



**World Council
of Churches**

**CONTINUATION
COMMITTEE ON
ECUMENISM
IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

**INTERIM REPORT PREPARED BY THE
COMMITTEE AT ITS SECOND
MEETING**

**BELEM, BRAZIL
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Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in the 21st Century

**Interim report prepared by the committee at its second meeting
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World Council of Churches

Geneva

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1. Introduction

1. The ecumenical movement would not exist without the churches' commitment to the search for visible unity and a common witness to the world. This commitment was and continues to be a task the churches cannot choose or reject. (John 17:21). Churches are called to participate in the reconciling and healing mission of God who "*was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven*" through Jesus Christ (Col 1:20/Eph 1:10). The goal for which the churches are striving is first of all a gift of God's love for creation and all humanity. The fellowship among the churches (*koinonia*) and the sharing of the gifts they have received reflect the relational reality of the triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

2. It was not an easy journey from the beginnings of the modern ecumenical movement in the 19th century to the foundation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948 in Amsterdam. These were challenging times of war and hatred - not at all conducive to the goal the pioneers of the ecumenical movement had in mind. Being responsive to the changing context and creative in their approach, they finally succeeded in bringing the WCC to birth.

3. During the formative years of the WCC, mutual trust and accountability were deeply undermined by war and by colonial attitudes and relationships. Rather than being overwhelmed by the situation, the pioneers of the ecumenical movement were motivated by the strong conviction that they were called to overcome precisely these realities in the search for the visible unity of the church and the struggle for a credible common witness.

4. From that time until the present day, war, hatred, racism and the influence of the unjust distribution of power and wealth within and between different countries and regions threaten to destroy the basis for ecumenical co-operation. Recently, the consequences of the financial crisis and economic recession have further deepened existing inequalities. But this is not the full story. There are also encouraging examples of Christians and churches growing beyond these threats, working together for reconciliation and just relationships through their common engagement. Ecumenical dialogue and co-operation have changed relationships between churches. Together, they have deepened their understanding of being church in today's world and of the fellowship that has developed between them.

5. With the growth of the ecumenical movement in the 20th century, existing differences have surfaced in new ways. With the increasing institutional differentiation of various actors and functions, new problems emerged. Competition among the various actors has become a factor to be reckoned with. Surely, it is not a simple task to sustain hope in the present situation and to build meaningful relationships as the basis for a shared vision, a common sense of direction and a willingness to address together contemporary threats to humanity and creation ¹.

6. The Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in the 21st Century is intended to be an instrument helping churches and ecumenical partners to build on progress made in the analysis of the changing context, to articulate the emerging horizons of the ecumenical vision and the underlying values, and to clarify roles and functions of different actors in the ecumenical movement in order to ensure greater coherence. The committee was formed to implement a recommendation of the 9th General Assembly of the WCC in 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, which responded to two previous consultations in 2003 in Antelias, Lebanon and in 2004 in Chavannes de Bogis, Switzerland with broad participation of representatives from different ecumenical organizations and churches. The committee is and will be offering its reflections and findings to all churches and ecumenical organizations that are represented in

¹ Rudolf von Sinner reminded the Continuation Committee in November 2007 in Bossey: There can be no Ecumenical Movement other than the one built on trust, and firstly on trust in God, who in Christ became human and is present through the Holy Spirit. Based on this trust, we can risk trusting each other. This makes us vulnerable. But it is the only way to build meaningful relationships. In many instances, however, it is precisely trust that is lacking, often with outright competition reigning and trust consciously being destroyed. (cf. Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in the 21st Century. Papers for and a report on the first meeting of the committee, Geneva: WCC, 2008, p. 20).

its membership. It will present progress reports in 2009 and 2011, and will prepare a final report with recommendations in time for the WCC General Assembly in 2013.

7. The committee accepted the proposal of its moderator, Archbishop Michael Kehinde Stephen, to move forward in the following three steps:

- a. Present a shared description of the present state of affairs;
- b. Deepen theological reflections on vision and values; and
- c. Develop concrete recommendations for action by churches and ecumenical partners.

