

OVERCOMING  
VIOLENCE

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**The Freising Agenda to Overcome Violence**  
**for the Years 2005 to 2010**

**in**

**the Decade to Overcome Violence**

**- Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace –**

In Freising from 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> April 2005, the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK) and the Ecumenical Basis Groups and Initiatives held an ecumenical consultation in the middle of the Decade with the theme “Just Peace – Life in an Endangered Future”. 140 activists from Churches, initiatives and groups in Germany and the wider ecumenical movement met to take stock and to prepare further work for the second half of the Decade. The Decade to Overcome Violence was declared in 1998 by the 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches for the years 2001 to 2010. In addition, a contribution from the German part of the ecumenical movement needed to be considered for the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu/Hermannstadt (Romania) in 2007. The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches had decided on the continent of Europe as the main regional focus of the Decade in 2007.

The Freising Agenda is intended to give to both the religious and non-religious public, suggestions from the participants’ thinking and acting towards the continuing open process of overcoming violence.<sup>1</sup> The results of the consultation are recommendations

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<sup>1</sup> The texts of the consultation are published in two epd-documentations (No. 20, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2005 and a further volume [publication] in June 2005). Orders: GEP-Vertrieb, Postfach 50 05 50, 60394 Frankfurt/Main, Tel. 069/58 098-189/58 098-226, e-mail: [vertrieb@gep.de](mailto:vertrieb@gep.de), [www.epd.de](http://www.epd.de).

which can give orientation in an exemplary way. The Churches and initiatives are invited to take up the suggestions either as their own ecumenical responsibility or together with others. In this the Churches are inspired by the message of the Gospel of Christ's peace and reconciliation as well as by the rich biblical tradition of peace in justice. It is recommended that for the work of the Decade co-operation is sought with key partner bodies beyond the Churches. One of the main purposes of the Freising Agenda is to define the areas of action of the second half of the Decade in the context of biblical-theological themes. The Freising Agenda connects the objective-specialist work of overcoming violence with biblical-theological work, because both will only succeed when they are integrated with each other.

**Three biblical-theological approaches are the basis for the recommendations of the consultation:**

- The dignity of the human being is rooted in mankind being made in the image of God. Therefore it is important to commit ourselves to human dignity and the observance of basic human rights for every human being irrespective of race, gender, religion, history of guilt and ability. In the Lord's Prayer we pray: *"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*
- The "kingdom of God" promises "fullness of life" as an inspiring and guiding power ("Kingdom of God Theology"). Inspired by this promise, Christian women and men live towards God's kingdom, which is already present in its coming. In the Lord's Prayer we pray: *"Thy kingdom come."*
- People experience that they are just and sinners at the same time, that is to say that they can be victims and perpetrators of violence at the same time. The justification experienced in Christ enables the victim to forgive the wrongdoer and the wrongdoer can confess his guilt and take responsibility for it. This path eliminates fixation on the role of the wrongdoer or victim. This is a prerequisite for penance and conversion and thus for overcoming violence in the light of the kingdom of God. We pray in the Lord's Prayer: *"And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."*

## **Main Themes for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Half of the Decade to Overcome Violence 2005 – 2010**

From the variety of the ecumenical discussion, the participants chose at the end of the consultation seven main themes as particularly important for work that is to take place between 2005 and 2010. The themes, which stand in relationship to each other, are the results of the consultation's twelve working groups on altogether twelve areas of action (cf. appendix):

### **1. Reception of the Ecumenical Process “Economy in the Service of Life”**

As a special form of structural violence, the neo-liberal globalisation of the economy causes the impoverishment and destitution of more and more people and peoples, whilst a minority are able to accumulate a disproportionate amount of wealth. It destroys the natural foundations of human life, encourages increasingly consumerist and violent ways of thinking, and causes new armed conflicts. A mentality of growth and wealth creation, which is orientated only on the market economy, deeply contradicts the biblical understanding of life and does not only divide societies, but also the Body of Christ. Therefore, in the ecumenical consultation process Churches and Christians are challenged to discuss principles and outlines of an “economy in the service of life”.

