



March 30, 2009

## **The CEC General Assembly in Lyon 2009**

### **Response to the CEC Work Program by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) approved by the Church Council for International Relations on March 30, 2009**

#### **1. General**

The Conference of European Churches works many-sided in three commissions and in the office of the General Secretary. The report *From Trondheim to Lyon* describes it quite well. The commissions and the General Secretary have worked out a plan for the next six years and proposed some priorities for the future work. We appreciate the work they have done. Both the elected officials and the staff bring good expertise and competence to the commissions. However, the commitment of the churches to the work of CEC and to financing it should be improved and balanced. The current economical situation will have an effect on the resources available for the churches and thus also on CEC.

The commissions and the whole CEC could focus more on certain priorities. There are plenty of good and important things currently on the agenda. Concentration on central issues is needed because of the limited size of the resources available. Especially we want to emphasize as guidelines that the mandate of CEC covers the whole Europe and its vocation is to gather all the churches of Europe, in cooperation with the CCEE. In general, it is essential that the structures are clear enough and serve the main functions of the organization. After Trondheim, it has been necessary to pay much attention to the renewing of the organization and to the improving of the internal conditions of CEC. It's time to go further in the next six-year-period and seize the strategic challenges.

#### **2. The General Secretary**

Adequate attention must be paid to the cohesion of the organization of CEC, the degree of interaction between the three commissions, and to what extent the General Secretary is to coordinate the different functions. Our church believes that also in the future CEC could be located in Geneva as well as in Brussels and Strasbourg.

The integration of CCME with CEC will be finalized at the general assembly. One must pay a lot of attention to good cooperation, to its development, and to the solving of the problems, which are still there. The negotiations have been led by a working group consisting of delegates from both of the organizations. It has functioned satisfactorily. One problem is how the integration will be realized in practice in the structure and in the functions of CEC.

Another problem is the differing criteria for membership in the organizations. A significant part of the members of CCME can't be members in CEC and therefore can't have an equal effect on the mutual challenges of the churches in Europe. CCME's wish that the position of the immigrant churches and various minorities will be on CEC's agenda in the future in a quite new and more active way is understandable.

The position of women and youth remains a vital issue in the church and in the society at large. Improving it should be done by mainstreaming gender-related and youth matters transversally into all activities of the CEC. Therefore, we do not consider it necessary to re-establish a separate Solidarity and Women Desk.

Listening to the member churches and good cooperation with them are essential elements in all the work of CEC. Special attention should be given to the nurturing of good relationships between the church families. The promotion of a dialogue between the patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow is very important in order for relations of CEC to the orthodox Europe to recover, remain good and even get better.

The relations of CEC to the Roman Catholic Church, and especially to the CCEE, are very important. Taking care of these relations should receive special attention. In addition to the meeting of Sibiu, important cooperation has been made, for example, in the encounter of the Muslim population in Europe. Therefore, it is noteworthy that in other global contexts there are not two full organizations side by side, but the totality has been organized under the same ecumenical umbrella.

The General Secretary regards the strong growth of the Pentecostal/Free churches and of the Migrant churches in Europe and moreover the attractiveness of the new ecumenical communities (Taizé, Iona, Focolare, St. Egidio) as vital challenges to the institutional ecumenical movement. The aspiration to work together and to learn from one another is good.

A kind of problem is that the employees of CEC mainly have a Protestant or an Anglican background. A year ago, CEC had only one Orthodox employee, and at the moment it has three. This is one thing to pay attention to when recruiting new personal.

### **3. The Churches in Dialogue Commission (CiD)**

Our church has considered it as vital to invest in ecumenism through theological work and has pointed this out as the way to lasting solutions in the long run. We also continually want to underline the theological work of CEC and support it.

In spite of its small staff, the CiD carries out quality work. From our point of view, the research work, which evaluates the past dialogues between the Porvoo Community and the Community of the European Protestant Churches with the Orthodox churches in Europe, has been especially valuable. We also give our support to the analysis of the encounter between the minority and the majority churches and their position in Europe. This project should be continued. A new thing on the agenda is the creation of a new ecumenical European network or forum - like the Global Christian Forum is on the global scale – including all Christian movements. It is important to reflect the need to renew the ecumenical movement in the changing context of our time. Close cooperation with the WCC is thereby needed.

The function of the CiD, which has aimed to promote the shaping of a common Christian theology of religion for the dialogue with other religions, is also important and useful. The same is true for ecumenical education – not only for the current and potential church leaders and employees, but as an open and dialogical attitude on all levels.

#### **4. The Church and Society Commission (CSC)**

The significance of the CSC should be made clearer to the member churches, with the aim of promoting the contribution of the member churches – on the basis of jointly agreed goals – in the questions concerning Europe. The CSC could motivate the member churches to more actively follow EU-matters.

The CSC must have good relations with all its member churches. The profile of the CSC is in theological and ethical reflection. The evaluation of the value dimension of the European Union is a good example of this.

One basic function of the CSC is to serve the member churches in issues concerning Europe. Many of the member churches of CEC are active in EU issues, and they are cooperating in various networks and organizations. However, we support the constructive role of the CSC in European issues. It's essential that also in the future the CSC follows the institutional development and the expansion of the European Union and maintains discussion about the European values and about a wider understanding of Europe.

The work program of the CSC for the years 2009-2015 is quite extensive and could benefit, if clearer top priorities were to be found. But the program must at the same time be elastic enough to enable quick responding to new challenges.

#### **5. The Churches' Commissions' for Migrants in Europe (CCME)**

We welcome the integration of the CCME and CEC. This is fruitful and beneficial to CEC in general. Accordingly, it is good to carry out the integration in a way, which makes it possible to use the whole potential of the organization. When integrating the CCME with CEC, a good cooperation between the commissions is essential. The special features of the CCME should not be endangered.

The CCME has appealed to CEC during the working period, in order to lift up the situation of the Roma people in the churches of Europe. After Trondheim, there has not been much progress in this matter. Our church regards improving the situation of the Roma people as important. For instance, the FinnChurchAid has recently made an initiative, in order to improve the situation of the Romany in the Eastern European countries in cooperation with the CCME. Also the Year of Migration 2010 requires support from the whole of CEC.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

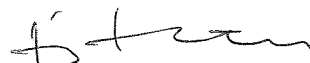
ELCF is an active member church of CEC. We welcome that the main work priorities of CEC for the years 2009-2015 have been thoroughly planned and described in the preparatory work programs of the General Secretary and of the commissions. CEC is with these guidelines heading in a good direction.

On behalf of

**The Church Council for International Relations of  
The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland**



Archbishop Jukka Paarma  
Chairperson



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