



FOR ACTION

**The next WCC assembly: Towards an expanded space**

*The changing political, economic, social and cultural context, as well as the changing ecclesial and religious landscape impact the fellowship of WCC member churches, the wider ecumenical movement and the common engagement for the visible unity of the church. Global threats to life such as climate change, the HIV and Aids pandemic, or the reality of growing poverty coupled with increasing violence and war require global multilateral responses by states, civil society and faith communities. The horizon for common action today is the oikoumene as God's household of life.*

*The changing ecclesial landscape presents particular challenges to the search for visible unity. The fellowship of WCC member churches represents slightly more than one-quarter of the world's Christians. The WCC member churches' role in caring for the coherence of the one ecumenical movement is affirmed by many, but not by all churches.*

*The churches themselves are challenged more than ever to reclaim and give direction to their search for visible unity and common witness through the instruments they have established. Forging new partnerships with recognized ecumenical organizations and building greater trust with churches that are not members of the WCC are additional reasons to consider how a new style of WCC assemblies might help to foster a more coherent commitment to the unity of the church.*

**I. A new style of assembly**

There is strong interest in a new style of WCC-led assembly that will gather churches and ecumenical partners to celebrate fellowship in Jesus Christ, to address common challenges facing the churches, to shape a more coherent ecumenical movement and to fulfil the required institutional business of the WCC.

Such an assembly, in how it is planned, implemented and followed-up, should help to forge a greater coherence of the one ecumenical movement. The WCC is well placed to take the lead in preparing such an ecumenical gathering. The WCC can, at the same time, fulfil the constitutional mandate of gathering the fellowship of churches in a deliberative assembly.

The coherence of the one ecumenical movement can be strengthened by the creative and directed interaction among churches and ecumenical partners. The WCC has been repeatedly affirmed by member churches and ecumenical partners as the most equipped, unique and preferred instrument to facilitate this. The WCC can, however, only facilitate this through the leadership of its member churches. It is the churches themselves, who through the council serve the one ecumenical movement (Article III, WCC Constitution).

## II. An event framework

The listening process revealed a number of concrete proposals for how to structure such an event. None of the proposals adequately respond to all the needs, but there is a convergence of opinion that the best model will be the one that promotes the churches' ownership of their ecumenical commitments and engages the widest platform of recognized ecumenical partners. *Three representative scenarios based on the feedback and models suggested by member churches and ecumenical partners are described in appendix 1.*

Because not one of the proposed models meets all needs, it would be important to continue the creative dialogue between churches and ecumenical partners that might result in a clearer consensus about the nature of the next WCC assembly. The listening process also revealed the challenge for more coordinated forms of preparation, theme and issue development, as well as coherent follow-up.

The success of the 2013 assembly depends on how the event is prepared and with whom it is developed. In the past, WCC assemblies were planned by committees representing member churches and did not significantly involve other constituent representatives. The feedback and wisdom of previous experience indicates that already at an early stage, ecumenical partners, particularly those having a vested interest in a WCC assembly, should be involved.

An expanded assembly that seeks to foster the coherence of the one ecumenical movement will anticipate and inform our understanding of the churches' search for unity and common witness within a rapidly evolving global context. The planning process itself will reflect much of the discussion on Ecumenism in the 21st century. The challenge to design assemblies differently is an opportunity to test, apply and nurture new styles of ecumenism.

## III. Recommendations for consideration by the Central Committee

The Central Committee is asked to deliberate how to proceed with conceptualizing the nature of the next assembly in light of the Porto Alegre mandate and the subsequent listening process. If a new style of assembly is to succeed it would be wise to move from a listening process to a process of discernment, seeking to understand how the shape, ethos, planning and coordination of the next assembly might facilitate the churches and ecumenical partners to express their unity in Christ and common witness to world.

1. The Executive Committee recommends that the Central Committee move from a listening process to a process of discernment that seeks to develop a new style of WCC-led assembly that will gather churches and ecumenical partners to celebrate their fellowship in Jesus Christ, to address common challenges facing the church and humanity, to shape a more coherent ecumenical movement and to fulfil the business of the WCC of member churches, according to the ethos of fellowship and consensus. (Referred to the Policy Reference Committee)
2. The Executive Committee recommends that the Central Committee initiate the formation of an Assembly Discernment Committee.

The mandate of the committee would be to deepen deliberation on the nature of the next assembly and to consider how the ethos, structure, planning and coordination of an expanded assembly might strengthen both the fellowship of WCC member churches and the coherence of the one ecumenical movement. The committee would also consider possible general theological directions for such an assembly. The committee would report to the Central Committee in September 2009. (Referred to the Policy Reference Committee)

The committee would be comprised of 28 members, including 14 WCC member church representatives serving on the Central Committee, 2 REO representatives, 2 NCC representatives, 2 CWC representatives, 2 IEO representatives, 2 SM representatives, 2 representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and 2 representatives of Pentecostal churches (that are not members of the WCC). The representatives of partner ecumenical organizations would be preferably governing body church representatives, i.e. church representatives and not staff members. (Referred to the Policy Reference Committee)

3. To form an Assembly Discernment Committee, the Executive Committee recommends that the Central Committee (a) nominate 14 persons from the Central Committee, including a moderator; (b) request the General Secretary to issue invitations to the REOs, NCCs, CWCs, IEOs, SMs, to collectively nominate 2 persons each, preferably governing body church representatives, (10 persons); and (c) request the General Secretary to issue invitations to the Roman Catholic Church and the World Pentecostal Fellowship to appoint 2 persons each (4 persons).

