

## MEETING WITH EVANGELICALS ON JUNE 10-11, 2013, WASHINGTON DC

The fifth meeting with Evangelical leaders took place in Washington, DC from June 10-11. Forty-one persons attended from all over the United States. The NCS delegation included: Rabbis Alvin Berkun, David Sandmel, Gilbert S. Rosenthal, and Jeffrey Wohlberg. The conclave discussed three papers that had been sent out in advance of the meeting: “An Evangelical Statement on the Jewish People,” “A Jewish Statement on Evangelical Christianity,” and “Proposed Guidelines for Evangelical-Jewish Conversations about the Israel-Palestine Conflict.” The participants met in breakout groups for discussions of the three papers after which recorders summarized the discussions for the plenum.

The “Evangelical Statement on the Jewish People” expressed the deep sorrow that the Christian church has throughout history frequently treated Jews with contempt and subjected them to cruelty. It noted the basic difference between the faiths over the role of Jesus as messiah and appointed way of salvation as well as the different ways of reading the *Tanakh*. It recorded the sensitive and painful area of evangelization. It also took note of the concept of supersessionism—that Christianity had displaced Judaism in the eyes of God, at the same time stressing the view of Paul (Romans 9-11) that Jews are part of the divine plan and the role that the land of Israel will play in the final eschaton. The faiths share a commitment to work to help those who suffer poverty and injustice and to live in accord with the will of God. Moreover, Evangelicals welcome the opportunity for dialogue and look forward to further conversations and instruction in the future.

The “Jewish Statement on Evangelical Christianity” stressed the impact of the *Shoah* on Christian-Jewish relations and how it precipitated one of the greatest theological revolutions in the history of Christianity, affecting both Catholics and Protestants. The Christian-Jewish encounter in America enjoys an unimaginable environment for the flourishing of a new relationship. We need to understand and respect what each faith group stands for; that Judaism is an amalgam of God, peoplehood, Torah, *mitzvot* and land; that Christianity is a monotheistic faith that has brought knowledge of one God to countless people as well as the sacred Scriptures. Both must pursue justice and righteousness grounded in the common belief that the one God created all humanity in the divine image.

The “Proposed Guideline for Evangelical-Jewish Conversation” about the Israel-Palestine Conflict” emphasized that criticism of policies of the Jewish state must not be taken as a challenge of its right to exist. At the same time, some Christian theological support of the state is problematic for Jews and Christians. All recognize the suffering of all the peoples in the Middle East and that not all criticism of Israel should be viewed as antisemitic. But there are some critics of the state who challenge the legitimacy of the state and inject classic anti-Jewish rhetoric, motifs and stereotypes. Moreover, some critics of Israel apply double standards in their criticisms and hold Israel to a higher moral level while ignoring similar practices in others. Christians need to understand that for the vast majority of the Jewish people, there is neither theological nor religious significance to Zionism or the State of Israel. They also need to understand the fragility of Jewish existence and the complexity of the Jewish and Israeli circumstance. Christians should place their criticisms in the context of Israel’s right to exist as sovereign in a

portion of the ancient homeland in a rough neighborhood. Conversation and good relations between us might benefit Jews and Christians in Israel and in the Palestinian territories.

On the second day of the conference, Rabbi Yehiel Poupko, Prof. Richard Mouw, and Rev. David Neff taught texts and discussed the meaning of the Sabbath in Jewish and Evangelical tradition. The final session was devoted to a critique of the conference and proposed subjects for the future meeting next year.