

Church compiles constitutional brief

The Division of Mission in Canada (DMC) submitted a brief in February to the Special Joint Committee On a Renewed Canada (Beaudoin-Dobbie Committee) entitled: "Sharing Canada's Future for the Common Good."

The statement was compiled with the help of submissions from United Church courts and members from all regions of the country, and built on previous consultations on constitutional matters during the Spicer Commission hearings. The brief was also submitted to the Assembly of First Nations Constitutional Circle for consideration at its deliberations.

The brief states that Aboriginal people must be at the table in the process of constitution making and that the negotiations must lead to recognition of their inherent right to self-government. Quebec should be recognized as the distinct society that it is by virtue of its language, culture and such historical developments as the Civil Code. The precedence of Canada's commitments under international human rights law should be enshrined in the constitution, especially for the protection of minorities. Social and economic entitlements should be ensured. The brief also emphasizes the need to build trust in the negotiation process itself and denounces public statements that raise the possibility of violence to preserve or dismember Canada.

The church also participated in the writing of two ecumenical statements on the constitutional process:

- the Canadian Council of Churches' Working Group on the Constitution prepared a brief entitled, *To Live As Neighbours*;
- the Aboriginal Rights Coalition (formerly Project North) authored a *Response to the Proposals to Amend the Canadian Constitution*.

A number of petitions on

constitutional issues, such as a proposed Social Charter, are before the conferences of the church, in preparation for General Council, which meets in August. As the process continues, the participation of churches in provincial debates becomes crucial.

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1993-UN Year of Aboriginals

Next year has been designated by the United Nations as International Year of Indigenous Peoples. Plans for celebrating the year and drawing attention to problems facing indigenous peoples are underway at the UN Centre for Human Rights in Geneva.

Hope for multifaith studies in schools

Momentum is growing in Canada to include studies of major religions in public education.

Such studies are intended to provide information about other religions; they are not religious instruction designed to promote a particular faith. The United Church has opposed religious instruction in public schools. It has, however, gone on record in support of multifaith religious education in both primary and secondary schools.

In 1984 the General Council passed a resolution to ask all departments of education to provide for the teaching of world religions in secondary schools, using teachers qualified through university departments of religious studies.

In 1989 the Division of Mission in Canada made a submission to the Watson Commission in Ontario calling for multifaith religious education from Kindergarten to Grade 8. There have been numerous other initiatives recently in many parts of the country to introduce religion studies into the school systems. Newfoundland has led the country in providing such studies. Elsewhere individual schools or school boards have begun to experiment.

Religion studies will be introduced earlier if people of the major religions advocate it. This issue of

common concern provides an occasion for people of different religions to collaborate with one another and with public educators to improve education and enhance the multicultural fabric of Canadian society.

A national conference of educators and representatives of major religions will be held in Victoria, BC from May 29 to June 1, to look at all the main aspects of teaching religions in schools. The United Church has given a grant to support the conference. It is expected that a report will be available in due course to all who are interested. Information can be obtained from The World Interfaith Education Association (Canada), P.O. Box 7384, Station D, Victoria, BC, Tel/Fax: (604) 360-1259.

The Watson Commission has given its report to the government of Ontario which has promised that some action will be announced in the near future. The Report contains 38 recommendations that could be a useful model for other provinces as well as Ontario. Congregations interested in promoting religion studies in their provinces may obtain copies of the Watson Commission recommendations by writing to Publications Ontario, 800 Bay Street, Toronto, ON M7A 1N8.

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