



European regional pre-assembly

“Christ’s love moves the world to Reconciliation and Unity”

25- 26 February 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

Dear Participants in this Pre-Assembly organised by the Conference of European Churches in view of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe,

Allow me to greet you in your official capacity on behalf of the Conference of European Churches. It is with joy and gratitude that I welcome you to this meeting which we had dreamed of organising in Warsaw, first last year and then this year, and then, once again, the pandemic disrupted our plans, forcing us to hold this session with video-conferencing support. I want you to know how difficult it is for me, like you, to be deprived of your immediate presence, of these precious moments of face-to-face meetings and exchanges, of these informal times of friendship, communion and fraternity that represent the coffee breaks, shared meals... While videoconferencing allows us to do our work, it deprives us of what is essential to our communion and bond of fellowship.

Our meeting was organised with the aim to offer a space for reflection, sharing and exchange between the European delegates who will participate in the Assembly of the World Council of Churches scheduled to take place in Karlsruhe from 31 August – 8 September 2022. The goal is

- to prepare Assembly participants to engage in the life and processes of the Assembly,
- to offer European reflections on questions of church and state and church and secularity
- to contribute new insights to the programmatic work of WCC in these areas.

Therefore, everything has been prepared to examine the theme "Christ's Love Moves the World, to Reconciliation and Unity", to exchange about the realities of our churches, their spirit of Unity, their place in plural and secularised societies, their contribution to social and political debate, the challenge of witnessing to

the Gospel in an environment at times in the grip of strong social, cultural and religious tensions.

Christ's Love Moves the World, to Reconciliation and Unity! A theme that draws on the very heart of the gospel that offers to the world the depths and wonder of the love of God. A Christological theme, that focus on the world and recalls God's design of reconciliation and Unity. A theme that opens a effective way for the churches to rethink their common call to seek the communion (koinonia) that is God's gift and promise, to shape their service (diakonia) to the people of the world and to creation. We were prepared to reflect that theme, but then, yesterday morning, the news of the Russian army's entry into Ukraine leading the offensive on Kiev overwhelmed us, appalled us, and disheartened us. We had to recognise that what is stirring the world today, what is setting in motion the political leaders, the actors of civil society, is not the love of Christ immediately, but the terrifying noise of weapons on European soil, a war and its toll of bloodshed, and this on the borders of the European Union.

I would like to stress here, in these opening remarks, that

The Gospel of Jesus Christ carries a message of peace for all humankind that calls for a deep respect for the dignity of every human being. This message is rooted in God's mercy, the forgiveness he offers by the gift of himself to anyone who comes to him. This message calls Christians and churches to be artisans of peace and reconciliation.

Driven by this call, the Conference of European Churches strongly condemns the act of war that the Russian armed forces have committed in Ukraine. This act is a denial of borders, of the principle of free determination of peoples, and an affront to the international order. CEC calls on all those who have the capacity to act to contribute to the immediate end of this aggression. At the level of the European Union, political leaders and the international community, no effort should be spared to limit the shedding of innocent blood and to return to the path of diplomatic dialogue and international order.

The Conference of European Churches calls on Christians to join together in prayer for peace, for the outcome of this war, for its victims, for those who are working for a peaceful outcome, and for all those who have been and will continue to be affected by it.

Evidently, we are all affected by these events, and we felt it was imperative to reorganise our session today, in order to offer you this morning a space to receive some information from the Ukrainian churches, and in particular from a planned solidarity and prayer for peace visit that was envisaged in partnership with World Communion of Reformed Churches and Lutheran World Federation. We will begin with this moment after the prayer and have rearranged the rest of the programme, to both honour each planned period, at times reducing somewhat the space dedicated to it, including your lunch break.

Allow me to conclude this greeting with a few words of gratitude to those who have prepared and organised this meeting and to the partners who are associated with it.

Thank you to the members of the planning committee

- From the Governing Board of CEC
 - Rev. Anne Burghardt (now General Secretary of LWF),
 - The Very Rev. Archimandrite Nektarios Ioannou,
 - Prof. Petr Kratochvíl,
 - His Grace Bishop Hovakim Manukyan,
- The representative of the Protestant Church in Germany
 - Rev. Sabine Udodesku
- From the CEC Office:
 - CEC General Secretary Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen
 - CEC Executive Secretary for Theological Dialogue, Katerina Pekridou

Our gratitude goes also to the

- World Council of Churches Assembly Office and the Karlsruhe Local Office for their support,
- the Polish Ecumenical Council for their cooperation, in particular, the President of the Polish Ecumenical Council, Bishop Andrzej Malicki and their Director, Rev. Dr. Grzegorz Giemza,

And to

- Archbishop Emeritus Anders Wejryd, President for Europe of the WCC and Rev Dr Benjamin Simon, World Council of Churches Executive for Church relations, both provided guidance during the planning.

I would also like to thank in advance the group of listeners, who works behind the scenes to produce a report of this Pre-Assembly:

- Rev Serge Fornerod,
- Rev Dr Hana Tonzarova,
- Ms Maria Mountraki,
- Ms Miriam Weibye, and
- Rev Matthew Ross from the WCC.

I look forward to a stimulating and inspiring dialogue during this European regional pre-assembly and a productive outcome meaningful for the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe.

Thank you for your attention.