### **2. Peace Politics: Freedom from Violence and Prevention of Violence**

Violent warfare increasingly happens in the form of violent inner-state conflicts, the reasons for which cannot be eradicated through military violence. Terrorism also cannot be fought with military means. Non-violence, as a central value of Christian existence, teaches the overcoming of violence. Therefore this is true spiritually and politically-practically: “If you want peace, you have to prepare peace”. This is contradicted by thinking in the first instance about criteria for the use of violence. Churches and initiatives as part of civil society should therefore encourage and publicly demand non-violent concepts and preventative instruments, the solution of conflicts and the consolidation of peace. What is meant by “security” should be reconsidered.

### **3. Human rights, law and international law should be strengthened**

Marginalisation, racism, group-related hatred, ethnic “cleansings”, military violence and illegitimate interventions cause massive human rights violations. For Christians, human rights are fundamentally rooted in the shared dignity of all human beings, which they receive through being the children of God and through God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ. Political and civil, but also economic, cultural and social human rights, as well as international law, are important instruments for overcoming violence because they are committed to the biblical call for justice amongst people and amongst the peoples, without which real peace and reconciliation cannot grow. The Churches are called to awaken in and to encourage their members to be conscious of the relevance of human rights, as well as to facilitate a growing, stronger incorporation of those rights in national and international law.

### **4. The Churches have to come to terms with their own history of guilt**

The Churches were, and are, both perpetrators and victims of violence. During their history, they have supported those who are powerful and govern to the disadvantage of peace and reconciliation. Theologically they have legitimised anti-Semitism and campaigns of conquest. However their members, people in responsible positions, and whole Churches are also victims of persecution and oppression. Today, the Churches have to prove that they fulfil their prophetic ministry in favour of the victims of violence. In cases of persecution they have to proclaim and to strengthen the Christian faith. Both are based in Jesus Christ’s spirit of non-violence. In a way the Churches face the challenge of analysing and dealing with their own involvement in structures of violence both in the past and in the present and to start to turn back towards the way of non-violence. By listening to the cry of those who have experienced injustice they contribute to peace and reconciliation.

### **5. Inter-religious dialogue has to be encouraged**

For many centuries, people of other faiths were ignored or, because of their different convictions, looked upon and treated as enemies. Social and international tensions and outbreaks of violence can be traced back to the Churches’ potential for violence, and that of its members, or to the political misuse of religion. A contemporary example of the latter is the instrumentalisation of Islam and Christianity for and against terrorism. Other religions and Christianity share a common feature in their wish to protect nature

(Genesis 1:27ff, 8:22, Isaiah 2:4f) and to facilitate the peace promised by God. An ethics of inter-religious dialogue leads to mutual respect and strengthens mutual trust. An understanding of other religions enables the discovery of common roots and differences to be a rich and supportive power of life together, and, it inspires a lived brotherliness/sisterliness.

#### **6. The sustainability of an ecological economy has to be strengthened**

The future of humankind depends decisively on the ability to care for the God-given creation. The recognition that creation maintains all life and mankind, changes the duty to till and care for the creation into a thankful return to the creator. The participation of the individual in the ecological economy enables an image of God's kingdom, in which animals, plants, human beings, air and earth work productively together for the benefit of all, whilst – on the other hand – the compulsive growth, which is orientated on the market, bars many people from the participation in the true ecumenical richness of life. The consequence, as a step towards the kingdom of God, is the demand, as an obligation for ourselves, that we push forward ecological education, manage our affairs in a sustainable way and enter into alliances with groups in society.