The Executive Committee recommends the following criteria for nominating 14 Central Committee members:

- Persons having experience with different types of assemblies and processes of discernment.
- Every region should be represented by at least one person.
- A greater percentage of women, youth and Orthodox members are needed to help ensure overall balances in the light of a 28 member committee.

(Referred to the Nominations Committee)

4. The Executive Committee recommends that the Central Committee request the General Secretary to initiate the search for a venue that could host the next WCC assembly, both physically and spiritually. The ideal venue would accommodate in one central location up to 7000 people for daily prayer, provide meeting space for up to 5000 people, and provide plenary space for up to 2500. The churches offering to host the assembly should exhibit a strong ecumenical cooperation and be able to offer logistical support and to ensure support through prayer. The results would be reported to the Central Committee in September 2009. (Referred to the Policy Reference Committee)

**Appendix 1: Three representative scenarios based on the feedback from and various models suggested by member churches and ecumenical partners**

*Coordinated events at different times and in different places* – An “expanded assembly” is not necessarily limited in time and space, but can be developed as a process of ecumenical dialogue in which different assemblies, synods and conferences are encouraged to listen to and respond to one another.

There are already a number of events scheduled between 2010 and 2015 that could be challenged to “plug-in” to an ecumenical event in late 2013 (LWF, WARC, CWME, etc.). The fact that the WCC has advanced the schedule of assembly preparation so that the theme will be set in 2009 and the basic agenda will be articulated by 2011 allows space to invite churches and ecumenical partners meeting prior to 2013 to begin reflecting towards the event and to invite churches and ecumenical partners meeting after 2013 to continue making a contribution.

This idea is not new and has born little fruit in the past. However, with a renewed approach, an advanced schedule of preparations and new platforms to encourage synergies, there is hope that more coordination on themes, issues and mutual prayer is possible.

The model could look something like the following:

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Common event themes, addressing similar issues, sharing resources, in dialogue with one another</b>				
LWF Assembly	DOV Peace Convocation	CWME Event	<b>WCC Assembly</b> Synthesizing what comes before and giving impulse to what follows	WCC Central Committee
WARC/REC Council	REO assemblies	Church assemblies		Other events
Edinburgh Centennial	NCC Gathering	Other events		

*Series of coordinated phases in the same place* – Some churches have proposed a model that would gather the churches and ecumenical partners in phases. One model proposes that phase 1 would be 3-day open forum of dialogue and celebration. This would be followed by phase 2, a 5-day space for confessional gatherings. The event would conclude with phase 3, a 5-day WCC assembly. The proposal is based on the assumption that each phase would build upon the previous one.

The same model has been critiqued by some as reinforcing fragmentation by delineating space for the movement (phase 1), the confessions (phase 2) and the WCC (phase3). The model does not adequately address the role of national and regional conciliar instruments. The fact that the two world communions most interested in conducting assembly-type business will hold separate assemblies before 2013, makes it less necessary to provide isolated space for that purpose (this time around).

The model could look something like the following:

<b>Phase I</b>		<b>Phase II</b>		<b>Phase III</b>
Open forum celebrating the whole ecumenical movement	Pause	Churches meet according to confession or church family	Pause	<b>WCC Assembly</b> harvesting celebration and dialogue
3 days	1 day	5 days	1 day	5 days

*Inter-related events in a common space and at the same time* – From the plethora of discussions, there is a strong interest in the pursuing a WCC-led ecumenical event that will gather the churches and affiliated ecumenical partners. Among the values of such an event is the opportunity for the WCC to provide a preparatory platform for churches and partners with a view toward strengthening the common vision and ownership of the ecumenical movement by the churches in the post-event period.

The event would offer common space for prayer, reflection, discussion and celebration, and would offer appropriately differentiated space “for the purpose of deliberation and/or overall agenda”. The event would offer considerable space to REOs and NCCs to engage the churches on regional concerns, issues and strategies. The event would offer considerable space to church families and CWCs to engage the churches on ecclesial concerns and to encourage each family of churches to strengthen its particular gift to the wider ecumenical movement. The event would offer considerable space to IEOs and SMs to engage the churches in networking ministries, developing common strategies and sharing resources.

The goal of the event would be to strengthen the churches as the primary actors in the search for visible unity and common witness and to strengthen the ecumenical instruments in serving the churches’ commitments. The event would be an opportunity to share the gifts that the churches, ecumenical partners and the WCC all have to offer the wider ecumenical movement.

The model could look something like the following:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
Opening	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Sunday	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Closing
Opening	Bible	Bible	Bible	Bible	Sunday	Bible	Bible	Bible	Closing
Opening	Dialogue	Dialogue	REO/NCC	CWC	Sunday	WCC	WCC	WCC	Closing
Opening	Dialogue	Dialogue	REO/NCC	CWC	Sunday	WCC	WCC	WCC	Closing
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Opening	IEO/SM	CWC	IEO/SM	REO/NCC	Sunday	REO/NCC	CWC	WCC	Closing
Opening	IEO/SM	CWC	IEO/SM	REO/NCC	Sunday	REO/NCC	CWC	WCC	Closing
Opening	Committees	Committees	Committees	Committees	Sunday	Committees	Committees	WCC	Closing
Opening	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Sunday	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Closing