

Programme Book

Ninth Assembly

Porto Alegre, February 2006



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Introduction

Within the pages of this *Programme Book* are several key texts and documents for delegates and other participants attending the ninth assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, from 14 to 23 February 2006.

This book takes its place alongside other resources that have been provided to help participants find their way at the assembly. These include *Springs of Living Water*, which contains the Bible studies prepared for the assembly, and *From Harare to Porto Alegre*, an illustrated account of WCC activities from 1998 to 2006. Upon arrival at the assembly, participants will receive *Em tua graça*, containing the prayers and music selected for the assembly. Also in Porto Alegre, participants will receive information about the churches hosting the assembly. An assembly *Handbook* will be distributed with the daily schedule, room assignments and helpful suggestions for our life together in Porto Alegre.

The *Programme Book* contains important information to help participants understand the nature and purpose of the World Council of Churches as “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (article I of the WCC Constitution, p.40).

Participants are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the materials in this *Programme Book* well before the assembly begins – to approach the task in prayer, to read carefully what is here and to reflect upon it, particularly in the light of the life and witness of their church and their own context. Participants are asked to bring this book to Porto Alegre. It will be used every day.

What is an assembly?

An assembly of the World Council is the coming together of the member churches of the WCC to reaffirm their fellowship and to take counsel with one another. Since the inaugural assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, at which the WCC was officially founded, these events have marked key moments in the life of the churches and in the history of the Council. They have been held at intervals of about seven years – at Evanston (USA) in 1954, New Delhi (India) in 1961, Uppsala (Sweden) in 1968, Nairobi (Kenya) in 1975, Vancouver (Canada) in 1983, Canberra (Australia) in 1991, Harare (Zimbabwe) in 1998 and now in Porto Alegre (Brazil) in 2006.

Persons whom the Council’s member churches have delegated as their official representatives constitute the assembly. The central committee in consultation with the churches decides the number of delegates for each church. While only the delegates named by the churches can participate in the decision-making process, they are accompanied by a variety of other participants who have been invited by the central committee to assist the assembly. Some of these other participants have the right to speak, but not to participate in decision-making. This is described in more detail on pp.1-2.

An assembly has three general functions.

First, as the most representative gathering of its kind, the assembly is an occasion to celebrate and reaffirm the mutual commitment that member churches and ecu-

menical partners have made through the WCC. It is a moment for the churches, through their delegates and all those gathered at the assembly to reaffirm their confession of Jesus Christ, to pray together, and to voice their intention to continue the search for the visible unity of the church. To ground its celebrations and commitments in the light of the present-day realities, each assembly has a theme. The theme chosen for Porto Alegre, “God, in Your Grace, Transform the World”, has been a prayer guiding preparations and encouraging reflection. At the assembly, the theme will be explored each day in prayer and through Bible study, discussions and deliberations.

Second, the assembly is an opportunity for the churches to receive an account of the work facilitated by the WCC with its members and partners over the seven years since the last assembly. Written materials, including *From Harare to Porto Alegre* and many of the documents published in this *Programme Book*, provide helpful information about the work of the WCC. Participants are asked to attend the plenary “From Harare to Porto Alegre” on 14 February during which an account of the Council’s work will be presented.

Third, the assembly, as the highest decision-making body of the WCC, must set policy and programme guidelines for the Council’s work in the years to come. It must also elect from among its delegates up to 150 members of the central committee, which will assume the responsibility for guiding the work of the WCC through the next assembly. The assembly will also elect the presidents of the WCC.

How does an assembly work?

Because of the large size of the assembly and the limited time available in which to give adequate attention to all three of these features, the programme was carefully constructed to enable an effective flow of work according to the procedures, while allowing for maximum participation.

The assembly will begin and end each day gathered together in common prayer. Following morning prayer, Bible study will provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on the scripture passage chosen for the day in the context of the life of their churches and their daily experiences.

Thematic plenaries will present some of the major issues facing the churches today, including economic justice, overcoming violence, church unity, and Christian identity in the context of religious plurality. Delegates and others will join ecumenical conversations to deepen their dialogue on twenty-two specific issues related to the rapidly changing religious, ecumenical, political, social and economic context in which churches and individual Christians are called to act.

The assembly committees will prepare reports to the assembly concerning the future directions and leadership of the Council. Delegates will seek consensus on the recommendations of the committees during the decision-making sessions at the end of the assembly.

The *Mutirão*, a market-place of workshops which accompanies the assembly, will provide an opportunity for the witness of church members and ecumenical partners to strengthen the assembly.

The assembly will have many opportunities to share in the life and witness of its host churches. This will be highlighted on 19 February when participants are invited to worship with local congregations. A plenary on Latin America and a cultural celebration will follow that evening. In addition, hundreds of people from Latin America

will join the assembly through the *Mutirão*, providing for a rich exchange of witness and culture with the churches and people of the region.

The various elements or “building blocks” of the assembly are explained on pp.1-22. Participants are asked to read these pages carefully and to attend the orientation plenary on 14 February during which the assembly programme and consensus procedures will be presented in detail.

What are the documents to be read?

The documents published in this *Programme Book* should be read carefully in preparation for the assembly. They will help participants to understand the issues facing the assembly and how it will function.

Policy documents

These documents are essential for understanding the nature and purpose of the World Council of Churches and how the assembly will function in Porto Alegre. The constitution and rules of the WCC contain important amendments and changes for decision or confirmation by the assembly. The “Guidelines for the Conduct of Meetings” will help participants become familiar with the consensus procedures used at WCC meetings. The document “When Christian Solidarity Is Broken” is presented as a covenant of respect and care for one another during the assembly.

Assembly documents

These documents will be used during the assembly or considered for action. The assembly is invited to consider and adopt the invitation “Called To Be the One Church” on pp.107-10. Both the AGAPE “Call to Love and Action” and the Decade to Overcome Violence mid-term “Call to Recommitment” will be used during the plenary sessions on respectively economic justice and youth overcoming violence. The financial profile will also be presented for action.

Ecumenical conversations

The introduction and twenty-two descriptions serve as a discussion starter for the ecumenical conversations. The theological overview on pp.127-32 that introduces the conversation descriptions is a reflection on the assembly theme in the light of the rapidly changing world in which we live and to which we witness.

Resource documents

These documents provide background reading on Christian identity and religious plurality, and on the work of the churches during the first five years of the Decade to Overcome Violence. They also provide background reading on the work of the Council in fostering church and ecumenical relations. The summary reports on preparations towards a Global Christian Forum and the work of the WCC-Pentecostal Joint Consultative Group should be read alongside the *Eighth Report of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches*, which was sent previously to all participants.

Some hopes and expectations

In the course of preparing this assembly, numerous hopes and expectations have helped to shape the programme, inform the agenda and determine the composition. Perhaps the most significant hopes and expectations relate to the context in which the

assembly will meet, the dawning of a new phase in ecumenism and the desire to strengthen the voice of young people in the ecumenical movement.

This will be the first assembly to take place in Latin America. The testimonies of the churches and the challenges faced by the societies throughout the continent will inform the work of the assembly in Brazil. Having visited the region at the close of 2004, I witnessed a great hope for political and economic renewal as so many people attempt to heal the wounds of decades of military rule.

The role of the WCC in expressing support and solidarity with the people of Latin America during those difficult times is gratefully acknowledged and appreciated. Many see the assembly as an opportune moment to testify to the world and thank the WCC for being in solidarity at the hour of great need.

This assembly will also be a platform from which the ecumenical journey of the Protestant, Pentecostal and Catholic churches in Latin America could inspire churches elsewhere to envision new ecumenical horizons.

The ninth assembly marks a new phase in ecumenism and a coming of age within the membership of the World Council of Churches. Delegates will embark on a journey of consensus-model decision-making, seeking new ways to come to agreement on important statements and actions by the assembly. In addition, the past years' discussion on ecumenism in the 21st century indicates that shared commitments and experiences, rather than common membership, will be the hallmark of our ecumenical future.

The central committee set the goal of making this the youngest assembly in the history of the World Council of Churches. As is often said, young people are not simply the future of the church, they are the church today. They are surely tomorrow's leaders of the church and the ecumenical movement. If we are serious about our future, we must be as serious about allowing young people to help lead the way.

Young people will play a key role in Porto Alegre. There will be over 100 youth delegates, representatives and advisers. There will be 150 youth present as stewards. A youth camp will welcome 150 young people from Brazil and Latin America. The *Mutirão* will welcome many more young people into the life of the assembly. Aware that a "youth assembly" cannot be measured in numbers alone, the central committee invited all registered participants between 18 and 30 to join the delegates in ecumenical conversations – thereby giving them a voice at a crucial time of discussion.

Assemblies are often turning points in the life of the World Council and Porto Alegre will surely leave its mark on ecumenical history. As you prepare for the assembly, I commend this book, along with other materials that were sent to you by post, for your serious consideration and preparation. I also ask you to prepare for the assembly by turning to the members of your church so that your presence in Porto Alegre will be a testimony to the concerns, hopes and prayers of the community that has sent you and will welcome you back home at the end of your journey.

Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

People at the Assembly

The assembly will gather up to 3000 church leaders, members and ecumenical partners from nearly every Christian tradition around the world. It is one of the broadest global gatherings of its kind.

Life in community

A gathering of persons from so many varied cultures and church traditions is a unique experience of the richness of God's gifts and grace in our midst. For many participants the highlight of an assembly is the opportunity it offers to meet people from all over the world – sharing stories and a common witness, and experiencing the amazing diversity of the body of Christ.

Such diversity, however, can also create misunderstandings, frustrations or even conflicts in an ecumenical setting. To prevent this, each participant is asked to be patient and sensitive with all the persons they will meet. Each participant has his or her own language, culture, tradition and experience to share for the benefit of all. “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt. 22:39).

The guidelines for consensus decision-making (pp.23-39) as well as the policy document “When Christian Solidarity Is Broken” (pp.104-106) offer important principles for how the community life of the assembly can be fostered and protected.

Categories of participation

Each participant has a specific role to play at the assembly. WCC Rule IV (pp.47-51) explains these roles in a formal way.

All participants will wear a badge, indicating their name, church and home country, as well as the role or category of the participant. What follows is a brief summary of the different categories.

- **Delegates** (approximately 728) of the WCC member churches. Eighty-five percent are designated by the member churches directly; up to fifteen percent may be named by member churches at the request of the central committee in order to achieve various balances in the composition of the assembly (the details of this process are set forth in WCC Rule IV). The delegates of the member churches are the only persons entitled to participate in decision-making at the assembly.
- The WCC **officers** and **presidents**, elected at the Harare assembly in 1998, may attend the assembly with the right to speak (and to participate in decision-making if they have been named delegates).
- Several members of the retiring **central committee**, elected to serve from 1998 to 2006, will be present, either as delegates of their churches or as participants with the right to speak.

Also present with the right to speak during sessions are:

- **Representatives** of the WCC's associate member churches (churches with fewer than 25,000 members).

2 *How the Assembly Works*

- Member churches and associate member churches were invited by the central committee to appoint an **adviser to the delegation**, who shares responsibility for ecumenical affairs within the life of the church, to accompany the delegation through the assembly.
- The central committee invited a limited number of **advisers** who have a special contribution to make to the deliberations of the assembly or who have participated in the activities of the WCC.
- **Delegated representatives** come from Christian world communions, regional and national ecumenical bodies, international ecumenical organizations and specialized ministries that are in a working relationship with the WCC.
- **Delegated observers** are officially named by churches which are not members of the WCC, but with whom the WCC has a working relationship – the largest such groups come from the Roman Catholic Church and various Pentecostal churches.

Among those who are registered as participants and who may attend the sessions of the assembly (but do not have the right to participate in decision-making and may not speak unless specifically requested by the moderator) are:

- **Observers** from related ecumenical organizations or churches that are not members or that are not represented by a delegated observer or a delegated representative. Also participating as observers are the heads of member churches who are present at the assembly but who are not delegates of their church.
- **Guests**, invited in a personal or individual capacity.
- **Mutirão participants** are persons from around the world and throughout Latin America who have come to Porto Alegre to share in and contribute to the life of the assembly. They may be individuals, congregations, student groups or ecumenical partners. Some will simply participate, while others will offer workshops, cultural celebrations and other activities.
- **Stewards**, approximately 150 young people between 18 and 30 years of age from around the world who give their time and energy to assist the assembly in its work, but also to share in an experience of ecumenical formation and to strengthen the voice of youth.
- **WCC staff**, approximately 100 persons employed by the WCC, who are present to facilitate the assembly programme, and provide administrative, financial, logistical and media services.
- **Co-opted staff**, persons who have been invited to assist the WCC staff and stewards in assembly operations.
- Members of the national and local **host committees** and volunteers serving in various **working groups** who have helped to prepare the assembly over several years and who assist with various tasks at the assembly.
- Over one hundred **accredited media** representatives, who are covering the assembly for journalistic purposes, including writers, radio and television reporters, photographers and technicians.
- **Service providers and partners**, persons employed by the companies that have been contracted to assist the assembly with logistical and technical needs.

Presidents of the WCC



*Dr Agnes Abuom
Anglican Church of Kenya*



*Bishop Jabez Bryce
Anglican Church in Aotearoa/
New Zealand and Polynesia*



*His Eminence Metropolitan Chrysostomos
of Ephesus, Ecumenical Patriarchate
of Constantinople [Turkey]*



*Dr Moon Kyu Kang
Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea*



*Rev. Kathryn Bannister
1998 - June 2004
United Methodist Church [USA]*



*Rev. Dr Bernice Powell Jackson
June 2004 - 2006
United Church of Christ [USA]*



*Bishop Federico J. Pagura
Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina*



*Bishop Eberhardt Renz
Evangelical Church in Germany*



*His Holiness Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas
Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate
of Antioch and All the East*

Officers of the Central Committee



*Moderator:
His Holiness Aram I
Armenian Apostolic
Church (Cilicia)*



*Vice-moderator:
Ms Justice Sophia
O.A. Adinyira
Church of the Province
of West Africa, Ghana*



*Vice-moderator:
Dr Marion S. Best
United Church of
Canada*



*General secretary:
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
Methodist Church in
Kenya*

HOW THE ASSEMBLY WORKS

Assembly Programme

Rich and diverse, the assembly programme contains several inter-related elements, involving fellowship, celebration, discussion, decision-making and prayer. The ninth assembly is expected to inspire and energize the churches and the ecumenical movement in addressing the challenges of the 21st century. It will be marked by a new ethos of discernment through consensus and the rapidly changing contexts of a globalized world in which the churches and individual Christians are called to witness.

The entire assembly will be strengthened by a deep spiritual life of daily prayer and Bible study. Thematic plenaries and ecumenical conversations allow participants to discuss key issues facing the churches today. For delegates and other official participants, business sessions will focus on the organization, programmes and future priorities of the World Council of Churches. An open partnership programme called the *Mutirão* offers space to churches, ecumenical partners and other participants to share experiences through workshops, exhibitions and other presentations.

In the pages that follow the assembly programme is explained in detail with a focus on:

- Assembly spiritual life – daily prayer and Bible study
- Assembly plenaries – addresses, business and thematic presentations
- Ecumenical conversations – deliberation on important issues
- Assembly business – consensus procedures, committees, statements and nominations
- *Mutirão* – workshops, exhibitions, celebrations

The timetable opposite gives an overview of the assembly, and a daily schedule of events will be distributed.

Assembly Spiritual Life

The whole of the assembly is a spiritual experience of prayer, encounter, reflection and discernment. This spiritual life is founded on the assembly theme, “God, in Your Grace, Transform the World” – itself a prayer before God.

Prayer life

The ninth assembly will be a “praying assembly”. Participants will gather each morning and evening for common prayer under a tent. After morning prayer, delegates will meet in small groups for Bible study, while *Mutirão* participants will join larger groups. Eucharist services may be offered by various church traditions in the university chapel. The assembly will be linked closely with local church life in Porto Alegre and congregations around the world will pray along with the assembly, using resources from the assembly website.

The prayer life of the assembly was planned by the assembly worship committee, whose members have been working for two years. Taking into account the advice of the report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation (see pp.69-103), the committee sought to prepare a prayer life meaningful for all church traditions.

Through daily prayer and Bible study, participants will explore the assembly theme holistically:

- God, in your grace, transform **our world** (14 and 15 February)
- God, in your grace, transform **the earth** (16 February)
- God, in your grace, transform **our societies** (17 February)
- God, in your grace, transform **our lives** (18 and 21 February)
- God, in your grace, transform **our churches** (20 February)
- God, in your grace, transform **our witness** (22 and 23 February)

Opening celebration

The opening celebration will take place on 14 February at 18:00. The celebration will gather 5000 assembly participants and people from local churches. The homily will offer a theological reflection on the assembly theme.

Morning prayer

Prayer begins each morning at 8:30 in the worship tent with time for singing and gathering beforehand. The assembly choir will rehearse at 7:30. Prayers and songs can be found in *Em tua graça: Resources for Praise and Prayer*, which will be distributed at the assembly. Please bring your copy every day and come ready to learn new music from around the world.

Evening prayer

Before retiring for the day, the assembly will gather for evening prayer at 18:45. Confessional evening prayers will follow varied church traditions of vesper services. Interconfessional evening prayer will have a thematic orientation.

The university chapel

The chapel of the Pontifical Catholic University may be used throughout the assembly for personal prayer and meditation. It will also host eucharistic services celebrated by different confessions either at midday or early morning. The assembly worship committee will coordinate services in the chapel, which will be announced in the assembly newspaper. Times of services will not conflict with the agenda of the assembly.

Worship with local congregations

Congregations from Porto Alegre and the surrounding area are invited to join the assembly for the opening and closing celebrations as well as for daily prayers. On Sunday, 19 February, participants are invited to join local congregations for worship and sharing. More information about this will be provided at the assembly.

Closing celebration

The assembly will close in prayer on the afternoon of Thursday, 23 February. This final gathering will send participants home with renewed hope in the power of God's grace to transform the world. The time of the service will be confirmed at the assembly.

Bible study

Reflecting the rich diversity of the participants and the churches from which they come, Bible study will help participants explore the assembly theme in light of the biblical texts, while sharing their own experiences of life and faith. Following morning prayer, participants will gather for Bible study from 9:15 to 10:30.

In the midst of such ecumenical diversity the invitation to read the Bible together is an invitation to be open to one another, to the witness of scripture and to the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a time to discern together the signs of God's grace in the texts, in our lives and in the world. Bible study will encourage participants to integrate all they have done and heard during the assembly and to discover the possibilities of transformation that God offers.

Reflections in *Springs of Living Water: Bible Studies on Grace and Transformation* have been published for the preparation of the assembly participants and for use by congregations around the world. Each day participants will focus on one of the two Bible texts chosen for each reflection.

Delegates, delegated representatives, delegated observers, observers, advisers and guests will join home groups of 10-15 persons. Each group will have a moderator whose role is to encourage everyone in the group to make a contribution. Home groups do not prepare reports: rather, they are a place to share and a resource for informed participation in the assembly.

Mutirão participants will join either an English-, Portuguese- or Spanish-speaking group to study the same texts from a wide range of contextual and experiential perspectives and challenges facing social movements and people's initiatives today. A team of three persons for each language group will facilitate these sessions.

Bible study group and locations will be announced upon arrival at the assembly.

Assembly Plenaries

Opening plenary and orientation

On Tuesday, 14 February, the opening plenary session will welcome participants and call the assembly to order. Opening plenary begins at 15:00 and will be followed by the opening prayers at 18:00.

On that morning, participants are encouraged to attend the following orientation sessions:

- *Orientation plenary* – from 9:15 to 10:30 delegates and other official participants are invited to an orientation plenary to review the assembly agenda and consensus procedures.
- *Mutirão orientation* – from 9:15 to 10:30 *Mutirão* participants are invited to an orientation session to review the *Mutirão* timetable.
- *“From Harare to Porto Alegre”* – from 11:00 to 12:30 all participants are invited to a presentation on the main activities of the World Council since the eighth assembly.

Moderator’s and general secretary’s reports

On Wednesday, 15 February, the assembly will be presented with two major addresses. The first will be delivered by His Holiness Aram I, moderator of the central committee of the World Council of Churches and Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Cilicia) – from 15:00 to 16:30. The second will be delivered by Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the World Council of Churches and minister in the Methodist Church of Kenya – from 17:00 to 18:15.

Business plenaries

During the business sessions on 15 and 16 February the consensus procedures prepared for the assembly will be formally presented. The procedures can be found on pp.23-39. Delegates will be introduced to the proposed revision to the constitution of the World Council of Churches, which can be found on pp.40-68. They will also be presented with proposals for assembly committee leadership and membership and other matters pertinent to the nominations process described on pp.18-19.

Decision plenaries

During the second week of the assembly committees will present reports and recommendations for consideration in plenary. The order of reports will be announced by the business committee at the assembly. More information on assembly committees can be found on pp.13-15.

Thematic plenaries

A series of thematic plenaries will present crucial issues in a manner that highlights their importance and relevance for the churches and the ecumenical movement today. The concerns raised in plenary presentations will be discussed in ecumenical conver-

sations, committees and workshops offered through the *Mutirão*. Topics to be examined include:

Economic justice – a world without poverty is possible!

Thursday, 16 February, 15:00-16:30

After briefly reviewing economic injustice from biblical/ethical as well as social/economic perspectives, the plenary will share highlights on a variety of church alternatives to the present economic system, and on the AGAPE (Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth) process – a series of church consultations and studies initiated since the last assembly. The assembly will be asked to respond in prayer, using the AGAPE Call found on pp.111-15.

Christian identity and religious plurality

Friday, 17 February, 15:00-16:30

The purpose of this plenary is to renew ecumenical reflection among churches on religious plurality and its implications, theological and otherwise. It also aims at enhancing dialogue on perceptions and on the significance of Christian identity in different cultures and contexts, as well as on the connection between self-understanding and witness in diverse situations of religious plurality. For background reading, see “Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding” on pp.154-63.

Youth overcoming violence: living a culture of peace

Saturday, 18 February, 15:00-16:30

This plenary will highlight the spirit and energy unleashed by the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-10 (DOV) and offer testimonies on local, national and regional DOV initiatives in various regions. It will attempt to identify challenges for the second half of the Decade, and invite the churches and the ecumenical community to recommit to the vision and call of the Decade, using the call on pp.116-18. A report on the first five years of the Decade can be found on pp.174-78.

Latin America

Sunday, 19 February, 16:30-18:00

Prepared by the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) and the National Council of Christian Churches in Brazil (CONIC) with the WCC, this plenary will share the history, culture and spirituality of Latin America with assembly participants, reflecting on critical moments in the region’s history (economic crises, military regimes) and the churches’ responses to these challenges. The purpose is to convey the complex and dynamic reality of Latin America’s churches and their contributions to the ecumenical movement, as well as to identify future challenges. The plenary will be followed by a Latin American cultural evening.

Church unity – claiming a common future

Monday, 20 February, 11:00-12:30

The plenary affirms that the church’s quest for unity is the indispensable response to the unity already given in Christ, and to Christ’s claim upon us and our lives. A panel of Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant participants will explore the text “Called To Be the One Church”, drafted for this assembly as a resource for churches in their search for unity in faith, life, witness and action. The plenary will include the voices of churches which are not members of the WCC in an attempt to explore the future of

the search for visible unity and how it can include a wider range of ecumenical partners. The invitation “Called To Be the One Church”, which can be found on pp.107-10, will be presented to the assembly for adoption.

“God, in your grace, transform the world”

Tuesday, 21 February, 11:00-12:30

The plenary will explore the assembly theme and its various dimensions from different theological, pastoral and ecclesial perspectives. It will then listen to a first reading of the assembly message, and attempt to contribute to its development, based on what the assembly has said.

Ecumenical Conversations

Ecumenical conversations are intended to engage delegates in sustained dialogue on a wide range of issues important to the churches, the ecumenical movement and the world at large. They will deepen the assembly's understanding of how churches can work together in their search for unity and their commitments to justice.

During three 90-minute sessions on 16, 17 and 18 February, delegates and other official participants will meet to discuss twenty-two different issues or challenges in response to the following changing contexts of the world today:

- Changing religious and cultural context
- Changing ecclesial and ecumenical context
- Changing international and political context
- Changing social and economic context

Each conversation will follow a similar rhythm. During the first session participants will explore current trends and “signs of the times”. In the second session they will share their witness of how churches are responding, and in the third they will consider the potential for an ecumenical response rooted in theological and biblical imperatives.

Ecumenical conversations have significant importance in the life of the assembly, and the potential to inform the future directions of the World Council of Churches. Each conversation will be moderated by a delegate, assisted by two rapporteurs (also delegates). Resource persons will be invited to contribute. The conversations will not produce reports, but rapporteurs will keep a record of the discussion as a resource for the future. Assembly committee members will serve the conversations as listeners, reporting back to their respective committees the insights from each conversation.

To strengthen the voice of youth in the assembly, all participants between 18 and 30 years of age are invited to join delegates and other official participants in the ecumenical conversations.

Below is a list of conversations. A comprehensive introduction and a description of each can be found on pp.127-53.

Changing religious and cultural context (pp.132-37)

1. Mission for healing and reconciling communities
2. Religious plurality is embraced and feared
3. Becoming a community of women and men: learning from women's ways of being church
4. Human sexuality: body and soul; world and church
5. Keeping the faith in a cyber-world: Christian communities and new technologies
6. Disabled people: a church of all and for all

Changing ecclesial and ecumenical context (pp.138-42)

7. Challenges on the way to unity: seeking an ecumenical response for today
8. Emerging forms of ecumenism

9. Challenges to diakonia today: seeking an ecumenical response
10. Memories and renewed quest for ecumenical formation
11. Youth transforming the ecumenical landscape

Changing international and political context (pp.142-47)

12. Walking in truth, speaking with power
13. Protecting peoples' lives and human dignity
14. Churches responding to new threats to peace and human security
15. Building hospitable communities: responding to migration
16. Public life, religion and politics: ambiguities and possibilities

Changing social and economic context (pp.147-53)

17. The scandal of poverty and growing inequality
18. Overcoming health threats to humanity in the context of HIV and AIDS
19. Witnessing to the sanctity of life: bio-ethics and the challenges of new technologies
20. Co-existence in God's creation: caring for the earth's resources
21. The agenda of racism: a priority for the churches?
22. Zero tolerance for violence against women and children

Assembly Business

As part of an underlying shift in ethos and culture, and in anticipation of the ninth assembly, the central committee of the World Council of Churches adopted a new style of doing business – consensus-model decision-making. This model encourages prayerful listening to one another and growth in understanding between ecclesial traditions. Consensus procedures allow more room for consultation, exploration, questioning and prayerful reflection, with less rigidity than formal voting procedures do – though procedures for voting are maintained. The shift promises to strengthen participation, dialogue and commitment among participants and member churches.

During the business plenary on 15 February, the assembly will be formally introduced to consensus procedures published in the “Guidelines for the Conduct of Meetings” on pp.23-39. The guidelines begin with a theological basis for the procedures, describe the role of delegates and other participants, explain how concerns may be raised, and outline the process of seeking consensus. Participants should familiarize themselves with the consensus procedures before the assembly.

Delegates will receive blue and orange consensus cards upon arrival at the assembly. The cards are used in the decision-making sessions to indicate the mood of the assembly, allowing the moderator to assess the level of consensus. The guidelines explain how the indicator cards should be used.

The guidelines describe three different categories of sessions:

- *General sessions* are formal occasions where there is no decision-making. This includes the opening plenary on 14 February.
- *Hearing sessions* deal with presentations about reports or proposals and discussion. The aim is to hear different experiences, perspectives and insights. This prepares the ground for any decisions to be made. These include thematic plenaries, ecumenical conversations and regional and confessional meetings.
- *Decision sessions* are when decisions are taken. Only delegates may take part in the decision-making process. These include the business sessions on 15 and 16 February, and the decision plenaries during the second week of the assembly when committee reports are presented.

At the assembly, people with knowledge and experience of consensus decision-making will be available to advise delegates, moderators and other participants. The location and hours of a permanent office on consensus will be announced at the assembly.

Committees

At the decision session plenary on 15 February, the assembly will elect six assembly committees composed of delegates to the assembly. These committees are responsible for preparing much of the subsequent business for action by the assembly. The committees review work since the last assembly, propose future programmatic priorities and prepare statements on issues of public concern. Committees also prepare the election of new governing bodies and draft a public message from the assembly.

The executive committee prepared nominations for the membership of the assembly committees based on recommendations submitted by member churches, and these nominations will be presented at the assembly. The names of additional members for any committee may be proposed to the business committee in writing, with the signatures of at least six delegates, within 24 hours of the 15 February plenary session. These written requests should be handed to the general secretary of the WCC.

The central committee appointed the assembly worship committee and the permanent committee on consensus and collaboration.

Nominations committee

Based on the recommendations from member churches, regional and confessional meetings of delegates, the committee makes proposals for the election of presidents and new members of the central committee from among the delegates. A detailed explanation of the nomination process is given on pp.18-19.

Message committee

This committee is responsible for listening carefully to what is happening at the assembly – in its prayer life, Bible study groups, plenary sessions, ecumenical conversations and the *Mutirão*. Based on what it has heard, the committee develops and presents for adoption by the assembly a text that captures the experience and hopes of those gathered in Porto Alegre. This message is intended to serve as an inspiration to Christians and the churches in their ecumenical commitment, and to offer a clear and convincing Christian witness to the world at large.

Finance committee

This committee discusses the finances of the WCC over the past seven years and financial projections for the period ahead, and proposes general guidelines regarding financial matters for the new central committee to follow. The financial report to the assembly for the period 1999-2005 can be found on pp.119-26.

Programme guidelines committee

This committee reviews the evaluation and reports since the eighth assembly, and prepares and presents for adoption by the assembly recommendations for future work.

Policy reference committee

This committee presents recommendations for assembly action on the reports of the moderator and the general secretary, relations with member churches and other partners, and reviews amendments to the constitution and rules of the WCC.

Public issues committee

This committee prepares and presents for adoption draft statements on selected issues of international concern, including ecumenical engagement in peace-building, human rights and justice. A detailed explanation of the process of dealing with public issues at the assembly is given on pp.16-17.

Business committee

Formed by the officers, presidents, the moderators of the assembly committees and other delegates, the business committee coordinates the daily business of the assembly. Its membership is defined the rule IV.5 of the WCC rules found on p.50.

Assembly worship committee

Responsible for the rich spiritual life of the assembly, the worship committee organizes the daily worship and coordinates other prayer services during the assembly.

Permanent committee on consensus and collaboration

This committee serves the assembly in an advisory capacity, helping to maintain the spirit of the mandate, concerns and dynamic of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC.

Regional and confessional meetings

On 17 and 18 February, delegates and other official participants are invited to attend regional and confessional meetings.

Delegates will review the proposed profile of the central committee as well as member church nominations. The region will identify additional candidates for consideration by the nominations committee. The committee member(s) liaising with each region will bring the proposals to the nominations committee.

Each group will also have the opportunity to discuss issues of concern to the churches in the region, including matters of public concern that might be on the agenda of the assembly.

During confessional meetings, confessional families will discuss the present state and future of the ecumenical movement, and how as a family of churches the search for visible unity can be strengthened. They will also discuss the unique role the WCC should play within the wider ecumenical movement, as well as the role of various confessional bodies.

Confessional families will also review the proposed profile of the central committee, along with member church nominations. Each confessional family may identify additional candidates for consideration by the nominations committee.

Public Issues Committee

Rules on public statements

Public statements are one way in which the WCC responds to critical issues on the international agenda. The basic provisions for making such statements are set out in WCC rule XIII:

In the performance of its functions, the Council through its assembly or through its central committee may issue statements on any situation or concern with which the Council or its constituent churches may be confronted. While such statements may have great significance and influence as the expression of the judgment or concern of so widely representative a Christian body, yet their authority will consist only in the weight which they carry by their own truth and wisdom, and the publishing of such statements shall not be held to imply that the World Council as such has, or can have, any constitutional authority over the constituent churches or right to speak for them.

Politics is an inescapable reality and involvement in it is a Christian responsibility. Churches are therefore expected to address current affairs. At the Amsterdam assembly in 1948, the framework for public issues was given in a way that remains valid: *the Council regards it as an essential part of its responsibility to address its own constituent members as occasion may arise, on matters which might require united attention in the realm of thought or action.*

The WCC responding to political challenges

A public statement may take various forms, including consultation reports and assessments of situations, pastoral letters and appeals to member churches, resolutions, and representations and appeals to governments and intergovernmental bodies.

Public statements are only one form of response to international affairs available to the Council; and in many situations other forms of action may be more effective. These include pastoral visits to churches in difficult or critical situations, discussions with governments, interventions with intergovernmental bodies, delegations dispatched to study and report on specific issues or situations, confidential representations to governments, and support to and solidarity with churches and action groups. All of these are undergirded by continuous monitoring of developments as they affect the life and witness of churches in particular situations and the fellowship of churches as a whole.

Criteria for public issues

The central committee has identified the main criteria used in selecting issues on which public statements are made:

- areas on issues on which the WCC has had direct involvement and long-standing commitment;
- emerging issues of international concern to which the attention of the churches should be called for action;
- critical and developing political situations which demand the WCC to make known its judgment and lend its spiritual and moral voice;

- expectations from the member churches that the WCC should speak;
- the need to set policy or mandates for the WCC staff.

Public issues give guidance to member churches for their own public actions and can serve as a tool for a more united voice. Public issues offer policy, by giving the language to bring to governments, intergovernmental organizations and other structures of political decision-making. Public issues guide programme work at the same time as programme work experiences guide public issues. The WCC work on small arms started for example with an active programme work, which resulted only recently in a public statement (EC 2005), while on nuclear arms there was a strong statement already in 1948, and the programme work followed. Consequently there has to be a close coordination at the assembly between the public issues committee and the programme guidelines committee as well as the policy reference committee, in particular when working on public issues that involve new policy directions.

Public issues reflect all political concerns of the Council, including war and peace, economy, ecology and human rights. They deal with violation of all rights – economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political ones.

The public issues are brought to the assembly through a long, careful and transparent process, involving the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, the officers of the WCC, the executive committee and the central committee to ensure best possible ownership by the constituency and quality of the message. The two key meetings in preparing the agenda were the CCIA in June 2005 and the executive committee in September 2005. The task of the staff, staff groups (like the strategic task group on global advocacy) and different meetings (like the advocacy weeks at the UN) is to listen, discuss and advise on what issues that should be given priority as public issues.

Process at the assembly

In Porto Alegre, the approval of the assembly is sought on the issues at an early business session at which the delegates will also be informed of procedures and deadlines for proposing additional issues on which they believe the assembly should speak. The fact that a particular public issue item if it comes from the floor should have the support of 10-15 member churches could limit public issues coming up in this way.

The public issues committee then reviews these proposals in the light of the criteria listed and selects topics on which it recommends that statements be issued, taking into consideration the time constraints and other limitations under which the assembly works. The topics selected should be of considerable international and ecumenical significance. The public issues committee will not propose statements on specific issues or situations which can be dealt with in the normal course by the general secretary, the officers or the central or executive committees. Nor will it propose statements on issues for which other forms of actions would be more appropriate.

The public issues committee discusses and prepares draft statements that are then brought before a business plenary of the assembly for adoption.

The Work of the Nominations Committee

One of the most important tasks of a World Council of Churches assembly is to elect from among its delegates the members of the new central committee, which will give leadership to the WCC in the years until the next assembly.

The WCC rules provide for the election of an assembly nominations committee to (1) nominate the presidents of the World Council of Churches, and (2) prepare the list of nominees to the new central committee. The members of the nominations committee are themselves not eligible for nomination to the central committee.

The assembly will be expected to elect up to eight presidents, who should be “persons whose ecumenical experience and standing is widely recognized among the ecumenical partners of the World Council in their respective regions”. Appropriate names for consideration by the nominations committee were solicited prior to the assembly, through the regional ecumenical organizations and pre-assembly regional meetings. The presidents will be ex officio members of the central committee.

The WCC constitution specifies the number of central committee members to be elected: not more than 150 from the member churches, including 5 from the member churches not meeting the criterion of size (formerly known as associate member churches).

The churches have been invited to nominate candidates for the central committee from among the assembly delegates. Consultation between churches in each region is encouraged, and a name supported by more than one church will carry more weight. The churches have been informed in advance that the nominations committee, in normal circumstances, might call upon any one of their delegates to serve on central committee.

The principles guiding the work of the nominations committee in preparing its slate are as follows:

- the personal qualifications of the individual for the task for which she/he is to be nominated;
- fair and adequate confessional representation;
- fair and adequate geographical and cultural representation;
- fair and adequate representation of the major interests of the World Council;
- the general acceptability of the nominations to the churches to which the nominees belong;
- nomination of not more than seven persons from any one member church;
- adequate representation of lay persons – men, women and young people;
- appropriate participation of persons with disabilities, Indigenous people, and persons of racial and ethnic minorities.

It has been the normal practice for the central committee to reflect in its composition the proportion of representation at the assembly. This applies not only to confessions and regions, but equally to women, youth and lay persons. In order to ensure an inclusive and balanced assembly and in line with earlier practice, the following goals

have been established: women 50 percent, youth 25 percent, lay persons 50 percent, Orthodox 25 percent.

In view of the above principles and to facilitate the task of the nominations committee, the churches have been asked to submit lists of nominations in order of priority rather than single names, insofar as possible following the criteria for balanced representation set forth in the WCC rules. The nominations committee will seek to respect the wishes of the nominating churches, while acknowledging that it may not be able to accept all recommendations.

Considerable information about potential nominees gathered through this process is therefore already available to the nominations committee as it begins its work at the assembly. Basically, its task is then to select nominees from the lists thus provided and to fill out the slate in a way that achieves a balanced representation overall. To facilitate what is evidently an extremely complicated task, the committee will consult as necessary with delegates from member churches and from various regions.

Delegates will also be given an opportunity to propose names for the new central committee. The precise procedures and deadlines for doing so will be explained during the plenary session early in the assembly when the nominations committee presents its initial report. During that session, the nominations committee will present a first proposal on the anticipated profile of the new central committee (without names) for consideration and approval by the assembly. Subsequently, a first reading of nominations will be presented for general discussion. Delegates may bring proposals for changes to specific nominations to the nominations committee outside of the plenary. Any change needs to offer a replacement with the same demographic profile (region, gender, age, etc.), and must be signed by six delegates from the same region.

The nominations committee will consider these responses, bearing in mind the criteria for balanced representation mentioned above. On this basis it will formulate a second slate to be presented in a plenary session for the assembly to vote on.

Following the election, the new central committee will hold a brief initial meeting to choose from among its own members a nominations committee responsible for proposing a slate of central committee officers and executive committee members. The new central committee will hold one further meeting towards the end of the assembly for these elections and any other organizational matters which need to be dealt with prior to its first full meeting, which is scheduled to take place 30 August-6 September 2006.

Mutirão

While the number of official delegates will be relatively small (less than 800), the *Mutirão* enables much broader participation in the assembly. The *Mutirão* will enrich the assembly programme and strengthen the assembly spiritual life.

What is the *Mutirão*?

The word *mutirão* is a Brazilian word with Indigenous roots meaning a meeting place and an opportunity to work together for a common purpose. In Brazil, for example, people in poor communities sometimes “make a *mutirão*” to build a house together. They ensure that the needed tools and expertise are present and the community works together to realize a concrete objective.

The *Mutirão* at the assembly provides a space for reflection, celebration and exhibits. It will host discussions organized by churches and ecumenical organizations from around the world on a wide array of issues. The *Mutirão* will have a particular Latin American and Caribbean focus with many participants from the region, and a special focus on youth.

Who will participate in the *Mutirão*?

The *Mutirão* is open to any person, congregation or organization that wishes to accompany the assembly in a spirit of ecumenical sharing, celebration and formation.

What will the *Mutirão* offer to the assembly?

The *Mutirão* offers workshops and seminars, cultural events and exhibits to all participants in the assembly. The *Mutirão* provides an opportunity to deepen substantive reflections on the assembly theme and the thematic plenaries. Delegates are encouraged to participate in the *Mutirão* offerings and to bring these reflections into the decision-making process.

As an integral part of the assembly, the workshops offered through the *Mutirão* are intended to enrich and accompany the assembly deliberations. These insights and deliberations will help to guide the work of the many churches and ecumenical organizations participating in the *Mutirão*.

What will participants in the *Mutirão* do?

Mutirão participants will share in the rich life of the WCC fellowship through prayer, Bible study, plenaries, seminars and workshops and cultural offerings.

- Following morning prayer, *Mutirão* participants will join an English-, Portuguese- or Spanish-speaking group for Bible study, facilitated by a three-person animation team using the texts published for the assembly.
- During thematic plenaries some *Mutirão* participants will be seated in the plenary hall, while others will watch along in an over-flow auditorium with commentary.
- At midday, from 12:45 to 13:15, the *Mutirão* offers the chance to listen to a “bate-papo” or conversation with an ecumenical leader or enjoy a cultural offering of music, street theatre, sports or dance.

- From 13:30 to 14:45, the *Mutirão* offers the opportunity to participate in any of 15 workshops – ten in English, five in Spanish or Portuguese, with interpretation for a limited number. A more limited number of workshops will be offered during the business sessions for *Mutirão* participants.
- During the ecumenical conversations, the *Mutirão* offers three sessions of ecumenical formation with interpretation in the plenary hall.
- The *Mutirão* will include an exhibition pavilion with space for over one hundred churches and organizations to display materials.
- The Brazilian churches will host eight different “spaces” for women, youth, Indigenous people, children, inter-religious issues, people of African descent and people with disabilities.
- A theological cafe, sponsored by the school of theology in São Leopoldo, will hold daily discussions with some of the theologians present at the assembly.
- The *Mutirão* can offer space to groups or organizations wishing to have informal meetings.
- Up to 150 Latin American young people will join the *Mutirão* as part of a youth camp.

The ecumenical *Mutirão* will accompany the assembly delegates and official representatives, expanding the circle of participants. It is an opportunity to grow and to learn, to meet people from different regions and different traditions, to celebrate and to discern together how to be agents of God’s transforming presence in the world.

The *Mutirão* timetable shows the flow of the day for *Mutirão* participants (see following page). A detailed schedule of the *Mutirão* workshops and other events will be distributed at the assembly.

Draft 12/05	God, in your grace, transform... our Churches										
	the World		the Earth		our Societies		our Lives		our Witness		
	Monday 13 February	Tuesday 14 February	Wednesday 15 February	Thursday 16 February	Friday 17 February	Saturday 18 February	Sunday 19 February	Monday 20 February	Tuesday 21 February	Wednesday 22 February	Thursday 23 February
08:30 09:00			Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer		Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
09:15			Exhibitions Open	Exhibitions Open	Exhibitions Open	Exhibitions Open		Exhibitions Open	Exhibitions Open	Exhibitions Open	Exhibitions Open
09:15 10:30		Mutirão Orientation	Bible Study	Bible Study	Bible Study	Bible Study	Worship with local churches	Bible Study	Bible Study	Bible Study	Workshops or Business Plenary
10:30		Exhibitions open	Break	Break	Break	Break		Break	Break	Break	Break
11:00 12:30		From Harare to Porto Alegre (attend and commentary)	Workshops or Business Plenary (attend and commentary)	Ecumenical Formation Presentation	Ecumenical Formation Presentation	Ecumenical Formation Presentation		Plenary: Church Unity (attend and commentary)	Theme Plenary (attend and commentary)	Workshops or Business Plenary (attend and commentary)	Workshops or Business Plenary (attend and commentary)
12:30 15:00	Setting up day for exhibitions										
Workshops and Cultural Presentations											
15:00 16:30	Opening Plenary	Workshops or Moderator's Report (attend and commentary)	Break	Plenary: Economic Justice (attend and commentary)	Plenary: Religious Plurality (attend and commentary)	Plenary: Overcoming Violence (attend and commentary)	Plenary: Latin America (16.30) Dinner and celebration with Latin American Churches	Workshops or Business Plenary (attend and commentary)	Workshops or Business Plenary (attend and commentary)	Workshops or Business Plenary (attend and commentary)	Workshops or Business Plenary (attend and commentary)
16:30	Exhibitions close (17:15)	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break		Break	Break	Break	Break
17:00 18:30	Opening Prayers (18:00)	Workshops General Secretary's Report (attend and commentary)	Workshops or Business Plenary (attend and commentary)	Workshops or Business Plenary (attend and commentary)	Workshops	Workshops		Workshops or Business Plenary (attend and commentary)	Workshops or Business Plenary (attend and commentary)	Workshops or Business Plenary (attend and commentary)	Closing Prayers
18:30		Exhibitions Close	Exhibitions Close	Exhibitions Close	Exhibitions Close	Exhibitions Close		Exhibitions Close	Exhibitions Close	Exhibitions Close	Exhibitions Close
18:45 19:15		Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer		Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
19:30		Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner		Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner
											Exhibitions taken down

Guidelines for the Conduct of Meetings of the World Council of Churches

The WCC rules for the conduct of meetings, and these guidelines, are worded as applying to a meeting of the assembly of the WCC. They are to be used similarly in meetings of all bodies of the WCC.

1. Consensus procedures

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is changing its meeting procedures from a parliamentary style to making decisions by consensus. [For explanation of why that has occurred, see Appendix A: Background to Changing Procedures.]

There is hope that in adopting consensus procedures as the norm throughout all its functions, the WCC may be assisted:

- to be as simple as possible;
- to be transparent;
- to enhance participation and dialogue in all meetings;
- to limit the possibility of domination by any participant or small group;
- to manage with courtesy, respect and grace discussions where participants bring deeply held, contending perspectives on matters at the heart of their Christian convictions;
- to provide orderly deliberations and timely decisions;
- to explore creative alternatives;
- to encourage decisions to go forward when most are agreed, limiting the power of a few to obstruct decisions;
- to ensure that moderators are enabled to move deliberations in the direction discerned by the meeting as a whole;
- to strengthen the capacity of the churches in fellowship in the WCC to engage in common witness and service.

The rules of the WCC, including revised rule XX, “Conduct of Meetings”, provide the authority for how meetings of all WCC bodies are expected to function. These guidelines are offered as a supplementary resource to help participants appreciate the potential of the changed procedures, as well as to explain some other features of the WCC.

2. Theological basis

The WCC is called to bear witness to unity in a world which is marked by tensions, antagonisms, conflicts, wars and rumours of wars (cf. Matt. 24:6). In this situation the WCC can bear witness not only by its programmes and resolutions, but also by the way it does its business. It can shape its rules and procedures in such a way as to express a faith “made effective in love” (Gal. 5:6). This means that member churches, as well as

representatives of those churches, will treat each other with respect and will seek to build one another up in love (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1-6, 14:12).

Some churches around the world, and some parts of the WCC itself, have found that making decisions by consensus is a better way of reflecting the nature of the church as described in the New Testament than is the “parliamentary” approach. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, St Paul speaks of parts of the body needing each other. A fully functioning body integrates the gifts of all its members. Similarly, any ecumenical body will function best when it makes optimum use of the abilities, history, experience, commitment and spiritual tradition of all the members.

Consensus procedures allow more room for consultation, exploration, questioning and prayerful reflection, with less rigidity than formal voting procedures. By promoting collaboration rather than adversarial debate, consensus procedures help the assembly (or a commission or committee) to seek the mind of Christ together. Rather than striving to succeed in debate, participants are encouraged to submit to one another and to seek to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17).

The consensus model for decision-making also encourages prayerful listening to one another and growth in understanding between ecclesial traditions. At the same time it requires discipline on the part of participants and moderators. There must also be rules. But the aim is to arrive at a common mind rather than simply the will of the majority. When consensus is declared, all who have participated can confidently affirm: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (Acts 15:28).

3. Building community

Developing consensus outcomes requires a culture in which there is willingness mutually to seek God’s will in humility and openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because the WCC is a fellowship of churches with a common basis in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour,¹ each time an assembly gathers there is fresh opportunity to affirm and express the rich relationship of being a community in Christ. Through those appointed to represent them, the member churches “seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of God”.² This assumes an awareness and appreciation of the contribution fellow participants bring to the meeting. As we seek to discern God’s will on issues (often starting from very different viewpoints), we acknowledge that each has unique God-given gifts and insights, and that all contributions are worthy of respect and consideration.

An assembly draws together people from many different countries, cultures and church traditions. It takes time to build the trust and relationships that form real *koinonia*. As we acknowledge the Lordship of Christ and listen for the word of God in daily prayer and Bible study together, the bonds of community are strengthened. Our diversity and unity in Jesus Christ is celebrated also as we grow to understand each other better while eating, working, relaxing, talking and praying together in more informal ways throughout the life of the assembly. Gradually a climate of trust is able to be developed.

¹ WCC constitution art. 1.

² *Ibid.*

4. Small groups

Each member of an assembly is part of a small “home” Bible study group throughout the time of the meeting, providing valuable opportunity within that small unit of the whole to experience *koinonia*, through:

- forming fellowship bonds which are necessary for the care and support of each other throughout the time of the assembly;
- feeling safe, in a context where concerns and confidences can be shared, where prayer requests and probing questions can be raised; and
- finding that theological differences can be enriching and that prior stereotyping is irrelevant as friendships form.