#### **7. Equality and justice have to be established where women and men are together**

In all the above points the togetherness of the genders, of men and women, plays whether unnoticed or openly an important part. In the course of the history of humankind, but also in the practice of Christians, it very often took forms which did not conform to the spirit of the biblical promises and therefore were the reason for discord. Today, in many areas of public, professional and social life, and also in the Churches, justice between the genders has still not been established. Women are assured of their equality, but with regard to access to tasks and the bearing of responsibility, barriers remain which contradict the biblical promise of equal dignity of man and woman. A one-sided relationship between the genders excludes men from opportunities for example in the family and education. Domestic violence is rooted very often in a distorted relationship between males and females. In order for men and women to find their identity in a fulfilled life, an opening up of socially dominant

gender images is necessary. This needs political courage and the strength to put changes through. The Churches can and must give an example here.

The participants in the consultation encourage all those participating in the Decade to work as far as possible on these main points and to remain in contact about their activities.

Frankfurt/Main and Schwerin, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2005

*The editorial group, elected by the Consultative Group of the ACK for the Conciliar Process:*

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Overcoming  
Violence

**Appendix to the “Freising Agenda” of the Consultation “Just Peace – Life in an Endangered Future” of the Council of Christian Churches (ACK) and the Ecumenical Basis Groups and Initiatives, 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> April 2005 in Freising**

**Exemplary guidelines and recommendations for further work in the Decade to Overcome Violence 2005 – 2010**

(Re. the methodological procedure of the consultation: In 3 meetings of the 12 working groups the 140 participants from Churches, initiatives and ecumenical bodies defined the 3-4 most important tasks under the following headings: a) objective-specialist challenge, b) biblical-theological reference, and c) concrete recommendations. After the recommendations of all groups had been introduced to the plenary each participant had the opportunity to mark the recommendations they believed to be the most important with four points. The number of points, showing the preferences of the participants, is printed after the actual recommendations. The 7 main topics were derived from the result of the working groups.)

**During the consultation, the following important tasks emerged in twelve areas of action:**

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*Objective-specialist) challenges and biblical-theological references*

*Necessary steps and concrete recommendations*

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**1. Area of action: Globalisation as challenge to the Churches: Fight against poverty and marginalisation**

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The globalisation of the economy according to a neo-liberal model has now also reached

a) Together with the ecumenical process  
“Economy in the Service of Life”

public awareness in Europe and Germany. Globalisation effects worldwide the impoverishment of an increasing number of people, whilst a minority are able to accumulate disproportionate riches. In this way not only society, but also the Body of Christ is divided. Further consequences include the destruction of the natural foundations of life and the causes of war and violence.

Sibiu/Hermannstadt. (54 points)

([www.kairoseuropa.de](http://www.kairoseuropa.de)), the Decade to Overcome Violence is the current priority in the process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

b) Within this framework, a wide-ranging consultative process should be initiated on a biblical basis in relation to globalisation as a spiritual-theological, social, peace-political and ecological challenge for all Churches.

c) This consultation process should be extended on a European level via CEC and CCEE and the various ecclesiastical-theological traditions - also as preparation and feedback in connection with the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Ecumenical Assembly in

## **2. Area of action: Globalisation as challenge to the Churches: Poverty, richness and unemployment in Germany**

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As 1. area of action, but in addition:

a) Against the background of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment it is necessary to raise awareness, especially about economic globalisation in relation to the external determination of life by the “market” and the world of “goods for sale”.

b) It is necessary to take the biblical-theological aspects seriously as a basis for the economic action of the Churches.

c) A more just distribution of goods is necessary to fight poverty. The rich, in particular, have to accept responsibility to share justly (Lk 19:1-9).

a) Poverty and richness have to be recognised as a consequence of a neo-liberal economy (15 points). The development of concrete alternatives is necessary to counteract the system, e. g. through regional community economies (exchange circles, local currencies). (9 points)

b) The economic action of the Churches as employers has also to become an issue (dealing with contracts, redundancies, ethical investment). (10 points)

c) Involvement in the tax policies of governments, e.g. necessary for the development of forms of just taxation. (18 points)

## **3. Area of action: The united Europe and its social and peace-political challenge**

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a) In the process of European integration, the example of the Constitutional Treaty of the

a) The “cultural, religious and humanist heritage of Europe” has to be explored (preamble of the

