

The Latest from the World Council of Churches

By Ellen Pye

For the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Harare Assembly in 1998 marked the beginning of new structures and procedures, which had to be worked into. Here in Canada, the WCC Relations Committee has a new Chair, and meetings have been better attended and very stimulating. The reports I receive via email from Eden Grace, the Friends United Meeting (FUM) delegate on the WCC Central Committee, are informative and inspiring, including some ministry to the recipient. Her approach as a delegate for Friends is one of not just providing a window in both directions, but also to illuminate each end of the affiliation to the other—in the process, throwing clearer light on our own situation. She had made a deep impression at the WCC in many ways: leading a Bible Study; arranging and preparing for a session of Worship in the manner of Friends that truly moved the hearts and minds of those attending; making perceptive and profound contributions to the Special Commission dealing with the participation of the Orthodox Churches in the life of the Council.

The work of this Commission now completed, the Central Committee has agreed (with some



trepidation) to try a modified consensus model for decision-making. There are still unresolved issues regard-

ing common worship, especially concerning the place of ordained women in it, where attempts at compromise have led to considerable distress in some quarters. A possible new basis for membership may well become a matter of concern to Friends in the near future. Eden Grace has addressed this vigorously. FUM has submitted an insightful paper on the way it defines 'Church' with which most unprogrammed Friends would feel uncomfortable; it is not certain what the outcome will be.

UNRESOLVED ISSUES REGARDING COMMON WORSHIP, ESPECIALLY CONCERNING THE PLACE OF ORDAINED WOMEN

The *Decade to Overcome Violence* (DOV) has been slow to take shape, both in Geneva and in Canada. The events of 11 September 2001 in the U.S. makes DOV more relevant than ever, but has also dissipated commitment to it, especially in the U.S. churches that are vacillating between the allure of patriotism and the call to peace. Konrad Raiser, the General Secretary, has written an insightful study of the prevailing economic globalisation, exposing its evils and the way it contributes to world-wide violence. A spirit of reconciliation created by the perspective of DOV underlay the work of the Special Commission and led to a sense of fellowship where, as

one participant expressed it, each side was more concerned with an equitable and beneficial outcome for the other side than with how its own side might be faring.

In Canada, the churches are proceeding separately, each continuing with existing programmes while strengthening them with the emphasis of DOV. One new departure is that the Presbyterian Church is revisiting its 'Just War' theology.

All this work, and much more, is taking place against a very threatening background. The WCC is in dire straits financially, having too optimistically lived beyond its means in the past, and now being confronted with the harsh economic realities such as plummeting investment. The churches have been similarly hit and, consequently, are having to drastically prune their donations to WCC. Staff is having to be laid off and many programmes cut, a painful situation in light of all the need for justice and healing in a suffering world.

The tenure of Konrad Raiser, which had already been extended by a year, is due to come to an end next year and it may prove difficult to find a successor to take over in the midst of this crisis.

The next Assembly is planned for the beginning of 2006, in Porto Alegre in Brazil. Hopefully, a Canadian Friend can be found to attend it. □

Ellen Pye is a member of Vancouver Monthly Meeting.