



For action

**REPORT OF THE JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMISSION BETWEEN THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
AND CHRISTIAN WORLD COMMUNIONS 2007 TO 2012**

The executive committee is asked to receive and forward the report of the Joint Consultative Commission between the World Council of Churches and the Christian World Communions to the assembly (Cf. approved recommendation 19 of the programme committee of the central committee of 28 August – 5 September 2012, GEN PRO 10).

What follows is the report on the work of the Joint Consultative Commission between the World Council of Churches and Christian World Communions. A draft report has been shared with the WCC Central Committee (August 2012) and the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions (October 2012) for information and feedback.

This final report, referencing the work of the Joint Consultative Commission and taking into account feedback from the WCC and CWCs, will be submitted to the Busan Assembly in 2013.

1. Introduction

The WCC Porto Alegre assembly initiated the Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) between the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Christian World Communions (CWCs) in 2006.

The assembly, having affirmed the “specific role and place of CWCs in the ecumenical movement” and convinced that “the WCC is strengthened by interaction with CWCs”, proposed that a joint commission would “explore the significance and implications of overlap of membership, coordination of programmes, and other common efforts between the WCC and the Christian world communions; [...and] the feasibility of a structure for WCC assemblies that would provide expanded space for Christian world communions and confessional families to meet, for the purpose of deliberation and/or overall agendas” (report of the policy reference committee, Porto Alegre assembly, 2006).

A Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) of 14 members was formed in 2006 with half of its members appointed by the WCC central committee and half of its members named by Christian world communions.

H.E. Dr Archbishop Nareg Alemezian (Armenian Apostolic Church Holy See of Cilicia) and Rev. Dr Robert K. Welsh (Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council) served as the co-moderators of the JCC on behalf of the WCC and CWCs respectively. The JCC met annually in Geneva from 2007 to 2012, meeting coincidentally with the steering committee of the conference of secretaries of CWCs.

2. The work of the Joint Consultative Commission

a) One ecumenical movement – reflections from the JCC

The fundamental affirmations that emerged during the past six years of JCC meetings were rooted in the mutual claiming of a common understanding of the one ecumenical movement that affirms the ecclesial nature of the search for visible unity and common witness; and the need for ecumenical partners to work cooperatively in the service of the churches. That is, the relationship between conciliar and confessional ecumenical partners is particularly important in helping to nurture the one ecumenical movement. While this relationship was sometimes strained in the past, a more cooperative and complementary relationship has emerged in recent years.¹

b) Inter-religious dialogue – new initiatives and approaches

The JCC helped to guide the WCC and CWCs in responding cooperatively to new initiatives in inter-religious dialogue, particularly with regard to Christian-Muslim dialogue, by encouraging space for wider Christian consultation and a common platform for dialogue with Islam facilitated through the WCC.²

c) Forum on Bilateral Dialogues – platform for sharing

The JCC gave direction for the on-going work of the Forum on Bilateral Dialogue, which is sponsored by CWCs and facilitated by Faith and Order, by encouraging reflection on the insights of and achievements of the bilateral dialogues; bringing coherence to the bilateral dialogues; endorsing proposals for the forum to meet more regularly; and challenging the CWCs to rethink the approach to bilateral dialogue so that it might be more relevant to churches, especially those churches in the global south.³

d) Assemblies – cooperative leadership

The JCC helped to reshape the discussion on common assemblies with a wider circle of partners and by clarifying that, rather than pursuing “joint assemblies”, it would be more strategic to develop the WCC assembly as a significant gathering of the whole ecumenical movement, which includes the strong participation and cooperation of CWCs and other ecumenical partners with the WCC as it prepares the assembly. The JCC affirmed the value of ecumenical leadership participating more fully in the assembly as a way to nurture greater coherence in the one ecumenical movement, i.e. CWC governing body members.⁴

e) Other areas – encouraging synergies

The JCC helped to encourage a number of common programmatic interests between CWCs and WCC member churches; particularly CWCs participation in the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation; and also the preparation of guidelines for common witness developed by the WCC, World Evangelical Alliance and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Interreligious Dialogue. It also held regular discussion with the leadership of the Global Christian Forum, taking stock of developments and offering advice from the joint perspective of CWCs and the WCC.⁵

¹ *cf.* Report of the continuation committee on ecumenism in the 21st century.

² *cf.* Current Dialogue, no 52, July 2012.

³ *cf.* Reports from the ninth and tenth forums on bilateral dialogue, 2008 and 2012.

⁴ *cf.* reports from the assembly discernment and assembly planning committees to the WCC central committee 2009, 2011 and 2012.

⁵ *cf.* Just Peace Companion; Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World; reports from the Global Christian Forum.

3. Affirmations from the Joint Consultative Commission

The work of the JCC affirmed a number of basic principles that are relevant for on-going cooperation between the WCC and CWCs.

