



## Conference of European Churches Governing Board

Brussels, 20-22 November 2019

### Activity report Thematic area Theological Dialogue

1. CEC participated in the planning of the second meeting of the Global Forum of Theological Educators that was held from 20-24 May at the Orthodox Academy of Crete, Greece. About 70 theological educators from around the world gathered under the theme “Vision and viability in contexts: Theological learning and formation” and examined ways in which theological and educational methods shape outcomes, sustainability in theological education, and the ways in which vocation is recognised and fostered. Due to the current global challenges, for the next phases of its work, the Forum decided to discuss migration and ecology as they relate to theological education, and also to explore empirical research of theological education in its third meeting.
2. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew hosted Halki Summit III from 31 May-4 June 2019 that brought together distinguished representatives of Orthodox theological schools and seminaries from around the world and focused on the theme of “Theological Formation and Ecological Awareness.” CEC executive secretary for Theological Dialogue participated in the coordination group and was invited to join a special committee established to determine how to reach out to Orthodox theological schools and seminaries with a view to collecting materials integrating environmental concerns into theological education (For further information on the event see <http://www.halkisummit.com/hs3/>).
3. Meeting with the CPCE Advisory Board on Migration and Church Communion, 7 June 2019, Brussels. The group was informed about CEC strategic goals in this area of work. CPCE Study Secretary shared CPCE’s plans on migration and communion, and members of the board raised the question of interreligious dialogue in a pluralist Europe. Discussion followed on ways of working together, and CPCE Study Secretary was invited to participate in the CEC meeting of ecumenical officers and secretaries for theology.
4. European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL), annual Council meeting, 13 June 2019, Brussels. The ECRL and Religions for Peace held a meeting at the EKD office in the context of the preparations of the 10<sup>th</sup> World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Lindau Germany. CEC executive secretary for Theological Dialogue attended the meeting on behalf of CEC. She offered an overview of the ongoing work and presented the strategic goals for 2018-2023.

5. WCC meeting of Regional Ecumenical Organisations (REOs), 2-4 July 2019, Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland. The meeting is intended for the General Secretaries of the REOs to gather together annually and discuss matters of common concern. In the absence of General Secretary, CEC was represented by the secretary for Theological Dialogue. The agenda included sharing from the regions, updates on ongoing work, discussion on opportunities for cooperation and joint action, meeting with the leadership of WCC, and updates on the WCC Assembly preparations.

Significant part of the meeting focused on the “Guiding Principles for Relationships and Cooperation between the WCC and the REOs,” (see Appendix 1), a document first published in 1992 and later revised by a small working group including two REOs General Secretaries and one WCC staff. The document had been shared prior to the meeting and had been discussed with CEC President and staff. During the meeting there was considerable discussion on its implementation. The document was approved with small revisions. It constitutes a concrete step in clarifying relationships with the WCC (CEC Strategy Plan, Aim 2).

Important part of the meeting was dedicated to ACT Alliance and its relationship to the REOs, as well as CLAI, the Latin American Council of Churches, which is experiencing inner division and for this reason it remains inactive and did not attend the meeting.

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11. Academic paper on Justification, August 2019. The paper was included in the acts of the colloquium on the topic that had been organised by the Institut Supérieur D' Études Œcuméniques (Faculté de Théologie et de Sciences Religieuses, Paris) in March 2019.
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16. Visit to the Headquarters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and meeting with staff working in the areas of mission, ecumenism, and interfaith dialogue. Visit to the Finnish Ecumenical Council and meeting with General Secretary Rev Dr Mari-Anna Auvinen, 23 September 2019, Helsinki, Finland.

17. CEC organised the first meeting of ecumenical officers and secretaries for theology focusing on questions of ecclesiology and mission. The meeting was held from 24-26 September 2019 in Kaunisniemi Finland. The response from the Member Churches was positive and about 25 officers attended the meeting. The first part of the meeting focused on sharing of current priorities and key questions in the Member Churches and their expectations from CEC. Three broad areas of work were identified as pertinent: 1. the mission of the Church in a secular or post-Christian society, 2. the way in which the identity of some churches is closely associated with nationality and ethnicity and how this affects ecumenical relationships, 3. the need for ecumenical theological education and formation. (See Appendix 2).

The second part of the meeting was concerned with the theological dialogue between churches with historical longevity in Europe and 'migrant' and 'minority ethnic' churches, which is the focus of CEC programmatic work for the period from 2018-2023. It explored questions of contextualization and identity of migrant churches, and discussed Christian communities and migration as an ecclesiological opportunity. The meeting reflected on the changing European religious landscape within the current developments in the international multilateral dialogue of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC. Lastly, it heard about the preparations of the 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of WCC and reflected on ways in which churches in Europe can contribute actively. (See <http://www.ceceurope.org/cec-conference-in-finland-brings-in-focus-ecclesiology-and-mission/>).

