



**FOR ACTION**

**Report of the Permanent Committee on  
Consensus and Collaboration  
4-8 July 2008, Hofgeismar, Germany**

The Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration (the "permanent committee"), held its second meeting at Hofgeismar, Germany 4 – 8 July 2008, hosted by Bishop Dr Martin Hermann Hein of the Evangelische Kirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck, Germany at the Predigerseminar (Pastoral Seminary) Hofgeismar. The committee, comprised of fourteen members, continues the work of the special commission on Orthodox participation in the WCC (the "special commission").

**Participants**

Co-moderated by Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Most Rev. Bernard Ntahoturi of the Province of the Anglican Church of Burundi, the meeting was attended by members: Dr Agnes Abuom (Anglican Church in Kenya), Bishop Samuel Robert Azariah (Church of Pakistan), H.E. Metropolitan Bishoy (Coptic Orthodox Church), Mrs Anne Glynn-Mackoul (Patriarchate of Antioch), Bishop Dr Martin Hermann Hein (Evangelical Church in Germany), Dr Nigussu Legesse (Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church), Rev. Graham Gerald McGeoch (Church of Scotland), Dr Magali Nascimento Cunha (Methodist Church in Brazil), and Rev. Dr Sharon Watkins (General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)), as well as Rev. Archpriest Mikhail Gundyayev substituting for H. G. Bishop Dr Hilarion Alfeyev (Russian Orthodox Church), and Rev. Archpriest Vladan Perisic, substituting for H.G. Bishop Irinej of Australia and New Zealand (Serbian Orthodox Church). Apologies were received from H.E. Metropolitan Dr Nifon of Targoviste (Romanian Orthodox Church). The committee welcomed guests for the opening session Hon. Rev. Dr Ofelia Ortega-Suarez, a president of the WCC and Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser, formerly general secretary of the WCC. The work of the committee was facilitated by WCC staff: Mr Georges Lemopoulos, Rev. Sabine Udodesku, and the Reverend Canon Dr John Gibaut, director of Faith and Order.

**Setting**

The permanent committee appreciated very much the congenial location for its second full meeting at the Evangelisches Predigerseminar Hofgeismar. The committee was impressed with the expression of faith, hope and love represented by the work of the seminary, the senior living centre and the other ministries of the Evangelische Kirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck. The committee's joining in praise and prayer with the vital congregation at the Christus-Kirche in Kassel, and being received by government leaders in the states of Hesse and Thuringia, provided a welcomed interaction with the local community. Walking in the footsteps of Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) and of St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207 – 1231) at the Wartburg Castle afforded the possibility to recall this significant period in Reformation history and to become better acquainted with a saint whose life is an example to all Christians. The committee was grateful for the thoughtful planning of this meaningful encounter and the generous hospitality throughout the days of our meeting.

## **Background**

The committee heard from the Living Letters/Decade to Overcome Violence visit to Germany involving members of the committee and staff, which immediately preceded this session of the permanent committee. Their reports included stories of the struggles to reunify a country after decades of division, to heal wounds that in some places are hardly even acknowledged, and to reconcile after violence in the home, the family, and the nation. Hofgeismar's location adjacent to the old border between West and East Germany, the reports from the Living Letters' visits and from members of the permanent committee from their varied church contexts from Africa, Asia, the Balkans, Europe, the Middle East, and North and South America, all provided context for the committee's discussions, and included stories of hope and reconciliation from troubled areas, as well as challenges to the churches in others. The committee was reminded that the social and political contexts in which Christians live have evolved with very different ways of responding to social, ethical and justice issues. The stark image of memorials marking the suffering and death from religious, national and ideological wars described by the Living Letters team offered a sobering reminder of the need for dialogue and reconciliation.

## **Agenda**

The work of the permanent committee for this second meeting focused on matters identified during the 2007 Damascus meeting and areas of continued concern in the life of the council, including matters receiving particular attention in the report of the policy reference committee of the central committee, such as, (a) expanded space – 10<sup>th</sup> assembly, (b) programme plans 2009-2013, (c) progress on consensus matters, and (d) ecclesiology.

A significant portion of the meeting focused on the work of the Faith and Order commission and in particular its reflections on Ecclesiology and Ethics. Reverend Canon Dr John Gibaut, director of the Faith and Order commission, was present at the invitation of the permanent committee, in order to discuss synergies between the mandates of the permanent committee and the Faith and Order commission.

