

U.S. church council renews call for common Easter

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Toronto, Canada, March 11 (ENInews)--Many Christians need to check the calendar for a reminder of the date for Easter in any given year. Adding to the confusion is the fact that Orthodox Christians usually mark Easter -- the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ -- on a different Sunday than western churches.

Some church leaders in the United States are promoting a decades-old idea of not only western and Orthodox Christians sharing a common Easter, but celebrating the holy day on a fixed date every year. (This year, due to a quirk in the western and Orthodox calendars and moon phases, Easter will be observed on the same Sunday in all Christian traditions: 24 April.)

The National Council of Churches in the United States made the proposal for a common Easter in a letter to member churches on 10 March. It is way, they argue, of effectively encouraging common witness to the "resurrection we proclaim."

The letter, signed by NCC general secretary, Rev. Michael Kinnamon, and Antonios Kireopoulos, the NCC's associate general secretary for Faith and Order and Interfaith Relations, noted, "almost every year the Christian community is divided over which day to proclaim this Good News (Easter). Our split, based on a dispute having to do with ancient calendars, visibly betrays the message of reconciliation."

The idea of a common Easter is not new; Kinnamon notes in the letter that it has been on the ecumenical agenda since a 1920 encyclical of the ecumenical patriarchate of Constantinople. A 1997 meeting between the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches in Aleppo, Syria, made recommendations on how best to achieve a common date for Easter, including:

-- adhere to the decision of the first ecumenical council at Nicea to celebrate Easter on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox, which

would preserve the biblical association between Christ's death and Passover;
-- agree to use current scientific methods to analyze the astronomical data (which is consistent with Nicea); and
-- use the meridian of Jerusalem (the place where Christ died and was resurrected) as the point of reference for these calculations.

The NCC letter acknowledges that churches will need to educate and be sensitive to their members when discussing the idea of a common Easter. Kinnamon and Kireopoulos urge churches to pray about the issue and suggested it would be discussed at the September meeting of the NCC's governing board.

Full text of NCC letter: www.ncccusa.org/news/110310easteragain.html