



World Council of Churches

REPORT

Inter-Orthodox Pre-Assembly Consultation For the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, 2022 “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity”

Organized by the World Council of Churches & hosted by the Orthodox Church of
Cyprus, Paralimni, Cyprus, May 10-15, 2022

Christ is Risen! Krishti u Ngjall! Ἐξηύνηθη ὁ Σωτήρ
ክርስቶስ ተንሥሐ ለሙታን! Христос воскрес! *Hristos a înviat!*
Christ est ressuscité! Χριστός Ἀνέστη! *ክርስቶስ ካብ ሙታን ተንሥሐ!*
"Christos Anesti" - Chrystus Zmartwychwstał!
ക്രിസ്തു ഉയർത്തെഴുന്നേറ്റു Христос воскрес! المسيح قام!
Kristus nousi kuolleista! ክርስቶስ ከሙታን ተለይቶ ተነሣ! *Vstal z mrtvých Kristus!*

Preamble

1. We, Orthodox delegates to the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to be held in Karlsruhe, Germany, give thanks to the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—whose self-giving love is the source of the Church’s unity and the power that strengthens it to address all divisions.
2. The WCC, in the articles of its Constitution, is “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” The primary purpose of this fellowship to which Orthodox churches have belonged since its founding in 1948, is “to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance toward that unity in order that the world may believe.” The Acting General Secretary of the WCC, Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Sauca, has called the Council a “blessed instrument” for promoting dialogue, witness, and service in the name of Christ.
3. Fifty participants, including delegates from twenty Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches along with observers and consultants, have gathered in Cyprus from May 10-15, 2022 for an Inter-Orthodox Pre-Assembly Consultation. We rejoice in the active presence of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church in such a Pre-Assembly meeting for the first time. This is

the sixth time, starting in 1983, that representatives of Orthodox churches have met in advance of a WCC assembly in order to reflect on the assembly theme, to identify how Orthodox Christians can contribute to the assembly's agenda, and to prepare for informed discussions on issues of the day. This meeting, organized by the WCC, is additionally intended to enhance Orthodox participation in the life of the Council. We express our gratitude to H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima for pursuing the vision of the late Rev. Ion Bria of Pre-Assembly meetings which include both Orthodox church families.

4. The theme of the WCC's 11th Assembly (August 31–September 8, 2022) is “Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity,” a theme drawn from St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (5:14). Consideration of the theme is, at heart, a matter of spiritual discernment, and, thus, we have set our days of study and discussion in a context of prayer. A summary of our discussions is set forth in the body of this report, but we note at the outset that this theme is surely timely. We gather at a moment when around the world the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, violence, conflicts, wars, Occupation, racism, poverty, and ecological devastation imperil human existence, contrary to Christ's love that moves the world to reconciliation and unity!

5. The World Council of Churches is a significant forum for dialogue among Christian communities and churches that, while sharing a common confession of the Triune God, may have theological differences and genuine disagreements about issues of the day. In this context, we cannot imagine the expulsion of any member. We are thankful that the WCC has provided a setting for this consultation of Orthodox churches, Oriental and Eastern, and look forward to the Council's 11th Assembly where we will join with the wider ecumenical fellowship in prayer, study of scripture, and dialogue. With them, we are called to witness that Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity! Being together as Orthodox families and with others in the fellowship of the WCC is itself a sign of God's life-giving grace.

6. We express our appreciation for the extraordinary hospitality of H.E. Metropolitan Vasilios of Constantia and Ammochostos, of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, as well as the local municipal authorities of Paralimni, Sotira, Agia Napa, and Protaras. We were graciously welcomed by Cypriot presidential commissioner, Photis Photiou, who commended the Orthodox churches for coming together and the WCC for providing an “open platform” for dialogue. We were warmly greeted by H.B. Archbishop Chrysostomos II in Nicosia. During this meeting, which took place on May 12, the Feast of St. Epiphanius, His Beatitude underlined the importance of Orthodox preparing together for the 11th Assembly. The same day also marked the 15th anniversary of the enthronement of H.E. Vasilios and the restoration of the Diocese of Constantia and Ammochostos.