8. A good start was made with the first meeting of the committee in 2007 in Bossey, Switzerland². The committee reflected on the recommendations that were handed to it by the consultation on Ecumenism in the 21st Century in 2004 in Chavannes-de-Bogis, Switzerland. This second meeting in January 2009 in Belém, Brazil, focused on the first of the three steps outlined by the moderator. The committee addressed emerging trends regarding the changing context, new horizons of the vision and institutional challenges that are spelled out in this document.³ The meeting was spiritually grounded in prayer from the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions and in Bible study. The Committee enjoyed the presence of six young theologians who were selected by an essay competition to mark the 60th anniversary of the WCC and benefited greatly from their contributions⁴. At the end of our consultation, the Committee was honoured by the visit of Archbishop Orani João Tempesta, of the Archdiocese of Belém, and we appreciated his reflections and benediction.



Belém: Boats on the river and the city of Belém

² Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in the 21st Century. Papers for and a report on the first meeting of the committee, Geneva: WCC, 2008.

³ The committee received progress reports on the implementation of the recommendations made in 2007 regarding the mapping of relationships between the variety of ecumenical organizations, their financial stability and efforts for more intentional co-operation especially between the WCC, Regional Ecumenical Organizations and Christian World Communions.

⁴ The essays were published in *The Ecumenical Review* 60/3, Geneva:WCC, 2008.

2. The Context of the Meeting

9. The committee came together in Belém, which in Portuguese means “Bethlehem”, the gateway to Amazonia, “city of mangoes”, surrounded by water and home to a rich diversity of peoples. We were warmly welcomed by the people of the Focolare movement to their beautiful and peaceful village-community of Mariápolis Glória (in nearby Benevides).



We were impressed by their humble way of engaging life, both together and with the poor in their community, giving powerful witness to “Jesus in our midst”.⁵ Joining our sisters and brothers of the small Lutheran congregation in Belém in worship, we celebrated the God of life and love. We experienced an impressive openness to people of other Christian traditions and other religions. We learned how long the different Afro-Brazilian communities have been victims of racism and persecution – even by some churches. We heard how the Council of Christian Churches in Amazonia (CAIC) originated in the struggles for and

confrontations over human rights, when Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians shared their lives with the excluded and forgotten people of that region. We heard how they created an ecumenical course in theology to form their pastors and priests and how they amplified their council to accommodate an interreligious committee in 2008.

10. Mindful of the words of Jesus, “I came that they may have life in fullness” (John 10:10)⁶, many of us were shocked when we saw how poor children, women and men have to struggle for survival in the favelas (slums). Listening to a sociologist and two political scientists⁷ from the Federal University of Belém, we realized that the Amazon region is trapped within the global economic system. It remains at the periphery of geopolitical power and serves as a supplier of raw materials for the highly industrialized countries. All export products, like many minerals, cereals, wood, gold, fruit or plants leave the country tax free, while the public administration remains weak and contaminated by corruption. The committee noted the important role that churches can play in empowering the poor at the grassroots level and contributing to build a strong civil society with the capacity to engage the state and transnational corporations. These experiences also reminded us of the churches’ vital role in the lives of youth and children facing increased violence and loss of community.



11. While meeting and sharing with people from different social, political and ecclesial movements, we were mindful of Luke 4:18, the promise that the poor would have good news

⁵ John 1:14 and Matthew 25:40.

⁶ John 10:10 was written on the cross in front of the Lutheran Parish in Belém (“...I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”)

⁷ Alberto Teixeira da Silva, Edir Veiga Siqueira, and Raimundo Valdomiro de Sousa.

preached, and we were impressed by the people's hope, their struggles and their life-affirming way of organizing people. And so we prayed and sang and danced with them, as they prepared to host the upcoming "World Forum on Theology and Liberation" and the "World Social Forum", because "another world is possible – um outro mundo é possível"! (Isaiah 65: 17-25).

3. Contemporary Challenges

12. From reports to the Ninth Assembly of the WCC in 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, reports and documents received by the WCC Central Committee, publications by other ecumenical organizations and individual authors, and ongoing deliberations of the Continuation Committee, we have concluded that there are considerable commonalities regarding the main dynamics and challenges of our time.

