

RESOURCES

for the celebration of the 20th Anniversary of
CHARTA OECUMENICA



“ REJOICE IN HOPE,
BE PATIENT IN SUFFERING,
PERSEVERE IN PRAYER. ”

[ROM 12:12]

Prepared and published by the CCEE-CEC Joint Committee

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INTRODUCTION

This year the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Charta Oecumenica, Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among Churches in Europe.

Regular CCEE-CEC Joint Committee meetings have been taking place since January 1976, whereas contact had been established even earlier, and plans for a large ecumenical gathering had been discussed since 1973. The first ecumenical encounter under the joint auspices of CEC and CCEE was held in April 1978 in Chantilly, France. This summit meeting, which was described as 'historic' by the French daily 'Le Monde', signified a new point in relationships between the Orthodox churches and the churches of the Reformation, which were members of CEC, and the Catholic Church represented by CCEE. The objectives set at that first encounter continued to guide the work of the Joint Committee in the years that followed: that Christians, although divided, are bound together by the power of the Holy Spirit, can experience fellowship through common prayer, and can discern ways and means of expressing Christian unity more adequately.

The most prominent outcome of the cooperation between CEC and CCEE has been the planning and running of the European Ecumenical Assemblies. It was the second European Ecumenical Assembly convened in 1997 in Graz that recommended the development of a common study document containing basic ecumenical duties and rights and fostering an ecumenical culture of living and working together. After a process of consultation and drafting, the Charta Oecumenica was signed on behalf of CEC and CCEE by the Presidents of the two organisations on Sunday 22 April 2001.

Since then, the ecumenical guidelines have been providing guidance to the theological work of the two organisations. In its annual meetings, the CCEE-CEC Joint Committee continues to reflect on the current challenges of the European Continent and the contextualisation of the ecumenical guidelines. Today, we celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Charta Oecumenica and rejoice in the strengthening of church fellowship through common prayer and action. We pray together for Christian unity and peace in the world, and we rejoice in the hope of the living God.

“REJOICE IN HOPE,
BE PATIENT IN SUFFERING,
PERSEVERE IN PRAYER.”
[ROM 12:12]

JOINT STATEMENT FROM THE PRESIDENTS OF CCEE AND CEC

20th Anniversary of Charta Oecumenica

12 April 2021

For the past twenty years the European continent has experienced a relatively peaceful period, along with an improvement of ecumenical relations. This was demonstrated in areas of daily life such as joint witness and action in local ecumenism, as well as inter-church marriages. Several theological agreements have been reached and a new generation of theologians has been ecumenically trained and formed. Several interfaith initiatives have flourished. Churches have strengthened their work towards a just and peaceful world, not least because of the increased movement of people from other continents and have increased their efforts towards the care for creation. The message of the Charta Oecumenica has contributed and given new vigour to all of this growth and transformation. For the peace we have experienced and the achievements of the global ecumenical movement, we rejoice and give thanks to God our Creator!

As we strive towards the Reign of God, our societies and churches continue to be challenged by our human sin and all kinds of division. Old and new church divisions are in need of healing, societal and economic inequalities call for the transformation of our attitudes and structures. The continued threats to democracy and the natural environment demand a renewed attention to the wholeness of life. The resurgence of armed conflicts and terrorist attacks in some parts of the continent in recent years require repentance, forgiveness and justice. In the face of these realities, as churches redefine their ministry in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, we reaffirm together and in a spirit of unity our commitment to witness to Christ as our Saviour and to his promise of a transformed life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Following the testament of our Lord expressed in John 17 and the Charta Oecumenica “that they may all be one”, we are aware that the unity of Christians does not result only from our human efforts. At the same time this unity, for which Jesus has prayed and suffered, must be perceptible in this world. In this sense we desire to be instruments for this unity and commit ourselves anew to the strengthening of church fellowship through common prayer and action, whilst offering our service to the world in promotion of justice and peace.

JOINT STATEMENT

“THAT THEY MAY
ALL BE ONE”
[JOHN 17]



Reverend Christian Krieger
CEC President



His Eminence Cardinal
Angelo Bagnasco
CCEE President

LET US PRAY TOGETHER TO THE ONE LORD AND MASTER

Reflection on the ecumenical guidelines from His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco^① CCEE President

On the 20th anniversary of the Charta Oecumenica, the Bishops of the Catholic Church, whom I have the honour to represent, greet affectionately all the brothers and sisters who, on the European Continent, pray to the one Lord and Master. The anniversary is a providential opportunity to reflect on the ecumenical commitment which was confirmed communally in the Charta by all the Continent's Christian denominations. Today we are gathered here to pray, to think in the light of the Spirit, and so relaunch the path to unity: a gift of God and the task of all Christians.

We see that the contemporary world is experiencing much anguish, it is faced with an uncertain future from different points of view; the pandemic, too, wounds health, social life, the economy, and religion itself. As disciples of the Lord, we make our own the pains and concerns of the individuals and the peoples of our lands, especially the young people disoriented and deceived by illusions which spread rapidly to weaken the soul and empty out life. Religious meaning, too, seems to be diminishing, and faith seems to be becoming irrelevant to human existence. Secularism is advancing and convincing people to live as if God was not there. The practice of religion – when it is still observed – does not always seem to impact on one's personal life, on civil life and in our common history.

Perhaps God is leaving Europe? Perhaps we are the last 'remnant' while the world is marching towards a new era: without Godless, without Christ, and soulless? Isn't this perhaps the most serious problem of our beloved Continent? The strain of being together, of mutual trust, of becoming a great "us" as Pope Francis exhorts in the Encyclical Fratelli tutti, of being one heart, does it not depend perhaps on a worldly mindset which reduces reality to just earthly life, and prompts belief that the meaning of life lies in satisfying material and immediate needs and desires? It is here, in this incapacity to look up to the Heavens, that we encounter

disappointments and delusions; here lies the origin of closure and arrogance, distrust and distance.

But this is not the entire reality: beneath the surface teems the life of the humble, the small ones of the Gospel, of a multitude who pray and live with honesty and sacrifice, who seek the truth with their hearts, who look Heavenwards and call on God to open the hearts of men and women, of peoples, of Nations and of continents, so that He might be able to enter as He did into the inn of Emmaus. The Lord Jesus continues to walk with us, is close to us as to the two tired and disillusioned disciples who were fleeing Jerusalem after the drama of Golgotha.

We, too, can experience the temptation of tiredness, feel the siege of doubt, but God is walking with us, is listening to the voices of our hearts, the sincerity of our desire to be united in the one Body of Christ, the one Church. The more the world plods along in the way of relationships between States and seems to cultivate the culture of conflict rather than that of encounter, the greater the need – and the hearts of people so desire it – to see paths of dialogue, of understanding, of communion. They need to see not just that it is possible to walk together, but also that doing so is more "beautiful"! We Christians are also called to this.

As on the road to Emmaus, the Risen One comes alongside, asks that hearts be opened to Him, and that voice be given to our expectations. Just as then, He challenges our incredulity, shakes our hardness of heart, and reminds us that the only path to Easter is the way of the cross. How long and arduous this path may be, we do not know. We are called to trust God, to pray with perseverance, to continue to forge bonds, to work together, to proclaim that Christ alone is the hope and future of humanity.

May the invocation of the two disciples become our own: "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening". Without the Lord it will always be evening, it is always night, and the darkness brings fear. The evening must never descend on our ecumenical journey, for this we must grow in our joint invocation so that the Master may remain with us and enlighten our steps. How can we forget the response of Christ? "So, he went in to stay with them"! Thus, it is not right for us to doubt and fear when faced with difficulties, times and trials.

While we pray that the Charta Oecumenica may be taken up again in our communities, that it may be an object of reflection and virtuous pathways with trust and courage, we believe that no step is too small, but that it deserves to be undertaken if it is born from, and sustained by, the light of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we renew the invitation to unite not just in the community celebration of this anniversary, but also to bear in all our hearts the disciples' invocation: "Stay with us, Lord, for it is nearly evening". Knowing that He will respond by entering into our hearts to eat with us in the sign of love which flows abundantly, and which, unseen, creates hopeful bonds.

(Original text in Italian)

^① Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco is the Archbishop Emeritus of Genoa, where he served for 14 years. He has been the CCEE President since his election in 2016.

THE CHARTA OECUMENICA, A PROPHETIC VOICE!

Reflection on the ecumenical guidelines from Reverend Christian Krieger,^② CEC President

The year 2021 marks the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Charta Oecumenica by the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences. For 20 years now, this text has embodied the dream of clearing the clogged sky of the "ecumenical winter" to enable the Churches, local communities and Christians in European countries to rediscover their vocation and their responsibility to work for reconciliation and unity. Indeed, at the Ecumenical Assembly in Graz (1997) a conviction emerged that in order to enable the ecumenical movement to continue its journey towards unity, it was essential to develop a common language and to create a common basis for ecumenical relations that would allow each person to position himself or herself in his or her Christian and/or institutional responsibilities. The Charta Oecumenica aims to meet this challenge. It is intended as an instrument to stimulate and strengthen the common life, prayer and witness of Christians.

The ecumenical movement has its spiritual origin in Christ's prayer to his Father that his disciples may be one so that the world may believe (Jn 17:21). Recognising and deepening the unity of the Church in order to make its witness credible has become the leitmotif of the ecumenical movement. Numerous initiatives mark out the path towards unity: theological dialogues conducted to better understand each other, to recognise each other as the Church of Jesus Christ, and sometimes to reach an agreement, or at least a form of consensus; fraternal meetings to get to know each other better among Christian families, to pray and celebrate together, to be nourished by the word of God; ecumenical cooperation to take up together the Christian witness at the heart of the world and its challenges. Among all these initiatives, the signing of the Charta Oecumenica on 22 April 2001 in St Thomas Church in

Strasbourg has a special place. It aims to gather the fruit of the the numerous initiatives that preceded it with the ambition of sharing them widely to stimulate the common life, prayer and witness of Christians.