In the course of plenary sessions, another type of small group may be used. From time to time this may be helpful for a brief period of discussion, perhaps in table groups (which is possible during central committee meetings) or among three or four neighbours of the same language preference seated close together in a plenary session. Complex issues can become clearer after a brief sharing time, and fresh approaches to a seemingly impossible dilemma may develop into a creative solution when the plenary resumes.

5. Categories of session

At the beginning of each session, the moderator announces whether it is to be a general, a hearing or a decision session. On occasions it may be necessary to move from one category to another within the same sitting of the assembly. Where this occurs, the moderator may announce a brief pause in proceedings for a time of prayerful reflection or the singing of a song.

a) General session

General sessions are the formal, ceremonial occasions. No discussion or decision occurs, and the content is pre-determined by the central committee or the business committee.

b) Hearing session

In a hearing session, information about reports or proposals is presented. All participants (delegates plus others who have the right to speak but not to participate in decision-making) may contribute in a hearing session when recognized by the moderator. The moderator encourages participants to explore a wide range of perspectives through question and comment, so that the meeting is fully resourced about possible options before a way forward is discerned by the assembly.

This may mean, if time allows and others are not left unheard, that participants are given the opportunity to speak more than once in the course of the discussion. Participants signify to the moderator their desire to speak, either by written request via a steward or by standing at one of the microphones until called by the moderator to contribute.

In some cases a moderator will turn to those who have queued to speak before all written requests to speak have been accommodated. Participants who had submitted requests to speak and still wish to do so may join those queueing for a turn to speak. A moderator may use the final portion of a hearing session to return to previously submitted written requests to speak.

No decisions are taken in a hearing session, except to deal with a point of order or procedural proposal if one arises, or to change to a decision session if it is agreed to finalize a particular matter in that same sitting.

c) Decision session

In a decision session, only delegates may speak. (Delegates will have been resourced in their decision-making responsibility by other participants when the issue was presented in an earlier hearing session.) Contributions are expected to develop a proposal progressively, each speaker taking heed of insights from other contributors in discerning the common mind of the meeting about the way forward for the assembly.

Because changes to an original proposal can occur during the discussion, care needs to be taken that the agreed wording at all stages is clear to everybody, and that time for interpretation is allowed as necessary. The session recorder³ has an important part in assisting the moderator in this role.

For the few agenda items where the rules specify that voting procedures are to be used, the rules provide an outline of how that is regulated.⁴ On rare occasions in a decision session when a consensus outcome cannot be reached, the meeting may choose to decide an urgent polarized issue by formal voting procedures also.⁵

6. Role of moderators

A number of different people share the work of moderating sessions throughout the assembly meeting. Moderators are designated prior to the assembly by the outgoing central committee, and if necessary during an assembly by the business committee.⁶ Each moderator is expected to have been trained in consensus procedures and to be familiar with the ethos and functioning of the WCC.

The responsibilities of a moderator are:

- to preside in a manner that assists the assembly to be open to discerning the will of God;
- to encourage the meeting to move towards a common mind; and
- to ensure that the needs and purposes of the WCC are met in the way business is carried out.

In so doing, a moderator is expected:

- to facilitate the exchange and development of ideas, encouraging trust and integrity in contributions;
- to ensure respect and support for all who participate;
- to seek indications of the delegates' response to each speech, and reflect back the mood of the meeting as it becomes apparent;
- to summarize the discussion from time to time, assisting the assembly to focus the move towards a consensus outcome;
- to encourage creative modifications of a proposal which take heed of insights expressed by earlier speakers;
- to invite participants, as occasion demands, to spend a few minutes in conversation with near neighbours;

³ Person appointed by the business committee to follow the discussion of a decision session, to record the languages of the emerging consensus, including final language of decisions taken, and to assist the moderator of the session in discerning an emerging consensus. Recorders shall also assist the moderator in ensuring that the final agreed wording of a proposal is translated and available to delegates before a decision is made. Normally a delegate will be appointed recorder. Rule XX.5.

⁴ Rule XX.10. ⁵ Rule XX.9.e, 9.f. ⁶ Rule XX.3.

- to test emerging agreement in decision sessions, to ascertain if the meeting is ready to move to a decision by consensus.

A moderator's role as a non-partisan facilitator is crucial to the flow of the meeting towards a consensus outcome. To that end, the moderator:

- convenes the session, announcing which category of session it is;
- announces any change in session category which may occur during a session, and may provide a brief break in the sitting at that time for reflective prayer or the singing of a song;
- encourages a fair range of views in selecting speakers from those whose desire to contribute has been indicated either in writing or by queueing at the microphone;
- liaises frequently with the recorder throughout the session, ensuring the wording of any agreed variation to a proposal is available to participants in an appropriately clear form;
- does not participate in deliberations (unless arrangements are made to relinquish the role of moderator while the particular matter is being decided);
- is entitled to a personal vote as a delegate of her/his own church in formal voting procedures, but not to a deciding vote where the outcome of a count is tied; and
- closes the session.

7. Setting the agenda

a) *Programme agenda*

The basic directions for the programmatic activities of the WCC are provided first by the programme guidelines committee for an assembly, and then developed by the programme committee of the central committee during the period between assemblies. Between assemblies, policy reference committees enable the central committee to take further initiatives by forwarding new proposals to the programme guidelines committee or to specific advisory bodies (such as commissions of the WCC).

An additional advisory body to the central committee and its executive committee is the permanent committee on consensus and collaboration (resulting from the work of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC). It helps between assembly meetings in guiding the process of programme agenda setting and in monitoring the overall balance of the work of the WCC, and during assemblies advises the business committee.

b) *Business agenda*

The business agenda of an assembly meeting is proposed by the central committee (through its assembly planning committee) to the first decision session of the assembly. A delegate may suggest an item of business through the central committee (prior to the meeting) or through the business committee, which has the responsibility during the assembly of monitoring when agenda changes should be brought to a plenary for approval.

The governing bodies of the WCC each have responsibility for specifically identified areas of business:

- *Assembly*: election of presidents; election of central committee members; revision of the constitution; adoption of programme guidelines; reception of the accounts of the central committee.

- *Central committee*: election of officers (moderator, vice-moderators, general secretary); election of executive committee; appointment of commissions and advisory groups; appointment of senior staff; budget and financial policy; programme policy.
- *Executive committee*: administrative decisions; staff appointments (other than senior positions).

Normally, the officers and the executive committee monitor the setting of the business agenda of an assembly or the central committee, ensuring an annotated agenda with supporting documents is made available well ahead of the meeting. Some smaller agenda items may be included on the agenda of a sub-committee right from the start, rather than waiting for listing in a plenary before being referred to the sub-committee for more detailed consideration. To ensure widespread awareness of matters being considered, all participants will be issued with annotated agendas of the different reference or sub-committees. Hence those not involved with a particular sub-committee, who have any concerns or insights on a particular agenda item, can share them with the sub-committee before the matter comes back to the plenary for decision-making.

How individual members of governing bodies introduce a matter to the business agenda of an assembly is addressed in the sub-section: “How to raise concerns” under “Role of delegates and participants” in section 8.

8. Role of delegates and participants

a) How to contribute

When a participant wishes to contribute in a plenary session, she/he indicates this to the moderator and waits to be called. This can be done either by submitting a written request (name, church, country and essence of contribution) via a steward, or queueing at a microphone when the moderator so invites.

When called to speak, all remarks are addressed to the moderator. A participant states her/his name, church, country, language preference, and (in a hearing session) whether she/he is a delegate or other participant. If one of the working languages of the WCC is used, simultaneous interpretation will be provided. If participants speak in another language, it is their responsibility to provide interpretation.

Remarks are limited to three minutes to enable as many contributions as possible within one session. Speakers should have a clear idea beforehand of what they will say, with the main points crystallized to as few words as possible.

b) How to raise concerns

Any participant may raise concerns outside of sessions with a member of the business committee. Concerns may include the appropriateness of a proposal, its priority in the agenda or the manner in which it is to be addressed, or suggestions for additions to the proposed agenda.⁷

During a hearing session, procedural suggestions about how an issue is handled can be raised if necessary in the course of the discussion (consensus procedures are used for hearing sessions).

During a decision session, a delegate:

- may raise questions about procedure;

⁷ Rule XX.6.a, 6.c.

- may challenge the result of a vote if there is doubt about the outcome: a counted vote is then taken immediately;
- may request a secret written ballot, such request needing to be seconded and agreed by a two-thirds majority before proceeding;
- may appeal against a moderator's ruling on a point of order; the moderator will put to the meeting without discussion the question of whether delegates concur with the moderator's ruling, and it is decided by either consensus or voting procedures (according to which are in place at the time).

In either a hearing session or a decision session, if a delegate considers that a matter under discussion goes against the ecclesiological self-understanding⁸ of her/his church, there is a process for bringing that concern to the attention of the assembly.⁹

c) How to listen and respond (ethics of participation)

Consensus procedures assume all are listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as each speaker contributes. So participants try to build creatively on the insights of earlier contributions as much as possible, always keeping in mind the goal of discerning a way forward for the assembly on which the meeting can agree.

It is assumed that all contributions are made with integrity and conviction, and so all speakers are treated with respect even where their understanding is quite different from one's own. Growth in participants' awareness of the richness and diversity of the Christian church is always the outcome of WCC gatherings, whatever specific decisions are taken on particular matters.

Because a consensus outcome usually arises from progressive development of a proposal during the course of hearing and decision sessions, there is no place for proxy or absentee votes when the mind of the meeting is being discerned (or when a formal vote is taken). Only those present and participating can be part of the communal discernment which develops, about God's will for the way forward at this time.

Similarly, where a participant has chosen not to attend a designated sub-committee that has been part of the process of considering a particular report or issue, it is generally inappropriate for her/him to raise objection to the outcome, or to record a minority opinion, when the report is presented in a subsequent plenary session. The place for the objection to be heard would have been in the smaller committee forum, where a different conclusion might have been reached in listening to others' contributions.

In central committee where a substitute for a delegate is allowed in certain circumstances, it is the responsibility of the delegate to fully brief the person taking her/his place.

d) How to report afterwards (advocacy for decisions of assembly)

Participating in a WCC assembly is a rare privilege. It is the responsibility of participants to ensure that the fruits of the experience are made known back in their home churches. This means advocacy for the resolutions of the assembly, even when in some particular instances the outcome might not have been the participant's first preference for wording.

And of course the rich ecumenical encounters will colour participants' total involvement in the life of their home church for years to come!

⁸ The self-understanding of a church on matters of faith, doctrine and ethics.

⁹ Section 12: safety valves; rule XX.6.d.

9. Making decisions – consensus¹⁰

a) *Understanding consensus*

Consensus is a process of seeking the common mind of the meeting without resort to a formal vote, engaging in genuine dialogue that is respectful, mutually supportive and empowering whilst prayerfully seeking to discern God's will.

A consensus outcome is declared when one of the following occurs:

- all those entitled to make decisions are in agreement about an outcome (unanimity); or
- most are in agreement and the few for whom it is not their first preference nonetheless accept they have been fairly heard and could live with that outcome, and so agree to consensus being recorded as the mind of the meeting.

Agreement about an outcome is not limited merely to approving the wording of a proposal. That may be what is agreed. But it may be that consensus is reached about another outcome, including such possibilities as agreeing to reject a proposal, or to refer a matter for further work, or to affirm that a variety of positions may be held by Christian churches on this issue.

There are no formal amendments in consensus procedures. Speakers may suggest variations to the wording of a proposal as discussion proceeds, and incremental changes can be agreed by the meeting as a possible outcome progressively becomes apparent. Consensus procedures assume all are eager to listen for insights from others that may help in the search to discern God's will for the way forward. Hence there will be an attitude of respectful anticipation, as all delegates work towards the common goal.

b) *Indicator cards*

In a big gathering, hearing all contributions and being aware of how delegates are responding to the ideas expressed by each speaker may be difficult. Indicator cards can assist in this process in both hearing and decision sessions. Blue and orange cards are provided for each delegate's use.¹¹ After a speaker finishes his or her remarks, the moderator gauges the proportion of those supportive of that point of view by calling for delegates to hold a card discreetly at chest level – orange to indicate warmth towards an idea or acceptance of it, blue to show coolness or disapproval. By reporting to the meeting what is visible in response each time, the moderator is able to help the meeting understand what aspects need more exploration, and thus gradually move forward to an outcome acceptable to all.

Indicator cards may also be used to show the moderator that a delegate considers it is time to move on – a speaker may be getting repetitious or irrelevant, or the points may have been well made already by other speakers. In this case, a delegate may hold the two coloured cards crossed in front of the chest as a silent indication to the moderator that prolonging debate does not seem helpful. If the number of crossed cards indicates that many delegates are of the same mind, the moderator may ask the speaker to conclude, or invite one with a different perspective to contribute next, or check whether the meeting is ready to move to recording a consensus decision.

¹⁰ See appendix B: flow chart of consensus procedures.

¹¹ These colours are chosen because even those who are colour blind can distinguish between orange and blue.

c) Small conversation groups

Breaking into small conversation groups is one way of enabling fuller participation – just turning to near neighbours of the same language preference in a plenary setting for a few moments of sharing ideas. Often an apparent deadlock can be relieved by such a technique, and when the plenary resumes, fresh insights may have emerged which lead to a creative way for an outcome to be achieved.

d) Checking for consensus

As discussion proceeds, it may become clear there are basic principles the meeting is able to affirm immediately, before the continuing search for a common mind on more diverse aspects of the proposal. The moderator can state what seems to be an underlying agreement, and then check with the meeting with such a question as: “Do we have consensus on this aspect at this stage?” Delegates are invited to show indicator cards, and the moderator is able to see if:

- all are in agreement (orange), in which case the consensus agreement is recorded, and continuing discussion can focus on the more contentious aspects;
- there is still a mixed response (many of both orange and blue), in which case more discussion on the whole issue is clearly needed; or
- only one or two are unable to agree at this point (mostly orange, one or two blue), in which case the moderator’s next questions can check whether those few feel their point of view has been heard, and whether they can accept the position reached by the others and agree to a consensus outcome being recorded, even though the wording is not their first preference.

e) When consensus seems elusive

After a reasonable attempt to achieve an agreed outcome, if it seems a consensus outcome is still elusive and the meeting is polarized with more than one potential outcome, one of a number of possibilities is available to the meeting (perhaps guided by the moderator), including:

- agreeing to refer the matter to a select working group to report back to a later session (ensuring the group’s membership includes people from each of the firmly held positions);
- agreeing to refer the matter to another body or to member churches for more work, and not considering it further at this assembly;
- agreeing to affirm that there are various opinions Christian churches may hold;
- agreeing that the matter be no longer considered.

f) In reaching any of these conclusions, certain questions should be asked, such as:

- “Must a decision on this matter be made today?” If no, the matter should be deferred to a later session (tomorrow, next week, or some other time). Further seasoning by a committee and informal discussion among those with strong views will often bring the meeting to a different level of agreement at a later session. If yes (and this is quite rare), the attention of the meeting must shift from approving or not approving the proposal at hand to finding other ways of meeting the pressing or time-critical need. Interim solutions can sometimes be found while the meeting searches for consensus on the original question.
- “Can this proposal be acted upon, on the understanding that some members (or member churches) cannot support it?” If no, the proposal should be deferred for

further work, as above. If yes, the effect is that those persons, or member churches, or parts of the Council, being of a dissenting opinion, nevertheless allow a policy or programme to go forward without endorsing it. This is sometimes called “standing aside”. In social and political issues it may sometimes be appropriate for some member churches or some committee or agency of the WCC to speak without committing the Council as a whole to one point of view.

- “Have we asked the right question?” When agreement on the issue, as posed, is not possible, this should not be regarded as failure. Sometimes a different question will yield a consensus. Sometimes it is helpful to ask, “What can we say together?” The meeting may not be of one mind on a particular statement on a difficult issue, but may find great value in articulating its various perspectives and the fruits of its discussion. There may be foundational principles on which we all agree. A clear articulation of these, followed by a description of the diverse conclusions that Christians of good conscience have reached, can be a powerful product of a discussion.

g) When a decision must be taken NOW

If in the opinion of an officer or the business committee it is vital for a decision to be made before the meeting concludes and yet the meeting is nowhere near a consensus outcome, the rules provide a process for the business committee to re-formulate the proposal.¹² When the reworded proposal is then brought back to a later session, it is the responsibility of the meeting to decide (by consensus procedures) whether it agrees a decision must be made at this meeting, and whether it is prepared to continue working towards a consensus outcome on the reformulated proposal. If a decision must be made immediately, but opinion remains divided about what that decision should be, the meeting can agree by at least an eighty-five (85) percent majority to decide the matter by formal voting procedures.

10. Making decisions – formal voting procedures

a) Exceptions to using consensus

It is expected that all decisions of the WCC will be made by consensus, except for:¹³

- changes to the constitution;
- elections; and
- adoption of annual accounts and financial audit report.

Each of these matters will initially be presented in a hearing session, where questions and discussion using consensus procedures may occur. At the start of the decision session where the matter will be decided, the moderator announces that the method to be used is voting by show of hands. Simplified rules for formal voting procedures¹⁴ are then employed for determining the matter, in which:

- all motions must be moved and seconded by a delegate;
- the mover has the right to speak first;
- an amendment may be introduced and if seconded it will be considered along with the motion;

¹² Rule XX.9.e.

¹³ Rule XX.10.a.

¹⁴ Rule XX.10.; appendix C: flow chart of formal voting procedures.

- no one may speak more than once except that the mover may answer objections immediately before the vote is taken;
- withdrawal of a motion requires the permission of the meeting;
- any delegate may move to close the discussion, waiting for a call from the moderator before so doing;
- voting is by show of hands or cards, those in favour first, those against next and then those abstaining;
- anyone voting with the minority or abstaining may have his or her opinion recorded in the minutes, the report of the meeting and the session record;
- there is provision for reconsideration of an earlier decision of the meeting;
- points of order and procedural proposals may be raised;
- approval requires two-thirds of those present to be in favour (unless otherwise specified or agreed by the meeting).

b) Moving from consensus to formal vote

Very rarely it may be necessary to resort to formal voting procedures when it is imperative that an outcome must be decided immediately and it has not been possible to reach consensus. The process for moving from consensus to formal voting procedures requires the moderator to announce that a vote to decide this change will be taken, eighty-five (85) percent of delegates present being needed to agree to do so.¹⁵

11. Procedural proposals and points of order

a) Procedural proposals

Any delegate in the course of either a hearing session or a decision session may ask for clarification of the pending matter or may raise suggestions about procedure which can be considered by the meeting and decided immediately. A delegate seeking to do so may not interrupt a speaker but must wait for the call of the moderator.

b) Points of order

Points of order may be raised by any participant during either hearing or decision sessions at any time, even by interrupting another speaker. A participant gains the attention of the moderator with the words, “point of order!” The moderator asks the participant to state the point of order and then (without debate):

- rules on it immediately; or
- asks the assembly to decide the matter.

Points of order which may be raised are:

- to question whether procedures being followed are in accordance with the rules which allow for a personal explanation if a subsequent speaker grossly misrepresents his/her remarks;
- to raise objection if remarks are thought to be offensive or derogatory;
- to request that the meeting move to a closed session until the matter under discussion is decided (closed session requires that all but delegates leave the session).

¹⁵ Rule XX.9.f.

c) If the moderator's ruling on a point of order or a procedural proposal is challenged, the challenger may speak and the moderator reply before the delegates present decide the question, according to the decision-making procedures then being employed.

12. Safety valves

Seeking the common mind of a meeting about the way forward needs some safeguards. No delegate or member church need feel pressured into an unacceptable position. All opinions are valued and on the occasions when, after careful consideration and listening, a minority cannot accept what has become the general mind of the meeting, there is reassurance in the following provisions.

a) *Consensus outcome on what?*

A consensus outcome may be reached that a variety of stances are appropriate for member churches to hold on a particular issue, and so the wording of the agreed resolution notes and affirms those differing perspectives.

b) *Definition of consensus – not only unanimity*

The definition of consensus is not confined to unanimity. It also includes the situation where most are in agreement and those few who cannot completely agree are satisfied that their point of view has been heard, that the discussion has been both full and fair, and that their church is not compromised in having a consensus outcome recorded on this matter.

c) *Recording minority opinions*

After every effort to discern a consensus outcome, occasionally a decision cannot be reached even though it is necessary to finalize the matter immediately. Among the possible outcomes for such a scenario is the provision for accepting the discernment of most delegates with some few others recording a different point of view. This can occur when those who cannot agree with the majority are yet satisfied with the outcome and exercise the right to record their opinion opposing the resolution in the minutes and to have their viewpoint noted in the record of the session.

d) *Ecclesiological self-understanding*¹⁶

Where a matter being raised is considered by a delegate to go against the ecclesiological self-understanding of his or her church, the delegate may request that it not be submitted for decision. The moderator shall seek the advice of the business committee in consultation with this delegate and other members of the same church or confession present at the session. If agreed that the matter does in fact go against the ecclesiological self-understanding of the delegate's church, the moderator shall announce that the matter will be removed from the agenda of the decision session and may be considered in a hearing session. The materials and minutes of the discussion shall be sent to the member churches for their study and comment.

e) *A member church may act after the assembly*

If after the close of an assembly a member church finds it cannot support a decision of the assembly, there is provision for that to be officially recorded.¹⁷

¹⁶ Rule XX.6.d.

¹⁷ Rule XX.5.e.

13. Language

Normally there are five working languages of the assembly – English, French, German, Russian and Spanish. Participants may contribute in another language if they can provide interpretation into one of these. The business committee will assist such participants to be able to contribute as fully as possible.

14. Election process

a) *Assembly committees*

During the first decision session of the assembly, the business committee will present nominations for election of the membership of all assembly committees (including the nominations committee). Committees begin their work immediately.

b) *Central committee*

- Prior to the assembly, member churches are invited to nominate candidates for the central committee from amongst assembly delegates. Consultation between churches in each region is encouraged, such that a name supported by more than one church will carry more weight for the nominations committee.
- During the assembly, regional meetings provide opportunity for discussion about particular nominations.
- Principles guiding the work of the nominations committee:¹⁸
 - the personal qualifications of the individual for the task for which she/he is being nominated;
 - fair and adequate confessional representation;
 - fair and adequate geographical and cultural representation;
 - fair and adequate representation of the major interests of the WCC;
 - the general acceptability of the nominations to the churches to which the nominees belong;
 - not more than seven persons from any one member church;
 - adequate representation of lay persons – men, women and young people.
- Early in the life of the assembly, the nominations committee presents a first proposal on the anticipated profile of the central committee (without names) for consideration and approval by the assembly.
- Subsequently, a first reading of nominations is presented in a hearing session, during which discussion about the list in general is encouraged. No proposed changes to names will be considered in this session.
- Delegates may bring proposals for changes to specific nominations to the nominations committee outside of the plenary meeting. Any change needs to offer a replacement with the same demographic profile (region, gender, age, etc.), and must be signed by six delegates from the same region.
- When the second reading of the list of nominations is brought to a decision session, the nominations committee gives an account of the proposals suggested for changes to the slate of names, and any variations resulting from them. If the assembly is not ready to approve the list, further time is given for out-of-session proposals as described above, and the list is brought to a subsequent decision session for the election.

¹⁸ Rule IV.4.c.

c) Presidents

- Prior to an assembly, staff will seek advice from regional ecumenical organizations and pre-assembly regional meetings about appropriate names to be considered by the nominations committee, in preparing nominations for the eight presidents of the WCC.

d) Voting

- Elections are determined by formal voting procedures.

Appendix A: Background to Changing Procedures

When the WCC was founded in 1948, the majority of member churches were located in Europe and North America. Procedures for decision-making were based on those customarily used in Protestant church councils and secular parliaments in those parts of the world.

With the widening of WCC membership to a global fellowship of churches since then, and with greater participation of women and youth in leadership in member churches across time, many have been expressing increasing frustration with parliamentary processes. Hopes and expectations have arisen that methods by which the WCC governs its life might more appropriately reflect the changes in the organization that have taken place since its inception. And while parliamentary procedures have served some member churches well, for others such an adversarial approach is quite unfamiliar both in ecclesial practices and within the cultures in which they are set.

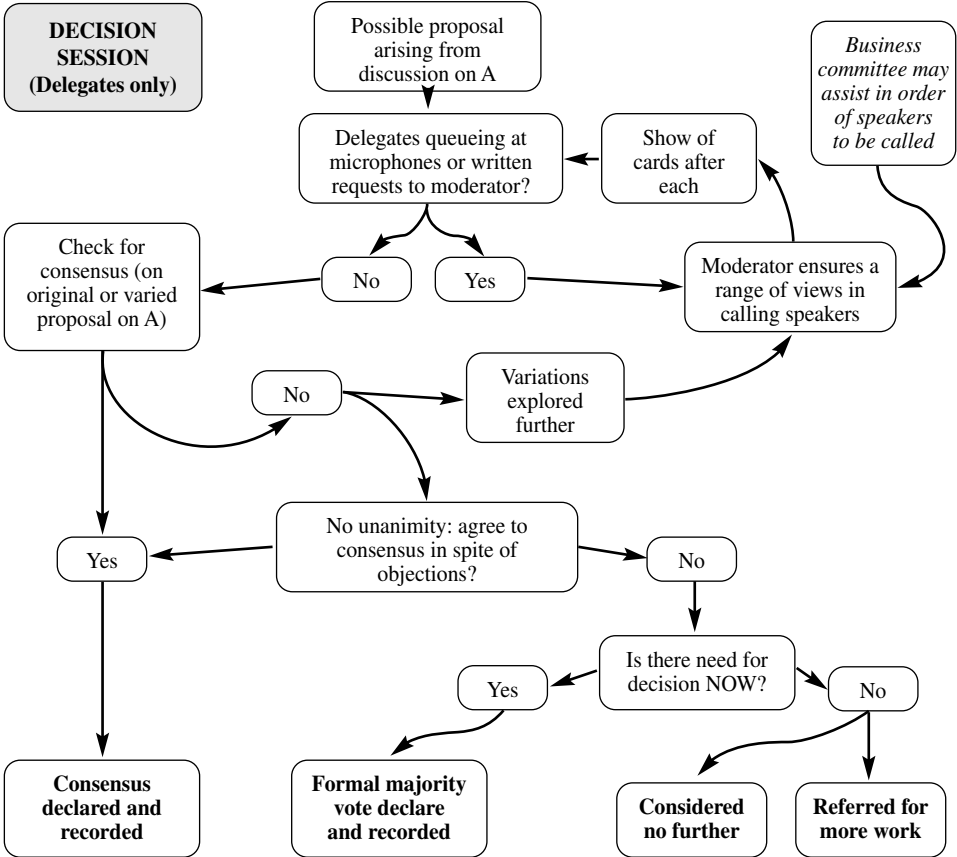
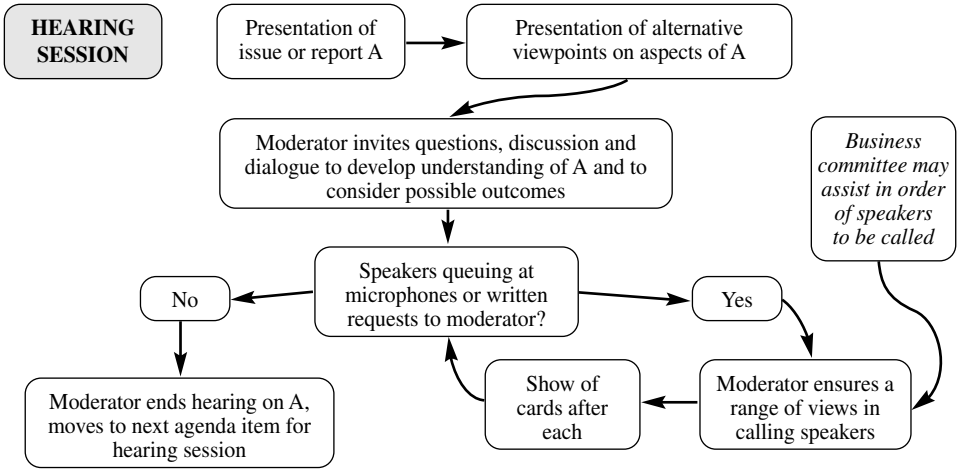
The eighth assembly in Harare received the document *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision* (CUV), and more clearly defined the WCC as a fellowship of churches seeking together to fulfil their common calling. Building on CUV, the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC brought its report to the central committee in September 2002. In recognizing the critical role the WCC has played in helping churches to work together to fulfil their common calling, the Special Commission affirmed:

- member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC are the subject of the quest for visible unity, not the Council;
- member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC teach and make doctrinal and ethical decisions, not the Council;
- member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC proclaim doctrinal consensus, not the Council;
- member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC commit themselves to pray for unity and to engage in an encounter that aims to find language for resonances of the common Christian faith in other church traditions;
- member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC are responsible for developing and nurturing the sensitivities and the language that will allow them to sustain dialogue with each other.

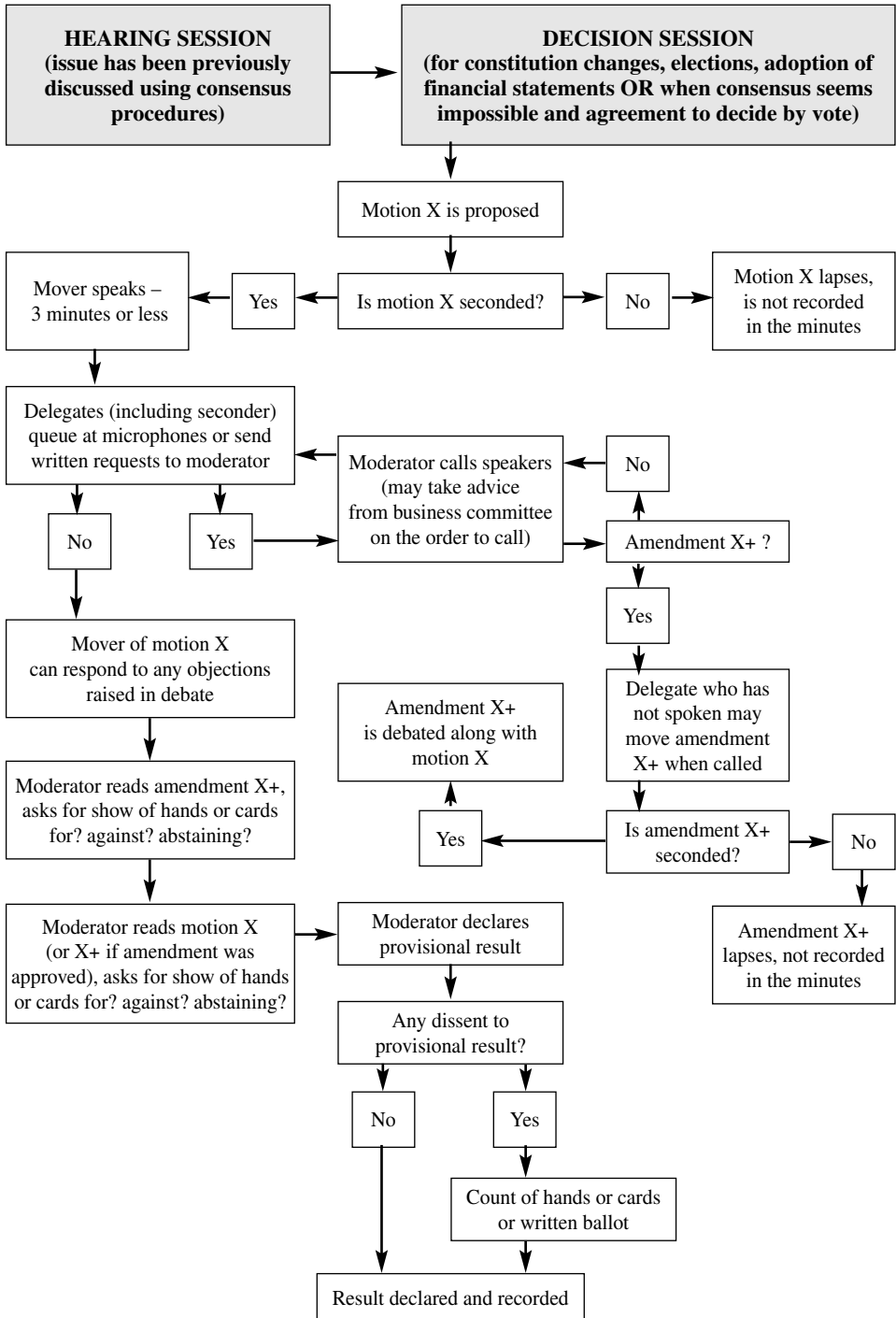
The Special Commission went on to recommend, among other changes, that the WCC move to consensus decision-making. This was in order to address long-standing concerns of Orthodox churches that, as a numerical minority in various governing bodies, they would continue to encounter substantial difficulties in having concerns and perspectives heard and addressed. This recommendation resonated deeply with others' convictions that the time for a change to consensus procedures had come.

Increasingly throughout the world, churches are seeking how to address potentially polarizing and contentious issues in a way that will not result in a church being internally divided. Some member churches of the WCC have experience in changed procedures that show signs of hope in this regard. Some WCC commissions and committees tend to function by a consensus method already, finding it ensures a more efficient and effective use of the time and talents of members in reaching a common goal.

Appendix B: Flow Chart of Consensus Procedures



Appendix C: Flow Chart of Formal Voting Procedures



Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches¹

CONSTITUTION

I. Basis

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

II. Membership

*(Note: The following **new wording** of this article was approved by the central committee in February 2005. It was submitted to member churches and is now presented to the assembly for final decision)*

Churches shall be eligible for membership in the fellowship of the World Council of Churches who express their agreement with the basis upon which the Council is founded and satisfy such criteria as the assembly or central committee may prescribe. The central committee shall consider applications for membership according to the consensus model of decision-making. The application shall be accepted for a specified interim period of participation in the work of the World Council of Churches and for interaction with the local fellowship of member churches. The member churches of the World Council of Churches shall be consulted during the interim period. Following the interim period, the central committee shall assess whether a consensus of member churches has developed in favour of the application, in which event the applicant church shall be considered a new member church.

III. Purposes and functions

The World Council of Churches is constituted by the churches to serve the one ecumenical movement. It incorporates the work of the world movements for Faith and Order and Life and Work, the International Missionary Council, and the World Council of Christian Education.

The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.

In seeking koinonia in faith and life, witness and service, the churches through the Council will:

¹ Including changes in the rules adopted at the central committee meeting in February 2005 (cf. *Minutes of the Fifty-Fourth Meeting of the Central Committee*). Please note that numbering of the CC minutes followed the sequence of the former version of the rules. The present document follows a different numbering because of the addition of new rules.

- promote the prayerful search for forgiveness and reconciliation in a spirit of mutual accountability, the development of deeper relationships through theological dialogue, and the sharing of human, spiritual and material resources with one another;
- facilitate common witness in each place and in all places, and support each other in their work for mission and evangelism;
- express their commitment to diakonia in serving human need, breaking down barriers between people, promoting one human family in justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation, so that all may experience the fullness of life;
- nurture the growth of an ecumenical consciousness through processes of education and a vision of life in community rooted in each particular cultural context;
- assist each other in their relationships to and with people of other faith communities;
- foster renewal and growth in unity, worship, mission and service.

In order to strengthen the one ecumenical movement, the Council will:

- nurture relations with and among churches, especially within but also beyond its membership;
- establish and maintain relations with national councils, regional conferences of churches, organizations of Christian world communions and other ecumenical bodies;
- support ecumenical initiatives at regional, national and local levels;
- facilitate the creation of networks among ecumenical organizations;
- work towards maintaining the coherence of the one ecumenical movement in its diverse manifestations.

IV. Authority

The World Council shall offer counsel and provide opportunity for united action in matters of common interest.

It may take action on behalf of constituent churches only in such matters as one or more of them may commit to it and only on behalf of such churches.

The World Council shall not legislate for the churches; nor shall it act for them in any manner except as indicated above or as may hereafter be specified by the constituent churches.

V. Organization

(Note: The assembly will be invited to confirm rule I on membership. This will have a consequence on article V of the constitution. The executive committee recommended to the assembly the adoption of the amendment with the understanding that all member churches were involved in preparing the new rule I and that the amendment of article V is a simple consequence of the new rule I.)

The World Council shall discharge its functions through an assembly, a central committee, an executive committee, and other subordinate bodies as may be established.

1. The assembly

- a) The assembly shall be the supreme legislative body governing the World Council and shall ordinarily meet at seven-year intervals.

- b) The assembly shall be composed of official representatives of the member churches, known as delegates, elected by the member churches.
- c) The assembly shall have the following functions:
 - 1) to elect the president or presidents of the World Council;
 - 2) to elect not more than 145 members of the central committee from among the delegates which the member churches have elected to the assembly;
 - 3) to elect not more than 5 members from among the representatives **elected to the assembly by churches which do not fulfil the criteria of size and have not been granted membership for exceptional reasons**;
 - 4) to determine the overall policies of the World Council and to review programmes undertaken to implement policies previously adopted;
 - 5) to delegate to the central committee specific functions, except to amend this constitution and to allocate the membership of the central committee granted by this constitution to the assembly exclusively.

2. *The central committee*

- a) The central committee shall be responsible for implementing the policies adopted by the assembly and shall exercise the functions of the assembly itself delegated to it by the assembly between its meetings, except its power to amend this constitution and to allocate or alter the allocation of the membership of central committee.
- b) The central committee shall be composed of the president or presidents of the World Council of Churches and not more than 150 members.
 - 1) Not more than 145 members shall be elected by the assembly from among the delegates the member churches have elected to the assembly. Such members shall be distributed among the member churches by the assembly giving due regard to the size of the churches and confessions represented in the Council, the number of churches of each confession which are members of the Council, reasonable geographical and cultural balance, and adequate representation of the major interests of the Council.
 - 2) Not more than 5 members shall be elected by the assembly from among the representatives **elected to the assembly by churches which do not fulfil the criteria of size and have not been granted membership for exceptional reasons**.
 - 3) A vacancy in the membership of the central committee, occurring between meetings of the assembly, shall be filled by the central committee itself after consultation with the church of which the person previously occupying the position was a member.
- c) The central committee shall have, in addition to the general powers set out in (a) above, the following powers:
 - 1) to elect its moderator and vice-moderator or vice-moderators from among the members of the central committee;
 - 2) to elect the executive committee from among the members of the central committee;
 - 3) to elect committees, commissions, and boards;

- 4) within the policies adopted by the assembly, and on the recommendation of the programme committee, to initiate and terminate programmes and activities and to set priorities for the work of the Council;
- 5) to adopt the budget of the World Council and secure its financial support;
- 6) to elect the general secretary and to elect or appoint or to make provision for the election or appointment of all members of the staff of the World Council;
- 7) to plan for the meetings of the assembly, making provision for the conduct of its business, for worship and study, and for common Christian commitment. The central committee shall determine the number of delegates to the assembly and allocate them among the member churches giving due regard to the size of the churches and confessions represented in the Council; the number of churches of each confession which are members of the Council; reasonable geographical and cultural balance; the desired distribution among church officials, parish ministers and lay persons; among men, women and young people; and participation by persons whose special knowledge and experience will be needed;
- 8) to delegate specific functions to the executive committee or to other bodies or persons.

3. Rules

The assembly or the central committee may adopt and amend rules not inconsistent with this constitution for the conduct of the business of the World Council.

4. By-laws

The assembly or the central committee may adopt and amend by-laws not inconsistent with this constitution for the functioning of its committees, boards, working groups and commissions.

5. Quorum

A quorum for the conduct of any business by the assembly or the central committee shall be one-half of its membership.

VI. Other ecumenical Christian organizations

*(Note: The following two sub-sections of article VI were simply amended from “invited to send **non-voting** representatives to the assembly” into “**shall not have the right to participate in decision-making**”.)*

1. Such world confessional bodies and such international ecumenical organizations as may be designated by the central committee may be invited to send representatives to the assembly and to the central committee, in such numbers as the central committee shall determine; however, these representatives **shall not have the right to participate in decision-making**.
2. Such national councils and regional conferences of churches, other Christian councils and missionary councils as may be designated by the central committee may be invited to send representatives to the assembly and to the central committee, in such numbers as the central committee shall determine; however, these **representatives shall not have the right to participate in decision-making**.

VII. Amendments

The constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the delegates to the assembly present and voting, provided that the proposed amendment shall have been reviewed by the central committee, and notice of it sent to the member churches not less than six months before the meeting of the assembly. The central committee itself, as well as the member churches, shall have the right to propose such amendment.

RULES

I. Membership in the fellowship of the World Council of Churches

(Note: This article of the rules elaborated in consultation with member churches and eventually adopted by the central committee has to be confirmed by the assembly according to rule XXI.)

The World Council of Churches is comprised of churches which have constituted the Council or which have been admitted into membership and which continue to belong to the fellowship of the World Council of Churches. The term “church” as used in this article could also include an association, convention or federation of autonomous churches. A group of churches within a country or region, or within the same confession, may choose to participate in the World Council of Churches as one member. Churches within the same country or region or within the same confession may apply jointly to belong to the fellowship of the Council, in order to respond to their common calling, to strengthen their joint participation and/or to satisfy the requirement of minimum size (rule I.3.b.3). Such groupings of churches are encouraged by the World Council of Churches; each individual church within the grouping must satisfy the criteria for membership in the fellowship of the World Council of Churches, except the requirements of size. A church seeking affiliation with a grouping of autonomous churches which is a member of the World Council of Churches must agree with the basis and fulfil the criteria for membership.

The general secretary shall maintain the official lists of member churches that have been accepted to belong to the fellowship of the World Council of Churches, noting any special arrangement accepted by the assembly or central committee. Separate lists shall be maintained of member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC that do or do not participate in decision-making.

1. Application

A church that wishes to join the World Council of Churches shall apply in writing to the general secretary.

2. Processing

The general secretary shall submit all such applications through the executive committee to the central committee (see article II of the constitution) together with such information as he or she considers necessary to enable the central committee to make a decision on the application.

3. *Criteria*

Churches applying to join the World Council of Churches (“applicant churches”) are required first to express agreement with the basis on which the Council is founded and confirm their commitment to the purposes and functions of the Council as defined in articles I and III of the constitution. The basis states: “The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

Applicant churches should give an account of how their faith and witness relate to these norms and practices:

a) *Theological*

- 1) In its life and witness, the church professes faith in the triune God according to the scriptures, and as this faith is reflected in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.
- 2) The church maintains a ministry of proclaiming the gospel and celebrating the sacraments as understood by its doctrines.
- 3) The church baptizes in the name of the one God, “*Father, Son and Holy Spirit*” and acknowledges the need to move towards the recognition of the baptism of other churches.
- 4) The church recognizes the presence and activity of Christ and the Holy Spirit outside its own boundaries and prays for the gift of God’s wisdom to all in the awareness that other member churches also believe in the Holy Trinity and the saving grace of God.
- 5) The church recognizes in the other member churches of the WCC elements of the true church, even if it does not regard them “as churches in the true and full sense of the word” (Toronto statement).

b) *Organizational*

- 1) The church must produce evidence of sustained autonomous life and organization.
- 2) The church must be able to take the decision to apply for formal membership in the WCC and continue to belong to the fellowship of the WCC without obtaining the permission of any other body or person.
- 3) An applicant church must ordinarily have at least fifty thousand members. The central committee, for exceptional reasons, may dispense with this requirement and accept a church that does not fulfill the criteria of size.
- 4) An applicant church with more than 10,000 members but less than 50,000 members that has not been granted membership for exceptional reasons under rule I.3.b.3,² but is otherwise eligible for membership, can be admitted as a member subject to the following conditions: (a) it shall not have the right to participate in decision-making in the assembly, and (b) it may participate with other churches in selecting five representatives to the central committee in accordance with rule IV.4.b.3. Such church shall be consid-

² When adopting the new rule on membership, the central committee of the WCC (Geneva, February 2005), made it clear that churches which are already members are an exception to this rule.

ered as a member church belonging to the fellowship of the WCC in all other respects.

- 5) Churches must recognize the essential interdependence of the member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC, particularly those of the same confession, and should make every effort to practise constructive ecumenical relations with other churches within their country or region. This will normally mean that the church is a member of the national council of churches or similar body and of the regional/sub-regional ecumenical organization.

4. Consultation

Before admitting a church to membership in the fellowship of the World Council of Churches, the appropriate world confessional body or bodies and national council or regional ecumenical organization shall be consulted.

5. Resignation

A church which desires to resign its membership in the fellowship of the Council can do so at any time. A church which has resigned but desires to rejoin the Council must again apply for membership.

II. Responsibilities of membership

Membership in the World Council of Churches signifies faithfulness to the basis of the Council, fellowship in the Council, participation in the life and work of the Council and commitment to the ecumenical movement as integral to the mission of the church. Churches which are members of the World Council of Churches are expected to:

- 1) appoint delegates to the assembly, the major policy-making body of the Council, and participate in council with other member churches in shaping the ecumenical vision and the ecumenical agenda;
- 2) inform the World Council of their primary concerns, priorities, activities and constructive criticisms as they may relate to its programmes as well as any matters which they feel need expression of ecumenical solidarity or which merit the attention of the Council and/or churches around the world;
- 3) communicate the meaning of ecumenical commitment, to foster and encourage ecumenical relations and action at all levels of their church life and to pursue ecumenical fellowship locally, nationally, regionally and internationally;
- 4) interpret both the broader ecumenical movement and the World Council of Churches, its nature, purpose and programmes throughout their membership as a normal part of their own reporting to their constituency;
- 5) encourage participation in World Council programmes, activities and meetings, including:
 - a) proposing persons who could make a particular contribution to and/or participate in the Council's various committees, meetings and consultations, programmes, publications and staff;
 - b) establishing links between their own programme offices and the appropriate World Council programme offices; and

- c) submitting materials for and promoting World Council communications resources: books, periodicals and other publications;
- 6) respond to decisions of the central committee which call for study, action or other follow-up by the member churches as well as respond to requests on matters referred by the central or executive committee or the general secretary for prayer, advice, information or opinion;
- 7) make an annual contribution to the general budget of the Council: the amount of the contribution shall be agreed upon in consultation between the church and the Council and shall be regularly reviewed;
- 8) participate, in ways commensurate with their resources and in consultation with the Council, in assuming responsibility for the costs of the Council's programmes and for expenses related to travel and accommodation of their representatives to Council events.

The implications of not fulfilling such obligations shall be such as the central committee shall decide.

III. Churches in association with the World Council of Churches

A church that agrees with the basis of the Council may request in writing to be received as a church in association with the World Council of Churches, stating its reasons for requesting this mode of relating with the Council. If the reasons are approved by the central committee, such a church may be accepted to be in association with the World Council of Churches.

Churches in association with the World Council of Churches:

- 1) can send representative(s) to the assembly and the central committee who can speak with permission of the chair, but have no right to participate in formal decision-making, whether by consensus or by vote;
- 2) can be invited to participate in the work of the commissions, advisory groups and other consultative bodies of the Council as consultants or advisers;
- 3) have the possibility of participating in the work of the WCC as described, but will not be identified with decisions taken or statements issued by the Council;
- 4) shall be expected to make an annual contribution to the general budget of the Council; the amount of the contribution shall be agreed upon in consultation between the church and the Council and shall be regularly reviewed; no financial support will ordinarily be made available from the Council to such churches to facilitate their participation.

The general secretary shall maintain a list of churches in association with the Council.

IV. The assembly

1. Composition of the assembly

- a) *Persons with the right to speak and the responsibility to participate in decision-making*

The assembly shall be composed of official representatives of the member churches, known as delegates, elected by the member churches, with the right to speak and with the responsibility to participate in decision-making.

- 1) The central committee shall determine the number of delegates to the assembly well in advance of its meeting.

- 2) The central committee shall determine the percentage of the delegates, not less than 85 percent, who shall be both nominated and elected by the member churches. Each member church shall be entitled to a minimum of one delegate. The central committee shall allocate the other delegates in this group among the member churches giving due regard to the size of the churches and confessions represented in the World Council of Churches, the number of churches of each confession which are members of the Council, and reasonable geographical and cultural balance. The central committee shall recommend the proper distribution within delegations among church officials, parish ministers and lay persons; and among men, women, young people and Indigenous peoples. The central committee may make provision for the election by the member churches of alternate delegates who shall serve only in place of such delegates who are unable to attend meetings of the assembly.
- 3) The remaining delegates, not more than 15 percent, shall be elected by certain member churches upon nomination of the central committee as follows:
 1. If the moderator or any vice-moderator of the central committee is not elected a delegate within the provisions of paragraph 2 above, the central committee shall nominate such officer to the member church of which such officer is a member. Paragraphs 5 and 6 below apply to such nominees.
 2. The central committee shall determine the categories of additional delegates necessary to achieve balance in respect of:
 - a) the varied sizes of churches and confessions;
 - b) the historical significance, future potential or geographical location and cultural background of particular churches, as well as the special importance of united churches;
 - c) the presence of persons whose special knowledge and experience will be necessary to the assembly;
 - d) proportions of women, youth, lay persons and local pastors;
 - e) participation of Indigenous peoples.
 3. The central committee shall invite the member churches to propose the names of persons in the categories so determined whom the churches would be willing to elect, if nominated by the central committee.
 4. From the lists so compiled, the central committee shall propose the nomination of particular individuals to their respective member church.
 5. If that member church elects the said nominee, he or she shall become an additional delegate of that member church.
 6. The member churches shall not elect alternate delegates for such delegates. Member churches are encouraged to consult regionally in the selection of the delegates described in paragraphs 2 and 3 above, provided that every delegate is elected by the church of which he or she is a member in accordance with its own procedures.

b) Persons with the right to speak but not to participate in decision-making

In addition to the delegates, who alone have the right to vote, the following categories of persons may attend meetings of the assembly with the right to speak:

- 1) *Presidents and officers:* Any president or presidents of the Council or moderator or vice-moderator or vice-moderators of the central committee who have not been elected delegates by their churches.

