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Titulaire de la Chaire de Recherche du Canada *Islam, Pluralisme et Globalisation* à l'Université de Montréal depuis 2005, Patrice Brodeur analyse les questions d'identités multiples et de dynamiques de pouvoir au sein des dialogues interculturels, interreligieux et intercivilisationnels avec une emphase particulière sur les contributions musulmanes depuis le 11 septembre 2001. Il a créé une équipe de recherche interdisciplinaire d'une vingtaine de chercheurs universitaires dont les travaux ont été financés par plusieurs organismes subventionnaires canadiens et étrangers. Il travaille aussi en collaboration avec l'Alliance des Civilisations des Nations Unies. Il a publié une dizaine d'articles dans des revues scientifiques ainsi qu'une douzaine de chapitres de livre académique, surtout dans le domaine des sciences des religions.

Résumé

Ce rapport de recherche fournit un état de la question sur les espaces de dialogues interreligieux au Canada et offre des pistes au gouvernement canadien afin de favoriser ces contacts tout en promouvant l'égalité des droits. L'étude se base principalement sur une vingtaine d'entrevues auprès d'intervenants experts du dialogue interreligieux et s'ancre dans quatre milieux urbains, soit Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver et Halifax. Elle met aussi en exergue comment, malgré l'ambivalence historique et actuelle des religions à l'égard des relations interreligieuses, les espaces de dialogues étudiés contribuent directement à promouvoir l'égalité des droits et la liberté de religion et de conscience au Canada. Le rapport comble aussi un manque, car il existe peu de recherches de terrain sur le sujet et il fait écho à une thèse de doctorat australienne très récente. Ses résultats laisse croire qu'il est hautement probable que développer la compréhension de différentes fois et de promouvoir le dialogue interreligieux aide à prévenir et à réduire les tensions sociales et les conflits, même si plusieurs défis et problèmes peuvent en émerger.

Spaces of Interreligious Dialogue in Canada:
Overview and Suggestions

Les espaces de dialogues interreligieux au Canada:

États des lieux et suggestions

Final Report to Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Rapport final pour Citoyenneté et Immigration Canada

Direction générale de la recherche et de l'évaluation

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9 August, 2010

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1.   Preamble

This research report provides a general, though by no means exhaustive, state-of-the-art picture of spaces of interreligious dialogue in Canada. It aims primarily to answer the following question: What can the Canadian government do to encourage interreligious/interfaith[1] dialogue in ways that effectively promote equality of rights, especially for religious minorities, social cohesion and peace? The direct answer to this question comes in the form of recommendations in section #11, largely based twenty semi-directive qualitative interviews with carefully selected expert practitioners in the field of interreligious dialogue based mostly in the three largest urban areas of Canada. To make sense of these recommendations, sections #2 to #8 of this report present a brief history of interreligious dialogue in Canada followed by a broad description of this dialogue, including its contextualization in four urban spaces: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and Halifax. Sections #9 and #10 provide many specific examples of the complexities, challenges, and successes of interreligious dialogue in Canada based on these interviews and much of the collective experience of this report's collaborating research team. The recommendations that emerged from this research also stem from over twenty-five years of active international engagement in the field of interreligious dialogue by its lead researcher in particular.

At the outset, while "equality of rights" is clear from a jurisprudential perspective in terms of the Canadian constitution and the charter of rights and freedom and a fundamental framework to fight hate crimes, what "social cohesion and peace" actually means is subjective to a person's and a group's own worldview and relationship to Canada as a Nation-State. Whatever the definitions of "social cohesion" and "social peace" as well as the means to achieve them might be, two things are certain: first, social cohesion and peace, together, are central responsibilities for any government in power; second, in any given society, social cohesion and peace are the results of how people feel about each other and directly act towards one another. Those feelings and behaviours are conditioned by at least three important factors: 1) the degree of intellectual knowledge, or ignorance, about a growing diversity of ethnic, religious, linguistic, and ideological identities that make up the Canadian population, as well as about Canadian and various provincial laws and regulations as to how best to govern this diversity of identities (i.e.: from rejection - based or not on ignorance - to wholehearted support for the principle of fundamental freedoms, including of conscience and of religion); 2) the degree of emotional openness, or fear, towards differences in identity, both individual and collective (i.e.: from exclusivist to pluralist perspectives); and 3) the degree of hope, or despair, that socio-economic integration is possible through equal opportunity and upward mobility.

This report highlights how, despite the historical and current ambivalence of religions in general,[2] Canadian interreligious dialogue activities directly contribute to equality of rights and freedom of religion and conscience, thereby fighting intolerance and hate crimes. They also

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[1]   In this report, the adjectives "interreligious" and "interfaith" can be used interchangeably. Brodeur prefers "interreligious" while Lamoureux Scholes uses "interfaith" exclusively. The reasons behind such preferences and choices are linked to semantic details that are still debated among scholars, with no obvious outcome yet. These details are thus not seminal to this kind of report.

[2]   See both Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ed., *War and Peace in World Religions*, (London: SCM Press, 2004), and Gustav Niebuhr, *Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America*, (New York: Viking, 2008).

foster higher levels for all above three factors, directly promoting social cohesion and peace in Canada. Yet, the extent of the effectiveness of its contributions and their relative impact across different areas of Canada remains largely unknown due to a lack of research in this field. The partial results of the first almost completed doctoral thesis on this topic in Canada is included in this report, thanks to the key participation of its lead collaborator, Laurie Lamoureux Scholes, who solely undertook to write sections #2 to #8 for this report. It is worth noting that her research coincides with the recently submitted doctoral thesis of Australian researcher Anna Halafoff, who presents the first scientific findings on interreligious dialogue using a new cosmopolitan theory and methodology that analyzes interreligious dialogue in the Australian state of Victoria within the broader global developments of the interreligious dialogue movement as reflected in its activities in the USA and the UK. The present report confirms Halafoff's recent doctoral thesis findings that interfaith organisations have four aims: 1) developing understanding of diverse faiths and of the nature of reality; 2) addressing global risks and injustices; 3) challenging exclusivity and normalising pluralism; and 4) creating multi-actor networks for common security (Halafoff 2010, 197).

But the following questions remain, both in her pioneering work as well as in this report's research findings: Does developing understanding of diverse faiths and of the nature of reality necessarily lead to discovering common values, which then develop into common action platforms for social cohesion and peace? More than simply addressing global risks and injustices, does interreligious dialogue actually prevent and reduce social tensions and conflicts, in Canada and beyond? How exactly does interreligious dialogue challenge exclusivism and help normalize pluralism? How extensive is the participation of Canadian interreligious dialogue practitioners in the creation and effective development of multi-actor networks for common security?

This report explores initial answers to these and other related questions with the aim of presenting positive outcomes and hopes, challenges, as well as negative tensions and conflicts that emerge from the experience of practitioners in various spaces of interreligious dialogue in Canada. This report's recommendations suggest avenues for future research and for the development of new Canadian policies that integrate better religious and interreligious factors in the practices of a more inclusive multiculturalism, especially in terms of making better use of formal and informal interreligious dialogue organizations and activities at the local, provincial, national, and international levels.

"Spaces of interreligious dialogue in Canada" are best understood within the broader spaces of intercultural relations and dialogue that take place daily across most sectors of Canadian society. They form a vital part of these interactions. Indeed, many religious spaces are themselves very multicultural and thereby the loci of intercultural relations and dialogue, a form of intra-religious dialogue. Similarly, many ethno-cultural groups are multireligious in nature, thereby potential spaces of interreligious relations and dialogue too. All of these forms of intercultural and interreligious (or interfaith) relations and dialogue take place within a broadly secular Canadian society. This point is crucial because it affects how commitments to a Canadian national identity are perceived by religiously self-identifying people and communities. When the major political institutions of Canadian society do not openly affirm the role of religious identities, values, and commitments in shaping the rich fabric of Canadian society, or only support some religious identities but not others, it can easily fall into the trap of fostering exclusions and double standards, potentially aggravating feelings of defensiveness first, leading to processes of ghettoization and anti-social behaviour, including radicalization. On the other

hand, an open attitude towards religions and spiritualities by all levels of government actors can enhance religious people's commitment to working out a constructive relationship between their religious and local/provincial/national identities. Such practice can truly foster the new priorities of Canada's Multiculturalism Program that aims to promote the successful integration of Canada's many different communities.

The closest country to Canada, both in terms of its constitutional culture on matters of State-religion relations as well as in terms of its politics of multiculturalism, is Australia.[3] Since the late 1990s, it has embarked on integrating the religious dimensions of a large percentage of their respective citizens through constructive cooperation between politics and religions in the public sphere, especially through empowering interreligious dialogue organizations, which is less conflictual jurisprudentially than empowering directly specific religious institutions. In respectively very different ways, the UK and the USA have also moved in the same general direction. These changes are part of a broader international transformation since the General Assembly of the United Nations consensually adopted, on December 20th, 2006, Resolution A/61/221 entitled: "Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding, and cooperation for peace." On October 4-5, 2007, this resolution began to be implemented through a two-day conference at the U.N. General Assembly during which over seventy countries presented their past activities and future objectives. Unfortunately, Canada refrained from sharing its own rich and growing set of experiences, as reflected in this brief report.

This report will not present any overview of research sources since there are no major studies of this topic in Canada officially published yet, although there is one very brief publication (Seljak 2009). It will also not provide any statistics about various degrees of interreligious dialogue practices in different parts of the country and among its different religious and spiritual groups, or any kind of impact and evaluation studies: both do not seem to exist so far in Canada. Yet, through our qualitative interviews, the impact of interreligious dialogue seems to be very important for the fight against intolerance as well as for the promotion of equality of rights, especially for religious minorities, as well as social cohesion and peace, through all four forms of peacebuilding: preventive diplomacy (formal and informal at various levels of society), peacemaking and peacekeeping, as well as post-conflict peacebuilding.[4]

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[3]   For a comparative analysis of Australia and the UK with the Canadian context, see Dereck Bianchi Melchin, *Models of Interfaith Engagement in Canada and Abroad : Opportunities for Public Policy Development*, report prepared for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Multiculturalism Branch, March 2010.

[4]   See the Report of the Secretary-General (Boutros Boutros Ghaly) pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council, 31 January 1992: *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping,* especially its sections on Definitions (#20-21-22).

2.   Introduction

In Canada, where one's religious identity is more often a private affair, organized interfaith initiatives provide one of the few public forums where one is encouraged to affirm their religious convictions. As Canadians are more and more encountering different religions and spiritual paths in workplaces, neighbourhoods, leisure activities, politics and the daily news, interfaith initiatives have flourished, especially in the larger urban centers. We can look to a number of formal interfaith policies and programs developed and implemented by various institutions representing all levels of government, including corrections services, healthcare, education, and the military. In many respects, it is these institutions that best demonstrate how Canadians have formally recognized religious pluralism as a social fact – however, some have been more successful than others. Grassroots interfaith initiatives also dot the Canadian landscape and include long-standing to ad-hoc formal organizations, localized outreach efforts by individual faith communities to small informal `home-study` dialogue circles.

While similar kinds of interfaith initiatives can be found across the country, variations in religious populations and pressing political / social concerns have influenced the distinct character of interfaith efforts in each centre. This section of the report aims to provide a descriptive map of publicly recognized interfaith organizations in Canada. A focus on public interfaith activities may seem limiting given that there are many informal interfaith activities which occur every day in Canada. Yet, it is the work of publicly recognized interfaith organizations and activities which offer the greatest opportunity to track the development and impact of interfaith work in Canada as such initiatives by definition demonstrate to the larger society the intentional cooperation of more than one religious community. Such organizations or activities may identify specific faith traditions (eg. Canadian Council of Christians and Jews), or include in their name such terms as 'interfaith', 'interreligious', "interspiritual" or 'multifaith' to indicate the presence of two or more religious traditions active in the aims of the organization (eg. Interfaith Council of Halifax, Ontario Multifaith Council, Vancouver Interspiritual Centre, Toronto Interreligious and Multicultural Family Festival).

This map is based on data collected between May 2006 and March 2009 as part of a qualitative research project that examines the interfaith movement as a growing religious voice both globally and within the Canadian social context in particular. The broader research includes one hundred in-depth interviews with active participants in publicly recognized interfaith initiatives across Canada (most notably within the large urban centres of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax), and an examination of scholarly literature, self-published interfaith promotional materials, conference proceedings and websites about interfaith initiatives globally and within Canada. As an account of all interfaith projects in Canada is near impossible, this section instead provides a general typology of motivations, types and structures that define Canadian interfaith activities.

3.   The History of Interfaith Work in Canada

3.1   *Phase One – Pre-Confederation to the 1960s*

Pre-confederation encounters between First Nations Peoples, French Catholic and British Anglican colonizers could be described as a coming together of distinct religious communities, but "tense" and "inequitable" best describes these early interfaith relations. French Catholic and later Protestant encounters with First Nations were marked by a missionary zeal to convert this "heathen" population to the one true faith of Christianity (Choquette, 2004: 80), an attitude that characterized relations amongst these communities, even after the mass conversion of most First Nations peoples, until well into the latter half of the twentieth century. The strained relations between Catholic and Protestant expressions of Christianity that coloured the often tense relations between the founding nations of England and France, were also present in the early contact between the two colonies in Canada limiting the development of cooperative or respectful relations until well into the 1960s. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century waves of immigration to Canada not only contributed to the development of diverse ethnic Christian and non-Christian religious communities but also gave rise to tensions between the newcomers and the more established communities. In particular Jews and immigrants from Asia were subjected to some of the more blatant discrimination[5] ever adopted into public policy (for more see Biles, 2004: 157; Banerjee and Coward, 2004: 40; Ravvin, 2004: 119).

It is in the years leading up to the Second World War that we find the earliest signs of public interfaith efforts dedicated to working toward better relations between religious communities. For example, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in the 1930s created a series of advisory boards with leaders from Catholic, Anglican, and Jewish religious communities who provided guidance for the respectful treatment of issues related to various religious communities. These groups continued until well in to the 1990s when budget cuts forced their demise (Montreal interview, 2006). There was throughout the 1930s also a rise in ecumenical relations, especially among Protestant denominations who eventually established the Canadian Council of Churches in 1944 with official representative members from most mainline Protestant traditions (Anglicans, Presbyterians, United Church and Lutherans), several Baptist assemblies and Orthodox Churches. Although the Roman Catholic tradition remained on the margins of these efforts until well after Vatican II (1962-65), these early ecumenical endeavours became a blueprint for later interfaith activities initiated by some of the same member churches.