When it was signed, the Charta Oecumenica responded to an imperative for the European churches in their desire to give credible witness to the Gospel. In Europe, in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was a question of living in the "common house" in a Union in the midst of enlargement, while recognising cultural diversity and identities, without levelling them. In addition, European countries are confronted with new ethical questions (biomedicine, ecology), a quest for meaning and happiness in consumerist societies, and the insistent question of their responsibility towards the southern hemisphere. The Charta Oecumenica is the result of the awareness that the churches cannot make a credible contribution to these social and societal problems until they are able to reach agreement and consensus among themselves. Thus, the challenge of evangelisation is the major reason for Charta. With it, the European Churches, aware of the need to overcome their divisions and conflicts, provide themselves with a solid working basis to strengthen their witness to the Gospel by enhancing the credibility of their ethical contributions and challenges in societal debates.

The history of the ecumenical movement is punctuated by numerous texts, whose main issue is usually their reception. The Charta is no exception. Yet CEC and CCEE did not want the Charta Oecumenica to be just another text. Therefore, it had to be a short text, not dogmatic, not canonical, not a declaration. Rather, it should be an inspiring text, based on Holy Scripture, setting out the main elements for promoting unity within the European churches. An accessible text that can initiate a learning process that promotes an ecumenical culture and instils a culture of dialogue within Christianity. Thus, these "Guidelines for Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe" include in a few pages a reminder of the common faith in the one, holy, catholic/universal and apostolic Church and base on it a common vocation to live in the unity of the faith. They then develop the path of visible communion of the Churches in Europe through common evangelisation, life, action and prayer. They outline the perspectives and commitments of the Churches in their common responsibility in Europe, at the level of European construction, dialogue with cultures, for the safeguarding of creation, the development of communion with Judaism, relations with Islam and dialogue with ideologies and philosophical movements.

^② Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco is the Archbishop Emeritus of Genoa, where he served for 14 years. He has been the CCEE President since his election in 2016.

The Charta Oecumenica represents a real milestone on the journey towards unity. On the one hand, it is the fruit of a considerable amount of work done by generations of ecumenical actors, of their commitment, their efforts, their dialogues, their vision, their hope... On the other hand, it is the fruit of a collaborative work in European Christianity carried out jointly by CEC and CCEE from the original idea in Graz in 1997 to its adoption in Strasbourg in 2001. Welcomed as an impetus, with a lively force, it remains an instrument to promote widely, including in local ecumenical groups, a life of dialogue, encounter, prayer and common action.

And now 20 years have passed since the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences succeeded in agreeing together on this key text, this essential ecumenical milestone, which contains the foundations of the relationship between the Churches, and which sets out the guidelines for their commitments. We have the opportunity to look back over the 20 years during which this text has accompanied and stimulated us on our journey towards unity. Today we are grateful for the positive advances and developments: the dynamic of encounter created by the Global Christian Forum; the development of celebrations within the framework of the "seasons of creation"; the unprecedented ecumenical sign set by the Holy Father when he attended the opening celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Lund. However, this gratitude should not blind us to the humility and repentance that are called for by the persistence of realities between and within the churches that undermine the witness to which they are called. Indeed, failures, abuses, rivalry, division and conflict have continued to undermine the credibility of the churches.

But the fact also remains that in 20 years the political and ecclesial context in Europe has changed. In many places Churches and congregations have been weakened. Today, more than in the past, the Churches are faced with the challenge of secularisation. What is more, they are not immune to the discourse of inward-looking attitudes that is spreading in the heart of Europe. Faced with the rise of nationalist or populist reflexes, the question of the credibility of the divided Churches at the heart of Europe is not without its challenges. In fact, the dream

and ambition of the Charta Oecumenica have lost none of their relevance. Its intuitions remain promising and inspiring. The affirmation of the foundations of unity resonates even more strongly at a time when the churches are often primarily concerned with their own future. The churches' commitments to their common responsibility in Europe are essential for the gospel witness in plural societies. Certainly, the Charta Oecumenica bears the marks of its time. It does not mention, or sometimes only marginally, major contemporary issues such as the migration crisis, security issues, the urgency to care for creation, nationalist or populist reflexes that threaten democracies, the question of freedom of religious expression in secular societies. This non-exhaustive list argues for a revision of the societal commitments made 20 years ago in order to update them in the spirit of the initial intuitions.

Living, praying and acting together remains an imperative on the journey towards unity. As an embodiment of this dream and ambition, the Charta Oecumenica remains of undeniable relevance. It is spiritually relevant in that it attempts to respond to the prayer of Christ by promoting the unity of his followers. It has vocational relevance in that it seeks to strengthen the witness of the Gospel by enhancing the credibility of the churches. It is strategically relevant in that it gathers the fruits of dialogue and encounter initiatives and makes them available to churches, communities and Christians, so as to enable everyone, wherever they are, to become actors of reconciliation and unity. It reflects a kerygmatic relevance, by setting out a vision of unity, the way to unity and commitments to the world. In setting out a vision and a path for a new impetus on the journey towards unity the Charta Oecumenica is firmly in the line of prophetic voices.

The Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences gratefully celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Charta Oecumenica and pray with one voice that the breath of this milestone will continue to inspire Christians. May the Spirit of God inspire us to words and deeds that strengthen the fellowship of all Christ's followers, "so that the world may believe".

ECUMENICAL SERVICE

for the 20th Anniversary of the Charta Oecumenica
22 April 2021 Order of Service

The Gathering

Classical music from St Gallen cathedral ^③

Words of Welcome

Leader 1:

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,
This year the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Charta Oecumenica, Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among Churches in Europe. Today, we rejoice in the strengthening of church fellowship through common prayer and action. We pray together for Christian unity and peace in the world, and we rejoice in the hope of the living God.

^③ *Kantate JS Bach BWV 87.*

^④ *As the leader of the service makes the sign of the cross on the lips, participants are warmly invited to make the sign of the cross as they feel comfortable.*



Leader 2:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader 2: The Lord be with you!

All: And also with you!

Leader 2: O Lord, open my lips ^④

All: And my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

L2: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

All: As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Invocation of the Holy Spirit

Veni Creator Spiritus ^⑤



Leader 1:

Let us pray:

Spirit of love, come upon our gathering and dwell among us.

All: Come, Holy Spirit!

Leader 1: Spirit of reconciliation show us the path towards Christian unity.

All: Come, Holy Spirit!

Leader 1: Spirit of hospitality, teach us to be welcoming and instil within us an attitude of respect to all those whom we meet.

All: Come, Holy Spirit!

Leader 1: Spirit of compassion, help us to be sensitive to the needs of all those who suffer.

All: Come, Holy Spirit!

Leader 1: Spirit of hope, help us to detach ourselves from all hindrances to our ecumenical journey.

All: Come, Holy Spirit!

^⑤ *Hymn of the IX Century from Stift Heiligenkreuz, Austria, Music: Kempten about 1000 / Mainz 1947. Text: Markus Jenny (1971) 1973 according to the hymn "Veni, creator spiritus" of Hrabanus Maurus 809; Robert Bridges 1899; Edmond Pidouxl Mikael Agricola 1544 / Jaako Finno virsikirjaan 1583; Jan Willem Schutle Nordholt 1964/73. © Theologischer Verlag, Zürich. © Internationale Arvbeitsgemeinschaft für Hymnologie (IAH). ©Virsikirian Kokonaisuus, Kirkonkeskusrahasto, Helsinki. © Interkerkelijke Stichting voor het Kerklied, Leidschendam.*

Repentance

Leader 2: We are here together as sisters and brothers from different churches.

We are here together because we hear the call of our Lord Jesus Christ, who wants us to be one.

Leader 2: O God, holy and undivided Trinity,
Give to us the thirst and the hunger for communion in faith, life and witness.

Keep us restless until we grow together in accord with Christ's prayer:
That we who believe in him may be one.

All: Kyrie Eleison

Leader 2: Forgive our many failings and help us to overcome them.
Root us firmly in faith and love, that we may be Your disciples on earth,
and messengers who proclaim good news in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Protect each of us from evil, from all forms of division and hostility,
and grant us strength to stand for all that is right and kind and beautiful.

All: Christe Eleison

Leader 2: Transform us, Lord God, that we may not only speak of faith
and love, but demonstrate these qualities in our lives.
Transform us, that we may not only overcome our own divisions,
but may go on to become agents of your reconciliation.

All: Kyrie Eleison

Leader 2: May the almighty God have mercy on us,
may He forgive our sins, the root of division, and
may He strengthen all our efforts towards the unity of the churches
through our Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Hymn

The Church's One Foundation ©



The Church's One Foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord.
She is his new creation by water and the Word.
From heav'n he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth,
her charter of salvation one Lord, one faith, one birth,
one holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses with every grace endued.

Confessing our faith together



Leader 1: "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)

Reader 1: 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. 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.

Response 1: We commit ourselves to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and persevere in seeking a common understanding of Christ's message of salvation in the gospel. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves 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.

(Charta Oecumenica 1)

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Prayer

We gather today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

We gather today
Through the strength of Christ's birth with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension.

May Christ always be with us,
May Christ always be before us,
May Christ always be behind us,
May Christ always be in us,
May Christ always be beneath us,
May Christ always be above us,
May Christ always be on our right,
May Christ always be on our left,
May Christ always be there when we lie down,
May Christ always be there when we sit down,
May Christ always be there when we arise,
May Christ always be there in the heart of all who think of us,
May Christ always be there in the mouth of all who speak of us,
May Christ always be there in every eye that sees us,
May Christ always be there in every ear that hears us.

We gather today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.
Amen.

All: Lord, hear our prayer!

Reflection on the ecumenical guidelines

Hymn

Jésus le Christ, lumière intérieure ^①



Jesus Christ, inner light, do not let my darkness speak to me.
Jesus, Christ, inner light, enable me to welcome your love.

Witnessing the Gospel together



Leader 2: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13: 35)

Reader 2: 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. Common witness requires increased dedication to Christian education and pastoral care with sharing of experiences in these fields.

Response 2: 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. We commit ourselves to appreciate the worship and other forms of spiritual life in other churches. We commit ourselves to move towards the goal of eucharistic fellowship.

(Charta Oecumenica 2, 3 & 5)

^① Music: Jacques Berthier, 1923-1994, © Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 71250 Taizé Community, France.

Prayer

Rekindle, Lord, the flame which you breathed into your church, and upon the world, at Pentecost. May this fire purify the church's speech of all pretentiousness and renew its thinking day by day.

Deliver it from all prejudices, rancour and suspicion which cloud the mind and harden the heart, and which prevent us from understanding and loving one another as we truly are.