13. Churches bear witness to Christ who gives meaning and fullness of life in a highly mobile, globalized context. Ecumenism can demonstrate how churches may faithfully define and discern ways that make for justice and the peace for which Jesus wept and prayed, not seeking benefit for themselves alone but for the *oikoumene*. Such ecumenical engagement by the churches is rooted in their commitment to unity in Christ and is manifested in advocacy and solidarity. The ecumenical movement is a space where an effective witness is possible by bringing parties to the table to demonstrate paths to peace, providing Christian witness to an alternative model for politics, economy, ecology and identity. This can help to overcome the loss of identity that global pressures bring, by bearing witness to the life-giving fellowship that is offered in the body of Christ. The committee is convinced that the following issues affect all: individuals, church bodies and ecumenical actors.

14. An important change in recent decades is the shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity (in terms of numbers of people confessing Christ as Lord and Savior) towards the global South that is related to the growth of charismatic and Pentecostal churches⁸. Another important change is the impact of the historic process of globalization on the economic, political, cultural and religious spheres of societies. These changes have many consequences. Migration, whether forced or voluntary, changes in family structures, economic, ecological and social pressures have resulted in a mobility that creates a myriad of social and religious identities. Mobility and pluralism are factors that did not exist to the same extent at the beginning of the ecumenical movement. They now have a deeper impact on the way personal and institutional identities are understood; they affect the individual's sense of community, belonging and loyalty, as well as the churches' relationship to the ecumenical movement as a whole⁹. This ambiguous situation should not be confused with the richness of God-given diversity.

15. Major challenges for the common witness and advocacy of the churches were highlighted by the committee:

a) Justice issues such as the consequences of slavery and colonial oppression, poverty, lack of land reform, unjust trade relationships, wars and conflicts for resources and control of entire regions, initiatives for basic health care etc. were always high on the agenda of the ecumenical movement. The financial crisis and economic recession are posing today a deep challenge for oral accompaniment, joint advocacy and action by the churches. The lessons of the economic downturn in 2008 confirm that the quest for justice and the critique of the prevailing economic paradigm remain a priority for the churches in today's world. This includes the concern for the

⁸ For most recent data see the World Christian Database, Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary - <http://worldchristiandatabase.org>; it is important to note, however, that not in all cases the data seem to be based on sound statistical material.

⁹ Mobility and identity become justice issues when they are coupled with an economic system that rewards the hyper-mobility of some while trapping others. This becomes visible in human trafficking and child labour.

just distribution of food, the fight against HIV/AIDS and preventable diseases, overcoming poverty, providing education, promoting health and advocacy for the most vulnerable communities including youth, women, indigenous communities and people with disabilities. Issues of gender justice and human sexuality have become church-dividing issues.

b) The concern for economic justice is closely intertwined with the concern for God's creation. The effects of climate change on the natural and human world, including resulting conflicts and migration, certain biotechnologies and the loss of biodiversity, are threats to life on earth that call for the witness of the churches to God the creator, the reign of Christ over the universe and the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

c) The concentration of different forms of power in the hands of a small minority of people and countries continues to be a major factor of global dynamics. The shift from the bi-polar world system that dominated the second half of the 20th century has, however, not given way to a mono-polar system. The transition process with new competing centers of power has brought conflict and war. The biblical understanding of peace with justice and reconciliation is of utmost importance for the churches' witness in today's rapidly changing geopolitical arena.

d) Technology is changing the way people communicate and relate to one another, creating new and often ambiguous forms of community. These technologies challenge the churches to find new ways to relate to people and build authentic community.



Belém: Aluminum Smelter

16. The market logic, in which goods are more valuable than community, affects the churches' practice. In this context, churches often lose focus on identity in Christian community and compete with each other locally and globally. Where this dynamic exists, communities of faith that don't have the ability to compete or don't believe in the logic of competition are further marginalized. The decrease in financial support for churches and ecumenical organizations exacerbates opportunities for ecumenical partnership and common witness.

17. There is a need for conversation with religions and ideologies – seeking to faithfully embody alternative ways of living together amid the rise of religio-national fundamentalism, relativism, privatization, and market ideologies, recognizing that these are often attempts to overcome the effects of marginalization. It is possible to support religious freedom while peacefully engaging religious diversity through interreligious dialogue and co-operation.

18. There are important differences concerning the ranking, the more detailed analysis and the theological discernment of these main concerns, which account for controversies and tensions within and among churches and different actors in the ecumenical movement. This fact underlines even further the need for a common platform that enables the churches, and ecumenical organizations to encounter and to engage each other in addressing these challenges at various levels.