- 2) *Members of the retiring central committee*: Any members of the retiring central committee who have not been elected delegates by their churches.
 - 3) *Representatives of associate member churches (following confirmation of rule I: "churches which do not fulfil the criteria of size and have not been granted membership for exceptional reasons")*: Each associate member church ("each one of these churches") may elect one representative.
 - 4) *Advisers*: The central committee may invite a small number of persons who have a special contribution to make to the deliberations of the assembly or who have participated in the activities of the World Council. Before an invitation is extended to an adviser who is a member of a member church, that church shall be consulted.
 - 5) *Delegated representatives*: The central committee may invite persons officially designated as delegated representatives by organizations with which the World Council maintains relationship.
 - 6) *Delegated observers*: The central committee may invite persons officially designated as delegated observers by non-member churches.
- c) *Persons without the right to speak or to participate in decision-making*
- The central committee may invite to attend the meetings of the assembly without the right to speak or to participate in decision-making:
- 1) *Observers*: Persons identified with organizations with which the World Council maintains relationship which are not represented by delegated representatives or with non-member churches which are not represented by delegated observers.
 - 2) *Guests*: Persons named individually.

2. *Presiding officers and committees*

- a) At the first decision session of the assembly the central committee shall present its proposals for the moderatorship of the assembly and for the membership of the business committee of the assembly and make any other proposals, including the appointment of other committees, their membership and functions, for the conduct of the business of the assembly as it sees fit.
- b) At the first or second decision session, additional nominations for membership of any committee may be made in writing by any six concurring delegates.
- c) Election shall be by ballot unless the assembly shall otherwise determine.

3. *Agenda*

The agenda of the assembly shall be proposed by the central committee to the first decision session of the assembly. A delegate may propose changes to the agenda in accordance with rule XX.6.c. New business or any change may be proposed by the business committee under rule IV.5.b.2.

4. *Nominations committee of the assembly*

- a) At an early decision session of the assembly, the assembly shall elect a nominations committee, on which there shall be appropriate confessional, cultural and geographical representation of the membership of the assembly and representation of the major interests of the World Council.

- b) The nominations committee in consultation with the officers of the World Council and the executive committee shall make nominations for the following:
 - 1) the president or presidents of the World Council;
 - 2) not more than 145 members of the central committee from among the delegates which the member churches have elected to the assembly;
 - 3) not more than 5 members of the central committee from among the representatives which the associate member churches (following confirmation of rule I: “churches which do not fulfill the criteria of size and have not been granted membership for exceptional reasons”) have elected to the assembly.
- c) In making nominations, the nominations committee shall have regard to the following principles:

- 1) the personal qualifications of the individual for the task for which he or she is to be nominated;
- 2) fair and adequate confessional representation;
- 3) fair and adequate geographical and cultural representation;
- 4) fair and adequate representation of the major interests of the World Council.

The nominations committee shall satisfy itself as to the general acceptability of the nominations to the churches to which the nominees belong.

Not more than seven persons from any one member church shall be nominated as members of the central committee.

The nominations committee shall secure adequate representation of lay persons – men, women and young people – so far as the composition of the assembly makes this possible.

- d) The nominations committee shall present its nominations to the assembly. Additional nominations may be made by any six delegates concurring in writing, provided that each such nominee shall be proposed in opposition to a particular nominee of the nominations committee.
- e) Election shall be by ballot unless the assembly shall otherwise determine.

5. *Business committee of the assembly*

- a) The business committee of the assembly shall consist of the moderator and vice-moderator or vice-moderators of the central committee, the general secretary, the presidents of the Council, the co-moderators of the permanent committee on consensus and collaboration participating as a delegate, the moderator or a member of the assembly planning committee participating as a delegate, the moderators of hearings and committees who may appoint substitutes and ten delegates who are not members of the outgoing central committee, who shall be elected in accordance with rule IV.2. If a co-moderator of the permanent committee and/or the moderator of the assembly planning committee is not a delegate, he/she shall be invited as an adviser to the assembly and its business committee with the right to speak but not to participate in decision-making.
- b) The business committee shall:
 - 1) coordinate the day-to-day business of the assembly and may make proposals for rearrangement, modification, addition, deletion or substitution of items included on the agenda. Any such proposal shall be presented to the assembly at the earliest convenient time by a member of the business committee with reasons for

the proposed change. After opportunity for discussion on the proposal, the moderator shall put the following question to the assembly: Shall the assembly approve the proposal of the business committee? The assembly shall decide the question by consensus or voting procedures. If decided according to voting procedures, then any proposed change must receive a two-thirds (2/3) majority of those present to be adopted;

- 2) consider any item of business or change in the agenda proposed to the business committee by a delegate under rule XX.6.c;
- 3) determine whether the assembly sits in general, hearing or decision session as defined in rule XX.2;
- 4) receive information from and review the reports of other committees in order to consider how best the assembly can act on them.

6. Other committees of the assembly

- a) Any other committee of the assembly shall consist of such members and shall have such powers and duties as are proposed by the central committee at the first decision session or by the business committee after its election and accepted by the assembly.
- b) Any such committee shall, unless the assembly otherwise directs, inform the business committee about its work and shall make its report or recommendations to the assembly.

V. Presidents

1. The assembly shall elect the president or presidents of the World Council of Churches; the number of presidents elected shall, however, not exceed eight; the role of the presidents being to promote ecumenism and to interpret the work of the World Council of Churches, especially in their respective regions.
2. The term of office of a president shall end at the end of the next assembly following his or her election.
3. A president who has been elected by the assembly shall be ineligible for election for a second consecutive term of office.
4. The presidents should be persons whose ecumenical experience and standing is widely recognized among the ecumenical partners of the World Council in their respective regions.
5. The presidents shall be ex officio members of the central committee.
6. Should a vacancy occur in the presidium between assemblies, the central committee may elect a president to fill the unexpired term.

VI. Central committee

1. Membership

- a) The central committee shall consist of the president or presidents of the World Council of Churches together with not more than 150 members elected by the assembly (see constitution, article V.2.b).

- b) Any member church, not already represented, may send one representative to the meetings of the central committee. Such a representative shall have the right to speak but not to participate in decision-making.
- c) If a regularly elected member of the central committee is unable to attend a meeting, the church to which the absent member belongs shall have the right to send a substitute, provided that the substitute is ordinarily resident in the country where the absent member resides. Such a substitute shall have the right to speak and to participate in decision-making. If a member, or his or her substitute, is absent without excuse for two consecutive meetings, the position shall be declared vacant, and the central committee shall fill the vacancy according to the provisions of article V.2.b.3 of the constitution.
- d) Moderators and vice-moderators of committees, commissions and boards who are not members of the central committee may attend meetings of the central committee and shall have the right to speak but not to participate in decision-making.
- e) Advisers for the central committee may be appointed by the executive committee after consultation with the churches of which they are members. They shall have the right to speak but not to participate in decision-making.
- f) Members of the staff of the World Council appointed by the central committee as specified under rule XII.3. shall have the right to attend the sessions of the central committee unless on any occasion the central committee shall otherwise determine. When present they shall have the right to speak but not to participate in decision-making.
- g) The newly elected central committee shall be convened by the general secretary during or immediately after the meeting of the assembly.

2. *Officers*

- a) The central committee shall elect from among its members a moderator and a vice-moderator or vice-moderators to serve for such periods as it shall determine.
- b) The general secretary of the World Council of Churches shall be ex officio secretary of the central committee.

3. *Meetings*

- a) The central committee shall ordinarily meet once every year. The executive committee may call an extraordinary meeting of the central committee whenever it deems such a meeting desirable and shall do so upon the request in writing of one-third or more of the members of the central committee.
- b) The general secretary shall take all possible steps to ensure that there be adequate representation present from each of the main confessions and from the main geographical areas of the membership of the World Council of Churches and of the major interests of the World Council.
- c) The central committee shall determine the date and place of its own meetings and of the meetings of the assembly.

4. *Functions*

In exercising the powers set forth in the constitution the central committee shall have the following specific functions:

- a) In the conduct of its business, the central committee shall elect the following committees:

- 1) nominations committee;
 - 2) executive committee;
 - 3) permanent committee on consensus and collaboration;
 - 4) programme committee (a standing committee);
 - 5) finance committee (a standing committee);
 - 6) reference committee or committees (appointed as needed at each meeting to advise the central committee on any other questions arising which call for special consideration or action by the central committee).
- b) It shall adopt the budget of the Council.
 - c) It shall deal with matters referred to it by member churches.
 - d) It shall determine the policies to be followed in the work of the World Council of Churches, including the task to initiate and terminate programmes and activities. It shall provide for the organizational structure to carry out the work mentioned herein before and to this end, amongst others, shall elect commissions and boards.
 - e) It shall report to the assembly the actions it has taken during its period of office and shall not be discharged until its report has been received.

VII. Nominations committee of the central committee

1. In its first meeting during or immediately after the assembly, the central committee shall elect a nominations committee which shall:
 - a) nominate persons from among the members of the central committee for the offices of moderator and vice-moderator or vice-moderators of the central committee;
 - b) nominate members of the executive committee of the central committee;
 - c) nominate a person for the office of president to fill the unexpired term should a vacancy occur in the presidium between assemblies;
 - d) nominate members of committees, commissions and boards and where appropriate their moderators;
 - e) make recommendations regarding the election of persons proposed for staff positions under rule XII.3.

In making nominations as provided for by (a) and (b) to (d) above, the nominations committee shall have regard to principles set out in rule IV.4.c and, in applying principles (2), (3) and (4) to the nomination of members of committees, commissions and boards, shall consider the representative character of the combined membership of all such committees. Any member of the central committee may make additional nominations, provided that each such nominee shall be proposed in opposition to a particular nominee of the nominations committee.

2. In between meetings of the central committee, the executive committee shall act as the nominations committee of the central committee.
3. Election shall be by ballot unless the committee shall otherwise determine.

VIII. Executive committee

1. Membership

- a) The executive committee shall consist of the moderator and vice-moderator or vice-moderators of the central committee, the moderators of programme and finance committees of the central committee and 20 other members of the central committee.
- b) If a member of the executive committee is unable to attend, he/she has the right – provided that the moderator agrees – to send a member of the central committee as a substitute. Such a substitute shall – as far as possible – be of the same region and church family, and shall have the right to speak and the responsibility to participate in decision-making.
- c) The moderator of the central committee shall also be the moderator of the executive committee.
- d) The general secretary of the World Council of Churches shall be ex officio the secretary of the executive committee.
- e) The officers may invite other persons to attend a meeting of the executive committee for consultation, always having in mind the need for preserving a due balance of the confessions and of the geographical areas and cultural backgrounds, and of the major interests of the World Council.

2. Functions

- a) The executive committee shall be accountable to the central committee, and shall present to the central committee at its next meeting a report of its work for approval. The central committee shall consider such a report and take such action in regard to it as it thinks fit.
- b) The executive committee shall be responsible for monitoring and overseeing the ongoing programmes and activities of the World Council of Churches including the task of determining the allocation of resources. The executive committee's power to make public statements is limited and defined in rule XIII.5.
- c) The central committee may by specific action provide for the election of staff to those positions specified in rule XII.3.a by the executive committee which should report these actions to the next meeting of the central committee.
- d) The executive committee shall supervise the operation of the budget and may, if necessary, impose limitations on expenditures.

3. Elections

- a) The central committee shall elect an executive committee at its first meeting during or immediately after the assembly.
- b) Vacancies on the executive committee shall be filled by the next meeting of the central committee.

IX. Permanent committee on consensus and collaboration

1. At its first full meeting after an assembly, the central committee shall elect from among its members the membership of the permanent committee on consensus and collaboration (the “permanent committee”), consisting of fourteen members, of whom half shall be Orthodox.

2. The Orthodox members of the nominations committee of the central committee, in consultation with all Orthodox members of the central committee, shall nominate the seven Orthodox members, and the other members of the nominations committee of the central committee shall nominate the remaining seven. The central committee as a whole shall elect the permanent committee. For election of the permanent committee, the provisions of rule VII.1. shall not apply: no counter nominations shall be accepted from the floor.
3. Of the overall membership at least half shall be members of the WCC executive committee. Proxies may substitute for absent members. Advisers may be invited from member churches. Observers may be invited from non-member churches, or on occasion from churches in association with the WCC.
4. Two co-moderators shall be elected by the membership of the permanent committee, one by the Orthodox members of the central committee, and one by the other members of the central committee.
5. The term of the members of the outgoing permanent committee shall conclude upon election of replacement members following an assembly. The permanent committee shall be considered a committee of the assembly and shall advise the business committee of the assembly.
6. The permanent committee will have responsibility for:
 - a) continuing the authority, mandate, concerns and dynamic of the Special Commission (mandated by the eighth assembly, Harare, Zimbabwe, 1998);
 - b) giving advice and making recommendations to governing bodies of the WCC during and between assemblies in order to contribute to the formation of consensus on matters proposed for the agenda of the WCC;
 - c) facilitating improved participation of the Orthodox in the entire life and work of the Council;
 - d) offering counsel and providing opportunity for action in matters of common interest;
 - e) giving attention to matters of ecclesiology.
7. The permanent committee will report to the central committee and to the executive committee.

X. Programme committee

1. The programme committee shall consist of up to 40 members including:
 - a) a moderator who shall be a member of the executive committee;
 - b) not more than 30 central committee members of whom 2 shall also be members of the executive committee;
 - c) the moderators of all commissions, boards and advisory groups that relate directly to the programme committee.
2. The programme committee shall normally meet in conjunction with the central committee and shall be required to report to it regularly.
3. Within the guidelines established by the assembly, the programme committee shall have the responsibility to make recommendations to the central committee on all matters regarding the programmes and activities of the World Council of Churches.

In particular, it shall:

- a) ensure that the development of programmes takes account of the major thrusts and policies adopted by the central committee as well as of the available financial resources;
- b) consider in particular the theological inter-relationship of different World Council activities;
- c) recommend to the central committee to initiate and terminate programmes and activities, as well as to make decisions on other basic questions of policy;
- d) provide for and make recommendations for regular evaluation of programmes and activities;
- e) recommend to the central committee the mandate and size of the commissions which are to advise the central committee through the programme committee in areas of constitutional responsibility of the Council;
- f) recommend to the central committee the mandate and size of boards, in particular the board of the Ecumenical Institute;
- g) appoint other advisory groups for specific areas or constituencies, as required. The size and periodicity of meetings of such advisory groups are to be determined in light of the tasks assigned and the resources available.

XI. Finance committee of the central committee

1. The finance committee of the central committee shall consist of not less than nine members, including:
 - a) a moderator, who shall be a member of the executive committee;
 - b) five members, who shall be members of the central committee, two of whom shall also be members of the executive committee;
 - c) three members, to be designated by the programme committee from its membership. The programme committee may designate alternates who may attend if the principal member is unable to be present.
2. The committee shall have the following responsibilities and duties:
 - a) To present to the central committee:
 - 1) in respect of the expired calendar year, an account of income and expenditure of all operations of the World Council of Churches and the balance sheet of the World Council of Churches at the end of that year and its recommendation, based on review of the report of the auditors, regarding approval and granting of discharge in respect of the accounts of the World Council of Churches for the completed period;
 - 2) in respect of the current year, a review of all financial operations;
 - 3) in respect of the succeeding calendar year, a budget covering all activities of the World Council of Churches and its recommendations regarding the approval of that budget in the light of its judgment as to the adequacy of the provisions made for the expenditure involved in the proposed programme of activities and the adequacy of reasonably foreseeable income to finance the budget; and
 - 4) in respect of the year next following the succeeding calendar year a financial forecast together with recommendations thereon as in (3) above.

- b) To consider and make recommendations to the central committee on all financial questions concerning the affairs of the World Council of Churches, such as:
 - 1) the appointment of the auditor or auditors who shall be appointed annually by the central committee and shall be eligible for reappointment;
 - 2) accounting procedures;
 - 3) investment policy and procedures;
 - 4) the basis of calculation of contributions from member churches;
 - 5) procedures and methods of raising funds.

XII. Staff

1. The central committee shall elect or appoint or provide for the election or appointment of persons of special competence to conduct the continuing operations of the World Council of Churches. These persons collectively constitute the staff.
2. The general secretary shall be elected by the central committee. He or she is the chief executive officer of the World Council. As such, he or she is the head of the staff. When the position of general secretary becomes vacant, the executive committee shall appoint an acting general secretary.
3. a) In addition to the general secretary, the central committee shall itself elect one or more deputy general secretaries, the directors for programme and management, and any other executive director.
 - b) The executive committee shall appoint all programme staff and shall report its actions to the central committee. Specialized, administrative and house staff shall be appointed by the general secretary.
4. The staff leadership group shall consist of the general secretary (moderator), the deputy general secretary or secretaries, the executive secretary in the general secretariat (secretary), and the executive directors. Other staff may be invited for specific items on the agenda.

The staff leadership group is the chief internal management team. Its overall responsibility is to advise the general secretary in his/her role as chief executive officer of the Council. It has the task of ensuring that all activities of the Council are carried out in an integrated and cohesive manner. For this purpose it will:

- a) Implement policies and priorities established by the central and executive committees and facilitate proposals to be submitted to them.
 - b) Provide for overall coordination, decide on priorities and the direction of the Council's activities.
 - c) Manage and allocate human and financial resources, propose the budget to the finance committees of the executive and central committees and ensure that programme planning is integrated with anticipated resources available.
 - d) Assist the general secretary in the appointment of staff and special reference groups.
5. There shall be a staff executive group. Its membership shall include ex-officio the members of the staff leadership group, the programme team coordinators, the director of Bossey and the management services managers. It shall meet regularly (normally twice a month); it shall be moderated by a member of the staff leadership group on a rotating basis.

The staff executive group shall advise the general secretary and the staff leadership group. Its purpose is to:

- a) advise on matters of long-range planning, monitoring and evaluation of activities;
 - b) consider the preparation of the budget;
 - c) assure regular sharing of information and provide for discussion and interpretation of policies and issues affecting the Council as a whole;
 - d) facilitate the coordination of the activities of the teams;
 - e) appoint ad-hoc or permanent functional staff groups to advise on specific areas of concern;
 - f) promote a spirit and style of work to strengthen and promote integration, cooperation and collegiality.
6. The normal terms of appointment for the general secretary and for the deputy general secretary or secretaries shall be five years. Unless some other period is stated in the resolution making the appointment, the first term of office for all other staff appointed by the executive or central committee shall normally be four years from the date of the appointment. All appointments shall be reviewed one year before their expiration.
 7. Retirement shall normally be at sixty-five for both men and women and in no case shall it be later than the end of the year in which a staff member reaches the age of sixty-eight.

XIII. Public statements

1. In the performance of its functions, the World Council of Churches through its assembly or through its central committee may issue statements on any situation or concern with which the Council or its constituent churches may be confronted.
2. While such statements may have great significance and influence as the expression of the judgment or concern of so widely representative a Christian body, yet their authority will consist only in the weight which they carry by their own truth and wisdom, and the publishing of such statements shall not be held to imply that the World Council as such has, or can have, any constitutional authority over the constituent churches or right to speak for them.
3. Any commission may recommend statements to the assembly or to the central committee for its consideration and action.
4. When, in the judgment of a commission, a statement should be issued before approval of the assembly or central committee can be obtained, the commission may do so provided the statement relates to matters within its own field of concern and action, has the approval of the moderator of the central committee and the general secretary, and the commission makes clear that neither the World Council of Churches nor any of its member churches is committed by the statement.
5. Between meetings of the central committee, when in their judgment the situation requires, a statement may be issued, provided that such statements are not contrary to the established policy of the Council, by:
 - a) the executive committee when meeting apart from the sessions of the central committee; or

- b) the moderator and vice-moderator or vice-moderators of the central committee and the general secretary acting together; or
- c) the moderator of the central committee or the general secretary on his or her own authority respectively.

XIV. Associate councils

1. Any national Christian council, national council of churches or national ecumenical council, established for purposes of ecumenical fellowship and activity, may be recognized by the central committee as an associate council, provided:
 - a) the applicant council, knowing the basis upon which the World Council of Churches is founded, expresses its desire to cooperate with the World Council towards the achievement of one or more of the functions and purposes of this Council; and
 - b) the member churches of the World Council in the area have been consulted prior to the action.
2. Each associate council:
 - a) shall be invited to send a delegated representative to the assembly;
 - b) may, at the discretion of the central committee, be invited to send an adviser to meetings of the central committee; and
 - c) shall be provided with copies of all general communications sent to all member churches of the World Council of Churches.
3. In addition to communicating directly with its member churches, the World Council shall inform each associate council regarding important ecumenical developments and consult it regarding proposed World Council programmes in its country.
4. In consultation with the associate councils, the central committee shall establish and review from time to time guidelines regarding the relationships between the World Council of Churches and national councils of churches.

XV. Regional ecumenical organizations

1. The World Council of Churches recognizes regional ecumenical organizations as essential partners in the ecumenical enterprise.
2. Such regional ecumenical organizations as may be designated by the central committee:
 - a) shall be invited to send a delegated representative to the assembly;
 - b) shall be invited to send an adviser to meetings of the central committee; and
 - c) shall be provided with copies of all general communications sent to all member churches of the World Council of Churches.
3. In addition to communicating directly with its member churches, the World Council shall inform each of these regional ecumenical organizations regarding important ecumenical developments and consult it regarding proposed World Council programmes in its region.
4. The central committee, together with the regional ecumenical organizations, shall establish and review as appropriate guiding principles for relationships and cooperation between the World Council and regional ecumenical organizations, including the means whereby programmatic responsibilities could be shared among them.

XVI. Christian world communions

1. The World Council of Churches recognizes the role of Christian world communions or world confessional bodies in the ecumenical movement.
2. Such Christian world communions as may be designated by the central committee and which express their desire to this effect:
 - a) shall be invited to send a delegated representative to the assembly; and
 - b) shall be invited to send an adviser to meetings of the central committee; and
 - c) shall be provided with copies of all general communications sent to all World Council member churches.
3. The central committee shall establish and review as appropriate guidelines for relationships and cooperation with Christian world communions.

XVII. Specialized ministries engaged in ecumenical relief and development

1. Specialized ministries engaged in ecumenical relief and development are those church-based, church-related or ecumenical offices and organizations within the family of WCC member churches, serving the ecumenical movement particularly in the area of world service and development.

Any specialized ministry, committed to ecumenical diaconal services, may be recognized by the central committee as an organization with which the World Council of Churches has working relationships, provided:

 - a) the organization, knowing the basis upon which the World Council of Churches is founded, expresses its willingness to relate to and cooperate with it; and
 - b) the WCC member church or churches with whom the specialized ministry is related do not formally oppose this form of relationship.
2. Each specialized ministry:
 - a) shall be invited to send a delegated representative to the assembly (cf. rule IV.1.b.5);
 - b) shall be invited to send an adviser to meetings of the central committee; and
 - c) shall be provided with copies of all general communications sent to all member churches of the World Council of Churches.
3. In addition to communicating directly with its member churches, the World Council may inform each of these specialized ministries regarding important ecumenical developments and consult it regarding proposed World Council programmes in its area of commitment and expertise.
4. In consultation with specialized ministries, the central committee shall establish and review from time to time guidelines regarding the relationships between the World Council of Churches and specialized ministries.

XVIII. International ecumenical organizations

1. Ecumenical organizations other than those mentioned under rules XIV, XV, XVI and XVII may be recognized by the central committee as organizations with which the World Council of Churches has working relationships, provided:

- a) the organization is international in nature (global, regional or sub-regional) and its objectives are consistent with the functions and purposes of the World Council; and
 - b) the organization, knowing the basis upon which the World Council of Churches is founded, expresses its desire to relate to and cooperate with it.
2. On the basis of reciprocity, each international ecumenical organization:
 - a) shall be invited to send a delegated representative to the assembly (cf. rule IV.1.b.5);
 - b) shall be provided with copies of general communications sent to all World Council member churches.

XIX. Legal provisions

1. The duration of the World Council of Churches is unlimited.
2. The legal headquarters of the Council shall be at Grand-Saconnex, Geneva, Switzerland. It is registered in Geneva as an association according to art. 60ff. of the Swiss civil code. Regional offices may be organized in different parts of the world by decision of the central committee.
3. The World Council of Churches is legally represented by its executive committee or by such persons as may be empowered by the executive committee to represent it.
4. The World Council shall be legally bound by the joint signatures of two of the following persons: the moderator and vice-moderator or vice-moderators of the central committee, the general secretary, the deputy general secretary or secretaries. Any two of the above-named persons shall have power to authorize other persons, chosen by them, to act jointly or singly on behalf of the World Council of Churches in fields circumscribed in the power of attorney.
5. The Council shall obtain the means necessary for the pursuance of its work from the contributions of its member churches and from donations or bequests.
6. The Council shall not pursue commercial functions but it shall have the right to act as an agency of interchurch aid and to publish literature in connection with its aims. It is not entitled to distribute any surplus income by way of profit or bonus among its members.
7. Members of the governing bodies of the Council or of the assembly shall have no personal liability with regard to the obligations or commitments of the Council. The commitments entered upon by the Council are guaranteed solely by its own assets.

XX. Conduct of meetings

1. General

- a) These provisions for conduct of meetings shall apply to meetings of the assembly, the central committee, the executive committee and all other bodies of the WCC. During an assembly, the titles "president, moderator and vice-moderators of the central committee" shall refer to the persons holding those offices in the outgoing central committee. During the term of a central committee such titles shall refer to the current presidents and officers of that central committee.

- b) “Delegate” shall mean an official representative of a member church to an assembly with the right to speak and the responsibility to participate in decision-making (rule IV.1.a). For meetings of the central committee, “delegate” shall mean a member of the central committee or that member’s substitute (rule VI.1.c), with the right to speak and the responsibility to participate in decision-making.
- c) “Participant” shall include delegates as well as persons invited to the assembly or a meeting of the central committee as persons with the right to speak but not to participate in decision-making (rule IV.1.b).

2. *Categories of sessions*

The assembly shall sit in one of the following categories of sessions: general, hearing or decision. The business committee shall determine the category of session appropriate for different parts of the agenda.

a) *General session*

General sessions shall be reserved for ceremonial occasions, public acts of witness and formal addresses. Only matters proposed by the central committee or by the business committee shall be included in general sessions. No decisions shall be made during general sessions.

b) *Hearing session*

Hearing sessions shall be designated for plenary presentations, discussion, dialogue, and exchange of ideas as a resource for developing understanding, deepening fellowship among member churches and coming to a common mind on matters on the agenda. A wide range of perspectives shall be encouraged during hearing sessions. No decisions shall be made during hearing sessions, other than to move to a decision session, if deemed necessary or to deal with a point of order or procedural proposals.

c) *Decision session*

Decision sessions shall be designated for matters requiring a decision, including:

- 1) adoption of the agenda;
- 2) proposal for change in the agenda;
- 3) appointments and elections;
- 4) reception or adoption of reports or recommendations;
- 5) actions to be taken on recommendations or proposals of committees or commissions, or arising out of hearing sessions;
- 6) adoption of accounts and financial audits; and
- 7) amendment of constitution or rules.

3. *Moderating sessions*

- a) A moderator for each session of the assembly shall be designated before an assembly by the outgoing central committee, and during an assembly by the business committee, as follows:
 - 1) in general sessions one of the presidents or the moderator of the central committee shall preside;
 - 2) in hearing sessions one of the presidents, the moderator or a vice-moderator of the central committee, or a delegate with specific expertise in the subject matter of the hearing shall preside;

- 3) in decision sessions the moderator or a vice-moderator of the central committee or delegate to the assembly who was a member of the outgoing central committee shall preside.
- b) The role of session moderators shall be:
 - 1) to convene the session, including announcing the category of session;
 - 2) to facilitate and encourage discussion and dialogue, for the exchange and development of ideas, and to assist the meeting to come to a common mind;
 - 3) during decision sessions, to test any emerging agreement on a particular point and whether the meeting is ready to move to a decision by consensus;
 - 4) in the event the category of session is to change during a session, to announce the change in category, providing a break in the session to mark the change in category; and
 - 5) to close the session.
- c) The moderator shall consult with the recorder for the session to ensure that the developing consensus is accurately noted and any changed wording promptly made available to the meeting.
- d) All moderators shall undertake specific training in conducting meetings based upon the consensus model of decision-making, as described in these rules and the accompanying guidelines.

4. Moderator of the assembly

The moderator of the assembly shall announce the opening, suspension and the adjournment of the assembly.

5. Official minutes, records and reports

- a) The business committee shall appoint recorders from among delegates for each decision session. Their role shall be to follow the discussion of a decision session, to record the language of the emerging consensus, including final language of decisions taken, and to assist the moderator of the session in discerning an emerging consensus. Recorders shall also assist the moderator in ensuring that the final agreed wording of a proposal is translated and available to delegates before a decision is made.
- b) The business committee shall appoint rapporteurs for each hearing session and for committee meetings for which official minutes are not maintained, to prepare a report of the meeting including major themes and specific proposals. A rapporteur appointed for a committee meeting shall function as a recorder of that meeting.
- c) The business committee shall appoint minute-takers to record the official minutes of general, hearing and decision sessions of an assembly or any meeting for which formal minutes must be kept, and shall include a record of the discussion, motions and decisions. The minutes will normally incorporate by reference any report of the meeting. The minutes shall be signed by the moderator and the minute-taker for the session and shall be sent to the participants of the meeting. For all minutes other than minutes of an assembly, if there is no objection within six months from the sending of the minutes, the minutes shall be considered to be accepted. The first full central committee meeting following an assembly shall confirm the minutes of the assembly.

- d) Decision sessions shall produce official minutes, a record and/or report.
- e) If, after the close of a meeting, a member church declares that it cannot support a decision of the meeting, the member church may submit its objection in writing and have its position recorded in the minutes or report of a subsequent meeting. The decision itself shall not be rescinded by this action.

6. *Agenda*

- a) Matters may be included on the agenda of a meeting according to rule IV.3 and procedures established by the business and programme committees, and any other committee established by central committee for that purpose. Normally, matters included on an agenda will be based upon reports, recommendations or proposals that previously have been fully considered and have the consensus support of the proposing group or committee.
- b) The business committee shall ensure that the moderator is advised before each session, and if appropriate during breaks within a session, as to the conduct of the business and the priority of various agenda items.
- c) A delegate may propose to the business committee an item of business to be included on, or any change in, the agenda. If after consideration the business committee has not agreed to the proposal, the delegate may appeal the decision to the moderator of the assembly in writing. The moderator shall at a convenient time inform the assembly of the proposal, and a member of the business committee shall explain the reasons for this refusal. The delegate may give reasons for proposing it. The moderator shall then without further debate put the following question: Shall the assembly accept this proposal? If the assembly agrees to accept the proposal, the business committee as soon as possible shall bring proposals for the inclusion of the matter or the change in the agenda.
- d) Matters concerning ecclesiological self-understanding: Where a matter being raised is considered by a delegate to go against the ecclesiological self-understanding of his or her church, the delegate may request that it not be submitted for decision. The moderator shall seek the advice of the business committee in consultation with this delegate and other members of the same church or confession present at the session. If agreed that the matter does in fact go against the ecclesiological self-understanding of the delegate's church, the moderator shall announce that the matter will be removed from the agenda of the decision session and may be considered in a hearing session. The materials and minutes of the discussion shall be sent to the member churches for their study and comment.
- e) Subject to the provisions of this rule, the agenda shall be proposed, amended and/or adopted in accordance with rule IV.3. and IV.5.

7. *Speaking*

- a) In hearing sessions, participants wishing to speak either may submit to the moderator a written request or may queue at the microphones when the moderator so invites, but may speak only when called by the moderator.
- b) In decision sessions of the assembly or central committee, only delegates may speak. Delegates wishing to speak either may submit to the moderator a written request or may queue at the microphones when the moderator so invites, but may speak only when called by the moderator.

- c) In sessions of committees and advisory bodies where both hearing and decision may take place, participants who are not delegates have the right to speak but not to take part in decision-making.
 - d) The moderator shall decide who shall speak, ensuring that a fair distribution of opinions is heard, and may take advice on the order of speakers from a small sub-committee of the business committee. If time allows and others are not left unheard, the moderator may permit speakers to intervene more than once.
 - e) When called by the moderator, a speaker shall speak from a microphone, first stating his or her name, church, country, and role at the meeting, and shall address all remarks to the moderator.
 - f) Remarks will normally be limited to three minutes; however, the moderator may use discretion in allowing extra time if there is a difficulty in language or interpretation or if the issues being discussed are unusually complex.
 - g) Procedural proposals – hearing or decision sessions: Provided that a speaker is not interrupted, a delegate may ask for clarification of the pending matter or may raise suggestions about procedure. The moderator immediately shall provide clarification or respond to the suggestion for change of procedure.
 - h) Points of order – hearing or decision sessions: This provision is available to question whether procedures being followed are in accordance with these rules, to object to offensive language, to make a point of personal explanation, or to request that a meeting move to closed session. Points of order may be raised by a participant at any time, even by interrupting another speaker. A participant gains the attention of the moderator by standing and calling, “point of order!” The moderator shall ask the participant to state the point of order and then (without discussion) shall rule on it immediately.
 - i) If any delegate disagrees with the moderator’s decision on a procedural proposal or point of order, the delegate may appeal against it. In this case the moderator will put this question, without discussion, to the meeting: “Does the meeting concur with the decision of the moderator?” The delegates present shall decide the question according to the decision-making procedures then being employed.
8. *Reaching consensus: seeking the common mind of the meeting*
- a) Consensus shall be understood as seeking the common mind of the meeting without resort to a formal vote, in a process of genuine dialogue that is respectful, mutually supportive and empowering, whilst prayerfully seeking to discern God’s will.
 - b) Decisions will normally be by consensus, unless otherwise specified by the rules.
 - c) A consensus decision on a particular matter shall be recorded when one of the following occurs:
 - 1) all delegates are in agreement (unanimity); or
 - 2) most are in agreement and those who disagree are satisfied that the discussion has been both full and fair and do not object that the proposal expresses the general mind of the meeting.
 - d) A consensus decision shall mean that there is agreement about the outcome of a discussion. This may mean agreement to accept a proposal or a variation of a proposal; it also may mean agreement about another outcome, including agreement to reject a proposal, to postpone a matter, that no decision can be reached, or that there

are various opinions that may be held. When consensus has been reached that various opinions can be held concerning a matter, those various opinions shall be recorded in the final wording of the minutes and the report and the record of the meeting.

9. *Decision-making by consensus*

- a) A proposal or recommendation considered in a decision session may be affirmed, modified or rejected. Delegates may suggest modifications, and the moderator may allow discussion on more than one modification at a time. Reaching a common mind may require a series of steps, if there is a variety of opinions being expressed. As discussion proceeds, the moderator may ask the meeting to affirm what is held in common before encouraging discussion on those aspects of a proposal about which more diverse opinions have been voiced.
- b) To assist the moderator in discerning the mind of the meeting and to move efficiently towards consensus, the recorder of the session shall maintain a record of the discussion. Delegates may be provided with indicator cards to facilitate participation.
- c) A delegate or the moderator may suggest that the matter under discussion be referred for further work to an appropriate group holding a range of points of view. This suggestion itself shall be tested to discern the mind of the meeting. If agreed, the business committee shall schedule consideration of the matter for a later session.
- d) When it seems that the meeting is close to agreement on an outcome, the moderator shall ensure that the wording of the proposal (or the proposal as varied during the course of the discussion) is clear to all delegates, and then test whether there is consensus on that outcome. If all are agreed consistent with rule XX.8.c.1, the moderator shall declare that consensus has been reached and the decision made. If the meeting is not unanimous, the moderator shall invite those who hold a minority view to explain their reasons if they wish and to indicate whether they can agree with a decision pursuant to rule XX.8.c.2. If so, consensus shall be declared.
- e) If, after every effort has been made to reach consensus, agreement cannot be reached and it is the opinion of an officer or the business committee that a decision must be made before the meeting concludes, the moderator shall ask the business committee to formulate a proposal for how the matter may be considered again in a new form. At the later decision session where this new approach is considered, the meeting itself shall decide whether a decision must be made at this meeting, and, if so, shall proceed on any one of the following courses, which may be followed sequentially:
 - 1) to work further towards consensus on the proposal in its new form;
 - 2) to work to reach agreement among most delegates with some delegates recording an objection, in which event a meeting shall record acceptance of the proposal, providing that each delegate who does not agree is satisfied with that outcome and has the right to have his or her viewpoint recorded in the minutes, in the report, and in the record of the meeting; or
 - 3) to move into voting procedures to decide the matter (rule XX.10).
- f) When a meeting discusses by consensus procedures a matter for which decision must be reached at that meeting and there is no ready agreement in accordance with

rule XX.9.e.1 or 2, the moderator may offer a procedural proposal: “That the meeting resolve the proposal now by vote”. Except for matters described in rule XX.6.d, “matters concerning ecclesiological self-understanding”, the moderator shall announce that a vote to decide this change of procedure shall be taken. Delegates shall indicate by voting whether they agree that the matter shall be decided by a vote. If 85 percent of delegates present vote in favour of moving the matter to a voting process, the matter shall so move. If fewer than 85 percent of delegates present vote in favour of moving the matter to a voting process, the matter shall not so move, and the meeting shall decide, again by vote of 85 percent of delegates present, whether discussion should continue to achieve consensus or whether discussion should be discontinued.

10. Decision-making by vote

- a) Some matters require decision by vote, rather than by consensus. These include:
 - 1) constitutional changes (two-thirds majority);
 - 2) elections (simple majority, with specific procedures in each case);
 - 3) adoption of yearly accounts and of the financial audit report (simple majority).
- b) For matters that have been moved from consensus procedures to decision-making by vote in accordance with rule XX.9.e.3 or rule XX.9.f, and for matters reserved to a voting procedure according to subsection (a) of this section, the following procedures shall be followed:
 - 1) All motions must be moved and seconded by a delegate, and the mover has the right to speak first.
 - 2) In discussion following the seconding of a motion, no delegate may speak more than once, except that the delegate who moved the motion may answer objections at the end of the discussion.
 - 3) Any delegate may move an amendment, and if a seconder supports it, the amendment shall be considered simultaneously with the original proposal.
 - 4) When discussion is concluded, including the right of mover to reply (see 2 above), the moderator shall call for the vote and shall put any amendment first. If approved, it will be incorporated in the original proposal, which will then be put to the vote without further discussion.
 - 5) If the mover seeks to withdraw a motion or amendment during the discussion, the moderator will seek the consent of the meeting for the withdrawal.
- c) A delegate may move to close the discussion, but in doing so shall not interrupt a speaker. If seconded, the moderator shall call for a vote on this motion immediately without discussion. If two-thirds of the meeting agree, the voting process will then begin. If the motion fails, discussion will proceed, but the same motion to close discussion may be moved again as the discussion continues, but not by the delegate who moved it the first time.
- d) Voting shall be by show of hands or indicator cards and the moderator shall ask first for those in favour, then for those against, and finally for those who wish to abstain from voting. The moderator shall announce the result of the vote immediately.
- e) If the moderator is in doubt, or for any other reason decides to do so, or if a delegate requests it, a vote on the matter shall be taken immediately by count of a show of hands or indicator cards. The moderator may call tellers to count those voting

and abstaining. A delegate may ask that voting be by secret written ballot, and if seconded and if a majority of delegates present and voting agree, a secret written ballot shall be taken. The moderator shall announce the result of any count or secret written ballot.

- f) A majority of the delegates present, including those who choose to abstain from voting, shall determine a matter being decided by vote unless a higher proportion is required by the constitution or these rules. If the vote results in a tie, the matter shall be regarded as defeated.
- g) If the moderator wishes to participate in the discussion, he or she shall relinquish the position of moderator of the session to another presiding officer until the matter has been resolved.
- h) A moderator entitled to vote as a delegate may do so, but may not cast the decisive vote in the event of a tie.
- i) Any two delegates who voted with the majority for a previously approved matter may request that the business committee propose reconsideration of the matter. The business committee shall bring the proposal to the next decision session and may express an opinion as to whether the matter should be reconsidered. Reconsideration shall take place only if two-thirds of delegates present agree.
- j) Anyone voting with a minority or abstaining from voting may have his or her opinion recorded in the minutes, in the report, and/or the record of the meeting.

11. Languages

The working languages in use in the World Council of Churches are English, French, German, Russian and Spanish. The general secretary shall make reasonable effort to provide interpretation for any one of those languages into the others and shall endeavour to provide written translation of the specific wording of proposals. A participant may speak in another language only if he or she provides for interpretation into one of the working languages. The general secretary shall provide all possible assistance to any participant requiring an interpreter.

XXI. Amendments

Amendments to these rules may be proposed at any session of the assembly or at any session of the central committee by any member and may be decided according to consensus or voting procedures. If decided according to voting procedures, then any proposed change must receive a two-thirds (2/3) majority of those present to be adopted. No alteration in rules I, VI and XXI shall come into effect until it has been confirmed by the assembly. Notice of a proposal to make any amendment shall be given in writing at least twenty-four hours before the session of the assembly or central committee at which it is to be considered.

Final Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC

The report of the Special Commission was submitted to the central committee at its meeting in September 2002. The meeting received the report and recommended a series of actions. Subsequently, in following up the work of the Special Commission, the central committee took concrete actions on decision-making and membership matters in its meeting in February 2005. As a result of the work of the Special Commission, the assembly will have to take action on article II of the constitution and rule I (see pp. 40 and 44).

Guide to the report

The report is presented in three sections:

- **Section A** sketches the context in which the Special Commission has undertaken its work, demonstrating that it has also sought to relate its work to the implementation of the CUV.
- **Section B** provides exposition of the five special themes with which it has been engaged.
- **Section C** concerns the limited number of finite actions which the Commission recommends.

Certain matters have to be spelt out in more detail and therefore attached to the report are four appendices.

- **Appendix A** offers “A Framework for Common Prayer at WCC Gatherings”.
- **Appendix B** provides further information on decision-making by consensus.
- **Appendix C** contains a “Proposal for Changes to the Rules of the World Council of Churches”, identifying especially the new theological criteria for churches applying for membership in the fellowship of the WCC.
- **Appendix D** lists the membership of the Special Commission and its steering committee.

A

I. History and process

1. The 60-member Special Commission was created by the WCC’s eighth assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998. Behind the assembly decision to create the Commission were increasingly vocal expressions of concerns about the WCC among Orthodox churches. These had culminated in a meeting of Eastern Orthodox churches in Thessaloniki, Greece, in May 1998. Central Orthodox concerns, as summarized by that meeting, included some activities of the WCC itself, “certain developments within some Protestant members of the Council that are reflected in the debates of the WCC”, lack of progress in ecumenical theological discussions, and the perception that the present structure of the WCC makes meaningful Ortho-

dox participation increasingly difficult and even for some impossible. In its action approving the creation of the Special Commission, the Harare assembly noted that “other churches and ecclesial families” have concerns similar to those expressed by the Orthodox.

2. The Commission has been unique in World Council history in being composed of an equal number of representatives appointed by Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches and representatives from the other churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC appointed by the central committee. Its co-moderators were Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Ephesus (Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople) and Bishop Rolf Koppe (Evangelical Church in Germany).
3. In presentations to the opening session of the Commission, the moderator of the WCC central committee, Catholicos Aram I of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Cilicia), underscored that “the Orthodox presence in the WCC has enlarged the scope of the Council’s life and witness” and that the Orthodox churches in turn “have been enriched by their ecumenical involvement” whilst the general secretary of the WCC, Konrad Raiser, noted that this Commission marked the first time the WCC has created an official body “with equal participation from the Orthodox churches and from the other member churches in the WCC”. He suggested that “never before in its fifty years of history has the WCC taken its Orthodox member churches as seriously as with this decision”.
4. The Commission has met in plenary on four occasions, in Morges, Switzerland (December 1999), in Cairo, Egypt, as guests of Pope Shenouda III and the Coptic Orthodox Church (October 2000), in Berekfürdő, Hungary, at the invitation of Bishop Gustav Bölcskei and the Reformed Church in Hungary (November 2001), and in Helsinki, Finland, hosted by Bishop Voitto Huotari and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (May 2002) where representatives of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem were present for the first time. Observers from the Georgian Orthodox Church were present at the meetings in Morges and Cairo. Subcommittee meetings had also been hosted by the St Ephrem Theological Seminary in Damascus, Syria, the Orthodox Academy of Vilemov, Czech Republic, and the Orthodox Academy of Crete, Greece.
5. The Commission has sought diligently to fulfil the twofold task assigned to it by the Harare assembly. Thus it has sought “to study and analyze the whole spectrum of issues related to Orthodox participation in the WCC” and “to make proposals [to the WCC central committee] concerning the necessary changes in structure, style and ethos of the Council”. In so doing, members have had access to a dossier of background materials, including statements and reports from all key conferences regarding Orthodox participation in the WCC throughout its history, various proposals for the future working of the WCC, as well as to the contents of the October 1999 issue of *The Ecumenical Review*, devoted to the theme “Orthodox Participation in the Ecumenical Movement”. A double issue of *The Ecumenical Review*, published in April 2002, contained many papers concerning worship, baptism and ecclesiology, some of which were based on presentations made to the Special Commission. The Commission has been provided with further collections of papers as the needs of its work have demanded, most of which are now available on the Council’s website.

6. The Commission, experiencing a genuine spirit of fellowship, has had the courage, on occasion, “to speak the truth in love”, as strongly held convictions have been vigorously defended. However, the whole engagement has been characterized by a deep respect for one another’s spiritualities and a genuine desire to understand and to accommodate differences of confessional outlook, enabling the Commission successfully to achieve its work.

II. What kind of Council do member churches want in the light of the acceptance by Harare of the CUV documentation?

7. More than fifty years of being together should not be lost but fed into future proposals for the ecumenical movement. Much had been learned in these years and the churches enriched by sharing together in the common journey towards Christian unity. Appreciation of this fellowship underlined an intention to stay together and work more intensively for fulfilling the common calling.
8. At times it seems as if the Council had become a prisoner of certain bureaucratic ways of proceeding, notwithstanding the revision of article III of the constitution which, after Harare, refers to the churches calling *each other* to the goal of visible unity.
9. Whilst the Council has a critical role to play in helping churches in fellowship with it to work together to fulfil their common calling, the following affirmations should be kept in mind:
 - Member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC are the subject of the quest for visible unity, not the Council.
 - Member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC teach and make doctrinal and ethical decisions, not the Council.
 - Member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC proclaim doctrinal consensus, not the Council.
 - Member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC commit themselves to pray for unity and to engage in an encounter that aims at finding language for resonances of the common Christian faith in other church traditions.
 - Member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC are responsible for developing and nurturing the sensitivities and the language that will allow them to sustain a dialogue with each other.
10. In a brutally divided world, churches have developed different ecclesial cultures, but by accepting the disciplines of the fellowship of the World Council of Churches they are called to acknowledge the necessity to witness together to their Christian faith, to unity in Christ, and to a community with no other limits than the whole human race.
11. The Commission envisions a Council that will hold churches together in an ecumenical space:
 - where trust can be built;
 - where churches can test and develop their readings of the world, their own social practices, and their liturgical and doctrinal traditions while facing each other and deepening their encounter with each other;

- where churches freely will create networks for advocacy and diaconal services and make their material resources available to each other;
- where churches through dialogue continue to break down the barriers that prevent them from recognizing each other as churches that confess the one faith, celebrate one baptism and administer the one eucharist, in order that they may move to a communion in faith, sacramental life and witness.

B

In its work the Commission identified five areas for specific study which were intensively investigated in sub-committees and plenary.

III. Ecclesiology

12. Ecclesiological issues embrace all of the matters under the consideration of the Special Commission: response to social and ethical issues, common prayer at WCC gatherings, matters of membership and representation, as well as how decisions are made together.
13. Joining a World Council of Churches entails accepting the challenge to give an account to each other of what it means to be church; to articulate what is meant by “the visible unity of the church”; and how the member churches understand the nature of the life and witness they share together now through their membership in the WCC. This is the question of how the church relates to the churches.
14. There are ecclesiological presuppositions lying behind both the basis and constitution of the WCC. How do churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC currently understand the commitment they make to the trinitarian faith in the basis? How do they understand the intention expressed in the constitution “to call one another to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world and to advance towards this unity so that the world may believe”?
15. The response to these questions is influenced by the existence of two basic ecclesiological self-understandings, namely of those churches (such as the Orthodox) which *identify* themselves with the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, and those which see themselves as *parts* of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. These two ecclesiological positions affect whether or not churches recognize each other’s baptism as well as their ability or inability to recognize one another as churches. They also affect the way churches understand the goal of the ecumenical movement, its instruments – including the WCC – and its foundational documents.
16. Within the two basic ecclesiological starting points there is in fact a certain range of views on the relation of the church to the churches. This existing range invites us to pose to one another the following questions. To the Orthodox: “Is there space for other churches in Orthodox ecclesiology? How would this space and its limits be described?” To the churches within the tradition of the Reformation: “How does your church understand, maintain and express your belonging to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church?”
17. Exploring these questions would lead to a greater clarity of how churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC relate to each other and to the World Council.

