**Summary Report – CTSA Conference May 1-4, 2014 Emmanuel College, Toronto**

This reports key events and processes that happened during the annual conference of the Canadian Theological Students Association at Emmanuel College Toronto last May 1-4, 2014.

Sandra Jenkinson, LPC Chair together with Rafael Vallejo, Conference Coordinator and volunteer Erica Rodriguez met at the CCC offices Wednesday afternoon to prepare the welcome packages for the delegates. Final arrangements were made at Knox by Nicole Reid for lodging and at Emmanuel for parking. Fraser had to do a run at Pearson to meet Emily and Colette Saunders from Sandy Saulteaux near Winnipeg.

**Day 1 : Thursday May 1**

After breakfast, Sandra Jenkinson opened the NPC/LPC gathering in prayer at the Emmanuel Chapel. After the meeting, the group took to their various tasks, making sure everything was ready for the delegates. Emily (NPC Chair) took care of registration and welcome. There was signage to lead people to the Student Lounge and Chapel on the 2nd Floor.

The conference opened at 2:30 with ageneral introductions by the delegates and NPC Chair Emily Jarett giving a brief history of the CTSA and the Annual Conference. She also introduces our two guests: The Rev Dr Karen Hamilton of the Canadian Council of Churches and Virginia “Geegee” Mills.

Karen Hamilton welcome the students on behalf of the Council and spoke about its work in the context of Christian Unity and the continuing work of ecumenism in the world. Geegee Mills welcomed the students as well and spoke of the vision of her husband the Rev Howard Mills and his legacy the Howard Mills Memorial Fund which provides for the holding of an annual conference for Canadian Theological Students. She read pieces from a speech by Howard Mills on Theological Education and Ecumenism in the 21st century.

Dinner was at St Andrews United Church on Bloor. The student walked to the church and had an experience of urban ministry. A participant of last year’s CTSA conference in Edmonton was around to serve the delegates.

At 7:00 PM Charles Fensham presented the keynote giving an overview of the presentations and exploring with the delegates and guests the theme of Rebuilding the Commons: Missional Theology in an Interfaith World. He explained the various concepts around mission and evangelism in a pluralistic and interfaith world.

**Day Two Friday May 2 :**

The group accompanied by Prof Fensham and Rafael Vallejo were met by interns at the Romero House at 1558 Bloor St.West. They were given a tour of the apartments that were part of Romero House and were given a history of the organization and its work with refugees of all faiths. <http://www.romerohouse.org/>.

Romero House was founded by Mary Jo Leddy , writer leader and advocate and recipient of the Order of Canada. (see Appendix 1) It welcomes refugees from all over the world – men, women and children, and families.It respects and welcomes all regardless of race, religion, political opinion, gender, sexual orientation or membership in a particular social group. Most of the residents of Romero House are refugees who are making a refugee claim within Canada’s refugee determination system. However, they also accept some sponsored refugees (government or private sponsorships) who have special needs.

Romero House was named after Bishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez (15 August 1917 – 24 March 1980) bishop of the Catholic Church in El Salvador who during his lifetime spoke out against poverty, social injustice, assassinations and torture. Romero himself was assassinated while celebrating Mass in 1980.

From Romero House the group took the subway back to the University of Toronto Multifaith Center to attend JUMMA: a Friday midday worship. Most of the prayers were in Arabic but the preaching was in English. The theme of the afternoon was Repentance and the Ramadan.

After worship they were given a brief history of the Center by its director Richard Chambers. He explained how U of T understands the idea of “open secularism”. [http://www.emmanuel.utoronto.ca/Assets/EmmCollege+Digital+Assets/EC+Newsletter/EC+Winter+2012+Revised.pdf?method=1](http://www.emmanuel.utoronto.ca/Assets/EmmCollege%2BDigital%2BAssets/EC%2BNewsletter/EC%2BWinter%2B2012%2BRevised.pdf?method=1)

The Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Toronto accommodates a variety of spiritual and faith-based practices, and encourages interfaith dialogue and spiritual development as part of the learning experience for all students. (See Appendix 2)

Later in the afternoon the group had a debrief of their structured learning experience with Prof Fensham. He then led the group with a discussion around Mission and Rebuilding the Commons.

Catholic students went to attend the afternoon mass at St. Basil’s on the University of Toronto campus.

In the evening the delegates had an opportunity to listen to an interfaith panel made up of : Dr Karen Hamilton (Christian) Evan Smith (Aboriginal) Zul Kassamali (Islam) Geoffrey Cameron (Baha’i) and moderated by Prof Fensham.