Out of the horrors of the WWII developed a committed international effort to bridge relations between Christians and Jews and in 1947 the International Council of Christians and Jews was born in Seelisberg Switzerland. Very quickly chapters were formed in nations and

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[5]   French Catholic and English Protestant Missionary efforts and later operation of Residential Schools for First Nations people (Miller, 2004); English Protestant efforts to "Canadianize" non-English Christian and non-Christian immigrants (Choquette, 2004: 339); the continuous passage legislation passed in 1907 designed to stop the "Hindoo invasion" *(sic)* (Mahmood, 2004: 57); Asians within Canada did not receive the civic right to vote in municipal, provincial or federal elections until 1947 (Banerjee and Coward, 2004: 40); Japanese migrants lost all possessions and were forcibly removed from coastal cities to internment camps in Alberta and the interior of British Columbia (Boisvert, 2004: 81); Canadian Jews have been subjected discriminatory policies adopted by governments and public institutions including the refusal of Jewish refugees during the Second World War and quotas to limit Jewish student enrolment in universities, a policy in place at McGill University until the 1950s (Ravvin, 2004).

large cities around the world including Canada where before the end of 1947 a small group of Christians and Jews from Toronto and Montreal who had already been meeting informally for a few years came together to establish the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews (CCCJ). The early aims of the organization included the promotion of understanding and cooperation between Christians and Jews, affirm human rights and to "counter all forms of prejudice, intolerance, discrimination and misuse of religion..." (CCCJ Website, 2006). Membership in the group included official representative members from various mainline churches (Presbyterian, Lutheran, United Church, Roman Catholic and Anglican), and appointed members from the Canadian Jewish Congress. Over the years the CCCJ has remained a consultative body only with no mandate to act. As such they have not engaged in public interfaith outreach activities but instead have directed their efforts to promoting a deeper respect and understanding of the two faith traditions. In 2003, the CCCJ experienced a significant evolution that ultimately resulted in the founding of the Canadian Center for Diversity in 2005. In response to the shift in focus some long-time members cited that advancements in Jewish Christian relations over the past 40 years allowed for a shift into the larger need for promoting understanding across religious and cultural traditions. Other members remarked the committee has stalled due to tension created by the critical statements directed towards Israeli policy in the Palestinian conflict taken by the United Church in their "Paths to Peace in Israel and Palestine" (2003).

3.2   *Phase Two – 1960s to 9/11/2001*

This period is marked most prominently by a distinctive shift in the statistical portrait of religion in Canada. As Table 1 indicates, from Confederation to the 1960s, more than 97% of the Canadian population identified with a Christian tradition. However, the introduction of the point-system immigration policy during the late 1960s created more equitable opportunities for greater ethnic and religious diversity within the immigrant pool. It is important to note that we are working with significant numbers here as the annual immigration to Canada has steadily increased from an average of 75,000 per annum in 1960s to figures that since 2001 range between 221,352 and 262,236 immigrants per annum – over 9,000,000 people since 1960. As Table 2 indicates, religious diversity of immigrants has also increased dramatically. While Christians continue to be the largest pool of immigrants their numbers have dropped from a high of over 80% in 1960 to less than 40% in 2001. During the period Jewish immigration remained fairly steady, but the number of Muslim immigrants increased 75 times from pre-1960 figures surpassing Judaism in 2001 as the largest non-Christian religion in Canada – see Table 3. Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh communities have also swelled with the steady inflow of immigrants who practice these traditions creating sizeable communities, particularly in large urban centers (Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver) where immigrants clustered and developed more visible religious communities.

While Christian-Jewish dialogues continued to flourish in the period, growth in religious diversity fuelled development of several grassroots interfaith organizations whose directive was to build bridges. Ongoing violence inspired the international effort to bring together religious communities for the purpose of promoting peace and in 1961 the "Religions for Peace" effort began (in 1971 becoming the World Conference of Religions for Peace). Soon after the establishment of this international organization several small but active chapters were formed in various urban centers across Canada including Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver and Calgary.

Another key objective of interfaith activities during this period was the building of bridges with the 'new to Canada' faith communities. For example, in Vancouver on the heels of the first World Urban Forum-Habitat conference in 1976, two interfaith organizations were born: the Ecumenical Action Society of British Columbia (since 1997, the Vancouver Multifaith Action Society – VMAS) and the Pacific Interfaith Citizens Association (PICA). Both organizations continue today. From inception, the mandate of each organization has included the objective of raising awareness about the diverse religious traditions practiced in the Vancouver area. For example, the Pacific Interfaith Citizens Association (PICA) grew out of a small group of individuals dedicated to helping new immigrants find places to worship. Initiated by a Catholic Priest committed to interfaith, the monthly meetings brought together Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Baha'is, where they shared stories of discrimination experienced within their respective communities and discussed possible solutions. What began as essentially a loose-knit support group became a formal interfaith organization dedicated to hosting public awareness events including interfaith education conferences, courses and annual dinners. The formal structure of the organization, with each member appointed to the board of directors by their faith communities, has allowed the organization to participate in provincial and federal government consultations that request public input on issues of faith.

Throughout the 1990s we also see the shift of many ecumenical initiatives towards interfaith awareness especially on university campuses where chaplaincy programs shifted from a focus on Christian traditions to a multifaith platform that could better serve the spiritual needs of the increasingly pluralistic student bodies.

Phase two is also marked by the development and adoption of several interfaith policies and programs for a number of government institutions including correctional services, healthcare, education, government administration and the military (discussed below).

3.3 *Phase Three – Post 9/11*

The attacks of September 11, 2001 mark a significant turning point for interfaith work around the world, greatly intensifying awareness about the importance of working toward better relations between religious communities. In Canada, several existing interfaith organizations rallied to the call for more information by introducing and refining outreach efforts beyond their own communities toward a more general public audience. For example, the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews initiated the "Discover Diversity" school tours of religious sites in Toronto, an initiative that became the foundational activity for the organizational shift to the Canadian Center for Diversity. This shift also marks a change from earlier grassroots interfaith activities in Canada that tended to focus more on building strong relationships between members of different faith communities, mostly by means of educational projects about "the other" directed toward their own members.

4.   Interfaith Organizations

In a 2004 essay entitled "The Interfaith Movement: An Incomplete Assessment", Kusumita Pedersen, a leading participant and scholar of Global interfaith activities, suggested that besides the most obvious need of a multireligious population where minorities are often key players, the three main motives for interfaith work are: "(1) to live together harmoniously, mitigate tensions, and resolve conflict; (2) to engage in a "common task" and (3) to search for truth and understanding in the context of religious plurality" (Pedersen, 2004: 75). We can see the influence of each within interfaith activity in Canada.

4.1   *Types of Dialogue*

Interfaith activities by definition are the coming together of two or more faith communities in dialogue. Interfaith dialogue can be either bi-lateral (between two faith traditions), tri-lateral (three faith traditions), or multi-lateral (three or more faith traditions). Often the motivation to participate in interfaith dialogue is centered on a specific issue or set of issues. Types of dialogues most commonly employed include:

1. Dialogue of Education: focus of encounter is on increasing one's basic knowledge about diverse religious beliefs and practices through a series of educational exchanges including bilateral, trilateral and multi-lateral dialogue formats, panel discussions with question and answer sessions, religious sites visits, shared meals, outreach efforts to schools and other community groups.

2. Dialogue of Life: is concerned with issues that are happening in daily life, in the workplace, at the local school, within the local community, that highlight community building activities. In the process of coming together in community, relationships are forged in which dialogue about faith are natural elements of conversation.

3. Dialogue of Social Justice: focus of encounter is on performing a common task or responding to social justice issues that impact the larger community. For example, people of diverse faith traditions might come together to organize a soup kitchen or participate in a Habitat for Humanity project. Others support programs that might raise awareness of social justice issues including poverty, violence, environmental degradation and/or concern that civil liberties are not threatened, including freedom of religion.

4. Dialogue of Belief: focus of encounter is to engage in a deep dialogue about foundational beliefs and practices of the religious traditions represented around the table. This is often the most formal and academic of interfaith encounters due to the high degree of religious knowledge one is expected to possess in order to contribute in a meaningful way.

5. Dialogue of the Spirit: focus of encounter is on shared spiritual practices most notably, shared retreats, meditation exercises, singing or visual art projects or creating and participating in public interfaith rituals.

6. Dialogue of Peace: focus of encounter is to find pathways away from conflict while also addressing the difficult religious and cultural questions that arise from such situations. Actions include organized peace walks and official statements on local to international conflict issues. Often one of the more emotional dialogue situations that may at times be suspended, sometimes indefinitely, when conflict flares.

7. <u>Dialogue with Governments</u>: focus of such encounters is to express essential needs of religious communities to various government institutions for the purpose of facilitating necessary accommodations and respect for the religious practices of citizens. For example, some groups provide consultative services to chaplaincies services at hospitals and/or prisons, or sit on advisory boards at various levels of government.

4.2   *Organizational Structures*

Interfaith organizations may solicit members by invitation only or through open calls to the public at large, but the structure of each interfaith initiative often depends on the aims of the interfaith groups, group objectives and the resources available.

4.2.1   Representative Model

This model requires that all members of the organization be appointed as representatives of their respective faith communities. Some organizations mark the benefit of this approach as integral to the credibility of the group, particularly when they issue public statements or are asked to perform consultation work with government advisory boards. However, it is often difficult to find official "representatives" as outside of the mainline Christian expressions the authority structures of most religions are polycentric rather than centralized. As a result interfaith organizations in Canada using this model tend to rely on local "associations" formed to manage places of worship to appoint members. For example, the Corrections Services Interfaith Chaplaincy Committee includes representatives from the Buddhist Society, Council of the Muslim Community of Canada, the Jain Society, the Canadian Jewish Congress, Federation of Sikh Societies of Canada, and the Islamic Coordinating Council of Imams (See Figure 1).

Advocates of the representative model like that they can expect both a set number of participants and equitable representation around the table. The Canadian Christian-Muslim Dialogue Group for example employs a formal representative model to ensure there are an equal number of Muslim and Christian participants around the table. However, equity and representation are not always certain. A common challenge identified within several multifaith organizations who work with this format has been to balance the desire for inclusion with the potential over-representation of Christians representing various denominations at table.[6]

4.2.2   Independent Model

Organizations working with an independent model see their members as individuals of diverse faith communities who come together with the common aim of promoting interfaith relations. While this model does allow for a more transient membership that may include inequitable representation of faith traditions, supporters claim this structure is more open to individuals from all faith traditions as it is not necessary to gain approval from their community to participate. Others see the independent nature of this model as the best way to ensure freedom of expression especially when discussing more controversial differences between faith traditions. Examples of the independent organizational model in Canada include the Vancouver Multifaith Action Society and the Interfaith Council of Halifax.

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[6]   Unitarians participating on representative councils have been caught in debates about over-representation with some holding Unitarianism as independent religious tradition and others arguing it is yet another Christian denomination.

4.2.3   Formal or Informal

Whether representative or independent, organizations may be formal or informal. Formal organizations may opt to create an official mission statement or outline a specific set of goals and objectives of the group, opt to manage a consistent program of educational interfaith activities or dedicate efforts to promote one-time events, maintain an official membership with or without fees, incorporate, engage in fundraising activities, and/or elect a board of directors. For example, the Edmonton Interfaith Center for Education and Action in an effort to realize their dream of establishing and interfaith centre in 1995 formalized their activities by establishing a representative board of directors, submitting an application for incorporation and adopting a paid membership fee. The corporate status of the organization allowed them to rent and insure facilities for the center and apply for funding from various government and non-government programs.

Informal organizations may also engage in any of the above actions (except incorporation), but more often tend to work organically or in an ad-hoc fashion responding to the changing interests of a core group, organizing activities as required, often one-off events that do not require membership in the group to participate. For example, one independent Vancouver interfaith initiative brought together individuals from Jewish, Anglican, Buddhist, and First Nations communities for a spring salmon blessing service.

4.3   *Resources for Interfaith*

With the exception of a few government sponsored programs, interfaith activities in Canada are organized by volunteers with funds raised almost exclusively through donations from members. Initiatives affiliated with larger religious institutions may benefit from financial and administrative support. For example, the Canadian Christian Muslim Liaison Committee is sponsored by the Canadian Council of Churches Interfaith Relations Committee who provides meeting space, refreshments for participants and administrative support for coordinating the annual meeting. Most Christian members are also paid staff members of their respective denomination. However, Muslim member are all volunteers who work full-time outside their religious communities. Likewise, the Montreal Interfaith Council among other bi-lateral dialogue groups in the city depend on the Canadian Ecumenical Center to provide space for meetings and basic administrative support for producing and distributing promotional materials. There are only a few grassroots interfaith organizations that support paid staff members (albeit often on a sporadic basis due to unstable funding sources), including the Vancouver Multifaith Action Society (part-time coordinator and contract staff for specific projects), Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action (one part-time coordinator).

5. Official Government Responses

There is an emerging scholarship in Canada which is questioning the fact that religion as a whole is being and has been largely ignored within official government policies and practices (Bramadat, 2005 & 2009; Seljak, 2008; Biles and Humeria, 2005; Milot, 2009). There are in fact several interfaith policies and programs that have been developed and implemented by various institutions representing all levels of government including corrections services, the military, healthcare, education and quasi-government sponsored councils. Although with varying success, in many respects, it is these institutions that best demonstrate how Canadian society has formally recognized religious pluralism as a social fact of Canadian culture.

5.1 *Corrections Services*

One of the most successful government sponsored efforts to respond to religious pluralism is found in the policies and programs adopted by corrections services with their effort to accommodate the religious needs of incarcerated Canadians. Corrections services from the federal to provincial and municipal levels include training programs for staff aimed at raising awareness of the various means in which the system accommodates the diverse religious needs of the population found within the prison system. Since 1982, Corrections Canada has had a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy (ICC). The ICC is a formal representation organization that has representatives from 17 religious communities in Canada on its committee including three non-Christian community associations (See Figure 1). With the adoption of the MOU, correctional chaplaincy programs have adopted an interfaith approach to chaplaincy services that includes Religious and Spiritual Accommodation guidelines for staff, offenders and their families, ensures chaplains have the resources to provide offenders with access to religious leaders when required and that the system provides the means for all to perform their religious duties (see Corrections Services Canada website).

