



World Council of Churches

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To members of the
WCC Executive Committee

Geneva, 10 January 2008

Dear friends,

My best wishes for a blessed, happy and joyful new year! May God's peace – the peace that surpasses all understanding – reign in our world, a world continuously tormented by so many tensions, conflicts and acts of violence. To you all, to your churches and communities, to your dearest ones, my best wishes from Geneva for a new year full of successes!

This brief report following the Officers' meeting, held in Geneva, 6-7 December 2007, comes to you only a few days before the first mailing containing information and documents for both the executive and central committees.

Consensus training

The Officers' meeting was preceded by a two-day training seminar, bringing together the Officers and the moderators of all sub-committees of the central committee, as well as of all commissions and consultative bodies.

The first day was mainly dedicated to an introduction to the consensus method, including reference to the WCC Rules and the Guidelines prepared in order to facilitate the task of those entrusted by the fellowship with chairing meetings.

The second day focused on practicing the consensus method and discussing extensively all the specific questions the moderators may have depending on the nature and character of the meetings they are chairing (e.g. plenaries, sub-committees, commissions, etc.).

Finally, the moderators were given the opportunity to meet with staff colleagues working with their respective committees and commissions.

At the same time, the consensus facilitators and staff who had coordinated the meeting, prepared a long memorandum including suggestions for implementing the consensus method, equipping the rapporteurs of committees and commissions, and drafting reports (particularly for the central committee).

The Officers Meeting:

The Officers met at the beginning of December here at the Ecumenical Centre. Rev. Dr. Walter Altman, the moderator of the central committee, H.E. Metropolitan Dr. Gennadios of Sassima and Rev. Dr. Margaretha Hendriks-Ririmasse, vice-moderators, were all present. Rev. Anders Gadegaard, who had participated in the consensus training, joined the Officers for the sessions where the prioritization process and the finance report were discussed.

Since the central committee is almost upon us and most of the matters will be discussed extensively, I will limit myself to simply highlighting a few selected items from our long deliberations:

- (a) *The Global Christian Forum* was at the centre of our sharing process. Attended by the moderator and the general secretary, this event constitutes an important development in the contemporary ecumenical movement, challenging both the existing institutional forms of ecumenism and the existing circle of ecumenically committed churches and organizations. It was agreed that the council should, at the same time, continue to facilitate the task of the continuation committee and to carefully assess the implications of this process for the entire ecumenical movement. The Global Christian Forum will be included in the report of the general secretary to the central committee and follow-up decided as necessary by the committee.
- (b) *A new communication strategy for the council* was a matter included in the general secretary's report and later further elaborated by Mr. Mark Beach, Director of Communication. The latter presented the outline of a strategy paper that will be submitted to the executive committee and discussed at the central committee. The paper includes sections on website, publications, staffing requirements, increasing the level of professionalism among staff, etc. As part of the communication strategy the "60th Anniversary logo" was presented, and the slogan "Making a difference, together" was discussed extensively. The Officers made suggestions and expressed their appreciation for the efforts made to become more strategic in the area of communication.
- (c) *Towards an expanded assembly* was another issue that drew the Officers' attention and was extensively debated. Indeed, the report on the results of a listening process (listening to member churches and ecumenical partners; including this item on the agenda of ecumenical gatherings, etc.) and the tentative proposals were discussed thoroughly as the matter seems to be extremely important and sensitive for the future of the council and of the ecumenical movement. It is another way of facing the challenge of ecumenism in the 21st century, where the council is invited by the member churches and ecumenical partners to find and implement

creative solutions manifesting the tremendous potential of the churches' common journey. This is also a matter that will be debated at the central committee since the process of preparation for the next assembly will have to begin quite soon.

- (d) Finally, *a progress report on the prioritization exercise*, requested by the executive committee in its September meeting, was presented to the Officers. A collegial process, involving the new programme directors, had confirmed that the gap of CHF 2.9 million (highlighted in the 2009 framework budget discussed at the executive committee) could be addressed in a number of ways. The very first and tentative reflections had resulted in almost filling the gap and staff promised to continue the exercise in order to submit concrete solutions to the executive and central committees. Rev. Anders Gadegaard challenged the staff to be more courageous in reducing the number of the planned activities and to provide more details in the presentation of two scenarios requested by the executive committee. The Officers agreed that what was presented was only a progress report and asked the general secretary to lead the process until the two scenarios are elaborated and submitted for further consideration and decision. The Officers encouraged staff to take seriously the counsel of Rev. Anders Gadegaard that the scenarios seem to build too much on increasing the income and not enough on reducing costs and activities.

From the perspective of the programmatic life of the council, an account was given of the events, meetings and discussions which had taken place since the last executive committee meeting in September. Brief reports were given on the:

- Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in the 21st century
- The Global Platform
- Healing memories: the Dublin consultation
- The second round of dialogue between the WCC member churches and Pentecostals, in Baar Switzerland
- The Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration
- Greed, over-production and over-consumption: an AGAPE regional encounter in Dar-es-Salaam.

The Officers, including Rev. Dean Anders Gadegaard, expressed their disappointment that the 60th Anniversary Fundraising Campaign had been delayed and would not be ready to launch in February as hoped.

The Officers made the following decisions:

- The agenda of the central committee meeting in February was finalized and approved.
- The opening of a vacancy for programme executive for the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) was approved.

- Two statements on “Calling the global church to joint, participatory action on global warming” and “Peaceful uses of nuclear energy” were authorized for drafting and presentation to the executive and central committee meetings.

The Officers requested and/or authorized the following actions:

- The number of inactive member churches increased from 30 to 51 by the end of 2007. The Officers confirmed the seriousness of the issue and encouraged developing means of engaging central committee members to help resolve it.
- Churches that have not paid 2007 membership fees are not eligible to receive subsidies to attend the central committee. A considerable number of central committee members are not eligible to receive subsidy for the February 2008 meeting. The Officers agreed that the policy of not offering subsidies should be maintained but, at the same time, staff should make all possible efforts to encourage (and to facilitate, as needed) member churches to pay their membership contribution.
- The general secretary presented a proposal on restructuring of the IMD office. Currently the IMD office is located in FSA. The proposal is to locate the IMD office in the office of the Associate General Secretary for Programmes. That means that the Associate General Secretary for Programmes will also be the Director of IMD. The general secretary sought, and the Officers gave their affirmation, for this proposal. The general secretary further proposed to fill this new position from within the current WCC staff. The Officers supported the idea and encouraged the general secretary to bring a recommendation to the executive and central committees in February 2008.

The staff here at the secretariat join me in looking forward to seeing you all next month here in Geneva.

With every good wish, yours in Christ,



Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia
General Secretary