7. The island of Cyprus is an apostolic land of the apostles Paul, Barnabas, and Mark, and was the first European country to receive the Gospel. It is also today a vivid indication of the need for reconciliation and unity. In addition to British colonial presence, one-third of the island is occupied by the Turkish army, including two-thirds of the diocese in which we have met. Nearly two hundred thousand Christians have been forced to flee their homes, and churches, Christian monuments, and other Christian cultural heritage have been, and continue to be, destroyed in the occupied territory. As H.E. Metropolitan Vasilios has said, the intention of Orthodox Christians is

not to further inflame relationships with Muslims or the people of Turkey, but to call on all churches to pray and work for the reunification of Cyprus, for an end to destruction and injustice on this island, and for the restoration of its churches.

8. One hopeful sign for us has been the combined presence of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox delegates at this pre-assembly consultation. During our sessions, we have been encouraged and informed by speakers from both traditions, Eastern and Oriental, and we look forward to further growth, led by the Holy Spirit, in this relationship.

9. Those gathered for this meeting are only part of the Orthodox delegates that will take part in the upcoming assembly. In Karlsruhe, there will be nearly two hundred delegates from Orthodox churches that are members of the WCC, one-quarter of all the delegates to the 11th Assembly. There should be no doubt that the Orthodox voice is strong and valued in the life of the Council, demonstrating Christ's love in our relations with one another and with our sisters and brothers in other churches. The papers and discussions at this consultation have reminded us that Orthodox participation in the movement to restore unity with other followers of Christ in the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church is not foreign to the nature and history of the Orthodox Church. It is with that conviction that we commend this report to our Orthodox churches and the other member churches of the WCC fellowship.

Theological Contribution to the Assembly Theme

10. This is the first time that 'love' has been part of an Assembly theme. While that has commended the theme to many Christians, others have raised questions: Does the focus on Christ's 'love' ignore the fullness of the Trinity? Does it undercut the importance of interfaith relations? Should the theme have explicitly included 'justice' and/or 'creation'? What is the meaning of 'unity'? The presentations at our Consultation have shown that an Orthodox understanding of the theme can effectively address such questions, and thus, contribute to the whole Assembly.

11. God is love (1 John 4:16). The whole creation has come into being due to the superabundance of divine goodness and is being saved by the same superabundant divine love. The ontological abyss between God's divine nature and our human nature is overcome by the Word of God taking on flesh. It is Jesus Christ, through His giving of the self, who brings to us the all-abundant love of the Creator. The passion of Christ was not the price to be paid for human sins, nor the ransom to be given to Satan, but was the ultimate expression of God's love for all people.

12. The Holy Trinity, the *koinonia* of love, calls humans to be participants in the love that does not discriminate but unites, that embraces not only the beautiful but also the disfigured, not only the perfect but also the imperfect, not only the world of angels blessed by heavenly bliss but also the world of pain and the realm of death. This love is universal. God entreats us to abide in this love by keeping his commandments (John 15:10). These commandments are "You shall love the

Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...and love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

13. The love referred to in these commandments does not signify a demand of a superior to his inferior but is a corroboration of the divine will, according to the commandment given to Adam in paradise. The commandments constitute a *modus vivendi*, which connotes the living of the faithful according to the truth and reflects divine goodness. They are 'light... and life' (Symeon the New Theologian), leading human beings to the light and the real life that is Christ Himself.

14. The transformation in Christ leads to the second great commandment: loving one's neighbor, whether they are agreeable or disagreeable to us, whether they are friends or enemies (Matthew 5:44). The love of this kind has nothing in common with all the causes of love known in our human experience. Its nature is not sentimental, due to an enthusiasm or a type of interest; it is not a creature of imagination, it is not a simple desire of the other, but, as the perfection of love, goes beyond all these, having a catholic character. It is addressed to all human beings no matter who or where they are.

15. Love, in Orthodox Christian perspective, is not merely tolerance, but is rooted in the very nature of God and is manifest in compassion, in taking on and identifying with the sufferings of the world through 'transforming discipleship'¹. Love-as-sacrifice supersedes love-as-tolerance. Through the sacrificial love of God in Jesus Christ, we are taught (1 Thessalonians 4:9), and called to emulate, a deeper experience of self-emptying love that knows no bounds. This emptying of the self in love for the other is a clear virtue and Christian preoccupation. The impetus of this love is reconciliation.

16. Genuine Christian reconciliation requires a *metanoia*, a real transformation of unjust relationships by acknowledging and recognizing our faults and mistakes, and changing our minds and ways of life. Reconciliation is both the foundation of life as well as a ministry we are called to serve. Having then received Christ's reconciling love, we are sent as ambassadors of reconciliation. The Church is called to be a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9). The unity of the church as witness to reconciliation, is always to be identical with and connected to its service in and for the transformation of the world. This is preceded by acknowledging one's mistakes for lasting reconciliation. This transformation is not restricted to an exterior change of the human, but according to Orthodox Christian perspective, to the inner radical change that is offered through *metanoia*.