It would also invite them to reflect on the implications of including baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as a criterion for membership in the Council.

18. To continue the discussion begun in the Special Commission on ecclesiology, the following issues will need to be explored further:
 - a) how the churches understand “visible unity”, “unity and diversity”, and the commitment they make to “call one another to the goal of visible unity”;
 - b) whether baptism should be included within the basis of the WCC;
 - c) the role of the WCC in encouraging the churches to respect each other’s baptism and to move towards mutual recognition of baptism;
 - d) the nature of the shared life experienced within the WCC: what is the meaning of the word “fellowship” (koinonia) used in this context?

In exploring these ecclesiological issues there is need to clarify the theological meaning of terms (e.g. ecclesial, ecclesiastical, church, churches, koinonia, et al.) in order to avoid unnecessary confusion and misunderstanding.

19. Future discussions can build upon work already done together over many years, including the Toronto statement; the New Delhi statement together with the Orthodox response; the Canberra statement; the Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC; *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the church responses. It is important to take account of work already done on ecclesiology. The leadership of the WCC is asked to promote that work both within the structures of the WCC and by encouraging churches to continue in a process of reflection and response to that work.
20. Some of the issues identified will be addressed within the developing programmes of Faith and Order on ecclesiology and baptism. Faith and Order is asked, within the development of the convergence text on *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*, to explore the specific issue of the relation of the church to the churches, ensuring the engagement of the major streams of the Christian tradition in that exploration.
21. It is also recommended that the issues of ecclesiology which have been identified by the Special Commission form an important part of the next assembly of the WCC.

IV. Social and ethical issues

22. At the beginning of the 21st century people all over the globe are confronted with unprecedented challenges: economic globalization, wars and ethnic cleansing, massive numbers of refugees, mounting xenophobia, threats to the environment, violation of basic human rights, racism, and the new possibilities of technology with the threats they pose.
23. Faced with the need to develop Christian ethics that respond to current problems and struggles, it is the responsibility of each church to shape its own moral teaching. At the same time, the Special Commission recognizes the WCC as a vital forum for raising and reflecting together on moral issues facing churches and society.
24. Many Christians all over the world give thanks to God for the role the WCC has played as an advocate for human rights, and as a participant in people’s struggles

to combat racism, economic misery, unjust territorial occupation, and the politics of brute force. Underlying all of these themes has been a commitment to a “theology of life”. Churches have been helped to care for the refugees of war, the hungry and the poor, and the socially marginalized victims of bigotry and political oppression.

25. Nevertheless, the Special Commission was created in part because of dissatisfactions raised by Orthodox and others with the ways in which certain social and ethical issues have reached the agenda of the WCC, and the ways in which they have been treated. Specifically, there has been a perception that churches are coerced into treating issues they deem as either foreign to their life or inappropriate for a worldwide forum. There has also been a perception that the WCC has on occasion sought to “preach” to the churches rather than be the instrument of their common reflection. The following observations and recommendations are an attempt to address these dissatisfactions.
26. Taking into account insights acquired from social and political analysis, the Commission affirms that the formation of moral judgments on social and ethical issues must be a continuing discernment of the will of God rooted in scripture and Tradition, liturgical life, theological reflection, all seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
27. The Council cannot speak for, nor require, the churches to adopt particular positions. It can, however, continue to provide opportunities for all churches to consult with one another and, wherever possible, for them to speak together.
28. By the same token, member churches should understand that not all matters discussed within their own fora can be imposed on the WCC agenda. Skill and sensitivity are needed on all sides to perceive which matters should remain within the counsels of particular churches and which can profitably be discussed together.
29. It is critical that the result of such dialogue and cooperation be clearly shown to be coming from a distinctively Christian perspective, embracing the values of the gospel. The churches take on a “prophetic role” when they truthfully describe and react to situations in the world precisely in the light of the gospel. More reflection is required on what it means for churches in fellowship to engage in this way. A prophetic voice can never be divorced from the pastoral role, which includes building up, encouraging and comforting (1 Cor. 14:3).
30. The Council is a necessary and helpful instrument in facing social and ethical issues when it enables the churches to:
 - a) reaffirm that they are bound together in fellowship by their common confession of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, to the glory of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
 - b) renew the commitment to stay together in order to foster love for each other, for love is essential to dialogue in freedom and trust;
 - c) recognize that differences arising out of churches’ responses to moral issues, stemming from churches witnessing to the gospel in varying contexts, need not be insurmountable;
 - d) recognize that dialogue on social and ethical matters presupposes that they are not content simply to “agree to disagree” on their own moral teachings, but are

willing to confront honestly their differences by exploring them in the light of doctrine, liturgical life, and holy scripture.

31. New and unprecedented issues constantly arise for which directly applicable models for ethical judgments are not to be found within the churches' own traditions, insights and ethical formulations. This holds true particularly within the bio-ethical and bio-technical sphere. Churches are challenged to articulate a Christian ethical approach, e.g. to cloning, in-vitro fertilization and genetic research. The experiences and reflections of others in the wider ecumenical fellowship provide a valuable and often indispensable resource.
32. The way in which a church (or churches together) orders and structures its own decision-making on moral matters is in itself a prime ethical issue. *Who decides what and by which means?* The forms of decision-making and communication already embody a social ethic, and influence moral teaching and practice. Structures, offices and roles express moral values. Ways of exercising power, governance and access have moral dimensions. To ignore this is to fail to understand why moral issues can be so divisive.
33. The WCC needs constantly to monitor procedures for dealing with social and ethical issues proposed for common deliberation. For example, how should it be determined that a given matter is directed to the WCC for discussion by a genuine "church" request, rather than by pressure-group advocacy?
34. Moreover, procedures for discussing such issues need constantly to be refined in a way that enables the Council to perform its role of enabling the formation of a common mind among the churches, and avoid causing or deepening divisions. The consensus method should determine the whole process of exploration at every level: governing bodies, staff, participants (cf. Appendix B, section II). It should not simply be reserved for the end of the process.
35. It is the expectation of the Special Commission that the use of consensus decision-making, with an increase in mutual trust, will make it easier for all to participate fully in the discussion of any burning ethical and social issue.

V. Common prayer

36. In the beginning of the new millennium humanity is confronted with new realities, new obstacles and new challenges. It is commonly admitted that we live today in a world of tensions, antagonisms, conflicts, wars, and rumors of wars (Matt. 24:6). Within such a situation isolation or destruction in no way can constitute paths to be followed by Christian churches. The continuation and strengthening of the existing dialogue and cooperation between Christian churches is an urgent duty. Isolation and disunity are anomalies which can only be understood as the result of sin and evil. In the biblical and ecclesiastical tradition sin and evil have been described as dismemberment, disorganization and dissolution of the unity created by God. This disunity leads to selfishness and a sectarian understanding of the Christian gospel.
37. The contemporary Christian commitment to visible unity – by its range, its depth, and its instruments – is a new reality in church history. Equally, the possibility of praying together in ecumenical settings is also a new challenge with specific and

particular mission to accompany and strengthen Christians in their journey towards unity. In order to make progress in dialogue with one another, Christians need to plead together for divine assistance.

38. The Christian way is always based on and connected with prayer. Therefore at the very heart of every effort towards Christian unity and collaboration is also the reality of prayer. Before every important stage of his salvific work, our common Lord Jesus Christ prayed to the Father, teaching us that we have the task of pleading with God in order to overcome all painful divisions and to offer a common testimony to the Christian gospel. Christ's prayer for unity is striking and challenging – "I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21).
39. Decades of experience of common prayer and spiritual sharing within the WCC constitute a heritage which cannot easily be ignored. Many Christians have the same experience in local situations; the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is one of the most widespread examples of such experience. Some churches today would easily affirm that they do not worship in the same manner they did fifty years ago. While they have been challenged initially, they have been enriched by their experience of common prayer. They have received with gratitude many gifts from other Christian traditions. During these decades, through their common prayer, dialogue and shared witness, churches have experienced progress towards unity, and some have even reached agreements leading to "full communion".
40. Praying together has also revealed many of the challenges along the way towards unity. This is in part because of confessional and cultural backgrounds leading churches to worship in different ways. In addition, common prayer as it has developed in the World Council of Churches has caused difficulties for some churches. Indeed, it is in common prayer that the pain of Christian division is most acutely experienced.
41. The Special Commission has dealt with some of these difficulties, by identifying matters of ecclesiology, theology, eucharistic practice and other sensitive issues. While these difficulties are not to be minimized, the call to pray together continues to be a primary importance. A way forward is needed which will allow all to pray together with integrity, on the way towards visible unity. In that spirit, the Special Commission has prepared the attached framework for common prayer at WCC gatherings (Appendix A).
42. Towards that end, a clear distinction is proposed between "confessional" and "interconfessional" common prayer at WCC gatherings.¹ "Confessional common prayer" is the prayer of a confession, a communion, or a denomination within a confession. Its ecclesial identity is clear. It is offered as a gift to the gathered community by a particular delegation of the participants, even as it invites all to enter into the spirit of prayer. It is conducted and presided over in accordance with its own understanding and practice. "Interconfessional common prayer" is usually prepared for specific ecumenical events. It is an opportunity to celebrate together

¹ The words "confession", "confessional" and "interconfessional" are used as technical terms, recognizing that they are imperfect. Not all churches would define themselves in terms of confessions.

drawing from the resources of a variety of traditions. Such prayer is rooted in the past experience of the ecumenical community as well as in the gifts of the member churches to each other. But it does not claim to be the worship of any given member church, or of any kind of a hybrid church or super-church. Properly understood and applied, this distinction can free the traditions to express themselves either in their own integrity or in combination, all the while being true to the fact that Christians do not yet experience full unity together, and that the ecumenical bodies in which they participate are not themselves churches (see Appendix A, §§15-18)

43. Thus, the goals of the attached considerations are twofold. One is to clarify that “interconfessional common prayer” at WCC gatherings is not the worship of an ecclesial body. The other is to make practical recommendations for common prayer at WCC gatherings on how to use language, symbols, imagery and rites in ways which would not cause theological, ecclesiological or spiritual offence. To the extent that one can satisfy these goals, common prayer can become something in which all traditions may participate in good conscience, and with theological and spiritual integrity. While it is the hope of the Special Commission that this work will facilitate progress, it is recognized that for some churches, prayer with Christians outside their own tradition is not only uncomfortable, but also considered to be impossible (see Appendix A, §§8-10).
44. Eucharistic worship at ecumenical events has been a difficult issue for the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches. Not all can receive from the same table and there exists a range of views and disciplines among churches belonging to the fellowship of the World Council of Churches on the offering and receiving of the eucharist. Whatever one’s views on the eucharist and how it may or may not be shared, the pain of not being able all to receive at the same table is felt by all. Following the pattern of distinguishing between confessional and interconfessional common prayer, confessional celebrations of the eucharist at assemblies and other major events can be accommodated. The hosting church (or group of churches which are able to host together) should be clearly identified. While it should be very clear that the WCC is not “hosting” a eucharist, these confessional eucharistic services, though not part of the official programme, may be publicly announced, with an invitation to all to attend (see Appendix A, §§36-39).
45. Exercising care for each other within the context of the WCC often means raising awareness about the ways in which we might unintentionally offend each other. In this spirit, these considerations seek to make planners of common prayer more aware of potential areas of concern. But these considerations are not comprehensive, and must be met by the sincere intention to develop opportunities for all participants to pray with integrity. As this framework makes clear, common prayer at WCC gatherings should be the result of serious and sensitive planning, and is not a task to be undertaken casually (see Appendix A, §41).

VI. Consensus model of decision-making

46. The Special Commission early came to the conclusion that a change in decision-making procedures in the governing bodies of the WCC would:
 - a) enhance the participation of all members in the various meetings;

- b) preserve the rights of all churches, regions and groupings, especially those which hold a minority opinion;
 - c) provide a more collaborative and harmonious context for the making of decisions;
 - d) enable representatives to have more “space” to discern the will of God for the churches, the WCC and the wider human family.
47. Having examined some models, the Special Commission believes that the Council should move to the consensus method as described in Appendix B to this report.
48. The reasons for change are elaborated in paragraphs 1-7 of Appendix B. The recommended consensus model is described in paragraphs 8-20. Some possible difficulties with consensus decision-making are outlined in paragraphs 25-32, and responses are made to these possible difficulties.
49. The following definition of the consensus method has been adopted by the Special Commission:
- a) The consensus method is a process for seeking the common mind of a meeting without deciding issues by means of voting. A consensus is reached when one of the following occurs:
 - i) all are in agreement (unanimity);
 - ii) most are in agreement and those who disagree are content that the discussion has been both full and fair and that the proposal expresses the general “mind of the meeting”; the minority therefore gives consent;
 - iii) the meeting acknowledges that there are various opinions, and it is agreed that these be recorded in the body of the proposal (not just in the minutes);
 - iv) it is agreed that the matter be postponed;
 - v) it is agreed that no decision can be reached.
 - b) Therefore, consensus procedures allow any family or other group of churches, through a spokesperson, to have their objections to any proposal addressed and satisfied prior to the adoption of the proposal. This implies that the family or group of churches can stop any proposal from passing until they are satisfied that their concerns have been fully addressed.
 - c) Since consensus does not always involve unanimity, and since there will be rare cases when consensus procedures are tried and do not succeed, a mechanism will operate which allows the meeting to move forward to a decision. The revised rules of the WCC will need to specify how this mechanism works and to ensure that the consensus procedures are not weakened. This process of revision should include consultation with the standing committee (see §51 below).
 - d) Within a consensus model, minorities have a right for their reasoned opposition to a policy to be recorded, whether in the minutes, in reports of the meeting, or both, if they so request.
50. Some matters will be better resolved by a voting procedure, even when consensus procedure has become the dominant model of decision-making. These matters include some financial and budget matters and some administrative decisions. Elections will need to be conducted according to rules which are specific to the particular election. While these rules may include elements of the consensus model, they may also include a process of voting at some points. Appointment of

programme staff will normally be by consensus. As these rules are being reviewed and revised, consultation with the standing committee on Orthodox participation (described below) should take place.

51. A major part of the discussion on decision-making has centred on the idea of “parity” between Orthodox representatives and other representatives. The Special Commission argues for the establishment of a standing committee in the following terms:
- a) Upon the completion of the work of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, the central committee will establish a new body, to be called the standing committee on Orthodox participation in the WCC. In August 2002, the central committee will appoint the steering committee of the present Special Commission to fulfil that role until the next assembly of the WCC.
 - b) Following the next assembly, the new central committee will appoint the standing committee to consist of 14 members, of whom half will be Orthodox; of the overall membership at least half will be members of the WCC executive committee.
 - c) The Orthodox members of the central committee will appoint the seven Orthodox members, and the other members of the central committee will appoint the remaining seven. All members of the standing committee will normally be drawn from the member churches of the WCC. Proxies may substitute for absent members. In keeping with the practice of the special commission, observers (rules III.6.c) from non-member churches, or on occasion from churches in association with the WCC, can be invited by the standing committee.
 - d) Two co-moderators will be appointed from the membership of the standing committee, one appointed by the Orthodox members of the central committee, and one by the other members of the central committee.
 - e) The standing committee will have responsibility for:
 - i) continuing the authority, mandate, concerns and dynamic of the Special Commission;
 - ii) giving advice in order to reach consensus on items proposed for the agenda of the WCC;
 - iii) giving attention to matters of ecclesiology.
 - f) The standing committee will give advice and make recommendations to governing bodies of the WCC, including issues of improved participation of the Orthodox in the entire life and work of the Council.
 - g) The standing committee will report to the central committee and the executive committee.
52. The principle of parity led the Special Commission to discuss the idea of having two moderators in the governing bodies of the WCC (one Orthodox and one from another tradition) and two vice-moderators (again, one from each). A considerable number of commission members proposed that this idea be referred to the central committee. Other suggestions, such as the rotation of Orthodox and “non-Orthodox” in the office of moderator, were also proposed.

When working towards a consensus, the role of the person in the chair is crucial. He or she must regularly test the mind of the meeting as the discussion develops, must be careful to respect the rights of all, and help the meeting formulate its ultimate decision. Moderators need particular skills, and these skills will be enhanced if a process of preparation is entered into, before undertaking this task.

VII. Membership and representation

53. Subsequent to the establishment of the Special Commission the executive committee of the WCC set up a separate study group to investigate matters of membership and representation and to make recommendations. This membership study group is composed of both members of the central committee and the Special Commission with parity between Orthodox and participants from the other member churches. It has already made interim reports to the executive committee and shared these with the Special Commission at its plenary meetings. It will present its final report to the executive committee for submission to the central committee meeting scheduled for August 2002.
54. All reports of the membership study group have been made available to all members of the Special Commission. The meetings of the membership study group purposely have been scheduled to alternate with the meetings of the Special Commission so that at every stage of the development of the work of the Special Commission, the Commission has been informed of the work of the membership study group and at every stage of the work of the membership study group, the group has had the benefit of the comments, discussion and advice of the Special Commission.
55. With the encouragement of the Special Commission, major focuses of the membership study group's work were (a) listing theological criteria required of those seeking admission as members of the WCC, (b) formulating new ways of grouping churches for purposes of their representation and participation in the Council, (c) exploring new models of membership including the family model and regional membership, and (d) evaluating new modes of relating to the Council.
56. The Commission proposes to the membership study group that the membership study group include in its recommendations to the executive committee two possibilities for churches wanting to relate to the WCC: (a) member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC, (b) churches in association with the WCC.

Member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC are churches that agree with the basis of the WCC, confirm their commitment to the purposes and functions of the Council, and conform to the theological and organizational criteria.

Churches in association with the WCC are churches that agree with the basis of the Council and are accepted for such status. Such churches can send representatives to the assembly and the central committee who can speak with the permission of the chair, but have no right to vote. Such churches can be invited to participate in the work of commissions, advisory groups, and other consultative bodies of the Council as consultants or advisers. Churches applying to be in association with the WCC should state in writing their reasons for requesting this relationship, which reasons must be approved by the central committee.

The Commission encourages the membership study group to offer in its final report additional specific language spelling out more particularly the relationship entailed for churches in association with the Council consistent with the plenary discussion of the Special Commission in Järvenpää.

57. The Commission and the membership study group recommend that the existing category of associate member church under rule I.5.a.2 be eliminated in favour of the new category of relationship with the World Council of Churches entitled “churches in association with the World Council of Churches”. The Commission and the membership study group recommend that the current category of “associate membership” by virtue of size under rule I.5.a.1 (“small churches”) be incorporated into the description of member churches belonging to the fellowship of the World Council of Churches, retaining however the restrictions on participation by small churches (see attached Appendix C).
58. The Commission and the membership study group propose that new member churches be received at meetings of the central committee and not the assembly. The application for joining the WCC would be presented to one central committee meeting, with an intervening period of participation in the work of the Council and interaction with the local fellowship of member churches, and the decision taken on the application at the next subsequent meeting of the central committee. *This change in procedure will require a revision of article II of the constitution.*
59. Exploring the question of membership, the Commission and the membership study group considered alternatives of either confessional or regional membership, but rejected both as leading to a diminished sense of the constituency’s owning the work of the Council. However, the study group and the Commission urge the churches to come together locally or confessionally for purposes of membership in the WCC.
60. The Commission and the membership study group propose that churches join in groupings, e.g. geographically, confessionally, or according to other models, in order to make nominations for the central committee. Such persons, if elected, would be expected to develop a greater sense of responsibility/accountability to those who nominated them.
61. The Special Commission takes note of the work undertaken by the membership study group and reported to it in interim reports and commends its work, and particularly expresses its agreement with the proposed changes to the rules, including the theological criteria proposed by the membership study group, acknowledging the rules and the constitution may require further modifications. These proposed changes to the rules are attached to this report as Appendix C.

C

Some of the proposals listed below may require changes to the rules and to the constitution of the WCC, if adopted by the central committee and the assembly.

The Special Commission :

1. **Proposes** that the Council moves to a consensus method of decision-making as defined in paragraph 49, noting that a limited number of matters will still need to

be decided by vote, as described in paragraph 50, and the need for a transition process leading to the use of the new procedures.

2. **Proposes** that a parity committee with the title of “The standing committee on Orthodox participation in the WCC” be established, consisting of 14 members half of whom will be Orthodox (see §51b and c). Until the next assembly it is proposed that the present steering committee of the current Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC fulfil this role. The terms of reference of this committee are set out in paragraph 51.e,f and g.
3. **Requests** the Council to ensure that the consensus method be used at every stage in addressing social and ethical matters (see §26) and to facilitate the exchange and discussion of information and the sharing of expertise in the area of social and ethical decision-making, not least in relation to the issues mentioned in paragraph 31.
4. **Encourages Faith and Order:**
 - a) to continue its studies on ecclesiology with special reference to the issues identified in paragraph 18, including: (i) visible unity and diversity; (ii) baptism and ecclesial fellowship;
 - b) to explore the specific issue of the relation of the church to the churches, ensuring the engagement of the major streams of Christian traditions in that exploration (see §20);
 - c) to undertake a presentation of the issues of ecclesiology which have been identified by the Special Commission at the next assembly (see §21).
5. **Receives** the document entitled “A Framework for Common Prayer at WCC Gatherings” (Appendix A) and commends it to those preparing common prayer at WCC gatherings.
6. **Asks** the standing committee on Orthodox participation to consider how best the following points identified by the sub-committee on common prayer can be handled within the programmatic structures of the Council.
 - a) consideration of the ecclesial nature of common prayer;
 - b) consideration of sensitive issues as they continue to arise in common prayer at WCC gatherings;
 - c) ongoing development of the life of common prayer in the fellowship of the WCC;
 - d) use of the attached framework in planning common prayer at WCC gatherings, reflection in light of that experience, and further refinement of the framework as necessary.
7. **Recommends** in accordance with the proposals of the membership study group, as described in paragraphs 56-57, that in the future there be two ways of relating to the WCC:
 - a) member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC;
 - b) churches in association with the WCC.
8. **Welcomes** the proposal of the membership study group for revisions to the Rules of the WCC regarding membership and in particular endorses the addition of theological criteria for member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC as specifically formulated in appendix C, criteria, I.3a.

9. **Recommends** that churches be accepted to join the fellowship of the WCC at meetings of the central committee and not at the assembly. The application for joining the WCC would be presented to one central committee meeting, with an intervening period of participation in the work of the Council and interaction with the local fellowship of member churches, and the decision taken on the application at the subsequent meeting of the central committee.

Appendix A

A Framework for Common Prayer at WCC Gatherings¹

Introduction

1. Common prayer in ecumenical settings makes it possible for Christians from divided ecclesial traditions to praise God together and offer prayer for Christian unity. Prayer lies at the centre of our identity as Christians, both in our separate communions and in the conciliar ecumenical movement. The very fact that we are able to pray together – both as individuals and as representatives of our churches – is a sign of the progress that has been made. Yet our common prayer is also a sign of those things that are still to be achieved. Many of our divisions become apparent precisely in our common prayer.²
2. Because of the complexities associated with common prayer at WCC gatherings, this document has been produced to identify a framework that may allow further progress. To help clarify some of the concerns and ambiguities raised by common prayer at WCC gatherings, it has been found useful to distinguish between “confessional common prayer” and “interconfessional common prayer”.³ The term “ecumenical worship” has caused confusion about the ecclesial character of such worship, the ecclesiological status of the WCC, and the degree of unity that has in fact been achieved. For these reasons, the phrase “ecumenical worship” will not be used.

¹ These considerations were produced by a working group at the request of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches. Working group members included an equal number of representatives from the Orthodox churches and from the other member churches of the WCC, as well as WCC staff. They were revised and approved by the common prayer sub-committee of the Special Commission, and by the Special Commission plenary. The Commission attached the document to its final report to the central committee.

² During the course of the Special Commission’s discussions on worship, a distinction has been made between the words “worship” and “common prayer.” This distinction was introduced for understandable reasons, since “worship”, as translated in a number of languages, carries the implication of eucharist. Yet the substitution of “common prayer” for “worship” is also somewhat complicated, since prayer can be misunderstood in a narrow way as private individual prayer. For the purpose of this paper, we use the term “common prayer”, recognizing that this is an imperfect solution.

³ We use the words “confession”, “confessional” and “interconfessional” as technical terms, recognizing that they are imperfect. Not all churches would define themselves in terms of confessions.

3. The considerations offered here are not intended to be comprehensive. Rather, the document highlights particularly sensitive issues that have surfaced in recent years. The categories of “confessional” and “interconfessional” common prayer are set out with suggestions for the implementation of such prayers. But it cannot be expected that all the challenges of common prayer can be removed, or that all unease will disappear. The hope is to address several of the sensitivities involved, and to achieve as much clarity as possible as to the nature, status and purpose of our common prayer.
4. The considerations here presented are meant to address the current situation of the churches in the fellowship of the WCC, and are not to be construed as permanent or unchanging. Ongoing progress towards unity will require the occasional revisitation of this topic. Additionally, this framework should not be understood as universally applicable within the ecumenical movement at all levels and in all places. Rather, it is specific to the World Council of Churches and its various meetings.

Common prayer at WCC gatherings

5. The ecumenical movement calls its participants to a respectful and humble state of the heart. At the core of our journey together is a respect for each other’s self-understanding, different as it may be from our own. We do not wish to judge each other. Neither do we wish to put a stumbling block before each other. It is in a spirit of generosity and care for one another that we enter this discussion of common prayer at WCC gatherings.
6. Christians from divided ecclesial traditions offer prayer together because of our shared belief in the Holy Trinity and in Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, and because of our common commitment to the quest for Christian unity. Our common prayer is both inviting and expectant. It is addressed to God, and is an opportunity to listen to God speaking to us. It is a time to plead together for unity, to witness to one another, and to receive God’s gift of reconciliation. Our common prayer rightly entails adoration, confession, supplication, thanksgiving, listening to scripture, and intercession for others. As we pray together we give gifts to and receive gifts from each other. Most fundamentally, we offer ourselves to God in all our brokenness, and receive God’s offer to heal, teach and lead us.
7. Unfortunately, one of the factors which divides Christians is the matter of worship itself. It is in common prayer, perhaps more than in any other ecumenical work, that we encounter both the promise of God’s reconciliation, and the pain of our divisions. Because our unity is both gift and calling, both realized and hoped for, our common prayer must also stand in that risky place. The experience of praying together is not always a comfortable one, nor should it be, for we approach God together before we have been fully reconciled with each other.
8. Indeed, for some, prayer with Christians outside one’s own tradition is not only uncomfortable, but considered to be impossible. For example, Orthodox Christians must take into account canons which may be interpreted as forbidding such prayer, although there is no consensus on how to apply these canons today. Historically, many Protestants have also faced obstacles to common prayer.

9. Yet common prayer in an ecumenical context can be understood as *a time for confession and reconciliation, on the way* to a full unity that would be expressed ultimately by sharing the Lord's supper at a common table.

So if you are offering your gifts at the altar, and there remember that your brother [or sister] has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother [or sister], and then come and offer your gift. (Matt. 5:23-24)

10. The goals of these considerations are twofold. One is to clarify that interconfessional common prayer at WCC gatherings is not the worship of an ecclesial body. The other is to make practical recommendations for common prayer at WCC gatherings on how to use language, symbols, imagery and rites in ways which would not cause theological, ecclesiological or spiritual offence. To the extent that we can satisfy these goals, common prayer can become something in which all traditions may participate, in good conscience, and with theological and spiritual integrity.

Challenges of common prayer in ecumenical settings

11. Common prayer at ecumenical events, particularly when combining elements from different traditions, is a source of joy and encouragement to many. It also poses challenges. The challenges have to do in part with issues of unfamiliarity, of adaptation to different worship styles, and even with a different "spiritual ethos". But the challenges of such common prayer go beyond issues of unfamiliarity; they are ecclesiological and theological as well.

Ecclesiological

12. Just as the World Council of Churches does not constitute "the church" or an ecclesial body itself, the common prayer of Christians from the different member churches is not the prayer of a church or "the church". When we gather together in prayer, we testify to a common belief in and reliance upon God. Christ himself is among us, as he promised to be among the "two or three who are gathered" in his name (Matt. 18:19). Yet the prayer of Christians from divided ecclesial traditions, particularly prayer which seeks to combine traditions, sometimes delivers mixed signals as to ecclesial identity. Such confusion can result from the way in which a service is organized, presided over, and celebrated, as well as in its content – such as when the gathering is referred to as "church".

Theological

13. There is an inherent and deep connection between theology and prayer. The ancient dictum *lex orandi est lex credendi* says that we pray that which we believe. The doctrine of a church is expressed in its worship life. This connection creates potential problems when prayers prepared for ecumenical events can imply or explicitly convey theology that is in disagreement with that of some of the gathered members, or when these prayers presume a greater unity than that which is in fact realized between the churches.
14. Several factors, such as those mentioned above, make the endeavour of prayer in ecumenical settings challenging. But they do not detract from the necessity of such prayer, nor do they make it impossible. In the conviction that the problems posed

by common prayer are not insurmountable, these considerations seek to offer advice for the preparation and conduct of common prayer at WCC gatherings, in order to allow the gathered community to pray together with integrity and devotion.

Confessional and interconfessional common prayer

15. When we gather to pray together at WCC events, there are occasions when the prayer has been identified with one confession or church within a confessional tradition; hence the term “confessional common prayer”. More often, common prayer in ecumenical settings is prepared from a combination of traditions. Such common prayer has often been called “ecumenical worship”, but this term can be imprecise and misleading, and therefore should not be used. Instead, a more precise term would be “interconfessional common prayer”. Distinguishing between confessional and interconfessional common prayer, along the lines drawn below, may provide a greater clarity – both spiritually and ecclesologically – to the prayer life of WCC events.
 - Confessional common prayer is the prayer of a confession, a communion, or a denomination within a confession. It has a particular ecclesial identity. Examples would include the service of the word of a Lutheran church, such as the ELCA; or the healing rite of a united church, such as the United Church of Canada or the Uniting Church in Australia. It could be a Roman Catholic vespers service, or an Orthodox matins service.
 - Interconfessional common prayer is usually prepared for specific ecumenical events. It does not emerge out of a single ecclesial tradition, or one church. It may represent patterns that churches have in common (service of the word, daily office), but it is not the established liturgy of one confession. It has no ecclesial standing; it is normally designed by an ad hoc committee.
16. The distinction between confessional and interconfessional is not always clear. For example, some confessional worship traditions may be increasingly hard to distinguish from one another. This reality, which stems in part from a liturgical renewal which touches many traditions at once, is to be celebrated. Indeed, the experience of common prayer in local ecumenical contexts is an important feature of ecumenical progress, and these considerations should not be understood as discouraging this sharing. Another example is the distinct and living worship traditions of communities such as Iona and Taizé. These communities have spawned new and creative worship traditions which are not readily identifiable with any single church.
17. In spite of these realities, preserving the distinction between confessional and interconfessional common prayer at WCC gatherings, and making it explicit (i.e., identifying each event accordingly), can be useful in addressing many of the ambiguities and tensions associated with common prayer. Properly understood and applied, this distinction can free the traditions to express themselves either in their own integrity or in combination, all the while being true to the fact that Christians do not yet experience full unity together, and that the ecumenical bodies in which they participate are not themselves churches.
 - Confessional common prayer expresses the integrity of a given tradition. Its ecclesial identity is clear. It is offered as a gift to the gathered community by a

particular delegation of the participants, even as it invites all to enter into the spirit of prayer. It is conducted and presided over in accordance with its own understanding and practice.

- Interconfessional common prayer is an opportunity to celebrate together drawing from the resources of a variety of traditions. Such prayer is rooted in the past experience of the ecumenical community as well as in the gifts of the member churches to each other. But it does not claim to be the worship of any given member church, or of any kind of a hybrid church or super-church. It is not (or ought not be) celebrated or presided over in such a way that would associate it with any one church, or imply that it has an ecclesial status.
18. Both confessional and interconfessional common prayer offer fruitful models for prayer at WCC gatherings. The present text makes no attempt to prejudge where either confessional or interconfessional services are the most appropriate style of prayer, and events which incorporate multiple services can easily use both models in turn. However, services ought to be identified clearly as to which form they take, and, if confessional, with which tradition or church they are identified. What follows are considerations for preparation of common prayer at WCC gatherings.

Considerations for preparation of common prayer at WCC gatherings

Confessional common prayer

19. Confessional common prayer arises from the living worship experience of a particular tradition within the fellowship of the WCC. It will normally be planned by an individual or group from within that tradition, who will discern carefully how best to present the distinctive character of their worship within an ecumenical context. Confessional common prayer is a way of offering the spirituality of one group to others, and therefore should be representative of that group, although the prayer of one group may not be easily distinguished from some others (e.g. Methodist and Reformed). What is offered should not be primarily experimental in character. Although confessional common prayer does not aspire to be universally accepted, planners should be sensitive to elements in their tradition which might cause difficulty for those present, and be ready to make occasional adjustments to their usual practice. Confessional common prayer should be designed and carried out in such a way that it is comprehensible to all those who are present, so that they may move beyond being observers. Planners should also take full account of the considerations below on use of language and on responsible approaches to sensitive issues.

Interconfessional common prayer

20. All participants enjoy equal status in interconfessional common prayer. As participants in the fellowship of the WCC, we share a belief in God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and a common commitment to Christian unity. Whether clergy or lay, male or female, whatever our confessional background – as fellow pilgrims in the ecumenical journey, we participate as equals in interconfessional common prayer.
21. Interconfessional common prayer should avoid giving the impression of being the worship of a church. Different churches express the marks of ecclesial identity in

different ways, which makes the application of this principle challenging. For example, for some member churches, ecclesial signs might include vestments, hierarchical leadership, clerical blessings, and the use of standard liturgical texts. Among other member churches, there is a variety of perspectives.⁴

22. Interconfessional common prayer in an ecumenical context is an opportunity to express together those things which we have in common, and to rejoice that “what unites us is stronger than what divides us”. We can experience the variety of cultural forms with which Christian faith is expressed. However, interconfessional common prayer should take care not to prejudge, implicitly or explicitly, those theological points on which the churches are still divided.
23. Interconfessional common prayer at WCC gatherings would be well served by the use of a structure or *ordo*, based on the ancient Christian patterns. In developing the *ordo*, the planning committee might draw, for example, on the daily offices or on the service of the word. Common prayer should strive for a coherence which integrates the various elements into a unified purpose. Committees might consult the work of the worship committee for the 1998 assembly in Harare in regard to the application of an *ordo* in interconfessional common prayer. In discerning how to enact an *ordo* in a particular ecumenical context, committees should make use of elements which have been “ecumenically tested” by prior use and reception, as well as provide opportunity to receive fresh offerings from the worship life of the churches. The balance between new and familiar elements must be carefully discerned.
24. Interconfessional common prayer at WCC gatherings will normally be planned by a committee which is composed of representatives from multiple confessions and regions. This committee should consider carefully how to structure common prayer in order to avoid conveying the impression that the World Council of Churches is a church. They should also take full account of the considerations below on use of language and on responsible approaches to sensitive issues.

Considerations on responsible approaches to some sensitive issues

25. All planners of common prayer should attempt to be sensitive to those issues which might cause difficulty for some participants, and to strive to avoid offence wherever possible. The following considerations can help raise awareness to potential difficulties. These same considerations would apply to all common prayer at WCC gatherings, whether using confessional or interconfessional form. In its confessional form, common prayer normally follows the discipline of that confession, and all other attenders enter into the devotion according to their conscience. Even so, those planning confessional common prayer should discern carefully how best to present their tradition in an ecumenical gathering. While it is not always possible completely to avoid offence, planners should make every sincere effort to pursue that aim.
26. The following is not intended to be a comprehensive list of potentially sensitive issues, but rather reflects the particular matters which have arisen in the discus-

⁴ Further work might profitably be undertaken on the ecclesial nature of common prayer.

sions of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches.

27. *Use of symbols and symbolic action:* Symbols and symbolic actions chosen for prayer in ecumenical settings ought to be readily understood by a culturally and confessionally diverse ecumenical gathering. When using elements which are particular to one tradition, these should be presented in a way that honours the integrity of that tradition and is meaningful in ecumenical usage. Some symbols may not translate well between particular cultures and ecumenical settings, and some may be too contrived to be useful for common prayer. At ecumenical gatherings such as WCC events, we should expect to experience a variety of symbols, some of which are unfamiliar to some participants. Such symbols will require explanation.
28. The use of some rites and symbols can be challenging. Sometimes what is “inculturation” to some can be understood as “syncretism” to others, and vice versa. This is an impossible line to define with precision, and someone who is not grounded in the cultural context from which the symbol arises should be hesitant to make such a judgment. Yet those who are planning common prayer should be sensitive to cultural expressions which are likely to be misunderstood. The anticipated work in Faith and Order on the hermeneutics of symbols may prove useful in relation to these issues.
29. *Use of space:* Planners should be sensitive to the disposition of the space in which the common prayer is being held, and if it is in a church building, also to the protocols of liturgical space of that community.
30. *Leadership of women:* When common prayer is being offered in a confessional form, the practice of that confession in regard to leadership of women should normally apply. For interconfessional common prayer, a decentralized leadership and equality of participation allow for any participant – male or female, clergy or lay – to take any role. In an ecumenical context, we come together with a range of positions on the question of ordination of women, both between and sometimes within our churches, and we are not yet ready to reconcile these differences. Thus, planners should refrain from taking a confrontational stance on the question of ordination of women by implying that the current practice of a particular church is the only possible Christian position on the issue.
31. *Unfamiliarity:* Care should be taken that our common prayer invites participants into particular contexts and symbols rather than asking them to watch it done as a cultural display. For major events (and especially for first time attenders), this will probably entail an orientation to the experience, explaining what will happen and what it means. The question of how to make common prayer accessible for those who are not familiar with the form is equally relevant for both confessional and interconfessional common prayer. Each individual enters into the experience according to his or her own conscience, yet we should strive to allow participants to move beyond being simply spectators of unfamiliar rites. The elements of common prayer should not themselves become the focus of common prayer, but rather should serve to facilitate the genuine prayers of the community.
32. *Social and political themes:* Our common prayer rightly entails elements of moral formation and prophetic proclamation. We are called to pray for justice and peace, yet we can distinguish between thematic prayer and prayer used to divide us fur-

ther on social and political issues over which we have deep disagreement. Our common prayer is addressed to God, and is an invitation to listen to what God is trying to teach us.

Use of language

33. Language matters. What we say in worship (*lex orandi*) is important because it represents a shared commitment of faith (*lex credendi*). In view of the profound connection between theology and prayer, issues of gender in language need careful consideration. The term “inclusive language” is sometimes used broadly and imprecisely. In fact, there are several separate issues involved.
34. We can make a clear distinction between language referring to God and language referring to human beings, and affirm that language for humans should always be inclusive of women and men. Language referring to the entire human community should also be sensitive to matters of race, class, and other potential categories of exclusion.
35. Scripture and Tradition offer a variety of metaphors and images for God. These metaphors and images can be used in common prayer to describe God and God’s activity in history. However, we make a distinction between an image of God and the name of God.⁵ We call upon God using many metaphors, for example Lamb of God and Rock of Ages. However, at WCC gatherings, the revealed and biblical names for God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – should be used when naming God in common prayer. This trinitarian formulation is central to the WCC basis and is therefore commonly held in all member churches.

Eucharistic practice at WCC gatherings

36. Eucharistic worship at ecumenical events has been a difficult issue for the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches. We cannot all receive from the

⁵ The Faith and Order paper *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith* is helpful with these issues:

“50. We may not surrender the language of ‘Father’ for it is the way in which Jesus addressed, and spoke of, God and how Jesus taught his disciples to address God. It is in relation to the use of Father by Christ Jesus himself that the church came to believe in Jesus as the Son of God. The language of ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ links the Christian community through the ages and binds it in a communion of faith. Moreover, it is the language which expresses the personal relationships within the Trinity, and in our own relations with God.

51. Nevertheless, the church must make clear that this language neither attributes biological maleness to God nor implies that what we call ‘masculine’ qualities, assigned only to men, are the only characteristics belonging to God. Jesus uses only some of the characteristics of human fatherhood in speaking of God. He also uses other characteristics than those of human fatherhood. Indeed, God embraces, fulfills and transcends all that we know concerning human persons, both male and female, and human characteristics whether masculine or feminine. However, ‘Father’ is not simply one amongst a number of metaphors and images used to describe God. It is the distinctive term addressed by Jesus himself to God.

52. We may not surrender the names Father and Son. They are rooted in Jesus’ intimate relation to the God whom he proclaimed, though he also used other characteristics than those relating to human nature. Beyond his own language, however, Christian language about God also draws from the resources of the whole biblical tradition. There we find ‘feminine’ images too in talking about God. We must become more attentive to these. This will affect our understanding of the relationships between men and women created in God’s image and the ordering and working of the structures of the church and society called to bear witness to wholeness.”

same table and there exists a range of views and disciplines among member churches on the offering and receiving of the eucharist. Whatever one's views on the eucharist and how it may or may not be shared, the pain of not being able all to receive at the same table is felt by all.

37. From an Orthodox perspective, the eucharist can only be celebrated by the church and shared by those in sacramental communion. For some Protestants, the eucharist is not only a sign of visible unity to be worked for, but also one of our greatest spiritual resources for the journey towards unity. For the latter, it is therefore appropriate to share it now. Some churches have an "open table" for all who love the Lord. Others offer hospitality at ecumenical occasions or in other clearly defined circumstances. It is important to understand and be sensitive to the different views held by the member churches and also to welcome the convergence in understanding the eucharist that is registered in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and in some bilateral dialogues.
38. The common prayer life of the ecumenical movement must have truthfulness and integrity. We cannot pray in a way which pretends we are something different from what we are, or that we are at a further stage in the quest for Christian unity than we actually are. The Lima liturgy is sometimes thought to be an ecumenically approved form for intercommunion between Roman Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox, thus creating the possibility that we might celebrate the eucharist together. This is not the case. While some bilateral agreements for intercommunion have made use of the Lima liturgy, this text has no official standing within the fellowship of the WCC.
39. Nevertheless, following the pattern of distinguishing between confessional and interconfessional common prayer, we can accommodate confessional celebrations of the eucharist at assemblies and other major events. The hosting church (or group of churches which are able to host together) should be clearly identified. While it should be very clear that the WCC is not "hosting" a eucharist, these confessional eucharistic services, though not part of the official programme, may be publicly announced, with an invitation to all to attend. Participants should be advised of the practice of the host church regarding who may receive communion, and should respect that advice.

Conclusion

40. Worship lies at the centre of our Christian identity. Yet in worship we also discover our brokenness. In an ecumenical context, common prayer can be a source of both joy and sorrow. When the pain of our disunity is compounded by an insensitivity to a particular ethos, a further deepening of division may result. As brothers and sisters committed to the quest for Christian unity, we seek not to offend but to encourage each other. We are called to approach common prayer with a spirit of generosity and love for one another.
41. Exercising care for each other in the context of the WCC often means raising awareness about the ways in which we might unintentionally offend each other. In this spirit, these considerations seek to make planners of common prayer more aware of potential areas of concern. But these considerations are not comprehensive, and must be met by the sincere intention to develop opportunities for all par-

ticipants to pray with integrity. As this framework makes clear, common prayer at WCC gatherings should be the result of serious and sensitive planning, and is not a task to be undertaken casually.

42. This framework uses the terms “confessional common prayer” and “interconfessional common prayer” to identify two distinct forms of common prayer at WCC gatherings, and recommends no longer using the term “ecumenical worship”. With this distinction, participants may enter the experience of common prayer with a clear understanding of the ecclesial status (or lack thereof) of each service, and thus feel free to pray with integrity.
43. Yet we continue on our ecumenical quest. Our divisions will not be resolved solely with theological dialogue and common service to the world. We must also pray together if we are to stay together, for common prayer is at the very heart of our Christian life, both in our own communities and as we work together for Christian unity. Thus the distinctions we make in this document are provisional, making space for common prayer before we have been fully reconciled with each other. We look forward to the day when our divisions will be overcome, and we can all stand united before the throne of God, singing praises together with one voice.

Appendix B

Consensus Decision-Making

Foreword to the appendix

This appendix has its own history. In its original form it was a background paper to assist the discussion of the Special Commission on the issue of decision-making. In this form, it argued the case for change to existing decision-making processes and described the consensus model – or, to be more precise, one form of the consensus model – as an alternative process.

As the Special Commission has continued its work, many comments have been made on the paper, and the Special Commission has made decisions which have now become recommendations to the central committee of the WCC. The paper has therefore been revised and expanded considerably. However, it still bears the marks of its original purpose, namely as background material. In its revised form – as an appendix to the final report of the Special Commission – it serves as rationale, description and elaboration not only of the reasons for change but of the character of the proposed methods of decision-making. If the proposals are accepted by the central committee, the next step would be (1) to redraft the relevant portions of the rules of the WCC, and (2) to institute a transition process, whereby moderators and members of governing bodies can be helped to enter into the new procedures confidently and effectively.

I. Why change decision-making procedures?

1. When the World Council of Churches was founded in 1948 the great majority of member churches were located in Europe and North America. The procedures for decision-making were, not unnaturally, based on the procedures customarily used in church councils – and secular bodies such as parliaments – in those continents.
2. In the intervening years more and more churches have become members. For many of the churches, especially Orthodox, these procedures do not resonate with the procedures of their own churches, or even, in some cases, with the cultures from which they come. There are differences, for example, between North and South. So the question is raised as to whether the current procedures should continue in their present form.
3. A second issue is the adversarial nature of the procedures. Proposals are debated “for and against”. While amendments are possible – and frequent – speakers are encouraged to argue in favour or against, rather than to explore. On many issues there are of course three or four different viewpoints, not just two. While there is provision for questions concerning any proposals, the adversarial nature of the process is still apparent. In some cultures this adversarial approach, which can even be confrontational, is something to be avoided. Further, it is arguable that the church, being the body of Christ, is true to its inner nature when it is exploratory, seeking the mind of Christ and striving after a consensus which can declare: “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (Acts 15:28). Rather than striving to succeed in debate, our aim should be a mutual submission, seeking to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17).
4. A third issue is the method of voting. In the present system a majority of 50 per cent plus one is sufficient for a proposal to carry, unless some special provision is made for a different percentage. Many matters are not closely related to doctrine or ecclesiology, and on these the voting will not usually follow denominational or cultural or geographical lines. But on other matters there has been, especially in recent years, a difference of approach between Orthodox on one hand and Protestants, Anglicans and Old Catholics on the other. Other combinations are of course possible, but with the present system of representation and membership (which is addressed elsewhere in the Special Commission’s report) the Orthodox are a minority in the governing bodies of the WCC and in certain cases have been out-voted. The proliferation of small member churches also affects the nature of the Council. The question of reform of “voting power” may be part of the solution, but in this part of our report the issue is the voice of minorities and how that voice can best be reflected in the decisions that are made. Not only Orthodox participants in the WCC but other churches as well experience frustration at their inability to influence decisions sufficiently.
5. The fourth in this list of reasons is the rigidity of meeting procedures, not only in the WCC but in many church bodies. The system of motions, amendments, further amendments, points of order and so on, while it can certainly work well with some matters and on some occasions, often seems inappropriate to the complex questions of true Christian obedience, of proper ecumenical relations, and of a Christian approach to historical, social and global change. Procedures which allow more room for consultation, exploration, questioning and prayerful reflection would be

likely to promote the purposes of the WCC better than the formal and often rigid procedures that are currently used. Even when it is doing its “business”, the church should seek to express that faith which is “made effective through love” (Gal. 5:6). This is not to say that the WCC should attempt to do without rules: on the contrary, rules that are fair, readily understood and workable are essential. The question is the style, content and application of such rules.

6. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 St Paul speaks of parts of the body needing each other. A fully functioning body integrates the abilities and contributions of all the members. So it is in the church. A set of procedures which makes the best possible use of the abilities, the history, the experience, the commitment and the spiritual tradition of all the member churches should be the aim of the WCC.
7. If changes are made, they should be formulated after wide consultation. And once introduced, they may still be modified in the light of further experience. The Orthodox principle of *oikonomia* would suggest that the ecumenical movement can accommodate change and development as the issues and circumstances change. While the principle of *oikonomia* has been applied, historically, mainly to the sacraments, it can also refer to right judgment in other ecclesial matters – always, of course, in the light of faith. To respect the *oikonomia* is to be open to various expressions of faith and life while remaining true to the “faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). The experience of all traditions represented in the WCC is valuable and should be utilized, as and where practical, in the common life, the functioning and the programmes of the Council.

