as we seek to serve and follow the God of peace, who breaks down the walls of division, and calls us to live lives of deeper compassion and solidarity with our fellow human beings.

The church is God's body here on earth for the healing of the nations. It is for each person of faith to seek to be friends; to stretch out the hand of friendship beyond the confines of our own traditions, and live as witnesses to Jesus Christ, who came into our world of injustice and violence, to transform it through love.

Opportunities

How very good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in harmony! – Ps 133:1

There are opportunities for members, congregations and Presbyteries to engage with the world church in learning and sharing, through offering to serve as a Mission Partner, through twinning, through making a point simply of getting to know those in our own neighbourhood. Conversations are

important in bringing people together and helping us gain a greater understanding of all who, together, share this world and who, without exception, are made in God's image.

Do

Invite a speaker from another faith to speak at your church. Visit another place of worship, eg a local mosque, synagogue, etc.

Invite other faith communities to visit you and share hospitality.

Befriend refugees in your community.

Take part in Interfaith Week in Scotland

Mark Holocaust Remembrance Day

Resources

Film: The Imam and The Pastor <http://www.ftfilms.org.uk/imam.html>

John Philip Newell: Praying with the earth: a prayerbook for peace, Eerdmans, 2011.

H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal: A Thinking Person's Guide to Islam: The Essence of Islam in Twelve Verses from the Quran

A Common Word between Us and You -

www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document/

Mary Miller, 'In Search of Jane Haining', (working title) to be published by Birlinn in Autumn 2018.

Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes, World Council of Churches

Look at the WMC pages on the Church website and read about work with our partners

In the name of the Council

IAIN D CUNNINGHAM, *Convener*
SUSAN BROWN, *Vice-Convener*
MAUREEN JACK, *Vice-Convener*
IAN W ALEXANDER, *Council Secretary*

Appendices (on the web)

Appendix I Deaths

Appendix II Mission Partners

Appendix III Faithshare Visits

Addenda

Rev Iain Cunningham, Convener

The Council records its gratitude and appreciation to the Rev. Iain Cunningham for the gifts which he has generously shared with the Council in the four years in which he has been Convener, and for his previous service as a member and Vice-Convener. Iain has led the Council with his usual good humour and generosity, combining this throughout his term with service in parish ministry. His sensitively chosen photographic images have enriched the Council's business, publications, and worship; and his musical gifts have enlivened the Council's worship and social gatherings. With imagination, insight and always with the right note, Iain has guided the Council through a re-imagining of its core tasks in its reworked strategy, and shared his considerable theological and practical capacities with the Council during these years. Iain has encouraged the Council to be innovative and creative and excited about its task of 'attentive accompaniment' - walking with our fellow Christians in the world church - and encouraging the whole Church of Scotland to be involved in building relationships with churches and Christian people beyond these shores, seeing these as central to our calling to love and serve God, God's people and God's world. The whole Council wishes him well as he looks forward to returning fully to his parish responsibilities, with more time to enjoy his family and growing number of grandchildren.

In the name of the Council

SUSAN BROWN, *Vice-Convener*
MAUREEN JACK, *Vice-Convener*
IAN W. ALEXANDER, *Council Secretary*

Rev Susan Brown, Vice-Convener

The Council records its gratitude and appreciation to Rev Susan Brown for the time, energy and insight which she has generously shared with the Council in the three years in which she has served as Vice-Convener and also in her service as a member, and then Convener, of the Europe and Americas Committee. Susan has helped the Council enormously in developing and deepening its work and relationships with partner churches in Europe and the Americas, especially in the Czech Republic, Hungary and the Hungarian diaspora churches, as well as with other linked organisations. Susan also worked to cement the relationship with the newly

created Presbytery of International Charges, and has visited many of the congregations, emphasising the interest and engagement of the Council with the Presbytery, even as it no longer has a role in its governance. For all these things, as well as her unfailing cheerfulness, sensitivity in worship, and pastoral accompaniment of members and staff, the Council expresses its gratitude. The Council rejoices in her nomination as Moderator of the General Assembly and wishes her and her family every blessing in the challenges and excitement of the year which lies ahead.

In the name of the Council

IAIN D CUNNINGHAM, *Convener*
MAUREEN JACK, *Vice-Convener*
IAN W ALEXANDER, *Council Secretary*