17. The achievement of the perfection of love presupposes the knowledge of God in as much as He reveals Himself to us. The internalization of this revealed knowledge is faith. Of course, faith is not merely an intellectual acceptance of the existence of God or even of the basic articles of faith but the absolute trust and self-giving of the faithful to God, as shown by Abraham and other saints, and most perfectly by the Theotokos, that permits the faithful to be known by God (1 Corinthians 8:1-3). It is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). In this perspective, faith is a foundational virtue and the spiritual prerogative, as

¹ Theme of the WCC World Mission Conference in Arusha (2018).

without it there cannot be any spiritual building.

18. The building up of faith denotes the confession of faith in one spirit, because one is the Lord. After His resurrection from the dead and before his ascension to heaven, Jesus Christ instructed His disciples: “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19) Jesus Christ, being the unifying principle for Christian faith, is the cornerstone on whom the spiritual construction is fit together, to whom we are assembled, becoming the temple of God in spirit. Thus, “we come to Him, the living stone... and like living stones we learn ourselves to be built into a spiritual house.” (1 Peter 2:4)

19. In this organic unity, founded on the one common faith and experience activated by love, Christ is the cornerstone. He is the Head of his Body, the Church, and the One who blesses, through the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, those who believe in Him. In this way, He makes all partakers of the one bread members of the same body with Himself and with each other. According to St. Epiphanius of Salamis², to us, “this is the faith and this is the pride, and this is our mother; the Church that saves through faith, that is strengthened through hope and that is perfected through Christ’s love, in the one confession, in the sacraments...this is the faith, this is the reality of our life, this is the truth, and again, this is the life and the hope and the assurance of immortality.”

20. The ontological unity of humankind broken by sin is restored through the incarnation, passion, and sacrifice of Jesus, His suffering, death, and resurrection, for those who are born from Him of water and spirit (John 3:5). The arms of the Savior stretched out on the Cross embrace all ends of the world, uniting all people who rely on Him into “one man” whom the Savior places “in the bosom of one deity”, that is, reuniting them with God and deifying them (St. Gregory the Theologian). Faith, hope, and love are interconnected. Each one of them depends on the other. Loving God results in loving the other. Love is often considered as the climax of spiritual progress which cannot exist unless it is founded in faith. (Galatians 5:6)

21. The deepest mystery of human dignity is not reached only by human intellect, but is mainly grasped through God’s revelation, achieving its fulfillment in Christ’s incarnation. In it is clarified that every human person has a great, unique and equal worth, and that the origin of this should be sought exclusively in the fact that humans have been created “according to the image and likeness of God”, and this creation is the root of the inherent worth or dignity of each and every human person. As “an image of God”, humans must act, live and create in a godlike manner; to become God’s partner in creation. This type of conduct cannot be enjoyed apart from relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, meaning, apart from God. Therefore, human freedom, a major characteristic of this godlike image, reflects not only an autonomous chooser, but also a responsible person with a sense of moral duty. This sense of moral duty, according to the Orthodox vision, should always be seen and fulfilled in the light of its eschatological dynamic.

22. The ascetic ethos of the Orthodox Church entails a manner of modesty in life and self-

² Epiphanius of Salamis, Panarion, De fide, 18-19

restraint towards all the offered goods of the creation and the respect to all resources, being to our disposal for the benefit of our life. It reminds us that we are responsible for the creation as its guardians but not its creators.

The Cry of the World

23. As Christians, we are greatly affected by the tragedies that have been unfolding before our eyes. Cries for help of millions of our brothers and sisters in various parts of the world must not remain the voice heard “wailing and in loud lamentation” like Rachel “weeping for her children, refusing to be consoled as they are no more” (Matthew 2:18) As Orthodox churches -- which identify both their history and their present with the mystery of the Cross, the suffering and resurrection of the Lord -- we are deeply concerned with the conflicts, human rights violations, the worsening refugee crisis, the systematic destruction of Christian cultural heritage, terrorist actions, and persecutions and uprooting of Christians taking place in different parts of the world. We are particularly concerned about, and lift up in prayer, the situation in Ukraine, Armenia, Cyprus, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and the Middle East and Africa, and other places in the world. We also sorrowfully remember the yet unresolved situation of the kidnapped Archbishop Paul Yazigi of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim, and other abducted clergy and lay people. “Never again”: “we do not forget” the consequences of degradation and dehumanization which has resulted in untold pain, suffering, and sorrow for generations.

