

Conference of European Churches

MEETING OF THE 15th ASSEMBLY WORSHIP COMMITTEE

**8-10 May 2017
Novi Sad, Serbia**

Draft minutes

1. Introduction

The Assembly Worship Committee (AWP), elected by the Assembly Planning Committee (APC) of the Conference of European Churches met 8-10 May 2017 in Novi Sad, Serbia.

Moderated by Rev. Sabine Udodesku of the Evangelical Church in Germany, the meeting was attended by members Fr Miodrag Andrič (Serbian Orthodox Church), Dr Marianna Apresyan (Armenian Apostolic Church), Mrs Anna Barton (Church of England and Old Catholic Church of the Czech Republic), Mr Nikos Kosmidis (Church of Greece), Mrs Jooa Sotejeff-Wilson (Orthodox Church of Finland), and Rev. Karin Wiborn (Baptist Union of Sweden).

Attending the meeting as advisers were members of the local planning team Mr Milovan Krstic, Mr Danilo Mihajlovic, and Mr Ivan Vasiljevic (all from the Serbian Orthodox Church). The work of the committee was facilitated by CEC staff Very Reverend Protopresbyter Heikki Theodoros Huttunen and Mr Szabolcs Lörincz.

Apologies were received from committee members Fr Constantin Miron (Ecumenical Patriarchate), Ms Triin Salmu (Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church), and Rev. Canon Dr Leslie Nathaniel (Church of England).

Participants were welcomed to the meeting in the beautiful city of Novi Sad by local worship committee coordinator, Fr Miodrag Andrič and CEC general secretary Fr. Huttunen. The AWP appreciated very much the careful attention and time given by the local committee members who were present during the whole meeting.

After introductions of members the proposed agenda, the purpose and the expected outcome of the meeting was discussed and confirmed: An outline of – and proposals for – the prayer life at the CEC 15th Assembly, to be brought to the APC for their decision. The terms of reference for the work of the committee serve as base for the worship committee's work and a background document.

Fr. Heikki Huttunen reported from the discussions in the APC:

Novi Sad should be a smaller assembly, where prayer, business and different aspects of life come together. After Budapest having been a mainly constitutional assembly, Novi Sad should be about our faith and how we work for our churches. The presence of Christian churches in Europe has changed a lot; some churches are growing because of immigrants; some traditional churches have become minorities; migration has also brought more people of other faiths. Against this background the assembly theme was chosen from Acts 1:8 "You shall be my witnesses" spelled out in the three keywords "witness", "hospitality", and "justice". These keywords will each be the focus on one day of the assembly, complemented

with a fourth word “Europe”. The main theme and the keywords will influence daily prayer, Bible study and deliberations in plenary and group work.

Mr. Szabolcs Lörincz introduced the not yet finalized format and structure of the assembly, informing us that ECEN (European Christian Environmental Network) will also have their assembly at the same time in Novi Sad. There will be some limitations on space and delegates will have to move between the main hotel and the convention centre every day for different types of sessions. Worship services and prayer will be celebrated in different places: Local Churches and congregations, convention centre, hotel meeting rooms, outside squares, and a place near the river-side.

Fr. Andrič introduced the confessions and religious communities active in Novi Sad: The Serbian Orthodox Church is the largest and traditional church of the country, the Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Methodist and Roman-Catholic congregations are much smaller. Jewish and Muslim communities exist as well. Twice a year there are common celebrations, a concert for a humanitarian cause after Christmas and the commemoration of victims in World War II, regular ecumenical gatherings do not exist so far. Separation by language (Hungarian, Croatian, Slovak, Serbian) and nationality is a problem that prevents common worship amongst Protestants. Religious freedom and proselytism seems to be issues that need more discussion. In general people are accustomed to street processions. The local committee will be in touch with all churches and faith communities to participate in worship and celebration.

Against this background the AWC started to imagine and develop the prayer and worship life during the assembly.

2. Worship places

Prayer and worship will happen in the following places:

- Opening/gathering worship in up to 5 churches in the city with a procession from each one to meet on a public square.
- Morning prayer in the Master Centre in the room assigned to worship.
- Midday prayer in the Master Centre plenary room.
- Night prayer in the committee rooms +one for non-committee members in the hotel.
- Sunday morning (Eucharistic) worship in local congregations.
- Sunday afternoon prayer on the banks of the river next to the bridges.
- Closing/sending worship to be defined.

