

## Thematic Reference Group Peacebuilding & Reconciliation

### A CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES PEACE TASK FORCE

#### i. DEVELOPING A PEACE TASK FORCE

##### RATIONALE

'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself...and has given us the message of reconciliation...' (2 Cor. 5:19). In the vision of St Paul reconciliation and peacebuilding are a participation in God's mission in and for the world. Jesus declared the peacemakers the children of God, a Jewish way of describing the most God-like people. The Churches, therefore, have a witness to and practice of peace. The Churches are also part of civil society and therefore reconciliation and peace are not private and individualistic pursuits. The witness to and practice of peace is public and peace witness is public theology in action. As responsible actors in civil society the Churches do their theology and peacebuilding in the public arena. The development of a CEC Peace Task Force is a response to God's action in Christ, the living out of public theology and being responsible actors in civil society. It is an essential step in becoming a peace Church.

##### DESCRIPTION

A public Church accepts its share of responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of its adherents and for the common good and wellbeing of society. It has a critical voice when necessary, envisioning an alternative world when required, and it articulates a hope-filled voice. It is local, European and global in its engagement.

CEC and Member Churches are active participants in *Missio Dei*. As a concrete expression of this, a Peace Task Force will be developed to give active witness to God's ministry of reconciliation.

As a Peace Task Force their action will essentially be as mediators of peace in the wider European and local contexts. This mediation work will be through CEC and its Member Churches. The task will be threefold:

- i. Responding to situations of Conflict
- ii. Peacemaking
- iii. Peacebuilding

The first point has to do with finding appropriate responses to the different situations of conflict. This will include working through case studies. The second point has to do with action to avoid any escalation, to keep conversations going. The third point is much more long term and is about the sustainability of a process of peace. The Task Force's role will reflect third party mediation. There will be times when in a local situation all three strands will be called for. At other moments it may only be one strand, perhaps the sustainability work of strand three. The Peace Task Force will exist to take initiatives and to respond to the call of Member Churches and other parties for intervention and help in building bridges for mediation and working for peace.

## **TASK & PRACTICE**

There is a need for churches at all levels to develop the capacity for peace building. The Task Force will be pro-active and reactive and will take appropriate steps in this connection. There will also be occasions when member Churches or local churches will call for CEC's engagement. Whether pro-active or reactive the role of local churches will be important, since only with local participation can situations be better understood and sensitivities taken into account. Local churches may also be willing to make initial contacts with the parties in conflict and become significant instruments of peacebuilding. CEC through its Task Force will offer sustainable coordination, mediation and long term support in a peace process as opposed to short term initiatives.

In collaboration with the local churches the Task Force will develop a strategy for peace engagement in the local context. Where appropriate the Task Force will keep the local church informed of developments and progress. The Task Force will decide when local sustainable peacebuilding has been achieved and discontinue its involvement. To this end, part of the Task Force activity may be to offer training programmes for development of skills in peacebuilding for purposes of sustainability.

The process will strengthen the Churches at all levels in their participation in God's mission in and for the world. The Church will also be seen as a positive actor in civil society and its ultimate wellbeing. CEC is a servant of peace. In an increasingly complex and fragile world in which conflict can erupt quite easily, Churches are called to pool their resources and work for a world in which there is peace and reconciliation for justice. Such an initiative will enable healing of memories and the building of right relationships thus contributing to God's Peace.

CEC already has credibility within European political and in civil society which enables it to be a trusted and accepted voice in situations of conflict and violence. CEC's capacity to be connected with grass-roots contexts through Member Churches makes it an authentic body to engage in peacebuilding. The Task Force will have two joint coordinators one of whom could be the CEC General Secretary and the other elected from the Task Force membership.

## **IDENTIFYING THE TASK FORCE**

The Task Force will draw on experienced practitioners from different parts of Europe. There will be people who have experience in conflict mediation, its resolution, and those who bring peacemaking and sustainable peacebuilding skills. Such practitioners will also have experience in training others, underpinning their practice and experience with their faith values and ethics in relation to peace.

Initially the pool will consist of 16 people, each nominated by their Member Church. Ideally the pool will be drawn from a range of geographical locations, confessional backgrounds and have a gender balance.

## **INDUCTION**

A Task Force pool will be aware that CEC and its Member Churches are instruments and servants of God's ministry of reconciliation. An induction process will include awareness raising of the history and ethos of CEC. Attention will be given to core values given expression at the 2018 General Assembly. These are justice, hospitality and witness. Together these are integral to peacemaking and peacebuilding. Without justice there is no peace, without the generosity of hospitality and openness

to each other there is no resolution of conflict. Without witness reconciliation and peace do not become public theological practice.

The process of induction to the CEC ethos will lead to consideration of an agreed purpose in relation to the pool of practitioners and to an agreed and flexible methodology in relation to an operation plan of the CEC Peace Task Force.

A Task Force coordinator will be elected. Lines of communication will also be agreed between the Task Force Coordinator and the CEC General Secretary. There will be periodic meetings of the Task Force for reflection on practice and sharing of new developments in conflict resolution and peacebuilding skills.

## **II. TRAINING OF PEACEBUILDERS**

### **RATIONALE**

To actively participate in God's mission skilled peace mediators are required. The ministry of reconciliation according to St. Paul is the task of all of God's people. Yet within this there is need for practitioners equipped with the knowledge and skills for engaging and responding appropriately to particular situations of conflict and for being instruments of peace. The Task Force will already consist of experienced practitioners who can bring their faith values and ethics to the processes of peacebuilding. Part of their task will be to train others in the same knowledge and skills, thereby creating a cascade effect which will benefit CEC and Member Churches as active participants in God's mission of peacebuilding and reconciliation.

It is recognised that there is generally a deficit of peacemakers and peacebuilders in the Churches. The development therefore of experienced practitioners who are also engaged in training others will address this deficit and enhance the churches ministry within conflictual communities.

The existence of practitioners lacks a geographical balance and it will be important to intentionally address this in a strategy for training. Addressing this deficit and imbalance will potentially strengthen the churches witness and its practice for peace. This would mean a more conscious and intentional engagement in God's purpose of Peace. Reconciliation and Justice for Peace initiatives will become central to the churches self-understanding and participation in God's mission in and for the world.

### **DESCRIPTION**

The CEC Peace Task Force will offer training programmes for Member Churches in how one responds to conflict, reconciliation and peacebuilding. Member Churches will be encouraged to nominate two peace agents to undertake training. The training will be sensitive to the tradition of peace witness within the different churches.

A training programme which will require to be written by members of the Task Force should include a module dealing with local history and context and a second model which will look at the wider European context. Other modules will include knowledge and skills of the three strands on Responding to situations of Conflict, Peacemaking and on Peacebuilding. The Task Force members will be drawing on a diverse range of techniques and skills required in the above.

All of the above would mean that CEC will have a training programme which can benefit Member Churches in their witness and practice of peace. This in turn would enable the churches to be more actively committed to peace as an essential part of their ministry.

#### **PEACE TASK FORCE RESOURCES**

The proposed Conference of European Churches Peace Task Force should be viewed in conjunction with the proposed CEC Peace Conference for 2019. The two proposals are integral and would require a designated resource person within the CEC General Secretariat. This would ensure not only coherence but the enhancement of delivery and implementation as well as crucial planning for both proposals.

#### ***CEC Thematic Reference Group Peacebuilding & Reconciliation***

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