European Union (EU) ([www.europa.eu.int/constitution](http://www.europa.eu.int/constitution)) clarifies that binding values for the very different identities and lives in a wider Europe are not yet a common good in a satisfactory way. The “soul of Europe” is in the process of rediscovering its new European identity.

b) In the EU Constitutional Treaty “security” is dealt with in a civil and military way. However, a military understanding of security is dominant in politics, which contradicts the biblical-theological content of “security”. The biblical-theological and the objective understanding of “security” has to be explored.

c) The EU Constitutional Treaty incorporates an imbalance between, on one hand, regulations about a social security and social support and, on the other hand, the codified liberal economic model.

d) The draft of the EU Constitutional Treaty suffers from a democratic deficit within the structures of the EU, particularly with regard to the European Parliament.

EU Constitutional Treaty). In order to clarify the European identity inter-religious exchange is necessary. The “Charter Oecumenica” is a basis of this dialogue.

([www.cec-kek.org/Deutsch/ChartafinG.htm](http://www.cec-kek.org/Deutsch/ChartafinG.htm)).

“European integration” should be planned as theme for the 3<sup>rd</sup> EEA in Sibiu/Hermannstadt 2007. (18 points)

b) Crisis prevention, non-violent solving of conflicts and consolidation of peace should be prioritised in the EU’s security and foreign policies in comparison with military efforts. Appropriate instruments should be created, e.g. an office for crisis prevention. Instead of armament and arms exports, arms conversions should be supported (18 points). Strong lobbying through non-governmental organisations in Brussels is necessary.

c) In EU social policies, the principle that human dignity and human rights determine the economic policies” should be supported. The ecumenical process “Economy in the service of life” should be referred to here. Social rights should be included in the EU Constitutional Treaty without restriction. Resources must be distributed in a just way. (4 points)

d) EU security policies must be democratised. For example, the rights of the European Parliament in questions of foreign and security policies, should be strengthened. (0 points)

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#### **4. Area of action: Dialogue and living together with Islam and inter-religious peace work**

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Like Christianity, Islam is a monotheistic religion. Currently, in Europe and Germany a dialogue with Islam is beginning and is caused by

a) the growing religious and social importance of Islam,

a) Inter-religious understanding needs an ethics of dialogue. In the dialogue with Muslims sensitivity, honesty, patience, but also awareness of one’s own standpoint, are necessary. (15 points). Christian solidarity with persecuted Christians in Islamic countries and persecuted Muslims in predominantly Christian countries

- b) century-long suppression of mutual recognition and acceptance,
- c) the political and economical importance of Islamic countries and their raw materials,
- d) the misuse of Islamic ideas by terrorist fundamentalists.

is necessary in an equal way.

- b) The powers of peace should be discovered and encouraged in the religions.
- c) A systematic training for Christian-Islamic understanding and conflict resolution should be established including the establishment of a training team. (9 points)
- d) The media, including those of the Church, should avoid the spreading of stereotypes, which favour hatred.

### 5. Area of action: Establishment of peace in the Middle East, Israel and Palestine

Unsolved problems are: The right of return of Palestinian refugees, the status of East Jerusalem, the Israeli settlements in the occupied areas, water, the wall.

- a) In the treaties between the EU and Israel and the EU and Palestine it is a European peace task to insist on the observance of human rights and international law. (6 points)

Involvement from outside is necessary. But the American government is completely on Israel's side. German foreign policy follows the American led course and has a good reputation in Israel. It also determines European Middle East policies.

- b) Europeans should stand up for the "Geneva Initiative" ([www.genfer-initiative.de](http://www.genfer-initiative.de)), for an end of the occupation of Palestine by Israel and against the building of the wall. (20 points)

The Churches in Germany still give too little support to Israeli and Palestinian forces of peace.