II. What sort of change? A possible direction

8. A method of decision-making based on consensus may well overcome most of the difficulties identified above. This document explores consensus decision-making with the hope that it can be adopted by the WCC for all levels of governance. The consensus method is a means of arriving at decisions without voting. It is more conciliar than parliamentary, and more inclusive than adversarial. Some Orthodox churches use a similar procedure, also some other churches such as the Religious Society of Friends and the Uniting Church in Australia. The experience of these churches is reflected in the following summary. However, no particular model can be simply transferred from a denominational context to the ecumenical context of the WCC: adaptations will be needed.
9. It should be noted, first, that consensus is not the same as unanimity (see §14 below). For example, a minority may agree to let a proposal go forward which has convinced the majority but not the minority, i.e. the minority accepts that the proposal represents the general “mind of the meeting”. This becomes possible when a minority feels that its concerns have been heard, understood and respected.
10. It is possible, too, to include, within the WCC rules, a provision that some matters will be decided by majority vote, either a simple majority or a greater number. In other words, consensus would be the normal procedure but not the invariable procedure. At the beginning of a session, the moderator would indicate clearly the procedures that operate in that session. The rules would determine those items of business which will be determined by vote.

11. How then does consensus procedure work? Typically a proposal, not always in complete or final form, is put forward, following which open discussion rather than “debate” begins. Usually the proposal has already been refined by a committee (see end of this section). The discussion may include questions. Members of the meeting may speak more than once. It is up to the moderator to ensure that all who wish to speak can do so and that no individual or small group dominates the discussion to the exclusion of others. It is important that all relevant views are brought forward at this exploratory stage.
12. As discussion continues, anyone may propose a change to the proposal without having to move an amendment. The moderator should test the response of the meeting to any such idea or modification by calling for an expression of opinion (sometimes called a “straw vote”). As the proposal continues to be discussed, the moderator needs to sense when the meeting is close to agreement. She or he may need to allow extra time for various denominational or cultural views to be expressed, but at an appropriate time the moderator should ask the meeting: “Are we agreed on this matter?” Or (similarly): “How many of you could accept this proposal in its current form?” This frequent testing of the mind of the meeting is central to the development of a consensus.
13. The assembly or committee may send a proposal to a drafting group or it may divide the whole meeting into sub-groups for a short or longer time, the purpose being to generate further refinements of the ideas and thereby move the meeting closer to consensus. “Table groups” or other groupings are also useful in clearing up misunderstandings. A weighty matter would typically be considered over several sessions, with time in between for a committee to incorporate comments and concerns from the discussion.
- 14.a. A consensus is reached, then, when any one of the following occurs:
 - 1) all are in agreement (unanimity);
 - 2) most are in agreement and those who disagree are content that the discussion has been both full and fair and that the proposal expresses the general “mind of the meeting;” the minority therefore gives consent;
 - 3) the meeting acknowledges that there are various opinions, and it is agreed that these be recorded in the body of the proposal (not just in the minutes);
 - 4) it is agreed that the matter be postponed;
 - 5) it is agreed that no decision can be reached.
- 14.b. Therefore, consensus procedures allow any family or other group of churches, through a spokesperson, to have their objections to any proposal addressed and satisfied prior to the adoption of the proposal. This implies that the family or group of churches can stop any proposal from passing until they are satisfied that their concerns have been fully addressed.
- 15.a. If consensus cannot be reached, certain questions should be asked, such as:
 - 1) “Must a decision on this matter be made today?” If not, the matter should be deferred to a later session (tomorrow, next week, or some other time). Further seasoning by a committee and informal discussion among those with strong views will often bring the meeting to a different level of agreement at a later session. If yes (and this is quite rare), the attention of the meeting must shift from approving or not approving the proposal at hand to finding other ways of

meeting the pressing or time-critical need. Interim solutions can sometimes be found while the meeting searches for consensus on the original question.

- 2) "Can this proposal be acted upon, on the understanding that some members (or member churches) cannot support it?" If no, the proposal should be deferred for further work, as above. If yes, the effect is that those persons, or member churches, or parts of the Council, being of a dissenting opinion, nevertheless allow a policy or programme to go forward without endorsing it. This is sometimes called "standing aside". In social and political issues it may sometimes be appropriate for some member churches or some committee or agency of the WCC to speak without committing the Council as a whole to one point of view (cf. the group in the Special Commission dealing with methodology in social and political matters).
 - 3) "Have we asked the right question?" When agreement on the issue, as posed, is not possible, this should not be regarded as failure. Sometimes a different question will yield a consensus. Sometimes it is helpful to ask, "What can we say together?" The meeting may not be of one mind on a particular statement on a difficult issue, but may find great value in articulating its various perspectives and the fruits of its discussion. There may be foundational principles on which we all agree. A clear articulation of these, followed by a description of the diverse conclusions that Christians of good conscience have reached, can be a powerful product of a discussion.
- 15.b. In rare situations, if the consensus procedures have been tried and have not succeeded, a mechanism will be needed to remove the blockage. The rules should specify how this emergency provision operates, ensuring that the emergency provision does not weaken the consensus procedures themselves. When drawing up this rule, consultation with the proposed standing committee (§21) should take place.
 16. In all cases in which consensus proves elusive, it is incumbent on those with concerns to work closely with those who initiated the item of business so as to find creative ways of moving forward. A major purpose of the WCC is for churches to learn from each other, to deepen their fellowship and to be better equipped for their mission. This means that there will be occasions when the churches accept a situation of disagreement while continuing to help and support each other.
 17. It can be gauged from the above description that effective chairing is essential to the success of consensus procedures. The moderator must be fair, sensitive and experienced. She or he must be able to sense the trend of a discussion and help the meeting to crystallize its thinking. Misunderstandings can be avoided if the moderator "checks" frequently the development of the mind of the meeting. This can be done, for example, by the use of coloured cards (say, orange for a positive opinion, blue for a negative). Such opinion can be sought on a part of a proposal, even a small part. The moderator can help the meeting by asking a "blue card holder" to explain what it is that prevents him or her from giving assent to the ideas being put forward. In this way objections can be aired, and possibly dealt with, as the discussion evolves. The aim is for the meeting as a whole to participate in developing the final decision, i.e. not only those who are particularly adept in debate, or those who use the official languages easily, or those who put the proposal forward in the first place. The rules should specify the role of moderators. While flexibility is important, it is also necessary to give guidelines for chairing meetings.

18. Between sittings the moderator may use a moderatorial group or reference group to provide advice. A business committee may perform the same function.
19. It is advisable, in an extended meeting, to specify the type of procedure for each particular session, e.g. a “voting” session; a “consensus” discussion; an “information” session. Such clear delineation may help members, especially the newer ones, or those working in their second, third or fourth language, to participate more easily. If the procedure is changed *during* a session, this should be done with care and with full explanation. If a complex or contentious issue is to be dealt with, prior notice is important. Prior to the actual discussion, i.e. at an earlier session, it can be helpful to give a “preview” of the issue so as to help members in their discussion at a later time.
20. The above principles, outlined only briefly here, need converting into rules. When these rules have been adopted and put into practice, experience over the months and years will indicate where further modifications need to be made. There is no single or pure form of the consensus method: the aim should be to develop a specific form for the specific needs of the WCC and to adjust the procedures in the light of experience. The Orthodox principle of *oikonomia* is relevant here. If the purposes of the WCC and of its programmes and policies are clear, the means by which these purposes, programmes and policies are achieved can be reviewed whenever it is desirable to do so.
21. In the work of the Special Commission, further suggestions which do not belong exactly to the consensus principles have been made. The first of these is the establishment of a standing committee on Orthodox participation. The detailed proposal is in the final report of the Special Commission. The principle of parity is important here.
22. The second is that if modifications to particular proposals have been prepared before a meeting sits, these should be notified – even circulated before the meeting begins – so as to allow adequate time for reflection. This would especially help those who are new or those who are working in a language which is not their first language. This provision implies that sudden changes to proposals (in the older terminology “late amendments”) should be permitted only when there is adequate time for explanation and discussion.
23. A third suggestion is that business committees should prepare for a plenary session in such a way as to avoid unnecessary polarizing of opinion. Such committees may also be called between sessions of a meeting to advise on procedure and to interpret the progress of the meeting. The concerns of minorities can sometimes be conveyed through members of a group such as this. When sensitive issues of ecclesiology or of a moral or political nature are proposed for discussion, the preparation by such a committee can help to ensure justice for all parties and also help avoid divisive debate. The rules of the WCC already describe the work of business committees, and these rules may need review. A business committee should where possible follow consensus procedures.
24. The keeping of minutes is an important task. The meeting needs to understand what it is agreeing to, so the text of all decisions should be read or displayed during the meeting. Major contributions to any discussion should also be recorded and this should include a summary of differing viewpoints. The right for a minority to

have its dissent recorded in the minutes and/or in any report of the meeting should be preserved, although in consensus procedures it is rare for such a right to be exercised. Sometimes it will be helpful for a small group to review the minutes before they are issued.

III. Possible difficulties with the consensus procedure

25. It has been suggested that the consensus procedure can be cumbersome and slow. For example, a published chart which outlines the Uniting Church in Australia's version of the procedure looks quite complicated. There are numerous steps to take on the way to declaring a consensus.
26. However, the experience of churches which use the consensus method indicates that this fear is probably exaggerated. Because people are working in a system which is less adversarial and less rigid than the older procedures, participants seem more prepared to listen to alternative views and to accept differences of opinion. It is not the case that the procedures, in normal circumstances, retard the making of decisions. Some discussions may be slow-moving, certainly, but this may be desirable if the topic requires detailed exploration or if there is a divergence of viewpoint. Generally there is an increased sense of cooperation simply because of the flexible and collaborative nature of the process. It should be admitted that, under consensus procedures, fewer decisions may sometimes flow from a particular meeting, the reason being that careful consultation takes time.
27. A second possible difficulty is that minorities – even one or two individuals – can stand in the way of forward-looking or innovative proposals. In other words, the desire for full participation and for consensus could open the door to unnecessary delay or even obstruction in the consideration of new ideas.
28. The response to this is twofold. First, consensus is not the same as unanimity. While everyone in a meeting can contribute to discussion, there is usually no voting. Objectors (we could call them “blue card holders”) can state their objections but the moderator will seek their concurrence with the wishes of a clear majority of the meeting. In this way no one's conscience is compromised, and decisions can still be made in an orderly way.
29. The other response is about the psychology of consensus procedure. While blue card holders have the right for their dissent to be recorded in the minutes and/or in any report of the meeting, experience shows that they rarely insist on this. The reason is that the discussion allows for many contributions and the moderator is responsible for seeing that the discussion has been both fair and as detailed as it needs to be. Because minorities are not “squashed”, their response is normally to allow the meeting to move ahead to a decision.
30. Third, it has been suggested that the “prophetic voice” of the WCC could be muted by the checks and balances of the consensus model. Again there are two points to be made in response. First, the encouragement of open discussion actually allows a diversity of views to be expressed. Second, the care taken in reaching decisions promotes the “owning” by all members of a meeting and therefore the solidarity of the ecumenical fellowship. Where decisions are not unanimous, and even where consensus proves to be unreachable, there is a process of reflection and enrichment

which strengthens the voice of the Council. A document which honestly explores the diversity of opinion within the ecumenical community can be a profoundly “prophetic” expression. To face differences squarely, and to accept each other in Christian love, is important in any ecumenical body.

31. A fourth possible difficulty is the amount of power given to the moderator. She or he must guide the discussion, sum up from time to time, and perceive when a consensus is developing. This responsibility is great, and (as in any procedures) mistakes can be made. But the flexible nature of the procedures is an effective balance to this heavy responsibility of the chair, i.e. any member of the meeting, without having to move “dissent from the ruling of the chair” (or some similar motion), can make a suggestion at any time concerning the guiding of the meeting. A good moderator (as in any procedures) will be open to suggestions. As soon as any member is dissatisfied with the handling of the business, a remedy is at hand. Some examples of such remedies have been given above. A reference group or business committee could also advise the moderator regarding the efficient handling of the business (see §23).
32. It has been suggested that a process of equipping moderators for their new role may be advisable. This is because the change of procedure to a consensus model is more than a technical matter or a change of rules. Members of a meeting, as well as moderators, need to adopt a different attitude towards decision-making. A “transition plan” should be developed, and perhaps a handbook issued.

IV. Conclusion

33. The above paper gives a description of how consensus procedures work, and the benefits that can be gained. To convert the principles into rules is a further step. It is important to reach agreement (even a consensus!) about the aims and principles first, and then to translate the principles into actual procedures suitable to the needs of the WCC.
34. The principles described above are an attempt to implement the accepted ecumenical aim of enabling all representatives and member churches to be heard within a committed fellowship which accepts differences of theology, culture and ecclesial tradition. Minorities may express their mind on any issue, and should, in consensus procedures, be allowed more than one attempt, if needed, to explain the basis of their views. At the same time the WCC can still (as it must) make the decisions about policy and programmes which are essential to its life.
35. All churches believe in the centrality of holy scripture in their life and doctrine. A significant image of the church in the New Testament is the image of the body of Christ, diverse and yet one. In the life of the WCC, with its fundamental aim of promoting the unity of all Christians, there must similarly be respect for diversity and difference. The rules and procedures which govern the working of the Council should enshrine this respect. While ecclesiologies in the WCC differ considerably from one tradition to another, the life of the Council should as far as possible be a mirror of the essential nature of the church. The consensus procedures offer an opportunity for the Council to put into practice a model of unity, a respect for diversity and the making of decisions in a way that is careful, flexible, frank and unifying.

Appendix C

Proposal for Changes to the Rules of the World Council of Churches

I. Membership in the fellowship of the World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches is comprised of churches which have constituted the Council or which have been admitted into membership and which continue to belong to the fellowship of the World Council of Churches. The term “church” as used in this article could also include an association, convention or federation of autonomous churches. A group of churches within a country or region, or within the same confession, may determine to participate in the World Council of Churches as one church. Churches within the same country or region or within the same confession may apply to belong to the fellowship of the Council, in order to respond to their common calling, to strengthen their joint participation and/or to satisfy the requirement of minimum size (proposed rule I, 3.b.3). Such groupings of churches are encouraged by the World Council of Churches; each individual church within the grouping must satisfy the criteria for membership in the **fellowship of the** World Council of Churches, except the requirements of size.

The general secretary shall maintain the official lists of member churches that have been accepted to belong to the fellowship of the World Council of Churches, noting any special arrangement accepted by the assembly or central committee. Separate lists shall be maintained of *voting and non-voting member churches* belonging to the fellowship of the WCC. *The general secretary shall also maintain a list of churches in association with the Council.*

1. Application

A church that wishes to join the World Council of Churches shall apply in writing to the general secretary.

2. Processing

The general secretary shall submit all such applications to the central committee (see art. II of the constitution) together with such information as he or she considers necessary to enable the central committee to make a decision on the application.

3. Criteria

Churches applying to join the World Council of Churches (“applicant churches”) are required first to express agreement with the basis on which the Council is founded and confirm their commitment to the purposes and functions of the Council as defined in articles I and III of the constitution. The basis states: “The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

Applicant churches also should understand themselves as conforming to the following criteria, and be ready to give an account of their faith and witness in relationship to these terms.

a) Theological

1. In its life and witness, the church professes faith in the triune God as expressed in the scriptures and in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.
2. The church maintains a ministry of proclaiming the gospel and celebrating the sacraments.
3. The church baptizes in the name of the “Father, Son and Holy Spirit“ and acknowledges the need to move towards the recognition of the baptism of other churches.
4. The church recognizes the presence and activity of Christ and the Holy Spirit outside its own boundaries and prays for the wisdom of all in the awareness that other member churches also believe in the Holy Trinity and the saving grace of God.
5. The church recognizes in the other member churches of the WCC elements of the true church, even if it does not regard them as churches in the true and full sense of the word.

b) Organizational

1. The church must produce evidence of sustained autonomous life and organization.
2. The church must be able to take the decision to apply for formal membership in the WCC and continue to belong to the fellowship of the WCC without obtaining the permission of any other body or person.
3. An applicant church must ordinarily have at least 50,000 members. The central committee may decide for exceptional reasons to accept a church that does not fulfill the criterion of size.
4. An applicant church with fewer than 50,000 members but more than 10,000 members which has not been granted a size exception, but otherwise is eligible for membership, can be accepted subject to the following provisions: (a) they shall not have the right to vote in the assembly, and (b) they may participate with other such churches in selecting five representatives to the central committee in accordance with section III.4.b.3 of the rules. In all other respects, such churches shall be referred to as member churches in fellowship with the WCC.
5. Churches must recognize the essential interdependence of the member churches belonging to the fellowship of the WCC, particularly those of the same confession, and should make every effort to practise constructive ecumenical relations with other churches within their country or region. This will normally mean that the church is a member of the national council of churches or similar body and of the regional/subregional ecumenical organization.

Other changes to the rules and to the constitution may be required if proposals of the Special Commission and the membership study group are adopted by the central committee.

Appendix D

Membership of the Special Commission

* Members of the Steering Committee May 2002

Dr Anna Marie Aagaard * Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark	H.E. Metr. Chrysostomos of Ephesus * Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople Co-moderator
Dr Agnes Abuom Anglican Church of Kenya	H.E. Metr. Chrysostomos of Peristerion * Church of Greece
Bishop Nareg Amezian * Armenian Apostolic Church (Cilicia)	Archbishop Chrystophor Orthodox Church in Czech Lands and Slovakia
Prof. Dr Walter Altmann Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil	Rev. Yadessa Daba Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
H.E. Metr. Ambrosius of Helsinki Orthodox Church of Finland	Mr Jean Fischer Swiss Protestant Church Federation
H.E. Metr. Ambrosius of Kalavryta Church of Greece	Prof. George Galitis Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem
Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantine Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem	Rev. Gao Ying China Christian Council
Mr Ramez Atallah Synod of the Nile of the Evangelical Church	Rev. Fr Dr Kondothra M. George Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
Rev. Canon Naim Ateek Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East	Bishop Hans Gerny Old Catholic Church of Switzerland
H.E. Metr. Athanasios Papas Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople	Ms Anne Glynn-Mackoul Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East
Archbishop Aghan Baliozian Armenian Apostolic Church (Etchmiadzin)	Eden Grace Religious Society of Friends
H.E. Metr. Anba Bishoy of Damiette * Coptic Orthodox Church	Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson * Reformed Church in America
Bishop Gustáv Bölskei Reformed Church in Hungary	H.E. Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch
Ms Manoushag Boyadjian Armenian Apostolic Church (Cilicia)	Fr Mikhail Gundyav Russian Orthodox Church
Prof. John Briggs Baptist Union of Great Britain	Mr Gabriel Habib Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East
Dr Thelma Chambers-Young Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.	Bishop Dr Hilarion of Kerch * Russian Orthodox Church

Bishop Dr Thomas L. Hoyt Jr
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

Bishop Voitto Huotari
Evangelical Lutheran Church
of Finland

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Ica, Jr
Romanian Orthodox Church

H.E. Ignatije of Branicevo
Serbian Orthodox Church

H.E. Irenej of Novi Sad
and Bachka
Serbian Orthodox Church

H.E. Archbishop Jeremiasz
of Wroclaw
Autocephalous Orthodox Church
in Poland

H.G. Bishop Basilios Karayiannis of Trinitus
Church of Cyprus

Very Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky *
Orthodox Church in America

Bishop Dr Christoph Klein
Evangelical Church of the A.C.
in Romania

Bishop Dr Rolf Koppe *
Evangelical Church in Germany
Co-moderator

Ms Jana Krajciriková
Czechoslovak Hussite Church

Dr John Lappas
Orthodox Autocephalous Church
of Albania

Dr Janice Love
United Methodist Church

Archbishop Makarios
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate
of Alexandria and All Africa

Most Rev. W.P. Khotso Makhulu
Anglican Church

H.G. Abune Mekarios
Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

Dr Soritua Nababan
Huria Kristen Batak Protestan

H.E. Archbishop Dr Nifon
of Targoviste *
Romanian Orthodox Church

Dr Mercy A. Oduyoye *
Methodist Church Ghana

Rev. Ofelia Ortega
Presbyterian Reformed Church
in Cuba

Rev. Dr John-Wha Park
Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea

Archbishop Michael Peers *
Anglican Church of Canada

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Dr Mary Tanner *
Church of England

Bishop Dr Zacharias M. Theophilus*
Mar Thoma Syrian Church
of Malabar

Rev. Robina Winbush
Presbyterian Church (USA)

Rev. Dr D'Arcy Wood
Uniting Church in Australia

Note:

In the course of the three-year mandate of the Special Commission some changes in its membership have occurred. The following persons have been members and participated in sub-committee and plenary meetings:

- Very Rev. Dr Georges Tssetis
Ecumenical Patriarchate
of Constantinople
- Rev. Dr Eugene Turner
Presbyterian Church (USA)

When Christian Solidarity Is Broken

A Pastoral and Educational Response to Sexual Harassment

Christian community and solidarity

The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. (Isa. 32:17)

Christians affirm the basic dignity of all humankind, created in the image of God. In ecumenical gatherings, an environment of welcome and hospitality encourages the full and equal participation of all. The WCC strives to bring together a community based on the values of solidarity and mutual concern that challenges all forms of violence and harassment. The WCC is committed to raise awareness about sexual harassment in order to prevent it from occurring and to provide a safe space free from intimidation for all participants. When human sin breaks the trust in this community, Christians are called to be present for one another, especially for those who struggle for their safety, dignity and rights. God calls us into right relations with one another – to show care and respect for each human being.

Cultural diversity

Our cultural diversity adds to the strength of our community and is something to be cherished and celebrated. As we encounter one another's differences we should be careful not to assume that our way of being and behaving is comfortable for everyone else. Sometimes our differences of age, gender, culture, spirituality, religion, ability, language, caste, ethnicity and class make it a challenge to understand and communicate effectively with one another. How can each person be encouraged to take seriously his or her own responsibility to act with care in the multi-dimensional, cross-cultural interactions of the ecumenical world? What may be considered normal friendliness and sociability to one person can be misinterpreted in a culturally mixed group and even between individuals of the same culture or background. This is why we must take extra care and sensitivity with one another in an ecumenical environment. Finding appropriate expressions of the friendship and warmth felt for others in a positive, non-threatening way is a challenge faced by the ecumenical community.

Violence and power

Harassment is an intolerable manifestation of unequal power relations between people. Sexual harassment often also includes discrimination on the basis of gender, age, race or class, causing stress or humiliation to the person being harassed. This may happen in situations where dominance and abuse of power result in a lack of respect for and mistreatment of people as sexual objects. This ultimately demeans and destroys the dignity of a person. Sexual harassment is most often experienced by women from men. So harassment is not an isolated incident or individual problem. Rather it is a problem stemming from wider patterns and dynamics of power in our societies.

Harassment can also occur between people of the same gender and sometimes involves women harassing men.

The Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace carries forward the commitment of churches around the world to overcome the institutional and personal violence that women experience. Sexual harassment has been identified as the most common expression of this violence. Incidents of sexual harassment and assault at church and ecumenical meetings have engaged the churches and the ecumenical movement in seeking responsible action and policy. Many churches, organizations and governments have introduced institutional or legislative remedies to protect those who experience the dehumanizing effects of violence and sexual harassment.

The purpose of these guidelines is to set a positive foundation upon which to build Christian community marked by solidarity, despite the brokenness in our midst. These guidelines are intended to encourage men to reflect on their attitudes towards women and those who are privileged on the basis of race, class, gender, social status, position of leadership and age to reflect on the spirit of justice and community that the ecumenical movement upholds.

They are also intended to encourage individuals to assert their dignity and contribute to the renewal of community. How can each of us, in our worship, work and meetings, help to create a reconciled, respectful community, conducive to the full humanity of all?

What is sexual harassment and assault?

On a continuum of severity, harassment ranges from whistles in the street and obscene phone calls to sexual assault. Sexual assault includes rape, sexual intercourse without consent, and sexual contact without consent.

Several kinds of behaviour with a sexual connotation, if unsolicited and unwanted and especially if repetitive, can be forms of sexual harassment. Examples are: suggestive looks or comments, teasing or telling of jokes with sexual content, letters, calls or materials of a sexual nature, imposed touching or closeness, pressure for dates or activities with a sexual overtone, or offers to use influence in return for sexual favours.

The feelings of the person experiencing any unwelcome behaviour are what is important. This depends on each individual and the context. In the end, harassment is not what someone necessarily intends to do but how his or her actions impact another's person's feelings and well-being.

Some steps to prevent and deal with sexual harassment

- Be clear with yourself and others about your personal boundaries – what sort of closeness with others feels comfortable or appropriate for you?
- Refuse any inappropriate gesture or contact.
- Respect other people's personal boundaries. If you are not sure ask first (i.e. would it be okay if I gave you a hug?).
- If you experience harassment, make it clear that the behaviour is unwelcome. You can say "no" with a look, words or gestures.
- Harassment is never the fault of the person being harassed. By its nature, harassment is unwanted attention or behaviour. It is not consensual.
- If harassment persists, and you are in a public place, make your protests louder so that the public notices the harasser.

- Trust your intuition and feelings if someone’s behaviour makes you feel uncomfortable. People who experience harassment sometimes try to rationalize or deny what is really going on.
- Talk about it with people you trust, so that the name of the harasser and the kind of objectionable things done are known. This is important so that others are not subjected to the same treatment. Silence may only provoke more harassment.
- In serious cases where legal or other follow-up action is necessary, a verbal and written record of events will be helpful.
- If you see or hear of someone being harassed, don’t keep silent. You could approach the person being harassed to see how you can help. Tell the person doing the harassing that their actions or words are inappropriate and make everyone feel uncomfortable. If the case is severe call for help.
- If you have experienced harassment, the solidarity care team can provide a safe space to talk about the situation and your feelings. They can also support you with whatever follow-up measures might be appropriate when you return home (i.e. local centre against sexual harassment and assault or support group through a local church).

Concluding statement

The churches and the World Council of Churches are called to develop a truly inclusive community free of violence and injustice. Sexual harassment and all forms of violence will not be tolerated or condoned. Offenders will be held responsible for their behaviour and are subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

The location and members of the solidarity care team will be announced at the assembly.

Called To Be the One Church

An Invitation to the Churches to Renew Their Commitment to the Search for Unity and to Deepen Their Dialogue

WCC assemblies have adopted texts offering a vision, or identifying the qualities, of “the unity we seek”. This assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, is invited to consider and adopt the present invitation to the churches.¹

The purpose of this invitation to the churches is twofold: (1) to reflect what the churches, at this point on their ecumenical journey, can say together about some important aspects of the church; and (2) to invite the churches into a renewed conversation - mutually supportive, yet open and searching – about the quality and degree of their fellowship and communion, and about the issues which still divide them.²

I

1. We, the delegates to the ninth assembly of the World Council of Churches, give thanks to the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who has brought our churches into living contact and dialogue. By God’s grace we have been enabled to remain together, even when this has not been easy. Considerable efforts have been made to overcome divisions. We are “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (basis of the WCC). Yet our continuing divisions are real wounds to the body of Christ. Thus we are committed to one another on the way towards *visible unity*. This commitment is a gift from our gracious Lord.

2. Unity is both a divine gift and calling. Our churches have affirmed that the unity for which we pray, hope and work is “a koinonia given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God’s grace to all people and serving the whole of creation” (Canberra unity statement, 2.1). Such koinonia is to be expressed in each place, and through a conciliar relationship of churches in different places. We have much

¹ The present invitation to the churches was produced at the request of the central committee of the WCC (2002), in a process organized by the WCC’s Faith and Order commission. A first draft was written at a meeting in Nicosia, Cyprus, in March 2004; this was revised (on the basis of extensive comments received from WCC governing bodies, the Faith and Order commission, and the steering committee of the Special Commission) at a second meeting in Nicosia in May 2005. Faith and Order extends on behalf of the WCC its appreciation to the Church of Cyprus, which graciously hosted these preparatory meetings. A final revision took place at the Faith and Order standing commission meeting in Aghios Nikolaos, Crete, in June 2005.

² To assist this process, Faith and Order has produced and sent to the churches a new study document, *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper no. 198, 2005.

work ahead of us as together we seek to understand the meaning of unity and catholicity, and the significance of baptism.

II

3. We confess one, holy, catholic and apostolic church as expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381). The church's oneness is an image of the unity of the triune God in the communion of the divine Persons. Holy scripture describes the Christian community as the body of Christ whose inter-related diversity is essential to its wholeness: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:4-7). Thus, as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit, the church is called to manifest its oneness in diversity.

4. The church as communion of believers is created by the word of God, for it is through hearing the *proclamation of the gospel* that faith, by the action of his Holy Spirit, is awakened (Rom. 10:17). Since the good news proclaimed to awaken faith is the good news handed down by the apostles, the church created by it is apostolic.

5. We affirm that the apostolic faith of the church is one, as the body of Christ is one. Yet there may legitimately be different formulations of the faith of the church. The life of the church as new life in Christ is one. Yet it is built up through *different* charismata and ministries. The hope of the church is one. Yet it is expressed in different human expectations. We acknowledge that there are different ecclesiological starting points, and a range of views on the relation of the church to the churches. Some differences express God's grace and goodness; they must be discerned in God's grace through the Holy Spirit. Other differences divide the church; these must be overcome through the Spirit's gifts of faith, hope and love so that separation and exclusion do not have the last word. God's "plan for the fullness of time [is] to gather up all things in him" (Eph. 1:10), reconciling human divisions. God calls his people in love to discernment and renewal on the way to the fullness of *koinonia*.

6. The catholicity of the church expresses the fullness, integrity and totality of its life in Christ through the Holy Spirit in all times and places. This mystery is expressed in each community of baptized believers in which the apostolic faith is confessed and lived, the gospel is proclaimed, and the sacraments are celebrated. Each church is the church catholic and not simply a part of it. Each church is the church catholic, but not the whole of it. Each church fulfills its catholicity when it is in communion with the other churches.

7. The relationship among churches is dynamically interactive. Each church is called to mutual giving and receiving gifts and to *mutual accountability*. Each church must become aware of all that is provisional in its life and have the courage to acknowledge this to other churches. We affirm that the catholicity of the church is expressed in sharing holy communion. Yet even today, when eucharistic sharing is not always possible, divided churches express aspects of catholicity when they pray for one another, share resources, assist one another in times of need, make decisions together, work together for justice, reconciliation and peace, hold one another accountable to the discipleship inherent in baptism, and maintain dialogue in the face of differences, refusing to say "I have no need of you" (1 Cor. 12:21). Apart from one another we are impoverished.

III

8. All who have been baptized into Christ are united with Christ in his body: “Therefore we have been buried with him by *baptism* into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). In baptism, the Spirit confers Christ’s holiness upon Christ’s members. Baptism into union with Christ calls churches to be open and honest with one another, even when doing so is difficult: “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:15). Baptism bestows upon the churches both the freedom and the responsibility to journey towards common proclamation of the word, confession of the one faith, celebration of one eucharist, and full sharing in one ministry.

9. Our common belonging to Christ through baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit enables and calls churches to walk together, even when they are in disagreement. We affirm that there is one baptism, just as there is one body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of us all (cf. Eph. 4:4-6). In God’s grace, baptism manifests the reality that *we belong to one another*, even though some churches are not yet able to recognize others as church in the full sense of the word. We recall the words of the Toronto statement, in which the member churches of the WCC affirm that “the membership of the church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own church body. They seek, therefore, to enter into living contact with those outside their own ranks who confess the Lordship of Christ” (IV.3).

IV

10. The church as the creature of God’s Word and Spirit is a mystery, sign and instrument of what God intends for the salvation of the world. The grace of God is expressed in the victory over sin given by Christ, and in the healing and wholeness of the human being. The kingdom of God can be perceived in a *reconciled and reconciling community* that overcomes divisions, including the discriminations of race, gender, age, culture, colour and class that are expressed in sinful social structures. The church participates in the reconciling ministry of Christ, who emptied himself, when it lives out its mission, affirming and renewing the image of God in all humanity and working alongside all those whose human dignity has been denied by economic, political and social marginalization.

11. The churches find themselves living alongside people of other living faiths and ideologies. As an instrument of God, who is sovereign over the whole creation, the church is called to engage in dialogue and collaboration with them so that its *mission* brings about the good of all creatures and the well-being of the earth. All churches are called to struggle against sin in all its manifestations, within and around them, and to work with others to combat injustice, alleviate human suffering, overcome violence, and ensure fullness of life for all people.

V

12. Throughout its history the World Council of Churches has been a privileged instrument by which churches have been able to listen to one another and speak to one another, engaging issues that challenge the churches and imperil humankind. Churches in the ecumenical movement have also explored divisive questions through multilateral

and bilateral dialogues. And yet churches have not always acknowledged their *mutual responsibility* to one another, and have not always recognized the need to give account to one another of their faith, life and witness, as well as to articulate the factors that keep them apart.

13. Therefore, the ninth assembly calls upon the World Council of Churches to continue to facilitate *deep conversations* among various churches. We also invite all of our churches to engage in the hard task of giving a candid account of the relation of their own faith and order to the faith and order of other churches. Each church is asked to articulate the judgments that shape, and even qualify, its relationship to the others. The honest sharing of commonalities, divergences and differences will help all churches to pursue the things that make for peace and build up the common life. It is time now to take *concrete steps*.

14. Towards this goal churches are called to address recurrent matters in fresh, more pointed ways. Among the *questions to be addressed* continually by the churches are these:

- a) To what extent does each discern expression of the apostolic faith in the life, worship and witness of the others?
- b) Where does each perceive fidelity to Christ in the faith and life of the others?
- c) Does each acknowledge the one baptism in the others?
- d) For what reasons is it essential, permissible, or not possible to share the Lord's supper with others beyond each church?
- e) In what ways is each able to recognize the ordered ministries of the others?
- f) How closely can each church embrace the spirituality of the others?
- g) How will each stand with the others to contend with problems such as social and political hegemonies, persecution, oppression, poverty and violence?
- h) To what extent will each participate in the apostolic mission of the others?
- i) How fully can each participate in common prayer and in the worship of others?

VI

15. Our churches *journey together* in conversation and common action, confident that the risen Christ has disclosed himself as he did in the breaking of bread at Emmaus, and that he will unveil the deeper meaning of fellowship and communion. Noting the progress made in the ecumenical movement, we encourage our churches to continue on this arduous yet joyous path, trusting in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whose grace transforms our struggles for unity into the fruits of communion.

Let us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches!

Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth – AGAPE

A Call to Love and Action

This document is the result of work on economic globalization from Harare to Porto Alegre. It was prepared by the commission for Justice, Peace and Creation under the direction of the central committee. Its final version was received by the executive committee in September 2005 which also approved the use of the document in the economic justice plenary.

Introduction

We, representatives of churches gathered at the ninth assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), emphasize that a world without poverty is not only possible but is in keeping with the grace of God for the world. This conviction builds on the rich tradition of ecumenical social thought and action, which is centred on God's option for the poor as an imperative of our faith. It captures the results of a seven-year global study process of the churches' responses to economic globalization with contributions from all regions of the world and involvement of a number of Christian world communions, particularly through the 2003 assembly of the Lutheran World Federation and the 2004 general council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (see appendix).

This process has examined the project of economic globalization that is led by the ideology of unfettered market forces and serves the dominant political and economic interests. The international financial institutions and the World Trade Organization among other such institutions promote economic globalization. The participants in the AGAPE process shared their concerns about the growing inequality, the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few and the destruction of the earth – all aggravating the scandal of poverty in the South and increasingly in the North. In recent years the escalating role of political and military power have strongly surfaced. People all over the world experience the impact of imperial forms of power on their communities.

Meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the home of the World Social Forum (WSF), we are encouraged by the constructive and positive message of the movements gathering in the WSF that alternatives are possible. We affirm that we can and must make a difference by becoming transformative communities caring for people and the earth.

We recognize that the divisions of the world are present among us. Since we are called to be one in Christ, we are called to be transformed by God's grace for the sake of all life on earth, overcoming the world's division. Challenged to monitor and transform economic globalization, we call ourselves to action as churches working alongside people of faith communities and movements.

AGAPE Call for love and action

God, Creator, endowing your creation with integrity and human beings with dignity;
God, Redeemer and Liberator, freeing us from slavery and death;

God, Holy Spirit, transforming and energizing us.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, let us witness to your love, life and transforming grace.

All: God, in your grace, transform the world.

We have become apathetic to suffering and injustice. Among us are many who suffer the consequences of economic globalization; women, abused and yet caring for life; children who are denied their rights; youth living in economic insecurity and unemployment; those labouring under exploitative conditions; the many caught in unjust trade relationships and debt slavery. There are people with disabilities and those living at the margins of society, people of colour often the first and most painfully hit by poverty, those pushed away and alienated from the land, the earth – battered, depleted and exploited. Denied of their sustenance, these people are often the most vulnerable to diseases such as HIV/AIDS. We confess that many of us have failed to respond in solidarity.

All: God, in your grace, transform the world.

We are tempted to give in to comfort and its empty promises when we ought to choose costly discipleship and change. We are driven to accept oppression and suffering as a given, when we should keep our hope and advocate for justice and liberation.

We confess that many of us have failed to take a stand in our faith and act against economic injustice and its destructive consequences on people and the earth. We are tempted to give in to materialism and the reign of money. We play to the rules of greed and conform to political and military power when we should align ourselves with the poor and excluded people.

All: God, in your grace, transform the world.

God, we ask your forgiveness.

All: God, in your grace, transform the world.

God, let our economic structures be inspired by the rules of your household of life,
governed by love, justice and grace.

Let us not be afraid of change, or to seek alternatives.

Let us work for justice by resisting destructive economic structures,

Proclaiming with hope the jubilee year of the Lord, the cancellation of debt, the release
of the captives and rest for the land,

let us work for an agape economy of solidarity.

All: God, in your grace, transform the world.

God, you send us out,

to care for the earth and to share all that is necessary for life in community;

to resist and to denounce all that denies life,

to love our neighbours and to do what is just,

so that where there was death, there will be life.

We call each other

to respond to your love for all people and for the earth

in our own actions and in the witness and service of our churches;

to work for the eradication of poverty and the unconditional cancellation of debts;

to care for land, water, air – the entire web of life;

to build just and sustainable relationships with the earth.

in the world of labour, trade and finance
to study and engage power in its different forms and manifestations,
remembering that all power is accountable to you, God.
God in your grace, help us to be agents of your transformation
and to hear your call to act with courage.

*All: Creator God, may the power of your grace transform us,
Christ, give us courage and hope to share our life with each other and the world,
Holy Spirit, empower us to work for justice for people and the earth.
God, in your grace, transform the world. Amen.*

In the spirit of this uniting prayer, we challenge ourselves to have the courage to take action. The AGAPE call invites us to act together for transformation of economic injustice and to continue analyzing and reflecting on challenges of economic globalization and the link between wealth and poverty.

1. Poverty eradication

We recommit ourselves to work for the eradication of poverty and inequality through developing economies of solidarity and sustainable communities. We will hold our governments and the international institutions accountable to implement their commitments on poverty eradication and sustainability.

2. Trade

We recommit ourselves to work for justice in international trade relations through critical analyses on free trade and trade negotiations, and to collaborate closely with social movements in making those agreements just, equitable and democratic.

3. Finance

We recommit ourselves to campaign for responsible lending; unconditional debt cancellation and for the control and regulation of global financial markets. Investments should be redirected towards businesses that respect social and ecological justice, or in banks and institutions that do not engage in speculation, nor encourage tax evasion.

4. Sustainable use of land and natural resources

We recommit ourselves to engage in actions for sustainable and just patterns of extraction and use of natural resources, in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, who seek to protect their land, water and their communities.

We recommit ourselves to challenge the excessive consumption of affluent societies so that they will shift towards self-restraint and simplicity in life-styles.

5. Public goods and services

We recommit ourselves to join the global struggle against the imposed privatization of public goods and services, and to actively defend the rights of countries and peoples to define and manage their own commons.

We recommit ourselves to support movements, groups and international initiatives defending vital elements of life such as bio-diversity, water and the atmosphere.

6. Life-giving agriculture

We recommit ourselves to work for land reforms in solidarity with landless agricultural labourers and small farm holders; to advocate in various ways for self-determination over food concerns; to oppose the production of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) as well as trade liberalization as the sole directive. We commit ourselves to promote ecological farming practices and to stand in solidarity with peasant communities.

7. Decent jobs, emancipated work and people's livelihoods

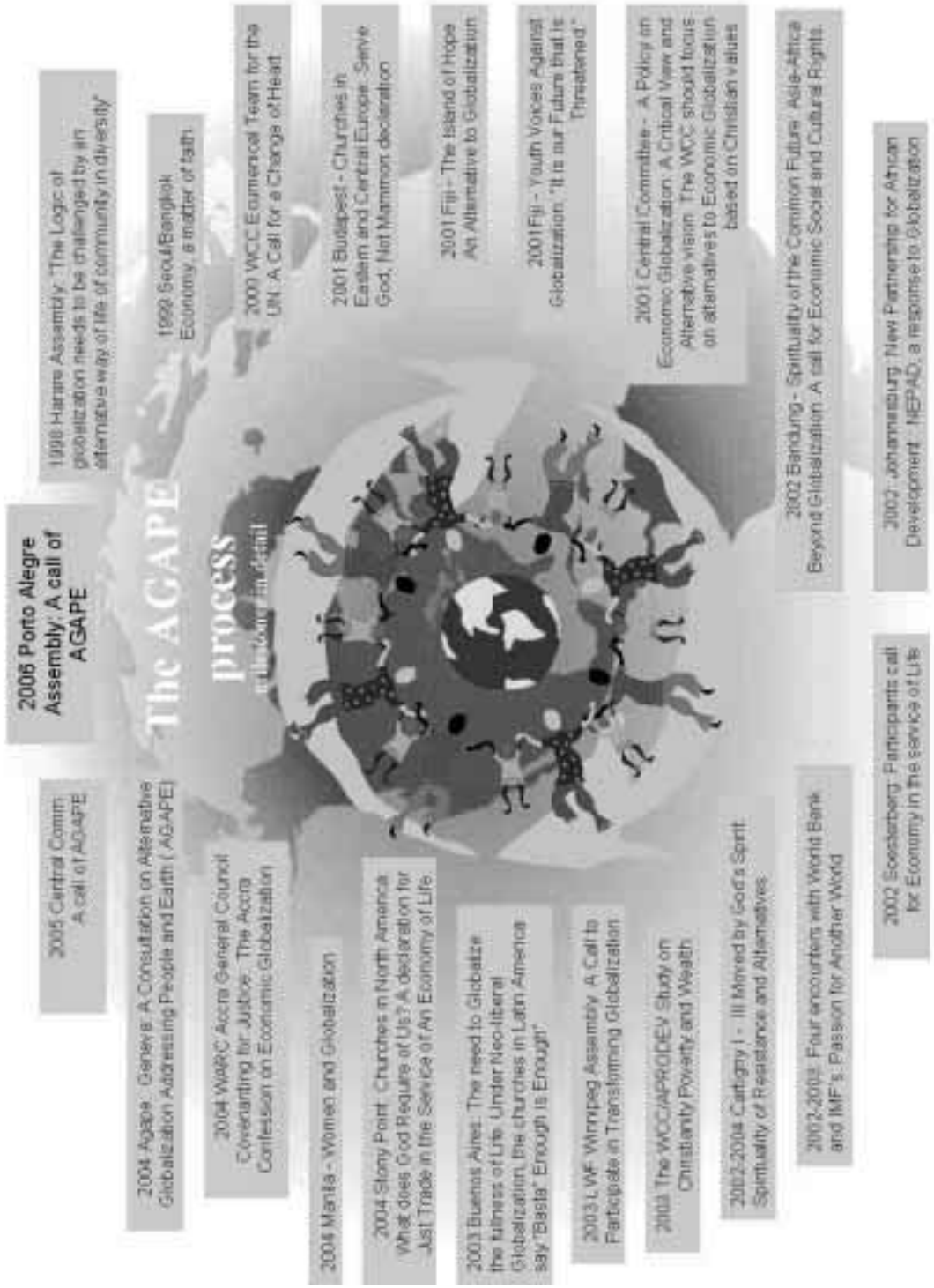
We commit ourselves to build alliances with social movements and trade unions that advocate decent jobs and just wages. We commit ourselves to advocate for those workers and bonded labourers who work under exploitative conditions and are deprived of their rights to form trade unions.

8. Churches and the power of empire

We recommit ourselves to reflect on the question of power and empire from a biblical and theological perspective, and take a firm faith stance against hegemonic powers because all power is accountable to God.

We acknowledge that the process of transformation requires that we as churches make ourselves accountable to the victims of the project of economic globalization. Their voices and experiences must determine how we analyze and judge this project, in keeping with the gospel. This implies that we as churches from different regions make ourselves accountable to each other, and that those of us closer to the centres of power live out our first loyalty to our sisters and brothers who experience the negative impacts of global economic injustice everyday of their lives.

This AGAPE call is a prayer for strength to transform unjust economic structures. It will guide our reflections and actions in the next phase of the ecumenical journey. Our engagement will build on the findings, proposals and recommendations to the churches from the AGAPE process as outlined in the AGAPE background document.



Call to Recommitment

Mid-Term of the Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-2010: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace

This document attempts to capture the learnings, the dynamics and the results of the first part of the Decade. Moreover, it is a reminder that the Decade is by no means over. In September 2005 it was submitted to the executive committee which affirmed its content with the understanding that it will be given to the delegates in the context of the plenary on the Decade to Overcome Violence as a call to recommitment for the churches.

Nothing is so characteristically Christian as being a peace-maker.

(St Basil the Great)

Five years have passed since the World Council of Churches launched the Decade to Overcome Violence. The assembly at Porto Alegre marks the mid-term and offers an opportunity to celebrate what has been achieved, share experiences, make an interim assessment, and refocus the course to be followed during the second five-year period.

The goals of overcoming violence and building a culture of peace imply spiritual, theological and practical challenges for our churches which touch us in the centre of what it means to be church. The debate about the whole spectrum of the spirit and logic of violence has started, but the course we have entered requires persistence and endurance.

It is encouraging that the impulse of the Decade has been taken up in an ever-growing number of churches and regions. Bonds of ecumenical solidarity in the search for reconciliation and peace have been built and strengthened: new initiatives around the world have started, new alliances in peace-building have emerged, new theological reflection is being undertaken and a growing number of Christians are rediscovering a spirituality of non-violence.

Inter-religious dialogue about the hidden connections between religion and violence has become one of the foci of the Decade. This is true in particular for dialogue between Christians and Muslims. The trust that has been built through patient dialogue and practical cooperation for the common good may prevent religion from being used as a weapon.

During the first half of the Decade we were confronted with cruel terrorist attacks, which have provoked wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The spirit, logic and practice of violence manifested themselves again in an unexpected dimension. The massive efforts for strengthening security in the context of the so-called “fight against terrorism” have led to a noticeable arms proliferation and a growth in the general militarization of the world. While we are beginning to discern in more depth the ethical demands of the responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves, we are convinced that international terrorism is not being overcome with military means. At the same time we acknowledge that more people are becoming victims of violence in civil and local conflicts which are being fought with light and small weapons. This remains a strong challenge to the churches together.

The concern for security has become the dominant motif for individual as well as social and political decisions. "Human security" is the fruit of just relationships in community. We acknowledge that security is increasingly being threatened through the effects of economic globalization. Therefore, the search for an "Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth" has to be understood as a decisive contribution to the continuation of the Decade.

The respect for human dignity, the concern for the well-being of the neighbour and the active promotion of the common good are imperatives of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Men and women are created equally in the image of God and justified by grace. Therefore, human rights are a basic element in preventing violence at all levels, individual, interpersonal and collective, and especially violence against women and children. This must include the effort to build and develop the rule of law everywhere. We shall further pursue the understanding of "restorative" or "transformative" justice with the aim of establishing viable and just relationships in communities.

To relinquish any theological and ethical justification of violence calls for discernment that draws its strength from a spirituality and discipleship of active non-violence. We have committed ourselves to a profound common ethical-theological reflection and advocacy for non-violent conflict prevention, civilian conflict management and peace consolidation. The praxis of non-violence must be rooted in a spirituality that acknowledges one's own vulnerability; that encourages and empowers the powerless to be able to face up to those who misuse their power; that trusts the active presence of the power of God in human conflicts and therefore is able to transcend the seeming lack of alternatives in situations of violence.

During the second half of the Decade we will increase our efforts to work towards firmer alliances and more effective links between churches, networks and movements. We will support and coordinate common projects, which are aimed at building up structures, instruments and communities of non-violent, civilian conflict management. The "ecumenical space" offered by the Decade needs to be shaped through mutual encounters, including governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Our goal remains to move the search for reconciliation and peace "from the periphery to the centre of the life and witness of the church". Peace-building in non-violent ways is a Christian core virtue and an imperative of the gospel message itself. We are determined to become what we are called to be: "ambassadors of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5). This is the mission of healing, including responsible accompaniment for those who are voiceless as well as speaking truth to those in power. We will reject every attempt to use violence and fear as tools of politics.

The ecumenical fellowship of churches strongly manifests the conviction that the communion of all saints which is a gift from God and rooted in God's triune life can overcome the culture of enmity and exclusion which continuously leads into the vicious circles of violence. It has become in itself an image for the possibilities of reconciled living together while recognizing continuing diversities. If this community becomes an advocate of reconciliation for all people in all places who suffer from violence, and presents active non-violent ways of resolving conflict, we will indeed become a credible witness for the hope that is within us, building a culture of peace and reconciliation for all of creation.

