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Convenor's Report to the Area Council February 27, 2008

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord to the delegates and observers of the Caribbean and North American Area Council gathered in Georgetown, Guyana jointly with our friends and colleagues of the Caribbean and North America Council for Mission.

We have come a long way since the rebirth of this Area Council two years ago. I am happy to report to you that the Area Council is on a rebound, and the upward trajectory of this organization strategically positions this Area Council to be an effective instrument of theological and missional engagement in this region and lend critical leadership within the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Let me take you on a brief journey from where we have come, and outline some critical challenges that can become God-given opportunities for creative thinking and renewed collaboration:

1. Reorganization of CANAAC

In March 2006, CANAAC delegates met in Techy, Illinois to reorganize the structures of CANAAC, to reconstitute a fully functional Steering Committee, and set specific goals and timetables for the 2006-08 biennium.

Under the reorganization, new by-laws were adopted (to be ratified by WARC Executive Committee at this meeting) which clearly define CANAAC as "the regional expression" of WARC, closely tying the core priorities of WARC and its General Council to the programmes of CANAAC; that is WARC's agenda becomes CANAAC's agenda, and CANAAC is to contextual the core priority, "Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth" in the Caribbean and North American milieu.

To that end, CANAAC constituted a new Steering Committee, representative of the member communions of the Area Council. The members who have served are the following: Ms. Omega Bula (United Church of Canada); the Rev. Dr. Dale Bisnauth (Presbyterian Church of Guyana); Ms. Neema Cyrus-Franklin (Presbyterian Church U.S.A.); Dr. Oliver Patterson (Reformed Church in America); the Rev. Neal D. Presa (Presbyterian Church U.S.A.), Convenor/Chair; the Rev. Robert Rush (Cumberland Presbyterian Church); the Right Rev.

For Information, CANAAC Business Plenary, Wednesday, February 27, 2008

Ralph Sukhu (Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago); the Rev. Tara Tyme (United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands); Rev. Ralph Kendall (Presbyterian Church of Canada), Treasurer; the Rev. Robina Winbush (Presbyterian Church U.S.A.).

This past June, to diversify our number, we welcomed the Rev. Joel Ortega Dopico from the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Cuba.

Because of CANAAC's intent to truly be a regional expression of WARC, CANAAC's meeting patterns between General Councils will be to meet three times over the seven year period, with the last meeting as a preparation for each upcoming General Council. Each CANAAC meeting is to contextualize the Covenanting for Justice core priority in the context of the meeting venue, bringing Bible, mission, worship, and youth/young adult experiences that will enable delegates and attendees to see the Covenanting for Justice priority in action, and with hopes that learnings can be taken back to their churches, communities, and areas of ministry.

2. Communication

In past years, CANAAC has been largely disconnected from member churches. The newly organized CANAAC sought to reconnect with member churches, to build trust, legitimacy and relevancy, and to engage in broad partnerships to carry out the goals of the Area Council and WARC.

A large part of the intra-Area Council/inter-WARC information-sharing was the creation of the on-line presence of CANAAC. Visit us at www.canaac.org
We partnered with BRC WebDesign of San Francisco, CA, to design this interactive website that includes postings on resource documents about CANAAC and WARC, a blog site, a photo gallery, general information about upcoming events and the Area Council, and links to member communions and other ecumenical partners.

A new logo was developed:



The leaf-cross logo expresses the budding of a new Area Council in a new day, with Jesus Christ as the center of all that we do.

In my capacity as Convenor/Chair of CANAAC, I engaged in "pastoral diplomacy" with several heads of communions and ecumenical officers, through face-to-face meetings and teleconferences as a means to share with them what the new CANAAC is about, to invite them to partner with us in tangible ways, but most of all, to listen – to listen to their concerns and questions. I found these listening conversations to be enlightening, stimulating, and very encouraging.