19. This Committee believes that churches can speak together to envision a new reality. It believes that ecumenism can offer a new vision of identity and community to help individuals and churches affirming their identity by participating in Trinitarian *koinonia*¹⁰. A foretaste of

¹⁰ The Greek word *koinonia* refers to the communion or fellowship among churches and Christians which is based on the conviction that in Christ Jesus God united with himself and with one another those dispersed by human sin and set against each other. Such relational understanding of salvation and of the church is rooted in the faith in the Triune God whose very being is *koinonia* (cf. *On the way to Fuller Koinonia: The Message of the World Conference*, in: Thomas Best and Günther Gassmann, *On the way to Fuller*

the fullness of life that is promised in Christ (John 10:10) this vision of identity and community is life-affirming and inspires action for the transformation of the world (Rev 22/23).

4. Theological Framework and Vision

20. Theological reflection will be the main focus of the next meeting of the committee. The following paragraphs of this section indicate some of the concerns and questions that will be explored more intentionally in the next report. The committee affirms that the Biblical and theological foundation of the search for the full visible unity of the church and common witness to the world is rooted in Christ's prayer for his disciples ("that they may all be one") as found in John 17:21. The ecumenical movement has its centre in Christ and not in us nor our own efforts, plans and desires. It is our understanding that the search for the goal of full visible unity of the church is also for the sake of the healing and transformation of the world. Common witness for justice and peace has always been central for the ecumenical movement. For the WCC, CWCs, REOs and NCCs, there is agreement on the centrality of the ecclesial basis in their expression of ecumenism. For International Ecumenical Organizations, Ecumenical Renewal Movements, Specialized Agencies, International Ecumenical Youth Organizations, the ecclesial basis is not necessarily a major consideration in their expression of ecumenism. However, all partners agree on the centrality of the ethos of fellowship, consensus and common witness as foundational for a common vision

21. Is there a shared theological understanding of the emerging horizons that require a new vision for how the ecumenical movement fulfills its purpose in the 21st century? Some of the emerging horizons are:

- The changing ecclesial landscape
- Our deeper awareness of our relationship to creation
- Relationships with other faith traditions and religions

Christians of different traditions are addressing these new horizons in serious ways. There are many practical examples of how churches translate these insights into action.

22. In terms of the changing ecclesial landscape, some theological questions raised involve who has the power to define, include, exclude. Some churches grapple with the ecclesial-based nature of the ecumenical movement in a context in which an increasing number of Christian communities do not identify with a denominational model. This raises the question of how to share space with such communities without sacrificing the positive achievements of the past.

23. Missionary *activities* and ecumenical dialogue require respectful relationships and trust. Proselytism destroys this foundation and becomes a stumbling block to dialogue and responsible mission. Our common ground in Jesus Christ does not allow building on someone else's foundation (Romans 15:20). The urgency of this issue requires a serious discussion as a step to assure each other of good intentions.

24. With regard to the deeper awareness of our relationship to creation, Christians of different traditions are indeed addressing this relationship in serious ways. Many churches argue theologically for the care of creation, and they address the relationship between economic development and resulting ecological issues from their faith perspectives.¹¹

Koinonia. Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Faith and Order Paper no. 166, Geneva: WCC, 1994, pp. 225 ff.)

¹¹ Cf. recently the final statement by the Synaxis of Orthodox Hierarchs in November 2008 in the Phanar and before the "AGAPE document" of the WCC (2006), the "Accra Confession" of the 2004 WARC General Council, the statement by the 2003 Winnipeg Assembly of the LWF etc.

25. Recognizing that we share life with our neighbors from other faith traditions and religions, how do our varying contexts lead to constructive engagement? In a globalized milieu of greater mobility and speedier communications, how do our different engagements impact and influence each other? There is a new urgency to find answers to these questions.

26. Different church traditions are wrestling both theologically and practically with these questions, each in its own way. Emphasizing Christ as the source of creation, together with the role of the Holy Spirit in sustaining life, affirms the dignity of all human beings irrespective of race, gender, nationality and religion. What is needed now is a more intense and deeper theological exchange about how these questions are answered from various theological and ecclesiological perspectives. Differences are not necessarily a stumbling block for a shared ecumenical vision if there is enough common ground to give and to receive from one another. A primary task for strengthening the ecumenical vision for the 21st century is theological reflection that allows these different approaches to interact and to inform each other in recognition of different contextual conditions and challenges.