5.2 *Canadian Military*

The Canadian Military has had a chaplaincy program since its inception. In 1997, the program shifted from its traditional Christian base to an interfaith approach with the institution of the Interfaith Committee on Canadian Military Chaplaincy. The move to an interfaith approach reflected not only the increasing religious diversity of the Canadian population, and the desire and potential to recruit from this growing pool of citizens, but also to be better prepared to respond to diverse religious situations associated with the increasing calls for Canada to participate in military exercises outside the country. Since then, efforts have been made to provide non-Christian members of the military (primarily First Nations), with access to chapels to perform their religious worship activities. For example, in 2006 the Canadian Forces Base Halifax celebrated the official opening and dedication of a Multifaith Hall to accommodate the religious service needs for all military personal. Despite the efforts to be more accommodating to diverse religious practices, so far recruitment of non-Christians has been limited mostly to the reserve forces. Even recruitment to the chaplaincy program has been limited with only two non-Christian chaplains in the military. A Muslim cleric (inducted in 2003) has been deployed to Afghanistan not only to provide chaplaincy services but also to assist in cross-cultural communication needs of the mission. In February 2007, an Orthodox Rabbi was inducted into Chaplaincy Services (Canadian Forces Website).[7]

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[7]   For more information about interfaith relations in the Canadian military and correctional services see the 2009 article by Joanne Benham Rennick published in *Horizons* (March 2009); and the 2006

5.3   *Health Care*

The healthcare system has been slower in adapting their services to accommodate religious diversity with much of the pressure directed toward chaplaincy programs in hospitals. In the hospital setting it is the chaplain who acts as the liaison between the patient and medical staff when religious questions or needs are raised. Most hospital chaplaincy programs across the country have evolved from their Christian foundations to become religious and spiritual care programs. Increasingly, hospital chaplains have shifted from the local clergy member to a professional position that requires completion of an extensive training program offered by the Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education (CAPPE). Individuals interested in pursuing a career in hospital chaplaincy must both complete a masters degree in theology (degrees received from a Jewish seminary or religious studies program are also accepted), but also must secure sponsorship by their religious community. This will allow them to enter the program which requires a minimum of 400 hours of practical training and course work including a basic overview of diverse religious traditions (CAPPE Website). The demand for formal training in one's religious tradition limits potential candidates from non-Christian traditions as such training is not readily accessible to many non-Christians living in Canada.

5.4   *Education*

The education system has had mixed results. At the elementary and secondary level attempts to counter the growing religious illiteracy in Canada has been limited (see Seljak, 2005). However, there have been some signs of progress.

5.4.1 Public Education

In Ontario the Catholic School board has incorporated a mandatory course on world religions into the grade eleven curriculum. In Toronto, several confessional high schools (Catholic, Jewish, Muslim), and public education high schools, have taken advantage of a program developed by the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews (since 2005 the Canadian Center for Diversity). The "Discovering Diversity School Program" takes classes on a one-day bus tour to three houses of worship where clergy from each faith introduce the students to the religious traditions and field questions. This program has been in operation since 2002 and boasts a full schedule of at least one group tour every school day of the 2009/2010 academic year (Canadian Centre for Diversity Website). Since 2006 the program has expanded to include tours and diversity leadership training in Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver and Halifax.

Quebec has pushed for one of the more comprehensive religious education programs in Canada. As of September 2008 a new course entitled "Ethics and Religious Culture" (ERC) became mandatory for all Quebec primary and secondary schools (except for grade 9). The program represents a radical departure from the previous Moral and Religious education programs that included directed instruction in Catholic, Protestant or moral education. In the new program students are expected to build competencies in three areas: 1) reflect on ethical questions; 2) demonstrate an understanding of the phenomenon of religion; and 3) engage in dialogue. These competencies are envisioned as both distinct and interrelated. The dialogue competency is considered the cornerstone of the program with the directive that dialogue is an

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article by Ron P. Bourque, "Religious Pluralism and the Current and Future Structure of the Canadian Forces Chaplaincy", in *Chaplains in War and Peace: Ethical Dilemmas of Conscience and Conflicting Professional Roles in Military Chaplaincy in Canada.* (81-110).

activity that is 'good for thinking' and is also a *moral good* in that it potentially enhances our capacity to 'live well together' (Quebec Ministry of Education Ethics and Religious Culture Guide, 2008). Unfortunately, the implementation of the program has encountered serious road bumps with minimal resources or training for teachers. The lack of training was most notable in the recent case that eventually went to court of a young Catholic boy from Drummondville who told his parents that he wanted his family to become Hindu because then they could have seven lives and that would save his dying grandfather (Fiedelman, 2009).

5.4.2 Post-Secondary

Success at the post-secondary level has also been mixed. While there are vibrant religious studies departments in many Canadian universities that offer courses covering the spectrum of religious expressions, the secular/positivist attitude of many disciplines in the social sciences and humanities is reflected in the limited number of courses that examine the impact of religion or religious diversity in society.

Outside the classroom, religious studies departments and research institutes, the most visible and vocal promotion of religious diversity on campus is often sponsored by the Chaplaincy Office. Many campus chaplaincy programs have over the past fifteen years adopted a multi-faith formula which maintains connections with local religious communities to provide the increasingly diverse student population with access to chaplains from their own religious faith tradition. Multifaith chaplaincies offer a range of informal interfaith education programs including interfaith fairs, meditations across traditions workshops, brown bag exchanges (informal lunchtime interfaith discussions), panel discussions, etc. Many also organize and host interfaith worship services to mark university events including convocation or memorial services when tragedy strikes the campus (eg. the death of a teacher, staff or student or to mark larger public tragedies such as the events of 9/11, the shooting at Dawson or to honor victims of the recent earthquake in Haiti).

5.4.3 Research Institutes

Since the mid 1990s there has been more academic interest in religion with the development of a number of research institutes whose research emphasizes the impact of religion in a range of social research. Most notable is the Victoria University Center for Studies in Religion and Culture which has been active for 15 years since 1994. However, since 2001 there has been a steady increase in research institutes whose mandate includes religion as a focus including the Centre d'étude des religions de l'Université de Montréal (CÉRUM) in operation since 2001, the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life at the University of Alberta opened in the spring of 2006, the Simon Fraser University Interfaith Summer Institute launched in the summer of 2007, the McGill Faculty of Education initiated in the fall 2007, and the Vancouver School of Theology's Iona Pacific Inter-Religious Centre for Social Action, Research and Contemplative Practice launched in 2009. There have also been several Canadian Research Chairs established with Religion as a key theme of research including Dr. Patrice Brodeur, Université de Montréal - Canada Research Chair on Islam, Pluralism and Globalization; Dr. Lori Beaman, University of Ottawa - Canada Research Chair in the Contextualization of Religion in a Diverse Canada; Dr. Jens Zimmerman, Trinity Western University - Canada Research Chair in Interpretation, Religion and Culture.

5.5   *Government Sponsored Interfaith Councils*

Although the above government sponsored initiatives suggest advancement in government sponsored programs to promote interfaith awareness, Canada lags far behind Britain and Australia particularly in the area of government sponsored interfaith councils (Seljak, 2009; Crabtree, 2003). A 2003 survey of Interfaith activity in the UK commissioned by the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom identified nearly 140 active multilateral local inter faith groups, councils and associations, a substantial growth from the dozen or so initiatives active in the 1980s (Crabtree, 2003). On reflection Crabtree suggested that introduction of the Local Government Act in 1999, the Crime and Disorder Act in 1998 and the Local Strategic Partnership requirement of 2000 encouraged local governments to seek out and cooperate with local authority figures, including religious authorities, to ensure adequate representation of all "service users" in preparing community development plans (Crabtree, 2003: 140-141).

In Australia we see a similar experience where the 1998 introduction of the government supported "Living in Harmony" policy and funding program resulted in an explosion of interfaith activity across the country. Beginning with the creation of the Australian Intercultural Society (AIS) in 2000, intercultural societies have sprung up in most large urban centers with the key mandate of promoting "interreligious and cross-cultural relations, harmony and social inclusion in the diverse multi-faith, multicultural communities in Australia, acting as a catalyst for social and policy change" (Australian Intercultural Society webpage). Alongside these formal interfaith councils the "Living in Harmony" program has since 2003 fostered the development of almost 390 community interfaith projects with a $1.5 million annual budget granting program (Living in Harmony Australia Webpage).

Such international efforts far out strip the record in Canada that currently provides policy endorsement and financial support to only two official interfaith councils across the country – (1) Ontario Multifaith Council and (2) Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council Inc. The Ontario Multifaith Council (OMC) was founded in March 1972 as a partnership between the Ontario government and a number of faith groups to ensure "spiritual and religious care would be consistently available to those in government-funded and –operated institutions", a relationship that was affirmed in a Memorandum of Agreement signed in 1992 (Ontario Multifaith Council Website). This formal representative body relies on volunteer representatives from an ever-expanding number of religious communities active in Ontario (thirty-three in 2007 - see Figure 2). The OMC operates a library, trains multi-faith chaplains for corrections services and hospitals in Ontario, prepares material and promotes the annual province-wide "Spiritual and Religious Care Awareness Week" (October), and acts as a resource centre. In recent years the Centre has fielded more than 20,000 questions about religious practices and accommodation needs raised by government departments, grassroots interfaith organizations, religious communities and the general public. However, funding cuts by the Ontario government in 2007 eliminated over half of the operating budget overnight, a move that has greatly reduced size of the Centre, the number of its staff and its capacity to continue its education and training programs. The Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council Inc. grew from a small organization of churches that came together in the post WWII period to support immigrants in their efforts to resettle in Canada. The representative organization relied mainly on volunteers and modest fundraising of donations by congregations to support their efforts until well into the 1980s. In 2000, a Memorandum of Agreement was signed with the Federal government to support refugee sponsor programs in Manitoba (Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council website).

6.   Grassroots Interfaith Activities

There are many common characteristics found amongst grassroots interfaith activities in Canada.

- Most interfaith grassroots activities follow an independent informal voluntary organizational structure with membership rosters filled by lay practitioners who self-identify with a particular faith but do not act as official representatives for the community. The exception is formal dialogue initiatives where invited or appointed representation is more often the norm.

- Many long-standing Christian members of grassroots interfaith organizations began their interfaith work in Canadian chapter groups of international ecumenical organizations like KAIROS or World Council of Churches.

- Likewise, many long-standing non-Christian members began their interfaith work through Canadian city chapters of international organizations including the World Congress for Religion and Peace, International Association for Religious Freedom, United Religions Initiative, and World InterFaith Education Association.

- The national network for many of these chapter groups has provided opportunities for many participants to develop relationships with their counterparts across the country. As such, despite geographical distances, within the Canadian interfaith community there are a significant number of participants well-known to one another.

- With few exceptions, most grassroots interfaith initiatives tend to attract individuals who have been active participants in religious communities with moderate to liberal ideologies (eg. mainstream Christians from the United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic communities; Unitarians; Conservative to Reform Jews; Ismaili, Ahmidayya, some Sufi Muslims and South Asian Sunni Muslims; Buddhist converts; Bahai's; Wiccan; Zoroastrians).

- While some initiatives include participation by individuals from more conservative religious expressions (e.g. Christian evangelists, Pentecostals, Mormons, Eastern Christians, and conservative expressions of non-Christian traditions), it is more the exception than the rule.

- Individual participants from Buddhist communities include several North American converts.

- Most multi-lateral dialogue groups include individual participants from the Sikh and Hindu traditions.

- Although the Baha'i and Zoroastrian communities in Canada are quite small, many initiatives try to include at least one or the other or both.

- Involvement by First Nations people is inconsistent or absent in most grassroots initiatives across the country.

- Some groups are open to accepting Pagans or "spiritual but not religious" people into their interfaith organization, but others have not.

- With the exception of Halifax, in each urban centre within this study, there are interfaith groups that have been going for more than 30 years with several founding members still involved. Thus the development of long-standing interfaith friendships is a common trait recorded.

- The aims of most Canadian interfaith activities tend to fall into three categories: networking, education, and social justice work.

6.1   *Networking*

Building bridges across traditions is a common goal of many Canadian interfaith efforts. Many initiatives begin with the primary intention of providing the opportunity for individuals from different faith perspectives to get to know one another better. Over time members become better acquainted with the activities and practices of the member faith communities. Friendships develop and stereotypes diminish. These networks serve to support one another especially when issues arise, locally or globally.   For example, in Montreal, the English Christian-Jewish dialogue group has several times issued statements against anti-religious acts of violence (eg. response to the 2004 fire-bombing of the library at Taldos Yakov Yosef, a Jewish school in Montreal).

Bi-lateral dialogue groups in particular have networking as a common goal.   Often, individual members must be invited to participate. Regular meetings are held where members or guest speakers initiate discussions through presentations on one traditional approach to a particular concept and / or practice that is often found in both traditions included in the dialogue group (eg. forgiveness, mercy, prayer, marriage and seasonal celebrations). Some groups might also organize visits to worship centers where they would participate in services. Still others gather to share information about events in their own communities with the intention that others within the group will invite members of their home congregations to participate.

6.2   *Education*

Education programs are another central goal of many Canadian interfaith activities, whether directed to their members only or to a broader public audience. Some of the more common interfaith education initiatives found in Canada include: touring houses of worship, one-off evening panel discussions, organized year-long programs, day-long conferences, interfaith worship retreats, multifaith concerts, shared meals and multi-faith centres.

Most interfaith grassroots organizations have at one point in their history organized educational visits to houses of worship. This form of interfaith education activity follows the familiar format of observing a worship service, followed by a panel presentation, Q&A, and a shared meal prepared by the host congregation. Organized public lectures is another favourite of grassroots organizations. For example, in Toronto, the Scarborough Missions Interfaith desk promotes an fall and spring "Interfaith Educational Series" of evening lectures which highlight individual speakers or panel discussions on various themes (eg. Understanding Native Spirituality, Sacred Cinema, Mysticism in the World's Religions, Humour in the World's Religions). Several interfaith initiatives focus on cultural events that usually highlight music, art

and food associated with different faith traditions (eg. West Coast Sacred Music Festival in Vancouver, Sacred Arts and Music Association in Toronto). Shared worship services are also part of the outreach programs for many communities. While many grassroots organizations include in their future goals the establishment of some type of center dedicated to interfaith education, the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action (since 1996), is the only operating interfaith education centre in Canada.

6.3   *Social Justice*

Responding to social justice issues is a key motivator for many interfaith activities in Canada. Several participants commented that it was in the act of protesting, serving lunch to the homeless, or canvassing support that real friendships are forged with people from other faith traditions. For example, in Vancouver there is a Muslim-Jewish dialogue group that once each month volunteers to manage the "Feed the Hungry" soup kitchen initiative that services homeless individuals living in the drug-riddled east-side Hastings district in Vancouver. The interfaith group promotes friendly competition amongst members to volunteer for the activity through their on-line sign-up sheet that tallies the overall percentage of Muslims and Jews filling each position. Those who participate in the activity express appreciation for the opportunity to not only provide a service to the homeless but to build friendships between Muslims and Jews in Vancouver.

7.   Regional Profiles of Interfaith Activities

While it is not uncommon to find non-Christian people in many rural settings, 'the city' or large urban environments are where the majority of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jews and other non-Christian faith communities live and consequently where most interfaith initiatives can be found. This is especially the case when one examines interfaith activities in the major Canadian urban centers of Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax.

