

The newest class of members to the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations (GACEIR) will gather before the fall 2014 meeting of GACEIR for orientation. During this time new members share with one another their call to ecumenism and hope for Christ's church. The Rev. Robina Winbush, Associate Stated Clerk for Ecumenical Relations, spoke with Rev. Robert C. Reynolds, Presbytery Executive for Chicago Presbytery to learn more about his journey and call to unity.

**Please share a bit of your own personal ecumenical and interfaith journey. As a Presbytery Executive what excites and challenges you about ecumenical and interfaith relationships?**

One of the great ends of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is "the promotion of social righteousness." Exciting local and global challenges for doing so are presented to Presbyterians today through ecumenical and interfaith collaboration. We have opportunities to cultivate the common good in rich soil of mutual trust, respect for truth, love of God (as each knows God), commitment to the well-being of the Earth, and care for the whole human family. As executive presbyter, I have served and led metropolitan ecumenical/interreligious councils in Chicago and St. Louis, which include religious leadership relationships among every major religious tradition. In Chicago I am a member of the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, the Greater Chicago Broadcast Ministries (Ecumenical-Interfaith Media Ministry), and I attend *Religion and American Foreign Policy Annual Workshops* sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations (NYC). While in Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery (St. Louis), I chaired Interfaith Partnership of Metropolitan St. Louis, the Episcopal Presbyterian Charitable Health and Medical Trust, and the Ecumenical Judicatory Coordinating Council for Faith Based Community Organizing. Also, I served as a director of St. Luke's Episcopal Presbyterian Hospital and St. Andrews Episcopal Presbyterian Foundation (Sr. Citizens Housing).

**The Presbytery of Chicago has an active Ecumenical and Interfaith committee. Please share how this committee was formed and how they're structured. What have been the highlights and challenges of its work?**

The Ecumenical and Interreligious Work Group (EIWG) was established in 2002 as part of an overall redesign of Chicago Presbytery. It consists of diverse members accountable to the Presbytery Coordinating Commission. In 2013 the presbytery established a formal covenant with the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago in which both communities committed to collaboration for the common good. This resulted from over twelve years of dialogue and is the first of its kind in the PC (USA). In an equally important way during this period, the EIWG engaged in robust quarterly dialogue with Chicago area Jewish leaders and initiated timely communications with them when anticipating tensions over presbytery and/or GA resolutions on the Middle East. These have increased trust. Seven years ago, the presbytery created an Interfaith Solidarity Network among our churches that

responds to religious hate crimes. To date, the Network responded ten times, through personal presence or letters, to incidents of defamation and violence aimed at other religious communities.

**The Ecumenical Stance of the PCUSA sets forth as one of ten priorities that the church bridge the gap between the local and the Global, individual congregations and the denomination in relation to ecumenism. As someone involved in a presbytery, how do you see this happening in your context? What might the role of the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations be in this priority?**

As people of diverse faiths increasingly interface because of advancements in transportation and communication, and because of global conflict, the PC (USA) has recommitted itself to fostering the common good through ecumenical and interreligious collaboration. This will include both active dialogue and shared initiatives for peace with justice. As Presbyterians, we share values with other faith traditions that call us to love neighbors near and far. It is essential to maintain a priority on building and sustaining trusted relationships with ecumenical and interreligious leaders, even at times when our positions on important issues conflict. Our church's future is tied to humbly and skillfully relating to people of other faiths as sisters and brothers in a global family, even though our ways of knowing and praising God may differ. To succeed, it is incumbent upon councils at every level to model the dialogue and to be mentors for others.