There is no need to tell how the loving-kindness of Christ comes bathed in peace. Therefore we must learn to cease from strife, whether against ourselves or against one another, or against the angels, and instead to labour together even with the angels for the accomplish-

ment of God's will, in accordance with the providential purpose of Jesus who works all things in all and makes peace, unutterable and foreordained from eternity, and reconciles us to himself and, in himself, to the Father. Concerning these supernatural gifts enough has been said with confirmation drawn from the holy testimony of the scriptures. (Dionysius the Areopagite)

We pray: God, in your grace, transform us, transform the world.

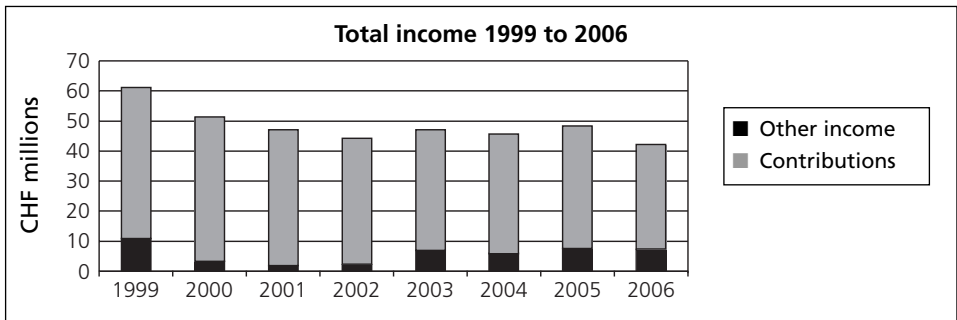
WCC Financial Profile

Recent History and Current Trends

This document is an account of responsible stewardship since the last assembly. It presents a summarized financial report for the period from 1999 to 2006 and introduces the work of the assembly finance committee which will have to formulate concrete proposals for the assembly to take policy decisions for the coming years.

I. Total income and total costs

1. Total income trends

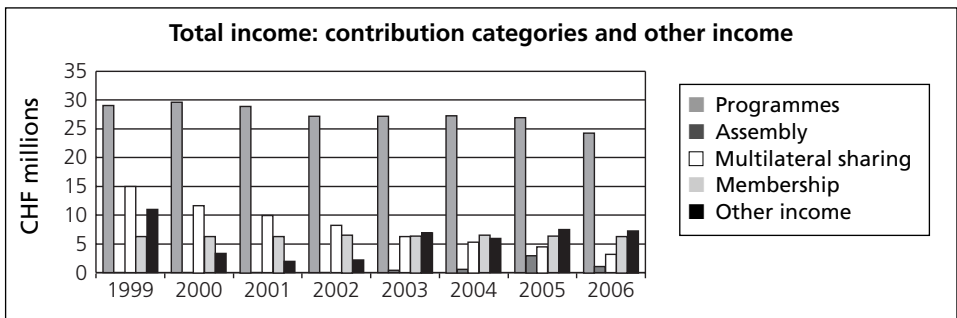


Total income has tended to decrease at an average of 4% per year, from CHF 61.2 million (USD 49.3 million) in 1999 to a budgeted CHF 42.2 million (USD 34 million) for 2006.

The total decrease in annual income is over 30% (total decrease CHF 19 million (USD 15.3 million)).

2. Trends within the income categories

Review of the same total income information by category shows that CHF 12 million (USD 9.6 million) or **63% of the overall decrease** concerns the category of **multilateral sharing contributions**.



On average over years, 75% of the year's income was **restricted** for use within specific programmes, and 25% **unrestricted**, WCC governing bodies freely determining its use.

(a) Restricted income

i) Programme contributions are earmarked for use for specific programmes. Contributions have remained relatively stable from 1999 to 2005, ranging from CHF 29 million (USD 23.3 million) to CHF 27 million (USD 21.7 million).

In 2006, however, programme contributions will decrease by almost 10% to CHF 24.2 million (USD 19.5 million). 2006 is a bridging year, and a time for strategic planning. The planned programme activities during this time are principally those considered necessary for carrying forward the constitutional mandate, and those which provide essential services to the wider ecumenical constituency.

ii) Assembly contributions total CHF 5.2 million (USD 4.2 million), raised from 2004 to 2006.

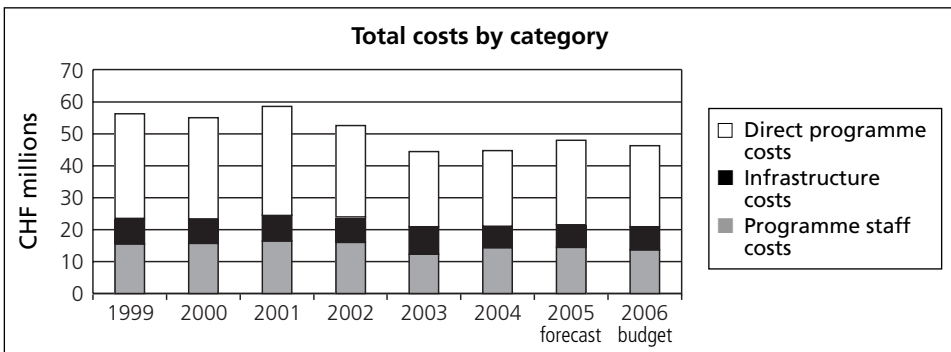
iii) Multilateral sharing contributions fall by almost CHF 12 million (USD 9.6 million). Multilateral sharing contributions have been managed by WCC Diakonia and Solidarity, supporting activities worldwide in accordance with funding partners' guidelines. The WCC's role in this work is diminishing.

(b) Unrestricted income

iv) Membership income has remained close to CHF 6 million (USD 4.8 million) over the period. The target of CHF 10 million (USD 8 million) set in Harare has not been met. Membership contributions are used at the discretion of the WCC, in contrast with programme contributions which are earmarked for specific purposes.

v) Other income includes investment income, rental income and publications income. The volatility between 1999 and 2002 was the result of record investment gains in 1999, followed by investment losses.

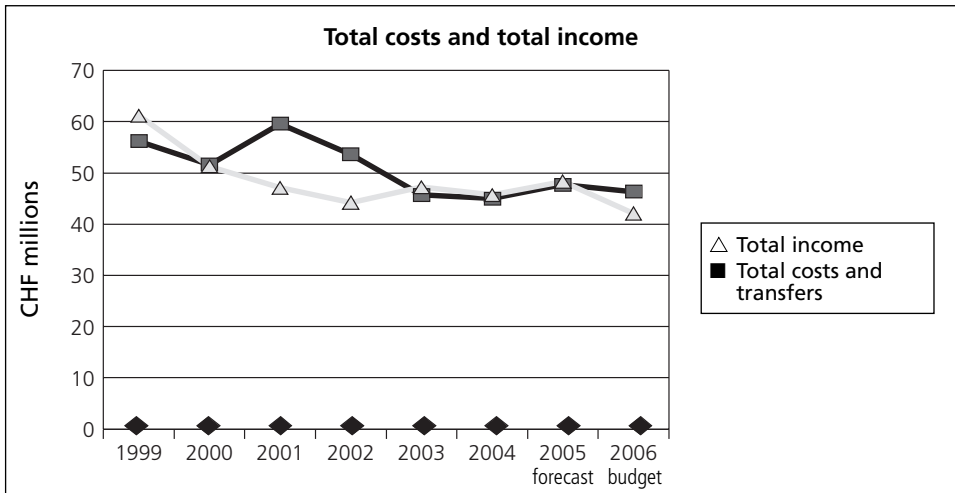
3. Total costs



From 1999 to 2006 budget, **total costs** range from CHF 58.6 million (USD 47.2 million) in 2001 to CHF 45.5 million (USD 36.7 million) in 2003. In 2001, CHF 1 million was expensed in restructuring costs.

Throughout the eight years, **programme staff costs** ranged from CHF 16.4 million in 2001 (USD 13.2 million) to CHF 13.3 million in 2003 (USD 10.7 million).

Infrastructure costs average CHF 7.5 million (USD 6 million) per year, ranging from CHF 8.1 million in 2001 (USD 6.5 million) to CHF 6.7 million in 2004 (USD 5.4 million). Infrastructure costs include an average of CHF 4.7 million (USD 3.8 million) in **staff costs in the management teams**, and an average of CHF 2.9 million **operating costs**, over 50% of which concerns running and maintenance costs for the Ecumenical Centre.



4. Breaking even: total income and total costs

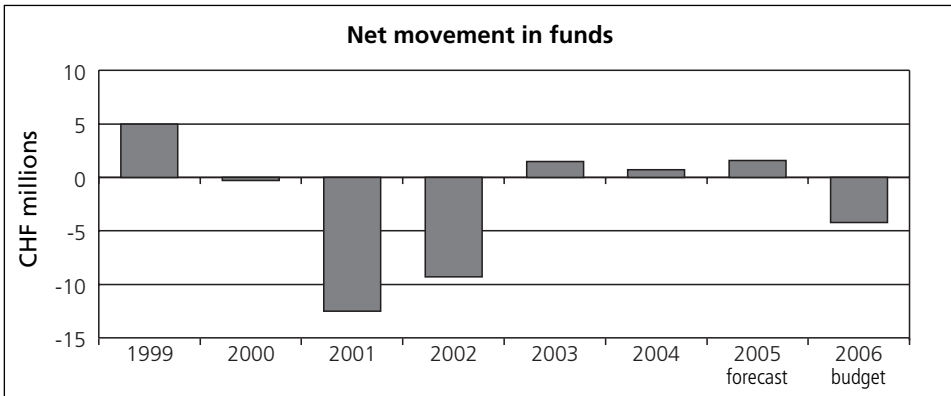
Following difficult years in 2001 and 2002, overall results **at or close to break-even** were achieved in 2003 and 2004, and are forecast for 2005.

The net results do not tell the whole story. Where costs exceeded income, was a particular restricted fund saved and held for the purpose being used, in accordance with a careful plan? Were general reserves and other unrestricted funds being used according to plan – or used abruptly to cover unplanned losses?

From donations received most gratefully, an assembly fund was accumulated over several years. In 2006, costs will exceed income during the 12 months. The WCC's overall results will report an excess of costs compared with income, as the budgeted 2006 results indicate in the graph. However, while the assembly fund will be reduced, the budgeted results for 2006 also include a planned increase in general reserves which cannot be seen when the results on all funds are netted, as above.

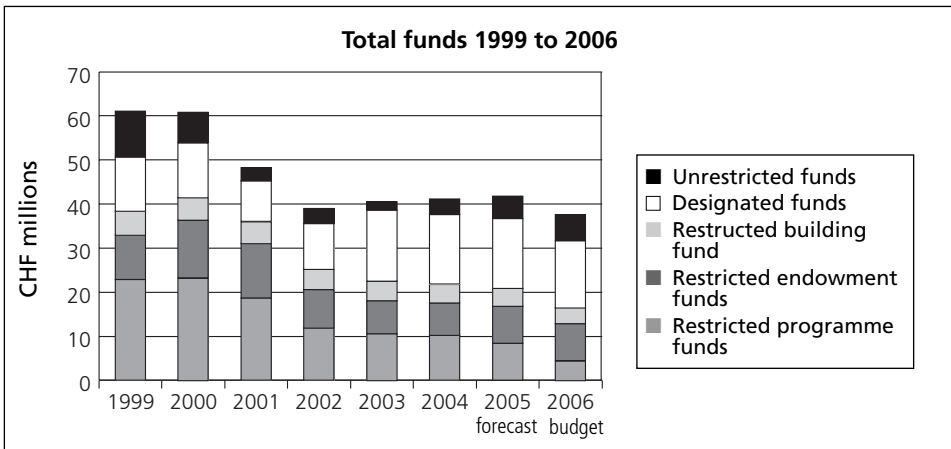
To understand the results of the WCC over recent years, it is necessary to have an overview of the evolution of the WCC's total funds. Before review of the categories of funds, point 5 first shows the value of overall fund movements per year more clearly.

5. Net results and impact on funds



During 2001 and 2002, funds were reduced by **CHF 21.8 million** (USD 17.6 million). Both restricted and unrestricted funds were affected, as explained in point 6 below.

6. WCC funds decrease by CHF 23 million from CHF 61 million to CHF 38 million



Total **funds reduced** (or will reduce) **by 38%** over the seven-year period. While the restricted programme funds diminish steadily, the overall reduction in funds occurred in 2001 and 2002, then stabilizing over years in which net results are at or close to break-even.

Restricted funds

Of the CHF 23 million (USD 18.5 million) reduction, CHF 22 million (USD 17.7 million) is a reduction in restricted funds, substantially in programme funds. With certain funding partners, WCC undertook through formal agreement to use programme contributions in principle in the calendar year in which they were received. A prior trend of retaining programme funds from year to year was changed.

The change in pattern calls for more careful financial planning. An excess of costs compared with income can no longer readily be met by reduction of restricted programme fund balances.

Unrestricted and designated funds

Designated funds are unrestricted funds at source, then designated for a specific use by WCC governing bodies. Of total unrestricted and designated funds, approximately **70% has been designated for buildings**. This means that the funds are actually invested in the buildings and equipment of the WCC; they are not readily available in cash. **Only unrestricted funds are supported by investments and cash.**

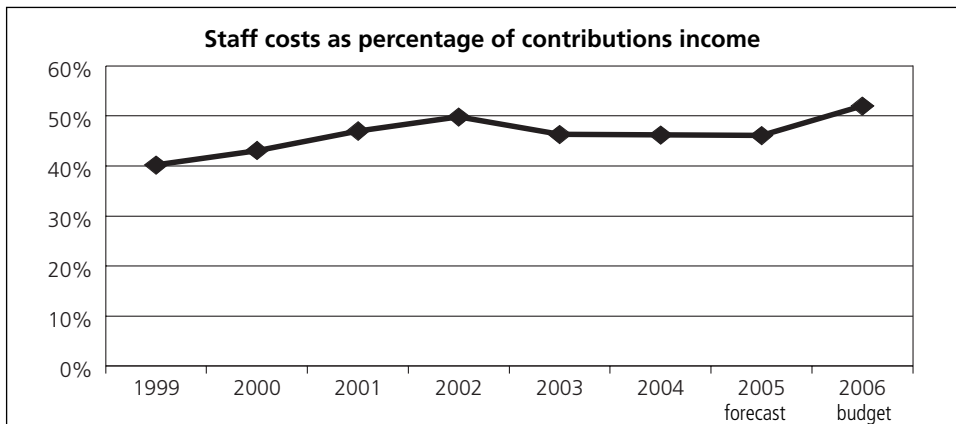
Unrestricted funds were reduced from CHF 10 million (USD 8 million) in 1999 to CHF 3 million (USD 2.4 million) in 2001 following planned and approved budget deficits of over CHF 2 million. The approved budget deficits were then exceeded by investment losses of over CHF 3 million, and unbudgeted expenditure of CHF 1 million in restructuring costs. In 2003, unrestricted funds were reduced to CHF 2 million on the recognition of further investment by WCC in its buildings, particularly at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland.

Forecast 2005 and budget 2006 include a planned increase in the unrestricted funds, principally the general reserves, to almost CHF 6 million (USD 4.8 million).

II. Monitoring recent history and current trends by ratio

1. Staff costs / contributions income

Staff costs in relation to contributions income rose steadily to 2002, and reduced after the restructuring efforts at that time. Steady in relation to contributions income over three years, the ratio is set to rise to over 50% in 2006.

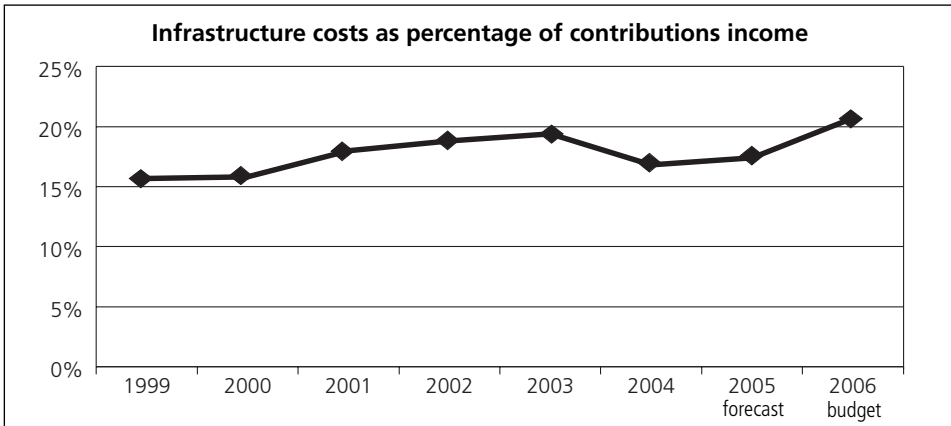


Staff costs = programme staff and support service staff; no consultants included

Contributions income = programme, multilateral sharing, membership and assembly contributions

2. Infrastructure costs / contributions income

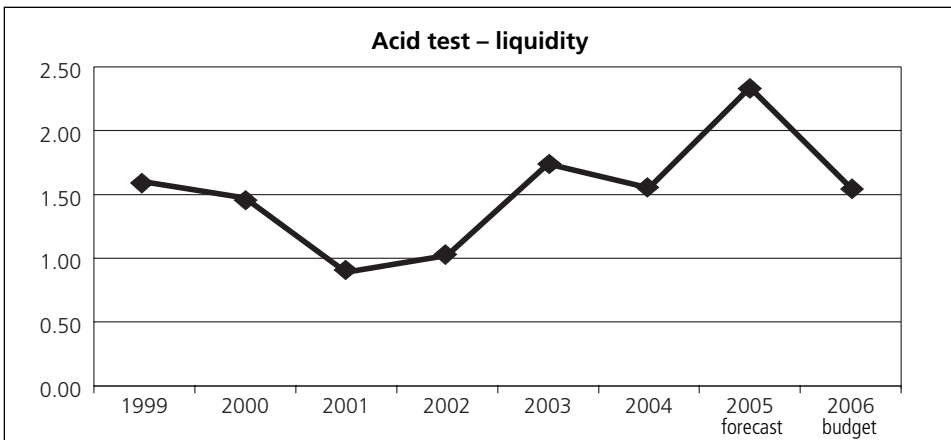
Infrastructure costs remained fairly steady from 1999 to 2003, while contributions income decreased. Infrastructure costs were reduced in 2004. Forecast 2005 and budget 2006 plan include increases in infrastructure costs causing the percentage of infrastructure costs in relation to contributions income to rise to over 20%.



Infrastructure costs = support service staff costs and support service operating costs
 Contributions income = programme, multilateral sharing, membership and assembly contributions

3. Liquidity

Current assets divided by current liabilities should provide a ratio result of at least the value one, the organization thus theoretically being able to pay all short term payables from cash and other liquid assets.



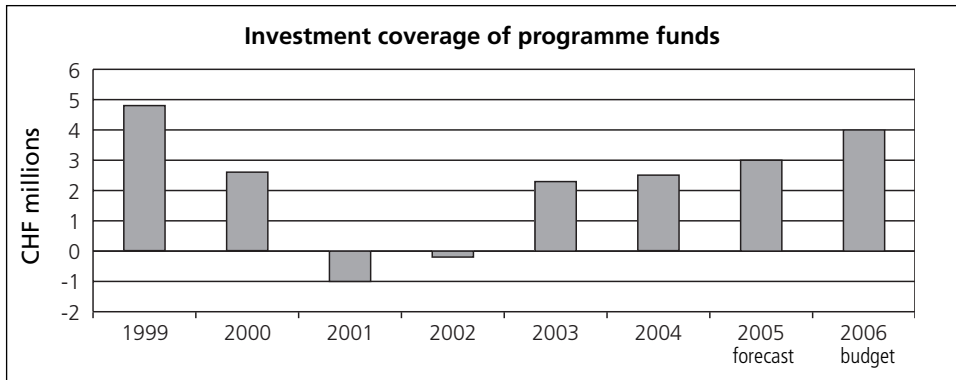
Data for 2005 prepared from draft balance sheets reviewed in cash flow planning work for executive Committee 9/2005

In 2001, investment losses, the overall deficit, and higher level of liabilities at the year end exposed a result which raised concern.

4. General fund investments coverage of programme funds

General fund investments were accumulated while the WCC built and maintained significant programme funds. The assets in the general fund investment accounts were then available to fund the use of the programme fund in any year in which expenditure exceeded income.

Where investments exceed programme fund balances, this indicates that investments are truly those of the WCC, and not required to meet programme obligations.



The lack of coverage of programme funds by investments in 2001 and 2002 was a red flag. The excess coverage achieved from 2003 and forecast for 2005 and 2006 indicates investments at the disposition of the WCC, available to cover the general reserves in the unrestricted funds.

III. Principal financial policy and other significant developments 1999-2005

1. 2002: Introduction of activity based costing (ABC)

Operating contributions were no longer sought from funding partners to cover both programme and staff costs, together with infrastructure operating costs. Based on estimates of time spent on activities, both programme staff costs and infrastructure costs were charged to activities. The total costs of programmes and activities could be reviewed. In planning, it could be ensured that total programme contributions would be sufficient to cover the total costs of the work planned.

2. 2003: Château de Bossey renovation completed at CHF 8.7 million cost (USD 7.6 million)

Renovation of the Château was completed. The central committee ratified mortgage loans of CHF 6.4 million to finance the renovation. Endowment funds of CHF 1.7 million were also used to finance the work. Resultant increased guest revenue from Bossey has covered the loan interest costs.

3. 2003: Funds and reserves policy

The central committee set a minimum target for general reserves of three months' salary costs, and defined general reserves as being those funds available to the WCC

after meeting all obligations, but without recourse to land, buildings or other fixed assets.

4. 2003: Investment policy

The central committee formally revised the investment policy, including the general ethical guidelines. The investment objectives for general and endowment investments were defined.

5. 2004: Plan for Ecumenical Centre renovation and maintenance

The executive committee required that a capital expenditure plan be developed for the renovation and maintenance of the Ecumenical Centre building.

6. 2005: Towards an income strategy 2006-2008

In discussion of the document *Towards an Income Strategy 2006-2008*, and in the light of the pre-assembly evaluation, the finance committee raised the following issues for serious consideration:

The Council has a unique role; it is in the sharpening of that role and in our communication of that role that our future funding opportunities lie.

The management culture and programme methodology need new approaches and increased visibility of programme work and results.

Continued efforts in improving the quality of WCC programmatic work and communicating this to funding partners are essential; improved planning, monitoring and evaluation are likely to be of considerable aid in building confidence, trust and the continued support of the major funding partners.

IV. Appreciation

The Council is grateful for the constancy, generosity and partnership in financial support given by the churches and specialized ministries, many of which have suffered years of financial hardship directly during the last seven years. For this true solidarity, the Council acknowledges its profound gratitude to the churches and the partners.

Note: Financial information in CHF is drawn from the WCC financial reports 1999-2004, forecast 2005 and budget 2006. Throughout, an exchange rate USD/CHF of 1.24 has been applied to provide indicative values in USD.

Ecumenical Conversations

Introduction

Ecumenical conversations provide a space for delegates to share their experiences in addressing key concerns for the future of the churches and their common witness and action. How do the churches respond, individually and ecumenically, to the diverse and rapidly changing realities of the world? What are the main concerns today that require action by the churches together because they challenge the very being of the church, tear people apart and set them against each other, but also because they urge the churches to be faithful to the call to become and to be one in Christ so that the world may believe (John 17:21)? What are the issues that are of vital importance for children and youth because they are crucial for their own future and for the lives of generations to come?

All who participate are invited to share their concerns and insights, being fully responsible both to their churches and people at home and to the common calling in Christ. In dialogue, the ecumenical conversations will become an exciting opportunity for addressing together the prevailing dynamics and trends of today's world and discerning the signs of the times in the light of faith.

Called to be co-workers with God

At the heart of Christian faith lies the affirmation of God's presence in this world: God assuming in Christ's incarnation the whole of the created order, visible and invisible, heaven and earth, for the healing, reconciliation, transformation and transfiguration of the entire cosmos. Christ became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14). In him and through him all were created, and in him all are to be gathered in unity, reconciled, transformed, transfigured and saved (Col. 1:15-23): a new humanity and a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1).

The world is God's creation, and it belongs to God. Humanity has the mark of God's image and is called to grow into God's likeness (Gen. 1:26). The whole of creation is filled with and sustained by God's Spirit (Ps. 104:29-30). The whole world is filled with God's grace. In Christ, through the incarnation, we have all received "from God's full store grace upon grace" (John 1:16).

By God's grace the whole of creation is sustained, transformed, transfigured and brought into unity. By grace, God has the initiative in all things. However, the new humanity in Christ, renewed, regenerated and transformed by God's grace, is commissioned to take part in God's healing and transformation of the world (1 Cor. 3:9). By God's grace, the world is being called to transformation, healing and reconciliation, but the ministry of proclamation remains our responsibility (Col. 1:23). The *martyria*, *leitourgia*, *koinonia* and *diakonia* of the church become, therefore, synergic acts by which Christians, with full accord and commitment, implement in mission, prayer and action the work of God's grace in their lives for the transformation of the world.

For such theological reasons, the theme of the assembly is in the form of a prayer. We are persuaded to give up any arrogant expectations based on the premise that with our force and skills alone the world can be changed and transformed. The grace of God

is given freely, salvation is offered to the whole of humanity and creation, but it is not imposed upon us, for the mystery of human freedom is also a gift from God. The good news of God's grace thus exposes the depth of human sin that still distorts the image of God in the other human being and exploits God's creation without mercy or limits. There is no doubt that also many Christians fail to respond to God's grace as the liberated children of God (Rom. 8:21; Cor. 7:23).

Therefore, the theme of the assembly is an invitation to reflection, *metanoia* and transformation. We are first called to recognize and affirm God's initiative and work in all, and to pray in support of it. At the same time, we are urged to a personal response to God's initiative and to act according to our new humanity renewed by grace, as fellow citizens with Christ and co-workers with God (Eph. 2:19).

The assembly theme is an invitation to look at the world as a place loved by God and permeated by God's grace. Seen through the eyes of faith, this world can and must be transformed: from unjust to more just relationships, from environmental destruction to care for creation, from a world marked by the deadly consequences of sin to a world open to receive life out of the hands of God. It is a miracle that happens again and again when people in the midst of severe threats to their lives celebrate in worship the presence and power of God's grace. With them we pray: "God, in your grace, transform the world".

"Another world is possible" was the motto of those who gathered in Porto Alegre for the World Social Forum in resistance to neo-liberal economic globalization, and engaged in the struggle for alternatives. Christians have even more reasons to resist fatalism and to say: God created the world and will never stop caring for it (Gen. 1-2). Christ shared the suffering of a world groaning for liberation (Rom. 8) in his death on the cross. "Christ is risen. He is risen indeed" – the joy of Easter is an expression of the yearning and hope that the chains of sin and death will be broken for all human beings and all creation (Col. 1:15ff.). The creative, reconciling and healing power of the Holy Spirit continues to transform the world as the breath of God's love (*agape*), which is God's transforming power of grace (Rom. 8-11).

Remembering that all life is created by God and that God continues to care for it, we affirm the sacredness of all life and receive God's gift of life that we share with all other creatures and all creation. The earth is not ours, but God's common home for all who are connected within the web of life, the earth community (Ps. 24:104). It is not we who sustain life, but God. All our human power must be accountable to God. All human activities must recognize and respect the logic and rules (ecology and economy) of God's greater household of life (*oikoumene*) in just and sustainable relationships that make for peace and the flourishing of communities.

Discerning the signs of the times

In trying to identify our specific tasks in the transformation of today's world, it is important to begin always from our faith convictions and to base our actions on biblical and theological grounds. Equally important, however, is understanding the context one is working in and addressing. God loved the world, though it was sinful and fallen, and through Christ in the Holy Spirit took it up, together with the consequences of sin, in order to transform and redeem it from within. Likewise, Christians today, before confronting and challenging the world and its ways, have first to understand and love it, to identify the signs of the presence of God's grace and to try building upon that foundation, by God's grace, through the work of transformation and reconciliation.

Success or failure of the ecumenical conversations will depend on a genuine and committed encounter among delegates and youth in addressing the challenges we are confronted with as people of faith. At times this may be difficult and even conflictual, but it will serve the process of spiritual discernment and a much better understanding of how differently people experience the impact of changing realities, depending on their place in a world marked by growing inequality, violence and misuse of power. Differing responses to ethical challenges such as human sexuality and the beginning and ending of human life have gravely undermined the common witness within and also among the churches. Coming together in ecumenical conversation will help the churches to see more clearly what needs to be done by churches in mutual solidarity and support at local, national, regional and international levels.

These conversations will facilitate the task of the assembly in identifying and determining the framework and guidelines for the future work of the World Council Churches (WCC). As the fellowship of churches committed to staying together, to praying and working ecumenically in making themselves accountable to each other, the WCC will only fulfil its task if the mandate given by the assembly reflects the common concerns of the member churches and ecumenical partners, supports them in overcoming divisive issues and facilitates their common witness and action. The WCC can do well only those things that the churches are committed to do together in clear recognition of their own diversity and differences.

**The changing religious, cultural and ecclesial context:
Christian identity and mission in a multicultural and multifaith world**

- In a world confronted with annihilation of identities through globalization and cultural homogenization on the one hand, and brokenness and fragmentation on the other, the mission of the church is to proclaim healing and reconciliation and to give shape to communities where the seeds of healing and reconciliation are experienced and lived.
- In the multicultural and multi-religious contexts that Christians live in today, in all parts of the world, there is an urgent need for a fresh articulation of Christian identity and of the mission of the church – not separated from or against others, but in relation to them.
- For a church which defines itself as the body of Christ, as a community of men and women renewed by grace sharing equally in the life of the one and common body, there is the need to learn from the experiences of women. Their experiences bring a vision of partnership in seeking justice, a key to what it means to be church.
- What is the role and place of the disabled in the life and mission of a church which follows the biblical vision of the whole cosmos being gathered in Christ, and sees itself as a mystery and seed of that integral and holistic eschatological reality?
- In approaching anthropology today, one can no longer deal with it dualistically and avoid topics considered taboo such as sexuality, which are essential to human integrity and wholeness. Churches and Christians are divided and keep dividing on such issues. A responsible answer is expected, based on biblical and theological foundations as well as on medical, sociological and psychological analysis and reflection.
- The new information and communication technologies (ICT) have permeated all spheres of life. Most people, and especially youth, are influenced by, if not depend-

ent on, these technologies. What is the place and role of such technologies in the overall life and mission of the church today?

The issue of transformation, healing and reconciliation is closely related to that of koinonia and ecumenical fellowship. How are these dynamics affected by, and how do they affect, the changing ecumenical approaches to ecclesiology and discipleship? Over the years, since the foundation of the WCC, the traditional meaning and goal of the ecumenical movement has been challenged, expanded, reshaped, rearticulated. The WCC document on *Towards a Common Vision and Understanding* made an attempt to bring into a coherent presentation the various meanings and goals of oikoumene and what people of our time expect from it. The process of reflection is still going on, and the need for a clear rearticulation of a contemporary ecumenical vision is vital.

- What are the meaning and components of the search for unity in a world confronted with a culture of violence, with the quest for more sophisticated weapons of mass destruction? What does it mean to be human in an age when the power of the rich is growing, migrants face discrimination and basic ethical categories of understanding and action are being challenged?
- What new forms of ecumenism and of ecumenical cooperation will motivate and inspire people today?
 - In a time when the ecumenical institutional structures are being challenged and the need for reconfiguration is being expressed, when a grassroots post-denominational ecumenism is emerging and many are in search of more experiential faith expressions?
 - In a time when many Christians, in particular the youth, are yearning for more spiritual depth and for a more meaningful expression of faith?
 - In a time when the Evangelicals, Pentecostals and charismatics are developing their own interchurch structures and are becoming interested and involved in an ecumenical search for unity, cooperation and service?
- How can the fellowship of churches act together with specialized ministries and local communities and organizations in responding to human suffering and need, when traditional Christian cooperation and diakonia are being challenged by the competition for resources between different actors working in the field of human development?
- From the beginning of the ecumenical movement, the youth movement was the engine which gave life to it and kept its flame burning brightly. What could be the role of youth, including students and other laity, in transforming the ecumenical landscape today?
- What content and methodologies of ecumenical formation could fit and have impact on the people of our time?

The changing international political, social and economic context: the challenge of economic globalization and empire

Justice as the essence of the love of God motivated the prophets in their critique of the destructive impact of injustice and misuse of power on people and earth. The prophets' vision of the good life was rooted in God's preferential option for the poor that was at the heart of the stories of Israel's liberation from slavery and in the sabbath and jubilee vision of God's good creation (Ex. 21; Lev. 25; Deut. 15; Isa. 61). Jesus

affirms this vision when he proclaims the jubilee year of the Lord (Luke 4) and teaches the disciples to liberate themselves from injustice, greed and fear of the future (Matt. 6:19ff.), to serve God and not mammon (Matt. 6:24), to trust in God's love and care for all life (Matt. 6:25ff.) and to "strive first for the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33). Jesus embodies the bread and the water of life (John 6:22ff., 7:37ff.). His body and blood are broken and shed for all (Luke 22:14ff.) so that all may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). Because the gospel proclaims the love of God revealed in Christ, it also points to the depth of human sin that leads to death and destruction and affirms the need for transformative justice and care for the earth.

But what does it mean to affirm these values in the changing international and political, social and economic contexts? Economic globalization and a new geopolitical configuration have an enormous impact on peoples' lives in all the regions of the world. Very often these forces deny the urgent need to address growing inequality, poverty, wars, the threats to nature combined with the spread of diseases and the death and fragmentation of communities caused by HIV and AIDS. The fear of loss sits deep – especially among those who continue to benefit from unequally distributed economic growth and accumulation of wealth at the expense of the poor and of nature. Are there ways that the vision of life as a gift of God's grace encourages people to trust that they may well gain in quality of life when the race to concentrate wealth and power into ever fewer hands stops, so that they may begin to resist the constant drive towards economic growth and misuse of power?

- How do the churches address different dimensions and forms of power relationships impacting on peoples' lives and livelihoods at the local level, but also at national and international levels, e.g. international military alliances, the United Nations system, the international financial institutions or the World Trade Organization?
- What does it require to speak truth to power in a context in which political, military, economic, social, cultural and religious forms of power are increasingly linked with each other in support of hegemonic, imperial power?
- How can peoples' lives and their dignity be protected from the impact of growing violence? What are the new threats to peace that even further undermine the security and future life of communities?
- Will the churches be able to build hospitable communities in such a violent and competitive environment where life is systematically devalued?
- What is the proper role of religion in politics and public life? What are the many dangers to which religion may fall prey in politics, and how may religion be manipulated and abused to counteract and paralyze the proper critique of the churches?
- Despite all promises of those still defending the prevailing economic paradigm, the scandal of poverty and growing economic inequality is a deadly reality for millions and even billions of people, children, women, men – sisters and brothers. How can the churches strengthen their prophetic voice in the quest for just economic and political structures and institutional frameworks, and improve the impact of their ecumenical cooperation?
- This question is closely related to the roles of science and technology that challenge the churches' witness to the sanctity of life.
- It also points to the vital importance of the earth's resources we are called to care for and not to plunder. What is the role of Indigenous peoples, of women and marginal groups in all of this?

- How do racism, casteism and other forms of discrimination justify and further aggravate injustice and inequality?
- How are children and women affected and what are the many forms in which they bear the brunt of the problems and become victims of violence?

In the centre of all of this are questions of power and structural injustice that need to be understood and addressed.

Renewing our commitment

As we reflect together in ecumenical conversations during the assembly on the common challenges facing the churches today, the expectation is that from sharing different experiences and actions, joys, frustrations, achievements and failures, Christians from different parts of the world will learn from one another and will strengthen their fellowship and commitment to stay and act together for the renewal and transformation of the churches and of the world. The future mandate that will emerge out of the assembly will be vital and coherent only if it grows out of a renewed commitment of the churches to their ecumenical calling. While we pray “God, in your grace, transform the world”, we also join in the prayer of Jesus Christ “that all may be one” (John 17:20).

Changing Religious and Cultural Context

1. Mission as healing and reconciling communities

In a time of globalization, violence, ideological polarization, fragmentation and exclusion, what is the importance of Christian mission? This ecumenical conversation will offer the opportunity to reflect on the message of the gospel and methods of mission in such a context.

Saint Paul speaks of the new creation heralded by Christ and enabled by the Holy Spirit. “In Christ”, Paul says, “God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting his trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:19-20). It is this “new creation”, by God’s transforming grace, that we hold to be the goal of God’s own mission.

Reconciliation, as the restoration of right relations with God in Christ, is the source of reconciliation with oneself, with other people and with the whole of creation. As Christians we are called to receive and celebrate this gift and, empowered by the Spirit, to involve the church in relevant forms of mission and proclamation that point to Christ’s vision of fullness of life for all.

As ambassadors of this message and partners in God’s mission, the church is called to reach out to individuals, families, communities, churches and nations bearing witness to the power of the Holy Spirit to transform the world as a living sign of God’s new creation. We are called to be agents of healing and reconciliation in the midst of illness and disease, conflict and tension, crisis and suffering. But we also are called in the midst of the search for meaning and community where “private” forms of spirituality or religiosity seem most attractive and where churches are losing clergy and members.

The road to reconciliation and healing is not an easy one. It involves listening, truth telling, repentance, forgiveness and a sincere commitment to Christ and his justice. It includes physical, mental, emotional and spiritual healing. It involves healing in the midst of struggles for social, economic and ecological justice. It involves reconciling communities and churches in conflict. It involves nurturing congregations seeking renewal. It involves proclaiming and testifying to the gospel of transforming grace where people are desperately looking for spiritual meaning. It lives in the tension of the coming of God's reign as "already here" and "yet to come", but with the assurance that all true healing comes from God.

Within our many traditions, we share rich resources of experience, testimonies and gifts to strengthen our common witness to the Risen Lord. These include healing through prayer, ascetic practices and charisms; sacraments and liturgies; medical and spiritual ministries; social and systemic approaches – all sustained by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

This ecumenical conversation will provide a space for theological reflection and sharing on the healing and reconciling mission of the church.

The **first session** will provide an opportunity to understand the varied contexts in which we live and witness to the gospel. It will include a presentation on fostering healing and reconciling communities.

The **second session** will be a sharing of experiences, both negative and positive, in ministries of healing and reconciliation as they relate to the mission of the church and the call to proclaim the gospel.

The **third session** will explore how, as fellowship of churches and a family with many traditions, we can work together as partners in God's healing and reconciling mission and how this can be a source of strength in our search for visible unity.

2. Religious plurality is embraced and feared

We live in a world where forces of cultural homogenization are at work. At the same time, communities and individuals alike often manifest the search for distinctiveness. In some cases, religious and cultural differences are blurred or even ignored. In other cases, they are exaggerated.

Religious plurality poses an unprecedented challenge to Christians in most parts of the world. It is both embraced and feared. In many ways, better relations with neighbours of other religions are sought. Yet relations between religious communities are marked, in many places, by suspicion or hostility.

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:2). As Christians, we oscillate between an openness to encounter God through others and our affirmation that "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

In the light of recent developments in inter-religious relations and the ways in which they are perceived, Christians are addressing afresh, theologically and otherwise, the question raised by religious plurality and its implication for the life and witness of the church.

Many concrete initiatives are taken in inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. Such initiatives, and the theological reflections that sustain them, invite an ecumenical conversation. Churches, in the diversity of their situations, can learn from each other's experience and agree on what they are called to do together.

What are the fears that hinder our commitment to inter-religious dialogue and cooperation? What are the reasons others might be fearful of us? How do we engage in dialogue while being true to our beliefs and respectful of the faith of others? What are the challenges we face once dialogue and cooperation are established? How does a fellowship of churches address these issues together?

The **first session** will assess the present state of inter-religious relations on a global level and the way they influence, and are influenced by, local realities in many parts of the world.

The **second session** will be a sharing of how Christians are addressing, in their local context, the changing inter-religious context in which they live. It will be an opportunity to learn from the diversity of theological insights and concrete experiences.

The **third session** will focus on the common responsibility of churches in fellowship and the various possibilities of increased cooperation between them in the area of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation.

3. Becoming a community of women and men: learning from women's ways of being church

The biblical story of creation offers a theological basis for the church as a community of women and men – created together in the likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). This is not an abstract understanding of humanity; rather, it affirms the dignity and value of all human beings – female and male.

It is a struggle to live into this Genesis vision. We face many theological challenges in the search for an authentic expression of the church as a community of women and men engaged together in the life of the church and society.

The challenges include deepening our understanding of the authority of scripture in light of our experience; of models of mission and service that strengthen the ministry of the full community; and of the language and symbols used in worship and how they impact relations between women and men.

While women have been faithful to the church, this is often trivialized or marginalized in terms of women's leadership as well as their theological and spiritual contributions. In many contexts the church is slow to speak about this injustice and as a result the ministry of the church suffers.

Women have unique perspectives on "being church" characterized by a vision of the church as a community of women and men – a vision of partnership seeking justice. This is a vision of the church in which solidarity, accountability, compassion and an ethic of care are foundational. Participation and a genuine sharing of power are central to this vision. Maintaining a critical perspective and visioning anew the history, theology and doctrine of the church has been fundamental to shaping this vision.

Through their faithful engagement in the ecumenical movement and contributions to the search for visible unity women have affirmed the plurality of their experiences, the integrity of their ecclesial traditions and a holistic commitment to ministry. They have underlined the need to respect and honour diverse understandings of liberation and freedom.

Each generation of ecumenically committed women has articulated its perspective on the renewal of the church in its time. This ecumenical conversation, which is open to women and men, will provide a space to listen to the experiences of women and to reflect on what it means to be a community of women and men transforming the world.

The **first session** will review the present context through a sharing of stories, hopes and struggles that address some of the visions women have to offer the church. It will include a theological reflection on the church as a community of women and men.

The **second session** will reflect on how churches express their solidarity with women. It will allow churches to share stories of commitment to strengthen the role of women in the church and to address the challenges that women face in serving the church.

The **third session** will listen to women's visions and ways of "being church". It will identify some of the challenges facing the ecumenical movement in encouraging churches to become authentic communities of women and men participating in the transformation of the church and the world.

4. Human sexuality: body and soul; world and church

A group of 150 church leaders from around the world recently gathered to discuss, among other things, human sexuality. Though the churches represented at this meeting of the WCC central committee had differing "entry-points" and positions on the way they perceive and respond to issues of human sexuality, the discussion was characterized by a spirit of understanding and sensitivity, empowered by grace, as the leaders attentively listened to one another. It is possible for churches to talk about human sexuality!

The rapidly changing cultural and religious context in which we live has challenged churches to reflect on specific issues, concerns and fears related to the often sensitive and sometimes taboo topic of human sexuality. In most contexts a generations-old dialogue between gospel and culture has crafted a specific understanding of "morality" that influences how churches address issues related to human sexuality.

However, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS has challenged many churches to discuss openly human sexuality in life-giving and healing ways. Clergy around the world are called upon daily to respond to a range of interpersonal concerns including chastity (pre-marital sex), marriage, family life, fidelity (extra-marital relations), contraception and abortion. In many places the church has responded with theological courage to community concerns such as the sexuality of persons with disabilities, women's sexuality and the desire of gay and lesbian Christians to contribute to the life of the church.

Churches around the world have responded to the issue as sometimes liberating and as sometimes threatening – each with its own "entry-point". Several churches have issued statements on human sexuality after careful study and consultation accompanied by prayer. And yet the biblical, theological and ethical challenges presented by these issues have sometimes caused painful divisions within the church locally, nationally and even confessionally.

Can it be said that we face a moment of *kairos* in regard to the challenges raised by human sexuality today? Is there a desire on the part of some churches to address these issues together as a fellowship of churches in search of visible unity?

Is there a danger in relying on a purely secular response to the issues at hand without any reference to faith? How can the church remain in dialogue with many of its younger members who believe their churches have not responded adequately to the breadth of the challenges we face?

This ecumenical conversation will draw upon the experiences of churches, families and individuals around the world as it seeks to help the ecumenical movement

move forward in addressing the theological and ethical concerns raised by issues of human sexuality.

The **first session** will review the present reality through a sharing of stories, hopes and struggles. It will address some of the questions facing the church and will include theological reflections on human sexuality as “a gift from God”.

The **second session** will draw on church statements, positions and experiences. It will listen to ways in which issues of human sexuality have been addressed through individual churches, within confessional families, across the ecumenical movement and among theologians.

The **third session** will ask in which direction a fellowship of churches seeking unity might “go from here” as it contends with the issues, attempts to listen to the concerns of its members, and seeks to offer a theological response marked by grace and transformation.

5. Keeping the faith in a cyber-world: Christian communities and new technologies

New information and communications technologies (ICTs) such as mobile phones, e-mail, internet, networked computers and digital television are influencing more and more areas of life all over the world. The ways people learn and think about their environment, relate and communicate to each other, judge situations and make decisions are all affected by the growing presence of new technologies and the immense volume of information, messages, values and cultural patterns they convey. Paradoxically the “digital divide”, be it an economic, cultural or generational divide, influences who has access to technology and who does not.

Christians are not exempt from this influence in their daily lives. Nor is the church as community of believers. Technology has the potential to transform the ways in which we worship in local congregations. Activities and areas of experience that have traditionally been found within a physical congregation – prayer groups, spiritual direction, biblical teachings, theological discussions, and even worship – can and are accessed through the new ICTs. These “virtual congregations” – with varying scopes, goals, origin and composition – are growing.

At different speeds and with different levels of enthusiasm established churches are addressing this phenomenon. As the body of Christ in which all the members are inter-related (1 Cor. 12:26) the church cannot ignore new forms of interconnection that defy time and space. Aware of the gift of the Holy Spirit to break barriers of communication for the sharing of the gospel (Acts 2:6) the church is attentive to the appearance of new languages and means of communication. But since at the same time it is called not to simply accommodate to the world but to actively transform it (Rom. 12:2) its approach is a critical one.

In addressing the effect of new technologies on Christian life, churches are confronted with a number of questions: What is their impact on the institutional dimension of the church? How can these technologies strengthen church administration and enrich worship life. How can they strengthen ecumenical commitments? What is the place of the “virtual congregation” in the traditional understanding of what it means to be church? What dimensions of the Christian experience can be mediated through new ICTs (i.e. “virtualized”)?

The **first session** will take stock of global trends and discuss how new technologies are influencing the life of persons, families, communities and societies – shaping

people's way of life, their values and their beliefs. Participants will contribute elements from their specific contexts – from across the “digital divides”.

The **second session** will offer space for sharing how churches are addressing the phenomena in their particular contexts. Participants are invited to learn from each other about different experiences and theological approaches.

The **third session** of the conversation will explore the ecumenical priorities in this field: how the new information and communication technologies influence the ecumenical journey and what opportunities they offer for a fellowship of churches seeking unity. What are the common responsibilities and the possibilities for cooperation?

6. Disabled people: a church of all and for all

The church of Christ is a welcoming place for all irrespective of our differences. As St Paul has demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 the church is the body of Christ and it is made up of many parts. It cannot be complete if it excludes any of these parts. All the parts have individual functions and even those that are seemingly weak are indispensable. However, this has not been the experience of persons with disabilities who have felt excluded in the spiritual, social, economic and structural life of the church. Their exclusion has been experienced through various barriers, the worst of which are those related to attitudes. There are so few persons with disabilities involved in any way in the ecumenical movement.

The main reason for their exclusion in the life of the church may be explained through an understanding of the struggle between the strong and the weak. As a seemingly weak group, they are considered to have no contribution to make and therefore a burden. Where their needs have been addressed, this has been done through a spirit of charity and choice rather than a conviction to do so as a defining characteristic of the church. If the church is to be truly the body that it is, it has to make a paradigm shift in dealing with disability issues from a charity perspective to a more empowering and inclusive theology. Signs of this departure have been experienced through the work of a few churches.

A number of the fundamental themes explored in the WCC interim theological statement “A Church of All and for All” have given some pointers to what the place of persons with disabilities in the church should be. Three of these are of particular interest: hermeneutics, *imago Dei* and healing. This conversation will revolve around these themes and their implication for the opening of the doors for full participation of persons with disabilities in the life of the church

The **first session** will provide the space to listen to personal experiences by persons with disabilities in their interaction with the church. It will discuss what it means for persons with disabilities to be part of the church for all and what the new testament healing stories communicate in the contemporary church.

The **second session** will provide opportunity for churches that have made progress in the inclusion and active involvement of persons with disabilities in their worship and structural life to share their experiences.

The **third session** will explore ways of opening doors into the future through such measures as removal of physical, social and attitudinal barriers and in engaging in a reflection on the ecumenical challenges before us.

Changing Ecclesial and Ecumenical Context

7. Challenges on the way to unity: seeking an ecumenical response for today

The WCC's Common Understanding and Vision process offers a coherent and challenging vision: a broad fellowship of churches, committed and accountable to one another, seeking visible unity in their life and witness today.

After centuries of division, the churches recognize anew that they are one in Christ. Within the ecumenical fellowship they witness together, work against injustice, and seek to overcome their theological and historical differences. The churches within this fellowship have agreed to reflect and act together – to stay together, to encourage and challenge one another, even as they work to resolve remaining differences which hamper and test their fellowship.

