

On the way to the third European Ecumenical Assembly

Impulses for the delegates in Sibiu/Hermannstadt, and for parishes and ecumenical groups in Germany. Loccum, 6th. December

150 participants from Germany and guests from various other countries in Europe met from 4th – 6th December 2006 in the Evangelical Academy Loccum at the national consultation of the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK) for the third European Ecumenical Assembly. Their meeting took place under the promise given in the theme of the third European Ecumenical Assembly: “The Light of Christ shines upon all. Hope for renewal and unity in Europe.”

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) have called on the churches in Europe to give the third European Ecumenical Assembly the form of a pilgrimage. All the churches in Germany, which are ecumenically related through membership of the ACK, have followed this call. The basis for the third European Ecumenical Assembly is the Charta Oecumenica. The Charta Oecumenica is the benchmark for the life together of the ACK churches.

The participants look back in thankfulness for the way in which the Churches in Europe have walked together:

- from the reception of the “Conciliar Process” for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation which was agreed upon in Vancouver (1983) and which played an important part in the political changes in 1989 and continues to be important up to the present day,
- via the first European Ecumenical Assembly in Basel (1989),
- on to the call to reconciliation at the second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz (1997),
- and to the Charta Oecumenica (2001), which has led to growing ecumenical relationships in many places and throughout Europe.

The participants in Loccum have heard opinions from the Catholic, Reformation (Established Churches and Free Churches) and Orthodox traditions, which are also visible in the three stations of the third European Ecumenical Assembly (Rome January 2006, Wittenberg February 2007 Sibiu/Hermannstadt September 2007). The General Secretary of CEC, Colin Williams reported on behalf of CEC and CCEE from the preparations at the European level.

In worship from different traditions they celebrated Christ, the light of the world. In lectures they asked themselves about the meaning of the Gospel in the context of secularisation in Europe. Delegates for the Assembly in Sibiu/Hermannstadt and people who were not delegates, representatives of church authorities, basegroups, ecumenical communities, parishes and associations have met in working groups to the nine themes of the Assembly and have agreed upon themes and recommendations.

They request CEC and CCEE to take up this message at the meeting in Wittenberg (February 2007). They request the delegates from Germany who will represent their Churches in Sibiu/Hermannstadt to take up the concerns of this message. And with great urgency they request the churches in Germany, parishes, ecumenical base groups, regional and local

councils of churches to discuss this message and to transform it into action here and with their partners in other European countries.

The Light of Christ and the Church

1. Forum: Dialogue, Unity

As churches we want to be a sign of the Kingdom of God in the world.

Recommendation:

We ask the churches and parishes to work for the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ through:

- giving the one faith, as expressed in the ecumenical Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381), a liturgical home in the churches,
- encouraging and confirming the mutual recognition of baptism through official agreements between churches,
- through developing appropriate intermediate steps on the way to eucharistic community,
- looking for ways to overcome the divisions between our churches in the questions of Ministry and nature of the Church.

With urgency we ask the member churches of CEC and the CCEE to make their own and act upon the commitment to visible unity of the Church in the Charta Oecumenica (Guideline 1). Mankind needs clear signs. Europe and the world expect *one* voice from the churches.

2. Forum: Spirituality, Praying together

We bring before God in many different ways and with each other what we are concerned about in Europe.

Recommendation:

We ask churches and parishes:

- to bring not only praise and thanks with each other before God, but also their concerns about destruction and distress in both Europe and the world,
- in particular to encourage the learning and valuing of different forms of spiritual life and worship as a source of strength for faith (Charta Oecumenica 5),
- to do all they can to discover the common roots of Christian prayer in all traditions, that they may be used as a basis for prayer and worship together,
- to let themselves be led from the Bible, the message of the cross and resurrection and the witness of Jesus Christ as the Light.

3. Forum: Witness, Mission

The common witness of the one Faith in the triune God should enable people to live as Christians, to give witness to the Gospel, and stand up for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.

Recommendation:

We ask the Churches and parishes,

- to continue the work on Guideline 2 of the Charta Oecumenica, that forms of self-commitment may be found which describe positively the content and form of the common mission of the churches,
- to emphasise publicly the unity of faith and action, of preaching and of social and ethical involvement,

- instead of drawing boundaries between each other to emphasise the importance of common mission as an authentic expression of unity.

