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Migration and Church Communion

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Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE)
Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)
Communión d'Eglises Protestantes en Europe (CEPE)

1 This document describes the CPCE's first steps in the field of "Migration and Church Commun-
2 ion". This issue was raised during the General Assembly in Florence and defined as a task for
3 CPCE there.

4 The Council is now submitting reflections and proposals for further work. These are based on
5 the explorative work conducted by the expert group, which was established by the Council of the
6 CPCE in 2015. The Council asks the General Assembly to take this document on board and
7 decide upon the specific proposals put forward therein.

8 **1 Report**

9 **1.1 From Florence to Basle**

10 During the CPCE's General Assembly in Florence 2012, the issue '*suitable channels of dialogue*
11 *and cooperation with migrant Christian communities*' (Final Report 3.3.6) was placed on the
12 work agenda for the forthcoming years.

13 In January 2015, the Council of the CPCE installed an expert group which should work on the
14 relationship of CPCE and its member churches with churches/communities with different linguis-
15 tic and social backgrounds. After the first meeting of this group of experts from different contexts
16 in Europe, the project "Migration and Church communion" was described in detail by the Council
17 of the CPCE in October 2015:

18 The Council mandates the expert group to seek explorative dialogues, perceived as a prototype
19 attempt to examine the principal issue of migration and church communion.

20 The Council identifies the following four areas of interest in this exploration:

21 1. How will the CPCE respond to the challenge that some of its member churches are becoming
22 increasingly "diverse, international and inter-cultural"?

23 2. How can the CPCE relate in a reliable and constructive way to migrant churches and congre-
24 gations outside of its own constituency?

25 3. What are some of the key theological and ecclesiological issues that migrant churches pose
26 for the CPCE?

27 4. What does the presence of migrant churches mean in terms of church communion, education,
28 recognition of ministry, etc.?

29 Establishing the expert group reflected the fact that the Council of the CPCE was / is aware of
30 the current situation. During recent years, many refugees have arrived in European countries, a

1 lot of them Christians from different Christian denominations and communities. In many coun-
2 tries, controversial discussions are taking place about the increase in the number of refugees
3 arriving. It therefore becomes even more urgent for the CPCE to deal with the topic of “migrant
4 churches”. Of course, there are many different ways of being a “migrant”, and many churches
5 within the CPCE are familiar with migration from their own history. The focus of the expert
6 group’s work was nevertheless placed on churches and communities with non-European cultural
7 and traditional background/roots. The issue lies in not only the current influx of refugees and
8 migrants to Europe, but also the challenge of getting to know these Christians, communities and
9 churches better and of finding ways of making contact and forming relationships with them. How
10 can we be a Church together?

11 As such, the CPCE’s task lies not in dealing with the more practical questions of living together
12 as different Christian congregations or churches – as is addressed by the CCME and Eurodi-
13 aconia, for example – but in focusing on the theological and ecclesiological questions, including
14 common witness and service.

15 **1.2 The work of the expert group and the need for strengthening the work** 16 **on “Migration and Church communion”**

17 The expert group held five meetings in Frankfurt, Basel, Rome, Berlin and Vienna. It discussed
18 the different contexts and challenges of “Migration and Church communion” within the constitu-
19 ency of the CPCE. Mindful of the importance of migrant Christian groups choosing their own
20 collective name, it decided to work with the provisional wording of ‘migrant churches’ for the
21 purpose at hand in the hope of arriving at (a) mutually agreed title(s) during these conversations.

22 The expert group focused on clarifying the key questions that would and should shape the work
23 of the CPCE in relation to this issue (see above). These were accepted by the Council as the
24 basis for further work.

25 The idea of interacting with migrant churches in (not formal, but rather) explorative dialogues in
26 order to find out whether the CPCE and the migrant church concerned might be able to establish
27 a closer relationship was also supported by the Council. The expert group contacted three mi-
28 grant churches, but in the end only one responded to the invitation. In October 2016, the Cheru-
29 bim and Seraphim Church sent two representatives to Vienna for an explorative dialogue. The
30 General Secretary together with the Chair and the Secretary of the expert group received them
31 in the CPCE’s main office and conducted a very promising and interesting meeting. At the end,
32 the question was raised as to whether representatives of the CPCE would be willing to visit the
33 Unification Council of the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches in London. This visit, in which four

1 members of the expert group participated, took place in October 2017. It became clear that the
2 Unification Council is very interested in a closer relation in CPCE and even reflects about be-
3 coming a member.

4 The expert group also contacted the CPCE's regional groups to ask whether they had experi-
5 ences in and insights into encounters with migrant churches. The expert group also offered to
6 visit them during their meetings. The North-Western Group responded positively, so the Chair of
7 the expert group attended their meeting in April 2016. The work of the CPCE – and of the expert
8 group in particular – was presented, and a lively discussion reflected the opportunities as well as
9 the challenges and possible conflicts arising from deeper relationships with migrant churches.
10 The Chair of the expert group also visited a consultation relating to ecclesiological questions
11 organised by the CEC, the Lutheran Church in Denmark and the CCME in Copenhagen in De-
12 cember 2016.

13 The Council of the CPCE has regularly received proposals and interim reports at its meetings.
14 The Council is aware that, during such a limited time, the expert group could only take some
15 initial steps relating to this issue, which is urgent but at the same time requires deeper explora-
16 tion, theological dialogue and attempts to build trust and reliable relations. It therefore recom-
17 mends ensuring that the work forms a substantial part of the CPCE's activities in the years to
18 come.

