

**Archdiocese of Canada
Orthodox Church in America**

**Archdiocesan Assembly
Gatineau, Quebec
August 22-25, 2013**

**Report to the Assembly
on Archdiocesan Ecumenical Activities**

The participation of the Archdiocese of Canada in ecumenical activities is a major way of bearing witness to the Orthodox Church as the One, True and Full Church of Christ on earth. At the same time our involvement in ecumenical bodies is an acknowledgement that numerous other Canadians are also seekers and followers of Christ, according to the light that they have received and to which they respond in all sincerity. The ecumenical movement in Canada, at a national level represented mainly by the Canadian Council of Churches, thus reflects the desire of all Christians to fulfil Christ's words in his priestly prayer with his Apostles "That they may be One, even as we are One" (Jn 17:22). The separation of Christians into many different Churches and communities is a historical and contemporary scandal and a counter-witness to Christ's prayer. It is thus the solemn responsibility of all Christians to move towards the restoration of Christian unity as exemplified in the One, Holy, Apostolic and Catholic Church of the early centuries. The modern ecumenical movement, despite its all-too-human weaknesses, hesitations and inadequacies, is a response to the impulse of the Spirit calling all Christians under the one banner of Christ.

The Orthodox Church has been deeply involved in the ecumenical movement for the last century and brings a unique perspective to bear in all Christian gatherings. This perspective is founded on the continuity and the constant revitalization of Tradition as the expression of the faith carried forward from the Apostles to the present day. The broadest and most accessible ecumenical forum in Canada for the Archdiocese is the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), founded in 1944 and which now has 25 members, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the major Protestant Churches, a number of Evangelical communities, and several Orthodox Churches.

The Archdiocese of Canada is presented on all of the major bodies of the CCC. Despite its small size relative to the major Christian denominations, the Archdiocese plays a leading role in the Council. A member of the Archdiocese, Professor Richard Schneider, served as Present of the CCC from 2003 to 2006 and Fr. Cyprian Hutcheon is currently a Vice-President of the Council. The Archdiocese has unquestionably been the strongest and most consistent Orthodox participant in the CCC, especially since the other Orthodox members of Council are not always represented at CCC meetings. Thus Archdiocesan representatives are frequently the only Orthodox voice on issues discussed in the CCC. The contributions of our participants in the various CCC bodies are valued and respected by other CCC members, and are far of proportion to our small size.

The purpose of this brief report is to provide a summary overview of the main activities of the CCC and the contributions of Archdiocesan representatives.

1. Governing Board (GB).

- Archdiocesan Representatives:
Archpriest Cyprian Hutcheon (Vice-president of the CCC) (Montréal QC).
Dr. Paul Ladouceur (Rawdon, QC) (alternating).
Colin Justin Grimmond (Oakville, ON) (alternating).
- Composed of representatives of all CCC members and responsible for the overall orientation and management of the Council. Six Orthodox and Oriental Churches are members, with the OCA Archdiocese as the most active Orthodox member of the CCC.

- Meets twice annually: spring meeting in Ottawa devoted to “Justice and Peace” concerns and to contacts with federal politicians to bring to bear Christian perspectives on issues of public concern, such as poverty, climate change, religious freedom and aboriginal justice issues; fall meeting in Mississauga deals mainly with “Faith and Witness” matters.
- “Religion in the Public Square” is a major ongoing and broadening concern.
- Fr. Cyprian Hutcheon was Moderator of a Forum on Faith and Public Life, held in conjunction with the GB meeting on May 22, 2013, with the newly appointed Dr. Andrew Bennett (a Ukrainian Catholic), head of the Office of Religious Freedom as principal speaker.
- The GB and Commission on Justice and Peace will be the main CCC points of contact with Office of Religious Freedom.
- The CCC is under severe financial constraints as a result of reductions in contributions from major denominations, themselves under financial strain from decreasing membership. Archdiocesan contributions to the CCC, although relatively small overall, have increased somewhat in recent years, a clear signal of our commitment to ecumenism.