7.1   *Vancouver*

Vancouver is the third largest city in Canada and home to the largest Asian population – it is projected that by 2025 more than 50% of the population will be of Asian descent making Vancouver the largest Asian population outside Asia and the Pacific Rim. As such it is not surprising that Vancouver is also home to the largest population of people who claim no religion at 35% - see Table 5. Since Statistics Canada first introduced in the 1971 census the option of marking one's religious affiliation as "none", this category of religious affiliation has recorded the most significant growth of any religious category starting with just 3% in 1971; 8.3% in 1981; 13.7% in 1991 and 16.8% in 2001 (see Table 1). It is important to note that growth in this category is due in part to the increasing non-Christian immigrants, particularly from Asian countries who have found it difficult to choose a single religious affiliation because of the need to perform as required a range of religious practices or social customs associated with ancestor worship, folk traditions, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism and/or Taoism. Conversely, the "no-religion" census category also reflects the transfer of religious affiliation by many nominal Christians who identify more closely with secularist attitudes or personalized spiritual practice over traditional Christian religious identities.

Vancouver is unique in Canada due to its large non-religious population; all practicing religious communities are minorities in the city, even the Christian communities. Altogether Christians make up less than 50% of the population which is split amongst Roman Catholics (18%), United Church (7.6 %), Anglican (6.3%), Lutheran (2.2 %) and Presbyterian (0.9%) with the remaining 10% spread among other minority Christian Communities including many immigrant Christian communities (see Table 4).

With a history of immigration from the Pacific Rim and South Asian countries, Vancouver has large Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist populations. As a result approximately two of every five Vancouverites maintain a non-Christian affiliation, increasing the potential for interfaith encounters. As Table 4 shows:

- Sikhs represent the largest non-Christian population at 5% or 99,000 almost doubling in size between 1991 and 2001.

- Buddhists are the second largest non-Christian population at 3.8% or just under 75,000 more than doubling in the last decade with growth of 135%.

- At 2.7%, Muslims are the third largest non-Christian population, and like the Buddhist community have more than doubled their size in the last decade.

- The Hindu population has also experienced considerable growth and in 2001 surpassed the Jewish population of Vancouver.

- The median age for most non-Christian faith communities is firmly within child-bearing years which suggest a strong potential for future growth. Conversely, the media age for most Christian traditions is on the upper end of child-bearing years suggesting a negative growth trajectory.

With such religious diversity it may be expected that interfaith organizations would also reflect this diversity. In many respects this is the case for the two long-standing interfaith organizations: the Vancouver Multifaith Action Society (VMAS) and the Pacific Interfaith Citizens Association (PICA). As explained earlier, PICA formed as a representative organization with members from the Roman Catholic, Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Baha'is communities (see history section above). The VMAS Society opted for an independent organizational structure that initially attracted a large Christian membership from mostly Anglican and United Church communities. However, the dialogue of life or social justice agenda of the organization has from the first days attracted many individuals from the Unitarian, Jewish, Baha'i, Zoroastrian, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist and, more recently, Muslim communities. Both organizations have sponsored many formal and informal events over the years. For example, the main focus of VMAS has been to provide inter-religious education and social justice activities to Vancouverites. Social justice interfaith activities coordinated by the group include the founding of the Vancouver food bank and support of various programs to assist the homeless. While inter-religious education outreach efforts to schools was more of a priority in the 1990s, efforts have shifted toward projects aimed at promoting religious diversity to the general public through initiatives like the interfaith calendar (since 1996), greening sacred spaces project, day-long conferences and/or dialogue workshops, and public outings to worship spaces in the community.

Vancouver is also home to several interfaith initiatives that promote shared worship practices including meditation retreats, sacred music festival, sacred poetry, Suffi circles and in a nod to the British roots of many in the province, the annual Commonwealth Day interfaith service. Many of these interfaith activities are open to individuals from traditional and non-traditional faith communities. That is, individuals who pursue a more spiritual than traditional religious practice are more often attracted to the shared interfaith worship activities than the more formal interfaith dialogue exercises, worship site visits or conferences organized by PICA and VMAS.

In 2006 there was a concerted effort by members from both interfaith organizations and several members of faith communities and/or spiritual practices in Vancouver to create an Interspiritual Center that would initially serve athletes of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics. After the games, the center would become a shared interspiritual place where Vancouverites could celebrate their religious diversity. Although enthusiasm was high, and the original organizers received approval in principle from both the municipality and Olympic organising team, the dream was not realized in time for the Olympics (Todd, 2008). There remains a small group interested in pursuing construction of such a center, perhaps on the property of the Unitarian Church but discussions about the endeavour have been stalled since 2008.

Long-term bi-lateral, trilateral or multilateral dialogue of belief groups dedicated to deep dialogue about foundational beliefs and practices of the religious traditions are not a common interfaith activity in Vancouver. In my research I found only one small informal bi-lateral

dialogue group of less than 20 independent Muslims and Jews who had recently formed a dialogue of peace to grapple with the volatile Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This group is unique in several ways. First, unlike many dialogue groups in Canada that clearly steer away from political issues, it is the focus of this group. Secondly, although members of the group live in Vancouver or the lower mainland, the major method for exchange is via the internet using a Google groups format. The email exchanges most often consist of sharing articles that either promote or diminish either side in the conflict. Occasionally the theme or tone of the information posted will initiate a more heated debate. Third, once a month the group volunteers gets together to serve in the "Feed the Hungry" soup kitchen initiative (discussed above in section four). This particular activity provides participants with the opportunity to dialogue while providing this importance service for the homeless in Vancouver.

Vancouver is also home to several academic forums that host interfaith activities. In 2009, the Vancouver School of Theology (VTS) opened the Iona Pacific Inter-Religious Centre for Social Action, Research and Contemplative Practice to provide students of VTS and University of British Columbia with opportunities to find new ways of facing critical local and global challenges of the increasingly inter-religious and multi-cultural world (Iona Pacific Interreligious Centre webpage). The VTS is also home to the Vancouver chapter of the Thomas Merton Society a group that celebrates the interfaith teachings of the respected theologian Thomas Merton through an annual series of guest lectures and annual conference. VTS also regularly hosts public events with invited speakers or panels that often address interfaith and intercultural issues. In 2006, the VTS worked with VMAS to host the annual North American Interfaith Network meeting. Simon Fraser University also sponsors an Interfaith Summer Institute which has developed a series of intensive social activist programs designed for faith practitioners interested in building interfaith alliances for justice and peace movement activism.

7.2   *Toronto*

Toronto is the largest of Canadian cities with an overall population of 4.5 million in the greater metropolitan area and is home to the largest visible minority population in Canada. A common destination for many immigrants, Toronto is also home to some of the largest religious communities in Canada. Christianity continues to maintain majority status with two –thirds of the population claiming affiliation, a figure split almost evenly between Catholics and Protestant traditions (See Table 5).

With almost one in three Torontonians maintaining a non-Christian affiliation the potential for Christian encounters with non-Christians is significant. As Table 5 shows:

- The "no religion" population of Toronto reflects the national average at 16.6%, a figure that has grown by more than 39% in the past decade in part due to a rise in arrivals of immigrants from Asian countries.

- The Muslim population is the largest non-Christian tradition in Toronto (and in Canada) with a population that is almost three times above the national average. However as Islam, like Christianity, is a proselytizing faith tradition with over 1 billion adherents around the world, the ethnic, cultural and theological distinctions within the *ummah* or community of believers do not always meld into a cohesive community. In Toronto, growth in the Muslim population since the 1990s has created a noticeable shift from the small, fairly cohesive but ethnically and theologically diverse early community to the

increasing development of distinct Muslim communities which often reflect specific ethnic, language and cultural tendencies.

- As in Vancouver, the Hindu population more than doubled their population between 1991 and 2001 and has surpassed the Jewish population to become the second largest non-Christian population. Buddhists rank fourth with Sikhs fifth in size of religious community in the region. As with the Muslim community, growth has in many respects served to highlight distinct cultural, religious and theological approaches to religious practice resulting in the increasing development of independent Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh communities.

In Toronto, the large populations of diverse religious communities certainly fulfill Pedersen's requirement of a multireligious population with significant minority communities as the catalyst for interfaith activity. However, interfaith activity is not as wide spread as one might expect.

With a substantial Christian population, several head offices for Canadian churches (United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic Archdiocese Toronto, Canadian Council of Churches), coupled with the presence of large active divinity schools at the University of Toronto, Toronto is home to a number of Christian driven formal bi-lateral dialogue of belief groups with representative membership structures. The Canadian Council of Churches is involved in several national interfaith dialogue groups including the Canadian Christian Muslim Liaison Committee, the Canadian Christian Jewish Consultation, the World Religions Canada (Canadian Chapter of World Religions for Peace), and an Interfaith Liaison Committee which is actually an ecumenical effort that brings together interfaith officers from the head offices of the various mainline Christian traditions located in Toronto. Dialogue representatives from the Christian communities are most often employees of the Church Head office with business meetings held during the day. The representative model, day time meetings and driving distances have been mentioned by members of the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities as key factors limiting their participation in these types of dialogue initiatives.

Outside the Canadian Council of Churches activities, interfaith officers are often responsible for fostering both ecumenical and interfaith relations on behalf of their respective organizations. As an example, for more than a decade the ecumenical/interfaith officer of the United Church has been engaged in overseeing several working group dialogue projects to encourage understanding and cooperation across faith communities directed specifically to building positive relationships with Jewish, Muslim and First Nations communities. The Scarborough Mission is a Catholic organization that also hosts a number of formal and informal interfaith awareness activities in Toronto and abroad. Supportive of formal Catholic and Jewish dialogue, the Scarborough Mission has extended its interfaith educational outreach efforts to the general public sponsoring seasonal lecture series, and is well known internationally for their "Golden Rule" project that promotes the shared ethic of reciprocity found in faith traditions the world over as an entry point for interfaith work.

The city is also home to several notable grassroots interfaith initiatives. For more than twenty years, upwards of 400 participants from seven Christian and two Jewish congregations within the Forrest Hill borough have gathered to dialogue around the dinner table. Christian participants hail from Roman Catholics, Baptists, Anglicans, Lutheran, and United Church congregations, with Jewish participants coming from the Reform and Conservative Synagogues

in the district. An official program for the event includes messages from each participating religious community, advertisements and promotion of the subject addressed by the invited guest speaker – a position that alternates from year to year between Christian and Jewish speakers. Since 1987, the "Out of the Cold" initiative has brought together volunteers from nineteen Toronto area synagogues, churches and faith communities to serve a "Host Sites" for the homeless during the winter months.   In 1988, Habitat for Humanity Toronto was founded with the mission of building homes for low-income people. Although founded as non-denominational Christian organization, several 'builds' have relied on interfaith volunteer teams to complete the project who come together to "live out" their faith. In 2007, with much fanfare, the Toronto Interfaith Council was created. The council brings together more than 50 faith communities (see Figure 3). Since then the interfaith work focus has been primarily directed towards the creation of a mission statement and hosting an annual interfaith breakfast with the Mayor, but members have high hopes to one day establish an interfaith centre.

In 2007 the University of Toronto opened the Multi-faith Centre for Spiritual Study and Practice. The center includes a main activity hall that can be adapted to accommodate the worship needs of different faith traditions, a meditation room and a multi-service room where various interfaith activities take place throughout the academic year. The University is also home to the Department and Center for Studies in Religion and the Toronto School of Theology which collectively include in their programs lectures and seminars with interfaith themes.

7.3   *Montreal*

Montreal is the second largest Canadian city with 3.3 million people. The religious profile is distinctive. The province is home to the largest French speaking population outside of France, a population that has traditionally held to the Roman Catholic tradition. As Table 6 shows, the religious population statistics for Montreal reflects that reputation with over 74% claiming affiliation with the Roman Catholic tradition, albeit a largely nominal or high holy days affiliation with less than 15% active in the church community.   Traditionally Protestant traditions in Montreal tended to cluster within the English speaking population and represents just 9.8% of the population. As the percentage change column demonstrates, other than the evangelical traditions, most protestant populations have experienced negative growth throughout the 1990s, a trend expected to continue especially given the median age of the community well into the late 40s beyond child-bearing years. Other trends notable from Table 6 include:

- Significant growth in the "no religion" population from 1991-2001 representing 7% of the population. However, unlike Toronto and Vancouver the Asian influence is low marking this group as more reflective of the strong secularist attitudes promoted in the wake of the Quiet Revolution.

- The Muslim community grew 143% from 1991 to 2001 surpassing the Jewish population to become the largest non-Christian population in Montreal

- The Buddhist community has also experience healthy growth of 35%

- While Sikhs and Hindus represent just under 1% of the total population, both communities have grown significantly throughout the 1990s during the last decade

The distinct religious profile of Montreal has certainly influenced the development of interfaith activities in the city. With more than 92% of the population affiliated with monotheistic Abrahamic traditions of Christianity, Judaism, and more recently Islam, interfaith initiatives tend more toward formal bi-lateral dialogues that explore various theological positions with the aim of building strong respectful relationships amongst dialogue partners. Public events are few as efforts to bridge religious diversity are often complicated by linguistic and political considerations that define the French Catholic dominated centre. Nonetheless, there have been notable interfaith activities.

There are both English and French language bi-lateral dialogue groups that bring together individuals from the Abrahamic traditions in the following formats: Christian/Jewish, Jewish/Muslim, Muslim/Christian. The longest standing group is the English Christian/Jewish dialogue group which began in the late 1960s and continues to meet 8-10 times each year (September to June). The group follows an informal representative model where individuals are appointed to the committee by their respective faith traditions but no effort has been made to formalize the group. Christian representatives come from various Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, United Church, Eastern Orthodox and Unitarian Churches. Jewish representatives are appointed by the local chapter of the Canadian Jewish Congress and include individuals from the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox expressions of the tradition. Monthly meetings attract 20-25 people and almost always include a speaker (often an academic from one of the four universities in Montreal), who introduces a theme found in both traditions followed by open discussion (eg. forgiveness, faith, prayer, God, sacred texts, idolatry, etc), although several members clearly explained that politics are not welcome at the table. The group has since the late 1980s, hosted an annual high school dialogue where students from Christian and Jewish high schools come together for a day-long workshop. The group also coordinates the annual Shoah commemorative services at Christ Church Cathedral to memorialize those who perished in the Holocaust. When required the group will issue public statements but only in relation to local issues (eg. denouncing the defacing of gravestone at a local Jewish cemetery). Several members from the Christian/Jewish dialogue group are also active members of either the Jewish/Muslim or Muslim Christian dialogue groups _and_ the Montreal Interfaith Council. The Montreal Interfaith Council is another long-standing interfaith initiative. Established in 1989 as an informal representative group, it brings together individuals from the same mainline Christian denominations as in the Christian/Jewish dialogue group (often the same people too), and representatives from Conservative Judaism, Sunni Muslim, Bah'ai, Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism and occasionally Longhouse Mohawk traditions. The main objective of the group is to build networks between the communities so as to promote understanding and respectful appreciation of religious traditions practiced in Montreal. To that end, the group meets 6-8 times each year to discuss similarities and differences in belief and practice across traditions. They also regularly host visits to religious sites throughout the city where guests will participate in a worship service followed by a shared meal and question / answer sessions. On request, group members will visit local schools to introduce students to various faith traditions from a practitioner perspective. With so many long-term members, the Montreal Interfaith Council has been reflecting on the need to introduce new members to the group to ensure its ongoing contribution to interfaith awareness in Montreal.