**Day 3 Saturday May 3** :

Morning worship was led by LPC member Deb McGinnis. The delegates debriefed the first two days of the conference and continued their own discussion of Mission in an interfaith world. The Annual Business Meeting was held with the election of a new set of officers and regional representatives. Elected were Deb McGinnis (Chair) Anu Rawana (Secretary) Fraser Williamson (Treasurer). The Regional representatives elected were Kate Fisher ( Pacific) Anu Rawana (Prairies) Fraser (Ontario ) Deb McGinnis( Toronto) Lucien Vallee (Quebec) and Samantha West (Atlantic).

The delegates went to attend an “aarti” at the BAPS Mandir temple of the Gujarati Hindu Community in Toronto (See Appendix 3) . The group drove to a local restaurant for an Indian Buffet lunch. The afternoon was free time for students to do a city tour and shopping. Some students went to the big Book Sale at Regis College.

During the final dinner/banquet there were simple turnover ceremonies between the old and the new NPC.

**Day Four Sunday May 4** :

The group met one last time at the chapel for a thanksgiving and closing service . Peter Noteboom of the CCC thanked the participants for their work at the conference. Delegates were helped to find their way to Pearson International Airport to take their flights in the afternoon.

A total of 14 students attended the CTSA 2014 conference : Emily Jarett (Vancouver School of Theology), Nicole Reid (Knox College), Sandra Jenkinson (Emmanuel College) Kate Fisher (Vancouver School of Theology) Anupama Ranawana (Newman College, Edmonton) Collette Saunders (Sandy Saulteaux Center, Winnipeg) Lucien Vallee ( Institut Pastorale Dominicaines) Jean Daniel Williams (University of Montreal) Fraser Williamson (Emmanuel College) Deborah McGinnis (Emmanuel College) Joanne Scofield (Emmanuel College), Samantha West (Atlantic School of Theology) Erica Rodrigues (Regis College, Toronto) and Rafael Vallejo (Conference Coordinator).

Prepared by: Rafael Vallejo

**Appendix 1:**

**Excerpt from *The Other Face of God* by Mary Jo Leddy, Romero House Toronto**

If you ask me, as if your life depended on it, “Do you believe in God?”, I would think twice and answer: Yes, I do believe because I have seen a young woman’s face and her name is Teresita Cedillos.

If you turned to me and asked me whether it was possible to be faithful, I would see that you have seen too much to be sure of that anymore. I would look at you and say that fidelity is real because I have known a woman who has struggled for twenty years to bring her husband home. Her name is Hidat Mosa.

If you held my hand and whispered, wondering if we could change, I would place my other hand over yours and say: Yes, because I was changed when I met a woman with a white leg and a man who slept with his briefcase. Her name was Deequa and his name was Gugan.

If you sat beside me and asked me whether life could be meaningful, I would look ahead and say, for sure, as sure as I know the name of Osman Omar and Clara Alvarez who hung on for dear life.

If you settled down to this pure question and asked me whether we could dream of peace, I would say yes dream on for there is a little street called Wanda Road where strangers sometimes become neighbours.

If you pursued this question and asked whether I had seen the evil in the world, I would answer yes but that it had no name and no face.

If you folded your hands into prayer and intoned a most ancient question, do you believe in Jesus Christ? I would cross my heart and say, yes because a Muslim man helped me help a dying man in the middle of the night. His name was Sheik Mohammed.

If you wrung your hands and asked, and what about the Church? Can We be faithful as scandal piles upon scandal? We must I would say, that is what I learned from a man by the name of Augustin who survived the Rwandan genocide.

If you breathed deeply and asked the question that had been on your mind from the beginning, “Have you seen the face of God?” I would reply

Yes. Almost. Always.

Teresita, Hidat, Deequa, Gugan, Osman, Clara, Sheik Mohammed and Augustin – these are some of the strangers with foreign names who have guided me on a new path to God. As I repeat their names, like beads on a rosary, I see their faces and I remember the first time I saw them and was faced. Strangers and foreigners, they are also newcomers who offer us the blessing of newness, a new way of seeing ourselves, the culture we live in and our church.

These are some of the refugees I have lived with for the past twenty years. We have become neighbours together and I have seen their faces, the landscapes of their particular stories and I have learned their names. In the process I have discovered the burden and the blessing of my own calling as a human being and as a Christian. Through their eyes I have seen the culture of North American and a church that is better than we think and worse than we know.

Where you live determines what you see. The people you listen to affect what you hear.