2. Commission on Faith and Witness (CFW).

- Archdiocesan Representatives:
Professor Richard Schneider (Past President of the CCC) (Toronto, ON).
Dr. Paul Ladouceur (Rawdon, QC).
Fr. Alexei Vassiouchkine (Toronto, ON).
- The “theological” commission of the CCC, focussing mainly on specific theological issues examined in common, with a view to mutual understanding and the identification of points of commonality and of residing differences. Archdiocesan representatives bring a broad historical and patristic perspective, often lacking in many commission members, on issues under discussion.
- Recently completed study on Suffering and Hope: Published report *The Bruised Reed: A Christian Reflection on Suffering and Hope* (60 pages) available in pdf on the CCC website (www.councilofchurches.ca) and printed copies from the CCC Secretariat. Archdiocesan representatives were extensively involved in the consideration of this theme and the final document reflects significant input from Archdiocesan representatives (Richard Schneider and Paul Ladouceur).
- Recently completed study on Church Doctrine: Richard Schneider and Paul Ladouceur prepared discussion papers. Discussion papers were published in *Ecumenism* (published by the Canadian Centre for Ecumenism, Montréal), No. 179-180 (2010).
- Current study on Salvation (also entitled “Why Be a Christian?” after a lecture by Fr. Alexander Men): Discussion papers and thematic papers by Richard Schneider and Paul Ladouceur. Archdiocesan representatives have emphasized the Orthodox doctrine of theosis in these discussions.
- Current study beginning autumn 2013: “Theology of Religious Pluralism.” Archdiocesan representatives are preparing a paper for discussion at the autumn 2013 meeting of the CFW.
- “Off-the-record” discussions provide an opportunity for Commission members to discuss freely on issues where differences in theology and practice are often evident. These discussions provide an opportunity for Archdiocesan representatives to present Orthodox theology on themes such as prayer for the deceased, the Mother of God, participation of the body in salvation, mission, ordained ministry, the authority of Scripture, universal salvation (*apokotastasis*).
- Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: Preparation of Canadian materials are undertaken by a committee which reports to the CFW. Materials for the worldwide 2014 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity have been prepared by the Prairie Centre for Ecumenism (Saskatoon) and are available though the CCC website (www.councilofchurches.ca/en/Our_Faith/week-of-prayer.cfm).

- Interfaith relations: The CCC is participating (together with representatives of other major Canadian faith communities) in ongoing discussions around the possible eventual creation of some kind of permanent and official Canadian Interfaith Forum.

3. Commission on Justice and Peace (CJP).

- Archdiocesan Representatives:
Colin Justin Grimmond (Oakville, ON).
Alexandra Lopoukhine (Ottawa, ON).
Savelia Curniski (Saskatoon, SK) (for Human Trafficking in Canada).
- This is the social justice commission of the CCC, which brings Christian responses and initiatives to social and political issues in Canada and abroad.
- Archdiocesan involvement presents an opportunity to reflect the teachings of the Church Fathers and modern Orthodox theologians on major societal issues such as inequality, poverty and war.
- Major priority issues of the CJP: human rights, religious minorities, religious freedom, racism in Canada, poverty, indigenous rights, religion and public discourse, climate justice, peace and disarmament, human trafficking, refugee and immigration policies and prison chaplaincy.
- The CJP works closely with KAIROS, a CCC partner organisation of Canadian Churches and religious organizations united in faith-based action for ecological justice and human rights.
- The Commission also coordinates its activities with Project Ploughshares, the ecumenical peace and security centre of the CCC, to advance policies and actions to prevent war and armed violence and to build peace.
- Human trafficking in Canada: Archdiocesan representatives have been involved in CJP work in this area: Colin Justin Grimmond drafted the first Program Plan for the Human Trafficking in Canada Working Group and Savelia Curniski of Saskatoon is an active member of this Working Group.
- Middle East: The CJP has been instrumental in expressing the concerns of member Churches of the Council on events in the Middle East, especially for the beleaguered Christian communities of the Middle East. This is reflected especially in a joint letter sent in May 2013 on behalf of the leaders of all CCC members on Crises in the Middle East to Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Fr Jaroslav Buciora (GB and CFW representative of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada) presented in person this Church leaders' letter to a meeting of the Middle East Council of Churches in May 2013. Copy of the letter: <http://www.councilofchurches.ca/uploads/Crises%20in%20the%20Middle%20East%20-%20Letter%20to%20the%20Prime%20Minister%20EN.pdf>.

4. Biotechnology Reference Group (BRG).

- Archdiocesan Representatives:
Archpriest Cyprian Hutcheon (Montreal, QC).
Dr. Emanuel Kolyvas (Montreal, QC).
- Faith and Genetics: The BRG has prepared a study resource/curriculum for parish use, dealing with the moral dilemmas created by new genetic technologies, entitled *When Christian Faith and Genetics Meet: A Practical Group Resource* (available on the CCC website and from the Secretariat). Fr. Cyprian Hutcheon prepared a tradition-specific appendix for Orthodox readers.

Respectfully submitted.

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Professor Richard Schneider
Dr. Paul Ladouceur
Colin Justin Grimmond.

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