The Light of Christ and Europe

4. Forum: The contribution of the Churches to the building of Europe, to the Future of Europe

The Churches should actively participate in the development of the civil society in Europe.

Recommendation:

We ask the churches and parishes

- as active participants in shaping the civil society
 - together with all European churches,
 - with respect for different experience and contexts
 - in attentive dialogue

to play their part in building up a just and jointly responsible Europe (for example by intensifying youth exchanges, strengthening dialogue between East and West, working on a common set of values and binding memories as a basis for European identity),

- to recognise that challenges and self commitments are bound up with the choice of meeting place for the third European Ecumenical Assembly that is at once in the middle of Europe and at the edge of the European Union.

5. Forum: Religions

Religious freedom in a democratic secular state is for christians today the necessary precondition for the peaceful life co-existence of religions and cultures.

Recommendations:

We ask the churches and parishes,

- to seek to establish a dialogue with people of other religions as citizens of Europe and as people of faith;

following Charta Oecumenica (10,11)

- to oppose all forms of Anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism in church and society
- to seek and intensify at all levels the dialogue with our Jewish brothers and sisters and distinguish between this and the commission to bring the Gospel to all peoples,
- to meet and value Muslims and to work together with them in issues of common interests,
- to be open for the dialogue with all people of good will, to pursue common interests and to give witness to them of the Christian gospel.

6. Forum: Reconciliation and Migration

Processes of reconciliation and migration need to be based upon mutual respect in order to be successful. They come to life in personal encounters and have as their aim a mutual understanding of basic values.

Recommendation:

We ask the Churches and Parishes to continue the work on Charta Oecumenica Guideline 8 “Reconciling peoples and cultures”:

- to assist CCEE and CEC to continue existing reconciliation processes and to initiate new ones,

- to invite people to encounters in places free of fear, to rework experiences and memories which cause division, and to live in reconciled togetherness with a mutual readiness to learn from each other,
- to support the improvement of conditions of life in the countries of origin of migrants through partnership projects and political intervention,
- to inform themselves without prejudices about the phenomenon of migration, its causes and consequences, to be prepared to encounter migrants and to stand up for their rights (Eg. Giving them the necessary space to care for personal identity)
- to work against all radical right-wing activities directed against migrants.

The Light of Christ and the World

7. Forum: Peace

In order to achieve the aim of the Charta Oecumenica for “Peace on the basis of solving conflicts through non-violent means”, we believe that it is necessary to ask critical questions about the understanding of security used in European security strategies.

Recommendation:

We recommend the churches and parishes,

- to deepen and bring into public debate the ecumenical reflection on the understanding of human security and vulnerability which grows out of the faith in Jesus Christ,
- to call on the European Commission to build up and institutionalise an effective instrument for the coordination of civil means for dealing with conflicts and to begin steps towards the disarmament of atomic weapons,
- to support the strengthening of international institutions which contribute to the prevention of crises and mediate in conflicts,
- to oppose the European strategy for security in its attempt to maintain areas of political influence,
- to regard as their duty that they contribute to the long term peace process through combating poverty, invest in social development and in the integrity of creation.

8. Forum: Justice

We plead for a responsible economy, which serves life.

Recommendation:

We recommend the churches and the parishes,

- to combine the demand for a just economy with a spirituality based on the conciliar process,
- to examine and publicise the relationships between the economic development in Europe and worldwide developments,
- to support and form networks which demand just taxes, the transparency of economic relations and the implementation of political rules for fairer economic trade system,
- to work for the realisation of the Millennium Aims of the UN and to demand that states act on the commitments which they have made,
- to press on with the process of widening the possibility of ethical investments and committing oneself to this process.

9: Forum: the integrity of creation

The change in the climate is one of the biggest challenges for humankind and for the life of the Church – locally, worldwide and in the churches themselves.

Recommendations:

We recommend the churches and parishes,

- to pledge themselves for binding aims for the reduction CO₂; this means the introduction of church environmental management;
- to cooperate with other parts of society at all levels in a alliance for the protection of the climate through effective political means,
- to urge the European Union to play a leading role in protecting the climate,
- in view of its special risks, to oppose the use of atomic energy as a measure for climate protection,
- to celebrate the Creation liturgically.