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20. Meeting with the Finnish Ecumenical Council. Discussion on *Charta Œcumenica* and interreligious dialogue, 4 October 2019, Brussels.
21. Meeting with WCC Director of Communications and her team on WCC journals and publications. The agenda included information on the Assembly preparations and the Communications Strategy for the WCC Assembly, 10 October 2019, Geneva.
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organisation of CEC. The meeting was held under the theme “Towards Fostering Dialogue Ecumenically: *Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up-building*, Rom. 14:19.” It included sharing from the WCC regions, reflection on different interreligious contexts, and discussion on ecumenical cooperation in interreligious matters. A number of topics surfaced during the meeting: a. The role of collective memory and imagination in the shaping of religious identity, and how ethnicity and nation relate to it, b. the colonial past of Christianity which still creates mistrust between interreligious partners, and the need for repentance, c. the balance between witnessing to Christ and being in dialogue with other religions, and the stereotypes around syncretism, d. the use of Scripture in interfaith work. The meeting heard about the preparations for the 11<sup>th</sup> WCC Assembly and the local and European context hosting it (<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/inaugural-meeting-of-interfaith-officers-in-wales-deepens-ecumenical-dialogue>).

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## **GUIDELINES FOR RELATIONSHIPS AND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC) AND REGIONAL ECUMENICAL ORGANIZATIONS (REOs)**

### **Preamble**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) and Regional Ecumenical Organizations (REOs) affirm that they are a “fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”.

### **The WCC and the REOs have in common:**

- their conviction that the ecumenical movement is one, that it is rooted in the churches and that it is wider than the ecumenical bodies they represent;
- their commitment to foster the one ecumenical movement and their openness to relationships with all churches, national councils of churches (NCCs), and church organizations which are prepared to enter into dialogue on the biblical vision that “all may be one...so that the world may believe” (John 17:21);
- their openness to dialogue and cooperation with those of other faiths;
- their commitment to work with all people of good will for peace with justice and the care of all creation.

### **Affirmations**

The WCC and REOs affirm that:

- the bases of the councils or conferences of churches qualifies their relationships with one other, with churches, and church related organizations;
- the oneness of the ecumenical movement implies the recognition of the principles of conciliarity, complementarity and mutual accountability in their relationships and functions, globally, regionally, nationally and locally;
- their primary function within the ecumenical family is to facilitate relationships, to serve, to enable and to inspire the member churches, NCCs and other Christian councils and one other in the common calling aimed at fostering the visible unity of the Church and its witness in the world;
- their relationship is one of partnership based on their common faith and commitment.

### **Mutual recognition**

The WCC and the REOs recognize:

- the diversity of the history, context and structure each of their organizations;
- the structure and functional character of each one of them.

- The common understanding of our calling to create a prioritized relationship with one another.

### **Principles of cooperation**

The WCC and the REOs agree to the following principles of cooperation:

- to proactively seek cooperation on prioritized issues and strategic initiatives according to the plans of the respective organizations.
- mutual trust, reciprocity and sharing of information as the basis of their cooperation.
- in each situation they will agree on the appropriate level of cooperation:
  - a) information sharing
  - b) mutual consultation
  - c) programmatic collaboration
  - in the case of programmatic collaboration or joint activities, they will agree on responsibilities, resources, implementation and evaluation of the programme or activity.
  - they will seek mutual involvement at the planning stage of programmes or activities whenever feasible.

### **Procedures of cooperation**

#### **1. WCC-REOs Group**

- a) the WCC and the REOs establish a Group comprised of the General Secretaries of the organizations for the purpose of mutual sharing, reflection and joint action;
- b) the group is expected to meet once a year. The WCC general secretary convenes and facilitates the meeting. Prior to each meeting, the WCC general secretary develops the agenda of the meeting in consultation with members of the group.
- c) All members of the group share prior to the meetings what has been pursued as joint activities since the last meeting.

#### **2. Inter-regional cooperation**

REO inter-regional cooperation (i.e., activities between two or more REOs) and programs are encouraged. When such initiatives take place, REOs are expected to share information with the WCC. If the WCC involvement is agreed, the REOs and the WCC should agree on the level of cooperation.

#### **3. REO cooperation with the WCC**

When an REO organizes programmes or events in their particular region which have a significance for the global ecumenical movement, information, planning and preparation

should be shared to the fullest possible extent with the WCC from the beginning of the preparatory process. The level of cooperation should be mutually agreed upon.

#### **4. WCC cooperation with an REO**

- a) When the WCC organizes programmes or events in a region, information shall be shared from the beginning of the preparatory process, so that the level of cooperation can be mutually agreed upon, and planning and preparation can be done in a relevant way with the REO.
- b) The regional meetings held as a part of WCC Central Committee meetings and Assemblies should be planned and conducted in consultation with the respective REOs.