**Appendix 2: The Multi-Faith Center at the University of Toronto**

The purpose of the Multi-Faith Centre is to support the spiritual well-being of students, staff and faculty and to increase our understanding of and respect for religious beliefs and practices. It does so by providing opportunities for members of the community to reflect, worship, contemplate, teach and learn, read and study, celebrate, mourn, engage in dialogue and interact on a daily basis.

* To provide facilities and related services to support the religious and spiritual practices of faith communities represented at the University of Toronto.
* To nurture spiritual development through the provision of counselling and guidance, resources and an environment that values spirituality.
* To further our understanding of the role faith and religion play in a number of academic disciplines.
* To celebrate the diversity of the University of Toronto community and to benefit from the richness of our differences; and
* To contribute to an end to religious conflict worldwide by providing opportunities for members of different faiths to interact, learn from and respect each other.

The remarkable diversity of the student population of the University of Toronto has added a new dimension to campus life. Many students today bring with them to the University not only the cultural traditions and expectations in which they were raised, but a set of spiritual beliefs that acts as an important part of a student’s identity and further development. At the same time, the study of religion and spirituality are being recognized in many academic disciplines as holding the answers to some of today’s most complex problems.

The University of Toronto is, of course, a secular institution. Its students and staff, however, are not necessarily easily defined as secular members. Institutions across North America have been grappling with the issue of how to accommodate the spiritual needs of their students and create opportunities for interfaith dialogue and exploration, while remaining true to their secular mandates.

It has been suggested that to dismiss the spiritual needs of students and to push religion to the margins of campus life not only wastes a valuable educational opportunity, but may alienate students from the institution. For students from communities outside of the traditional Judeo-Christian spectrum, the absence of space and scheduling accommodations which acknowledge their spiritual practices means their disaffection is even more acute. Further, members of many religious groups point to a link between spiritual development and academic success for students; this relationship is only fully realized when students’ spiritual needs are recognized and respected in the academic context.

The solution to accommodating burgeoning diversity and interest in spirituality at many North American universities has been to create so-called multi-faith spaces – facilities dedicated to no one faith or religion, but designed to both accommodate spiritual practice and to facilitate dialogue.

Perhaps nowhere has spiritual pluralism been more pronounced than at the University of Toronto. For a decade or more, members of this community have drawn attention to the need for facilities and initiatives to address inequities in the way religious needs and practices are accommodated.

In 1999-2000, the University recognized some 35 different student clubs dedicated to religious and spiritual practice. The Campus Chaplains’ Association has grown to include spiritual leaders of more than 20 denominations, including all of the world’s major religions, and is believed to be the most diverse organization of its kind.

Given the historical relationships between the U of T’s federated colleges and Christian churches, there has emerged, quite naturally, some concern for equity among non-Christian groups. This has taken the form, primarily, of the demand for prayer and worship space on campus.

**Appendix 3: BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Toronto**

This Hindu Mandir (place of worship) has become the focus of interest and wonder for local citizens and visitors to Toronto. The complex consists of the first traditional hand carved Hindu Mandir, Haveli and the Heritage Museum.

The fusion of traditional Indian architecture with modern technology has attracted people from all walks of life; including students on field trips, accomplished architects and engineers and visitors from all over the world who come to enjoy the experience. All visitors have been awestruck by the unique architecture and the detailed intricacy of the carvings.

The Mandir is a masterpiece of intricate design and workmanship of ancient Indian arts, traditions and philosophy. The Mandir was constructed in a record 18 months. It is a testimony to the sheer dedication and devotion of over 400 volunteers.

Visitors come to the Mandir to experience Hinduism and the peace and tranquility the sacred Mandir and murtis provide. Together with the Mandir, the Heritage Museum showcases the history and culture of the Indo-Canadian diaspora. With a central theme of "Unity in Diversity" the museum's aim is to educate the public through a myriad of creative and visually stunning exhibits.

Festivals are celebrated on a grand scale at the Mandir, which include Diwali & Annakut, Swaminarayan Jayanti, Ram Navmi, Janmashtmi, Shivratri, Holi and Ganesh Chaturti. Diwali and Annkut celebrations which take place toward the end of October or into early November are among the most grand festivals of the year. We encourage everyone to join us during this auspicious time of year.

The Mandir also facilitates numerous activities for young and old. The annual walk-a-thon helps to foster and ignite a spirit of service into the community. In fall, doctors also provide voluntary services at the Annual Health Fair providing free consultations in a myriad of medical fields.

On July 22, 2007 the Mandir was dedicated to the people of Canada by the spiritual leader of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha and the inspirer, His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Present at the dedication ceremony were: The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, Hon. Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario, His Excellency Rajamanjinarayan, High Commissioner of India to Canada and Mayor David Miller, Mayor of Toronto.