May the church learn to communicate in the loving, gentle and humble words of your gospel, so that the world will listen and will hear you! May the church lead the world with a sure and gentle hand, to encounter with you, to the place where all are gathered into you, you who alone can make us one again, and in whom the eternal truth of all creation is fulfilled.

Honour, glory and thanks be to you, O Lord. Amen.

All: Lord, hear our prayer!

Hymn

Christ be our light [®]



Longing for light, we wait in darkness. Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people, light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light! Shine in your church, gathered today.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless. Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others, walls made of living stone.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light! Shine in your church, gathered today.

Many the gifts, many the people, many the hearts that yearn to belong.

Let us be servants to one another making your kingdom come.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light! Shine in your church, gathered today.

[®] Music and Text: Bernadette Farell, b. 1957 ©1993, 2000, Bernadette Farell, Published by OCP Publications. All rights reserved. During the hymn a candle is lit as we prepare to receive the word of God. Participants are kindly invited to light their own candles.

A reading from Scripture



Romans 12:2-12

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

(NRSV [®])

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Hymn

Hosanna 10

Serving the world together



L1: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9)

Reader 3: On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious and open Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail. We recognise the desire of young generations for a healthy and attractive common home. We appreciate the peace and respectful cohabitation of various religions in our Continent and the fruitful collaboration with the secular European institutions.

Response 3: We commit ourselves to work for a deepening of consciousness for the value of human dignity. We strive for the safeguarding of creation. Recognising the freedom of religion, the freedom of conscience for individuals and religious communities, we desire to strengthen the dialogue of Christians with Jews, Muslims, followers of Eastern and all other religions, and each person of good will whilst giving a witness of our Christian faith.

(Charta Oecumenica 7-12)

Prayer

We remember, Lord, all the victims of conflicts and injustice, whilst taking initiatives of solidarity with them.

We pray for the migrants, displaced and immigrants in the whole World even in Europe, especially from the Middle East and Africa Regions, so that they can find stability and serenity.

We unite our intentions with the sick and wounded, particularly in this period of the Pandemic so that they may be healed.

We raise our prayers for those living in egoism and selfishness and causing wars and divisions, that they may experience the beauty of Creation and reconcile with the cosmos, among themselves and with the Creator.

Help us Lord to reinforce the dialogue of life among us and to discover that we are "One Human Family", inhabitants of the "Common Home", being one in our diversity of religions, traditions and cultures.

We offer to You, Almighty God, our prayers and intentions as fragrance, so that by your Mercy and Love, the Holy Spirit may transform our life and grant us peace.

Amen.

All: Lord, hear our prayer!

Hymn

Christ There is No East or West [®]



In Christ There is No East or West, in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.

In him shall true hearts everywhere their high communion find.
His service is the golden cord, close binding humankind.

Join hands, disciples of the faith, whate'er your race may be.
Who serves my father as his child is surely kin to me.

Reflection on the ecumenical guidelines

Leader 1: In confidence that you, Lord, hear our prayers for the reconciliation of this world and for the unity of all Christians in their witness, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

[®] Music: Alexander Robert Reinagle 1830. Text-E: John Oxenham 1908; D: Otto Brodde 1971/Zürich 1988/1989; Per Lønning 1973; Jan Willem Schutle Nordholt 1973. © Verein zur Herausgabe des Gesangbuchs der ev.-ref. Kirchen der deutschspr. Schweiz, Zürich. © Verbum, Oslo. © Interkerkelijke Sighting voor het Kerklid, Leidschendam.

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing and Sending

Leader 1: As we pray for Christian unity and the reconciliation of the whole created world, we commit anew to bring hope to the world.

Leader 2: Concluding words

"May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

All: Amen.



Concluding Hymn

Jubilate, Everybody [®]



Jubilate, Everybody
Serve the Lord in all your ways,
And come before His presence singing,
Enter now His courts with praise.
For the Lord our God is gracious, and His mercy everlasting.
Jubilate, jubilate, jubilate Deo!

[®] Music and text based on Psalm 100: Fred Dunn © 1977 Thank you Music, Für D, A, CH: SCM Hänssler, D-171087 Holzzerlingen.

INTERPRETATION OF THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS 12: 2-12

His Eminence Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden and All Scandinavia

In the second half of his letter to the Romans, which begins at the twelfth chapter, St Paul sends moral instructions and practical exhortations to the faithful to help them lead a truly Christian life. St. Paul is not a moralist but a theologian, and his morality is grounded in theology.

Each one of us possesses different gifts, depending on the grace we have received and the degree of our faith. Through the sacrament of baptism, which receives Christians into a new life in the faith, the Holy Spirit dwells in their souls and endows them with gifts. The Holy Spirit grants these gifts, giving each of us gifts that are to be used for the benefit of all.

Afterwards, the Apostle mentions certain gifts, beginning with the gift of prophecy, which is significant for two reasons. It is a teaching that foretells the future, while also revealing those things that are hidden. Specific reference is made here to the prophecy of the New Testament that manifested itself on the day of Pentecost. St. John Chrysostom offers the interpretation that “even though prophecy is a gift, it is not given coincidentally, but according to the measure that each of the recipients can accept.”

St. John Chrysostom explains that “ministry” refers to all types of ecclesiastical work. The apostles, the deacons, the aides to the apostles, the teachers, etc. undertake it along with their faith. All forms of ministry are connected to Christ Himself, Who, through His teaching and example became the first deacon and servant. The Lord Himself distributes ministries to His faithful through the Holy Spirit. It is the duty of each of the faithful to carry out their ministry with care and thoroughness.

As the letter progresses, there is mention of “paraclesis,” which takes on multiple meanings. We can approach an understanding of its meaning if we correlate it to the Holy Spirit, which is called the Paraclete, because its work is the very act of paraclesis or comforting. Here, Chrysostom explains – and Theodoret of Cyrus adds – that this is a teaching “to encourage virtue.”

After making specific reference to three ministries – prophecy (preaching), teaching, and paraclesis – the Apostle changes the syntax as he continues his letter. He does not mention the variety of gifts, but instead emphasizes the manner in which those possessing them should administer the Church. He who possesses a gift should generously offer his goods and distribute them to those who are in need. However, any offer must be made in a spirit of simplicity, and generosity.

The Proistamenos – in other words, the person who holds an administrative position in the Church – ought to conduct his ministry with zeal. There is also a mention of the person who shows mercy – in other words, the person who empathises with others.

St. Paul the Apostle then instructs those receiving various gifts on how they should use them. He concludes with the gift of love, which represents the quality of Christian communion. The Apostle advises the Romans to ensure that their love is sincere and free of hypocrisy, and that it is manifested through works of sacrifice and offering. He also points out that Christians should avoid wickedness and evil, while remaining attached to and focusing on what is good.

Next, the letter encourages the faithful to listen to other believers as caring brethren, presenting the concept of “philadelphia” (love for brothers and sisters). When displaying brotherly love, the faithful must also be caring. Care adds intensity, and gentleness to love. According to St. Basil the Great, care renders “the disposition of him who loves toward the person being loved fervent and ardent.” This disposition must be strengthened by the sense of respect for each of our brethren – ensuring that we offer honour with genuine sense of modesty, thus securing the unity of the Church.

At the close of the chapter, St. Paul reminds the reader that all the faithful must display eagerness and zeal for every godly work. A burning desire for the Lord and His ministry keeps the faithful vigilant. If the faithful are to succeed in all these things they must have hope, which represents a betrothal to the Holy Spirit, a foretaste of salvation. The joy that comes from hope is the weapon with which to confront temptation. If they possess the joy and hope of the Holy Spirit, Christians can face sorrow with patience, forbearance, and happiness. Divine patience leads to salvation and redemption!

UNITY: ONE BODY AND ONE SPIRIT

Biblical Reflection on Ephesians 4:3-6 from Dr Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi^⑬

“What keep us together is the common calling to which we can respond only by invocation of the Holy Spirit...The fact of being together, and the decision to stay together means that we are all equal depending on God’s guidance and grace”^⑭

1. Introductory comment

Paul wrote the epistle to Ephesians to expand the horizons of his readers, so that they might understand better the dimensions of God’s eternal purpose and grace and come to appreciate the high goals God has for the Church. The letter divides neatly into two halves, chapters 1-3 and 4-6. The first section, lyrical in style and taking the form of blessings and prayers, sets out certain truths about God, Christ and salvation, the church and Christians, especially in the latter case, with the Gentiles.

The second section is more or less ethical, containing some general instruction: to preserve unity, to put on Christ and keep separate from darkness, and to avoid obvious sins. It continues with some specific instructions, known as the household codes, addressed specifically to husbands and wives, children and their parents, slaves and their masters. It finishes with general instruction, comparing Christian virtues to a soldier’s armour. The writer emphasizes that the whole church needs to grow into the fullness of Christ’s love and truth. Truth, according to John Riches: “is neither to be found in constantly changing fads and fashions, “wind(s) of doctrine” (4:14), nor in the simple formulations of penny catechisms. Truth has to enlighten the eyes of our heart”.^⑮

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^⑭ Nikos Nisiotis, “The importance of the Faith and Order Commission for restoring Ecclesial Fellowship” in *Sharing One Hope*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1978), 13-14.

^⑮ John Riches, “Ephesians”, in Daniel Patte (Ed.), *Global Bible Commentary*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 473-481.

