

Conference of European Churches

Minutes from the TRG on Bioethics meeting

November 7-8th 2016

Strasbourg

Participated: Dr Ulrik Becker Nissen (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark); Dr Murdo Macdonald (Church of Scotland); Ms Julija Vidovic (Serbian Orthodox Church); Prof Luca Savarino (Waldensian Church in Italy); Rev Dr Brendan McCarthy (Church of England);

Were unable to attend: Rev Dr Jean Boboc (Romanian Orthodox Church), Dr Andrea Dörries (Evangelical Church in Germany); Bishop Makarios of Christopolis (Ecumenical Patriarchate); Rev Dr Miriam Prasilova (Silesian Evangelical Church A.C. in the Czech Republic); Mr Meego Rimmel (Estonian Council of Churches);

1. **Welcome and opening prayers** by Murdo
2. **Adoption of the Minutes of the last meeting** (14-15 March 2016)

Item 3: Re Official church statements on bioethical matters: Maria informed that there is a platform that gathers church statements on bioethics (www.globethics.net) and that CPCE has its own stock of statements in that matter. The group decided that a letter should be sent to CEC member churches encouraging them to send their statements on bioethical issues. Some have already posted documents on www.globethics.net

Action: Encourage member churches to ensure relevant documents are posted

Item 6: Working with the European political and legal bodies: Julia will attend DH-BIO meeting in December on behalf of CEC and its TRG on Bioethics.

3. **Possible Skype call to CEC General Secretary:** It was regrettable that this was unable to take place as requested, as members felt this would have been encouragement to the group.

Maria informed the meeting that the appointment of the new secretary in charge of the group should take place soon: the group looked forward to working with this person in the future.

Chair felt that the agenda as circulated should be reordered: moved to **item 7: Work on short reports**. These will be presented to the CEC Governing Board, and circulated to member churches.

Assisted Reproductive techniques (ART): group expressed thanks to Bishop Makarios for his translation of his book on ART, which had been circulated to the group. There was wide ranging discussion around various aspects of the paper. It was felt that, while there was much excellent material and that this was a valuable starting point for discussion, the final paper should be able to be presented to the CEC Governing Board. There is therefore a need for a variety of voices to be represented in the different faith traditions within our constituency.

Some specific points were raised and discussed at length. There is a need to be distinctive and also pastoral, and to speak to audiences both within and outside the church(es). It was agreed that Luca and Ulrik, who were part of the working group, would work further on this. Luca drafts the first version and sends it to the whole TRG for comments. It is planned that this paper will be considered at the next meeting of the group.

Action: Luca/ Ulrik

Gene editing: Again it was felt that, although there is much of value in the paper, some further work is still required. The paper needs to be more logically ordered, and clear theological, anthropological, and philosophical strands need to be woven through it. There was discussion around aspects of where the technologies might be deployed, as well as potential future uses in enhancement. There was a concern that a distinctive Christian voice be involved in helping ensure that the vulnerable in our societies are cared for.

It was agreed that Ulrik would write to the TRG group, asking that any comments or suggested changes be submitted to Murdo by 1st February 2017, in order that the paper be close to a final draft for our March meeting. This would then agree the text which would be submitted by end May, for circulation for CEC Governing Board in June 2017.

Action: All to submit changes to Murdo by end Jan 2017

Murdo to circulate revised draft to TRG by 27th Feb

Maria to pass finalised report to CEC for Governing Board following our March meeting

Conference: At a previous meeting it had been agreed that the TRG would organise a conference. There was extensive discussion at the meeting, and it was decided that we should plan to hold a conference with the theme of “Gene Editing”. This would take place in Strasbourg in November 2017 (7th-8th), and should include keynote speakers from a scientific, theological and socio- legal perspective. Our audience will be representatives of CEC member churches (as well as some other key specialists in the matter), and we will aim for 30- 40 participants.

