

Document No 4

For Action

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

1. Introduction

Following the last review of membership matters with the executive committee in February 2007, efforts have focused on strengthening the existing fellowship, rather than facilitating new and pending applications.

2. New applications

Incoming inquiries receive, in response, details on the criteria and conditions for membership in the World Council of Churches (WCC) as well as application materials. The backlog of pending inquiries is attended to as possible.

The vast percentage of inquiries, new or pending, are from churches with fewer than 50,000 members and therefore not ideal candidates for membership in the WCC. In these cases, churches are strongly encouraged to seek membership in their national and regional ecumenical bodies.

Two churches recently submitted applications:

- Calvary Christ Lutheran Mission in Sri Lanka – 3 parishes, fewer than 50,000 members and not affiliated with the National Council of Churches in Sri Lanka.
- Congregational Christian Church in Tokelau – 9 parishes, fewer than 50,000, but one of two majority churches in the three-island nation¹.

3. Pending cases

Among the pending cases, only one church has more than 50,000 members. The Church of Christ in Congo (Democratic Republic of Congo) has over 25 million members and is an umbrella church/council (quite similar to the Evangelical Church in Germany-EKD). Although there have been discussions about the eventual membership of the CCC in the WCC, the church has never formally applied for membership and therefore does not technically constitute a pending application.

Until 2004, the constitution of the church excluded the possibility of membership in either the World Council of Churches or the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). The church constitution was changed in 2004, so that membership in either the WCC or the WEA could be possible.

Eight of the sixty-four member communities of the CCC are members of the WCC and three CCC member communities are in fellowship with the WCC through the United Methodist Church. The

¹ Tokelau is a three-island independent state under the protectorate of New Zealand. On Atafu the majority of people belong to the Congregational Christian Church, while on Nukunonu virtually the entire population belongs to the Roman Catholic Church. On Fakaofu both churches are represented with the Congregational Christian Church having the largest following.

potential membership of the CCC would be an opportunity to broaden and consolidate the WCC membership of Protestant churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Contact with the church has been renewed to inquire if the church foresees applying for membership in the WCC.

4. New members churches

In September 2006 the central committee formally accepted the application for membership of two churches:

- Laos Evangelical Church
- Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil

In accordance with WCC Rule I.5, the general secretary informed all WCC member churches that the applications had been accepted and asked for feedback concerning their admittance to membership. To date, no member church has raised objection to admitting either church to the WCC fellowship. It should therefore be anticipated that the central committee will receive the churches into membership at its meeting in February 2008.

The executive committee is asked to *recommend* that the Laos Evangelical Church and Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil be admitted to the fellowship of WCC member churches.

The executive committee is also asked to *extend an invitation* to both churches to attend the central committee meeting in February 2008.

5. Inactive members ²

After reviewing the list of thirty-one inactive member churches with the executive committee in February 2007, a letter was sent to all inactive churches emphasizing the spiritual dimensions of fellowship and asking the churches to respond urgently (see appendix 1). Based on the limited responses received to date, it has been possible to already reduce the number of inactive churches to twenty-seven (from 11% to 9% of total membership).

The following churches wrote to reiterate their commitment to active participation in the fellowship of WCC member churches, and to the extent possible, to regularize their membership contributions:

- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana
- Polish Catholic Church in Poland (Old Catholic)

It has been brought to our attention that the two inactive churches in India have somehow disbanded or restructured. A different approach and follow-up is needed to regularize both cases. Advice will be sought from the National Council of Churches in India and the Christian Conference of Asia as to how to proceed. The churches concerned are:

- Bengal-Orissa-Bihar Baptist Church
- Samavesam of Telugu Baptist Churches.

The executive committee is asked to *intercede through personal contacts with the remaining twenty-seven inactive member churches.* The attached list offers suggestions as to which executive committee member is asked to contact which church (see appendix 2).

Potentially inactive member churches, those whose contribution or contact with the WCC has lapsed for already two years, are also receiving similar attention so as to avoid increasing the percentage of inactive churches.