3. CANAAC-CANACOM Joint Assembly/Council Meeting – February 25-29, 2008

We are very excited about this gathering of CANAAC. For the first time, we are holding a joint Assembly/Council meeting with our friends and partners of the Caribbean and North America Council on Mission (CANACOM) here in Guyana under the theme, “Breaking the Chains.”

This joint Assembly/Council meeting grew out of conversations in March 2006 in which CANAAC delegates expressed a strong intentionality to engage in bilateral talks with CANACOM on how we may mutually find ways to cultivate a close working relationship of theological reflection and mission service in this region. A CANAAC delegation met with CANACOM’s Administrative Committee in Toronto to initiate a first in a series of talks. A direct outcome of that meeting was the proposal for a joint Assembly/Council meeting.

A local planning team comprised of members of the three Guyana churches (Presbyterian Church of Guyana, Presbytery of Guyana, Guyana Congregational Union) has worked closely with me and the Steering Committee in providing local arrangements, programming, hospitality, and worship components of our gathering. A joint planning committee composed of all the members of the CANAAC Steering Committee and CANACOM’s leadership have been working over the past several months to put together Bible studies, opportunities for interactive dialogue and contextual learning, and a theological institute for young adult delegates.

I am especially pleased that we prioritized the inclusion of young adult seminarians. They are joining us as part of our Theological Institute. Thank you to the Formation for Ministry and Mission (FMM) at Quamina House, an ecumenical educational initiative of the three Guyana churches, ably directed by the Rev. Maureen Massiah. Seven seminarians from Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean will join the residential study body of FMM to engage in theological reflection, mission site visits, and dialogue about contextual understandings of Covenanting for Justice.

4. Youth Gathering – October 2007, Trinidad

CANAAC sees the need to engage youth and young adults in all aspects of ecumenism, particularly through opportunities of mission work projects, worship, fellowship, networking, and study.

Through the leadership of CANAAC Steering Committee member, the Rev. Tara Tyme (United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands), a local team of youth leaders, youth workers, and pastors from the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago put together a youth gathering just prior to the convening of the WARC Executive Committee.

The event was so successful that all the participants to that gathering expressed a strong interest in establishing some sort of network where regular networking opportunities can occur to worship, work and reflect together with other youth and young adults. A direct outcome of that Assembly is a proposal that will be brought to you for consideration to formally establish a CANAAC Reformed Youth Network.

5. Observance of Abolition of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

WARC's core priority of Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth speaks to the need for observance and reflection of, and action and tangible commitment against one of the most tragic outcomes of empire through the commodification of human beings in the Trans-Atlantic Slave abolished 200 years ago.

Through the able leadership of WARC Executive Committee member and CANAAC Steering Committee, Dr. Oliver Patterson (Reformed Church in America), chairs a planning committee that seeks to collect and disseminate information and raise awareness to all our member churches of events, seminars, lectures, and gatherings in the Caribbean and North American region, as well as England and Africa, and observance of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade 200 years ago.

6. Covenanting for Justice Consultations

We were gladdened at the appointment of Ms. Gretel van Wieren to serve as consultant for the Covenanting for Justice project here in North America. She has lent considerable leadership in various consultations over the past months to envision how the Covenant for Justice core priority is lived out in the Caribbean and North American region. Working in partnership with the Covenanting for Justice Network, as well as a staff team of ecumenical officers of CANAAC member communions and WARC Executive Committee members Drs. Susan Davies and Oliver Patterson, Gretel has been instrumental in assisting us in envisioning what the 2008-2010 biennium will look like in terms of tangible actions and grounded theological reflection.

This Work Group has produced a thoughtful and very usable Study Pamphlet of the Accra Confession which you will be given in your registration packets in Guyana. I encourage you to use it in your various networks and constituencies.

The Work Group is seeking to broaden the conversation to engage partners in the Caribbean and see how Covenanting for Justice finds expression in this area.

The next gathering of the Work Group will be March 31-April 1, 2008 in Toronto.

