

7 July 2017
Mayor Dennis O'Keefe
City Hall
St John's

Dear Mayor O'Keefe

At a recent meeting of the Executive Committee of the St John's and Area Council of Churches we reflected on our activities during the past year. Concern was expressed that the City of St John's declined an invitation to express support for the Week of Christian Unity in January 2017.

The St John's and Area Council of Churches was organized in 1998 for the purpose of giving expression to the fundamental unity of the several Christian denominations in our community. We are a founding sponsor and continue to be one of the sponsors of the Annual Jewish/Christian/Muslim Dialogue that had been taking place for many years. We also have a positive relationship with many of the other faith communities in our area.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an international observance, and is supported by Christian denominations throughout the world. It is traditionally observed in January of each year. For several years, the St John's and Area Council of Churches has followed the practice of having a Proclamation supporting the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity signed alternately by the Premier of the Province and the Mayor of St John's.

Premiers Williams and Dunderdale have signed Proclamations, and In 2016 the Proclamation was signed by Premier Ball. (Premier Davis was not in office when it would have been his "turn" to sign. Previous Mayors of St John's, and you have also signed the Proclamation "in turn". Following our practice, we submitted a request that the Proclamation for 2017 be signed by the Mayor of St John's. Arrangements were made and the draft Proclamation was submitted to your office. We arranged for Executive Members to attend a Council Meeting to witness the signing of the Proclamation, as had been done in previous years.

A few days prior to the designated date for the signing, I received a telephone call advising that the policy of the City has changed, and that there would be no signing or expression of support for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Needless to say, we were disappointed. Our activities went ahead without the expression of support by the City of St John's. Our major event was held at St Pius X Roman Catholic Church with Roman Catholic Archbishop Martin Currie and Anglican Bishop Geoff Peddle as the main speakers. Leaders of other Christian denominations also participated.

The St John's and Area Council of Churches provides an avenue of communication with the Canadian Council of Churches (established in 1944) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). (The WCC is a fellowship of some 348 member churches representing more than half a billion Christians in all regions of the world. The WCC has its roots in the 19th century and international conferences held in 1910, 1927 and 1937-38. It formally came into being at a conference in Amsterdam in 1948.)

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an opportunity to remind Christians at least once a year of Jesus' prayer for His disciples that "they may be one so that the world may believe" (cf John 17:21).

On behalf of the St John's and Area Council of Churches, I solicit your comments on the reason the City of St John's declined to sign a Proclamation in support of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. I would also ask that you provide us with a copy of the City's policy on this matter for our future guidance.

Sincerely,

George H Powell, President
St John's and Area Council of Churches

Copies to City Manager
 Deputy Mayor Ron Ellsworth
 Councillor Danny Breen
 Councillor Jonathan Galgay
 Councillor Bruce Tilley
 Councillor Sheilagh O'Leary
 Councillor Wally Collins
 Councillor Tom Hann
 Councillor Sandy Hickman
 Councillor Dave Lane
 Councillor Art Puddister
 Leaders of Christian Denominations