## **NARRATIVE**

### **Tenth assembly**

The permanent committee reviewed the composition and mandate of the discernment committee as included in the adopted report of the policy reference committee to the 2008 WCC central committee (Doc. No. GEN/PRC 04), noting in particular that the narrative section of that report lifted up the need to assure that the ethos of fellowship and consensus be maintained as fundamental to any proposal for the 2013 assembly.

The permanent committee noted that the discernment committee is accountable to the central committee, and therefore, the next assembly, in whatever form is decided, fundamentally will be an assembly of the churches in fellowship through the WCC. The earlier request to the member churches from the general secretariat for responses to the proposal for "expanded space" for ecumenical partners at the next assembly, or an "expanded assembly," has received little response from the member churches. The discernment committee has been directed to continue the process of "listening" to the member churches. The permanent committee has identified the need to elicit aggressively additional reactions from the churches to this proposal so that sufficient information is available to the discernment committee prior to undertaking its work, and also so that ecumenical partners are not surprised by responses first received at the next meeting of the central committee.

The permanent committee recognized that "expanded space" for ecumenical partners at the next assembly, or an "expanded assembly," could put at risk the achievements of the special commission and its successor committees, particularly by exacerbating the dynamics experienced by the Orthodox churches, which are few in numbers in the fellowship of the WCC membership and do not figure at all in most of the ecumenical organizations which may be interested in participating in an expanded assembly (e.g. CWCs, Specialized Ministries and most of the REOs, NCCs, IEOs). While consensus process of

governance and allocation of representation on governing bodies have eased the impact of this situation, the structural minority status is not fully mitigated by adjusting modes of governance in the WCC and could be overwhelming to effective Orthodox participation in an expanded form of assembly.

It was noted that the global Christian forum (GCF) was a successful experience of expanded space outside of the current structure of the WCC. It is understood that a representative of the GCF will participate in the meeting of the discernment committee.

### **Programme plans 2009 – 2013**

The permanent committee was provided with a very helpful overview prepared by deputy general secretary Georges Lemopoulos entitled "Reading the WCC Programme Plans from an Orthodox Perspective" that classified Orthodox Church engagement in various areas and also posed some fundamental questions that transcend specific programmatic activities (Appendix 1). The overview noted that there are areas of rather good, or at least satisfactory levels of Orthodox participation, but also many areas of concern regarding Orthodox participation or lack of response. There seems to be a corollary tendency on the part of the WCC and ecumenical partners to discount the importance of maintaining Orthodox involvement and profile when the Orthodox churches themselves choose not to participate or respond. For instance, if the pattern continues of creating organizations (such as EAA, ACT, ACT Development) that are related to WCC work but not fully of the WCC – and hence do not include the Orthodox or account for Orthodox concerns – this tendency will be exacerbated.

### **Progress report on consensus**

The committee received a report of the efforts since 2003 to implement the consensus model of decision-making presented by committee member Anne Glynn-Mackoul (Appendix 2). The report included a survey of opportunities provided to train the moderators, recorders and rapporteurs in this new model of meeting, and an assessment of efforts in these areas that still need to take place. The committee affirmed this assessment, and also noted that as the WCC has been living into this new model, it has encountered deeper layers of meaning in the consensus process than simply institutional changes in the conduct of meetings (such as moderating sessions and recording decisions). Rather, the council has begun to experience the profoundly spiritual changes possible for its work if it fully embraces the consensus model, and works to transform the culture of the WCC in all of its expressions into a culture of consensus.

The report of the special commission itself anticipated that the change in ethos of the council would need to go beyond rules, training and technical aspects. Consensus is more conciliar than parliamentary and more inclusive than adversarial. The emphasis on decision-making serves an institutional logic, the consensus method, as an effort to build the "common mind" aims at strengthening the fellowship. Even in cases of "business" matters, the consensus method points to the possibility for churches to express their faith which also is "made effective through love" (Gal 5:6). (cf. Appendix B of the report of the Special Commission)

The committee noted in its 2007 Damascus report that "The challenges of this significant change in the culture of the WCC may require additional adjustments as well, including attention to planning the schedule of meetings to allow sufficient time for consensus to develop around issues that may be on the agenda of a meeting, and sufficient time for the drafting of statements and reports that allow consensus to develop around a text" (2007 Damascus Report). Recent meetings reinforce the importance of this observation.