Recommendation: AWC asks APC to agree with the proposed places for prayer.

3. Morning prayer

Morning prayer should happen in a hall in the Master Centre, which will be set up and used for the spiritual life of the assembly. The hall will have a stage and seating capacity for ca. 400 people.

Prayer will be designed every morning according to a different confession (Anglican, Armenian (oriental), Eastern Orthodox, Protestant) including people and, if possible, prayers or songs from other traditions.

The theme of the day will be taken up in the prayer and run through the spiritual life on the day.

The klapalo (a typical Serbian instrument) will call people to prayer.

Recommendation: AWC to further develop the morning prayer.

4. Mid-day prayer

At the end of each plenary there will be a short prayer taking up the theme of the day, silence & a song, prepared by AWC. The klepalo will sound to mark the beginning of the prayer.

Recommendation: AWC to further develop the mid-day prayer.

5. Night prayer

The committee meetings will end with a common inter-confessional prayer prepared by the AWC. The nature of the prayer will be meditative and give thanks for the day; different structures /styles are possible. Songs should be well known. The Lord's Prayer could be said in peoples' own languages. There will be one room in the hotel assigned for non-committee members to come together for the same prayer.

Recommendation: AWC to further develop the evening prayer.

6. Bible Studies

The biblical texts for the day's Bible study will be read as part of the morning prayer.

The AWC proposes a selection of texts relevant to the keywords, as follows:

- **WITNESS:**

Mt 5, 19-45	The Law and the Prophets
James 2:1-17	Faith without Works Is Dead
1 John, 1	The Word of Life; God Is Light
Acts 6-7	The story of Stephen

- **HOSPITALITY:**

Luke 19	Jesus and Zacchaeus
Genesis 18	A Son Promised to Abraham and Sarah

Mark 14:3-11 The Anointing at Bethany
 Mark 6:30-44 Feeding the Five Thousand

- **JUSTICE:**

1 King 21	Naboth's Vineyard
Amos 5	A Lament for Israel's Sin
Isaiah 1,17	The Wickedness of Judah

The bible study should be led by experienced and creative scholars with methodological skills.

Recommendations: AWC asks the APC to review the assembly schedule to allow 30 minutes for prayer and at least 45 minutes for Bible study.

Bible study should be held in plenary, with possible breakup into 4 groups including one with interpretation (in the plenary hall). The worship hall (next to the plenary hall) can be used for some groups. Moving from the Master Centre to the hotel for Bible study in small groups would cost a lot of time.

The AWC needs to know which Bible passages have been chosen for the bible study, in order to continue its work on the daily prayers, and asks the APC how best to go about decision making on this matter.

7. Opening (Gathering) worship service

The opening service will begin with prayers in five congregations (Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed and Roman Catholic), located around the central square. The local priests and pastors, with the assistance of an assembly delegate (recommended by the AWC), will welcome the participants to Novi Sad by delivering small confessional prayers in the languages used by the members of these congregations (Serbian, Slovakian and Hungarian) and, partly, in one of the official CEC languages. The text of the prayers will be available in printed form in all the official languages of the Assembly.

Following these prayers, those present will process from each church towards the main square. Each procession will carry a piece of a bridge symbol; this will be put together upon arrival at the square and form a visible artistic sign of the Assembly, which is expected to be designed and implemented by local artists (preferably college students). In the central square, an ecumenical prayer will officially open the Assembly. Local choirs will be invited to perform hymns and songs.

Recommendation: The AWC asks the APC to approve this general outline for the opening worship. The AWC will then work to develop it further and commission the "bridge".

8. Closing (Sending) worship service

The worship should be inter-confessional and should build on the deliberations and results of the assembly. The newly elected governing board members could be sent out with the blessings of the assembly. The final order will only be established during the assembly itself.

Recommendation: AWC to further develop the closing/sending worship.

9. Peace Prayer near the bridge

The idea of a Prayer for Peace next to the bridges over the Danube river has been taken up and given some thought by the committee. Locally, every year a common prayer is held together with the Jewish community at the memorial next to the Danube river to commemorate the victims of World War II (see Appendix 1).

