

‘You shall be my witnesses’ (Acts 1:8)

Justice – Witness – Hospitality

CEC Assembly 2018

Novi Sad, 31 May – 6 June 2018

Hearings and workshops

A concept note

Aims

The hearings and workshops section of the Assembly will be closely related to the Assembly thematic blocks on justice, witness and hospitality. Its aim is to enhance thematic scope and the participatory modus of the Assembly.

Hearing and workshops will provide an opportunity for raising some particular aspects of the 3 sub-themes of the Assembly: justice, witness and hospitality, especially in their relation to the churches’ discussion on the Future of Europe. They will provide a space for highlighting good examples of churches’ and ecumenical work in these areas, which will contribute to increasing the awareness of work on these themes and highlight the churches’ engagement in society. They will equip delegates of the Assembly for their further consideration of the work programme of CEC for the next period of time.

Form

In order to fulfil the aim, i.e. to strengthen the participative approach, enable discussion and sharing, as well as to highlight specific features of churches’ work and the need for justice, witness and hospitality in Europe, the Assembly will offer the possibility of organising both, hearings as well as workshops. The particular form of events organised in this section of the Assembly will be specified in the description of each event and will be decided upon by the organiser of the event.

Timing and the scope

Hearings and workshops will take place in 2 consecutive sessions during the first two days of the Assembly. The venue of the Assembly offers the possibility of organising parallel events in up to 8 different places. This provides the opportunity for up to 16 hearings/workshops with different thematic accents.

Responsibility for organisation

The key responsibility for organising workshops and hearings will be with the existing CEC Thematic Reference Groups, networks as ECEN and CALL, and with CCME.

Participation and involvement of CEC Member Churches and partner organisations

CEC Member Churches and partner organisations are invited to participate. They are invited to contribute to one or more offered thematic events in the list below. Following the selection process, it will be up to the organiser of each respective hearing or workshop to find a way which will result in a fair and enriching input, and a contribution to the event from the organisation or church offering the contribution.

Others

There will be as well the possibility for CEC Member Churches and partner organisations to contribute to the exhibition, which will be highlighting good examples and churches’ work

related to the Assembly theme, and which will be displayed in the Assembly venue during the Assembly.

Workshops and hearings offered at the Assembly as of 28th September 2017

Thematic workshops and hearings will be organised with the following themes:

1. Social imbalances in Europe – Reflections on challenges for Societies and our Churches

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group on Employment and Social Issues

A reflection paper on social imbalances in Europe will be presented, which played a role in recent years in undermining democracy and has diminished social cohesion in many countries in Europe. As the CEC Constitution defines, CEC “will work towards building a humane, social and sustainable Europe at peace with itself” (Art. 2) the discussion about social imbalances is a central part of CEC’s mission. The CEC reflection paper seeks to formulate a theological CEC perspective on inequalities, describes and analyses some case studies and the in-depth consequences of specific existing inequalities. Finally, recommendations to CEC Member Churches are presented. The workshop will discuss the findings and reflections of the CEC reflection paper to enhance its scope, strengthen its reflections and discuss it with the CEC constituency.

2. What will be the world of work tomorrow? Discussion on digitalisation and the churches reflection on “good work”

Responsible: CEC’s Church Action on Labour and Life network

Work, labour, employment is one of the most significant determining factors of modern life. With the process of digitalisation it is going again through a far-reaching transformation. CEC’s CALL network has worked on Christian reflections about this transformation, based on the tradition that Churches are calling for good and decent work which relates to the dignity of the human being, created in the image of the triune God. CALL contributes by this discussion also to the preparation of the 100 years jubilee of the International Labour Organisation. The workshop will introduce the analysis and the reasoning of CALL to open a debate which will enrich CALL’s analysis and reasoning and will ensure that work as a determinant of human life is a recognized part of CEC’s discussion on the future of Europe.