### **Introduction to the programmatic work of the Faith and Order commission**

Over the course of several sessions, the committee listened to a thoughtful and thorough presentation by the director of Faith and Order introducing the work of the commission in a number of important areas (see report attached). The director reported on:

- a. the substantial Orthodox participation in the leadership of Faith and Order
- b. progress in the area of ethics (in particular the study on moral discernment)

- c. sources of authority: Tradition and Traditions
- d. involvement of Faith and Order in facilitating the communication among bilateral ecumenical dialogues and the united and uniting churches convocation
- e. work with Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- f. involvement with Common Witness regarding holy women and men
- g. substantial work on the question of the One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition
- h. Ongoing consultation on the matter of particular interest to the permanent committee: ecclesiology. In particular, Canon Gibaut reviewed the process of reception to the two documents, "The Nature and Mission of the Church," and "Called to Be the One Church."

A rich and stimulating discussion followed.

### **Baptism**

On the subject of baptism, the permanent committee noted that the very fact of pressing the ecclesiological questions has led to renewed discussion in the area of baptism. Old questions are being raised with new vigour: Is baptism needed for salvation? Is baptism by water and spirit or by word and spirit? The theological background of mutual acceptance of baptism deserves renewed discussion in our time.

The committee was reminded that agreements on recognition of baptism are being reached already in certain national and regional contexts. An example of such an agreement in April 2007 among different Christian churches in Germany was mentioned in particular ("Magdeburg Agreement"). It was noted that research has been undertaken (although not published) to ascertain the number and content of such agreements worldwide. A concern was expressed that in the global ecumenical movement we may reproduce work unnecessarily. On the other hand, sometimes issues such as baptism and ecclesiology are not addressed at all because they seem so distant to matters of war and peace, justice and injustice, requiring the immediate attention of churches.

The committee observed that there is a need to continue to harvest information on both theological reflection and practice in churches and in national and regional contexts on questions of baptism as well as the nature and mission of the church.

### **Ecclesiology**

The committee conducted an extended conversation on the relationship between the work of Faith and Order and the permanent committee in the area of ecclesiology. Canon Gibaut framed the conversation by noting the important contribution of Orthodox scholarship and theology, which roots the discussion in Eucharistic theology and eschatology. The current mechanism for council-wide discussion of ecclesiology, however, is the response process on the two documents, "Nature and Mission of the Church" and "Called to be the One Church". The committee noted with some disappointment the low number of responses to date and gave serious consideration to what might be the reasons and how to encourage additional interest.

The challenges in offering theological studies for the consideration of the churches include the differing priorities faced by member churches in their local contexts and ecumenical organizations. To the extent that enthusiasm exists for documents such as "The Nature and Mission of the Church", and "Called to be the One Church", it may be helpful to the process of reception and response by member churches that those engaged with the document undertake the personal task of eliciting response, an approach that marked the BEM process and was particularly effective.

### **Changing Ecumenical Landscape**

The committee noted the very different ecumenical landscape that marks the end of the Twentieth and beginning of the Twenty-first centuries. The ecumenical movement, which was originated to overcome the fragmentation of the Christian churches, has itself become fragmented and is subject to centrifugal

forces that reflect the era. For instance, it was noted, with relationship to the united and uniting churches, that the zeal that once characterized that movement has waned significantly. The WCC continues to hold two primary objectives: to accompany the churches in calling one another to visible unity and to offer coherence to the ecumenical movement. The challenges of the era only strengthen our resolve to seek that unity for which Our Lord prayed.

### Next Meeting

The permanent committee has tentatively reserved dates for its next meeting, with arrival anticipated on 1 July 2009, with an opening session in the evening and departure on 5 July 2009, with consideration to be given to appropriate planning for the development of its report and recommendations. The agenda will focus on common prayer and the Midterm Evaluation, and include discussion on moral and ethical issues from the perspective of the report of the special commission.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The permanent committee on consensus and collaboration recommends:

1. That an urgent reminder be sent to member churches who have not yet responded to the proposal for "expanded space" for the 2013 assembly or an "expanded assembly", urging them to respond by 1 November 2008. This renewed call should be by letter from the general secretary to the member churches and by email to the central committee members, and by web posting. It should also be included in the summary of issues to the central committee following the next meeting of the executive committee.
2. That the mandate of the midterm evaluation committee include evaluation of the WCC's progress in implementing the main findings of the special commission and that the team be invited to attend the next meeting of the permanent committee.
3. That all efforts be undertaken to facilitate the deepening of the council's embrace of the consensus model, transforming the culture of the WCC in all of its expressions into a culture of consensus. To this end, the committee restates here by reference Recommendation 6 from the 2007 Damascus report of the permanent committee<sup>1</sup> emphasizing the additional levels of training and reflection necessary to this process. The general secretariat is encouraged to undertake more intentional efforts in (a) consulting with member churches or ecumenical organizations that use consensus, (b) providing some consensus orientation in the planning of all meetings of the WCC to assure that the consensus methods are fully established as the default model for all phases of meetings, and (c) orienting and training current WCC staff and new staff at the time of their employment in the consensus model.
4. That the permanent committee and the Faith and Order secretariat continue the close collaboration that marked the work of the special commission on matters of common interest and concern particularly ecclesiology, with special attention to issues identified by the special commission (cf. Report of the Special Commission paragraphs 14, 15, 16). The permanent committee would draw the attention of the Faith and Order commission to these issues and asks for its help, putting these issues as much as possible into focus during its work.

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<sup>1</sup> 6. affirms the intention to train the leadership of WCC (officers, moderators of committees and commissions) on consensus procedures and urges the consideration of similar training for rapporteurs, **recommends** that this training of the leadership and rapporteurs consist of intentional and ongoing training and evaluation, **recommends** that a presentation on consensus decision-making to participants of major ecumenical meetings of the WCC be included very early in the agenda of such meetings, and **recommends** that the agendas of meetings be designed to facilitate discernment and development of consensus in the drafting of any report and statements.

5. That the WCC continue to encourage member churches to respond to the two ecclesiological documents currently being circulated "Called to be the One Church" (Porto Alegre) and "The Nature and Mission of the Church" (Faith and Order), identifying the purpose that will be served by each document and the responses received. This encouragement should employ multiple approaches, including: (a) renew the invitation to the churches for responses; (b) engage centres of theological inquiry close to the ecumenical movement to undertake to respond; and (c) engage in regional consultations around the documents, also by inviting regular local or regional gatherings to include on their agendas consultations about these documents and the issues raised. Where necessary, efforts should be made to accompany member churches or build their capacity to respond.

## APPENDIX 1

### Reading the WCC Programme Plans from an Orthodox perspective:

#### *A brief overview and discussion starter*

The few pages of the present report do not claim to be more than a simple and preliminary survey. They have an indicative – and certainly not an exhaustive – character. Their only intention is to serve as a discussion starter for the Permanent Committee in its effort to overview (assess, facilitate and, if needed, intervene in order to ensure) the Orthodox participation in the WCC.

If proven helpful, the document could also be used in some other circles (such as the Orthodox Staff Group, the Staff Leadership Group, etc.) to stimulate discussion.

#### **1. Areas with rather good/satisfactory participation**

*Visits to member churches:* The General Secretary visited practically all Orthodox member churches in the Middle East during his recent travel in the region. Each visit included at least one Orthodox member as is the case with all other visits (particularly the “Living Letters”). A forthcoming programmatic visit to Finland is planned with the full participation of the Orthodox Church.

*Ecumenical officers' network:* This is a gradually growing network, to some extent complementing/assisting the members of the governing bodies, and serving their churches in the area of ecumenical relations with the WCC.

*Women in church and society:* The recent consultation held in the Academy of Volos (June 2008) constitutes a continuation of previous efforts and yet a new beginning.

*Youth in the ecumenical movement:* Young Orthodox people are playing a key role within ECHOS – the Commission on Youth in the ecumenical movement.

*Faith and Order - Called to be the One Church:* Many Orthodox church leaders and scholars actively participate in the Standing and Plenary Commissions.

*Churches in the Middle East:* Activities related to the Palestine/Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF), the Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (JIC) and the Ecumenical Accompaniment in Palestine and Israel serve, to a large extent, the interests of Orthodox churches in the region and involve representatives of Orthodox churches.

*The Ecumenical Institute, Bossey:* After some difficulties in previous years, the Graduate School and Masters Programme have a considerable number of Orthodox students from a wide range of local churches. Some of the students also participate in the English language courses during the summer.

*Inter-religious dialogue:* Orthodox churches and theologians have actively participated in the process of responding to the letter written by Muslim scholars. WCC staff disseminate and promote responses by Orthodox church leaders.