- Maria and Ulrik will investigate budgets
- Brendan, Ulrik, Julija and others will approach speakers
- Brendan will circulate a 200 word abstract describing aims of the conference
 - **Will send to Maria by Nov 18th**
- will plan to produce a book for CEC General Assembly in Autumn 2018

An outline plan was discussed:

- Mon 6th Nov: TRG will meet from 2pm
- Conference: 9.30am Tue 7th – 3pm Wed 8th Nov
- Wed 8th Nov: TRG to meet 3.30- 5pm for debrief

There will be two scientific talks, one describing techniques, and the other discussing motivations. At least two distinct theological voices, as well as legal and/or societal expert. We will return to the more detailed planning of the conference, when we meet in March 2017.

Agenda item 6: working with European political and legal bodies: nothing to add

8: Meetings where CEC presence could be beneficial:

- Julija will attend **DH-BIO** Dec 5-7th 2016. It is anticipated that the new secretary will be in post to attend meeting in June
- **London Festival of Genomics** (Jan 31- Feb 1): It was felt that, although this may be of interest to some members of the group, there was not any way in which the TRG could be officially involved.

4. Update on what is going on in our constituencies:

Luca: Italian Parliament has passed legislation permitting same sex civil unions; legally, adoption of step children is only allowed in marriage contexts, though some courts are allowing within same sex partnership

There has been controversy around a poster for "Fertility Day"; there has also been discussion within Roman Catholic Church about Papal stance on the family. Waldensian church document on end of life/ assisted dying issues being updated.

Murdo: Non- invasive prenatal testing (NIPT) is being adopted within **UK** health service, and there has been some concern, especially in regard to Down's syndrome pregnancies.

Ulrik: Discussion in **Denmark** around whose responsibility to decide on foetal reduction in multiple IVF pregnancies: ethics committee divided on this. Later this month there will be a parliamentary hearing on use of CRISPR in plants, animals and humans; also debate around whether meat from animals which have been fed on GMO feedstocks should be labelled. Controversy in media over euthanasia and assisted dying leading to some MPs calling for changes in law.

Brendan: **UK** Upper House of Parliament (House of Lords) has discussed proposals to remove "severe handicap" as a reason for termination from 1967 Abortion Act; this is on basis of disability equality. Also probable that limit on experimentation on human embryos will be raised from 1990 limit of 14 days to 18 or 21 days. Public consultation on this likely in early 2017.

Julija: Serbia: intense societal debate around LGBT issues, though no legislative change currently in train. Conference organised by European Society for Philosophy of Medicine and Healthcare (ESPMH) in Belgrade ("Emerging Technologies in Healthcare" <http://espmh.org/>) 16 - 19 August, 2017.

Crete: Orthodox Council in June- there hasn't been one since 787. This was mainly on liturgical issues, but bioethics also featured.

5. Feedback on events attended: Will return to this in spring meeting

**9. Dates of next meetings: 13- 14th March 2017 (as previously agreed)
6- 8th November 2017 (see above)**

10: Miscellaneous: Asked whether should stay in hostel (CIARUS) rather than hotel, but Maria explained it is not possible.

11. Closing Prayer: Brendan led in Lord's Prayer as we departed.

Appendix 1

Conference of European Churches

Thematic Reference Group on Bioethics

Strasbourg, Monday 7 – Tuesday 8 November 2016

Draft Agenda

Working times: Monday 14h-18h30 - Tuesday 09h-12h

1. Welcome and opening prayers
2. Adoption of the Minutes of the last meeting
3. Possible Skype Call with the General Secretary of CEC on Tuesday morning (TBC)
4. What is going on in our constituencies (part of Europe, churches, country, international institutions we are related to...)
5. Feedback on :
 - a. Consultation on the Guide to the Ethics of Reproductive Medicine from the Council of CPCE (Community of Protestant Churches in Europe) on 16–18 March 2016 in Loccum, Germany
 - b. European Seminar Labour Right to the integrity of the person - 6 - 7 October, Brussels (Julija Vidovic)
6. Working with the European political and legal bodies (any initiatives we should be aware of?)
7. Work on a series of short reports or statements :
 - a. Gene Editing
 - b. Assisted Reproductive Techniques
8. Meetings where CEC presence could be beneficial?
 - a. Festival of genomics: London <http://www.festivalofgenomicslondon.com/>
 - b. DH-BIO
9. Dates of our next meetings
10. Miscellaneous
11. Closing Prayer before departure