

## Introduction

This worksheet is intended to be a **tool** to reflect and/or prepare a discussion on reconciliation and in particular social reconciliation and its relevance for churches in mission.

It is based mainly on reflections taken from Robert Schreiter's book *The Ministry of Reconciliation. Spirituality and Strategies*. Maryknoll, Orbis, 1998, pp. 105 ff., and the experience of WCC colleagues, in particular Guillermo Kerber Mas, from the WCC team on International Affairs, Peace and Human Security.

## Preamble

Tackling reconciliation at social and political levels is crucial in the present times. The ministry of reconciliation and healing which the churches are called to cannot deal only with inter-personal relations. The churches are challenged to exercise their prophetic ministry in situations that require discernment, wisdom and experience in community processes. They need however to be aware of the necessary distinction between individual reconciliation and social reconciliation, in the sense that the processes are not necessarily the same in each case.

Many times, churches have themselves been responsible for major crimes against humanity (participation of churches in Latin American dictatorships or in the genocide in Rwanda). Church leaders have also played key roles in reconciliation processes in different countries (Archbishop Tutu in South Africa, Cardinal Arns in Brazil, for instance, among others). Too often however, churches and church leaders are reluctant to involve themselves and the churches in reconciliation processes at a social or national level.

Reconciliation should be seen as a broader approach to justice than political or judicial approaches. Peace agreements, judiciary decisions don't achieve full justice for societies. A deeper process including healing of memories, dealing with forgiveness, going beyond the division between victim and victimizer is needed. This is what is meant by a reconciliation process.

## Reconciliation questionnaire

"Defining reconciliation in a given context is an important part of the initial stage of the reconciliation process itself"

(Schreiter, 1998, p. 106)

The first question to be asked is **what and who needs reconciliation**. Wrongdoers and victims will have different answers to that question. Should reconciliation aim at addressing the most obvious wrongdoings (human right abuses e.g.) or deeper causes (e.g. land ownership, identity questions)? Is a reconciliation process the best way to address the problem or are other means better adapted, such as legal action?

The second question is **Why?** - Why is reconciliation needed in a concrete circumstance? What were the means used to overcome a conflict at a political and judicial levels? How did people react to these means? Is there any feeling of something missing?

The third question is about **appropriate means** for reconciliation. This can raise cultural questions, request reflections about resources which are available (existence or non-existence of legally trained people e.g.), and an analysis of hindrances (powers with responsibility in wrongdoing might still be in place or capable of influence).

Fourthly, a dialogue is needed about what the **reconciled stage** will look like. What is aimed at? It might not be possible to know it in advance, but a discussion on this is needed.

Then reflection is needed about the **actors** and their agenda and role in a reconciliation process (cf. Schreiter, 1998, p. 108-110)

- Victims and survivors
- Wrongdoers
- Bystanders (tacitly complicit with what happened, not directly involved, but not having done anything to stop wrongdoing)
- People who have been both victims and wrongdoers (people sometimes forced to do violence to others)
- Dead
- Future generations
- Neighbours (in neighbouring countries)
- God

Some **burning issues** that should be addressed while reflecting on reconciliation in general:

Issues of forgiveness. Is forgiveness possible? How? How do we relate forgiveness to justice? Sometimes Christian understanding of reconciliation is seen as undermining justice procedures. How can this be addressed? Issues of reparation. What reparation is foreseen, or has been granted? Many times the discussion is focused on economic reparation, but talking with victims you realize that symbolic reparation is as important as economic. Church knowledge of the symbolic dimension of life can be an important contribution in dealing with these issues. Issues of accountability and responsibility. Shifting from individual to social level implies to understand responsibility differently. Community and society cannot be seen as innocent or neutral actors. The shift to the social also implies that victims and perpetrators are not only or mainly individuals but collective and social actors. The collective meaning of "sin" (in Adam) and "redemption" (in Christ) in St Paul's letters could have something to say at this level. The constant need of conversion is addressed to Christians as individuals, but also to the church as community. Issues of interreligious dimension of reconciliation. Many times conflict is seen as involving religions, a factor which is highlighted in the media. However existing interreligious efforts for reconciliation should also be stressed.

#### **Editor's additional note:**

This sheet addresses in particular questions related to reconciliation in the socio-political realm and the church's ministry in society. As you work with this sheet, you may however also want to apply it to questions of church unity and mission in unity, and discern how to move towards healing of memories and reconciliation in old or new conflicts involving churches and Christians:

As examples, let us mention local or national conflicts between individual churches, old or new conflicts between denominations or church families, between foreign missionaries or mission bodies and local churches, between churches in economically rich countries and churches in economically poor countries, between conflicting mission movements, or between churches or Christian mission bodies and Indigenous Peoples.

Please share with the CWME Conference Office your experiences, reactions, your reflections on such processes and also suggestions for improving this tool.

CWME Conference Office  
WCC  
150 route de Ferney  
CH-1211 Genève 2  
Switzerland