*Staffing:* There are twelve Orthodox staff (representing ten local Orthodox churches): three at the level of leadership (DGS, P5 Director, HR Manager), seven programme executives spread across all programme areas (with the exception of Communication), and two specialized staff with key responsibilities (respectively in Bossey and in the area of data administration). One position of senior project assistant is

held by an Orthodox and there is a vacancy in the area of Church and Ecumenical Relations to be filled soon by an Orthodox. The head of the WCC Eastern Europe Office could be added to these numbers.

## **2. Areas where efforts are being made to improve participation**

*WCC Interns programme:* Except for last year, young Orthodox people have been invited to participate in this programme (from Armenia, Belorussia, Greece, Hungary and Romania). The Programme Committee strongly recommended to the central committee that the number of interns be increased to five, and therefore it can be expected that Orthodox candidates will be included in the 2009-2010 cycle.

*Ecumenical solidarity: The meaning of diakonia:* This is a new project, crafted only this year as part of the 2009 activity plans. The aim is to encourage member churches to reflect on the theological meaning of diakonia and enter into creative dialogue with their specialized ministries and other diakonal institutions. Orthodox participation in this process will be extremely important and therefore carefully planned.

*WCC office in Eastern Europe:* Efforts are being made to ensure the continuity of the activities deployed by this office, though in a different structural configuration. The Conference of European Churches and the Russian Orthodox Church are participating in the elaboration of a new solution.

*Faith, science and technology:* An experimental cooperation was tentatively established with the Volos Academy (Metropolis of Dimitrias, Church of Greece).

*Communication:* The Publications department is exploring the possibility of inaugurating an "Orthodox Collection" (in cooperation with Orthodox publishers such as the Holy Cross, St Vladimir's, the Volos Academy, etc.). There have already been co-publications with the Holy Cross.

*Finances:* The majority of Orthodox churches are in order with their membership fees. Over the last five years (2003 to 2007) there has been an average of only 2.4 churches not paying membership (a rate of 11% non-payment annually, compared favorably with the global average which is over 30%). Doc. Fin 07 from the central committee (February 2008, distributed to the Finance Committee) shows that the Orthodox member churches contributed 2% of total membership income in 2007. Meanwhile, local Orthodox churches (the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, Church of Greece, Church of Cyprus, Coptic Orthodox Church, Holy See of Etchmiadzine) have hosted meetings and expressed their willingness to continue offering hospitality for encounters organized by the WCC.

## **3. Areas where additional efforts are needed**

*The WCC and the Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century:* There are several reflection processes on this issue (including the Assembly Discernment Committee) and an active Orthodox participation is absolutely needed.

*Ecumenical perspectives on mission and unity: Celebrations of the 1910 Edinburgh World Mission Conference:* Staff colleagues have identified the need for a call for reflection by Orthodox churches and a carefully planning of the Orthodox participation in the event.

*Decade to Overcome Violence: International Ecumenical Convocation:* A first encounter with substantial Orthodox participation was organized in cooperation among the WCC, the Holy Cross School of the Theology, the Boston Theological Institute and the Volos Academy. Plans are on their way for a more formal Orthodox preparatory consultation. Participation in the International Convocation has to be planned and monitored carefully, since financial constraint could play a decisive role in maintaining balances.

*Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel:* Though many young persons from many countries and churches participate in this project, practically no Orthodox has applied (or was encouraged by an



Orthodox Church or institution to apply). Targeted efforts might be needed to encourage churches (e.g. in Greece, Cyprus, Russia, the USA, etc.).

*Irak*: Christians in Irak, as well as Christian refugees from Irak, need a worldwide support in these particularly difficult times. Orthodox churches should be involved more in ecumenical efforts – at the local, regional and global levels.

#### 4. Some fundamental questions (transcending programmatic activities)

Any assessment of Orthodox participation in the Council's life and activities should not remain limited within the framework of programme plans and activities. It may need to go deeper (e.g. to institutional, strategic and broader ecumenical layers). Thus, some of the questions could be the following:

- Where we are after a few years of implementation of the main findings of the Special Commission (is an evaluation needed)?
- How do we make sure that Orthodox churches and their theologians actively participate in key debates/processes (e.g. on ecclesiology; mission; ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; spirituality and common prayer, etc.) and that their voice is heard and seriously taken into consideration?
- How could Orthodox theologians contribute to a motivating, involving and energizing discourse (in French, "*un discours mobilisateur*") for the ecumenical movement in general and the WCC in particular?
- What would be the specific Orthodox contribution to the dialogue of religions (particularly today, as a natural continuation of the ground-breaking reflections by Orthodox church leaders and theologians in the past decades)?
- How do we convince, encourage and assist some Orthodox churches who seem to gradually decrease their interest and participation in the activities of the Council?
- How do we assist Orthodox churches in their efforts to face internal pressures from conservative/fundamentalist groups?
- How do Orthodox churches assess new ecumenical initiatives (e.g. the Global Christian Forum)?
- What is the attitude/assessment of Orthodox churches with regard to new ecumenical instruments (ENI, EAA, ACT, etc.)?

All these questions are of extreme importance for the future of the ecumenical movement and the WCC. They are closely related to ongoing reflection process, more specifically to *ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*.

All the questions could be turned around and addressed to other church and confessional families participating in the ecumenical movement and in the WCC.

Therefore, an intense dialogue on some of them could be beneficial.

Geneva, June 2008

Georges Lemopoulos  
Deputy General Secretary

## APPENDIX 2

### Implementation of the Consensus Model of Decision-Making since 2003

From the time the Central Committee adopted consensus as the model for decision-making for meetings of the WCC, the Central Committee, leadership of the WCC and some staff have recognized the need for training of the key roles involved in this process. Those advisors who have experience from their own contexts with this shift from parliamentary process to consensus emphasize the critical importance of training, and not just once or twice, but on a continuing basis, to assure that those moderating and recording meetings are given the skills and tools necessary to facilitate discernment about issues presented for decision, to build a common mind of the meeting, and to assure that those gathered are provided with the tools to engage with one another in a manner consistent with the consensus model. Failure to provide adequate training almost assures confusion and frustration, with the chair likely to lapse into the previous model of briskly moving through an agenda according to the will of the majority, or a hybrid of majority will with the appearance of consensus process that serves neither model nor the WCC.

Having listened to experts, the survey results from Porto Alegre and recently this Committee, to date there have been several "training" sessions with more or less ground covered. Prior to the first meeting of the Central Committee that followed adoption of consensus, our two Australian colleagues Gregor Henderson and Jill Talbart with Eden Grace, an American Quaker who had served on the Special Commission, conducted training and role playing using a thoughtful power-point presentation that introduced use of the colored cards with which we are now familiar. The model used by the church and council of churches in Australia is the closest in process to that devised for the WCC. Prior to the Porto Alegre Assembly, the moderators, recorders and rapporteurs of Assembly committees were gathered at Bossey for training that included both general Assembly planning and also consensus process training. We all experienced the results during the Assembly, where some sessions went better than others, largely as a result of the skill of the moderator, and also witnessed the first meeting of the Central Committee there in Porto Alegre, which pretty much presented a case study in how not to do consensus.

Last December the moderators of Committees and Commissions, but not recorders, were gathered for two days of training in Geneva just before an officers meeting, so that most of the officers were present for most of the first day. It was a substantive meeting that included reporting back and reflection on the first rounds of meetings using the new process, exchanging suggestions for ways to better implement the process in different contexts, a gathering for which most present seemed thankful.

Immediately prior to the February meeting of the Central Committee, rapporteurs were invited to attend a short late afternoon training session immediately upon arrival and were provided with a template designed facilitate the writing of reports of the committees. Copies of this are available for those interested in looking at it. A session during the first day of Central Committee reminded Central Committee members and participants of the basics of consensus process.

This brief survey, and I may have omitted a session or so if any training sessions have taken place specifically for the executive committee, may provide the impression of a significant amount of training. This, no doubt, has been the intention and hope of the staff organizing these various sessions. However, having participated in all of the sessions specifically listed, I have some reservations about the adequacy of the depth and breadth of the training to date, about how intentionally the Council is immersing itself in the new model, and whether those entrusted with the leadership of meetings have fully absorbed the skills necessary to conduct meetings effectively according to the consensus process of decision-making. On the other hand, some issues that might have proven significantly more divisive if decided in a majority/minority paradigm may have been diffused to some extent by the fact of implementation of the consensus process itself, expertly directed or not.