2. Unity: One Body and One Spirit

The body metaphor was commonly used in antiquity to restore unity among dissident members of society. Paul used this metaphor to promote unity in early Christian communities. In his case, the metaphor was the body of the crucified and risen Christ. Along with the theme of unity, Paul used this metaphor to promote a form of caring for each other, as among the individual limbs of the body. Unity among believers is explicitly tied to the relations of each individual to another especially in the letter to the Romans, although it is certainly implied in 1 Corinthians 12.^⑯

The reason why Paul drew upon this image of the church as a body is clear. It expresses a very distinctive kind of unity (organic unity): of unity in and through diversity. In Paul’s mind, the oneness of our Lord Jesus Christ that the Church needs to manifest and proclaim through the Holy Spirit is similar to the unity of a body which consists of many members and yet is one. This comparison allows Paul to illustrate unity in diversity, the mutual interdependence of the members of the Church, the necessity to honour all members, and their solidarity or unity in destiny. According to Paul, all gifts and services must thus be regarded as essential for the life of the Church. All gifts of the Holy Spirit are ministries to the life of the Church. Their unity is derived from the fact that they actualize, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the saving ministry of Jesus Christ. St. John Chrysostom, in commenting on unity, diversity and equality among members declare: “the saving and sustaining the life of our souls, divine grace is distributed with the same equality to each one and to all. Neither are you served from different Eucharist Lamb than I am, but all are participating in the same. We all enjoy the same baptism, each having been honored of the same Spirit, and we are all marching to the same Kingdom. Equally, we are all brothers of Christ. All these things are common to all of us.”^⑰

It is the mission of the church to exemplify unity and harmony and to participate with God in bringing the whole creation (“all things”) into this realm of shalom (peace). There is one body and one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, a seven-fold oneness that should leave no doubt as to the significance of the affirmation. This unity which embraces diversity can be observed in congregations, denominations, and ecumenical circles. Participation in the Oneness overcomes barriers of doctrine and practice, race and ethnicity, culture and nationality, economic and educational status. Note that diversity remains, but it has been integrated in the one Spirit, joined in the one hope.

^⑯ Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi, “Unity in Diversity: A Reflection on First Corinthians 12” in *Yearbook of Orthodox Theology Program of the Hellenic Open University*, (Athens: Hellenic Open University, 2010), 147-157.

^⑰ John Chrysostom, *Homily 4,4 on Thessalonians*.

Despite the communal experience, there is also a personal one. According to the report of the inter-orthodox consultation "Your will be done: Orthodoxy in Mission" Neapolis Greece, 16-24 April 1988: "the mission of everyone is to know Christ, to live in him and witness to him by word and deed. When our Eucharistic assembly experiences this truth, the necessity to share the joy of the resurrection with all people is a natural consequence...the Church's mission also calls us to the task of peacemaking, reconciling and defending justice for everyone, especially in contexts where the people of God suffer from injustice, violence, oppression and war. When the Eucharist assembly does not engage in such outreaches it fails to realize its missionary responsibility".¹⁸

In other words, the liturgy, the center of spiritual life for Christian communities, is not to escape from life, but a continuous transformation of life according to the prototype Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit. If it is true that in the Liturgy the faithful not only hear a message but they participate in the great event of liberation of sin and of koinonia (communion) with Christ through the real presence of the Holy Spirit, then this personal incorporation into the body of Christ, this transfiguration of their little being into a member of Christ, must be evident and the proclaimed in their actual lives. The liturgy has to be continued in personal everyday situations. Each of the faithful is called upon to continue a personal 'liturgy' on the secret altar of his own heart, to realize a living proclamation of the good news 'for the sake of the whole world'.¹⁹

Dietrich Bonhoeffer maintained that a healthy faithfulness to Christ calls us in every place and at all times to be open to everybody, especially those who have been marginalised. This perspective and our

responsibility today to ask critical questions about the Church and its aim in the world was emphasized in his well-known statement in Letters and Papers from Prison:

There remains an experience of incomparable value. We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history, from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled-in short, from the perspective of those who suffer.²⁰

3. Closing Remarks

The COVID-19 pandemic urges Christian churches to re-evaluate their practices and raises questions on how churches should respond to a difficult and extraordinary situation where not only health and economic issues are at stake, but also spiritual and ethical dimensions of human life. In other words, it is the understanding of what the church is all about and how ecclesial life is practised. Christian communities are challenged to discuss on how to be the Church of/or in the 21st century, be the Church "outside the walls", be the Church in the family and the home.²¹

Some Christian churches have a long and strong diaconal tradition. For them helping the poor, the sick, and otherwise disadvantaged is part of their identity. Other churches, especially younger ones, place more emphasis on proclaiming the Good News and pragmatic fellowship. This pandemic has challenged both kinds to reflect anew on the nature, constitution, and role of the church. For those who have a strong sacramental tradition, it includes deliberating on how the central role of the eucharist may be upheld if physical participation is not or only privately possible. Other churches need to reflect more on down to earth matters, for instance, how "works of mercy" can be extended in a secular environment. Both groups are challenged to stretch

¹⁸ "Report of an Inter-Orthodox Consultation 'Your will be done: Orthodoxy in Mission' Neapolis, Greece, 16-24 April 1988" in *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism. Statements, messages and reports on the ecumenical movement, 1902-1992*, Gennadios Limouris (ed.), (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 141-149.

¹⁹ See *Annastasio Giannoulatos' comment to the Consultation in Armenia 16-21 September 1975, on the topic "Confessing Christ through the Liturgical life of the Church"*.

²⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer – *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Eberhard Bethge (ed.), (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1972), 17.

²¹ *The households were the historical churches in early Christianity, and highly influenced the ethos, theology and terminology of the Church. More than any other writing of the New Testament, Luke-Acts makes clear the fundamental role which private houses and households played in the spread of the Jesus movement. Perhaps, the Covid-19 era is a good opportunity for churches to remember their biblical roots and the transformative experience of early Christianity.*

their understanding of what they took for granted for a long time and are invited to widen their understanding of the church.

For some orthodox scholars: "the present pandemic is a period of spiritual renewal and of hope for a meaningful storm for a liturgical and overall renewal of the Church; it is a powerful experience of the authentic nature of the Church and manifests a longing for a return to the traditional status of the priesthood of all believers and to a wider permanent ministry of the Diaconate for men and women".²²

In other words, as Professor C. Kavin Rowe writes in The Wall Street Journal: "it is one more obvious, terrible instance of a broken world. But amid all the reasonable concern, we shouldn't lose sight of the deeper cause of our anxiety—our mortal fear—and the unprecedented chance within this life to become fuller, richer and more joyful human beings."²³

It is obvious that our witness to the Gospel in the current situation must include care for God's creation as an integral part of our mission, the full participation of all members in the life of the church without exceptions and exclusions, as well as other aspects of social teaching of our Churches. The present pandemic situation has brought our divided Churches into closer cooperation and rendered more urgent our Church's quest for the visible unity of the Church of Christ.

²² This was the general conclusion and recommendation of an International webinar on "Religious Communities and Church in a Period of Pandemic" organised from April 6 to April 11, 2020, by the Center of Ecumenical, Missiological, and Environmental Studies (CEMES), within the framework of the inter-Orthodox Master Program on "Orthodox Ecumenical Theology" (MOET) of the International Hellenic University (IHU).

²³ *The Church in a Period of Pandemic: Can the Present Pandemic Crisis Become a Meaningful Storm for Renewal in Our Churches?*, Petros Vassiliadis and George Demacopoulos (eds.), (Thessaloniki: CEMES, 2020).

A new awareness of belonging to the Body of Christ on a global level is indeed growing. It is focusing on what believers of all origins have in common, their faith in Jesus Christ; our faith can be expressed in common prayers, their hope in common witness, and their love in common actions and good practices. It is a duty of Christian churches to find new ways of that expression, for instance online or physically distanced, but always socially and spiritually united due to the fact:²⁴

"4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:4-6)

²⁴ Jean-Daniel Pluss, "Covid-19, the Church and the Challenge of Ecumenism", *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Studies* 37/4, (2020): 286-296.

'IT IS BY YOUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER THAT EVERYONE WILL RECOGNISE YOU AS MY DISCIPLES'

Biblical reflection on John 13: 35 His Eminence Cardinal Vincent Nichols ²⁵

The emotive episode of the Washing of the Feet at the beginning of chapter 13 of St. John's Gospel focusses our minds on "love", a word which conjures up many different definitions. St. John offers us a context in which we can define "love" according to Our Lord's teaching. St. John says that: "Jesus, knowing his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, loved them to the end." What does it mean, then, to "love his own" and "love them to the end"? Here, we can gain assistance from Pope Benedict XVI, who in his book *Jesus of Nazareth* explained that: "Love is the very process of passing over, of transformation, of stepping outside the limitation of fallen humanity – in which we are separated from one another and ultimately impenetrable to one another – into an infinite otherness." Jesus offers us a new meaning of love, where we step beyond our limits and are transformed. He demonstrates this when he stoops down to wash his disciples' feet. This is the love that we have for one another, and the love that makes us known as His disciples.

St. John's Gospel takes us through the many signs and miracles that Jesus performed, reminding us of his humanity and divinity, to this second section of the Gospel recounting the moments of the Lord's Paschal mystery, leading us to the Sign, the hour, the moment of glory of the Lord's death on the cross. The hour of this supreme sacrifice commences with the Washing of the Feet, replacing in John's Gospel the institution of the eucharist, giving way to a different way to frame the retelling of the Last Supper. At the heart of the eucharistic mystery is both the love that the Father has for us, which we celebrate in the eucharist and receive in Holy Communion, and the command to become what we receive, which is to serve our brothers and sisters and be recognised as the Lord's disciples. Jesus himself says in the course of the Last

Supper: "He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father."

Therefore, the call to service is clear! We must wash each other's feet, as Jesus puts it: "I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you." The invitation is clear not just to those who first heard these words, but also to those who follow Jesus today. We share with those who first heard this message, and generations of Christian men and women, the desire to follow this command and share in the Lord's example of love. We know that initially this did not go down well with the Twelve. St. Peter who so often gathers the thoughts of the whole group, demands that the Lord does not just wash his feet but the whole of his body. St. Peter doesn't understand what Jesus is trying to teach them. In washing his disciples' feet, Jesus is taking the lowest place among them, and performing the menial task of a servant. The master becomes the servant and bends down before each one of his disciples to serve them physically lowering himself to carry out this act of love. The implication is clear that they must do the same, they must serve each other, and no-one is above serving the needs of another. We believe in the Lord, so are called to share in these works and do even greater ones!

"It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognise you as my disciples." The context for these words makes sense when they are seen through the prism of the Washing of the Feet and related to it. If they are taken out of context, they could offer us a distorted notion of what discipleship actually is, reducing it to no more than being friendly to each other, or having a passing concern for our neighbour's needs, or just to think well of another person. The love that Jesus not only talks about, but demonstrates so clearly in this action, demands that we go deeper into the mystery. The way that we show love to each other must come from a heart that is open to God's grace. To be recognised as one of the Lord disciple's means that we too have to go beyond our limits, and with the help of His grace be transformed so as to wash each other's feet. The Lord showers this grace upon us when we ask for it in prayer, when we are inspired to follow his example manifested in the Scriptures and most especially when we celebrate the Eucharist. Gradually we learn more and more to put aside our own needs so as to be open to serve each other.