The Prayer for Peace will be a moment for remembrance (lamentation), doxological thanksgiving (thanks for survival and reconciliation) and of prophetic encouragement (hope). The event will take place close to the monument dedicated to the World War II victims in Novi Sad. It is expected that representatives of the Jewish and Muslim minority will be invited to participate as well. In addition, the Assembly Worship Committee suggests that this prayer event will also commemorate the recent past of the wider region as a challenging time for unity in Europe and as an ongoing opportunity for reconciliation and collaboration among nations, faith communities, churches and peoples in Europe. As we will be gathering on the banks of the Danube, which passes through many European countries, we will also commemorate the challenges Europe faces at present (refugee crisis, economic recession, extremism and violence). Due to the symbolic significance of this event, we suggest a live webcast of the prayer.

The prayer would happen in the following three movements:

1. Lamentation

Armenian song; Jewish chanting; orthodox singing
Very short readings in several languages (local and CEC languages).

2. Thanks for survival & reconciliation

Gospel singing; prayers /doxologies in different languages;
Symbolical "Building of a bridge" in a simple way (bricks with planks on top).

3. Hope for Peace

Silent prayer = prayer for peace at the same time but not with the same words;
"Crossing the bridge" (walking across or from both ends toward each other).

Beginning & end should be marked by klapalo.

The order of the prayer needs to be simple and clear for people to participate in without printed material (no paper).

Recommendation: AWC to further develop the Peace prayer along the three proposed movements.

10. Sunday worship services in local congregations

The local co-ordinators recommend celebrating (Eucharistic) services in various local parishes (Eastern Orthodox, Roman-Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist) in and close to Novi Sad. Appropriate places for Anglican and Armenian worship services would also be found. The AWC will develop overall guidelines to help the local committee with the preparations.

Recommendation: AWC to support the local committee in preparing Sunday worship services.

11. Music

Music plays an important role in most worship traditions and should not be underestimated. The selection of songs and instrumental music for the assembly should aim to present a proper balance between different regions and traditions.

For the opening and sending worship services the committee would like to invite bigger choirs, while a small choir would help the congregation to sing in the morning prayer.

The Peace prayer would include a variety of singing and chanting from different traditions.

Some instrumentalists with a minimum of equipment (e-piano, percussion and other instruments) need to be identified locally to facilitate rehearsal space and time.

The AWC lacks one more musician with prior experience of CEC or other ecumenical assemblies, who would be knowledgeable about music from Protestant and Anglican tradition and could lead a choir and congregational singing.

Recommendation: AWC to further develop the selection and performance of music. AWC asks APC to agree to add one more musician to the AWC.

12. Worship material

Due to lack of time, the committee only briefly discussed the possibilities for worship materials. In the past CEC Assemblies have used a variety of printed materials: for Trondheim there was a worship book including the orders of every worship service and Bible study in 3 languages, while for Lyon and Budapest only song books were produced. The committee discussed the possibility of using downloadable PDF materials (which delegates could view on their mobile/tablet, of projecting texts and songs onto screens in the worship halls, and of printing booklets either in several languages together, or as separate single-language booklets. Printing separate booklets for the opening and closing worships might be practical. The committee heard that if it is possible to reduce the amount of paper at the assembly, this would be appreciated.

Recommendation: AWC asks APC to discuss possibilities and give further guidance to the AWC on this matter.

13. Communication

The committee did not have enough time to discuss this in depth. The orthodox church in Novi Sad has a local TV station which could be used for transmitting the opening worship or the Peace prayer. There is a daily TV show by the orthodox diocese of Bachka which could also inform about different aspects of the assembly.

Recommendation: AWC asks APC to include worship and prayer in an overall communication plan.

14. Finance

The amount designated to worship should be reviewed according to the established needs (see APC minutes 6-8 Feb 2017).

Recommendation: APC asks AWC together with the assembly coordinator and the local coordinator to draw up a budget for worship during the assembly.

The next meeting of the AWC will take place 27. - 30. November 2017 in Prague.

ANNEX 1

NATO bombing in 1999

According to NATO press releases, the bombing targeted oil refineries, roads, bridges, and telecommunications relay stations, facilities which had military uses. The bombing of the city caused great damage to local civilians, including severe pollution and widespread ecological damage as well as lasting consequences for the well being of the population. On April 1 and 3 the old Varadin Bridge and the Liberty Bridge on the Danube were destroyed by NATO bombs.



This memorial is in Novi Sad, Serbia next to the Danube river. The statue was built in 1971 and it stands for the mass shooting of Serbs, Jews and Gypsies by Hungarian fascists in 1942.

Every year there is a common prayer commemorating the victims of World War II.