While it is true that there may not be a wide array of expert consultants available for consensus process training, given that few decision making bodies, including churches and church bodies, yet function on this model, in my opinion, there are more resources available than currently have been employed and perhaps more effective techniques to be explored. The last few training sessions that have been scheduled outside of Central Committee meetings have fallen to Eden Grace and myself. Eden is an immensely gifted American Quaker whose church relies upon discernment of the will of the Holy Spirit in its decision-making; she is thoughtful and skilled in the techniques that have proven helpful in building the mind of the meeting and also those in recording the decisions taken by a meeting, and responding pastorally to those who allow a decision to go forward but feel moved to record dissent. Her church does not, however, follow a model that looks like the WCC model. The only expertise I can offer these training sessions is as someone familiar with the Rules, having served on the drafting committee for the Rules following on the work of the Special Commission. Neither my church nor the US National Council of Churches uses consensus. Those with models closest to that of the WCC have been engaged in some training sessions, but not others, such as colleagues from Australia or from Canada. While Eden and I -- and here I know that I can speak also for Eden -- both are happy to offer whatever we can to this process, both of us are aware of our limitations, me especially, and remain frustrated that others more expert are not regularly engaged in the training process, or even that some of those to be trained are not offered the possibility of watching those other bodies conduct business by consensus by traveling to them when they are meeting. There may be many reasons why this has not yet happened, but it remains a concern.

Another concern has been the attendance at many of the training sessions. For whatever the reason, no doubt especially busy schedules and overlapping demands on time (but including perhaps a perception about the expertise of those chairing the training session) some of those with primary responsibility for chairing sessions of the Central Committee have chosen over and over again not to attend training sessions. This has been perceived as a lack of commitment to the process, whether or not that perception is accurate. The training session for rapporteurs immediately before the February Central Committee meeting was so hastily planned that most rapporteurs were unable to attend, having not figured the session into their travel plans.

While we are still on a consensus learning curve and each new meeting and situation discloses unfamiliar consensus terrain and new learning opportunities, the question of staff commitment to fully buying into consensus process is also open. Here in this committee, we experienced last time the challenge of drafting a report according to consensus process with the schedule prepared along the old model of meeting agendas. Thanks to Sabine and Yorgo our own schedule has been adjusted to account for this once it was identified, but the challenge applies to every committee and meeting of the WCC. Unless there is an intentional cultivation of consensus mentality, in the preparation of an agenda, the planning of a meeting and the time allotted to drafting a report, the ethos of consensus process for the life and work of the WCC will not become embedded in the fellowship as anticipated by the Special Commission, and the Central Committee.

An example of this I have just lived through was the recent meeting for Orthodox Women in Volos, Greece where the planning of the meeting and agenda itself were somewhat opaque; the drafting committee had no choice but to work overnight before many substantive reports had been offered; there was little time for discussion and only an hour to receive and amend the report with close to forty people in the room. Staff support was below minimal, with primary staff departing midway through the meeting, and no preparatory discussion of consensus process. From my perspective the whole meeting was designed according to an old model that should have been rejected post CUV and post Special Commission.

This transition to consensus decision-making, though it could be improved, is not dire; in fact, it is hopeful. Each meeting adds more opportunities for refinement of specifics for the process. As painful as it was, the closed session of the Central Committee discussing the tenure of the General Secretary illustrated the profound gift to the WCC presented by consensus process. Had those issues moved swiftly

to a vote, with debate stifled and voices left unheard, the result for the Council might have been a starkly more divided body. As it is, there is healing that will need to take place, but placed within the paradigm of consensus decision making, building up one mind within the fellowship of churches, and making every effort to be open to discerning the mind of Christ while conducting the business of the WCC, there is a way forward that recognizes and respects all voices and provides a process for moving forward together.

In conclusion, It would be my hope that this committee would (1) affirm the need for continuing training and debriefing of moderators, rapporteurs and recorders, (2) encourage all persons serving in those roles to participate in the training sessions and to share the lessons learned from various meetings and experiences, (3) provide the possibility of including consultants from churches or REOs that use consensus or for some Moderators, rapporteurs and recorders, traveling to meetings of other bodies where consensus process is used, and (4) insist that some consensus orientation be provided in the planning of all meetings of the WCC and for all those staffing such meetings, such as that in Volos, to assure that the consensus methods are fully established as the default model for meetings in all phases with sufficient time allotted in agendas for meetings for listening to one another before drafting and then to assure enough time to discussing messages or reports so that the message or report reflects the consensus of the group. The statement, report or message should be complete before the meeting concludes.

Anne Glynn Mackoul  
Member of the Central and Permanent Committees