What we read in this section of St. John's Gospel commits us to set our understanding of the Eucharist in this context of service of our neighbour. In the Eucharist, Jesus unites us to his gift of self-sacrificing love to the Father, which he himself has

²⁵ Cardinal Vincent Nichols is the Archbishop of the Westminster, London, England since 2009. He also serves currently as President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales since 2009 and as Vice-President of the CCEE since 2016.

received from the Father. The words from the letter to the Philippians sum this up succinctly; "His state was divine, yet Christ Jesus did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are, and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross." This defines our attitude to how we are to serve our brothers and sisters, humbly placing ourselves before the Lord, and before our brothers and sisters, and allowing ourselves to be transformed by God's grace which raises us up to become the children of God, just as Jesus himself was raised up.

How does this passage of the Scriptures speak to our ecclesial context in Europe today? How does it help the Church to speak to the challenges that we face today?

Perhaps we can see a parallel in the "hour" in St. John's Gospel, with the "hour" that the Church finds herself in at the present time. It is perhaps too easy to suggest that we are living in tumultuous times! This is true! It could also be true to say that the "European ideal" is attempting to redefine itself in the current climate, and yet much of this has been stalled necessarily by the sustained battle against the coronavirus pandemic. As infection rates have increased and decreased, as hospitals have been overwhelmed and many people have been in lockdown, we have realised that we are all in the same situation, if you like in the same boat, and coronavirus is no respecter of national boundaries.

Pope Francis encapsulated this in his remarkable Urbi et Orbi address in an empty St. Peter's Square last year during the height of the first wave of the pandemic. He said: "We have realised that we are on the same boat, all of us are fragile and disorientated but at the same time important and needed, all of us are called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other." He told us that the pandemic has manifested our vulnerabilities and it has made us reassess what is important to us. It has made us realise the deepest longings of our hearts and reminded us of our need for the Lord. Pope Francis stated that "the Lord asks us, and in the midst of the tempest, invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope, capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering."

What, then, can the Churches give at this time? We can offer to each other a way to navigate through the storms and the challenges that we currently face. We can console each other, share the experience of rowing together for the good of all. Put another way, we could say that we are washing each other's feet, realising that we can't maintain the superficial hierarchies of past ideals, but serving each other's vulnerabilities as brothers and sisters in the Lord. In that sense nourished and empowered by the divine gift of the eucharist, what we offer to the world is a gift of faith in the God who loved us so much that he shared in our human condition in all things but

sin and left us an example of how we are to be caught up in his sacrificial love through lives of service and fraternity.

It is true to say that over these past twelve months we have already been rowing together and that we have washed many feet. Many have sacrificed themselves for others and put the needs of others before their own, not least medical professionals and carers, scientists, shop workers, food producers, clergy and religious and so many more. All of us have shared in the sacrifices of what it means to not be able to leave the home and be with our families and friends, we have done this to try and support the common good. In the midst of this, the Church has been a beacon of light and peace, pointing the way to the Lord's love, giving an example of service and offering hope to those who most need it, often in quiet and unremarkable ways. Our parishes have not just been places of prayer, but food distribution centres, medical facilities and so much more. We can say that we have been part of the transforming and sacrificial love of Christ.

We have, perhaps, realised the paradox that when the physical doors of the Church have been closed that they have actually been wide open! The celebration of Mass has continued, and although we have experienced it in a different way and sometimes only in the virtual world of the internet, and indeed, extending our reach to many who would find it difficult to participate normally. Here in the UK, we are grateful that for much of the pandemic our church buildings have remained open, and it has been important to us that we have been able to provide Mass and other sacraments in a safe way. At Easter, we know that even with smaller physical congregations, but we will be enriched by our liturgies, meditating in the action of divine love, and strengthened to live more faithfully the ways of the Lord.

Let us turn back to the Lord's words: "I give you a new commandment, love one another, you must love one another just as I have loved you. It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognise you as my disciples." Our prayers must be that what we receive from the Lord we pass on to each other, that as we grow in his love, we become more faithful disciples. We hope that our words and actions will speak of His love to the vulnerabilities of this world and that we have the strength to pull together in the same boat, that we will wash each other's feet. The words of the Prophet Isaiah from the first reading on Palm Sunday gave the direction for the holiest of weeks in the liturgical year and for our own journey of faith: "The Lord has given me a disciple's tongue. So that I may reply to the wearied he provides me with speech. Each morning he wakes me to hear, to listen like a disciple." Let us wake each morning to listen like a disciple, live out in His love and be recognised as His disciples.

'BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, FOR THEY WILL BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD'

Biblical Reflection on Matthew 5:9 Reverend Dr Sofia Camnerin ²⁶

We are called to be “peacemakers”. Peacemakers shall be called the children of God. Peacemakers are those who are both working for peace and trying to preserve peace. They keep the peace in which they are already clothed through baptism. We are called to be peacemakers since we also are clothed in peace. Christ Jesus our peace, has already made the two groups one and destroyed the barrier, the walls of hostility (Eph 2:14). Therefore, we ourselves are not to invent peace or try to force it into being, but rather to allow it to fill our hearts, our bodies and our minds.

To become the peacemakers we already are, needs our full attention, stillness, and prayer, it needs us to move between watchfulness and action. Peacemakers live their lives on a wave moving back and forth between giving and receiving.

Jesus proclaims these words “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God” in his sermon on the Mount, at the time of the Roman occupation of Palestine. These words when they were spoken must have appeared impossible and provoking, and yet nevertheless filled with promise, since Jesus had spoken them. He spoke with authority, as we know from other places in the New Testament. How could it be possible to be a peacemaker under occupation? How can justice and peace be achieved when people are oppressed? Today how can justice and peace prevail when hostility is actually growing, together with mistrust, economic injustice and a pandemic which forces us to isolate and to distance ourselves from others?

²⁶ Cardinal Vincent Nichols is the Archbishop of the Westminster, London, England since 2009. He also serves currently as President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales since 2009 and as Vice-President of the CCEE since 2016.

We know that child abuse is on the rise and that many children and young people are anxious and have those deep fears that can cause mental illness. We are aware of giant climate challenges, which will require us all to fundamentally change. Furthermore, we know that hate-speech is on the increase, both on social media and in real life. Politicians and religious leaders face threats. Antisemitism and hatred towards Muslims are growing problems worldwide, not least in Europe including Sweden. Migrants everywhere suffer from xenophobia.

In all these contexts and situations, we are called to be peacemakers. It will be necessary to keep reminding ourselves of the one in whom we have our being and experience that back-and-forth movement between contemplating what we have received and finding creative ways to it. We must at the same time be brave and not be afraid of the whole truth. We must be prepared to walk closely with others, to walk with and listen carefully to young people, our children, and be their witnesses, their companions. Likewise, we have to co-operate with all people of good will and must learn to pay active attention to scientists and researchers, climate experts and technological innovators, and most of all sharpen our gift of discernment. For all of this we must rely upon, and deepen our trust in, him who is the God of all life, our belief in the God who is close to all humanity, the God who dwells in every part of creation and aspect of our life and society and we must strengthen our belief in the Lord of Peace incarnated and ensuring salvation and restoration. The Triune God is constantly sending the Spirit. The whole Oikoumene is interconnected in God's web of life.

We read in Colossians 2:6-7: “Since you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, live in union with him. Keep your roots deep in him, build your lives on him, and become stronger in your faith, as you were taught. And be filled with thanksgiving”. In that bible verse the preposition “in” is crucial. “In” union, “in” faith. The connection between receiving and living through the word “since” is evident.

Here again we find the link between receiving, incorporation into Christ through baptism, the inner life in Christ, and the outer life lived in Christ. Since Jesus Christ is our peace, the one in whom we have been clothed through faith and baptism, we also live in this peace which is as much prayer as action. Therefore, let us observe the preposition "in", the simultaneity that is covered in it, the prayer and breathing in the Spirit, as well as the action. Let us seek the stillness, keep the roots. And yet not be naive.

We know that the dominating destructive forces are strong and must be resisted. It is always necessary to protest against egotistic, protectionist and violent forces. Since we are in union with Christ who is in union with the whole world, unity comes together with peace and is closely connected to reconciliation. As peacemakers we cannot ignore wounds. We cannot ignore perpetrators. To become a peacemaker is not to distribute cheap grace or quick forgiveness. We have to equip ourselves with time and patience, remember the wave, the continual movement back and forth between our inner wells and the faith lived out in the world. We must build up our strength in union with the Lord and walk closely with our neighbours. Peacemakers keep their eyes open and their hearts warm, and they acknowledge their own vulnerability.

For a peacemaker it is necessary to take injuries seriously and always respect the victims, to combine justice with peace and seek restoration. Integrity is important, both for the peacemakers themselves and for the value they bring to situations of conflicts. Different parties must be respected, and their integrity secured. Peacemaking takes time and indeed should take time. Both victims and perpetrators need time to heal and repent, to take responsibility for

suffering they may have been affected by or may have caused others. Peace and reconciliation does not necessarily mean forgiveness. Forgiveness always belongs to the victim and the victim decides when, and if, it is possible to forgive. Unconditional forgiveness belongs to God.

To make peace is to do good, to protect life, to protest against humiliations and that which threatens lives. To make peace is to love, in response to the gift given to us. That is why Christians are called to be the people of the eucharist.

I am convinced that the message of peace is equivalent to the message of the gospel. The good news of Jesus begins with the angels' greeting of peace, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased" (Lk 2:14). Jesus is God's gift of peace to all humanity and all creation. The message of peace runs like a flood through the gospel and the promise is as nourishing as merciful: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God."

A peacemaker cannot distinguish between faith and action. "So it is with faith: in itself, without works, it is dead. But someone will say, "One person has faith, another has actions". My answer is, "Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will show you my faith by my actions." (Jas 2:18,22) Faith and action work together. Faith needs to become action and action needs to become faith. I hope that we as Christians can, more and more, transform faith into actions and actions into faith. It would, for example, give the world about two billion peacemakers. It could really transform the world. It could transform Europe.