² According to the policy adopted by the central committee in 2002, inactive members are churches that have not maintained a membership contribution and /or contact with the WCC for more than three consecutive years. Inactive members and churches that have not paid their annual membership contribution are not eligible to receive subsidies to participate in WCC events.

Membership Matters: Appendix 1
Model text for letters to inactive members

Dear Bishop/General Secretary/Pastor/etc.,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our common Lord Jesus Christ. We are writing to express our concern that we have not heard from your church in many years. We trust that God has continued to bless the ministry and witness of your church abundantly. Please know that as a member of the body of Christ and the fellowship of churches seeking visible unity and common witness through the World Council of Churches, we hold you in prayer and we desire urgently to have news from our brothers and sisters in the [name of the church inserted here].

Because we have not heard from you and because your church has not made a financial membership contribution for three years, we are obliged by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches to consider your church as an “inactive” member of the fellowship of churches. This means that your church is not permitted to send delegates or representatives to WCC meetings. It also means that the WCC is not permitted to offer assistance with travel and other costs to members of your church who might have a valuable contribution to make to the programmatic work of the WCC. This weighs very heavily in our hearts, particularly because we value participation in membership as a commitment to fellowship and unity in Christ.

We would very much prefer to consider your church as an active member of the WCC fellowship. There may be a good reason why your church is not able to make an annual financial membership contribution. If this is the case, please write to us so, explaining why so that we can better understand your situation.

Regardless of the financial ability of your church, we value your active participation in spirit and in prayer. Indeed, your prayers and commitment to the unity of the church are more valuable to the WCC than gold. A simple letter to testify to your desire to remain an active member, to assure us of your continued prayers and to help us to understand your financial situation would permit us to report to the Central Committee that the [name of the church inserted here] is indeed an active member of the WCC fellowship of churches.

If there are other reasons why we have not heard from you in the past years, please help us to understand by writing to us to explain the reasons.

Most importantly, we wish to have news from your church so that we can thank God for the work He is doing through you and so that we can pray even more earnestly for your ministry and witness in Christ’s name.

Sincerely Yours,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

Membership Matters: Appendix 2

Inactive members as of 30 August 2007 (27 in total)

			Member or President asked to intercede
Africa	Algeria	Protestant Church of Algeria	Dossou
Africa	Côte d'Ivoire	Church of Christ - Harrist Mission	Dossou
Africa	Kenya	African Church of the Holy Spirit	Abuom
Africa	Kenya	Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church	Abuom
Africa	Liberia	Presbyterian Church of Liberia	Dossou
Africa	Madagascar	Church of the Province of the Indian Ocean	Dossou
Africa	Malawi	Church of the Province of Central Africa	Abuom
Africa	Namibia	Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia	Abrahams
Africa	Nigeria	Nigerian Baptist Convention	Abuom
Africa	South Africa	Council of African Instituted Churches	Abrahams
Africa	South Africa	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa	Abrahams
Africa	South Africa	Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa	Abrahams
Africa	South Africa	Presbyterian Church of Africa	Abrahams
Africa	Zambia (DRC)	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo	Abrahams
Asia	Indonesia	Batak Christian Community Church (GPKB)	Hendriks
Asia	Indonesia	Christian Church of Central Sulawesi (GKST)	Hendriks
Asia	Indonesia	Christian Evangelical Church in Sangihe Talaud (GMIST)	Hendriks
Asia	Indonesia	Protestant Church in Western Indonesia(GPIB)	Hendriks
Asia	Indonesia	Nias Protestant Christian Church (BNKP)	Hendriks
Asia	Japan	Orthodox Church in Japan	Vicken
Europe	Serbia	Reformed Christian Church in Serbia	Schindehülte
Latin America	Argentina	United Evangelical Lutheran Church	Altmann
Latin America	Brazil	Christian Reformed Church of Brazil	Altmann
Latin America	Chile	Free Pentecostal Mission Church of Chile	Altmann
Latin America	Mexico	Methodist Church of Mexico	Altmann
North America	United States	Hungarian Reformed Church in America	Vicken
North America	United States	National Baptist Convention of America	Pitts