But this fellowship of churches is challenged today as never before. One challenge comes from the rise of new communities seeking a “denomination-free” Christianity, something outside the historic forms of church life. Many such communities remain, by choice, outside any fellowship of churches. Others, including many rapidly growing churches, look for alternate ecumenisms, other experiences of common life outside the “mainstream” ecumenical movement. All these developments test the limits of the present fellowship of churches as expressed in the WCC.

Yet another challenge comes, paradoxically, from the sharpening of identities in churches within the traditional ecumenical movement. This may be a necessary response to a rapidly changing world, with its uncertainty about the future, loss of traditional social values and increasing secularization. It need not be anti-ecumenical. But it often is: an emphasis on the local and familiar, a fear of what is different, financial stress – such factors call forth a “re-confessionalizing”, a turning inward which leaves fewer resources for the ecumenical fellowship. Meanwhile many churches are growing and have new resources, but these are not always shared. And beyond the “symptom” of shrinking resources, there often lie deeper problems: a loss of confidence and enthusiasm for the very search for unity itself.

The churches, seeking a creative response to these challenges, are trying to understand the forces changing the world – and themselves – today. They are listening to each other in new ways, finding that within the fellowship there is room to ask each other even the most challenging questions about their understanding of the faith, and of each other as churches (cf. the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC). They are listening together to the concerns of those outside the fellowship. They recognize that today's religious plurality brings new challenges for their search for unity. And together they asking: Are we ready to be accountable to one another, to be visibly one in our life, witness and service to the world? Are we ready to discern the grace of God to transform ourselves and the world we live in?

The **first session** will review the churches' commitment to one another in working towards unity within the ecumenical fellowship, and explore the emergence, role and significance of “post-denominational” churches, and other alternate expressions of church, today.

The **second session** will address changing patterns of engagement (in priorities, time, energy and funds) for the ecumenical movement, and how these affect the fellowship of churches.

The **third session** will focus on how the churches can reaffirm their fellowship and accountability to one another, as a basis for responding to these challenges today.

8. Emerging forms of ecumenism

The WCC's Common Understanding and Vision process offers a coherent and challenging vision: a broad fellowship of churches, committed and accountable to one another, seeking visible unity in their life and witness today.

After centuries of division, the churches recognize anew that they are one in Christ. Within the ecumenical fellowship they witness together, work against injustice, and seek to overcome their theological and historical differences. The churches within this fellowship have agreed to reflect and act together – to stay together, to encourage and challenge one another, even as they work to resolve remaining differences which hamper and test their fellowship.

In recent years the ecumenical landscape has changed dramatically. New partners have emerged, and new partnerships have been formed. Churches meet in one-on-one bilateral discussions; a global “forum” may bring to the table a wider range of churches and groups, including some outside the traditional ecumenical movement; specialized ministries of (and sometimes outside) the churches for diakonia and development are emerging as strong forces, bringing their perspectives to the ecumenical movement.

In response to the new situation, many – churches within the fellowship, conciliar organizations in national, regional or international contexts, communions of churches and ecumenical ministries – are seeking new models and possibilities for living their ecumenical commitment in today's world. They are exploring a “reconfiguration” of the ecumenical movement, not just a rearranging of the present landscape but a new way of understanding of one body and many members (cf. Rom. 12:4, 1 Cor. 12:12, 1 Cor. 12:20) and doing ecumenism today.

The churches are seeking to face the new ecumenical situation courageously and creatively, in order to work and witness effectively today. They are trying to be engaged with the new ecumenical partners and specialized ministries, asking themselves: How can we, all of us, embody our ideals in one ecumenical movement? What form should our ecumenical vision take today? How may God's grace assist in facing the challenges of ecumenism today?

The **first session** will listen to the stories and examples and explore the range of emerging ecumenical expressions in local, national, regional and international contexts.

The **second session** will explore the ecumenical “reconfiguration” process. This effort seeks to clarify and restate the vision of the fellowship of churches within the WCC, for a broadly based ecumenical movement for today. Discussion would touch on the origin of the process, its goals, and the challenge it poses to traditional understandings and forms of the ecumenical movement.

The **third session** will focus on future possibilities for the ecumenical fellowship. It would seek to bring the reconfiguration process described above into dialogue with other visions, and other possible forms, for the ecumenical movement today.

9. Challenges to diakonia today: seeking an ecumenical response

The WCC's Common Understanding and Vision process offers a coherent and challenging vision: a broad fellowship of churches, committed and accountable to one another, seeking visible unity in their life and witness today.

After centuries of division, the churches recognize anew that they are one in Christ. Within the ecumenical fellowship they witness together, work against injustice, and seek to overcome their theological and historical differences. The churches within this

fellowship have agreed to reflect and act together – to stay together, to encourage and challenge one another, even as they work to resolve remaining differences which hamper and test their fellowship.

The churches together serving a world in need: this is a vivid sign of their faithfulness to Christ, whose ministry was marked by service to others, and one expression of their accountability to one another within the fellowship of churches. As they move beyond words to actions, their unity in Christ becomes visible, a “mark” of their common commitment to service which all the world can see.

Because it is rooted in the gospel, diakonia has always been central to the life of the churches. Within the fellowship of churches, diakonia has evolved to encompass the struggle for justice and sustainable communities, the commitment to upholding human dignity, and the vision of communities participating in the decisions affecting their lives. It has become global, even as it is rooted in local communities.

Moreover, the ecumenical landscape is changing dramatically, and not least in the field of diakonia. Some churches now respond directly to local needs, bypassing the ecumenical fellowship. A proliferation of new non-governmental organizations have emerged to offer services to those in need. Diaconal agencies and specialized ministries, in an increasingly competitive environment, are pressed to demonstrate tangible – and often immediate – results. These changes have challenged the churches’ understanding of their fellowship, and how it can be expressed in common service to those in need.

In response to the new situation, churches within the fellowship are seeking creative new models and possibilities for diakonia today. Together with the specialized ministries they are exploring new “configurations of caring” among the churches, the sources of diaconal support and expertise, and local situations of need. They hope to form true partnerships marked by respect, sharing of power, mutual accountability and a readiness to be vulnerable

The churches are seeking to face creatively the new possibilities – and challenges – for diakonia today in order to offer effective service to the world. They are trying to understand the new situation, and asking: How can we, as a fellowship of churches, act together with specialized ministries and local communities and organizations in responding to human suffering and need?

The **first session** will review the biblical grounding of diakonia, the traditional forms of the churches’ common service to the world, vis-à-vis the changing context in which diakonia is carried out today.

The **second session** will explore the emerging forms of diaconal service today, noting how diakonia and the search for justice are expressed in new forms of ministry. Initiatives towards new global partnerships for diakonia will be considered, including their relationship to – and impact on – the broader ecumenical fellowship.

The **third session** will focus on how the churches can continue their commitment to common service to the world, best suited to today’s needs.

10. Memories and renewed quest for ecumenical formation

One of the major achievements in Christianity in the 20th century was the coming and staying together of some major church traditions that have witnessed the development and growth of the ecumenical movement. This rich legacy of churches staying and working together towards the visible unity of the church could not have been possible without intentional and dynamic ecumenical formation and learning that have taken place in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, we live in a diverse and rapidly chang-

ing ecclesial and ecumenical context. Some of us have come to the assembly with deep memories of how we have been ecumenically formed. Others may be wondering what it means to be “ecumenical” and hence what is “ecumenical formation”? Still others are actively and intentionally involved in nurturing ecumenical consciousness as they confront the growing reality of religious pluralism and different kinds of injustices in their context. Moreover in the scriptures we are admonished to be transformed by the renewal of our minds by discerning the will of God (Rom. 12:2) and to seek God’s grace.

Ecumenical formation does not happen in a vacuum. The context, human condition and people’s experiences influence different kinds of initiatives in ecumenical formation. Major changes in ecumenism, demographic shift in global Christianity, post-denominationalism, religious plurality and interfaith education, call for an ecumenical conversation. In addition, rapid growth of new ways of expressing Christian spirituality and proselytism, in some places, create a renewed quest for exploring creative ways of doing ecumenical formation and to redefine our understanding of ecumenism and transformation.

Churches, in different contexts, need to learn from one another and to articulate for themselves what it means to be ecumenical in relation to the gospel message of a just world and the reign of God.

The **first session** will be dedicated to recall into memory how some of the participants have been ecumenically formed (people’s experiences) in different contexts and how that has shaped their understanding of ecumenical formation.

The **second session** will be an opportunity for exploring how Christians are engaged in ecumenical formation today and the major challenges they face in their context, giving adequate space to youth, women, people with disabilities and indigenous people who represent a wide variety of local contexts.

The **third session** will focus on identifying the spirit of renewal and transformation in the church that will be the basis of creating realistic models of ecumenical formation in the 21st century in different contexts.

11. Youth transforming the ecumenical landscape

The ecumenical movement started with young people – in the Student Christian Movements, YMCA, YWCA – taking leadership and daring to challenge the churches. What sustained them was a passion to bring the gospel to the whole world through mission, social action and transformation of the churches. Youth have a special capacity of speaking with a prophetic voice and bringing about change. They are especially called, like the young prophet, to transform the world – to “pluck up and break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer. 1:10). This reminds us of the important role youth can and should play in the ecumenical movement of the 21st century.

Among young Christians, faith in God and the strong need for spirituality very often do not go together with their presence and activity in the churches. Churches in most parts of the world witness decline in youth attendance and engagement. This questions the relevance of the churches’ ministry and challenges the way the churches place themselves in the world today.

Deep commitment of many young people to transforming the world results in significant involvement in various social movements. However, the youth’s desire for a united, just and caring oikoumene too often does not find expressions within the churches and ecumenical organizations. This questions the relevance of the ecumenical movement itself.

This ecumenical conversation will explore youth's dreams and visions for ecumenism in the 21st century. It will provide a space for discussion on how young people, and young theologians among them, can and are contributing to the quest for the visible unity of the church. The conversation will attempt to capture the youth spiritualities characterized by impatience with injustice, courage, openness and passion for the transformation of the churches and the world. Although led by youth, it is not meant to be exclusively for young people. It aims at engaging participants in an honest and constructive dialogue, also across generations.

The **first session** will focus on youth's aspirations and challenges faced in their churches, organizations, societies. Time will be given to share experience and youth perceptions of the world, churches and the ecumenical movement.

The **second session** will explore what young people are doing to transform the churches and the ecumenical movement. It will highlight successes but also failures and frustrations. It will be an opportunity for participants to exchange good practices and lessons learned.

The **third session** will be looking into the future asking the following questions: How to ensure the vitality, visibility and impact of the ecumenical youth movement on the churches and the world? How can ecumenical youth organizations strengthen the common Christian identity and bonds of solidarity among young people globally? How to reclaim and creatively utilize the youth spirituality from the origins of the ecumenical movement in the quest for the church and oikoumene that God desires?

Changing International and Political Context

12. Walking in truth, speaking with power

From the prophet Isaiah to the pastor Bonhoeffer, from Esther in ancient Israel to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina of our day, prophets are real and inspiring. They are raised up in honour at regular intervals in the Bible. God's promise of a new heaven and a new earth owes something to their labours. Yet most believers – no matter how committed to God's justice – would not call themselves prophets or think of themselves as prophetic people. Prophets are unusual, remote and rare people. The admonition to "speak the truth to power" is well-known, but in daily life most followers of Jesus live silently, feel quite powerless and remain deeply challenged by how to deal with power and by whether those who try to do so actually even make a difference.

What is more, the prophet Samuel spoke straight to King Saul. There is no mention of media, market forces or international alliances coming between them, however clearly the relational dimension of power is highlighted. In our world, power is grafted into global structures of influence, wealth, information and privilege. It is defined by image and prerogative. Old dynamics of gender and race are reasserted in new patterns of oppression. Power is mediated and projected across entire regions and cultures. Its sources are more impersonal than ever before, yet its impact is more acutely personal than in the past.

The last decade has witnessed deep changes in political power. From a bipolar world to a single super-power, with new possibilities for countries such as China, Russia and India playing key roles. At the same time, locally, nationally and interna-

tionally, civil society is becoming increasingly active in expressing its power and, in some situations, influencing global policy directions. Individual churches and related organizations mount highly developed advocacy programmes and sustain them against strong odds. Churches united in advocacy have made the WCC a moral compass in an international system that is sometimes confused and often short of viable answers.

Still, one prophet, the Son of God, stands at the door of the human heart and speaks to the halls of earthly power: I am the Truth. Blessed are the poor, and also the meek. Whatever you do to the least of these you do to me. Loose the chains of oppression. Let justice flow. Walk humbly with God. Do we hear these words of hope and take heart?

In the **first session** participants will discuss the nature of public power in the world today and set the stage for further analysis. They will examine power at different levels, from local to global, from bipolar to multilateral and also identify new forms of power.

The **second session** will examine the churches' ability to walk in truth and speak with power. How can we compare our situation with the biblical narratives about prophetic action? Over against a more integrated and more complex world, what are the churches' greatest strengths for addressing and influencing public and corporate authorities?

The **third session** will discuss the balance between actions to denounce, to offer hope and to live in hope. Participants will hear and discuss testimonies and will be asked to choose gifts of God that they are receiving at this assembly and will take back to their churches as a dynamic expression of ecumenical action in the world: churches speaking truth to power as a critical, moral, constructive and united witness in a world that is being transformed by the gracious love of God.

13. Protecting peoples' lives and human dignity

The changing context of the world after the end of the cold war poses new threats to human rights and human dignity. The weakening of the nation-state, as a result of the globalization process, the increased number of conflicts within rather than between states, have all meant increased violence against innocent civilian populations, women and children, and threats to their dignity and rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural.

Work for justice is at the core of the biblical message. The prophets call God's people to act with justice, especially for the poor, the victim, the oppressed (cf. e.g. Isa. 1:17). The message of Jesus is a message of life, and life in all its fullness (John 10:10). The Bible invites us to a holistic approach to justice, life and dignity, looking at human beings as stewards of the creation, and protecting, as God does with his grace, the whole creation with a particular concern for the weakest members of the community (Ps. 82).

The pursuit of justice, rights and life in its fullness cannot be merely understood from an individual perspective. Biblical, theological and ethical perspectives call for shifting from the individual to the community. This collective understanding of human dignity and human rights is also highlighted by African and Indigenous traditions.

In this context, what should be the responsibility of the international community to protect peoples' dignity from gross human-rights violations, genocide and war crimes? What is the role of the churches in promoting and protecting lives and dignity? How can the issues of impunity, religious freedom, land rights be addressed from ethical

and theological perspectives? What role can churches play in post-conflict situations and for reconciliation?

The **first session** will assess the changing context on the ground for human dignity and rights, discern new trends and raise some ethical questions to be addressed by the ecumenical family, including as consequences of globalization: economic changes, inequities in power and awareness of and respect for human rights. Consideration will be given to UN processes (reform of the UN, Security Council, Commission on Human Rights, etc.), the failure of the international community to respond to critical situations, and the need for implementation of established rights.

The **second session** will enable the sharing of examples from churches and ecumenical partners working for human rights in diverse and changing contexts. This will include: historic examples of support to victims of human-rights violations, advocacy around grassroots issues, ecumenical accompaniment in risky situations, church involvement in truth and reconciliation work, etc. Lessons from these successes will be drawn as well as from the difficulties encountered by churches who are divided and/or not willing to take the risks of engagement in human-rights work and from inter-religious dialogue for the promotion and protection of human rights.

The **third session** will identify new areas and trends in the work of the churches and the ecumenical movement to protect peoples' rights and dignity and will look at new models of accompanying the churches in critical situations and of working ecumenically towards transformation, peace and reconciliation.

14. Churches responding to new threats to peace and human security

A new wave of militarization is shaping the international arena. In national budgets, military spending appears to be a much higher priority than social and human development. At the same time, trouble with the treaties designed to control or eliminate certain especially destructive weapons are a clear signal of new trends that threaten human security and well-being.

The increased proliferation of small arms and light weapons is responsible for 95 percent of people killed in today's armed conflicts. Non-state actors committing acts of terror are now more internationalized and better organized than before. Military technologies reach ever deeper into civilian life as a consequence of the so-called war on terror. The arms industry continues to be a very lucrative activity and many countries practise a double standard between their discourse about peace and their trade in arms.

The treaty that controls the most fearsome weapons of mass destruction, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, is eroding. Nuclear weapons remain on high alert while the intergovernmental forums designed to control them are paralyzed. The essential bargain behind the treaty – that nuclear weapons states will gradually eliminate their weapons so that non-nuclear weapons states will not seek those same weapons – is now broken in certain regions of the world. Serious repair work is on hold: 189 states are implicated in this impasse, yet a divided majority is not prevailing against the policies of a powerful few.

In today's thinking, the concept of security has shifted away from national security towards a new focus on human security that embraces the rights and needs of individuals and communities. However, in the era of a global "war on terror" national security itself has re-emerged as a threat to citizens and their rights.

Peace, together with justice and love, are gifts given by God (Ps. 85:8-13). Jesus Christ himself is our peace (Eph. 2:14). Our mandate as Christians is to look for peace, pursue it and transform the world towards communities of peace and reconciliation. The Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV)¹ is a framework to work for peace and overcome threats to peace and human security

The **first session** will assess the new threats to peace and human security that come from the proliferation and sophistication of weapons, the increased militarization of societies and the inter-relationships between them. How do people view and experience different threats to peace in their local realities?

The **second session** will share positive examples of church involvement in disarmament and in fighting militarization, through: the destruction of small arms after wars; the involvement in arms control; the promotion of codes of conduct on arms exports; different actions taken against small arms in the context of the Decade to Overcome Violence. What lessons can be learned? What are the resources of the ecumenical movement (theological, ethical, spiritual, human) to make a difference?

The **third session** will address the question of how to use the experience of the churches in relation to present and future threats from nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. How can the theological resources and the pastoral experience be combined with political advocacy in the work against proliferation of small arms? How can churches be helped to be more courageous on these issues? How can the role and potential of the DOV be strengthened in the area of militarization? What message of hope can be sent to overcome the fears coming from the new threats to peace and human security?

15. Building hospitable communities: responding to migration

Throughout the world, people are increasingly on the move. Many are forced to leave their communities because of war, human-rights violations, dire poverty, environmental degradation and social inequalities. But others leave because of a desire to explore new opportunities, to join family members, and for better jobs. Migration is a fact of life and has been since biblical times. Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, people are called to love and offer hospitality to strangers and exiles (Lev. 19: 33-34). Christ's call to welcome the stranger (Matt. 25:31-45) is central to the gospel message. As expressed in the July 2004 Faith and Order commission meeting, "through the practice of true hospitality, which transcends somehow the distinction between 'host' and 'guest', a mutual transformation takes place". Today, one in fifty people on earth are living outside their home countries, millions more are displaced within their own countries and migration is increasingly becoming a women's issue. At the same time that globalization is leading to freer movement of capital, goods and services, walls are going up to limit the movement of people. As the "human side" of globalization, the phenomenon of migration means that virtually all societies are multi-cultural and multi-religious. Refugees and migrants enrich the societies in which they live, but the process of integration is often difficult. Social tensions are increasing in many countries as governments, churches and societies grapple with the implications of these population movements.

¹ The Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace (2001-2010) calls churches, organizations and individuals to address the challenges of violence and non-violence in new creative ways in the spirit of the gospel.

The phenomenon of migration is a complex one which raises questions for churches on many levels. As governments erect barriers to keep people out – often justifying this on security grounds – desperate people take desperate measures to escape their countries. Trafficking is increasing in all regions. Many host societies are experiencing an upsurge in racism and xenophobia while the countries from which migrants leave often experience “brain drain”. Societies and churches are struggling with the issue of how migrants and refugees can preserve their culture and at the same time be integrated into their new societies. At the same time, immigrants themselves are establishing their own churches. Churches are challenged not only to offer hospitality to those who arrive in their countries, but also to combat stigma and discrimination in their societies and to challenge their governments’ policies. Even as churches are being transformed by the presence of migrants and refugees, opportunities for interfaith understanding at the local level are growing. Building hospitable communities can sometimes be a costly undertaking.

In the **first session** participants will examine present trends in migration, including governmental policies, the reasons behind new forms of migration, and the impact of migration on both the sending and receiving societies.

In the **second session** participants will discuss how churches are responding at the local, national, regional and global levels, exploring ways that churches are working together to address the needs of those leaving their communities.

In the **third session** participants will reflect on how churches are challenged to work together – across national boundaries – to respond to the challenges of migration.

16. Public life, religion and politics: ambiguities and possibilities

The relationship between religion and politics has been prominent in both the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament. The history of the Kings and the Judges shows the characteristics of the just political leader, while many of the prophets denounce those who abuse their power to oppress the people. Jesus distinguished between Caesar’s and God’s kingdoms (Mark 12:17) but his ministry was perceived as eminently political by those who accused him before Pilate (Mark 15:12,18). His call to his followers to work for peace and justice challenges churches today to reflect on their role in public life and politics.

While the influence of religion in politics is not a new phenomenon, a growing interaction between religion and politics, political processes and conflicts can be observed today in most cultures, countries and contexts. There seems to be a growing recognition that there is a place for religion in public life, even as there are different views on what that place should be. Christians from all sides of the spectrum feel that their faith should be a basis for their political action, as do many followers of other faith traditions. While some welcome this increased political engagement of faith-based groups, others are cautious because the results of this engagement are ambiguous.

In some cases religion has fuelled violent political conflicts and has been used to justify violent and oppressive policies. In other cases religion has been a key component in building peace and reconciliation. Religion has been intimately linked to ethnic confrontations, national aspirations for independence and self-determination, struggles for exerting power. While most churches agree that religion has a role to play in public life, they have different positions on how this engagement should be expressed. The need for reflection and discernment of the interplay between religion, religious com-

munities and power – and the ethical dilemmas that arise from this interplay – is crucial to respond to the call for transformation of the world.

The **first session** will identify global trends on the role of religion in politics in different contexts, with examples from different regions, preferably also from different religious contexts: Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu.

The **second session** will identify responses from the churches to this challenge. Specific examples from different contexts will address: the role of religion in public life; religious rights of minority groups; the role of the churches in post-conflict contexts; and church-state relations.

The **third session** will look towards the future in raising questions such as: What are the challenges to the ecumenical movement to assist churches in facing changing understandings of the role of religion in politics? How can the ecumenical movement reflect and respond to the diversity among Christians on the role of religion in politics? How can the inter-religious dimension be integrated in an ecumenical agenda on this crucial issue?

Changing Social and Economic Context

17. The scandal of poverty and growing inequality

Poverty threatens life and human dignity. It is not a destiny, but the very result of the methods and structures of wealth creation and distribution of wealth in individual societies and worldwide. Inequality increases not by accident, but by the way economic and political processes are structured and function. Poverty undermines the very basis of life of billions of children, women and men who are denied not only the benefits of growing wealth, but even of access to basic necessities of life. Over-consumption and over-development on the one side correspond to hunger, disease and suffering on the other.

The Bible reminds Christians of God's agape (love) and calls for the sharing of gifts and resources so that all may have life. Seen from the perspective of the biblical notion of justice and of God's preferential option for the poor, inequality and poverty are a scandal. The word of God through Amos decries those who "practise deceit with balances" and "who buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals" (Amos 8:5f.). Jesus challenges the rich to share their resources with the poor – he is asking them to go beyond what is practised today as charity. "Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me" (Luke 18:22b). Justice for the poor is, therefore, the biblical yardstick by which any economic system can be tested. This faith conviction calls us to act resolutely to work for a world free of poverty and inequality.

A number of ecumenical reflections on Christianity, wealth and poverty have argued for a sharper focus on the scandal of the growing gap between rich and poor and increasing inequality. We need to engage ourselves on what we can concretely do to ensure that resources are justly shared. Can the sharing of resources among and within our churches be revisited and made more just and transparent? Do we have a specific ministry to the rich urging them to share resources? What examples for transforming structures that create poverty can we share? How can our churches contribute to developing credible alternatives?

To contribute to transformation is not easy. The complexity of the context needs careful processes of discernment so as to identify the main actors and how they contribute to a web of oppression and exclusion, so as to determine actions that need to be taken by individuals, communities and the churches.

The **first session** will reflect on the way wealth creation results in the scandal of poverty today and provide an opportunity for participants to discern the main factors that contribute to the growing inequity and to scandal of poverty at national, regional and international level.

The **second session** will share specific examples of church action, advocacy and accompaniment to overcome inequality and poverty either directly or in making alliance with other actors. The objective will be to highlight best practices and reflect on lessons that can be learned and shared with the ecumenical fellowship.

The **third session** will look at different ways by which the ecumenical movement could commit itself to and get more boldly involved in promoting transformations that will address the scandal of poverty from a theological, ethical and political perspective, at local and global levels.

18. Overcoming health threats to humanity in the context of HIV and AIDS

One of the unique features of Christianity is the identification and practice of healing as one of the four pillars of sharing the good news along with preaching, teaching and nurturing (Matt. 4:23 and 25:41-45). This is grounded in the holistic vision of achieving fullness of life for all. The people of God are called to be effective channels of the healing and transforming power of God's love for all humanity.

The context of iniquity and injustice in which we live today is making humanity susceptible to health threats as never before. Despite great progress in the technical aspects of the prevention and cure of many diseases, access to health care remains practically impossible for the majority of the world population. Preventable diseases such as HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis are still causing countless deaths and suffering among the poor and the most vulnerable (an estimated 6 million people die each year of these diseases). At the same time there is a global increase in chronic illnesses often related to life-style and behaviour.

In a rapidly changing world, poverty, illiteracy or oppressive patriarchal societal structures continue their suffocating influence on the health status of our human family. And, tragically, many newer challenges are emerging, calling on our churches to find relevant and appropriate responses that would contribute to overcoming the health threats of today. In order to refer our reflection to a concrete reality, so as to be able to discern specific ways forward, we will focus the ecumenical conversation within the context of the HIV and AIDS epidemic and look at some of the fundamental questions that our churches need to address.

How can we renew our theological and ethical perspectives in dealing with this disease holistically? The need to address issues of stigma, discrimination and marginalization with determination and courage continues to challenge us. How are our churches applying the body of experience and the spiritual and theological resources they have, at the pulpit, in theological formation or in renewed liturgies?

In the situation where a whole generation has been wiped out and orphans are heading households, are congregations equipped and able to be caring communities? What is the experience of churches in become welcoming communities, promoting meaningful participation of people living with HIV and AIDS in our churches and societies?

Our effectiveness in advocating for equitable access to education, prevention, care and treatment for all and in addressing the fundamental issues of gender inequity and poverty will be addressed too.

The **first session** will provide an overview on how the HIV and AIDS pandemic exposes in an unprecedented manner the vulnerabilities of our societies. The participants will reflect on the diverse impacts of the disease and the varying responses (including denial and silence) in their own church and society contexts.

The **second session** will provide opportunities for participants from different regions to share experiences, best practices and models for change and advocacy undertaken by their churches locally, nationally and internationally.

The **third session** will suggest ways forward on how the fellowship of churches can best live the healing ministry and strengthen cooperation among us and with the civil society.

19. Witnessing to the sanctity of life: bio-ethics and the challenges of new technologies

What does it mean to be human and to be part of God's creation? Responses that seemed to be clear and unshakeable for centuries are severely challenged by new scientific and technological developments. Genetic engineering, for instance, added a new dimension to the capabilities of humankind to modify and change the development of ourselves and other species. Genetic technologies touch our deepest convictions about the value of human life and human dignity. Often religious language is invoked in public: "We learn the language in which God created life" was the claim made when the mapping of the whole set of human genes began.

The ecumenical movement addressed some of these concerns as part of a study process that culminated in the 1979 conference on "Faith, Science and the Future". In the meantime, churches have wrestled with the often difficult and divisive ethical questions concerning the beginning and ending of human life and have engaged with the newly evolving challenges of rapidly developing technologies. Genetically modified seeds are now available. Cloning, stem cell research and pre-implantation diagnostics are possible now.

Confronted with these challenges we need to go further in searching common ground for the churches witness to the world. How do we assess the new possibilities? Do we see them as opportunities or risks for the future of life? How do we address justice issues involved such as unequal access to technologies and the allocation of resources away from most urgent needs?

How do our beliefs and convictions concerning the sanctity of life inform our reflection and action? It is important to look again at the biblical witness. What is the deeper meaning of the tradition that human beings are made in the image of God and life is a gift of God (Gen. 1). Human lives are not at the disposal of human goals or wishes. We understand what it means to be human in the light of Jesus Christ as the one human being in whom God's creative will for humankind and all creation was revealed (John 1).

This ecumenical conversation will provide an opportunity to exchange experiences and lessons learned by churches and ecumenical partners in addressing the challenges of new technologies; e.g., genetic engineering and the more recent developments in the area of nano-technology, the very small-scale technologies in the nano-meter area

that attract much attention and research funding for a very wide range of possible applications. A number of these applications are of special concern to persons with disabilities.

The **first session** will invite to dialogue concerning the different issues our churches are struggling with and on to the ethical challenges these questions pose to the churches and their respective society. Identifying some of the most complex and divisive issues, it will at the same time explore common ground for addressing the challenges of new technologies. Persons with disabilities will share their perspective on these issues.

The **second session** will focus on instructive examples of churches responses to these ethical challenges and on models for reflection and witness in the wider public.

The **third session** will focus on the question how churches can better listen to each other and walk together in their search, developing their own responses fully aware of the ways how others approach the issues, thus learning from each other and strengthening common ground.

20. Co-existence in God's creation: caring for the earth's resources

Many of the challenges facing the world today, highlight the need for churches to be actively engaged in the search for better ways to relate to the earth and to balance our human needs with care for all life. Our understandings of how we view God as Creator, and God's purpose for creation, are also integral to the way in which we seek to be the church in solidarity with struggles for life and "life in all its fullness". The creation stories (Gen. 1-2), but also Psalms (Ps. 24, 104) and other books of the Bible remind us that we are part of the earth community, God's household of life.

As we are called to challenge the dominant economic paradigms of the world today, that exploit both the earth's resources and human labour and creativity, these issues present some of the most important ethical concerns facing humankind. For the poor and the marginalized, these concerns are matters of life or death as they are the most exposed to pollution, more frequent and violent storms, changing rainfall patterns and other forms of disasters. Environmental degradation and dramatic loss of bio-diversity are the legacy that we leave to our children and to the generations to come. Caring for the earth's resources is indeed closely linked to our commitment to justice.

Indigenous peoples' struggles for land and identity, farmers' engagement for sustainable agriculture, action to curb climate change, and peoples' initiatives to defend their rights to water, are just a few key examples for relevant and vital engagement for transformation. Such transformation is urgently needed, especially as people struggle with these crises that threaten their very existence. Churches together with relevant social movements have engaged these concerns at a local level and internationally with ecumenical partners and organizations.

What kind of actions, do we want to support and strengthen concerning the struggles for vital resources of life? How do we promote understanding of care for God's creation in our Christian education ministries? Together with people of other faiths, how can we best deepen the discussion on the relationship between ecojustice and social justice, recognizing that the struggle for a sustainable livelihoods is a struggle for a sustainable humanity?

The **first session** will give an assessment of the major ecological concerns facing the world today, and how our diverse understandings of the relationship between theology/spirituality and ecology/economy inform our actions in our local contexts.

The **second session** will provide opportunities for participants to share how churches, in their local contexts are addressing the ecological concerns – sharing experience, best practices and models for change and advocacy.

The **third session** will propose ideas and directions for just and environmentally sound teaching and practice in faith communities, focusing on how the fellowship of churches can best strengthen cooperation in promoting just and sustainable alternatives.

21. The agenda of racism: a priority for the churches?

In spite of the fact that we all belong to one human race, racism as a social construction is a reality. Incidents of racial violence are happening every day, everywhere in the world and are reported by the media. In the recent past an alarming increase of racist practices and attitudes has been recorded, notably in Europe, but the problem exists in all continents. Is any country free of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia? Racial violence is only the tip of the iceberg – racism manifests itself in many forms both overt and covert.

The victory against the institutional form of racism that was apartheid in South Africa did not mean that racism had been defeated in the rest of the world. Systemic and structural forms of racism, profoundly integrated in societies continue unabated; for example, the discrimination and oppression of Dalits, Roma, Indigenous peoples and of Africans and people of African descent. Racism is becoming more pervasive and complex as it is increasingly interconnected with the widespread phenomenon of migration and with many other economic, political, social and ideological factors. It grows and festers in situations of tension and conflicts and accompanies the polarization of extremisms, be they religious, nationalistic or ethnocentric. These factors can explain the resurgence of antisemitism in Europe, more than fifty years after the end of the second world war.

Indeed racism remain a crucial issue for our time. But is it still a priority in the agenda of our churches? Several decades ago the ecumenical movement condemned racism and called it a sin. Our many Christian traditions have continually affirmed that “all human beings – regardless of religion, race, national origin, colour, creed, or gender – are living icons of God, innately worthy of respect and dignity. Whenever human beings fail to treat others and creation with this respect, they insult God, the Creator” (statement of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew). Yet, the situation is as challenging as ever for the churches who are faced by a number of serious questions:

How are we and our churches living out that commitment? How can we and our churches continue to advocate for and express concrete solidarity with those affected by racism and by racist immigration policies? Have we been able to address racism in our own churches’ structures and institutions? How can we and our churches deal with memories of past racist discrimination caused by some missions and by ex-colonial powers?

The **first session** will focus on discerning the present trends of racism in the world today. Participants will share experiences and reflection from their own contexts and listen to stories of hope and struggle, including the claim for reparations, from people who experience racist discrimination today.

The **second session** will address the question of the churches involvement to overcome racism. It will lift up stories of good practice, as well the difficulties faced by our

churches. It will give visibility to actions taken by our churches to live out transformative justice and to address some of the historical wrongs they have experienced. It will include a theological reflection on a racially just and inclusive world.

The **third session** will reflect on how we should and could equip ourselves and our churches to further their engagement in overcoming racism in all its forms.

22. Zero tolerance for violence against women and children

Each day more stories of violence against women and children hit the media. The World Health Organization releases a world report on violence and health which records that intimate partner violence occurs in all countries irrespective of social, economic, religious or cultural background. The statistics are startling to say the least – in 48 population based surveys 10–69 percent of women reported being physically assaulted by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives. The issue of clergy sexual abuse and of pedophilia in the church cannot be hidden any more and is reported from different parts of the world.

For nearly two decades the issue of violence against women and children has been in the agenda of the churches. Sexual violence is understood theologically and ethically as “sin”. Such a conviction has guided the commitments of many churches in addressing violence against women and children. And yet, women in the church today have to ask again and again the question «How long are we to speak about this? When will we be heard?»

At the heart of the problem is the abuse of patriarchal power which leads to violent behaviour as a mechanism to control women. Theology, the Bible, church teachings and practices have all been abused by some to legitimise violent behaviour. The psalmist reminds us that, “It is not enemies who taunt me... it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend, with whom I have kept pleasant company” (Ps. 55), which describes well the hurt women feel when it is someone who they trust betrays the relationship. But if violence were a biological imperative in men, all men would be violent, and they are not. Many men have become part of movements to reclaim positive images of masculinity as decent, loving, responsible and respectful and as people who do not harm women and are willing to work with other men to redress this historical wrong.

This ecumenical conversation will bring some of these burning issues to the table.

What are the obstacles that still remain in our churches and societies to allow these widespread trends of violence against women and children to continue unabated? Do our churches through their theology and practice contribute in any way to promote, or condone violence against women and children? Jesus demonstrated a new understanding of power – how can the church in its own life model this? How can the teaching, preaching and forms of leadership of the church and its pastoral and practical responses be transformed, so that women and children will find advocates, support and sanctuary in the church?

The **first session** will assess the present trends of the violence against women and children in our churches and societies. Participants will share experiences and reflections from their own contexts and identify the key concerns that the churches should take further at local, national and international level.

The **second session** will reflect on how our churches address – or fail to address – these concerns. We will address the theological imperative to overcome violence against women and children and will listen to actions by women in addressing

violence. It will also listen to good examples of men's initiatives in overcoming violence against women and the challenges before men in the churches. Space will be given to the sharing of good practices of the churches in responding to this issue.

The **third session** will focus on looking at ways forward to engage our churches further in their efforts to overcome violence against women and children, and to become both transformed by a renewed commitment to the gospel imperative and agents of transformation in their societies.

Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding

The present document is the result of a study process in response to suggestions made in 2002 at the WCC central committee to the three staff teams on Faith and Order, Inter-religious Relations, and Mission and Evangelism, and their respective commissions or advisory bodies. The question of the theological approach to religious plurality had been on the agenda of the WCC many times, reaching a certain consensus in 1989 and 1990.¹ In recent years, it was felt that this difficult and controversial issue needed to be revisited.

Some twenty scholars from different contexts and denominations, specialized in religious studies, missiology or systematic theology and part of the networks of the three teams, worked for two years in a significant effort of cooperation between different constituencies in the recent history of the WCC.

It must be emphasized that the paper does not represent the view of the WCC. Discussions in commissions showed how important but also how controversial the matter is. Much careful theological work is needed. This document is shared as a background document for discussion and debate. Further comments, critiques and suggestions from assembly participants or churches and other partners are welcome and will be fed into the continuing reflection on the key issue of Christian self-understanding and witness in a religiously plural world.²

Preamble

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it (Ps. 24:1).

For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts (Mal. 1:11).

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35).

1. What do the experiences of the psalmist, the prophet and Peter mean for us today? What does it mean to affirm our faith in Jesus Christ joyfully, and yet seek to discern God's presence and activity in the world? How do we understand such affirmations in a religiously plural world?

I. The challenge of plurality

2. Today Christians in almost all parts of the world live in religiously plural societies. Persistent plurality and its impact on their daily lives are forcing them to seek new and adequate ways of understanding and relating to peoples of other religious tra-

¹ For the world mission conference of 1989, cf. F.R. Wilson ed., *The San Antonio Report*, WCC, 1990, in particular pp.31-33. For the 1990 consultation in Baar, Switzerland, see *Current Dialogue*, no. 19, Jan. 1991, pp.47-51.

² Reactions can be sent to the World Council of Churches, General Secretariat, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland, bc@wcc-coe.org.

ditions. The rise of religious extremism and militancy in many situations has accentuated the importance of inter-religious relations. Religious identities, loyalties and sentiments have become important components in so many international and inter-ethnic conflicts that some say that the “politics of ideology”, which played a crucial role in the 20th century, has been replaced in our day by the “politics of identity”.

3. All religious communities are being reshaped by new encounters and relationships. Globalization of political, economic, and even religious life brings new pressures on communities that have been in geographical or social isolation. There is greater awareness of the interdependence of human life, and of the need to collaborate across religious barriers in dealing with the pressing problems of the world. All religious traditions, therefore, are challenged to contribute to the emergence of a global community that would live in mutual respect and peace. At stake is the credibility of religious traditions as forces that can bring justice, peace and healing to a broken world.

4. Most religious traditions, however, have their own history of compromise with political power and privilege and of complicity in violence that has marred human history. Christianity, for instance, has been, on the one hand, a force that brought the message of God’s unconditional love for and acceptance of all people. On the other hand, its history, sadly, is also marked by persecutions, crusades, insensitivity to Indigenous cultures, and complicity with imperial and colonial designs. In fact, such ambiguity and compromise with power and privilege is part of the history of all religious traditions, cautioning us against a romantic attitude towards them. Further, most religious traditions exhibit enormous internal diversity attended by painful divisions and disputes.

5. Today these internal disputes have to be seen in the light of the need to promote mutual understanding and peace among the religions. Given the context of increased polarization of communities, the prevalent climate of fear, and the culture of violence that has gripped our world, the mission of bringing healing and wholeness to the fractured human community is the greatest challenge that faces the religious traditions in our day.

The changing context of the Christian faith

6. The global religious situation is also in flux. In some parts of the Western world, the institutional expressions of Christianity are in decline. New forms of religious commitment emerge as people increasingly separate personal faith from institutional belonging. The search for authentic spirituality in the context of a secular way of life presents new challenges to the churches. Further, peoples of other traditions, like Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, etc., who have increasingly moved into these areas, as minorities, often experience the need to be in dialogue with the majority community. This challenges Christians to be able to articulate their faith in ways that are meaningful both to them and their neighbours; dialogue presupposes both faith commitment and the capacity to articulate it in word and deed.

7. At the same time, Christianity, especially in its evangelical and Pentecostal manifestations, is growing rapidly in some regions of the world. In some of the other regions, Christianity is undergoing radical changes as Christians embrace new and vibrant forms of church life and enter into new relationships with Indigenous cultures. While Christianity appears to be on the decline in some parts of the world, it has become a dynamic force in others.

8. These changes require us to be more attentive than before to our relationship with other religious communities. They challenge us to acknowledge “others” in their differences, to welcome strangers even if their “strangeness” sometimes threatens us,

and to seek reconciliation even with those who have declared themselves our enemies. In other words, we are being challenged to develop a spiritual climate and a theological approach that contributes to creative and positive relationships among the religious traditions of the world.

9. The cultural and doctrinal differences among religious traditions, however, have always made inter-religious dialogue difficult. This is now aggravated by the tensions and animosities generated by global conflicts and mutual suspicions and fears. Further, the impression that Christians have turned to dialogue as a new tool for their mission, and the controversies over “conversion” and “religious freedom”, have not abated. Therefore dialogue, reconciliation and peace-building across the religious divides have become urgent, and yet they are never achieved through isolated events or programmes. They involve a long and difficult process sustained by faith, courage and hope.

The pastoral and faith dimensions of the question

10. There is a pastoral need to equip Christians to live in a religiously plural world. Many Christians seek ways to be committed to their own faith and yet to be open to the others. Some use spiritual disciplines from other religious traditions to deepen their Christian faith and prayer life. Still others find in other religious traditions an additional spiritual home and speak of the possibility of “double belonging”. Many Christians ask for guidance to deal with interfaith marriages, the call to pray with others, and the need to deal with militancy and extremism. Others seek for guidance as they work together with neighbours of other religious traditions on issues of justice and peace. Religious plurality and its implications now affect our day-to-day lives.

11. As Christians we seek to build a new relationship with other religious traditions because we believe it to be intrinsic to the gospel message and inherent to our mission as co-workers with God in healing the world. Therefore the mystery of God’s relationship to all God’s people, and the many ways in which peoples have responded to this mystery, invite us to explore more fully the reality of other religious traditions and our own identity as Christians in a religiously plural world.

II. Religious traditions as spiritual journeys

The Christian journey

12. It is common to speak of religious traditions being “spiritual journeys”. Christianity’s spiritual journey has enriched and shaped its development into a religious tradition. It emerged initially in a predominantly Jewish-Hellenistic culture. Christians have had the experience of being “strangers”, and of being persecuted minorities struggling to define themselves in the midst of dominant religious and cultural forces. And as Christianity grew into a world religion, it has become internally diversified, transformed by the many cultures with which it came into contact.

13. In the East, the Orthodox churches have throughout their history been involved in a complex process of cultural engagement and discernment, maintaining and transmitting the Orthodox faith through integration of select cultural aspects over the centuries. On the other hand, the Orthodox churches have also struggled to resist the temptation towards syncretism. In the West, having become the religious tradition of a powerful empire, Christianity has at times been a persecuting majority. It also became the “host” culture, shaping European civilization in many positive ways. At the same time, it has had a troubled history in its relationship with Judaism, Islam, and Indigenous traditions.

14. The Reformation transformed the face of Western Christianity, introducing Protestantism with its proliferation of confessions and denominations, while the Enlightenment brought about a cultural revolution with the emergence of modernity, secularization, individualism, and the separation of church and state. Missionary expansions into Asia, Africa, Latin America and other parts of the world raised questions about the indigenization and inculturation of the gospel. The encounter between the rich spiritual heritage of the Asian religions and the African Traditional Religions resulted in the emergence of theological traditions based on the cultural and religious heritages of these regions. The rise of charismatic and Pentecostal churches in all parts of the world has added yet a new dimension to Christianity.

15. In short, the “spiritual journey” of Christianity has made it a very complex worldwide religious tradition. As Christianity seeks to live among cultures, religions and philosophic traditions and attempts to respond to the present and future challenges, it will continue to be transformed. It is in this context, of a Christianity that has been and is changing, that we need a theological response to plurality.

Religions, identities and cultures

16. Other religious traditions have also lived through similar challenges in their development. There is no one expression of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, etc. As these religions journeyed out of their lands of origin they too have been shaped by the encounters with the cultures they moved into, transforming and being transformed by them. Most of the major religious traditions today have had the experience of being cultural “hosts” to other religious traditions, and of being “hosted” by cultures shaped by religious traditions other than their own. This means that the identities of religious communities and of individuals within them are never static, but fluid and dynamic. No religion is totally unaffected by its interaction with other religious traditions. Increasingly it has become rather misleading even to talk of “religions” as such, and of “Judaism”, “Christianity”, “Islam”, “Hinduism”, “Buddhism”, etc., as if they were static, undifferentiated wholes.

17. These realities raise several spiritual and theological issues. What is the relationship between “religion” and “culture”? What is the nature of the influence they have on one another? What theological sense can we make of religious plurality? What resources within our own tradition can help us deal with these questions? We have the rich heritage of the modern ecumenical movement’s struggle with these questions to help us in our exploration.

III. Continuing an ongoing exploration

The ecumenical journey

18. From the very beginnings of the church, Christians have believed that the message of God’s love witnessed to in Christ needs to be shared with others. It is in the course of sharing this message, especially in Asia and Africa, that the modern ecumenical movement had to face the question of God’s presence among people of other traditions. Is God’s revelation present in other religions and cultures? Is the Christian revelation in “continuity” with the religious life of others, or is it “discontinuous”, bringing in a whole new dimension of knowledge of God? These were difficult questions and Christians remain divided over the issue.

19. The *dialogue programme* of the World Council of Churches (WCC) has emphasized the importance of respecting the reality of other religious traditions and

affirming their distinctiveness and identity. It has also brought into focus the need to collaborate with others in the search for a just and peaceful world. There is also greater awareness of how our ways of speaking about our and other religious traditions can lead to confrontations and conflicts. On the one hand, religious traditions make universal truth claims. On the other hand, these claims by implication may be in conflict with the truth claims of others. These realizations, and actual experiences of relationships between peoples of different traditions in local situations, opened the way for Christians to speak of our relationship with others in terms of “dialogue”. Yet, there are many questions awaiting further exploration. What does it mean to be in dialogue when the communities concerned are in conflict? How does one deal with the perceived conflict between conversion and religious freedom? How do we deal with the deep differences among faith communities over the relationship of religious traditions to ethnicity, cultural practices and the state?

20. Within the discussions in the *commission on World Mission and Evangelism* (CWME) of the WCC the exploration of the nature of the missionary mandate and its implications in a world of diverse religions, cultures and ideologies have drawn on the concept of *missio Dei*, God’s own salvific mission in the world, even preceding human witness, in which we are in Christ called to participate. Several issues of CWME’s agenda interact with the present study on religious plurality: What is the relation between cooperation with people of other religious traditions (for justice and peace), involvement in inter-religious dialogue, and the evangelistic mandate of the church? What are the consequences of the intrinsic relation between cultures and religions for the inculturation approach in mission? What are the implications for interfaith relations if mission focuses, as the 2005 conference on world mission and evangelism suggests, on building healing and reconciling communities?

21. The WCC’s *plenary commission on Faith and Order*, meeting for the first time in a Muslim-majority country (in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2004) spoke of the “journey of faith” as one inspired by the vision of “receiving one another”. The commission asked: How do the churches pursue the goal of visible Christian unity within today’s increasingly multi-religious context? How can the search for visible unity among the churches be an effective sign for reconciliation in society as a whole? To what extent are questions of ethnic and national identity affected by religious identities and vice versa? The commission also explored broader questions arising in multi-religious contexts: What are the challenges which Christians face in seeking an authentic Christian theology that is “hospitable” to others? What are the limits to diversity? Are there valid signs of salvation beyond the church? How do insights from other traditions contribute to our understanding of what it means to be human?

22. It is significant that all three programmatic streams of the WCC converge in dealing with questions that are relevant for a theology of religions. In fact, attempts have been made in recent conferences to deal with, and formulate, positions that take the discussions forward.

Recent developments

23. In its search for consensus among Christians about God’s saving presence in the religious life of our neighbours, the world mission conference in San Antonio (1989) summed up the position that the WCC has been able to affirm: “We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God.” Recognizing the tension between such a statement and the affirmation of God’s presence and work in the life of peoples of other faith tradi-

tions, the San Antonio report said that “we appreciate this tension, and do not attempt to resolve it”. The question following the conference was whether the ecumenical movement should remain with these modest words as an expression of theological humility, or whether it should deal with that tension in finding new and creative formulations in a theology of religions.

24. In an attempt to go beyond San Antonio, a WCC consultation on theology of religions in Baar, Switzerland (1990), produced an important statement, drawing out the implications of the Christian belief that God is active as Creator and Sustainer in the religious life of all peoples: “This conviction that God as Creator of all is present and active in the plurality of religions makes it inconceivable to us that God’s saving activity could be confined to any one continent, cultural type, or group of people. A refusal to take seriously the many and diverse religious testimonies to be found among the nations and peoples of the whole world amounts to disowning the biblical testimony to God as Creator of all things and Father of humankind.”