Although there is significant cross-over amongst the dialogue groups conducted in either French or English, there remains a divide between French and English organizations.

Montreal boasts four major universities: McGill University (English), Université de Montréal (French), Concordia University (English), Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM) (French). All have large and active religion departments and celebrated research institutes that promote greater understanding and appreciation of religion as a significant force in historical to contemporary society. McGill Faculty of Religious Studies has since 1999 hosted summer interfaith seminars for students and religious leaders. The participants attend lectures, tour worship sites, share meals and engage in deep discussion about themes that cut across traditions (eg. food in religion, the significance of hair in religion, authority of sacred texts, etc.). The Centre d'étude des religions de l'Université de Montréal (CÉRUM) has since 2001 sponsored research projects, conferences and public lectures often focused on the theme of negotiating religious diversity in contemporary society. In 2005, the Faculty of Theology embraced religious pluralism by changing the faculty name to Faculté de théologie et de sciences des religions and supporting the creation of a Canada Research Chair on Islam, Pluralism and Globalization held by Dr. Patrice Brodeur.

Montreal was also host to the 2006 international conference World Religions After 9/11 Congress which brought together over 2025 individuals from 84 countries for the five day congress (World Religions after 9/11 Congress Webpage).

7.4   *Halifax*

Halifax offers another distinct portrait of interfaith activity within Canadian urban centres. Although home to a substantially smaller population than the three profiles above – just 356,000 – Halifax is largest urban centre in the Maritimes. It is also a major port city, home to five universities (St. Mary's, Dalhousie, Mount Saint Vincent, King's College and NASCAD), and CFB Halifax one of the largest military bases in Canada. In Halifax, almost 85% of the population is Christian with 47% affiliation split amongst Protestant denominations and 37% Catholic (See Table 7). Add to this the 12.6% who claim no religion and there is less than 4% of the population from non-Christian traditions.

- As with other Canadian urban centres, the Muslim community experienced significant growth in Halifax more than doubling their numbers between 1991 to 2001 surpassing the Jewish population to become the largest non-Christian population in Halifax. However, with real numbers at just over 3,000 the community is quite small and dedicate most of their volunteer efforts to building the necessary social institutions to serve the needs of the community.

- The Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh communities are also the smallest of the four urban profiles with less than 2,600 people altogether.

The dominant Christian profile and small non-Christian communities has limited development of interfaith activities in Halifax, with ecumenical or intra-faith relations the more prominent form of dialogue in the city. While there have been some small scale dialogues amongst some Christian and Jewish clergy, it was out of crisis that the first and only public interfaith organization was formed.

The Interfaith Council of Halifax began in response to the need for an interfaith memorial service in the wake of the Swiss Air crash near Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia on September 2, 1998. The local military chaplain asked to organize a memorial service brought

together more than 10 religious leaders representing the various faith traditions held by victims of the crash – Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Jewish, Mormon, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Baptist, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhism and Unitarian. The group designed a series of memorial service activities that would be respectful of the religious traditions and honour the memories of the victims. The camaraderie formed by the coming together of faith communities inspired creation of the interfaith council. Since 1998 the group has sponsored several interfaith luncheons, speaker series, issued joint statements (against video lottery terminals, against changing the Sunday Shopping law, and in support of continuing the opening prayer in the legislature). Recently, activities have stalled with the understanding that the members will re-group ad-hoc when the need arises.

8.   Interfaith Participant Profiles

Who is an active interfaith participant in Canada? While religious leaders and scholars are active participants and organizers of interfaith activities, by and large the membership roster for most interfaith initiatives in Canada is populated by lay practitioners who self-identify with a particular faith. As expected, given the religious population landscape, individual members of mainstream-to-liberal Christian organizations dominate Canadian interfaith activities. Christian participants are also by and large seniors who have been active supporters of interfaith activities for most of their adult life – many for 30 plus years. The increasing age of participants is also evident with individuals from non-Christian traditions too due in part to the changing demographics within their own communities. As non-Christian communities become more established in Canada there are more opportunities to become involved with interfaith initiatives, especially for individuals who have raised their families or are reaching retirement age.

Although effort is made to invite to the dialogue table individuals from all Canadian practicing faith traditions, a common complaint raised by interfaith groups is the need for greater representation from non-Christian communities, especially Muslims who seem to be underrepresented given that they constitute the largest non-Christian population in Canada. However, it may literally be a matter of time before this problem is resolved. For example, the Canadian Muslim community, like many non-Christian communities, has grown rapidly in the closing decades of the twentieth century, with a five-fold increase in the population from 1981 to 2001 (Statistics Canada, 1993). As with other non-Christian communities, growth has been primarily through immigration. As such, many Canadian Muslims are busy finding work and raising young families. For those with strong ties to their religion, whatever spare time and energy they have is most often directed to the development of the religious institutions that serve their community. For many then, interfaith outreach comes second to the primary needs of providing for one's family and building one's own religious community. This pattern is also evident in other emerging non-Christian religions in Canada namely Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

Interfaith initiatives in Canada tend to attract individuals:

- with some level of post-secondary education (many with graduate degrees especially those from non-Christian communities)

- who have traveled extensively (especially in youth)

- most were raised either in an interfaith community (especially immigrant participants from countries in South Asia and Africa) or had a positive interfaith encounter in their high school or post-secondary schooling

Although many participants claim their interfaith work to be an important contribution to their spiritual growth, there appears to be little information exchange about interfaith activities amongst interfaith participants and their co-religionists. Several participants even indicated that while some of their co-religionists are interested in the interfaith organizations/activities, as many or more held indifferent to negative views about participation and the potential outcomes of such efforts. Some were even chastised by their co-religionists for dedicating too much time outside the religious community which is in more need of their volunteer time.

While interfaith activity in Canada is not as robust as found in Britain or Australia, there has been considerable growth from its post-WWII roots.   As the above indicates, there are a range of interfaith activities that touch on various sectors of society. Although there remain many Canadians who do not participate or even support interfaith activities, whether due to more conservative religious or secular attitudes, religious diversity is a Canadian reality that will continue to shape interfaith efforts to build bridges/friendships, increase awareness of religious diversity, ensure religious rights are upheld, and add religious voices to social justice efforts - in other words to demonstrate how it is Canadians make the religious mosaic work.

9.   Complexities, Challenges, and Successes of Interfaith Dialogue

9.1 *Complexities*

Spaces of interfaith/interreligious dialogue live within broader spaces of intercultural, political, economic, and various other social dynamics that cannot be ignored. These dynamics are what makes understanding and delimiting the boundaries of what interfaith/interreligious dialogue is or isn't so complex.   The following eleven paragraphs each present a set of complexities that are necessary to keep in mind, so as to avoid reductions and simplistic understandings of the various kinds of interreligious dialogue spaces.

As presented in section 4.1, there are different types of interfaith/interreligious dialogue. Their practitioners often carry different meanings and definitions that may vary, more or less, with Halafoff's aims for what she calls multifaith dialogue, as presented in this report's preamble.   In addition, there are various meanings attributed to the word "dialogue" itself, ranging from a value to be nurtured, with its requirements to seek to reach equality between speakers and to work on oneself endlessly, to "dialogue" as a simple conversation between two people as reflected, for example, in the third objective of the new "Ethics and Religious Culture Programme" of Quebec's Ministry of Education.   These differences in types of interreligious dialogue and meanings regarding the word "dialogue" itself therefore require a constant attention to precision when it comes to developing concrete proposals for policy and action on the ground in order to avoid generalizations as much as possible.   It is also important to add that many groups prefer the word spirituality to religion or faith, therefore making the common usage of "interreligious" or "interfaith" problematic as it is not inclusive of all groups that share a worldview rooted in a human relationship or relatedness to a transcendent power, however defined.

Each person is a complex set of fluid identity dynamics, of which religion is always only one factor, if present at all (depending on the province, somewhere between 10 and 20 percent of the population indicates no religious identity in the 2001 Canadian census).   This means that, if a person self-identifies religiously in one form or another, an external observer can never reduce this person to only his or her religious identity only, even though this identity marker may be the most important one for this person (in some cases, above that of their national identity/ies). Each person who lives in Canada, whatever their legal status may be and whatever their feelings maybe regarding Canada as a Nation-State or any of its inhabitants, is faced with responsibilities that prevent any behaviour that would threaten social peace.   It is imperative that religious institutions teach these civil responsibilities, and interreligious dialogue organizations can help train religious leaders (however defined for each community) with best practices in this area.

Each religious community is made up of internal differences on a number of issues, from doctrine to ritual behaviour, etc. The same is true regarding attitudes towards interreligious dialogue. For example, depending on a person's own personal understanding of their religious/spiritual tradition, they may be more or less interested in participating in interfaith/interreligious dialogue or, on the contrary, they may deeply reject it, whether by ignorance of what it really entails and/or by fear of what it might produce, such as significant change in one's own faith understanding, potentially affecting one's commitment to it (although practitioners claim the opposition effect for a vast majority of interreligious dialogue participants).   In general, those believers/practitioners of any religious tradition who hold

exclusivist understandings of themselves vis-à-vis others are almost always against any kind of interreligious dialogue that might lead them to change their own understanding of themselves. However, some may participate if they see an interest for their own community, such as a platform to express their opinions and beliefs without having to be affected by true listening to others participating in the same interreligious activity.

There are also important differences between those organization that promote theological understanding in their interreligious dialogue activities, often at the expense of putting aside ideological differences, and those that focus on social justice and/or one kind of activist cause or another in the name of their own ideological stances, often rooted in their own spiritual values. For example, both sides of the abortion debate include religious supporters who argue their position on the basis of their own interpretation of the tradition to which they strongly claim to belong. This implies that not all persons involved in interreligious dialogue do it in a desire to learn about others; more or less subtle manipulations for narrow personal and communal benefits/protection happen frequently, especially the more official the dialogue activity is.

Some spaces welcome all human beings, wherever they might be "on the spiritual journey", while other spaces only include those for whom their religious identity is already well formed. An example of the former is the Rivendell Retreat Center on Bowen Island near Vancouver. Examples of the latter include more official forms of dialogue, where organizers seek "representatives" for each religious traditions included in their particular form of dialogue. Implicit in this approach is that these persons have the backing of important members of their religious community already carrying institutional identities of one sort or another.

Then, there are subtle forms of engagement in or resistance to interreligious dialogue by certain individuals and groups. For example, members of a majority religious group can use their own weight in a particular space of interreligious dialogue in order to affect ideological change in various governmental sectors of society. The reverse is equally true: they may choose not to participate in order to impair those efforts.

Of course, the above cases tend to be more prevalent among those religious communities/organizations that are very centralized institutionally (i.e.: Baha'is, Sikhs, Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Eastern Churches, as well as most Protestant "high church" groups, etc.). They have relatively well-developed mechanisms for participating in various kinds of interreligious dialogue, especially in comparison to those that are more decentralized, to various degrees (i.e.: First Nations, Afro-Caribbean, and Far Eastern religious/spiritual traditions, as well as Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.), although new forms of largely inclusive community networks have emerged to compensate for this historical decentralization (i.e.: Assembly of First Nations, Canadian Jewish Congress, Canadian Islamic Congress, etc.). Linked to this sociological distinction are the more official kinds of dialogue that work with "representative" people. To the extent that a religious group is more centralized, its institutions are often better able to develop processes to send "representative" people. But it comes at a cost: greater centralized control and often longer periods of waiting before decisions are taken. Despite those challenges, more centralized religious groups have a built-in advantage in more formal kinds of dialogue settings, which themselves carry more weight proportionally than more informal kinds of dialogue. For example, many different religious/spiritual groups of African and/or indigenous descent are rarely seen in most interreligious dialogue activities in North America.

There are at least three different ways to mark different degrees of de/centralization. Here are three concrete examples: 1) Isma'ili Muslims are very centralized while most other

Muslim groups tend to be decentralized; 2) Canadian Jewish Congress presents a more centralized image than the diverse realities of intra-Jewish dynamics; 3) Roman Catholic centralized hierarchy of leadership is not to be mistaken with the broad spectrum of internal differences on all matters of life, from theology to political ideology. Those communities that tend to be more centralized institutionally tend to be more visible in various forms of interreligious dialogue, often giving the impression, but not yet measured in proportion to religious demographics in Canada, that most spaces of interreligious dialogue are in fact majoritarily or exclusively monotheistic in nature. This phenomenon seems to have been reinforced after 9/11.

In all of the above cases, there is a growing degree of transnational interactions, whose impact is hard to monitor (and the difficulty of defining what is "positive" and "negative" depending on whose interest: religious community, the ethnic and/ or political group, the individual, the Nation-State (i.e. Canada/Quebec/First Nations or others), etc. For example, many of the above groups are sometimes linked to particular ethnic/national identities, "national" being normally linked here to Nation-State ideology de facto or in aspiration (i.e.: Buddhists from Vietnam versus China or Sri Lanka, Jews and Israel, Sikhs and Punjab, Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir, Indigenous peoples of the First Nations, etc.).

Another factor revolves around how many generations a given community (religious and/or ethnic) has been living in what is now called Canada. Older minority religious communities have long been organized across their internal differences, to a large degree (i.e. Baha'is, etc.) but not always completely (i.e.: Jews, etc.). As for newer ones, they are in the process of organizing nationally (i.e. Muslims, Buddhist, Hindus, Zoroastrians, etc.), making the question of "Who represents who exactly?" very difficult to answer especially among most smaller and more recently immigrated religious groups. There is also the challenge of those who (seek to) speak, officially or not, "on behalf" of a group, however small or large, causing perceived and real inequalities in various spaces of interreligious dialogue. This problem can be encountered across all religious communities and groups, irrespective of their own relationship to this particular land.

Linked to this question of time, older minority religious communities that have integrated to a large degree the Canadian social fabric seem less of a threat to majority group(s) in their remaining differences than newer minority religious communities that reflect various points in the integration process. However, this generalization has its limits. For example, two significant differences exist between recent immigration patterns and older ones: new immigrants arrive with high expectations of their legal rights under the charters of rights and freedoms (depending on which province they are in) and they remain linked to their country of origins more strongly due to new technologies, potentially slowing down the process of cultural integration.

This report only begins to point out the complexities within spaces of interreligious dialogue in Canada. It reflects the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

9.2 *Challenges*

Overlapping with the above complexities encountered in various interreligious dialogue activities, there are also several challenges. Here is a list of ten of them.

It is often difficult to talk about political differences within many interreligious dialogue circles, whether local, national (e.g.: Quebec vs. Canada, indigenous sovereignty claims, the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, etc.) or in terms of Canadian foreign policy (e.g: Afghanistan, Israel-Palestine, Sri Lanka, Sudan, etc.) This difficulty means that the wisdom and peace values of the various religious and spiritual traditions are not always salient in many dialogue spaces, making their potential contributions to peacebuilding processes on various political conflicts less effective than they could become.