7. Finances

The budget approved by CANAAC delegates at the reorganization meeting was a lean budget that sought to focus on achievable goals. We are grateful for the considerable administrative support that the Office of Ecumenical and Agency Relations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) provided in the last year at no charge to the Area Council. The Office of Church Renewal, Justice, and Partnership of WARC under the direction of the Rev. Patricia Sheeratan-Bisnauth, likewise, offered critical support to us. This goes in saying that CANAAC, while possessing a small budget, has been blessed this past year by several ministry partners to accomplish much.

We have challenged member communions to support CANAAC financially and otherwise. Some have done so through contributions to CANAAC's general budget; others have opted for

one-time grants to specific programs/activities. And still there are a large number who only have the financial means to contribute to WARC's budget only.

In all and every case, we are grateful to God for what is given and what God provides. Truly, there is provision where there is vision.

8. Representation

Over the last two years, I have represented the vision and work of CANAAC at the WARC Executive Committee meeting in Trinidad last October; at the WARC-REC planning meeting in Calvin College (Grand Rapids, MI) earlier this month to conceptualize the Uniting General Council in 2010; and numerous conversations with the WARC Secretariat, heads of communions and ecumenical officers in this region, seminary presidents and heads of theological schools related to WARC.

But we face some critical challenges that are opportunities to stimulate our thinking, evoke our prayer, and which call us to action:

1. Legitimacy and Trust

Because of the long dysfunction of CANAAC and disconnect from WARC for a number of years, we have much to do by way of building trust with our member churches and legitimacy as a vibrant, relevant organization. Because of the gains of the last two years, we are poised to do just that. Our meeting here in Guyana is proof-positive that we seek to partner with churches and organizations like CANACOM, contextualize the Core Priorities of WARC, and enable tangible learnings to impact delegates and observers so that the excitement and information that is shared in gatherings like these will not remain here but can be shared with our own local ministries, congregations, denominational offices, and schools.

As we develop the goals and objectives for the 2008-2010 biennium and the budget that expresses those goals, we must be mindful of the principle that we set out in Techny: let us do a few things really well rather than aim for so much and produce mediocrity or nothing. Part of building legitimacy and trust is engaging all of our partners and those formerly not at the table but who should be or who feel frustrated at the organization but just need to be inspired again, as well as delivering on promises and commitments. Consultation and commitment. If we can set a few, achievable, relevant, visionary goals and objectives, we will have come a long way in helping to rebuild trust and legitimacy with our member churches.

2. Covenanting for Justice – contextualizing

Continuing our stated commitment to make the work of this Area Council meaningful and relevant which is connected to the core callings of the WARC General Council, we must continually seek to find creative ways to contextualize the Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth priority in all that we do.

3. **Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) churches**

When WARC and the REC unite in 2010, the newly formed World Communion of Reformed Churches will grow in membership. How well we grow into the birth of this organization and its regional expression in CANAAC will largely depend on our commitment as an Area Council to be welcoming and open to the contributions of REC churches in North America and the Caribbean that will become members of CANAAC.

4. **CANACOM**

Our joint Assembly/Council meeting with CANACOM is one major step that signals a bright future for our two organizations. But we must not stop here. Let us build on the good relationships we have had and together explore ways where mutual collaboration for missional and theological praxis can open up doors for a closer partnership.

5. **Youth and Young Adults**

Whether it be at the 24th General Council meeting in Accra, or the WARC Executive Committee meeting in Trinidad, the youth and young adults are calling for inclusion in all areas of leadership of the Area Council and the Alliance. They (We) have much to offer to the Church universal and the ecumenical movement, just as much as they (we) have so much to learn. For the 2008-2010 biennium, we must find creative ways to empower youth and young adults to serve and lead.

Closing Thoughts

It has been a privilege serving you together with our Steering Committee. I look forward to our gathering in Guyana in February 25-29, 2008 and the work afterwards, as we seek to faithfully live out our covenant for justice in the economy and the earth in common mission and witness, and collective action.

On behalf of the CANAAC Steering Committee, I remain....

Your partner in Christ's service,



Rev. Neal D. Presa
CANAAC Convenor