25. Hence, developments in the Mission and Evangelism, Faith and Order, and Dialogue streams of the WCC encourage us to reopen the question of the theology of religions today. Such an inquiry has become an urgent theological and pastoral necessity. The theme of the ninth WCC assembly, “God, in Your Grace, Transform the World”, also calls for such an exploration.

IV. Towards a theology of religions

26. What would a theology of religions look like today? Many theologies of religions have been proposed. The many streams of thinking within the scriptures make our task challenging. While recognizing the diversity of the scriptural witness, we choose the theme of “hospitality” as a hermeneutical key and an entry point for our discussion.

Celebrating the hospitality of a gracious God

27. Our theological understanding of religious plurality begins with our faith in the one God who created all things, the living God present and active in all creation from the beginning. The Bible testifies to God as God of all nations and peoples, whose love and compassion includes all humankind. We see in the covenant with Noah a covenant with all creation that has never been broken. We see God’s wisdom and justice extending to the ends of the earth, as God guides the nations through their traditions of wisdom and understanding. God’s glory penetrates the whole of creation. The Hebrew Bible witnesses to the universal saving presence of God throughout human history through the Word or Wisdom and the Spirit.

28. In the New Testament, the incarnation of the Word of God is spoken of by St Paul in terms of hospitality and of a life turned towards the “other”. Paul proclaims, in doxological language, that “though he (Christ) was in the form of God he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8). The self-emptying of Christ, and his readiness to assume our humanity, is at the heart of the confession of our faith. The mystery of the incarnation is God’s deepest identification with our human condition, showing the unconditional grace of God that accepted humankind in its otherness and estrangement. Paul’s hymn moves on to celebrate the risen Christ: “Therefore God has highly exalted him, and given him

the name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). This has led Christians to confess Jesus Christ as the one in whom the entire human family has been united to God in an irrevocable bond and covenant.

29. This grace of God shown in Jesus Christ calls us to an attitude of hospitality in our relationship to others. Paul prefaces the hymn by saying, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). Our hospitality involves self-emptying, and in receiving others in unconditional love we participate in the pattern of God’s redeeming love. Indeed our hospitality is not limited to those in our own community; the gospel commands us to love even our enemies and to call for blessings upon them (Matt. 5:43-48; Rom. 12:14). As Christians, therefore, we need to search for the right balance between our identity in Christ and our openness to others in kenotic love that comes out of that very identity.

30. In his public ministry, Jesus not only healed people who were part of his own tradition but also responded to the great faith of the Canaanite woman and the Roman centurion (Matt. 15:21-28, 8:5-11). Jesus chose a “stranger”, the Samaritan, to demonstrate the fulfilling of the commandment to love one’s neighbour through compassion and hospitality. Since the gospels present Jesus’ encounter with those of other faiths as incidental, and not as part of his main ministry, these stories do not provide us with the necessary information to draw clear conclusions regarding any theology of religions. But they do present Jesus as one whose hospitality extended to all who were in need of love and acceptance. Matthew’s narrative of Jesus’ parable of the last judgment goes further to identify openness to the victims of society, hospitality to strangers and acceptance of the other as unexpected ways of being in communion with the risen Christ (25:31-46).

31. It is significant that while Jesus extended hospitality to those at the margins of society he himself had to face rejection and was often in need of hospitality. Jesus’ acceptance of the peoples at the margins, as well as his own experience of rejection has provided the inspiration for those who show solidarity in our day with the poor, the despised and the rejected. Thus the biblical understanding of hospitality goes well beyond the popular notion of extending help and showing generosity towards others. The Bible speaks of hospitality primarily as a radical openness to others based on the affirmation of the dignity of all. We draw our inspiration both from Jesus’ example and his command that we love our neighbours.

32. The Holy Spirit helps us to live out Christ’s openness to others. The person of the Holy Spirit moved and still moves over the face of the earth to create, nurture and sustain, to challenge, renew and transform. We confess that the activity of the Spirit passes beyond our definitions, descriptions and limitations in the manner of the wind that “blows where it wills” (John 3:8). Our hope and expectancy are rooted in our belief that the “economy” of the Spirit relates to the whole creation. We discern the Spirit of God moving in ways that we cannot predict. We see the nurturing power of the Holy Spirit working within, inspiring human beings in their universal longing for, and seeking after, truth, peace and justice (Rom. 8:18-27). “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”, wherever they are found, are the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23, cf. Rom. 14:17).

33. We believe that this encompassing work of the Holy Spirit is also present in the life and traditions of peoples of living faith. People have at all times and in all places responded to the presence and activity of God among them, and have given their witness to their encounters with the living God. In this testimony they speak both of

seeking and of having found wholeness, or enlightenment, or divine guidance, or rest, or liberation. This is the context in which we as Christians testify to the salvation we have experienced through Christ. This ministry of witness among our neighbours of other faiths must presuppose an “affirmation of what God has done and is doing among them” (CWME, San Antonio 1989).

34. We see the plurality of religious traditions as both the result of the manifold ways in which God has related to peoples and nations as well as a manifestation of the richness and diversity of human response to God’s gracious gifts. It is our Christian faith in God which challenges us to take seriously the whole realm of religious plurality, always using the gift of discernment. Seeking to develop new and greater understandings of “the wisdom, love and power which God has given to men (and women) of other faiths” (New Delhi report, 1961), we must affirm our “openness to the possibility that the God we know in Jesus Christ may encounter us also in the lives of our neighbours of other faiths” (CWME, San Antonio 1989). We also believe that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, will lead us to understand anew the deposit of the faith already given to us, and into fresh and unforeseen insight into the divine mystery, as we learn more from our neighbours of other faiths.

35. Thus, it is our faith in the trinitarian God, God who is diversity in unity, God who creates, brings wholeness, and nurtures and nourishes all life, which helps us in our hospitality of openness to all. We have been the recipients of God’s generous hospitality of love. We cannot do otherwise.

V. The call to hospitality

36 How should Christians respond in light of the generosity and graciousness of God? “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2). In today’s context the “stranger” includes not only the people unknown to us, the poor and the exploited, but also those who are ethnically, culturally and religiously “others” to us. The word “stranger” in the scriptures does not intend to objectify the “other” but recognizes that there are people who are indeed “strangers” to us in their culture, religion, race and other kinds of diversities that are part of the human community. Our willingness to accept others in their “otherness” is the hallmark of true hospitality. Through our openness to the “other” we may encounter God in new ways. Hospitality, thus, is both the fulfillment of the commandment to “love our neighbours as ourselves” and an opportunity to discover God anew.

37. Hospitality also pertains to how we treat each other within the Christian family; sometimes we are as much strangers to each other as we are to those outside our community. Because of the changing world context, especially increased mobility and population movements, sometimes we are the “hosts” to others, and at other times we become the “guests” receiving the hospitality of others; sometimes we receive “strangers” and at other times we become the “strangers” in the midst of others. Indeed we may need to move to an understanding of hospitality as “mutual openness” that transcends the distinctions of “hosts” and “guests”.

38. Hospitality is not just an easy or simple way of relating to others. It is often not only an opportunity but also a risk. In situations of political or religious tension acts of hospitality may require great courage, especially when extended to those who deeply disagree with us or even consider us as their enemy. Further, dialogue is very difficult when there are inequalities between parties, distorted power relations or

hidden agendas. One may also at times feel obliged to question the deeply held beliefs of the very people whom one has offered hospitality to or received hospitality from, and to have one's own beliefs be challenged in return.

The power of mutual transformation

39. Christians have not only learned to co-exist with people of other religious traditions, but have also been transformed by their encounters. We have discovered unknown aspects of God's presence in the world, and uncovered neglected elements of our own Christian traditions. We have also become more conscious of the many passages in the Bible that call us to be more responsive to others.

40. Practical hospitality and a welcoming attitude to strangers create the space for mutual transformation and even reconciliation. Such reciprocity is exemplified in the story of the meeting between Abraham, the father of faith, and Melchizedek, the non-Israelite king of Salem (Gen. 14). Abraham received the blessing of Melchizedek, who is described as a priest of "God Most High". The story suggests that through this encounter Abraham's understanding of the nature of the deity who had led him and his family from Ur and Harran was renewed and expanded.

41. Mutual transformation is also seen in Luke's narrative of the encounter between Peter and Cornelius in the Acts of the Apostles. The Holy Spirit accomplished a transformation in Peter's self-understanding through his vision and subsequent interaction with Cornelius. This led him to confess that, "God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (10:34-35). In this case, Cornelius the "stranger" becomes an instrument of Peter's transformation, even as Peter becomes an instrument of transformation of Cornelius and his household. While this story is not primarily about interfaith relations, it sheds light on how God can lead us beyond the confines of our self-understanding in encounter with others.

42. So one can draw consequences from these examples, and from such rich experiences in daily life, for a vision of mutual hospitality among peoples of different religious traditions. From the Christian perspective, this has much to do with our ministry of reconciliation. It presupposes both our witness to the "other" about God in Christ and our openness to allow God to speak to us through the "other". Mission when understood in this light has no room for triumphalism; it contributes to removing the causes for religious animosity and the violence that often goes with it. Hospitality requires Christians to accept others as created in the image of God, knowing that God may talk to us through others to teach and transform us, even as God may use us to transform others.

43. The biblical narrative and experiences in the ecumenical ministry show that such mutual transformation is at the heart of authentic Christian witness. Openness to the "other" can change the "other", even as it can change us. It may give others new perspectives on Christianity and on the gospel; it may also enable them to understand their own faith from new perspectives. Such openness, and the transformation that comes from it, can in turn enrich our lives in surprising ways.

VI. Salvation belongs to God

44. The religious traditions of humankind, in their great diversity, are "journeys" or "pilgrimages" towards human fulfillment in search for the truth about our existence. Even though we may be "strangers" to each other, there are moments in which our

paths intersect that call for “religious hospitality”. Both our personal experiences today and historical moments in the past witness to the fact that such hospitality is possible and does take place in small ways.

45. Extending such hospitality is dependent on a theology that is hospitable to the “other”. Our reflections on the nature of the biblical witness to God, what we believe God to have done in Christ, and the work of the Spirit show that at the heart of the Christian faith lies an attitude of hospitality that embraces the “other” in their otherness. It is this spirit that needs to inspire the theology of religions in a world that needs healing and reconciliation. And it is this spirit that may also bring about our solidarity with all who, irrespective of their religious beliefs, have been pushed to the margins of society.

46. We need to acknowledge that human limitations and limitations of language make it impossible for any community to have exhausted the mystery of the salvation God offers to humankind. All our theological reflections in the last analysis are limited by our own experience and cannot hope to deal with the scope of God’s work of mending the world.

47. It is this humility that enables us to say that salvation belongs to God, God only. We do not possess salvation; we participate in it. We do not offer salvation; we witness to it. We do not decide who would be saved; we leave it to the providence of God. For our own salvation is an everlasting “hospitality” that God has extended to us. It is God who is the “host” of salvation. And yet, in the eschatological vision of the new heaven and the new earth, we also have the powerful symbol of God becoming both a “host” and a “guest” among us: “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples...” (Rev. 21:3).

Global Christian Forum

Summary of the Report to the Ninth Assembly¹

At the eighth assembly (Harare, December 1998), a proposal for a forum of Christian churches and ecumenical organizations was presented and discussed in policy reference committee I and in plenary. The assembly encouraged the central committee to continue the process of consultation, and affirmed further work towards the goal of a more effective, more sustaining, more inclusive network of relationships.

The “forum proposal” as it came to be known, evolved out of the reflection process on the Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches (CUV). The proposal was to explore the potential of a forum that would reflect a broader pattern of relationships than the fellowship of WCC member churches. Such a forum should bring together churches participating in the ecumenical movement, e.g. WCC member churches, the Catholic church, other churches, and Evangelical, Pentecostal and Independent churches, as well as ecumenical and para-church organizations. A consultation was held at Bossey in August 1998, which produced the document that went to the Harare assembly. At this consultation a small continuation committee was set up, which became responsible for the process after the Harare assembly.

1. Process of consultation

The following meetings have taken place in the period from the eighth to the ninth assembly:

- September 2000 Meeting between the continuation committee and a group of Evangelical and Pentecostal leaders from around the world, to discuss common interest in the forum proposal. Venue: Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, USA.
- June 2002 First international forum consultation of about sixty participants from many parts of the world, representing all the main Christian traditions, with a relative majority of Evangelical, Pentecostal and Independent participation (about 50 percent). Venue: Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, USA.
- May 2004 Asia consultation on a forum, bringing together about fifty participants representing all the main Christian traditions in Asia, with a relative majority of Evangelical and Pentecostal participation. Venue: Hong Kong, China SAR.
- August 2005 Africa consultation on a forum, bringing together about sixty participants representing all the main Christian traditions in Africa,

¹ The issue of a global Christian forum is on the agenda of the policy reference committee, which will propose action to be taken by the assembly. Copies of the full report can be obtained from the policy reference committee at the assembly or from the WCC, General Secretariat, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland, bc@wcc-coe.org.

with a relative majority of Evangelical, Pentecostal and African Instituted churches participation. Venue: Lusaka, Zambia.

At the meeting in September 2000, it was proposed to use the name *global Christian forum*, as a designation acceptable to all the Christian traditions participating in the process.

The continuation committee has met annually in the period from the eighth to the ninth assembly. The composition of the committee has increased from seven to eleven members, and the committee has become more representative of Evangelical and Pentecostal participation in the forum process.

In 2003 the continuation committee worked out an action plan for the period 2004-2007. Following an advice of the June 2002 consultation, it was decided to hold consultations in four major regions of the world (Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America) in 2004-2006, and to envisage a global “forum event” in 2007, as a culmination of the process.

2. Provisional purpose

The participants at the first forum consultation (June 2002) discussed in some depth the basis for participation in a global Christian forum and offered a provisional purpose statement:

To create an open space wherein representatives from a broad range of Christian churches and interchurch organizations, which confess the triune God and Jesus Christ as perfect in his divinity and humanity, can gather to foster mutual respect, to explore and address together common challenges.

In the spirit of John 17:21 “that all of them may be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me” and because of our faith in a reconciling God (2 Cor. 5:18-21) a forum could pursue the following:

- *deepen our commitment to God’s word and mission in the world;*
- *enhance our understanding of contemporary expressions of Christian mission;*
- *pursue principles and practices that enable us to deal freely, responsibly and peaceably with our Christian differences and distinctive qualities;*
- *engage in theological reflection in areas of mutual concern;*
- *strengthen the wholeness of the church by encouraging communication and cooperation; and*
- *foster relationships that may lead to common witness.*

This provisional statement has been discussed in subsequent consultations, and will be shared for discussion at future meetings. It is not submitted to changes at each stage of the process. Comments and suggestions are noted, with the intention to design a way whereby an improved formulation can be offered, possibly at the time of a future global forum event.

3. Progress made

3.1. All the meetings held so far, as well as the many discussions that have been going on in various circles, point to a general perception that a global Christian forum is timely. Time has come to move beyond the 20th-century divide of “ecumenical” and “evangelical”. A forum responds to an expectation, and this is so on both sides.

3.2. In all the meetings, the participants have enthusiastically supported the forum concept. They have underlined the importance of a forum as a process, that should involve a steadily increasing and widening range of churches and Christian organizations, and their representatives.

3.3. The process has enabled people from Christian traditions who have not been in conversation with each other before to meet and enter into dialogue. A global Christian forum is fulfilling its purpose of creating a new space for ecumenical-evangelical encounter, a space where trust can grow.

3.4. The notion of a forum has contributed to creating new relationships. A crucial element in all the meetings has been the exercise of sharing the faith journeys and the stories of the faith communities by the individual participants (with sixty people around the table this can take more than a full day!). This has proven to be a powerful means of discovering the faith convictions that are held in common, and overcoming mutual prejudices.

3.5. All the consultations have benefitted from local experiences reported by the participants, and have in turn contributed to discussions and initiatives at regional and local levels. In Asia as well as in Africa, the meetings have already resulted in a regional follow-up.

3.6. A forum is supported by the Christian world communions, which in various ways have participated in the meetings. The conference of secretaries of Christian world communions has received progress reports on a forum, and has stated its support in writing.

3.7. It has been possible so far to avoid any direction of the forum process that could have led to the creation of a new organization or institution, or any concept of “membership”, or the formation of a new fellowship of churches over against existing ones. A forum continues to be based on participation, with no other structure than a committee and a small secretariat.

4. Difficulties encountered

4.1. The issue of a forum has been a much longer process than was initially thought. In the 1998 proposal it was expected that a high-level, global forum meeting of 150–250 participants could be held within two years after the Harare assembly.

4.2. Up to now, several major Pentecostal organizations and churches have declined invitations to participate, e.g. the World Pentecostal Fellowship, the World Assemblies of God, the Assemblies of God (USA). The World Evangelical Fellowship has been involved informally.

4.3. It has not always been possible to expect or obtain official representation of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches and organizations. Invitations have sometimes to be addressed to individuals, who at best are able to work out some degree of informal understanding with their constituency about their participation.

4.4. The limitations of representation of WCC member churches on the continuation committee have an adverse effect on their sense of ownership of a forum and their commitment to it.

4.5. The discussions have generally not gone beyond some preliminary exchanges on the understanding of the church and its mission. In order to go deeper into dialogue,

it will be necessary to develop a common agenda. It can be expected that when controversial issues come on the table, it will become more difficult to stay together.

4.6. The idea of a global Christian forum is not well known in the churches. The negative side of its light operating structure is that the mechanisms for effective communication and information are missing.

4.7. A forum has no financial basis. For each activity, funds have to be raised, and the number of churches and organizations which contribute has remained limited.

5. A forum and the WCC

In all the meetings and consultations, as well as in the correspondence and in the information on a forum, the continuation committee has explained the role of the WCC as the initiator and sustainer of the process. While this had sometimes to be done with care, it has never been hidden. From its side, the central committee has acknowledged the necessary independence of the continuation committee. It is within this understanding that the continuation committee has understood the space it was given, as the opportunity to be an autonomous body fully responsible for the task entrusted to it, and accountable to all the participants in a forum.

All along the process thus far, there has been regular reporting on a global Christian forum to the governing bodies of the WCC. In order for a forum to advance, it is essential that the WCC continue to participate, and that it does so in the perspective of the CUV, that is, as a participant together with others. Yet the role of the WCC has been distinctively different from that of other participating bodies, because it has not only launched the process, but also provided staff support and resources. The progress of the idea of a forum up to this point is largely due to the willingness, and the ability, of the WCC to give this level of assistance.

6. Future plans

At its most recent meeting, in August 2005, the continuation committee decided to carry on with the process as outlined in the 2004–2007 action plan, in other words to hold two more meetings in major regions in 2006, and to convene a “global forum event” in 2007:

Europe	June 2006 (timing is tentative)
Latin America	November 2006 (timing is tentative)

These two consultations will basically have the same design as the previous ones. Contacts will soon be taken with the respective REOs and other regional bodies.

Global event	November 2007 (timing is tentative)
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The global event is in principle the implementation of the original forum proposal. However, its shape, composition, content and size require further reflection, discussion and input from the various churches and organizations participating in the forum process, in light of the experiences that have been gained. The continuation committee has developed some broad guidelines:

- a) It should be an opportunity of consolidation of all that will have been achieved by that time.
- b) It should include all the main traditions of the Christian family worldwide. If any one of these is not prepared to join, the meeting should be postponed until a more favourable time.

- c) It should be representative of leadership at a significant level. Clarity and agreement on the level of representation is one of the major points for further reflection and discussion.
- d) The main argument for calling together a global forum of representatives of all the Christian traditions is that such a “space” for encounter and fellowship currently does not exist.
- e) The meeting should promote Christian unity, and be a “hope-giving” event for Christians, churches and the world.
- f) The choice of the venue of the meeting will have important implications. A set of criteria needs to be developed in order to decide on the venue.

The continuation committee sees the global event as the time for it to give an account of the work done, and to hand back its responsibility.

7. Action by the ninth assembly

It is hoped that the ninth assembly of the WCC will:

- receive the report on a global Christian forum, express its views on the process “from Harare to Porto Alegre”, and offer guidance for the future plans;
- recommend to the member churches to participate in such a forum and provide support, including financial;
- recommend the participation of the WCC in the global forum event of November 2007;
- consider the implications of a global Christian forum for the process of reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement, and provide recommendations for the relationships between the two processes.

Members of the continuation committee: Rev. Dr W. Granberg-Michaelson, WCC; Rev. Fr M. Gundiaev, Moscow Patriarchate; Rev. Dr Han Sang-Ehil, Church of God (Cleveland, USA); Rev. Richard Howell, Evangelical Fellowship of India; Dr Musimbi Kanyoro, World Young Women’s Christian Association; Metropolitan Mar Gregorios, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch; Rev. Kuzipa Nalwamba, United Church of Zambia; Mgr John Radano, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; Dr Cecil M. Robeck, Pentecostal; Rev. Sarah Rowland Jones, Anglican Communion; Dr George Vandervelde, Institute for Christian Studies.

Joint Consultative Group WCC-Pentecostals (JCGP) 2000-2005

Excerpts from the Report to the Ninth Assembly¹

Created on the basis of a decision taken by the Harare assembly of the WCC, the Joint Consultative Group (JCG) met for the first time at the Abbey of Hautecombe, France, 19–23 June 2000, where it adopted the following purpose for its work:

Seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in response to the invitation of the eighth assembly of the World Council of Churches, we have come together. We believe the purposes of our group are:

- to search for better ways of understanding one another;
- to look for new opportunities for mutual learning and action;
- to share our experience of Christian witness with one another;
- to discuss our challenges with the hope of moving beyond them;
- to share what we will learn with our respective churches, leading to our affirmation of the common life in the Spirit.

Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:19-20).

The following annual meetings took place: Quito, Ecuador (2001), Seoul, Korea (2002), Cleveland, TN, USA (2003), Johannesburg, South Africa, (2004) and Cairo, Egypt (2005).

At its last meeting, the JCG worked and agreed on two texts which summarize some common trends discerned in the dialogues and important challenges which remain, and formulated recommendations to the Porto Alegre assembly. These three texts are reproduced below:

Affirming Our Faith Together

Since 2000, in response to the mandate of the 1998 WCC assembly held in Harare, Zimbabwe, the Joint Consultative Group has brought together representatives from a range of WCC member churches and from a range of Pentecostal churches from around the world. When we members of this group first came together, in Hautecombe, France, we came with our fears, stereotypes and apprehensions, as well as with our confidence and hope. As we have prayed together, listened together to the proclamation of the word of God, engaged in Bible studies and in dialogue with one another, we have enjoyed a genuine sense of community with one another.

¹ The JCGP is on the agenda of the policy reference committee, which will propose action to be taken by the assembly. Copies of the full report can be obtained from the policy reference committee or the WCC, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland.

Our time spent in prayer and Bible study and our testimonies of the work that God has done and continues to accomplish in our lives have revealed that each of us shares a deep, personal devotion to God, and each of us has manifested a desire to act according to the will of God. We have been able to address many of the stereotypes that have contributed to our divisions, misunderstanding and misconceptions. We have changed many of the false images about one another, and we have set to rest many of our apprehensions.

We have come to realize that we have much more in common than we had realized when we first came together. All of us understand that there is only one church. It is not our church, but rather, the church of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is He who has called us together, and has called us to be the body of Christ, and it is to him that we give our love, devotion and allegiance. We recognize him as the head of the church. It is also the case that, through our mutual acceptance of one another in our prayer and work together (Eph. 4:2-3), we have come to recognize that we are all Christians. We have confessed Jesus Christ to be our Lord and Saviour according to the scripture and we have sought to follow him. We have called upon the Holy Spirit, the giver and sustainer of life, to be with us throughout the journey. We have also come to see the light of Christ in one another, and therefore are, as St Paul says, "members of one another" (Rom. 12:5).

Each time we have gathered together, we have prayed together. In our prayers, we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit, and we have prayed to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who hears our prayers. We have also made it a regular practice to read and study the scriptures together. We find in the scriptures an unparalleled authority for the ongoing life of the church and its members. We have been taught, challenged, strengthened, encouraged and comforted by the words of scripture as they have been inspired in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Though not always in agreement about the ways and methods of reading and interpreting the scriptures, we continue to grow in our appreciation of the varieties of ways in which scripture is understood. We are not yet in agreement on the meaning of all biblical texts, but have come to understand that these writings, inspired by the Holy Spirit, bear richer meanings than we originally thought. We have been able to learn from one another throughout our Bible studies.

In our time together, we have been touched by the richness of the diversity among us. We come from many places. We come with varied histories. We come from many denominations with different expectations. We come from many races and ethnic communities, and we come as older and younger men and women. We have therefore come to appreciate the gifts that each other brings to the dialogue. We have come to recognize more fully the diversity that fills the church of Jesus Christ. We have come to see that place must be made for each one to share within the whole body that which God has given to him or her (1 Cor. 12ff.). Our work together has been marked by this sharing, and our report of our meetings has been touched in some way by each of us. We believe that before God, we stand as equals, regardless of our differences and diversity. We recognize that while the various gifts that we bring are important, their value is enhanced by the realization that together they contribute as a whole to the one body of Christ.

All of us agree that we are to proclaim the goodness of God and the good news of the gospel to the world. Through what God has done for us in the life, death and resurrection of his Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, we have been given new life in Christ, and therefore have gained entry into the presence of God in a new way. We have been empowered for the life and work that God has so generously given to us and have hope

for the future. There can be a particular emphasis upon proclaiming this message of salvation and hope through Jesus Christ by word of mouth. Another emphasis is the demonstration of the reality of this message through the testimony of signs and wonders. Alternatively there can be an emphasis upon proclamation through a ministry of consistent living or by ministering through various acts in the world that are performed in the name of Jesus Christ. Most would embrace more than one emphasis. We have come to appreciate that, while these different methods originate in the example of Jesus Christ, our practice must always be tested against Christ's ministry. We realize, therefore, that we need to become aware of the various forms by which the gospel is proclaimed and should develop, for the sake of our dialogue, a method of discussion that is intent on gaining knowledge rather than criticizing one another.

In our discussions, it has become clear to us that the present divisions in the Christian community hinder the work and witness of the church in the world. These divisions confuse those who look to the gospel for hope. We feel many Christians, including ourselves have failed to live up to the common calling to be sisters and brothers in Christ, who love one another, submit to one another, and seek to build up the entire body of Christ. The central message of the gospel is that all be healed and reconciled to God and to one another through Jesus Christ. We recognize our own culpability in not heeding this message to its fullest.

The question of the discernment of the Spirit has emerged on several occasions in our discussions. How do we know if it is the Spirit that is at work in us and in our communities, or whether what we claim to be the Spirit working in us is not of human interests? How do we know where the limits of our faith and our actions should be placed? We were in agreement that these questions are important, but also very difficult to answer. We have not yet agreed on a common understanding of the criteria that might be used to discern the Spirit and set boundaries, nor have we always been clear about who has the authority to do so. We recognize that Christ has taught us not to judge one another (Matt. 6), while at the same time the scriptures call us to discern the spirits, to test the fruits of our actions, and to enter into discipline within the Christian community. As we have listened to each other, we have come to understand the centrality of these issues for our dialogue, and the necessity to continue wrestling with these questions.

Issues That Challenge Us Further

Throughout our time together, we have discussed the various teachings of our respective churches and the perceptions that we have of one another. Even though we have met regularly for the last six years, the group has just begun to address the many differences and concerns that were raised at our first meeting. What has also become clear is the diversity within each respective group, WCC and Pentecostal; the representatives from the World Council of Churches member churches held differing understandings of specific theological teachings, as did the representatives from among the Pentecostals. This fact added to the richness of our discussions and the complexity of ordering our meetings.

The following are among the areas which need to be addressed more extensively by the JCG in the future:

1. Inadequate understandings of one another still exist and need to be explored more fully. What is perhaps more relevant, though, is the need to share what we have learned from one another with our respective communities.

2. There were initial discussions on the issue of mission and evangelism. The importance of dialogue between churches concerning evangelism, respect for one another's churches, and proselytism cannot be over-estimated. The group is committed to addressing the tension among us and exploring ways that we might be able to work together in mission.
3. The gifts of the Holy Spirit (charismata) are of interest to many members of the group. What are they? How are they defined? How are they manifested? How are they recognized?
4. The sacraments emerged as an area for further discussion. The churches recognize the significance of the sacraments in various ways. What is the role of the sacraments in the life of the church?
5. Even though the group dedicated much time to the study of scripture, more work needs to be done with regard to the different ways in which scripture is interpreted and understood.
6. Spirituality was a main theme throughout our work over the past six years. Our discussions looked at the variety of ways in which the work of the Spirit is discerned. How do we discern the work of the Spirit? What criteria have our respective churches developed for determining the work of the Spirit?
7. And finally, the over-arching question that emerged during our discussions addressed the extent to which World Council of Churches member churches and Pentecostal churches see each other as "churches". In our discussions on Christian unity, we asked: What is the nature of the church? Who are the members of the church? What is church and what is not? What or who is the ultimate authority in the church? What are the criteria by which an individual church recognizes another as church?

These issues are presented by our group to those who will take up the task of continuing this conversation. The Joint Consultative Group sees these issues as the emerging concerns that will help guide the future dialogue between the World Council of Churches and Pentecostals.

Recommendations to the Ninth Assembly

1. We **recommend the continuation of the JCG** with the goal of building relationships through ongoing theological conversations and studies (focusing on themes of the nature of the church, mission, understanding charismatic gifts, sacraments and the nature of scripture, as well as others as they arise) with the hope of delving deeper into our respective theologies, and the education of our respective constituencies.

The JCG should also endeavour in its work to respond to and cooperate with WCC commissions (such as Faith and Order and the commission on World Mission and Evangelism) and other programmatic areas whenever possible.

2. We **recommend the expansion of this type of dialogue** in the following ways:
 - a) At the level of regional, sub-regional and national councils of churches whose purpose could be similar to that of the JCG, namely, to build relationships through education and theological conversations. At each level, this dialogue could take place with the cooperation of the respective ecumenical bodies (i.e., the regional ecumenical organizations). The WCC should take an initiating role in this dialogue by contacting these councils of churches to encourage dialogue and cooperation, and

provide the names of members of the JCG in the region to act as resource persons who would be willing to share their experiences.

- b) Through initiatives by individual members of the JCG, preferably through their respective ecclesial affiliations.
 - c) Through ongoing dialogues with the Christian world communions (such as the bilateral theological consultations).
 - d) By engaging and cooperating in diaconal and practical work together through the various Christian development and aid organizations and Bible societies. We recognize that this work is already taking place in some regions.
 - e) Through dialogue within academic institutions via:
 - 1) consultations on Pentecostalism and ecumenism (which would include academics and denominational leaders);
 - 2) the exploration of ways to introduce the study of ecumenism into the training programmes of Pentecostal seminaries;
 - 3) the exploration of ways to introduce the study of Pentecostalism into the training programmes of ecumenical and denominational institutions of member churches; and
 - 4) publication of journals (whereby the work of Pentecostal scholars would be included in theological journals, and Pentecostals would continue the development of their own ecumenical journals) and websites with the purpose of advancing theological studies and educating all constituencies.
3. We **recommend to Pentecostal churches** that they:
- a) foster intra-Pentecostal dialogues (specifically a North/South dialogue);
 - b) encourage dialogue with WCC member churches at local and national levels; and
 - c) encourage dialogue between Pentecostal churches who are members of the WCC and who are not members of the WCC.
4. We **recommend that the WCC and its member churches:**
- a) plan consultations on Pentecostalism and related themes and include Pentecostals in the participation and planning of these consultations as part of their programmatic work;
 - b) build relationships with Pentecostal churches at local and national levels; and
 - c) enable more Pentecostals to become members of the commissions and advisory groups of the WCC and take a greater part in its programmatic work.

Participants in the JCG

Co-moderators: Cecil M. Robeck Jr (Pentecostals), Bruce Robbins (WCC)

Pentecostal members: Miguel Alvarez, Danielle Augustine, Sheri R. Benvenuti, Harold Hunter, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Japie Jimmy LaPoorta, Young-Hoon Lee, Paulson Pulikottil, Stephen Safwali, Frederick L. Ware

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Mid-Term of the Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-2010: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace

This is a back-ground document shared for information and for continued work in shaping the Decade to Overcome Violence. It raises questions that may allow an interim assessment and points to the course that might be followed during the remaining five-year period, so as to carry the effort of overcoming violence beyond the Decade.

Five years have passed since the ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence was launched in February 2001 in Berlin. The assembly at Porto Alegre, therefore, marks the mid-term of the Decade and offers a welcome opportunity to share experiences, make an interim assessment, and refocus the course to be followed during the second five-year period.

I

It is encouraging that the impulse of the Decade has been taken up in an ever-growing number of churches and regions. The annual thematic and geographic foci on the challenges facing the churches in certain conflict areas and on their witness for peace have helped to forge bonds of ecumenical solidarity in the search for reconciliation and peace.

During the second half of the Decade the task will be to develop these efforts in the direction of firmer alliances and more effective links between churches, networks and movements. The “ecumenical space” that is being offered by the Decade needs to be shaped and filled through mutual visits, by identifying more exemplary initiatives, and by a deliberate focus on the basic elements of the Christian witness for peace, in order to strengthen the unity and the common voice of the churches. Only in this way can the overall goal of the Decade be reached, i.e. to move the search for reconciliation and peace “from the periphery to the centre of the life and witness of the church”.

II

With the Decade the churches in the fellowship of the World Council have entered a course which requires persistence and endurance. The goals of overcoming violence and building a culture of peace imply spiritual, theological and practical challenges for the churches which touch them in the centre of what it means to be church.

At the opening of the Decade the following goals were formulated:

- Addressing holistically the *wide varieties of violence*, both direct and structural, in homes, communities, and in international arenas, and learning from the local and regional analyses of violence and ways to overcome violence.
- Challenging the churches to *overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence*; to relinquish any theological justification of violence; and to affirm anew the spirituality of reconciliation and active non-violence.

- Creating a *new understanding of security* in terms of cooperation and community, instead of in terms of domination and competition.
- Learning from the *spirituality and resources for peace-building of other faiths to work with communities of other faiths* in the pursuit of peace and to challenge the churches to reflect on the misuse of religious and ethnic identities in pluralistic societies.
- Challenging the *growing militarization* of our world, especially the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Looking back on the first five years of the Decade, what can be said in terms of an interim assessment?

III

1. It is encouraging that many congregations, initiatives and Christian peace services have begun during the first half of the Decade to develop various grassroots projects in order to address the different forms of violence that we experience today in families, in schools, in streets and in civil conflicts. In view of the very diversity of the projects it is necessary, however, to identify places(?) and persons in the churches who accept the responsibility for coordination, networking, advice and improvement of such efforts and for stimulating the sharing of experiences. In a fair number of churches encouraging steps have been taken in this direction. Such efforts are all the more important that only in this way the different projects of non-violent action can achieve relevance in society.

The Decade to Overcome Violence runs parallel to the UN Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. In the context of the analysis of violence worldwide, conducted by the World Health Organization, violence prevention is declared as a public health priority (*World Health Assembly Resolution WHA 49.25*). The Violence Prevention Alliance offers the churches both opportunities and challenges to act as responsive and responsible actors of civil society, in conjunction with governments and non-governmental partners. These collaborations need further strengthening.

At the same time it should be noted that there are churches which so far have made little room in their life and praxis for non-violent ways of thinking and acting. In these cases little has been done to provide resources and structures for activities in the framework of the Decade, and most often there is no responsible accompaniment and coordination of such activities. As a consequence, the Decade is hardly known in some regions, especially by other social forces which are themselves engaged in efforts to prevent violence, and its social and political impact is very limited. Since the Decade is an ecumenical initiative of the community of churches worldwide, members of this community who are engaged in processes of reconciliation will need to share their convictions and their energy with those who have not yet reacted to the strong and clear call: peace-building in non-violent ways is a Christian core virtue and imperative of the gospel message itself.

2. The debate about the whole spectrum of violence has started. Much critical attention has of course been focused on analyzing the different experiences of violence. It has to be noted that individual and interpersonal violence are prevalent, constituting eighty percent of the world's casualties in terms of physical violence. During the second half of the Decade emphasis should now be placed more deliberately on the

search for concrete and realistic ways of “overcoming the spirit, logic and practice of violence”.

It should be acknowledged, however, that the first half of the Decade was overshadowed by brutal acts of international terrorism and the reactions to it, especially in the form of military interventions in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Seldom before have the spirit, logic and practice of violence manifested themselves so openly. The challenge to the churches to relinquish any theological and ethical justification of violence calls for the exercise of spiritual discernment that draws its strength from a spirituality of active non-violence. Here the churches are in need of mutual support and encouragement. The efforts of the churches in the context of the Decade should be marked even more decisively by profound common ethical-theological reflection and advocacy for non-violent conflict prevention, for civilian forms of conflict-management and peace consolidation, as well as for a “just peace”.

3. The concern for security has become the dominant motif for individual as well as social and political decisions. More and more, traditional approaches based on the notion of national security and its defence by military means seem to be gaining the upper hand once again and tend to supplant the insight that the main objective should be security for people and not only for the state. Human security is the fruit of just relationships in community and of respect for human rights. In light of the recent findings on physical violence, the notion of human security as being safe at home and in the community deserves more attention and education. At the same time, today security is increasingly being threatened through the effects of economic globalization. Therefore, the search for an “Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth” has to be understood as a decisive contribution to the continuation of the Decade.

4. All religious communities and traditions are facing the expectation and the challenge to show the way towards peace and overcoming violence. Often, religious loyalties connected with ethnic identity are being used for purposes of legitimizing and mobilizing in situations of violent power conflicts. For this very reason inter-religious dialogue on the hidden connections between religion and violence has become one of the foci of the Decade. This is true in particular for dialogue between Christians and Muslims. To be sure, “by its very nature, inter-religious dialogue is not an instrument to resolve problems instantly in emergency situations”. However, the trust that has been built through patient dialogue and practical cooperation for the common good “may in times of conflict prevent religion from being used as a weapon”.¹

5. The massive efforts for strengthening security in the context of the so-called “fight against terrorism” have led to noticeable arms proliferation and a growth in the general militarization of the world, following upon a period of actual disarmament in all categories of weapons from anti-personnel mines to nuclear arms. In their activities during the second half of the Decade, the churches should pay more attention to the challenges arising from this situation. While churches are beginning to discern in more depth the ethical demand of the responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves, they are pointing out in particular that international terrorism is not being overcome with military means, i.e. by war; it is rather being encouraged and strengthened. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that an increasing number

¹ *Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions*, WCC, 2003, no. 29, p.12.

of people become victims of violence in civil and local conflicts which are being fought with light and small weapons. This remains a strong challenge to all the churches.

IV

In the long-term the Decade to Overcome Violence will be judged by whether it will have led to a change of consciousness and to deepened insights into the theological, ethical and spiritual foundations of Christian action for peace. During the first half of the Decade the struggle with the question of violence received priority attention. For the remaining five years the search for reconciliation and building a culture of peace should be the main focus. This should be linked with a critical re-reception and further development of the discussion about the ethics of peace in the ecumenical movement.

1. In recent times the notion of a “just peace” has appeared more and more frequently in ecumenical discussion, especially in contrast to that of a “just war”. However, no convincing foundation or action-oriented practical implementation has so far been developed. The insight of biblical wisdom that peace and justice are linked inseparably (Ps. 85) has always been part of basic ecumenical convictions. Interest should therefore be directed to the question of how to overcome the structures of injustice which continue to provoke new violent conflicts. What are the minimal requirements that must be fulfilled with regard to human security and the respect for the rights and dignity of people in order to be able to speak of peace? The respect for human dignity and the active promotion of the common good are imperatives of the gospel of Jesus Christ, i.e. persons, men and women, are created in the image of God and justified by grace. Human rights should therefore be emphasized as a basic element of a praxis of preventing violence and of shaping a just peace. In addition, the effort to build and develop an obligatory rule of law on the national as well as the international level is one of the conditions for a just peace. But there is also the need to review critically the understanding of justice and to develop it in the direction of “restorative” or “transformative” justice with the aim of establishing viable and just relationships in community.

2. The active struggle against the “spirit, logic and practice of violence” should be directed first of all towards developing and appropriating concrete ways and means for the peaceful and non-violent resolution of conflicts. Those who are engaged in this search in the context of the Decade should realize that at its core this is a moral and spiritual struggle in which the religious communities have to take the lead. They have to begin with a critical reassessment of their own contribution to the emergence of a culture of violence and to strengthen the spiritual resources that can help to transform the destructive energy of violence into a constructive force of promoting life. The praxis of non-violence must be rooted in a spirituality that acknowledges one’s own vulnerability and is able, at the same time, to resist being caught in the mentality of perpetrator and victim; that empowers and encourages the powerless to be able to face up to those who misuse their power; that trusts the active presence of the power of God in human conflicts and therefore is able to transcend the seeming lack of alternatives in situations of violence.

3. In the context of the many “truth commissions”, attention has been drawn to the intimate relationship that exists between reconciliation and the uncovering of truth regarding the processes and structures of violence. The effort in South Africa to come to terms with the long history of violence under the apartheid regime has shown that

there is no direct way leading from the uncovering of truth to reconciliation and forgiveness. The gospel is a message of unconditional love, and reconciliation is a process bearing the fruits of love, as Jesus Christ demonstrated. Nevertheless, advocacy for truth and resistance against its distortion have to be considered as an important response to given situations of violence. Most violently fought conflicts are being nourished by distorted mutual perceptions. They live on the projection of enemy images behind which the actual people and their life situation disappear. And yet, no solution of conflict or even a process of reconciliation is possible without the participation of the people concerned. Among all organizations in society the churches are those that are most intimately aware of the true life-situation of the people, because their interpretation of reality in the light of the gospel transcends all political, ethnic and national interests and thus opens the way for a reconciled community in justice. The Decade should strengthen the readiness and courage of the churches “to live in the truth”, even where this places them in opposition to the prevailing political power interests, and thus to open ways towards reconciliation.

4. These basic convictions should be translated into practical action during the second half of the Decade. Throughout the Decade the churches should be encouraged continuously to open themselves even more deliberately in their witness and service to become “ambassadors of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5). This also means that they should offer responsible accompaniment and support for those projects in relation to the Decade that have been initiated by people at the grassroots; this includes providing for coordination – wherever necessary – for advice and possibilities of improvement and the exchange of experiences, as well as financial and material support.

In addition, the churches should be prepared, more than so far has been the case, to affirm publicly and forcefully the concerns and the goals of non-violent projects in the framework of the Decade, and themselves to engage in actions which serve these concerns and goals. In particular, they should actively support all efforts which are aimed at building up structures, instruments, programmes and communities of non-violent, civilian conflict management. In their programmes of education and public information they should promote a civilian and non-violent understanding of security; in their exercise of public responsibility and in dialogue with political partners they should condemn the growing militarization of international politics and the proliferation of small arms. Every attempt to use violence and fear as legitimate tools in politics needs to be rejected.

5. Since its earliest beginnings the ecumenical movement has been a movement for peace and reconciliation. The ecumenical fellowship of churches strongly manifests the conviction that the communion of all saints, which is a gift from God and rooted in God’s triune life, can overcome the culture of enmity and exclusion which continuously leads into the vicious circles of violence. It has become in itself an image for the possibilities of reconciled living together while recognizing continuing diversities. If this community becomes an advocate of all people in all places who suffer from violence, and shows the way for active and non-violent forms of resolving conflict, it can indeed become a credible witness for the hope that is within us: a culture of peace and reconciliation for all of creation.

*Nothing is so characteristically Christian as being a peace-maker.
St Basil the Great*

Glossary

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
adoption of a report	Following reception of a report, the assembly may agree to adopt some or all of its contents as ongoing policy or agreed statement
adviser	A person invited by central committee to participate in an assembly because of specific expertise or significant association with the WCC
APC	assembly planning committee
ARCIC	Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission
business committee [see rule IV.5.]	The body with responsibility for the business agenda of an assembly. For central committee meetings, its executive committee acts as the business committee
CCA	Christian Conference of Asia
CCC	Caribbean Conference of Churches
CCEE	Consilium Conferentiarum Episcoporum Europae
CEC	Conference of European Churches
CECEF	Conseil d’Eglises chrétiennes en France (Council of Christian Churches in France)
CELAM	Latin American Episcopal Conference
CICARWS	Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service
CLAI	Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias (Latin American Council of Churches)
central committee	The body elected by the assembly to carry out the work of the WCC between assembly meetings
consensus process	A process of seeking the common mind of the meeting without resort to a formal vote, engaging in genuine dialogue that is respectful, mutually supportive and empowering whilst prayerfully seeking to discern God’s will
CTBI	Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
CUV	Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches, a document of the WCC
CWME	Commission on World Mission and Evangelism
decision session	A session when delegates make decisions about agenda matters – other participants do not contribute at this stage
delegate	A person appointed to an assembly as an official representative of a member church, with the right to speak and the responsibility to participate in decision-making
delegated observer	A person officially designated by a non-member church and invited by the central committee to participate in an assembly
delegated representative	A person officially designated by an organization in relationship with WCC and invited by the central committee to participate in an assembly
ecclesiological self-understanding	The self-understanding of a church on matters of faith, doctrine and ethics

ECLOF	Ecumenical Church Loan Fund
ENI	Ecumenical News International
executive committee	Elected by central committee, responsible for monitoring programmes and activities of the WCC between central committee meetings; responsible for administrative decisions and staff appointments (other than senior staff)
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
finance committee	Elected by central committee to present annual accounts; reviews, budgets and recommendations regarding all WCC work
general session	A session reserved for ceremonial occasions, public acts of witness and formal addresses
hearing session	A session in which matters are presented with careful attention to the broad range of perspectives member churches hold, issues arising are discussed by participants, and progress is made towards a possible outcome for the assembly. No decisions are taken in this session
ICC	Irish Council of Churches
ICCJ	International Council of Christians and Jews
indicator card – blue	Held at chest level after a speaker has concluded, it indicates coolness towards a point of view, or not ready to approve
indicator card – orange	Held at chest level after a speaker has concluded, it indicates warmth towards a point of view, or ready to approve
indicator cards – both	Held at chest level at any stage, crossed cards indicate a delegate's opinion that it is time to move on
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MECC	Middle East Council of Churches
minutes	The official record of general, hearing and decision sessions of an assembly or central or executive committee meeting, including a record of the discussion, motions and decisions. The minutes will normally incorporate by reference any report of the meeting
minute-takers	Appointed by the business committee to record the official minutes of general, hearing and decision sessions of an assembly or any meeting for which formal minutes must be kept. The minute-taker is usually designated from WCC staff
moderator	The moderator of the assembly
moderator	A person designated to moderate a session
<i>Mutirão</i>	Activities surrounding the assembly in Porto Alegre (celebration, exhibition, reflection, discussion, Bible studies, lectures): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to help participants better understand the issues being discussed – to provide a forum for airing concerns of members churches and ecumenical partners – to encourage participation and ecumenical formation of those new to WCC events – to widen horizons through interaction with the many cultures gathered for the assembly

NCC	National council of churches
NCCA	National Council of Churches in Australia
officers	Moderator and vice-moderators of central committee, and the general secretary
participant	A person participating in the work of the assembly – includes delegates and those with the right to speak but not to participate in decision-making (advisers, delegated representatives of ecumenical organizations, delegated observers from non-member churches, representatives of associate member churches, retiring members of central committee)
PCC	Pacific Conference of Churches
PCCC	Permanent committee on consensus and collaboration
PCPCU	Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
plenary	Meeting in session of the entire assembly in the one place
point of order	An interjection by a participant to make personal explanation if misrepresented, to object to offensive language, or to seek for the issue under discussion to be dealt with in private
president	One of up to eight eminent persons elected by the previous assembly to promote ecumenism and interpret the work of the WCC especially in her/his region; ex-officio a member of central committee
procedural proposal	A proposal for a variation to the procedures.
rapporteur	Person appointed by the business committee to prepare an account of the discussion of a hearing session or report of a committee meeting for which minutes are not kept. A rapporteur appointed for a committee meeting shall function as a recorder of that meeting
reception of a report	Agreement to consider the substance of a report. No action is implied as a result – either the report as a whole must be adopted if its substance is to become policy, or specific proposals arising from the report must be considered in their own right before agreement to act can be assumed
record of session	An account of the discussion during hearing or decision sessions including final language of decisions taken
recorder	Person appointed by the business committee to follow the discussion of a decision session, to record the language of the emerging consensus, including final language of decisions taken, and to assist the moderator of the session in discerning an emerging consensus. Recorders shall also assist the moderator in ensuring that the final agreed wording of a proposal is translated and available to delegates before a decision is made. Normally a delegate will be appointed recorder
REO	Regional ecumenical organization
Report of a meeting	Summary of a meeting including a presentation of major themes and specific proposals
SECAM	Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar
Sections	A gathering of ten Bible study groups for integrated reflection
Session	A sitting of the assembly in one of general, hearing or decision sessions (as defined)

Tellers	Appointed by the business committee to act as scrutineers for elections, and to count votes where necessary
Vice-moderator	One of the officers of the WCC elected by the central committee with responsibilities to act in place of the moderator as necessary
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches



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