- c) The three-month-long "Ecumenical Peace Service in Palestine and Israel" of the Berliner Missionswerk, Brot für die Welt, eed, EMS, Evangelisches Missionswerk, AGEH and Pax Christi ([www.eappi.org](http://www.eappi.org)) should be made more public. (4 points)
- d) Partnerships should be established and developed with groups and communities in Israel, with Palestinians in Israel and with Palestinians in the occupied areas. Inter-religious dialogue there should be encouraged. (6 points)

### 6. Area of action: Strengthening of human rights, liberation from the perpetrator-victim-fixation, discussion of the Churches' history of guilt

a) Human rights are an expression of humanity in the image of God. Particularly in the

- a) Human rights have to be "globalised" through human rights education and training, through

Old Testament (Jer 22:16; Ps 72:4; Jer 22:3; Ps 103:6 and many more) the law serves the protection of the weak. Human rights have become an important cause and instrument to overcome violence.

b) People are just and sinners at the same time. Therefore, both perpetrator and victim have to be seen as such. That is the prerequisite for forgiveness and the solution to the perpetrator-victim-fixation. Church rituals such as confession, repentance, “altar of tears”, peace greeting are important for the process of repentance and reconciliation.

c) The Churches’ history of guilt with regard to violence has not been dealt with.

insisting on civil, political as well as economic, social and cultural human rights (19 points) and through making them into an effective instrument of prevention and overcoming of violence.

b) Theological keys for overcoming violence include reflection on the perpetrator-victim-theme according to the function, meaning and limitations of the perpetrator-victim-category as well as the appropriate theological and biblical themes (theology of the cross, justification theory, Easter and resurrection, image of God, cleansing of the Temple, Jesus and the adulteress, succession etc.). (5 points)

c) It is important for the trustworthiness of the Churches that they deal with their own history of guilt in their role as perpetrators and victims (Church on the side of the perpetrator: e.g. dealing with resources, limitations, conflict management, officials as perpetrators; Church on the side of the victim: globalised finance politics, church members as victims. (13 points)

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## 7. Area of action: Overcoming of war and terrorism

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a) The widespread “apocalyptic eschatology” should be replaced by an “eschatology of the kingdom of God” and the forgiveness of guilt.

b) Non-violence has to be discovered in one’s own spirituality. The understanding that there is no security without vulnerability has to be encouraged.

c) The Torah as a gift of God’s law contributes to the overcoming of violence through law.

d) The investigation of violence inherent in religions

a) War has to be de-legitimised through a critical discussion of the terms such as “security”, “defence” and “war against terror”. (12 points)

b) Concepts and instruments for the prevention of war and terrorism have to be developed, e.g. for sustainable development and civil, non-violent management of conflicts through civil peace services. (32 points)

c) Law and international legal standards have to be strengthened through political discussion and influence on political practice. (10 points)

d) Violence inherent in religions should be

is a task of every religion.

diminished through education and dialogue.

(12 points)

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### 8. Area of action: Strengthening of sustainability and preservation of creation

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Nature is the common denominator for human life in the cycle of life and death in an attitude of humility before the Creator and creation.

a) The model of “managing for life” has to be encouraged through, for example, the introduction of an ecological share of the costs and the use of money in a serving function.

(9 points)

Sustainable and ecologically appropriate management, as well as spirituality and the establishment of a new community, go hand in hand.

b) A sustainable and ecologically compatible economy has to be achieved through a continuation of the Conciliar Process and the observance of Agenda 21. (10 points)

The theological approach of humanity in the image of God was stressed. According to this, through a “call (of God) to community”, human beings create their relationships and, last not least, the Church. This opens up thinking about the eschatological dimension of the “kingdom of God”.

c) In order to deal with the life of perpetrators and victims and their relationship with each other, spirituality and the establishment of a new community are important. (11 points)

Growth, which is only orientated towards the market, misunderstands creation and leads to catastrophe. Creation as the true ecumenical richness of all life has to be recognised again. It is made aware only through intellectual-spiritual growth.

d) “Ecological information as a programme of theological ethics” should be made prominent though, for example, the eco-audit-information system of the University of Osnabrück.