To conclude: The foundation of peace does not lie in ourselves, our endeavours and strivings, it comes from Christ, who is as close to us as our own hearts. Therefore, we are not to invent peace ourselves or try to force it but rather to allow it to be within us. In every heartbeat - beat for beat - let love and peace fill our bodies and souls, and it will overflow, if we let it. In that way unity, reconciliation and peace will become more visible, effective and real, and we will show forth the peacemakers we already are, in Christ.

HOW CAN THE CHURCH AS BE A SOURCE OF HOPE IN TODAY'S EUROPE?

Biblical reflection on Romans 15:13 His Excellence Monsignor Stanisław Gądecki ²⁷

The final wish, and even exhortation, of the Charta Oecumenica are the words of the Apostle Paul in the Letter to the Romans: "May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Rom 15:13).

1. Letter to the Romans 15:13

a) This is a very significant exhortation because, as is well-known, the Letter to the Romans is the cornerstone of Christian faith, theology and morality. It is one of the most mature letters of the Apostle Paul. Its author wrote it not only after his conversion and entry into the Christian community, but also after three missionary journeys. He preached Christ in various settings and communities. He also founded many Christian communities, the care of which he handed over to his successors. He is therefore a very experienced man.

This is how - during his third missionary journey, in the mid-50s - he wrote the Letter to the Romans, planning his stay in the Eternal City. This text is so unique in that it was written for a Christian community that Paul did not know personally. He had never been to Rome before. He knew Rome only by hearsay. He may have met some people who lived in the Eternal City, he may have had some contact with them, but he did not know the Roman community of Christians.

The Gospel - preached by Jesus to the simple people on the Sea of Galilee - through Paul had already reached this city, the most significant in the ancient world which at that time had about a million inhabitants. Paul, intending to go to Rome, writes a Letter facing the need to confront

two systems of thought. On the one hand, there are Christians of Jewish descent who are still firmly anchored in the Old Testament. (Rom 9-11). On the other hand, there are Christians of pagan origin who do not know the Old Testament. (Rom 3:21-4, 25). For both, the Apostle is compelled to mark a common path: "For it is one God, that justifieth circumcision by faith, (ἐκ πίστεως) and uncircumcision through faith (διὰ τῆς πίστεως)" (Rom 3:30).

b) Like every other Epistle of Paul, the Epistle to the Romans is divided into two parts. The first is the doctrinal part; it is the teaching about Christ and who Christians are. The second part is the moral obligations, i.e. how the Christian's life should be lived according to the new law of the Holy Spirit.

In this second part of the Letter, Paul asks us to build unity in diversity. The difficulty with this question is that Christians are often tempted to interpret this unity as homogeneity, which leads to various forms of conflict. On this occasion, Paul states: "the strong" should help "the weak". The principle of mutual relations is not homogeneity, but love that builds community.

c) "Now the God [giver] of hope (ὁ δὲ Θεὸς τῆς ἐλπίδος), fill you with all joy and peace in believing (πληρώσαι ὑμᾶς πάσης χαρᾶς καὶ εἰρήνης ἐν τῷ πιστεύειν) so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (εἰς τὸ περισσεύειν ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἐλπίδι)" (Rom 15:13).

The text of Romans 15:13 is found in the second part of the Epistle and belongs to the so-called exhortations. Almost all of these indications and instructions are found in the Apostle's first epistles (especially in Corinthians and Galatians). These exhortations (Rom 12:1-15,13) not only apply to the problems of the ancient Romans, but to the situations in which Christians in the world find themselves and will always find themselves.

In Rm 15:13, St Paul speaks of the "God of hope" in a similar way to how he wrote about "God of peace": "And may the God of peace himself sanctify you in all things; that your whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes 5:23); "For the rest, brethren, rejoice, be perfect, take exhortation, be of one mind, have peace; and the God of peace and of love [ὁ Θεὸς τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ εἰρήνης] shall be with you " (2 Cor 13:11; cf. Rom 15:33).

²⁷ Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki is the Metropolitan Archbishop of Poznań since 2002. He also serves currently as President of the Polish Bishops' Conference from 2014 and as CCEE Vice-President from 2016.

Similarly, we find the wish expressed in Rom 15:13, also in the 2nd Letter to the Thessalonians, where the apostle wishes: "Now the Lord of peace himself give you everlasting peace in every place [ὁ Κύριος τῆς εἰρήνης δῶν ὑμῖν τὴν εἰρήνην] The Lord be with you all" (2 Thes 3:16).

Peace and joy are gifts from God; they are the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit in man: "On the other hand the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22). These gifts testify to the presence of the kingdom of God in the Christian: "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink; but justice, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Rom 14:17).

These gifts are only given "in faith", of which the Apostle Paul is the messenger; "I shall abide, and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith" (Phil 1:25).

What does it mean specifically to "be rich in hope" (εἰς τὸ περισσεύειν ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἐλπίδι)? At first it could simply mean 'to have great hope', to hope in abundance (similar to "abound to every good work" - 2 Cor 9:8). It can also mean "hoping for a reward for a good work of faith" ("that he that plougheth, should plough in hope; and he that thrasheth, in hope to receive fruit." (1 Cor 9:10), that is, to have hope in "salvation" (Rom 8:24), in the "life everlasting" (Tm 1:2), "what the hope is of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." (Eph 1:18). It can also mean knowing "Christ, in you the hope of glory." (Col 1:27), or "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Christ Jesus." (2 Cor 4:6).

d) Contemporary biblical scholars interpret the expression "God of hope" in various ways. Firstly, because of the condition of hope: "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink; but justice, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Rom 14:17). "On the other hand, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control; no law can touch such things as these" (Gal 5:22-23). These qualities carry hope in themselves and are brought about by hope.

Secondly, in view of how joy and peace - in which there is a vital hope - can be received and preserved 'in faith'.

Thirdly, for the purpose indicated and the fruit of the gifts that - in faith and hope founded by God - give full hope through the abundance of grace: "But not as the offence, so also the

gift. For if by the offence of one, many died; much more the grace of God, and the gift, by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." (Rom 5:15). This does not mean that the Roman Christian community had no hope at all. Rather, the Apostle is saying that no community ever has hope to a sufficient degree. Faith in Christ - through the power of the Holy Spirit - brings joy and peace in this earthly life and abundant hope in the eternal life.

If [one] has no hope – writes Pieper – concerning "the other world", on the other side of death, then there is no longer any hope.: Hope that does not save from death is not true hope. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" – writes St Paul (1 Cor 15:19).

Fourthly, this kind of full hope is only realised through the action of the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit in its power gives unimaginable hope. It is significant that the last fragment of the Letter ends with a plea for hope, and thanks to it the great subject of the Letter - the community of Jews and Gentiles - the community of all people in Him is once again moved.;

St Paul – Pope John Paul II taught us – highlights the intimate and profound link between the gift of the Holy Spirit and the virtue of hope. "And hope – he says in the Epistle to the Romans – confoundeth not: because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us" (Rom 5:5). Yes, precisely the gift of the Holy Spirit, filling our hearts with God's love and making us children of the Father in Jesus Christ (cf. Gal 4:6), gives us real hope that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:39).

It is also for this reason that God, revealing himself in the "fullness of time" in Jesus Christ, is truly the "God of hope" which gives joy and peace to believers and makes them "rich in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (cf. Rom 15:13). [...] "To the gift of hope "special attention should be given ... especially in our day in which many people, including quite a few Christians, are floundering in the illusion and myth of an unlimited capacity for self-redemption and self-

® J. Pieper, *Speranza e storia*, (Varsavia: publisher, 1981), 47.

® H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief*, (Freiburg/Basel/Vienna, publisher, 1977), 426.

® Pope John Paul II, *The Spirit "hope that does not disappoint"*. General Audience, 11/ 11/1998.

fulfilment and the temptation to pessimism from the experience of frequent disappointment and defeat.”³⁰ “If God were the point of reference - which does not mean only Catholicism, Christianity, but that there is a true central religious dimension - if Europe were not resistant to God, many of life’s, family, national and human problems would already be resolved” (Card. Angelo Bagnasco).

2. Tasks

So, we repeat once again the question of the title: How can the churches become a source of hope for Europe today?

a) Since only Christ is the source of hope for Europe and for the whole world, this means that faith in Christ is the most valuable asset that European Christian churches and ecumenical organisations can offer Europe. Only as a subsequent consequence can we expect the solution of other problems that we call the new European humanism.

“With mind and heart – states Pope Francis – with hope and without vain nostalgia, like a son who rediscovers in Mother Europe his roots of life and faith, I dream of a new European humanism, one that involves “a constant work of humanisation” and calls for “memory, courage, [and] a sound and humane utopian vision”. I dream of a Europe that is young, still capable of being a mother: a mother who has life because she respects life and offers hope for life. I dream of a Europe that cares for children, that offers fraternal help to the poor and those newcomers seeking acceptance because they have lost everything and need shelter. I dream of a Europe that is attentive to and concerned for the infirm and the elderly, lest they be simply set aside as useless. I dream of a Europe where being a migrant is not a crime but a summons to greater commitment on behalf of the dignity of every human being. I dream of a Europe where young people breathe the pure air of honesty, where they love the beauty of a culture and a simple life undefiled by the insatiable needs of consumerism, where getting married and having children is a responsibility and a great joy, not a problem due to the lack of stable employment. I dream of a Europe of families, with truly effective policies concentrated on faces rather than numbers, on birth rates more than rates of consumption. I dream of a Europe that promotes and protects the rights of everyone, without neglecting its duties towards all. I dream of a Europe of which it will not be said that its commitment to human rights was its last utopia.”³¹

b) At this point, I would like to quote some passages from Pope Francis’ speeches to the European Parliament, to the Council of Europe, and speeches on the occasion of the

Charlemagne Prize awarding ceremony, which emphasise the specific tasks that - as understood by the Catholic Church - lie ahead of us on the path to achieving this new European humanism. These are not tasks that are not in some way already included in the spirit of the Charta Oecumenica, but it is worth mentioning them here for a deeper reflection on the future that - from the point of view of the Catholic Church - we all have before us in the prospect of becoming a source of hope, for Europe, and not only in a religious way.