3. Persecution of Christians: situation in Syria and Iraq

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group on human rights

On 3 February 2016 the European Parliament adopted the resolution on systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called ISIS/Daesh. The religious and various ethnic minorities in Syria and Iraq are continually and systematically facing slaughtering, abduction and torture; many are enslaved or killed (especially women and children who are subjected to different forms of sexual violence or have been victims of forced marriages or human trafficking) etc. Among all these brutalities churches places of worship, mosques, shrines, commentaries are intentionally vandalised and burned. The hearing will explore what churches can do more to address the permanent violation of human rights in Syria and Iraq vis-à-vis International organizations such as the UN, CoE, EU and OSCE?

4. Freedom of Religion or Belief brings Justice for Minorities and Majorities

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group on human rights

The hearing will address the violation of religious freedom in Europe that CEC Member Churches are facing with in their life and work, whether they are a minority or majority.

During the hearing there should be stock-taking of the current challenges and discussion on how CEC can assist as much as possible its members in helping them to address their issues vis-à-vis international institutions in the most effective way. Issues such as access to worship places, property rights, registration, state financing etc. are just some of many challenges that many churches in Europe are still facing. The shrinking space for civil society and the role of religion in the public sphere will be also part of the discussion.

5. Witness to Climate Change and efforts for sustainable future

Responsible: European Christian Environmental Network

Continuing climate change is becoming an increasing urgency and one of the key challenges of the 21st century. The outcomes of the Paris climate conference in 2015 offer a frame for global efforts to address the issue in a concerted way and through political efforts of governments throughout the globe. Countries in Europe and especially the European Union are important players in these efforts. Growing number of churches, ecumenical organisations and individual Christians contribute to addressing climate change through their work in advocacy, dialogue with political decision makers and through a great number of projects on national, regional and local levels. The hearing will offer the space for rising awareness, intensive sharing and discussion leading to strengthening of a joint churches' voice and visibility of churches' action in addressing climate change.

6. Promoting economic and ecological justice in and by Europe

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group Economic and Ecological Justice

Our relations with nature and with each other have become profoundly unjust. In acquiring great economic wealth we have caused damage to creation that sustains us; with both climate change and loss of natural biodiversity risking chaos to life on earth. And we have not shared the great wealth we have acquired equally. Both within countries, across Europe and around the world we have created great and systematic inequalities of wealth. Poverty exists alongside affluence within communities at every geographical scale. This indifference to nature and to each other is an affront to God. Economic and ecological justice has to find a way on how to face the current injustices. We believe that it is possible. Sharing of experiences, increasing of partnerships and contributions which will enhance the motivation for churches' action will be part of the discussion in the workshop.

7. Ecumenical fellowship of churches: How is it relevant for the Conference of European Churches today?

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group Ecclesiology and Theological Dialogue

The Conference of European Churches is “an ecumenical fellowship of Churches in Europe which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. The members of CEC, therefore, “seek [...] to pursue together the path of growing conciliar understanding [...] to continue to grow in a fellowship of faith, hope and love [...] to make a common contribution to the mission of the Church, to the safeguarding of life and the well-being of all humankind [...] to share their spiritual life, to strengthen their common witness and service and to promote the unity of the Church and peace in the world.” *Charta Œcumenica* underlines that “European Churches have a responsibility to call each other to a life of reconciliation as an expression of Christian unity and for the sake of the well-being of Europe and the world” (CEC's *Constitution*, Preamble, p.1).

In view of these affirmations, how is ecumenical fellowship perceived and expressed by the members of CEC? What have been the recent achievements of ecumenical dialogue in this respect on the European level, and what are the issues that still divide the Churches? In what ways is the visible unity of the Church relevant for the life of CEC?

8. Interreligious work in the face of migration in Europe

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group Ecclesiology and Theological Dialogue.

Organised in cooperation with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, the Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation Programme of the World Council of Churches, and the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

Churches in Europe involved in interreligious work can offer a timely and meaningful contribution vis-à-vis the challenges of the current migration situation and increased political polarisation in Europe. Interfaith engagement may offer a remedy to the rising Islamophobia, antisemitism and racism. Facing fears and adequately addressing them is a significant concern for Christians in Europe at the present time. Engaging in interreligious work and theological reflection can contribute to overcoming them. The session will address concerns of the Churches in Europe with regard to interreligious work, and explore the interreligious aspects of migration from both practical and theological perspectives.

