

Report on the Consultation on Conciliar Ecumenism

Saydat El Jabal, Lebanon

February 5–11, 2012

I. Introduction

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.”
(Ephesians 4:4-6a)

Within the one ecumenical movement, councils of churches serve as the most prevalent and significant expressions of the engagement of the churches in their common calling to unity and common witness and service. Of different origins, composition and structures, and with different areas of engagement, councils nevertheless share together an important ecumenical vocation of fellowship, engagement in common witness and advancing towards visible unity for the churches within a particular place.

The Consultation on Conciliar Ecumenism held at Saydat El Jabal, Lebanon from February 5–11, 2012 brought together 43 participants representing 32 different councils, including the World Council of Churches. Each region of the world – Africa, Caribbean, Latin America, North America, Europe, Asia, Pacific, and the Middle East – was represented by conciliar leadership either regionally or nationally.

The consultation situates itself within a rich history of such meetings. Previous gatherings of Regional Ecumenical Organization (REO) and National Council of Churches (NCC) leadership had been convened by the World Council of Churches in 1971, 1986 and 1997. As in previous gatherings, this consultation sought to examine the theological basis for councils, the different roles of councils in various contexts, cross-cutting themes and areas of engagement, and future directions and vision, all within the framework of understanding the current ecumenical landscape in which we live.

It is significant that this meeting was held in Lebanon. The Middle East region reflects our common heritage as Christians. It is a region of great complexity and which presently faces numerous challenges. Even as the participants met, we were aware of the growing crisis in nearby Syria where violence and political instability threatens the very fabric of life for all. Participants in the consultation came to offer their solidarity with the region and particularly the Middle East Council of Churches as it seeks to offer ecumenical witness and hope.