19 **2 Proposals for the CPCE's work in the field of "Migration and** 20 **Church communion" as from 2018**

21 a) The CPCE will establish an advisory board to replace the current expert group. This will be
22 responsible for all work relating to "Migration and Church communion" and submit proposals to
23 the Council regarding relations with migrant churches.

24 b) The dialogue with the Unification Council of the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches should be
25 continued and deepened in the years to come. Explorative dialogues should be commenced
26 with other migrant churches.

27 c) The CPCE should reflect upon the impact of its commitment to the issue of "Migration and
28 Church communion" on other projects, doctrinal discussions and studies. Theological education
29 is already an important issue for the CPCE, and it has been worked on formulating a common
30 understanding that will support cooperation and mutual acknowledgement of graduations and
31 training courses. The potential for cooperation should be explored. The advisory board should

1 reflect upon the experiences and results of the work that has already been achieved within the
2 CPCE during recent years.

3 The CPCE will collaborate with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) in its
4 work on "Migration and Church communion".

5 d) Consultations should deal with the potential for collaboration in witness and service (e.g.
6 theological training, further education and in public political statements).

7 **3 Appendix**

8 **Some insights related to Christian migrant churches and communities**

- 9 • Christian migrants and their congregations in some ways represent the full range of ex-
10 pressions of Christianity that exist around the world today.
- 11 • Many migrant Christian communities come from Lutheran, Reformed, United and Meth-
12 odist churches, which in many cases were first established as a consequence of Euro-
13 pean (or North American) missionary work. Some of these churches are already involved
14 in partnerships with churches in Europe and are often members of national, regional and
15 global ecumenical organisations. Nevertheless, they have developed their own contextu-
16 al profile, and so we find ourselves in a situation where Lutheran, Reformed and United
17 traditions of Christianity are now "returning" to Europe in a new way. They sometimes
18 may not be recognisable, e.g. as "Lutherans", at first sight because of the ways the tradi-
19 tion has been acculturated, as often reflected in how they celebrate worship, their differ-
20 ent uses of language and diverse cultures. Hence their cultural traditions are often per-
21 ceived as "strange" in the eyes of the domestic churches / congregations. The theologi-
22 cal aspects of the doctrinal and liturgical practices that have been formally defined ac-
23 cording to the principles of the Reformation churches need to be studied and engaged
24 with from an intercultural perspective.
- 25 • Some of these migrant congregations have become part of European churches that be-
26 long to the CPCE.
- 27 • Some of the CPCE's member churches also have experience of migrants attempting to
28 integrate into them. Some of the smaller churches in particular, e.g. in Italy and France,
29 have welcomed many new members from different backgrounds, traditions and cultures.
30 The resultant changes in liturgy, theology and socio-ethical questions have often led to
31 disagreements and should form part of mediation processes in order to reach mutual un-
32 derstanding.

- 1 • Other migrant congregations are Pentecostal congregations whose ecclesiology does
2 not include the idea of church communion. Some of them see it as their mission to reach
3 out to people who are no longer members of the churches in Europe.
- 4 • Churches in Europe are in different situations with regard to congregations with different
5 linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds and have developed different forms of cooper-
6 ation or even integration. Many churches in Europe reflect theologically upon migration
7 (“theology of migration”) and defend refugees against hostility and any xenophobic or
8 racist ideology.
- 9 • Taking the CPCE’s member churches as a whole, it is clear that there are also many
10 churches, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, who have fewer encounters with
11 Christian migrant communities, or even none at all. For many churches in the CPCE, it is
12 an ongoing challenge to find ways of living out our Christian faith together.
- 13 • Nevertheless, it is a task for the CPCE as a whole to examine the potential for (theologi-
14 cal) dialogue and to test (maybe new) forms of relationship with migrant Christian com-
15 munities, as clearly reflected in the mandate presented by the Council.

16 **The Leuenberg Agreement (1973)**

17 Every dialogue between the CPCE and migrant churches must be closely related to the charac-
18 ter and role of the CPCE as a church communion, with its foundation in the Leuenberg Agree-
19 ment (LA).

20 The following passages of the Leuenberg Agreement might be considered particularly relevant
21 in this context:

22 *11 This message (of justification) makes Christians free for responsible service in the world and*
23 *also ready to suffer in that service. They stand up for justice and peace on earth between indi-*
24 *viduals and nations. In consequence, they must join with other people in seeking appropriate*
25 *rational criteria and play their part in applying these criteria. They do so in confidence that God*
26 *sustains the world, and as those who are accountable to him.*

27 *46 Ecumenical aspects*

28 *In establishing and realizing church communion among themselves, the participating churches*
29 *do so as part of their responsibility to promote the ecumenical fellowship of all Christian church-*
30 *es.*

31 *47 They regard such a fellowship of churches in the region of Europe as a contribution to this*
32 *end. They hope that the overcoming of their previous separation will influence churches in Eu-*

1 *rope and elsewhere who are related to them confessionally. They are ready to examine with*
2 *them the possibilities of wider church communion.*

3 *49 They also hope that the church communion will provide a fresh stimulus to encounter and*
4 *collaboration with churches of other confessions. They affirm their readiness to set their doctri-*
5 *nal conversations within this wider context.*

- 6 • Obviously, the authors of the Leuenberg Agreement (LA) found a common theological
7 basis for the church communion of Lutheran, Reformed and United churches in Europe,
8 whereas communities and congregations from other regions of the world were not part of
9 their considerations. Since 1973, discussions have started with Methodist, Baptist and
10 Anglican churches. The Methodist churches have even become members of the CPCE.
- 11 • Looking at LA 47, it opens a space to examine possibilities of wider church communion
12 with other churches in Europe and elsewhere that are related to them confessionally. Of
13 course, the words “related confessionally” are very important and need clarification.