#### **5. WCC-REO Relationships**

- a) The WCC Church Relations office should serve as the entry point for relationships between the WCC and the REOs. Its task is to facilitate and to monitor the relationships on the basis of the above guiding principles.
- b) As the partners commit to relevant cooperation and sharing of information, the WCC and REOs will use proper means and platforms for internal and external communication between them, facilitated by the WCC. These include: Sharepoint (Intranet solution) to share internal communication such as updates, plans, calendar, subscribe on newsletters, organize 1-2 video conferences. Then introduce the new online platform - WCC Online Academy and establish a global and regional communication network WCC-REO.
- c) The WCC should provide for internal coordination of its relationships with the REOs.
- d) In view of the diversity of the regions and the REOs the above guiding principles should be supplemented with specific agreements between the WCC and each one of the REOs.

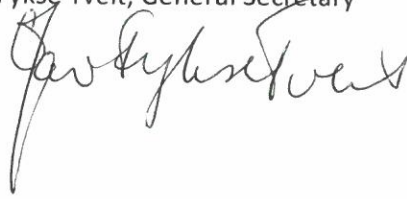
#### **6. These guidelines should be included as a point of information in the material distributed for each meeting of the WCC and REOs**

These guidelines were discussed and agreed on 2-4 July 2019, in the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland by:



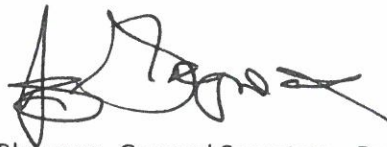
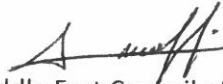
**World Council of Churches**

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary



**Regional Ecumenical Organizations**

Dr Souraya Bechealany, General Secretary - Middle East Council of Churches



Rev. James Bhagwan, General Secretary - Pacific Conference of Churches



Dr Mathews George, General Secretary - Christian Conference of Asia



Gerard Granado, General Secretary - Caribbean Conference of Churches



Katerina Pekridou, CEC representative - Conference of European Churches



Rev. Dr Fidon Mwombeki, General Secretary - All Africa Conference of Churches



Peter Noteboom, General Secretary - The Canadian Council of Churches



Jim Winkler, General Secretary - National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA

Conference of European Churches  
*Together in Hope and Witness*  
“You shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8)

First meeting of Ecumenical Officers and Secretaries for Theology  
24-26 September 2019  
Kaunisniemi, Finland

Reflections from the listeners’ group

The group listened carefully to the conversations, presentations, group discussions, and other exchanges during the meeting. They reflected on the inspiring and encouraging experience of being together. It became clear that there were some terms that were understood differently by various members of the group and needed to be defined.

The first is the term ‘migrant’. Who is a migrant? We noticed that in many of our references and reactions to migrants, they are depicted as people in need of pity and help. While some do indeed need assistance, this is not true of all migrants and we need to pay attention to the language we use. A definition of a migrant was cited twice and included all people on the move. People move for all sorts of reasons - they have always done so and this movement of peoples is not going to stop.

We also recognised that we need to consider how we used terms such as migrant churches and minority ethnic churches. We should remember that the experience of migration around Europe is varied. For some it indicates a declining population and loss of church members.

From our conversations it was clear that we had different understandings of the word “mission.” We needed to decide on a working definition and we thought we could do so by building on existing work. The group found the definition from the Faith and Order work helpful. Mission is to serve the purpose of the church (see *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, §25)

We identified a number of themes that ran through the presentations and discerned three broad areas of work:

1. To explore the mission of the Church in a secular or post-Christian society.

The experience of many of us is that numbers in churches are declining and that sometimes the church is not seen to be relevant to everyday life. In a secular, post-Christian society, the effect of religious illiteracy is another aspect that should be addressed. In this context, how do churches have a common witness in public discourse? Can we have a prophetic voice? Is the

mission of the church a treasure? How do we live out our discipleship in the modern context?

2. **To explore the way in which the identity of some churches is closely associated with nationality and ethnicity and how this affects ecumenical relationships.**

How can churches learn to be receiving churches and open up possibilities for different relationships with other churches which are mutually enriching? Migrant churches challenge us to rethink what it means to be incarnational, catholic and diverse. Is plurality a threat or a force for engagement and inclusion in the church? Can the church be a model of what it is to be a truly welcoming people, where others are “no longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God”? (Eph. 2:19)

3. **The need for ecumenical theological education and formation.**

Can we work with all expressions of Christianity in Europe to develop our skills of communication and encounter? We often talk of dialogue with others but we need to be aware that the term “dialogue” relates specifically to formal doctrinal discussions for some, whilst at the same time having a broader meaning for others. Do we need to reconsider our working methods and how we engage in conversation with others? The group emphasised the need to remember that “nothing without them is for them.”

Listeners group: Mgr Dr Dirk Jan Schoon (convener), Shari Brown, Revd Ruth Gee, Revd Dinah Hess, Revd Dr Jonas Jørgensen, Revd Dr Andrei Kuzma.