There are numerous ways political conflicts abroad affect the nature of interreligious dialogue spaces in Canada, making them so much more fragile. This is often due to biased patterns in media coverage on the part of media producers, as well as biased patterns in the use of media (selective reading and viewing so as to reinforce one's own perspective) on the part of media consumers. This last point raises the urgent need for media literacy for all Canadians.

There is a growing inter-generational gap within and across religious communities and beyond. This gap is even more pronounced within more recently immigrated families, as the parents struggle to preserve important values that their own children often reject to different degrees under social pressure to conform and succeed, especially materially. The various educational systems across the country often aggravate this problem, especially when a culture of human rights is emphasized at the expense of human responsibilities.

The weight of material culture in a globalized and internet world often causes apathy towards old and rich religious and spiritual worldviews. All cultural, religious, and spiritual traditions confront today this issue linked to the underlying values of globalization.

There are those people who are open to dialogue and those that are not, especially within one's own identity group (be it religious or otherwise). If a person demonstrates a level of openness to dialogue, they tend to interact more easily with others like-minded people than with those that are less or not open within their own identity group. This point was clearly formulated in terms of "cosmopolitan" versus "anti-cosmopolitan" values in Halafoff's doctoral thesis (2010).

There is a lack of real dialogue when it comes to large groups of people gathered together for "dialogue" purposes, unless these large groups are subdivided into smaller groups during the course of most of the event. Yet, there is a need to reach out to large segments of the Canadian population because of expectations that majority groups (both religious and not religious), when it comes to their behaviour and beliefs regarding minority groups (especially more recent immigrants, but not always) and differences (especially when marked visibly),carry more responsibility to reduce superficial tolerance and, at worse, outright rejection and discrimination, often through verbal abuse that sometimes include physical attacks.

There is not enough deep training in intercultural communication that always affect interreligious dialogue so as to develop a wider cadre of experts who can lead old and new initiatives in interreligious dialogue.

There are not enough financial resources for the development of a variety of activities, from educational to spiritual, which can demonstrate how effective and efficient interreligious dialogue can be in so many diverse settings for improving social peace.

There is also a lack of physical spaces that can serve the regular needs of various interreligious dialogue activities, especially at local levels, from schools and universities to neighbourhood centers.

Finally, there is a lack of participation, in general, from youth, indigenous and Afro-Caribbean peoples, and a variety of other marginalized voices (economically, genderly, sexually, linguistically, etc.).

These various forms of challenges are only a few examples of the many difficult situations confronted by persons who seek to foster spaces of interreligious dialogue in Canada.

9.3 *Successes*

There are also successes, to various degrees and often not very well researched, in the area of interreligious dialogue in Canada. They emerge, at this stage, more from the perceptions of those involved in them than from good surveys of their general participants. Therefore, the lack of better evaluation to measure the real impact of these various forms of interreligious dialogue activities needs to be taken into consideration too in the following description.

There are a number of annual interreligious celebrations in Canada. In Montreal, the best one is the coming together of people of different faiths in mid-October to promote world peace, in commemoration of the Assissi event of 1986. Initially, this event was organized by the Franciscans. Over the years (and there was a significant interruption in the late 1990s), the organizing committee expanded to include a variety of religious and interreligious groups. It was revived in the aftermath of 9/11. Another example is the Hiroshima/Nagasaki commemoration around August 6th to 9th, linked to a broader peace movement network.

Very different in nature, there are many clear recommendations promoting dialogue and diversity training in the Bouchard-Taylor Commission report (Québec: May 2008), which include directly and indirectly references to interreligious dialogue per se.

At a Canadian level, the development of national initiatives and structures for the training and daily management of various queries and needs related to religions within the sectors of correctional services, military, and health care in particular all point towards growing awareness and implementation of spaces within which interreligious dialogue takes place, directly or indirectly (as part of intercultural dialogue).

Another healthy sign is the development of grassroots initiatives despite the overall lack of financial incentives, whether from various levels of government or private philanthropy and business corporations. While much of these efforts are ad hoc in nature, addressing specific challenges and rarely able to do much about complex issues our society confronts, there is one recent exception on a national level: the preparation of an international summit for religious leaders in preparation of the G8 summit in Winnipeg in June 2010. It is worthwhile examining how a collaborative effort across most religious communities in Canada can lead to a constructive interaction with major political leaders at an internal level.

At a provincial level, the implementation of the new Ethics and Religious Culture programme of the Quebec Ministry of Education, is an example of success-in-the-making, because it is too soon to judge its real impact on the ground, although its very existence is hailed by many as a sign of courageous change. Yet, it is important here, given the nature of this report on interreligious dialogue, to clarify that while the third objective of this programme is to develop dialogical skills amongst all students, this programme never includes interreligious dialogue per se. Indeed, there is a fine line between promoting dialogue in general and not wanting to promoting particular religious perspectives on the part of the institution and the

teachers who must remain neutral because of the new secular educational framework (*système d'éducation laïque*). Technically, it is therefore clear that this programme does not include interreligious dialogue per se, although many teachers have experienced what seem to be various kinds of interreligious dialogue by the simple fact that they have mostly students who self-identified religiously and therefore bring their religious identity dimensions in the practice of dialogue in the classroom.

Finally, there are spaces of interreligious dialogue that fall at the intersection of the dialogues of live, belief, and spirit. For example, there are artistic spaces where different verbal and non-verbal dialogues take place, whether informally or formally through festivals and courses, etc. These spaces witness exchanges of different kinds, consciously or not, that expand our notion of dialogue. The case of "fusion" represents a combination of mingling, hybridity, and mutual influences between two or more musical styles that are at the heart of religio-cultural traditions that can be sometimes very old. For example, in Montreal, there are vibrant spaces of dialogue between many practitioners of the spiritual music of reggae, gospel, and arabo-berber (often sufi/mystical) traditions, not to mention interreligious choirs as such (Coeur pour la Paix).

This paper assumes that increasing religious literacy and interreligious dialogue skills can only help prevent prejudice and conflicts based on prejudice, although there is a lack of longitudinal studies in Canada to prove this point scientifically. Yet, the results of our qualitative interviews all point in that direction. In general, interreligious dialogue, like the broader intercultural dialogue, decreases social resistance, tensions, and fears, but not among all segments of the population. There are always segments, and sometimes more than only pockets, that are not receptive to the idea of dialogue, and the inclusion of such perspectives was not been possible in this research project. The most extreme among them (e.g.: hate crime instigators and perpetrators) are normally judged and repressed, as well as subject to psycho-social treatment of various kinds. Whether or not religious groups and interreligious organizations have been successfully involved in preventing and enabling their reinsertion remains to be studied further.

Yet, the result of our semi-structured interviews of over twenty expert practitioners in the field of interreligious dialogue confirm that its practice directly contributes to fostering religious literacy (of both one's own and that of others) and the development of dialogical skills, which includes many aspects related to emotional intelligence. These skills are highly valuable in any social setting, from interactions in local neighbourhoods to various national and international environments, both public and private in nature. Enhancing the acquisition of such skills is therefore important to improve the quality of human relations in Canada when it comes to developing and enacting better policies in such areas of tensions and conflicts as: women and minority rights (religious and indigenous), public display of religious differences (especially through particular clothing practices), women in high religious authority posts, alternative justice, treatment of petty legal violations (i.e. social compassion), abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriages, polygamy, biotechnologies, military presence abroad, human rights and democracy-building in Canadian foreign policy, reduction of social programs (i.e the question of social justice), etc. While open displays of physical conflicts around these difficult issues are relatively rare, they seem to be increasing, although more statistical information would be very useful at this point.

What is certain, however, is that public displays of verbal tensions and violence are on the rise, especially in Quebec where open calls for the rejection of any display of religiosity in any public space is now at the heart of parliamentary debates (i.e. Bill 94). The very nature of

what constitutes the limits between politics and religion when we say "secularism" or "laïcité" is presently being carried out, or experimented on, in the public grounds of various levels of our parliamentary democracy and within various mediatic spaces, both written and oral. These debates are mostly fought on the back of small religious and ethnic minority groups, within a broader resurgence of intolerance towards what are perceived as "new immigrants". In fact, it is unrealistic to think that people from such a wide variety of worldviews across Canada can easily develop consensus on these many difficult topics and realities on the ground. It is therefore important to distinguish between "social cohesion", which implies common values (of which there may be less than one thinks), and "social peace", which implies sharing a common space peacefully (without violence), despite often radically different values. This paper will emphasize the latter usage because it is more realistic, especially in terms of policy.

In short, this brief research project argues that spaces of interreligious dialogue across Canada contribute to social cohesion and peace by increasing both basic knowledge about each other's worldviews as well as dialogical skills applicable in a wide variety of settings. The overall results, to be further investigates still, seem to be that interreligious dialogue fosters more balance and accuracy in our perceptions of what constitutes our real similarities and differences across not only religious worldviews, but often ideological perspectives as well. This information is crucial for better policies on a variety of difficult topics. It confirms that according to its practitioners, interreligious dialogue fosters both better knowledge and dialogical skills, even though the learning is not devoid of ideological biases, is often slow, and requires time and patience on all sides. Further quantitative and qualitative research about points of disagreements both within and across religious communities and non-religious people is imperative along with the development of peacebuilding initiatives on a wider scale across Canada, of which interreligious dialogue in all of its diversity is one set among many. Indeed, interreligious dialogue, in general, helps reduce tensions related to both religious issues as well as religious perspectives on current problems.

Yet successes raise expectations. In the words of one of this report's collaborator:

> Quelles que soient les difficultés auxquelles se heurte le dialogue interreligieux, il suscite des attentes : produire une métamorphose des mentalités. Sans emprunter la voie du prosélytisme ni celle du syncrétisme, cette transformation prend diverses formes comme la redécouverte du sentiment religieux, la prise de conscience de sa tradition, la compréhension que le dialogue dans l'altérité religieuse conduit vers une spiritualité personnelle. Le dialogue contribuerait à réfléchir en commun sur comment vivre ensemble, comment construire une société édifiée sur le respect de la reconnaissance de l'autre et la confiance envers lui. Une société qui envisage la mise en place d'un lien social favorable à l'inclusion de tous puisque le dialogue permettra de dire ce qui divise et exclut. Il participe à voir un monde autre. Il engendre, chez les croyants, une attitude dialogique de leur foi. Il met, chacun, au défi de se situer dans sa propre tradition et de la placer dans une conversation avec les autres traditions. Il le place également face à une autre option, celle d'être solidaire avec la société par une participation dans l'arène politique pour débattre des questions sociétales et en vivant dans l'action nos responsabilités citoyennes.

10.   Interview Results

For the purpose of this brief research paper, twenty interviews were conducted with 7 women and 13 men: 9 Christians (1 Orthodox, 3 Roman Catholics, 2 Anglicans, 1 United Church of Canada, 1 Baptist, and 1 Mennonite), 5 Muslims, 2 Jews, 2 Sikhs, 1 Baha'i, and 1 humanist. The ages varied between 24 and 80, with a majority in their fifties and sixties. They represented both national and local organizations, and their respective functions varied from full time volunteer and paid directors to part-time volunteer in a variety of positions within both registered non-profit organizations as well as religious institutions. The range of activities covered by the interviewees includes those mentioned in sections #5 and #6 above, except for military and health chaplaincies. These interviews are thus indicative of a broad range of interreligious dialogue spaces, though mostly from the three largest metropolitan areas of Canada: Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Yet, without a more significant pool of persons interviewed across all range of interreligious dialogue activities, no quantitative data can be derived from the present diverse, yet limited, sample.

The questionnaire used for these semi-directive qualitative interviews is available in section #14.1. Following the answers to its thirteen question course, with occasional interviewee quotes, highlights a broad range of contemporary perspectives among our mostly expert practitioners at interreligious dialogue across Canada and beyond. These perceptions offer very useful insights on the state of interreligious dialogue today and help us answer our initial question on how government can foster interreligious dialogue for social cohesion and peace.

The answers to the first question, on how long each interviewee had been involved in interreligious dialogue, varied from a couple of years (in the case of both young adults) to more than fifty in one case. Concerning the second question, all interviewees answered that they were speaking on their own behalf, except for two who spoke as officers for their religious community at a national level. The third question, on geographical levels of involvement, produced a range of answers, from a couple of interviewees who only did local activities to most who combined several if not all levels (local, regional, provincial, national, continental, and international). This point corresponds with what Halafoff noticed in the range of 54 expert practitioners she interviewed from Australia, the UK and the USA for her doctoral research. One religious community representative noted that there is "a fair mix between local and national" interreligious dialogue activities within her relatively large Canadian Christian community. "Both individuals and communities engaged in dialogue with other congregations or institutions. Most of our activities are of that nature. But for me, most of my time is national, with a little regional and international work in such organizations as NAIN [North American Interfaith Network], Religions for Peace, and the Parliament of the World's Religions."

As for question four, on the kinds of dialogue the interviewees had been engaged in mostly, the answers varied a lot, often including all three: bilateral, trilateral, and multi-lateral. While is little sustained trilateral form of dialogue at the moment in Canada, interviewees seem to be involved in either multilateral dialogue or bilateral kinds (almost exclusively Jewish-Christian or Christian-Muslim dialogues, although sporadic efforts at sustaining Jewish-Muslim dialogue, mostly private, exists and hopes to continue/revive them exists). Their experiences of bilateral dialogues tend to be more theological while that of their multilateral dialogues seem to be focused more on interreligious cooperation, with a variety of aims. For many of the interviewees, the bilateral dialogue also seems to foster greater fecundity, spontaneity and ease than multilateral dialogue. It is often easier to journey together towards fraternity, friendship

and a common humanity across one boundary that divides two faith groups and the many boundaries that divide multiple ones in multilateral settings. But other interviewees evoked the solidarity that emerges across multiple faith lines through shared activities that address common human needs, from poverty relief to the environment, passing through combating injustices of different kinds. One emphasized "the satisfaction that comes from experiencing people understanding each other when they are able to do things together, especially in a secular society; that they are able to work together." Another said:

> When we create opportunities and activity platforms for people of diverse faiths and spiritual traditions to live and act together, when we perform charitable services, we see that the hearts, minds, and souls of all people are connected. Regardless of the differences, people focus on shared values and try to make a positive impact. I find this most inspiring.

Two interviewees based in the province of Quebec shared a similar perspective:

> To promote interreligious encounters, but also the mission to project an image of the religious world in civil society is important to allow people to rethink the image of religion in society, because there is a lot of anti-religion sentiment in our secular society.