([www.oekoaudit.uni-osnabrueck.de](http://www.oekoaudit.uni-osnabrueck.de))

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### 9. Area of action: Fighting exclusion through racism and group-related hostility

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a) For many centuries, the Churches have theologially legitimised Anti-Semitism (e.g. Martin Luther’s writings, liturgies of the Catholic and Orthodox Church). Theological reference: roots of Christianity in Judaism: prophets, psalms, Ro 11:1. Testament contains tradition of justice; 2.Co 5:20: reconciliation between the religions.

a) Anti-Semitism has to be dealt with within the Church through recognising the roots of Christianity in Judaism and through initiatives such as the investigation of school books and a culture of remembrance (27<sup>th</sup> January, 9<sup>th</sup> November, Week of Brotherliness, Israel Sunday). (9 points)

b) and c) Exclusion through xenophobia, racism and discrimination (special needs, homeless, homosexuals) is expressed in social violence.

Theological references:

ad b) Protection of the stranger in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Jn 4 (Jesus and the Samaritan woman), flight of the Holy Family, image of the body and the reason in Christ: 1.Co 12; Eph 2:19-21

ad c) Humans in the image of God (Gen 1); the blessing is for all peoples (Gen 12), overcoming the dividing and often discriminating differences in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28)

d) Integration is often misunderstood as assimilation and the task of cultural identity. Theological reference: Last Supper as a meal of love 1 Co 11, God's kingdom as table community (Lk 14:15-24)

b) Xenophobia and discrimination and fear towards Gypsies should be overcome through making the causes of xenophobia an issue (including recognition of fears), through highly valuing a plural and multi-cultural society.

Here, the maintenance of counselling and support services, the support of refugee initiatives, church asylum, facing one's own history with Sinti and Roma are necessary. (8 points)

c) Racism and discrimination against people must be overcome through the creation of protected areas, through encounters and the provision of homes, through uncovering the instrumentalisation and discrimination of people, anti-violence and courage training. (4 points)

d) Integration can only succeed as a bilateral process. Open meal communities and joint celebrations have to be discovered as Christian values which contribute to mutual understanding. Inter-cultural and inter-religious projects (ACK: Do you know who I am?, Week of the Foreign Fellow Citizens) should be implemented locally as practical steps towards integration. (4 points)

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## 10. Area of action: Overcoming violence in the media, education and culture

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The reduction of violence in the media, education and culture is biblically-theologically rooted:

- humanity in the image of God. Therefore people must not be turned into objects,
- in God's liberation history which has to be proclaimed,
- in a life of grace, life and truth instead of fighting and competing,

a) Training and further training in dealing with violence in the media is necessary. (13 points)

b) Violence in the media should be reduced through support for the freedom of the press, realisation of the educational task of the press and reduction in the commercial dependency of the media. (4 points)

c) "Peace journalism" should be developed.

- in the “yes” to the cross and suffering, in favour of the oppressed and weak. (18 points)

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### **11. Area of action: Violence in the family, against women and between the generations**

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The encouragement of an image of the family, based on the human in the image of God and the dignity of man and woman given by God.

a) The Church has to prepare, guide, counsel and support women, men and children according to this image of the family.

b) The Churches support the creation of such an image of family through politics, society and economy. (16 points)

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### **12. Area of action: Support for gender equality as a cross-section task**

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Man and woman are images of God (Gen 1:27). “You are all one in Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:28). Therefore, man and woman have a redeemed existence in Christ and work together in the community on an equal basis. The unity of the triune God corresponds to the human community, where the people are characterised by their being together and for each other, rather than by power and dominance, and where they enjoy the differences which God Himself has created.

Steps towards the equality of genders are: (1 point)

- men and women look at the relationship of the genders and thus practice a change in perspective (gender analysis).
  - The participation of men and women in violent situations has to become an issue and ways out of the fixation on defined roles have to be sought for, including from the point of view of the victim when dealing with power.
  - Men and women find their identity beyond narrowing traditional roles.
  - Gender-mainstreaming is institutionally necessary to strengthen the role of women.
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