9. Refugee protection – a task of the churches

Responsible: Churches' Commission in Migrants in Europe

The workshop will briefly examine the biblical foundation of the work of churches in support of refugees. It will then highlight a few examples of how churches in Europe reacted to the refugee arrivals in 2015 and the following years. It will then examine future challenges in refugee protection, e.g. a possible need to revisit the internationally accepted definition of refugees or the challenge posed by increasing externalisation of refugee protection to the borders of Europe.

10. Ecclesiology in times of migration

Responsible: Churches' Commission in Migrants in Europe

Organised in cooperation with CEC Thematic Reference Group on ecclesiology and theological dialogue.

The workshop will explore how the character of churches in Europe is being shaped by the reality of migration. It will examine some of the results of the consultation “Being a Church in Europe Today: Migration and Ecclesiology”, of December 2016. The European response to the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* developed at the consultation will be reviewed. This workshop will contribute spiritual, pastoral, and theological perspectives on migration to the important global dialogue on what it means to be a Church.

11. Democracy and populism

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group education for democratic citizenship

12. Possibly 2nd workshop by TRG education for democratic citizenship

13. The role of religion in Peace and Conflict

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group Peacebuilding & Reconciliation

Research shows that religiously defined conflicts have been on the rise in the last four decades. At the same time, there is a rise of religious fundamentalism and religiously justified violence. Among other factors, religious identity makes conflicts hard to resolve. Churches have also been involved in conflicts, thus compromising their prophetic witness. This makes

the healing of memories even more difficult to achieve. On the other hand, churches and religious leaders or communities have played a crucial role in building bridges and paving the way for sustainable peace. The workshop will explore the biblical and theological metaphor of the Reign of God as the theological underpinning of the work of churches in witnessing peace in their daily life. It will also examine the promotion of justice and hospitality for a sustainable future of Europe. Lastly, it will demonstrate how a change of mind and heart (*metanoia*) is needed so that churches in Europe commit anew to their calling for peace and reconciliation demonstrating actively their witness to Christ and promoting justice and hospitality.

14. Just war – Just peace

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group Peacebuilding & Reconciliation

Christian Churches rooted in Christ's Cross and Resurrection see themselves as signs of peace and reconciliation into the world. However, Christian approaches to peace and reconciliation vary. The debate over the question in the last decades has led churches to an increasingly common understanding (see Charta Oecumenica, and relevant CEC and WCC declarations), although there are still Christians who hold polarised positions that point to either a cynical realism or an absolutist pacifism with regard to the use of violence in resolving conflict. The session will explore how the recent ecumenical debate on "Just Peace" has been taken up by those Churches that supported the theory of "Just War," the historic Peace Churches that advocate nonviolence and pacifism, and those Churches that do not have a comprehensive theory due to various historical and theological factors. Secondly, it will unpack "Just War and Just Peace" reflection in the context of a theology of conflict resolution. Lastly, the session will elaborate the vision of just peace Church as manifested in key texts and theological reflection of the Churches in Europe taking into consideration important developments worldwide.

15. Bioethics and the development of science. Challenges for the future

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group Bioethics

Biotech and science continue to press the limits of what we can do and at times also the question, what we should do. The normative implications of many scientific developments give rise to fundamental questions related to beginning and end of life issues. The questions and issues have theological, philosophical, societal and anthropological implications that call for a thorough and careful deliberation from the churches. How are the churches to respond to, for example, genome editing? Increasingly efficient prenatal testing? Heated discussions on euthanasia policies? All of these questions touch on and challenge the churches to ponder how to be a church in the light of these scientific developments.

16. The dialogue according to Art. 17 III TFEU: opportunities and challenges

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group on EU policies and legislation

The intention of the Workshop is to present background and structure of the dialogue, to highlight challenges and points for reflection in order to broaden the understanding in CEC Member Churches on this important instrument of political interaction, dialogue and exchange, with the aim of strengthening and enhancing the dialogue between the EU institutions and the Churches.

The CCME ExCom would like to encourage a mainstreaming of the issue of Roma and the churches in the assembly and calls for visibility of Roma e.g. in worship life

TM/28 Sep 2017