

# CHARTA OECUMENICA

## Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe

***"Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit"***

*As the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE)\* we are, in the spirit of the Messages from the two European Ecumenical Assemblies of Basel (1989) and Graz (1997), firmly resolved to preserve and develop the fellowship that has grown up among us. We give thanks to the Triune God for guiding our steps towards an ever deeper fellowship through the Holy Spirit.*

*Various forms of ecumenical co-operation have already proved themselves. Christ's prayer is: "...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). If we are to be faithful to this prayer, we cannot be content with the present situation. Instead, aware of our guilt and ready to repent, we must strive to overcome the divisions still existing among us, so that together we may credibly proclaim the message of the Gospel among all people.*

*Listening together to God's word in Holy Scripture, challenged to confess our common faith and to act together in accordance with the perceived truth, let us bear witness to the love and hope which are for all people.*

*Europe - from the Atlantic to the Urals, from the North Cape to the Mediterranean - is today more pluralist in culture than ever before. With the Gospel, we want to stand up for the dignity of the human person created in God's image and, as churches together, contribute towards reconciling peoples and cultures.*

*In this spirit, we adopt this charter as a common commitment to dialogue and co-operation. It describes fundamental ecumenical responsibilities, from which follow a number of guidelines and commitments. It is designed to promote an ecumenical culture of dialogue and co-operation at all levels of church life, and to provide agreed criteria for this. However, it has no magisterial or dogmatic character, nor is it legally binding under church law. Its authority will derive from the voluntary commitments of the European churches and ecumenical organisations. Building on this basic text, they can formulate their own local addenda, designed to meet their own specific challenges and resulting commitments.*

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*\* To the Conference of European Churches (CEC) belong almost all Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, Old-Catholic and independent churches in Europe. In the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) are represented all Roman Catholic Bishops' Conferences in Europe.*

### I.

#### WE BELIEVE IN "ONE HOLY CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH"

**"(Make) every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:3-6)**

#### **1. Called Together to Unity in Faith**

With the Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to the witness of Holy Scripture and as expressed in the ecumenical Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, we believe in the Triune God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because we here confess "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church" our paramount ecumenical task is to show forth this unity, which is always a gift of God.

Fundamental differences in faith are still barriers to visible unity. There are different views of the church and its oneness, of the sacraments and ministries. We must not be satisfied with this situation. Jesus Christ revealed to us on the cross his love and the mystery of reconciliation; as his followers, we intend to do our utmost to overcome the problems and obstacles that still divide the churches.

### **We commit ourselves**

- to follow the apostolic exhortation of the Letter to the Ephesians and persevere in seeking a common understanding of Christ's message of salvation in the Gospel;
- in the power of the Holy Spirit, to work towards the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ in the one faith, expressed in the mutual recognition of baptism and in eucharistic fellowship, as well as in common witness and service.

## **II.**

### **ON THE WAY TOWARDS THE VISIBLE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCHES IN EUROPE**

**"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,  
if you have love for one another" (John 13:35)**

### **2. Proclaiming the Gospel together**

The most important task of the churches in Europe is the common proclamation of the Gospel, in both word and deed, for the salvation of all. The widespread lack of corporate and individual orientation and falling away from Christian values challenge Christians to testify to their faith, particularly in response to the quest for meaning which is being pursued in so many forms. This witness will require increased dedication to Christian education (e.g. catechism classes) and pastoral care in local congregations, with a sharing of experiences in these fields. It is equally important for the whole people of God together to communicate the Gospel in the public domain, which also means responsible commitments to social and political issues.

### **We commit ourselves**

- to discuss our plans for evangelisation with other churches, entering into agreements with them and thus avoiding harmful competition and the risk of fresh divisions;
- to recognise that every person can freely choose his or her religious and church affiliation as a matter of conscience, which means not inducing anyone to convert through moral pressure or material incentive, but also not hindering anyone from entering into conversion of his or her own free will.

### **3. Moving towards one another**

In the spirit of the Gospel, we must reappraise together the history of the Christian churches, which has been marked by many beneficial experiences but also by schisms, hostilities and even armed conflicts. Human guilt, lack of love and the frequent abuse of faith and the church for political interests have severely damaged the credibility of the Christian witness.

Ecumenism therefore begins for Christians with the renewal of our hearts and the willingness to repent and change our ways. The ecumenical movement has already helped to spread reconciliation.

It is important to acknowledge the spiritual riches of the different Christian traditions, to learn from one another and so to receive these gifts. For the ecumenical movement to flourish it is particularly necessary to integrate the experiences and expectations of young people and actively encourage their participation.

### **We commit ourselves**

- to overcome the feeling of self-sufficiency within each church, and to eliminate prejudices; to seek mutual encounters and to be available to help one another;
- to promote ecumenical openness and co-operation in Christian education, and in theological training, continuing education and research.

#### **4. Acting together**

Various forms of shared activity are already ecumenical. Many Christians from different churches live side by side and interact in friendships, in their neighbourhoods, at work and in their families. Couples in interdenominational marriages especially should be supported in experiencing ecumenism in their daily lives.

We recommend that bilateral and multilateral ecumenical bodies be set up and maintained for co-operation at local, regional, national and international levels. At the European level it is necessary to strengthen co-operation between the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) and to hold further European Ecumenical Assemblies.

In the event of conflicts between churches, efforts towards mediation and peace should be initiated and/or supported as needed.

#### **We commit ourselves**

- to act together at all levels of church life wherever conditions permit and there are no reasons of faith or overriding expediency mitigating against this;
- to defend the rights of minorities and to help reduce misunderstandings and prejudices between majority and minority churches in our countries.

#### **5. Praying together**

The ecumenical movement lives from our hearing God's word and letting the Holy Spirit work in us and through us. In the power of this grace, many different initiatives now seek, through services of prayer and worship, to deepen the spiritual fellowship among the churches and to pray for the visible unity of Christ's Church. A particularly painful sign of the divisions among many Christian churches is the lack of eucharistic fellowship.

In some churches reservations subsist regarding praying together in an ecumenical context. But we have many hymns and liturgical prayers in common, notably the Lord's Prayer, and ecumenical services have become a widespread practice: all of these are features of our Christian spirituality.

#### **We commit ourselves**

- to pray for one another and for Christian unity;
- to learn to know and appreciate the worship and other forms of spiritual life practised by other churches;
- to move towards the goal of eucharistic fellowship.

#### **6. Continuing in dialogue**

We belong together in Christ, and this is of fundamental significance in the face of our differing theological and ethical positions. Rather than seeing our diversity as a gift which enriches us, however, we have allowed differences of opinion on doctrine, ethics and church law to lead to separations between churches, with special historical circumstances and different cultural backgrounds often playing a crucial role.

In order to deepen ecumenical fellowship, endeavours to reach a consensus in faith must be continued at all cost. Only in this way can church communion be given a theological foundation. There is no alternative to dialogue.

#### **We commit ourselves**

- to continue in conscientious, intensive dialogue at different levels between our churches, and to examine the question of how official church bodies can receive and implement the findings gained in dialogue;
- in the event of controversies, particularly when divisions threaten in questions of faith and ethics, to seek dialogue and discuss the issues together in the light of the Gospel.