The most important value is the sanctity of the human person: “... the time has come to work together in building a Europe which revolves not around the economy, but around the sacredness of the human person, around inalienable values. In building a Europe which courageously embraces its past and confidently looks to its future in order fully to experience the hope of its present. The time has come for us to abandon the idea of a Europe which is fearful and self-absorbed, in order to revive and encourage a Europe of leadership, a repository of science, art, music, human values and faith as well. A Europe which contemplates the heavens and pursues lofty ideals. A Europe which cares for, defends and protects man, every man and woman. A Europe which bestrides the earth surely and securely, a precious point of reference for all humanity!”³²

The human person, starting with the family, needs a solid education: “The first area surely is that of education, beginning with the family, the fundamental cell and most precious element of any society. The family, united, fruitful and indissoluble, possesses the elements fundamental for fostering hope in the future. Without this solid basis, the future ends up being built on sand, with dire social consequences. Then too, stressing the importance of the family not only helps to give direction and hope to new generations, but also to many of our elderly, who are often forced to live alone and are effectively abandoned because there is no longer the warmth of a family hearth able to accompany and support them.”³³

³⁰ *Address of Pope Francis, European Parliament, Strasbourg, 25/11/2014.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Address of the Holy Father Francis, Conferral of the Charlemagne Prize, Sala Regia, 06/05/2016.*

This educational task is pursued by schools and universities, contributing to the development and maturation of the person: "Alongside the family, there are the various educational institutes: schools and universities. Education cannot be limited to providing technical expertise alone. Rather, it should encourage the more complex process of assisting the human person to grow in his or her totality. Young people today are asking for a suitable and complete education which can enable them to look to the future with hope instead of disenchantment." ³⁴

In today's situation, it is easy to see that universities wishing to contribute to the growth of Europe's hope must seek the truth with all their strength, avoiding interest in ideologies. "It also needs to be kept in mind that apart from the pursuit of truth, each individual becomes the criterion for measuring himself and his own actions. The way is thus opened to a subjectivistic assertion of rights, so that the concept of human rights, which has an intrinsically universal import, is replaced by an individualistic conception of rights. This leads to an effective lack of concern for others and favours that globalisation of indifference born of selfishness, the result of a conception of man incapable of embracing the truth and living an authentic social dimension." ³⁵

The task of states and European institutions in developing Europe's hope will always be to promote just human rights. "The path chosen by the Council of Europe is above all that of promoting human rights, together with the growth of democracy and the rule of law. This is a particularly valuable undertaking, with significant ethical and social implications, since the development of our societies and their peaceful future." ³⁶

All churches and ecumenical movements should realise that "that it is vital to develop a culture of human rights which wisely links the individual, or better, the personal aspect, to that of the common good, of the "all of us" made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. In fact, unless the rights of each individual are harmoniously ordered to the greater good, those rights will end up being considered limitless and consequently will become a source of conflicts and violence." ³⁷

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Address of Pope Francis to the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 25/11/2014.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Address of Pope Francis, European Parliament, Strasbourg, 25/11/2014.*

In their preaching, the Churches can also contribute to restoring dignity to work, while political institutions can: "to promote policies which create employment, but above all there is a need to restore dignity to labour by ensuring proper working conditions. This implies, on the one hand, finding new ways of joining market flexibility with the need for stability and security on the part of workers; these are indispensable for their human development. It also implies favouring a suitable social context geared not to the exploitation of persons, but to ensuring, precisely through labour, their ability to create a family and educate their children." ³⁸

Just as the Churches in the Charta Oecumenica have expressed their willingness to cooperate in solidarity in the work of proclaiming the Gospel, the need for subsidiarity and solidarity in the social sphere should also be promoted: "I consider to be fundamental not only the legacy that Christianity has offered in the past to the social and cultural formation of the continent, but above all the contribution which it desires to offer today, and in the future, to Europe's growth. This contribution does not represent a threat to the secularity of states or to the independence of the institutions of the European Union, but rather an enrichment. This is clear from the ideals which shaped Europe from the beginning, such as peace, subsidiarity and reciprocal solidarity, and a humanism centred on respect for the dignity of the human person." ³⁹

In preaching the Gospel, we cannot forget to emphasise the value of the social economy either: "If we want to rethink our society, we need to create dignified and well-paying jobs, especially for our young people. To do so requires coming up with new, more inclusive and equitable economic models, aimed not at serving the few, but at benefiting ordinary people and society as a whole. This calls for moving from a liquid economy to a social economy; I think for example of the social market economy encouraged by my predecessors". ⁴⁰ Passing from an economy directed at revenue, profiting from speculation and lending at interest, to a social economy that invests in persons by creating jobs and providing training." ⁴¹

Nor is it interference with politics if the churches are committed to the good of democracy in their own countries: "keeping democracy alive, democracy for the peoples of Europe. It is no secret that a conception of unity seen as uniformity strikes at the vitality of the democratic system, weakening the rich, fruitful and constructive interplay of organisations and political parties.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Ambassador of the F.R. of Germany, 08/11/1990.*

⁴¹ *Address of the Holy Father Francis, Conferral of the Charlemagne Prize, Sala Regia, 06/05/2016.*

This leads to the risk of living in a world of ideas, of mere words, of images, of sophistry... and to end up confusing the reality of democracy with a new political nominalism. Keeping democracy alive in Europe requires avoiding the many globalizing tendencies to dilute reality: namely, angelic forms of purity, dictatorships of relativism, brands of ahistorical fundamentalism, ethical systems lacking kindness, and intellectual discourse bereft of wisdom.”^②

Twenty years ago, the Charta Oecumenica already stressed the need to develop dialogue: “If there is one word that we should never tire of repeating, it is this: dialogue. We are called to promote a culture of dialogue by every possible means and thus to rebuild the fabric of society. The culture of dialogue entails a true apprenticeship and a discipline that enables us to view others as valid dialogue partners, to respect the foreigner, the immigrant and people from different cultures as worthy of being listened to.”^③

In the social sphere, it is worth recalling the subject to which the Apostle Paul drew attention; it is worth taking care of diversity, which is not homogeneity: “To speak of European multipolarity is to speak of peoples which are born, grow and look to the future. The task of globalising Europe’s multipolarity cannot be conceived by appealing to the image of a sphere – in which all is equal and ordered but proves reductive since every point is equidistant from the centre – but rather, by the image of a polyhedron, in which the harmonic unity of the whole preserves the particularity of each of the parts. Today Europe is multipolar in its relationships and its intentions; it is impossible to imagine or to build Europe without fully taking into account this multipolar reality.”^④

^② *Address of Pope Francis, European Parliament, Strasbourg, 25/11/2014.*

^③ *Address of the Holy Father Francis, Conferral of the Charlemagne Prize, Sala Regia, 06/05/2016.*

^④ *Address of Pope Francis to the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 25/11/2014.*

Conclusion

Brother Alois of Taizé sums up in a certain sense the task of all the Churches: “Yes, in the midst of the difficult realities of the present, we can glimpse reasons to hope, and even at times to hope against all hope. For this, we need to come together with others who have made different choices—with Christians from other denominations, with believers of other religions, and with people who are agnostic or atheist and who are also committed to solidarity and sharing”.

We need one another more than ever. No one is saved alone. In relationships between individuals as well as between peoples, let us do all we can to move from competition to cooperation. Let us support the agencies or associations that promote cooperation and solidarity, whether it be locally, nationally or internationally.”^⑤

“As the experience of Europe in recent months has shown, the pandemic has made this increasingly evident. On the one hand, we have witnessed the temptation to go it alone, seeking unilateral solutions to a problem that transcends state borders. Yet thanks to the great spirit of mediation that distinguishes the European institutions, we have also seen a determination to set out on the path of fraternity, which is also the path of solidarity, unleashing creativity and new initiatives Christians today have a great responsibility: they are called to serve as a leaven in reviving Europe’s conscience and help to generate processes capable of awakening new energies in society. I urge them, therefore, to contribute with commitment, courage and determination to every sector in which they live and work.”^⑥ While the world is oppressed by the pandemic, “the contagion of hope is needed”.

(Original text in Polish)

^⑤ *Brother Alois, Hoping in Season and out of Season. A message for 2021, available on https://www.taize.fr/en_article29846.html.*

^⑥ *Holy Father Francis, Letter on Europe, to His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, Vatican, 27/10/2020.*

Prayers for a time of Pandemic

CCEE & COMECE Joint Prayer



God our Father, Creator of the world, almighty and merciful, out of love for us You sent your Son into the world as the doctor of our souls and our bodies, look upon your children who, in this difficult time of confusion and dismay in many regions of Europe and the world, turn to you seeking strength, salvation and relief, deliver us from illness and fear, heal our sick, comfort their families, give wisdom to our rulers, energy and reward to our doctors, nurses and volunteers, eternal life to the dead. Do not abandon us in the moment of trial but deliver us from all evil. We ask this of Thee, who with the Son and the Holy Spirit, live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Mary, mother of health and hope, pray for us!

His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, CCEE President

His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, COMECE President

TOGETHER – A WORLD IN PRAYER ¹⁷



Our heavenly father,
Through your spirit we are united in faith, hope and love.
Even if we are isolated and lonely in these times– we belong to the worldwide community of your children.
Let grow our faith that you are always close to us
and let us experience that we are one with our sisters and brothers all around the world.
Uplift those who are sick.
Lighten the hearts of those who are lonely.
Grant wisdom and courage to those who bear responsibility.
Strengthen all those who work in the medical services
Stand by our sisters and brothers in the worldwide ecumenical community.
And endow all of us with new ideas to strengthen our bond.
May the Lord bless you
and keep you;
may the Lord make His face shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
may the Lord turn His face toward you
and give you peace.

Amen.

Prayers for a time of Pandemic

A Prayer in the Time of the Coronavirus [®]



Almighty and All-loving God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
we pray to you through Christ the Healer
for those who suffer from the Coronavirus Covid-19
in Ireland and across the world.
We pray too for all who reach out to those who mourn the loss
of each and every person who has died as a result of contracting the disease.
Give wisdom to policymakers,
skill to healthcare professionals and researchers,
comfort to everyone in distress
and a sense of calm to us all in these days of uncertainty and distress.
This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord
who showed compassion to the outcast,
acceptance to the rejected
and love to those to whom no love was shown.
Amen.

*Archbishop Michael Jackson
Dublin & Glendalough,
Church of Ireland*

Locked Down [®]



There were other doors
once locked in fear,
in a time of waiting
and distress.

It was an uncertain,
questioning time -
longing for what had been known
and treasured before.

Into that space,
calming and soothing,
came these welcome words -
"Peace be with you."