24. During our deliberations, there was an expression of grave concern over the armed conflict in Ukraine that has already claimed many people’s lives. The participants in the meeting have been unanimous in condemning the wars and call upon all the parties involved in the conflicts to do everything within their power for the urgent establishment of peace and for ensuring safety in Ukraine, Russia, Europe, and the whole world. We also condemn systematic campaigns of disinformation that promote divisions and hatred. In this time of great hardships, we are called to lift up fervent prayers to Christ the Savior so that hatred may not take hold of human souls and hearts, but, instead, love and fraternal communion may return to the brotherly peoples in anguish.

25. We should not allow our hearts and minds to be governed by all passions and old imperfections and expressions of our fallen human nature, which drives us to sin and distance from God and our neighbor. We believe that conflicts must be solved only through peaceful means and dialogue, and not through military action. We call and pray for the immediate cessation of violence in these areas, as in all places where conflict is occurring, and for the universal observance of self-determination and good governance. Christ’s love moves us to work and pray for reconciliation and unity, to express God’s will for peace.

26. At this meeting, we also discussed such documents as: ‘Conversations on the Pilgrim Way – Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality’ (received by the Central Committee in February 2022), informing our participation in the WCC. We recall what has been stated in the 2002 Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, in

order to strengthen the ecumenical memory on special social and ethical issues: “The Council cannot speak for, nor require the churches to adopt particular positions. It can, however, continue to provide opportunities for all churches to consult one another, and, wherever possible, for them to speak together. By the same token, member churches should understand that not all matters discussed within their fora can be imposed on the WCC agenda. Skill and sensitivity are needed on all sides to perceive which matters should remain within the counsels of particular churches and which can be profitably discussed together.”

27. We are called to bear witness to the Tradition of the Church of the first centuries, which is faithfully preserved and lived in the Orthodox churches. The state of ethics and morality in the present-day society urges us to raise our voice in defense of the traditional values of family and marriage and in defense of human life, from the moment of conception until natural death. We must not be apathetic towards moral relativism and degradation. It is only the clear example of faithfulness to the commandments of God and a firm word that can produce results in order to “by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22).

28. The Covid-19 pandemic, which continues to rage on in many parts of the world at the time of this meeting, has wrought misery and death. The pandemic has reminded us of our inherent fragility. It has exposed great inequalities within and between nations: the unequal distribution of Covid-related health care and aid has prolonged the pandemic in the Global South, leading to health and economic crises that have pushed millions of people into further vulnerability and poverty. The pandemic must be understood as a consequence of humankind's exploitative relationship with the rest of creation, an entitlement that is arrogant and neglects the ethos of *metanoia*.

29. Christ's love reaches not only to the human realm but to all creation, calling Christ's followers to responsible care for the creation. This is why the devastating impacts of climate change and potentially irreversible destruction of life on land and under water is an urgent priority for the Orthodox people. Paul's words – “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22) – take on new meaning for us in this era. Our Christian vocation means we should seek to rectify our wrongs against creation and aid in its full restoration.

30. We also received with appreciation the Report³ of the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Women's Consultation which was held from October 3-7, 2019 by the invitation of the WCC and with the gracious hospitality of H.B. Anastasios of Tirana, Durres, and all Albania. 18 women, of which 6 are now present here, convened to reflect on the theme ‘Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: The Journey of Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Women Today’, and endeavored together to strengthen fellowship, witness together, and encourage spirituality. The meeting served as a platform to celebrate and learn from the innovative work and diaconal ministries of women in their unequivocal love for the stranger, the compassion and care of the refugee, the counseling and healing of the traumatized – all for the glory of God.

³ The full Report of the meeting of Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Women's Consultation held in Albania in 2019 on the theme ‘Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: The Journey of Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Women Today’ can be found in the Appendix.

Epilogue

31. In our meeting we, delegates of both Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, gave thanks to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for bringing us together in a spirit of love, reconciliation, and unity. We prayed to have our Lord Jesus Christ, “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6) always in our midst, trusting in His promise: “I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you” (John14:18). With this promise in our hearts, we renew our commitment and common obedience to our Triune God, that we follow His commandment to Love Him, to love one another, and to protect His creation, which is our home.