Sunday in a local congregation

27. Resources for this theological exchange include relationships built on trust, mutual respect and a commitment to the ethos of fellowship, consensus and common witness as well as the conviction that all of these are founded primarily in our reliance on God.

5. Institutional challenges

28. There are three different sets of institutional challenges:

- the first concerns the classical streams of the ecumenical movement;
- the second relates to the different institutional expressions of the ecumenical movement that developed in the 20th Century;
- the third refers to new institutional challenges that reflect the changing context.

29. The major streams¹² of the past are still visible, although they have changed considerably in recent decades. If it was the genius of the founding generation of the WCC to combine the major streams of the young ecumenical movement in one organization that was based on member churches, it is very important now to understand how the major streams continue to be represented in the movement and institutions we encounter.

30. The stream of ecclesially-centred ecumenism today goes beyond the work of the Commission on Faith and Order. With the Roman Catholic Church joining the ecumenical movement after the Second Vatican Council, the bilateral dialogues pursued by the Roman Catholic Church and other World Communions at various levels have become an important element of the search for visible unity, with the Christian World Communions as primary actors¹³. The question to be addressed is, "What is the role of the World Council of Churches and Christian World Communions within this stream, and how do they relate to each other?"

¹² The three classical streams of the ecumenical movement are the Missionary movement (1910 Edinburgh), the Faith and Order movement (1927 Lausanne) and the Life and Work movement (1925 Stockholm). Faith and Order and Life and Work came together to form the WCC, while the International Missionary Council joined the WCC only in 1961. There were other, smaller entities, e.g. the Commission on International Affairs (included in the WCC in 1948 already), the World Council of Christian Education (included 1971) etc. that also contributed to life and action of the WCC.

¹³ It is also important to note in this context the renewed impetus for a Panorthodox Council; cf. the statement by the Synaxis of Orthodox Hierarchs in November 2008 in the Phanar.

31. The Mission movement and the Life and Work Movement have also changed considerably in recent decades, especially under the influence of contextual theologies and a more active role of churches from the Global South. Perspectives of contextual theologies with a strong focus on culture and social justice have broadened the scope of mission theologies and approaches to issues of church and society. This happened not without tension and conflict, dynamics that are still echoed in contemporary debates.

32. Another notable shift is a consequence of the growing importance of financially strong specialized ministries in the field of ecumenical diakonia and development. Mission societies that have been active in the domains of health, education and social action for decades are increasingly asked to avoid duplication with development agencies or to merge activities. Fundraising and advocacy campaigns by specialized ministries have also had an influence on the understanding and methods of advocacy with governments and other national actors and with the UN at the international level. At times, the impression was given that these were competing and not complementary approaches. The inequalities in existing distribution of financial resources within the ecumenical movement have raised new questions of power relations in mission engagement and ecumenical efforts.

33. After decades of alienation between some Evangelicals and some Ecumenical organizations, the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) has started to reach out to Charismatic, Pentecostal and African Instituted Churches. The process towards the Centenary of the 1910 World Mission Conference at Edinburgh is a case in point. Another important process, including inter-religious involvement, is the series of consultations concerning a Code of Conduct on Conversion. Differences regarding the understanding of mission today, of evangelism, conversion, syncretism and proselytism need to be addressed, while efforts still have to be made to build trust and reliable working relationships. The Global Christian Forum (GCF) has emerged as a relevant platform for the broadening participation in the ecumenical movement in dialogue with Charismatic, Pentecostal and African Instituted Churches.

34. These observations point to the fact that the institutional arrangement of the ecumenical movement has become more diversified. The same factors that changed the outlook of the traditional streams also influenced changes in and among the main organizational expressions of the ecumenical movement in the 20th century.

35. Analysis of the relationship between the different spheres of ecumenism shows that there is growing intentional co-operation and division of labour; for instance, between the WCC and Regional Ecumenical Organizations (REOs), National Councils of Churches (NCCs) and in Africa sub-regional Fellowships of Churches¹⁴. This is partly due to the fragile financial situation of many of the National Councils and of the Regional Ecumenical Organizations. While the REOs are confronting these challenges, the WCC and other ecumenical partners have continued to accompany and support them. What is emerging is a clearer understanding of the different priorities in response to the context and the need for a clear division of labour so that different ecumenical efforts complement each other¹⁵.