> Il est très important car une image positive des religions et des religions qui se parlent entre-elles permet de casser l'image du fait que les religions ne sont pas capables de se parler; donc une image positive des religions permet aux gens de sortir de la dichotomie : croyants/non-croyants, religieux/non-religieux, mise de l'avant par certains qui sont carrément anti-religieux. C'est un beau défi et très imposant pour la cohésion sociale. Je crois que les organismes interreligieux auraient fort intérêt à se montrer dans la société civile et pas être seulement avec des organismes religieux.

From this point of view, the dialogue between believers of all traditions and currents within Canadian society indicates how it contributes to bringing the members of its diverse groups closer to one another and more in touch with society in general. Dialogue becomes a valuable means to combat prejudices and hostilities on all sides, often fuelled by narrow and selective readings of scriptures and history, often promoting one form of discrimination or another. Dialogue is also a means of convergence for common action, a necessary competency to develop for common living together in social environment that claims to uphold freedom of conscience and religion. This is only possible when religion no longer claims political power, and that it, in turn, does not try to use religion to enhance its hegemony. To achieve this fragile balance in the face of the maintenance of religious phenomena side by side both individual and institutional secularization processes, interreligious dialogue is an absolute necessity and must be fostered through both private and public initiatives, at all levels of society across Canada and beyond.

The next question, related to the primary focus of their interreligious dialogue activities, the answers also covered a broad range, including theological, activist, social service, and educational, for the most part, although interfaith chaplaincy in the areas of health and correctional services was mentioned by one interviewee from a provincial interfaith council. More would have emerged if the sample had included interviewees directly involved in these two fields as well. The same is true in the field of policing, with the exception of one Montreal interviewee who shared a best practice of having invited over the last two years both on-duty police officers with other non-Muslim community members for a family *iftar* dinner during the month of fasting (*ramadhan*). The first year, the officers did not want to take off their shoes nor

their anti-bullet vest while having dinner. The second year, they did take them off, explaining that they now trusted the organizers and hosting families. These same four police officers (two women and two men) also mentioned that the Turkish Muslims were the only ethnic/religious community to have ever invited them to come into their homes. Such small gesture, which would greatly benefit to be promoted interracially especially because of the rise in racial profiling,[8] can go a long way to transform attitudes and can greatly help improving police-local community relations. It is one way interreligious dialogue can help promote common security and possibly prevent radicalization and violence. Many other best practices have been carried out elsewhere in this field of policing, such as in Melbourne, Australia (Pickering 2007).

Another area is the field of sustainable development, knowing that improvement in economic levels decreases immigration pressures and enhances local quality of life. Dialogue between CIDA and various religious groups throughout Canada took place already in the late 1980s. Its convenor for the mostly Christian Churches then involved, is now director of a faith-based development agency. For him, interreligious cooperation is key to his work and straight forward:

> For us, we have some purposes that can be easily shared across faith traditions. Looking for those common purposes, set aside those differences, without minimizing them. Here is where there is space where we can work together. It is all about finding those points of connection, without pretending that you are all the same. Ex: food grain bank, it has worked so well, "on this we can agree, and that is what we can collaborate on". We do not go further. It is "practical ecumenism."

On the sixth question, on what participants found the most rewarding, there was consensus on element: developing friendships across faith lines leading to not only greater understanding of diverse religious worldviews, but also better self-understanding. This point is at the heart of dialogue. Authentic and constructive dialogue, in the sense of a transformation of one's perception of the Other, requires the will to go towards this Other to meet him or her. In the words of one interviewee: "I always had an interest in knowing better values, beliefs and rituals, so as to understand better from within. So the most important is to develop friendship between us, to deepen the content of our respective faith journeys by opening ourselves to each other, to host each other." For another, the most important is "the warm links that are created between people I call spiritually active. Those links, beyond beliefs and religions, I can quickly feel between people who practice spiritually. A common and deep affinity develops, nourishing that deeper interior feeling, allowing us to live fraternally above dogmas." For yet a third one: "the reciprocal trust that was established over many years is the most beneficent element [of dialogue]. Without thinking in an egotistic way, the very fact that we are able to dialogue allows us to talk respectfully about very difficult subjects."

It seems that such quality in communication is essential to facilitate spaces where the many contemporary difficult human dilemmas need to be raised and solutions found. One interviewee said the World Summit of Religious Leader that met in early June in Winnipeg to agree on a statement that was then sent to the G8 and G20 political leaders was "very rewarding. We accomplished this thanks to the Canadian Council of Churches that opened their door to

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[8]   According to a recent newspaper article written from an internal report of the City of Montreal's Police Force (SPVM): La Presse, "Profilage racial au SPVM: un rapport alarmant" 9 August, 2010.

minority religions." One interviewee gave the example of the Multifaith Religious Center at the University of Toronto as a best practice. Another answered with a different concrete example:

> It is really important to create safe spaces, with norms for open and honest dialogue about some of the more difficult issues. What is really great: program called "QUEST (Canadian Center for Diversity)", which connects Jewish, Islamic, Catholic schools, meeting 4 or 5 times a year, etc.). They discuss hot topics such as abortion, same-sex relations, issues that can be very sensitive and very difficult to talk about. I am very impressed with that program. Reactions of students have been incredible. First, they created safe space in order for these conversations be possible at a later stage, after the trust has been created. Each of the schools host one of the sessions.

All interviewees working in Quebec agreed that the third objective of the new Ethics and Religious Culture program of the Ministry of Education is a major step in the right direction to promote dialogue in general, though not specifically interreligious dialogue (at least not officially in the classroom). One interviewee argued that this new program reflects a certain kind of "democratization of dialogue".

> Moi je suis une des personnes qui croit beaucoup que si on lui donne la chance de se déployer, et pas rester buter sur ses manques actuels, le nouveau programme ÉCR mis en place au Québec par le MELS est très riche pour l'avenir du développement de la société au Québec. Quand on parle de ce programme là, il y aussi le dialogue. L'une des trois grandes visées de ce programme là est de former les gens à découvrir la valeur du dialogue, dans le respect et l'accueil des autres. Je mets beaucoup d'espoir dans ce programme là. [...] Le dialogue interreligieux risque d'être mieux vécu si on arrête de mettre l'emphase sur les autorités religieuses; il faut démocratiser l'expérience du dialogue interreligieux, du processus, inclus diminuer le rôle des universitaires [...].

Another interviewee from a very small minority religious community, often victim of stereotypes and attacks, was also very positive: « I am very optimistic [about ECR]. I see no discouragement, not in my religious community, nor in other ones. And I must say that the Church which is most solidly behind dialogue is the Roman Catholic Church." Indeed, the Quebec Conference of Catholic Bishops is fully behind this new ECR program, albeit not in agreement always with every one of its details.

For another person, the reward came simply from "following what is for me a religious obligation." In addition, "since I love the teaching and learning which I find myself doing [in interreligious dialogue activities], […] Mutual education is a reward for me."

The next two questions, on challenges and obstacles encountered, raised very different answers. In addition to including many of the complexities and challenges raised in section #9 above, these answers also presented new elements worth quoting. One interviewee was quick to respond: "To listen to the other and to put yourself under his/her skin, trying to be neutral. Not that this would mean to accept or to want to convert, but [rather] to listen, not to judge." For another, long term sustainability of those new friendships acquired during interreligious dialogue activities is often challenging, in part because those activities do not take place regularly, even if they are periodic (rarely more frequent than once a month). It is not like many other kinds of activities that are weekly, if not daily, including religious rituals. There is also the sheer diversity of religious communities and the impossibility to develop solid friendships across them all: "The most difficult is often to begin establishing contacts, especially in certain communities. There are also numerous communities we would like to reach, but there is little time." This

challenge is particularly acute for the vast majority of interreligious dialogue practitioners who are volunteers, often carrying more important family and professional responsibilities too.

Two interviewees answered that what is most difficult for each one of them is:

> […] moving from the abstract, and being nice to each other, to moving to social action (where there is a split between the conservative and the more left wing activists). Having prayers together is nice, but moving to commenting on social issues is difficult […].

> Le glissement qui se fait très souvent d'une discussion autour de principes ou identités religieuses à des thèmes plus politique et polémique (immigration, délinquance, etc). Il est souvent incontournable de parler politique lorsque l'on parle religion, et je ne suis pas contre, mais dans certaines limites et surtout dans le respect de la position des autres. Or ce n'est pas toujours le cas. Je trouve aussi déplorable la désinformation qui est si rependue qu'il faut très souvent passer un long moment en rectifiant des idées reçues qui ne sont pas fondés avant même de pouvoir aborder un thème de rapprochement plus en profondeur. Il est déjà arrivé qu'une rencontre de dialogue finisse plutôt par ressembler à des discours politiques, des monologues ou (au meilleur des cas) à une séance d'information et de déconstructions de préjugées.

Dialogue is not easy. One challenge comes from the intensity in the exchanges. If the rules of dialogical communication are not clear or followed well, "you get hurt, intentionally or not; you get challenged and it is difficult to go back to that dialogue. This is not a pastry shop. People do not come back always joyful." Indeed, dialogue requires sincerity, respect and reciprocal consideration for those involved. It can borrow from the metaphor of hospitality,[9] whose principal impact is on the conversion of a participant's own understanding of religious otherness. The journey is built upon moments of hospitality, of acceptance of otherness, of inclusion, leading to transformation in perceptions of one another. Dialogue is necessary to foster a series of elements that are required to reduce the negative impact of asymmetrical relations between a majority Christian community across all Canadian provinces and much smaller non-Christian religious and spiritual groups. But it takes time, and this slow process often results in many losing patience and becoming discouraged:

> People should learn to be patient. Sometimes people are losing their hope for having result regarding to interfaith dialog issues. Because it's a long process and it takes time, sometimes you need to wait one generation long.

When dialogue takes place within institutions, be they religious or otherwise, exogenous and endogenous factors can become obstacles, while also allowing the dialogue space itself. Regarding external obstacles, one interviewee gave the example of his university chaplaincy position, which was initially conceived of in strictly Roman Catholic terms (i.e. the "right" Roman-Catholic credentials) to satisfy external diocesan and Roman exigencies, instead of human qualities and interreligious dialogical skills to help serve the spiritual needs of all university community members, even though non-Roman Catholics formed only very small minority religious groups. As for internal obstacles, his university administrators and most faculty members only expressed disinterest and worry at his role, until the day of and following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, when they suddenly recognized the crucial

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[9]   It takes place within the World Council of Churches' project to foster a reflection on the hermeneutics of a theology of religions linked to Christian faith, mission and dialogue.

importance he and others linked to his interreligious network on campus played to avoid deteriorations in the university's social fabric, thanks to his more than ten years of grassroots interreligious dialogue experience. Every university, indeed every school, needs this kind of practical dialogical experience to complement whatever specific mission it may have.

Another kind of internal obstacles comes from the unique histories of bilateral interreligious relations, with their often unresolved conflicts. This is particularly the case in Jewish-Christian dialogue circles, although much improvement has taken place since Vatican II, for example, as well as Christian-Muslim dialogue groups, where the heritage of stereotypes and misunderstanding on both sides often mar the dialogue. Every time there is media coverage of a crisis somewhere in the world that pits one against the other, those unresolved internal tensions re-emerge. This is no where clearer than in the case of Jewish-Muslim dialogue, where often the condition of sustained dialogue is to avoid, literally, any discussion related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Another challenge comes from walking the middle ground between, on the one hand, seeking the lowest common theological denominator that leads to "water things down too much […] but means little, and what is core is lost" and, on the other, letting differences become so large that interreligious dialogue and cooperation becomes impossible. "We simply need to accept that there are real differences, but that there are places where we can work together, and this is a way to deal with these obstacles and differences." Interestingly, many recognize that it is precisely Canada's secular framework which enables interreligious dialogue to thrive. Here is one voice:

> Practical obstacles: man people of faith communities never have an opportunity to meet somebody from some other community. Many groups are fearful of loosing their identity. One flashpoint is the relationship with LBGTQ community (real discomfort). Second flashpoint is the control that certain historical Christian churches have had over society, especially women (abortion, etc.). Third flashpoint is that in big Canadian cities, you do not have to engage others necessarily. Ironically, it is only the secular framework which allows the engagement to take place.

Finally, another set of internal obstacles comes from particularly difficult personality types when it comes to ensuring a healthy dialogical space: dominant, even at times aggressive people, as well as those dialogue participants who feel the need to protect the "orthodox" position of their own religious community, whether or not they have the pedigree to do so. This is often the case when a person ends up being the only one from their community in a mixed group, raising the need to be aware of number dynamics to create better dialogical spaces.

The answers to the ninth question, on who (individual/organizational/community-based) actively participates in each interviewee's interreligious dialogue activities, demonstrated a wide variety of cooperation, most often beyond religious communities per se.

The answers to the tenth question, about who they would like to see participate but does not, were enlightening. Two started with a simple answer: "Ordinary people".

> Ordinary people. Not just educated people. Somehow, interreligious dialogue has become a high class thing for those with enough time to participate. It has become an intellectual activity. There are other ways to dialogue: cooking, dancing, observing rituals, sports, etc.

The other interviewee added the example of how Scotia Bank and IBM have opened spaces to answer different religious needs in their workplace, which can also serve for interreligious dialogue (often called differently). If these for-profit secular spaces can be open to this kind of work, why not more people, businesses and organizations? And why not government too?

> When we launched this process of a conversation about interfaith principles [on development], CIDA eventually got cold feet. They eventually sent some observer, but chose not to actively participate. We were quite disappointed by that decision.

> People who are working on governance must help to create multi-meaning spaces. Or give money to universities to help them deploy these spaces in society.

Another interviewee noted two more important categories of potential participants in interreligious dialogue activities: "Les medias ainsi que l'individu lambda qui a subi ou qui fait subir une quelconque forme de violence sociale."

The eleventh question, on how important interreligious dialogue is to improving social cohesion in Canada, provided the second unanimous answer: from very to extremely useful. As for the next question on how each interviewee envisions the future of interreligious dialogue in Canada, insightful answers emerged.

> I think it is very important. We need to find ways for talking to each other, rather than having stereotypes about each other. It is not about finding agreement. It is about finding practical common ground. The same thing for governments: they need to talk to each other, but not because there is a desire to agree on everything. We need this at a global level. We need lots of dialogue.

> If we do not put an emphasis on interreligious dialogue in its different ways, beyond a place just for intellectuals that needs to include especially children, we will go towards social chaos, especially because of mediatisation. [Interreligious dialogue] is one of the most efficient ways of fighting against empoisoning mediatisation.

> It is very important, and being very careful and diplomatic about it. In the long run, it is important to talk about our actual beliefs in the open, and discuss them. Not being so sensitive to attacks. Interfaith dialogue needs to be more open to constructive criticism. I am convinced that if we are engaged in interreligious dialogue, it helps moderate our language and helps us define to others more clearly. That is a long term goal.

