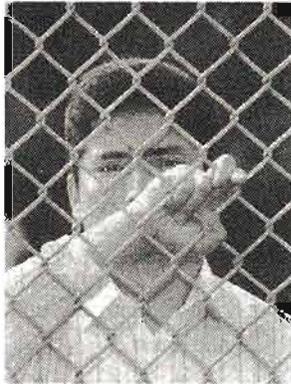


# Mandate

## CONTENTS

November 1991

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On our cover: Photographer Wolf Kunahorsky took this picture of a refugee in Canada.

4

**Fair Comment**  
by Bonnie Robinson

4

**Mish'n Stew**  
by David Spivey

5

**Mutuality in Mission**  
An interview with Korean minister  
Kwang Il Lee.  
by Tom Megginson

9

**"We Are Part of the Earth"**  
British Columbia's Gitksan-  
Wet'suwet'en people continue to  
fight for their land.  
by Rhoda Playfair Stein

12

**The Way I See It**  
by Rod Booth  
The Summer of '91

### COVER STORY

17

#### **Refugees: The Struggle to Stay in Canada**

As thousands of refugees remain caught in the backlog of Canada's immigration system, churches need to look at the role they can play in helping to address this problem.  
by Helga Kutz-Harder

19

**Being a Sponsor**  
by Laurie-Beth Davidson

20

**Being a Host**  
by Kathryn Storrington

13

**What's New in AVEL?**  
by Kristine Greenaway  
New videos for the Decade  
mission theme

14

**Letters from Overseas**  
Word from Japan, Chile and  
South Korea

16

**In Worship**

21

**In Focus**  
by Fred Sharp  
Images of Central America

26

**Economic Renewal**  
As its large employers closed down,  
throwing many people out of work,  
citizens in Milverton decided to take  
economic initiative into their own  
hands.

29

**Mission Digest**

30

**In Ministry**  
by Paul Newman

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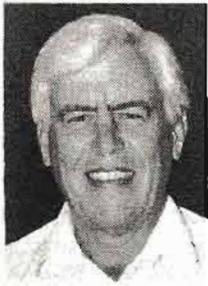
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In Ministry

*Paul Newman*

# Speaking with people of other faiths

Interfaith dialogue is an issue whose time has come. The interest in it is mushrooming, and all kinds of exciting things are happening. People across the country see the promise of solidarity among those of good will, no matter what religion or belief system they adhere to.

Together with a Buddhist teacher, I teach courses on interfaith dialogue in the Toronto School of Theology and give workshops in churches and study centres whenever and wherever possible. Dr. Sugunasiri and I led a weekend retreat in September 1990 at Aurora United Church, just north of Toronto. The participants developed the following suggestions:

1. Actually meet a person of another faith.
2. Listen to the convictions of your neighbours of different faith.
3. Be prepared to grow and change your mind about some things.
4. Be fair and practise the Golden Rule --this means not using hurtful terminology, not hanging on to misconceptions when they are shown to be false, and not insisting on using your own terms to define others' beliefs. Let them define their faith themselves.
5. Witness to what you believe most deeply. When you listen to others' deepest beliefs, you are given permission to witness to your own.
6. Agree to disagree, if necessary. That assumes you will question the other about aspects of their religion that you do not like, and they will do the same to you.
7. Work together with your neighbours

of other faiths to make the world a better place—some of the biggest problems in the world or in your community cannot be resolved without interfaith co-operation.

8. Share each others' celebrations, rituals, worship and meditation. As mutual respect and understanding grow, it becomes possible to participate in common religious activities.
9. Do your homework to learn about each others' history and scriptures, if there are any.
10. Hope that dialogue will make for peace and justice and fullness of life.

There are already many organizations and projects working to promote interfaith dialogue, and the United Church is deeply involved:

- On-going official dialogues continue among Christians, Jews, Muslims and Buddhists. In the Muslim-Christian Liaison group, there was a somewhat tense dialogue during the recent Gulf War. However, an association of more than 10 years helped members of the group maintain their mutual trust and acceptance, despite the war.
- Public and high schools in Canada urgently need to teach their students about the major religions of the world. The Victoria-based World Interfaith Education Association (Canada) is sponsoring a conference on this subject next summer, and ran an interfaith camp last summer for young adults in the Vancouver area.
- United Church clergy recently received a brochure entitled *United Church Statements on Interfaith Dialogue*. The Interfaith Dialogue Committee of the Division of World Out-

reach designed the brochure to be easily duplicated and used as a Sunday bulletin insert, or as a handout for study in church groups.

- There is a useful packet of brochures available from the United Church for a dollar a copy, discussing what Christians should know about various religions when they prepare for interfaith dialogue. Covering 10 different religions, it prepares people so that they will not be embarrassingly uninformed when they take part in interfaith dialogue. Soon, a booklet with similar information will be available through the United Church Publishing House.
  - We hope to develop a regular page or column in one of our United Church magazines, where church people from across the country can share their experiences and experiments with interfaith dialogue.
  - We are working with the publishers of the Whole People of God Sunday School curriculum to include more interfaith material in the weekly lessons.
  - The newly established North American Interfaith Network (NAIN) will give organizations interested in interfaith dialogue the chance to share ideas and resources on a regular basis.
- Dialogue and partnership are expressions of love both for God and our neighbours, and the United Church has affirmed them since as early as 1936. If you have stories to tell about your experiences in interfaith relations we would be glad to hear about them.

*Paul Newman is Secretary for Inter-Faith Dialogue with the Division of World Outreach.*