



Original

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English

FOR INFORMATION

Plenary on Church and Society

The churches' role in transforming societies *Faith, stewardship, life in dignity for all*

The plenary honors the Church and Society tradition as living tradition that has taken roots among the member churches. It points to the potential of mutual support and common voice that can be unleashed with the WCC as catalyst and common space.

Motivated by the 30th anniversary of the 1979 Church and Society Conference on Faith, Science and the Future that was held in the Massachusetts Institute for Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, USA, the plenary will focus on the most burning issues central committee members and their churches are facing regarding the witness and the role of the churches in their societies. Together with the World Conference on Church and Society in 1966 in Geneva, the 1979 MIT Conference has been a landmark event in the work of the department on Church and Society of the WCC.

The plenary, however, does not commemorate this conference by recalling its proceedings or the major outcomes of it. The plenary rather follows a different approach that reflects the emphasis on the WCC as fellowship of churches. *Living the fellowship* begins with listening to each other, moves towards the discernment of common challenges and concerns, and helps to discover how churches can accompany and support each other in sharing their knowledge, experience and resources that are available to them.

The theme of the plenary recalls the emphasis of the WCC 9th assembly in 2006 in Porto Alegre on transformation. The churches' involvement in transforming societies needs to be pro-active in response to the diverse contexts they are facing. There is no one solution that fits all. Dialogue and ecumenical cooperation between churches is required especially when they are addressing global challenges. Shared faith and a common focus on responsible stewardship of resources and life dignity can foster mutual support and common action.

The plenary discussion began already weeks and months before the central committee meeting. Central committee members were invited to share brief written reflections on the issues at stake. Contributions sent by central committee members were and continue to be posted on the internet (see <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/events-sections/cc2009/plenary-on-church-and-society>). The website offers the possibility to post comments and to engage in discussion and will serve this purpose also in the future.

First session 9:30 – 10:30

- Introduction by the moderator of the session, WCC President, Dame Dr Mary Tanner.
- Three examples from different regions:
 1. Rev. Micheline Kamba Kasongo (Church of Christ in Congo-Presbyterian Community of Kinshasa) and Rev. Dr Elisée Musemakweli (Presbyterian Church in Rwanda) on the action for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo that was initiated by the churches in the Great Lakes sub-region of Africa;
 2. H.E. Metropolitan Mor Eustathius Matta Roham (Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East) on the challenges a church in the Middle East is facing;
 3. Ms Terauango Beneteri (Kiribati Protestant Church) on the situation of a church on a Pacific Island.

At the end of the first session, central committee members are asked to gather outside in front of the **Decalogue sculpture**. A staff member (Theodore Gill) will share information about the artist and the sculpture. The Ten Commandments are read in different languages.

The Ten Commandments shaped a precious space for the life of families and communities. Entering the space meant to discern which practices and desires undermine and even destroy life in dignity in communities and which values and activities support it. Such signposts for flourishing life in community have also been developed by other religions and traditions than the Judeo-Christian tradition. To shape public spaces where people share and affirm life together is crucial also today.

Second session: 11:10 – 12:30

- The moderator of the session invites central committee members for a time of sharing and discussion in small groups (20 minutes):
 - How do the issues shared by the presenters resonate with your own experience and context?
 - What are the most burning issues you are facing and how can we as a fellowship of member churches, accompany and support each other in addressing these concerns?
- Discussion in plenary (30-35 minutes).
- Summary by the general secretary and introduction of a video message by Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann M.M.

Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, Nicaragua, was president of the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly, 2008-2009. A veteran statesman, politician, community leader and priest, Father d'Escoto served for over a decade as the Republic of Nicaragua's minister for foreign affairs (1979-1990), as well as serving as senior adviser on foreign affairs, with the rank of minister, to president Daniel Ortega Saavedra (2007-2008). Ordained a priest of the Maryknoll missionaries in the early 1960s, Father d'Escoto has travelled extensively, visiting most of the world's capitals, as well as many remote and less accessible areas of the globe, and has dedicated much of his life to helping the poor.

- Closing by the moderator of the session.