¹⁴ Jill Hawkey presented results of her study mapping current ecumenical structures and relationships at the consultation on Ecumenism in the 21st Century in Chavannes de Bogis/Switzerland (Appendix V to the report, pp. 66-80). A wealth of data on work by different partners that is financed by the specialized ministries is made available by the yearly Partner Survey for the WCC Roundtable. Making use of these data, the WCC has analyzed the development of Regional Ecumenical Organisations and two World Communion that are closely co-operating with the WCC (LWF and WARC).

¹⁵ The following are just a few examples for improved co-operation: the WCC together with REOs (All Africa Conference of Churches, Conference of European Churches, Middle East Council of Churches, Christian Conference of Asia, Caribbean Council of Churches and Pacific Conference of Churches) have fostered inter-regional co-operation on migration and trade; the AACC is contributing to the WCC's work on economic justice through its focus on poverty in Africa; the same is true for the Pacific Conference of Churches and its focus on Climate Change.

36. A number of organizations that are concentrating on specific target groups or concerns are loosely defined as International Ecumenical Organizations. Some of them, such as the World Student's Christian Federation (WSCF), the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) date back to the 19th century – whereas others such as Ecumenical News International, ACT International and ACT Development have been created only in recent years. The General Secretary of the World Association for Christian Communication is representing them on the Continuation Committee. It is important to map their individual contributions and explore the linkages with other ecumenical organizations. It is encouraging to see, for instance, increasing co-operation between organizations focusing on young people, e.g. the World Student Christian Federation, Syndesmos, Young Men's Christian Association and Young Women's Christian Association. The creation of the WCC's ECHOS youth commission, which includes membership beyond WCC member churches, has also contributed to improved co-operation. The YWCA has also strengthened its financial basis through clearly focused priorities (e.g. work on HIV/AIDS). The need for clearer priorities seems a common trend for all those organizations that depend on specialized ministries and other donors for their funding.

37. The Christian World Communions (CWCs) include the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, and different Church families. While they differ in the extent to which they engage in mission, ecumenical actions and diakonia, one main contribution they make to Christian Unity is involvement in bilateral dialogues. The annual meetings of the Secretaries of the CWCs provide an opportunity to deepen fellowship and develop ecumenical co-operation, and the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance also send representatives.

38. There are three new institutional challenges that reflect the changing context (again influenced by some of the same trends that surfaced earlier):

39. First, there are the new forms of networking. There are two basic models that have developed: these networks either concentrate on particular issues – which allows for the co-operation of a broad coalition of different actors - or they concentrate on one set of actors with the ability to address a broader agenda. The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) is an example of the first approach; the ACT Alliance, the merger of ACT International and ACT Development that will be completed in 2009, is an example of the second approach¹⁶.

40. Second, there are new platforms for broader participation beyond the classical ecumenical movement, such as Churches Together, Christian Councils or the Global Christian Forum. These platforms tend to focus more on open dialogue and much less on the discipline of mutual accountability.

41. Third, there is an increasing number of inter-religious councils locally and nationally. Some of these are replacing local councils of churches, while others are focusing on reconciliation and peace in situations of conflict. Internationally there are new opportunities emerging to work together with inter-religious partners.

42. All three dimensions of institutional challenges demonstrate how new realities and dynamics drive institutional development and change. There is a need a) to deepen the relationships between those belonging to the fellowship of ecumenically committed churches, b) to broaden participation in the ecumenical movement and c) to ensure greater coherence of the different institutional expressions and organizations involved. These actions need to be informed by analysis of the



*Archbishop Michel K. Stephen,
Moderator of the Committee*

¹⁶ See the most recent Joint Newsletter of ACT International and ACT Development, Dec. 2008.

trends that can be observed. There is also a need for thorough theological reflection on guiding vision and values, as the process of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC and the subsequent work of the Permanent Commission on Consensus and Collaboration have clearly shown. There is an ongoing need to map ecumenical activity, to define the charism of each ecumenical organization and to plan how to support each organization in its work.