Peace be with you in every worry,
in every sleepless night,
in every loss experienced,
in every comfort now distant.

*Reverend Dr Lezley Stewart,
the Church of Scotland's Recruitment and Support Secretary*

Peace be with you in every
certainty,
in the shared burden of these days,
in the unexpected connections,
in the gift of another sunset and
sunrise.

Peace be with you and yours,
the deepest peace,
the strongest peace,
the peace that passes all
understanding.

Christ is our peace
and is in our midst.
His words echo again -
"Peace be with you."

[®] Available on <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/9440/a-prayer-in-the-time>.

[®] Available on <https://churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2020/2020/locked-down-a-prayer-from-lezley-stewart>.

Prayers for a time of Pandemic

Excerpts from the Office of Supplication upon the Threat of Plague



Physician of bodies and souls alike,
compassionate Master, we implore You and we entreat,
forgive and remit every sin of ours, O Savior,
and rescue us Your servants from the pandemic's wrath.
Fear of the pandemic has gripped the hearts
of all of Your servants, O compassionate Lord and God.
Quickly come and save us, we earnestly entreat You,
invoking Your great mercy, Savior most merciful.
Savior, we will all never cease to be
the sheep of Your pasture, even though we have many sins.
Please do not despise or ignore our supplication;
end, rather, the upheaval caused by the current plague.
Truly from the ages, O gracious God,
and unto the ages is Your mercy and love for man.
Therefore, now, according to its abundance, rescue
a multitude of people from the impending plague.
Lord, do not ignore us in our distress,
anxious as we are now, and beside ourselves with the fear
of catching a painful disease that may be fatal.
We pray You quickly save us from this calamity.
Join the Theotokos, all you arrays
of angelic powers, honored Forerunner of the Lord,
holy Twelve Apostles and all the Saints together,
and pray for our salvation, and intercede for us.

Forbearing and merciful, loving and compassionate, Almighty Lord,
who brought our nature into being and having fallen once again raised us.
Who sent Your only-begotten Son, Savior and Redeemer, and Benefactor healing the passions
of body and soul.

Do You, forbearing Master, look down upon us and hearken to our entreaty
in our day of sorrow.

Safeguard us from the coming upon all the earth of the plague-bearing
threat. Lord, take away affliction and fear.

The darkness of death surrounds us. Remember Your innumerable acts of
compassion; reveal to us the depths of Your mercy;
do not let us be destroyed because of the multitude of our sins.
Hearken unto the voice of our prayer from deep within us as it cries out to
You.

Do not turn Your face away from us nor turn away from your creatures in
wrath. Be our aid and deliverer.

O our God and Savior, do not reject or abandon us but come and redeem
us. Draw near in Your customary kindness.

Crush the power of the illness-bearing plague; disgrace its violence, pain
and dejection, transforming it to joy.

Preside over calm for humanity. By Your power greatly aid those serving in
the field of health.

Raise us from our bed of pain and from our bedding of affliction.

Grant health to those who have contracted the illness.

Give rest in the tentings of the Saints to those who have surrendered their
lives to the virus.

Grant consolation to their families.

For You are the physician of our souls and bodies and to You we offer
glory:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.

Amen.

Composed by Metropolitan Cyril of Rhodes [®]

[®] Excerpts from the Office of Supplication upon the Threat of Plague, Composed by Metropolitan Cyril of Rhodes, Translations by the Very Rev. Archimandrite Spencer T. Kezios and Rev. Fr Seraphim Dedes, available on https://www.goarch.org/el/chapel/texts/-/asset_publisher/ulcNzWPdScz6/content/office-supplication-plague?_101_INSTANCE_ulcNzWPdScz6_languageId=en_US

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 Basle (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.

* 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.

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.

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.

OUR COMMON RESPONSIBILITY IN EUROPE

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9)

7. Participating in the building of Europe

Through the centuries Europe has developed a primarily Christian character in religious and cultural terms. However, Christians have failed to prevent suffering and destruction from being inflicted by Europeans, both within Europe and beyond. We confess our share of responsibility for this guilt and ask God and our fellow human beings for forgiveness.

Our faith helps us to learn from the past, and to make our Christian faith and love for our neighbours a source of hope for morality and ethics, for education and culture, and for political and economic life, in Europe and throughout the world.

The churches support an integration of the European continent. Without common values, unity cannot endure. We are convinced that the spiritual heritage of Christianity constitutes an empowering source of inspiration and enrichment for Europe. On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail. We likewise insist on the reverence for life, the value of marriage and the family, the preferential option for the poor, the readiness to forgive, and in all things compassion.

As churches and as international communities we have to counteract the danger of Europe developing into an integrated West and a disintegrated East, and also take account of the North-South divide within Europe. At the same time we must avoid Eurocentricity and heighten Europe's sense of responsibility for the whole of humanity, particularly for the poor all over the world.

We commit ourselves

- to seek agreement with one another on the substance and goals of our social responsibility, and to represent in concert, as far as possible, the concerns and visions of the churches vis-à-vis the secular European institutions;
- to defend basic values against infringements of every kind;
- to resist any attempt to misuse religion and the church for ethnic or nationalist purposes.

8. Reconciling peoples and cultures

We consider the diversity of our regional, national, cultural and religious traditions to be enriching for Europe. In view of numerous conflicts, the churches are called upon to serve together the cause of reconciliation among peoples and cultures. We know that peace among the churches is also an important prerequisite for this.

Our common endeavours are devoted to evaluating, and helping to resolve, political and social issues in the spirit of the Gospel. Because we value the person and dignity of every individual as made in the image of God, we defend the absolutely equal value of all human beings.

As churches we intend to join forces in promoting the process of democratisation in Europe. We commit ourselves to work for structures of peace, based on the non-violent resolution of conflicts. We condemn any form of violence against the human person, particularly against women and children.

Reconciliation involves promoting social justice within and among all peoples; above all, this means closing the gap between rich and poor and overcoming unemployment. Together we will do our part towards giving migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers a humane reception in Europe.

We commit ourselves

- to counteract any form of nationalism which leads to the oppression of other peoples and national minorities;
- to strengthen the position and equal rights of women in all areas of life, and to foster partnership in church and society between women and men.

9. Safeguarding the creation

Believing in the love of the Creator God, we give thanks for the gift of creation and the great value and beauty of nature. However, we are appalled to see natural resources being exploited without regard for their intrinsic value or consideration of their limits, and without regard for the well-being of future generations.

Together we want to help create sustainable living conditions for the whole of creation. It is our responsibility before God to put into effect common criteria for distinguishing between what human beings are scientifically and technologically capable of doing and what, ethically speaking, they should not do.

We recommend the introduction into European churches of an Ecumenical Day of Prayer for the Preservation of Creation.

We commit ourselves

- to strive to adopt a lifestyle free of consumerism and a quality of life informed by accountability and sustainability;
- to support church environmental organisations and ecumenical networks in their efforts for the safeguarding of creation.

10. Strengthening community with Judaism

We are bound up in a unique community with the people Israel, the people of the Covenant which God has never terminated. Our faith teaches us that our Jewish sisters and brothers "are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11.28-29). And "to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah" (Rom 9.4-5).

We deplore and condemn all manifestations of anti-Semitism, all outbreaks of hatred and persecutions. We ask God for forgiveness for anti-Jewish attitudes among Christians, and we ask our Jewish sisters and brothers for reconciliation.

It is urgently necessary, in the worship and teaching, doctrine and life of our churches, to raise awareness of the deep bond existing between the Christian faith and Judaism, and to support Christian-Jewish co-operation.

We commit ourselves

- to oppose all forms of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in the church and in society;
- to seek and intensify dialogue with our Jewish sisters and brothers at all levels.

11. Cultivating relations with Islam

Muslims have lived in Europe for centuries. In some European countries they constitute strong minorities. While there have been plenty of good contacts and neighbourly relations between Muslims and Christians, and this remains the case, there are still strong reservations and prejudices on both sides. These are rooted in painful experiences throughout history and in the recent past.

We would like to intensify encounters between Christians and Muslims and enhance Christian-Islamic dialogue at all levels. We

recommend, in particular, speaking with one another about our faith in one God, and clarifying ideas on human rights.

We commit ourselves

- to conduct ourselves towards Muslims with respect;
- to work together with Muslims on matters of common concern.

12. Encountering other religions and world views

The plurality of religious and non-confessional beliefs and ways of life has become a feature of European culture. Eastern religions and new religious communities are spreading and also attracting the interest of many Christians. In addition, growing numbers of people reject the Christian faith, are indifferent to it or have other philosophies of life.

We want to take seriously the critical questions of others, and try together to conduct fair discussions with them. Yet a distinction must be made between the communities with which dialogues and encounters are to be sought, and those which should be warned against from the Christian standpoint.

We commit ourselves

- to recognise the freedom of religion and conscience of these individuals and communities and to defend their right to practise their faith or convictions, whether singly or in groups, privately or publicly, in the context of rights applicable to all;
- to be open to dialogue with all persons of good will, to pursue with them matters of common concern, and to bring a witness of our Christian faith to them.

Jesus Christ, the Lord of the one Church, is our greatest hope of reconciliation and peace.

In his name we intend to continue on our common path in Europe. We pray for God's guidance through the power of the Holy Spirit.

“May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

(Rom 15.13)

As Presidents of the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, we commend this Charta Oecumenica as a Basic Text to all the churches and Bishops' Conferences in Europe, to be adopted and adapted in each of their local contexts.

With this commendation we hereby sign the Charta Oecumenica, on the occasion of the European Ecumenical Encounter, on the first Sunday after the common celebration of Easter in the year 2001.

Strasbourg, 22 April 2001

Original Text: German

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CCEE-CEC Joint Committee wishes to thank the members of the Committee and staff who developed the online service and the celebratory booklet for the 20th Anniversary of the Charta Oecumenica:

Fr Antonio Ammirati, CCEE Vice-General Secretary and Spokesperson

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Special thanks go to those who provided translations for this publication:

Ms Martina Repele, CCEE Assistant

Also to the Young Musicians of St Gallen who contributed to the online service celebrated on 22 April 2021:

Ms Daniela Brülisauer

Ms Riccarda Iten, and

Mr Alessandro Vicentin,

as well as to

Mr Nikos Kosmidis, theologian and artist,
for the poster image and design of the online service.