- a) The ecclesial nature of the ecumenical movement; that is, churches are the primary actors of the ecumenical movement and their direct involvement is needed to make Christian unity and common witness in the world more visible.
- b) The WCC as a fellowship of churches that provides space for its member churches to experience the fellowship they share in Christ. The ethos of fellowship and consensus offers the WCC a unique role in the ecumenical movement in convening churches and ecumenical partners around common concerns.
- c) The CWCs as communions of churches that provide space for their member churches to experience communion as a family of churches sharing a common theological and confessional heritage. The ethos of communion offers CWCs a unique role in the ecumenical movement in deepening Eucharistic fellowship and engaging in inter-communion dialogue.
- d) The value of conciliar and confessional cooperation in serving the one ecumenical movement. The relationship between the WCC and CWCs has matured over decades from antagonistic to cooperative based on a growing sense of common responsibility in nurturing the churches' commitment to making unity in Christ more visible.
- e) Recognizing areas for strategic cooperation. There are key areas where cooperation between the WCC and CWCs has particular relevance, e.g., in presenting a common Christian voice for dialogue with other faiths; in pursuing theological dialogue that reconciles divisions among churches; and in pursuing common witness for justice and peace.

4. Recommendations of the Joint Consultative Commission

The JCC helped to begin reshaping relations and building greater cooperation between the WCC and CWCs with a focus on nurturing the one ecumenical movement and serving the fellowship of churches in their pursuit of visible unity and common witness in Christ.

The JCC provided a flexible mechanism for consultation and sharing between the WCC and CWCs. Meetings of the JCC were held annually in connection with an already established gathering of CWC leadership.

The JCC **recommends** to both the WCC assembly and the conference of secretaries of CWCs that a similar joint commission be continued to strengthen interaction and cooperation between the WCC and CWCs:

- a) Such a mechanism should be flexible, i.e. meeting regularly to maintain interaction; connected with other events; and bringing together church representatives, communion leadership and relevant ecumenical staff;
- b) The commission should involve the leadership and key staff of the WCC and the leadership of Christian world communions committed to deeper cooperation and engagement with the WCC;
- c) The commission should report regularly to the WCC central committee and the conference of secretaries of Christian world communions for accountability and feedback.
- d) The commission should continue to reinforce on-going collaboration, while helping to facilitate communication and collaboration in response to emerging issues.

Appendix 1 – Meetings of the Joint Consultative Commission

The meetings of the JCC were held in conjunction with the steering committee of the conference of secretaries of Christian world communions, which meets annually in May/June in Geneva.

The JCC met on the following dates:

- 10 May 2007
- 14 and 15 May 2008
- 22 and 23 June 2009
- 19 and 20 May 2010
- 8 and 9 June 2011
- 6 and 7 June 2012

Appendix 2 – Members of the Joint Consultative Commission

WCC members included:

H.E. Dr Archbishop Nareg Amezian, (2007 to 2010; 2102), Co-chair
Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Cilicia)

Mr Douglas L. Chial (2007 to 2012)
World Council of Churches

Rev. Canon Dr John Gibaut (2008 to 2012)
World Council of Churches

Dr Aruna Gnanadason (2007 to 2008)
World Council of Churches

Archpriest Mikhail Gundyayev (2007 to 2012)
Russian Orthodox Church

Archimandrite Benedict Ioannou (2007)
Ecumenical Patriarchate

Mr Georges Lemopoulos (2008 to 2012)
World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus (2007 to 2012)
World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr Larry Pickens (2007 to 2008)
United Methodist Church

Rev. Dr Martin Robra (2007 to 2012)
World Council of Churches

CWC members included:

Rev. Dr Robert K. Welsh, (2007; 2009 to 2012), Co-chair
Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council

Rev. Canon Dr Alyson Barnett-Cowan (2010 to 2012)
Anglican Communion

Monsignor Gosbert Byamungu (2008 to 2011)
Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Rt Rev. Gregory Cameron (2007 to 2008)
Anglican Communion

Bishop Brian Farrel (2007 to 2012)
Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Rev. Dr John Graz (2007 to 2012)
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Nancy Irving (2007 to 2009; 2012)
Friends World Committee for Consultation

Dr Kathryn L. Johnson (2008 to 2011)
Lutheran World Federation

Rev. Canon Kenneth Kearon (2009)
Anglican Communion

Rev. Stephen Larson (2012)
Lutheran World Federation

Rev. Dr Larry Miller (2007 to 2008; 2010 to 2012)
Mennonite World Conference

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko (2007 to 2009)
Lutheran World Federation

Rev. Dr Setri Nyomi, Co-chair in 2008 (2008 to 2009; 2011 to 2012)
World Communion of Reformed Churches

Monsignor John Radano (2007)
Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Rev. Dr Douwe Visser (2009 to 2010; 2012)
World Communion of Reformed Churches