43. Deepening the fellowship, broadening participation in the ecumenical movement and maintaining greater coherence are tasks that the WCC is willing to perform in the service of its member churches and to benefit all partners in the ecumenical movement. The WCC has begun to approach this task in new ways by convening all who need to interact and to talk to each other in one ecumenical space or around one table. The Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in the 21st Century and the WCC Assembly Discernment Committee¹⁷ are the most recent examples of both the willingness of the WCC to fulfill this convening role and the readiness of ecumenical partners to recognize the WCC as the privileged instrument of the ecumenical movement, demonstrating the ecumenical commitment of the fellowship of its member churches, but not demanding to be recognized as the centre of the movement. Such a convening role facilitates developments, but it also requires the capacity to discern the signs of the time and to stimulate new insights – very much in the same way as the convening function should enhance and not mute prophetic voices. In addition to accepting the privileged role of convening, the WCC is will to be a participating member in shaping and encouraging the discourse. The WCC is able to provide a space where conflicts are not avoided but may be identified and worked through. These steps are preconditions to fulfilling a prophetic role.

6. Main foci

44. There has been a shift from the *reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement* to the emphasis on *ecumenism in the 21st century*. This shift requires that more attention be given to the convergence between theological, contextual and institutional challenges.

45. Churches are building common ground in recalling the spiritual roots of the ecumenical movement – that they are one in Christ, and that he is calling us to make that oneness visible through unity and witness. Christians are meant to be an answer to Christ's own prayer (John 17:21). Re-affirming the ecclesial nature of the search for visible unity and common witness, they remind each other of their common roots and their common journey. The churches – their members and their leaders along with their doctrines and traditions – are the primary agents and actors of the ecumenical movement. The churches engaging with each other more deeply in common witness will strengthen not one, but all ecumenical instruments.

46. Worship (leitourgia) and proclamation (kerygma) are essential for nurturing the fellowship in the ecumenical movement through love and prayer. Community (koinonia), witness (martyria) and service (diakonia) lend themselves to structure the interaction between these different sets of actors in the ecumenical movement, as some examples demonstrate:

47. a. The search for visible unity will benefit from the deliberate interaction between the bilateral approach and the multi-lateral approach. The WCC-convened forum on bilateral dialogues provides a model for this interaction that has the potential to clarify the different roles in this arena and the different understandings of unity that have emerged.

¹⁷ The WCC ninth assembly in 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, had a vision of an "ecumenical assembly that would assemble all churches to celebrate their fellowship in Jesus Christ, and to address common challenges facing the church and humanity", and agreed on the specific mandate "to explore the feasibility of a structure for WCC assemblies that would provide expanded space for Christian world communions and confessional families to meet for the purpose of deliberation and/or overall agenda" (policy reference committee report). The Assembly Discernment Committee was established by the WCC Central Committee in February 2008 to work on this recommendation, cf. Continuation Committee *ibid.*, p. 32

48. b. Mission in the 21st century is a core issue at stake in the relationship between WCC member churches and Evangelicals and charismatic and Pentecostal churches. Edinburgh 2010 is a crystallizing event for this agenda that needs further reflection and action. The Roman Catholic Church and other ecumenical bodies are engaged in critical issues important to mission in the 21st Century.
49. c. The churches' engagement for economic justice, creation, peace and reconciliation forms one arena. The role of the churches and specialized ministries in ecumenical diakonia and global advocacy belongs to this arena in which the relationship between churches and specialized ministries has to be addressed.
50. d. The previous three foci need to be accompanied by a fourth focus on the role of different ecumenical actors in inter-religious dialogue and co-operation. This is an urgent matter given the pressing need for successful models of inter-religious co-operation at local, national and international levels.
51. Other concerns have become a priority for almost all involved in the ecumenical movement, i.e. the nurturing of the spiritual roots of ecumenism and the need for concentrated and sustained efforts for ecumenical formation at all levels.
52. A question to be addressed: Is it possible to say that these four foci lend themselves to re-focus the common efforts of different actors involved in the ecumenical movement?
53. Lessons learned in the process on ecumenism in the 21st century so far seem to suggest that a shared understanding of contemporary challenges, the combination of theological reflection on the basic elements of the new horizons for the ecumenical vision, the nurturing of the ethos of fellowship and consensus, followed by work on the four main thematic foci can, indeed, lead to a more solid basis for common action and facilitate a renewed flourishing of the ecumenical movement.

7. Recommendation

54. The Committee asks the Central Committee of the WCC to forward this interim report to member churches and ecumenical partners with an invitation to share their comments on the report and suggestions for further work of the committee with the WCC secretariat by the end of May 2010:

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