> Comme toute forme de dialogue, le dialogue interreligieux est incontournable si l'on veut réellement construire une société multi- voire trans- culturelle, religieuse, etc… L'éducation, le dialogue, le partage de connaissance, de vécu et le rapprochement que cela engendre sont à mon avis les seuls moyens dont nous disposons pour en arriver à développer un réel projet commun de société.

The twelfth question was: What do you envision for the future of interreligious dialogue in Canada?

> Begin with a deputy for social cohesion in the Ministry of Immigration, of course with the collaboration with other ministries. One day, Canada can then have a Ministry of Social Cohesion. That is very important because this country is very diverse. This

diversity is at the basis of its foundation. Having a ministry or office of social cohesion is a must, of which a big part of its activities would be interreligious dialogue.

I am reflecting on the Tony Blair Foundation, I think that philosophy intrigues me. Hand, Heart, Head approach. Let's try to do projects together with our hands. Through that process, we will get to know each other, and our hearts will connect. Then down the road, we can talk about our theological differences. I am for a transparent dialogue: let's not be afraid of differences. […] Religion should take a bigger place in the public sphere, by adopting both strategies: talking where we can, and doing thing together when we can.

Finally, the last question asked whether present levels of resources, both human and material, are adequate for the interviewees' interreligious dialogue activities, prompting them to identify also what kinds of human and/or financial support (private individual, private philanthropy, private religious communities, public governmental, etc.) they would recommend. One interviewee thought the present level was sufficient. Another expressed resistance to governmental funding:

Spaces and money is not an issue for us. We do not look for government funding. We do work with CIDA for some of our development work. We are not overly sympathetic with governmental funding. If religions are not good enough to support their own causes, then…

Apart from these two persons, all the other expert practitioners interviewed agreed that more governmental involvement was necessary, in different ways and at all three levels: municipal, provincial and national:

Mis à part les aides financières qui nous permettraient de faire beaucoup plus, il faudrait un appui officiel de l'État et/ou des différents paliers gouvernementaux. Une politique publique encourageant au dialogue ne pourrait pas être néfaste! Elle peut se faire en conjonction avec la lutte contre toutes formes de discriminations.

Serious governmental involvement can help the beginning of all private and public donations, [including in the area of interreligious dialogue]. To me, when individuals or foundations try to start things, it is hard to be as successful as if they are linked to governmental efforts. For the human resources, it is important to train the trainers. Like anything else in this world, we need teachers. People need to get trained. What we need is not to go in different cities to look for good people. We need to train trainers to teach people to be tolerant and respectful. "All roads lead to teachers" and that is why the governmental involvement is so important.

My own sense is that we have sufficient resources [in different sectors of Canada], if we choose to do it. But we do not commit enough resources to it. In our case, Christian communities do commit much resources. But there is not enough human resources. Not enough time is given, and the priority becomes less. For our organization, it is low in our priority.

The secular study of religions can help take the heat out of topics. The dialogue is important, but documenting this dialogue is important.

There is a real hesitancy to give money to specific faith communities. But what about giving it to multi-faith organizations in general? It promotes a share communal experience

to experience together the secular space. How the public and private spheres are now reimagining themselves together. Let's take different figures, religious or else, as theorist. Thomy Douglas (Premier of Saskatchewan) was a Christian minister. His efforts resulted in social welfare (universal healthcare is now taken for granted). If Christians can take a good idea and present it in a secular way, then why not doing it with ideas from other traditions too?

There are now 150 Muslim centers in Toronto. Close to 100 million dollars is raised every year during *ramadhan*. If 1 % was given, together with 1% of every other religious communities, it could lead to the creation of multifaith centers, where people can engage with each other much more than if either their own communities would do it alone or the private sector. This tsunami is on our doorstep, because of our demographic changes. New mega churches (evangelical), etc., where will the dialogue take place? The next impetus is that the government must see it as a public policy mandate to create those spaces. […] The government could give money to retrofit decaying churches in to multifaith spaces. [..] Also, why can't university act as a bridge between themselves and society? If faith is a problem, let's call them something else. Quiet space (Scotia Bank), reflexion room (IBM), multi-purpose spaces, etc.. Universities (multifaith centers), airport (chapels), hospitals (chapels), military (?). Even in these areas, there is no body of research that shows best practices of multifaith centers and chapels, etc. It needs more investment. […] The government needs to step up to the plate: Would it not rather have a multifaith center rather than another mosque? Let's go beyond reasonable accommodations. Building a new society together. […] There is a synergy that can be developed. […]

11.   Recommendations

The following set of recommendations is directed towards answering the initial question raised in the preamble: What can the Canadian government do to encourage interreligious/interfaith dialogue in ways that effectively promote equality of rights, especially for religious minorities, social cohesion and peace? These recommendations are also aimed at reinforcing the new priorities of the Canadian Multiculturalism program, without violating the separation between the State and religion. Indeed, it is vital for the various levels of government across Canada to take seriously their role in engaging religious communities, what is called in the USA "faith-based organizations", as well as a wide variety of interreligious organizations. They are already active in the integration of diverse cultural and religious people, yet much more can be done through a better coordinated effort that brings together various governmental, religious and interreligious actors from a wide variety of cultures and ideologies.

These multi-sectorial partnerships can result in new opportunities and innovative solutions to a variety of pressing concerns. They will inevitably increase community involvement and hopefully lead to greater degrees of integration. These recommendations also aim to increase the number and viability of spaces of interreligious dialogue with the two primary objectives of improving intercultural and interreligious understanding as well as dialogical skills, as a most effective means of reducing intolerance by enhancing understanding and cooperation, resulting in greater social cohesion and peace across Canada.

The following recommendations are divided into two sections: further research and further policy integration of both religious institutions and especially interreligious organizations.

11.1   *Further research*

1.   Commission a broader qualitative survey to continue the research began here, to be carried out over a one year period, so as to expand the number of interviews to reflect the whole range of interreligious dialogue activities as well as the broad variety of religious identities present in the Canadian population.

2.   Commission a serious survey to be carried out on a list of sensitive subjects and questions that affect perceptions about religion in the public sphere, insuring that a quantitatively sound number of participants from all major religious and spiritual traditions in Canada, including a variety of degrees of practice within each of them, as well as participants with non-religious worldviews (atheist, agnostic, sceptic, humanist, etc.). The aim of such a survey would be to correlate degrees of consensus, or not, among different groups (both religious and non-religious) on any given sensitive subject in order to assess how best to work with various groups for policy development that can be as inclusive as possible in the long term. No such survey was ever carried out in Canada.

3.   Commission a comparative description and analysis of regimes of separation of Church and State (Canada, USA, France, England, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Italy, etc.) and compare their treatment of religious minorities both legally and policy-wise.

4.   Commission a survey on the impact of religious institutions in the public sphere of these different societies as well as impact on their own institutional transformations. The aim of this survey would be to find out the degree of impact (both positive and negative) that these religious institutions may have, or not, on public debates and policies so as to determine whether fears

about them are justified or not, or to what degree and depending on any given subject matter. These results, such as the degree of secularization and religiosity of individuals, political participation according to one's religious belief, etc., may help alleviate fears in certain segments of pro-"hard secularism/laïcité", especially in Quebec. These fears are linked to different forms of intolerance, as much as the ignorance and fears which different religious persons may have of others (both religious and non-religious), which could be another survey topic.

5.   Commission a research to develop an online training programme on the religious landscape of Canada for the personnel of all sectors of public and semi-public institutions in order to learn more about: the nature of the separation between Church and State in Canada, the institutional organization of the various religious communities in Canada (especially the minority ones), their religious values and fundamental principles, etc. During the 1980ies, Multiculturalism Canada embarked on such a broad training program across Canada to reduce discrimination against visible minorities in particular.

11.2   *Policy integration of religious institutions and interreligious organizations*

11.2.1 Education

1.   Increase multireligious literacy (both history and religious worldviews; both strengths and challenges) through formal education, especially in secondary schools, both private and public, with a special focus on developing dialogical skills, such as in the new Ethics and Religious Culture program in Québec.

2.   Increase multireligious literacy through informal education, especially within religious institutions, starting with majority ones (Roman Catholic and Protestant) because of the impact they have on social peace throughout Canada as they reach out to understand better various minority religious communities and develop partnerships to address issues of common concern.

3.   Strengthen interreligious organizations to deliver informal multireligious and interreligious educational programs to help both youth and adults discover the faith of their neighbours through interreligious dialogue based on respect and equality (ex: Connect guide (UK), enhancing at the same time the understanding of their own.

4.   Encourage existing artistic and sport events, when applicable, to foster intercultural and interreligious dialogue as part of informal educational activities, especially in areas of high ethno-religious diversity, with exchanges in areas of low diversity. Combine with linguistic immersion programs if possible.

11.2.2 Government Sponsored Interfaith/Interreligious Councils

1.   Facilitate the establishment of a strong national interfaith/interreligious council, with provincial branches, that are consultative to government agencies as well as bridges to various religious institutions and interreligious organizations.

2.   Help strengthen, or establish where they do not yet exist, provincial councils in their work with a variety of public institutions, such as for example: health, higher education, arm forces, and correctional services. All such institutions need to provide multifaith services (to replace the Christian language of "chaplaincy") that work closely with other related services.

3.   Encourage the formation of a cross-partisan committee at the Federal level to publish a White Paper on the orientations, instruments and propositions for a call to action in interreligious and intercultural dialogue (following the December 20th, 2006, U.N. Resolution A/61/221 entitled: "Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding, and cooperation for peace."

4.   With the help of such a consultative body, support effective mechanisms by which religious communities and interreligious organizations can increase their participation in the monitoring of intolerance (both verbal and physical) across Canada.

5.   With the help of such a consultative body, support interreligious dialogue projects and collaborations that aim to increase participation of religious and spiritual people, especially from minority communities, in both intra- and interreligious and interspiritual activities, as well as intercultural ones where useful, in a coordinated rather than in the present ad hoc fashion.

6.   With the help of such a consultative body, support increased diversity in participation within already existing spaces of interreligious dialogue.

11.2.3 Networking

1.   Enable a partnership between a small number of academic institutions and interreligious organizations across Canada for the creation of a quality internet space for interreligious dialogue, so as to discuss and monitor best interreligious dialogue practices in Canada as well as to bridge distances and the lack of various religious groups' participation in interreligious dialogue activities throughout the country (not just in the major Canadian urban centers).

11.2.4 Social Justice and Conflict Resolution

1.   Strengthen interreligious organizations to develop and offer conflict resolution programs rooted in both older inherited cultural, religious, and spiritual practices as well as newer developments in the interdisciplinary field of conflict resolution studies.

2.   Support issue-oriented interreligious projects for social justice that seek inclusive partnerships across a broad variety of religious/spiritual identities and ideological perspectives.

3.   Ensure balanced representation of women and youth in any government funded project.

4.   Support interreligious organizations in the development and offering of training programs on interreligious and intercultural dialogue for various kinds of workplaces, especially where workers may not have engaged so much with diversity of worldviews. Priority needs to be given to the training of workers in law enforcement agencies (esp. the police) so as to improve common security and reduce injustices.

5.   Support interreligious organizations in the development and offering of training programs on legal rights and responsibilities in a Canadian secular environment tailored specifically to the needs of different religious communities, especially where there are high numbers of more recent immigrants.

6.   Support interreligious organizations in the development and offering of training programs

12.   Conclusion

Today, more than ever, intercultural dialogue and cooperation are critical to Canada's success as a pluralist society.   In particular, interfaith/interreligious dialogue activities, as described in a non-exhaustive fashion in this brief report, are vital to fighting intolerance and hate crimes in different ways, such as its practices of developing communication skills that foster common understanding, mutual respect, trust and collaboration among diverse religious and spiritual communities and beyond.   Through many of its diverse activities, Canadian interfaith/interreligious organizations practice equality of rights, especially by creating spaces of encounter between larger and smaller religious and spiritual communities, thereby reducing social tensions and conflicts and contributing to social cohesion and peace.   In brief, interfaith/interreligious dialogue helps build better relations and break down barriers between people from different backgrounds through positive interactions and collaborations in shared activities, with a common purpose and concrete outcomes.

While the current dialogue activities taking place at the grassroots level reflect an important first step for Canadian society at large, the recommendations presented in this report reflect the need to expand from important conversations to include more joint cooperation on many different concrete initiatives that can help reduce tensions and exclusions between communities, so as to fight intolerance and foster integration.

Given the continued steady immigration of people from all over the world to Canada as well as the complex patterns of transformations and conversions in religious/spiritual identities that are taking place worldwide, Canadian society will only grow to become more and more diverse in probably all identity aspects, including religion and spirituality.   Difficult internal transformations of Canadian society as well as external situations in various parts of the world indicate that Canadian society is not immune to global influences, and can indeed contribute to them as well, both in terms of best practices as well as worst ones, whether physical and/or ideological, produced both within and beyond its own borders.   Even though we do not have any scientific mechanism to monitor quantitatively this broad spectrum of best and worst practices, probably only a small percentage of them are carried through religiously related discursive means.   Whether latent or active, it is clear that they have positive or negative impact for persons as well as broader groups, communities and Canadian society.   This report demonstrates that for those people interviewed as well as its producers, there is no doubt that, mostly in preventive and post-conflict ways that are hard to measure, interreligious/interfaith dialogue, in general, contributes to greater equality of rights, as well as social cohesion and peace in Canada.

Interreligious/interfaith dialogue is often like friendship: it is most difficult to start in times of crisis, yet essential precisely then.   It is therefore crucial to strengthen spaces of interreligious dialogue in Canada now, when interreligious relations are relatively good, so as to improve our collective multi-sectorial responses to increasing signs of intolerance in Canadian society today.

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14. Annexes

14.1 *Interview Questionnaire*

1. How long have you been involved in interreligious dialogue?
2. Do you speak on your own behalf or for an organization/religious community?
   a. If so for the former, which religious identity(ies) to you speak from?
   b. If so for the latter, which one(s)?
3. What geographical level(s) do you consider most of your interreligious dialogue activities to be at? (local, regional, provincial, national, continental, international)
4. What kind(s) of dialogue are you engaged in mostly: bilateral, trilateral, multi-lateral?
   a. If more than one kind, how would you compare their respective usefulness to you?
5. What is the primary focus of your interreligious dialogue activities: theological, activist, social service, educational, others?
6. What do you find most rewarding in your interreligious dialogue activities?
7. What do you find most challenging in your interreligious dialogue activities?
8. What are the most important obstacles you encounter in your interreligious dialogue activities and interests?
9. Who (individual/organizational/community-based) actively participates with you in such activities?
10. Who would you like to see participate but does not?
11. In your opinion, how important is interreligious dialogue to improving social cohesion in Canada?
12. From your experience, what do you envision for the future of interreligious dialogue in Canada?
13. Are present levels of resources (human and material) adequate for your interreligious dialogue activities? In Canada in general? Why?
    a. If not, what kinds of human and/or financial support (private individual, private philanthropy, private religious communities, public governmental, etc.) would you recommend?