

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
***ECUMENICAL DECADE TO OVERCOME VIOLENCE:
CHURCHES SEEKING RECONCILIATION AND PEACE
2001-2010***

The Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), a fellowship of over 300 churches including The United Church of Canada, gathered under an African cross in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998 to discern priorities and programmes until the Ninth Assembly in 2005, and beyond. At the African Assembly delegates established the ***Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV)***, which was officially launched in February of 2001 in Berlin, Germany. The Assembly stated that the WCC must “*work strategically with the churches on these issues of nonviolence and reconciliation to create a culture of nonviolence, linking and interacting with other international partners and organizations, and examining and developing appropriate approaches to conflict transformation and just peace-making in the new globalized context.*”

Churches and Christians around the world are being asked to consider the goals and issues of the Decade, as follows:

Goals

In order to move peace-building from the periphery to the centre of the life and witness of the church, and to build stronger alliances and understanding among churches, networks, and movements which are working toward a culture of peace, the goals of the ***DOV*** are;

- Addressing holistically the wide varieties of violence, both direct and structural, in homes, communities, and in international arenas, and learning from the local and regional analyses of violence and ways to overcome violence.
- Challenging the churches to overcome the spirit, logic, and practice of violence; to relinquish any theological justification of violence; and to affirm anew the spirituality of reconciliation and active nonviolence.
- Creating a new understanding of security in terms of cooperation and community, instead of in terms of domination and competition.
- Learning from the spirituality and resources for peace-building of other faiths, to work with communities of other faiths in the pursuit of peace, and to challenge the churches to reflect on the misuse of religious and ethnic identities in pluralistic societies.
- Challenging the growing militarization of our world, especially the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Issues

“Violence” is not only physical. “Violence” is also emotional, intellectual, structural. Throughout the **DOV**, the focus will be on the response to and prevention of forms of violence, such as overcoming;

- violence between nations
- violence within nations
- violence in local communities
- violence within the home and the family
- violence within the church
- sexual violence
- socio-economic violence
- violence as a result of economic and political blockades
- violence among youth
- violence associated with religious and cultural practices
- violence within legal systems
- violence against creation
- violence as a result of racism and ethnic hatred

The World Affairs Committee of Toronto Conference calls upon Conference to “*encourage Pastoral Charges to undertake a project or discussion of the Decade theme in their context by March 2002.*” We hope that many congregations will soon consider how to respond to this call to mission and engagement in transformation.

The DOV will be a broad mission within participating churches, and build upon significant work already done within The United Church of Canada, including:

- the previous *Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women in Church and Society*;
- our relationship with First Nations peoples, particularly in regard to healing initiatives as a result of the Residential Schools legacy;
- *Bearing Faithful Witness*, examining our relationship with Jewish people;
- *Mending the World*, highlighting our ecumenical breadth, our relationships with all peoples and the earth;
- *Beyond Military Force: Seeking Peace After the Cold War*, which calls for common security and decreased militarization;
- *One Earth Community*, calling us to live with respect in creation;
- *To Seek Justice and Resist Evil: Towards a Global Economy for All God’s People*, calling us to consider the injustices of global capitalism and market ideologies.

Within Toronto Conference, go to the website: www.unitedchurch.web.ca/toronto_conference and browse through the Decade material posted there for more information and ideas.