



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

## **Protestant in Europe**

### **Greeting from the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Gathering of Synod Members**

in Berne, 10-12 March 2017

#### **to the Council of the CPCE and the 2018 General Assembly of the CPCE**

More than 100 synod members representing 48 member churches of the CPCE and from 17 countries gathered in Berne from 10 to 12 March 2017 at the invitation of the Reformed Churches of Berne-Jura-Solothurn and the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (FSPC).

By conducting these meetings of synod members, the CPCE is intensifying church fellowship at European level in accordance with the wishes of the 2012 General Assembly in Florence.

A Lebanese representative of the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches also attended the gathering. She highlighted the dire refugee situation in her region and called for solidarity. The Evangelical Churches are an important partner for the CPCE. For this reason, the CPCE has repeatedly encouraged more intense collaboration and closer contact between the churches from the two regional church communities.

The meeting is also concerned about the current situation in Europe. The synod members support common European values such as democracy, human rights, cosmopolitanism, hospitality and freedom. The growing Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, which has been instrumental in this meeting of synod members, should also play a positive role in the process of integration throughout Europe. The process of European integration arose from resistance against nationalism and totalitarianism. This is why Protestant churches are affiliated with this effort and support it.

The meeting was held under the banner "Protestant in the House of Religions". A highlight of the event was the visit to Berne's "House of Religions", a centre of culture and dialogue between eight religions that is unique throughout Europe. The main focus of the gathering was the way Christian faith behaves towards other religions and how we can join forces to meet the challenges faced throughout an increasingly secularised and multicultural Europe. Protestantism can and must raise its profile also in this respect.

Prof. Reinhold Bernhardt (Basle) believes a culture of openness towards inter-religious relations is required, based on God's unconditional affection for humankind. In his keynote speech, he



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

emphasised the concept of God's "radical grace" as the Protestant contribution to a theology of religions.

At the behest of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gathering of European Synod Members in Budapest in 2015, this meeting was involved in preparations for the 2018 General Assembly in Basle.

Besides the main headline, "Plurality of Religions", the synod members looked at other focal points of the CPCE's current work: "church fellowship", "theology of diaspora", "migration and church fellowship" and the "ethics of reproductive medicine". This offered insights into the work of the CPCE, with the aim of making these spheres of activity accessible for discussion at the synod levels of the member churches.

The synod members pointed out that the documents need to be written in an easily comprehensible language for this to happen. They expressed their clear wish to engage in the preparatory process for the CPCE General Assembly.

The synod members agreed to send this message to the Council and General Assembly of the CPCE.

They will report the results of their work back to their churches. They thank the Reformed Churches of Berne-Jura-Solothurn and the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches for their very warm welcome and hospitality.

There was a clear vote in favour of continuing this kind of meeting on a regular basis combined with the offer to get more actively involved in preparing and conducting forthcoming events.

The aim is to strengthen and intensify the fellowship between the Protestant churches this way during the interim periods between General Assemblies.

The synod members ask that ways might be sought to anchor these gatherings of European synod members within the CPCE's fields of work.

There are already plans to continue this kind of event, as the Protestant Church in Baden has offered to host a 4<sup>th</sup> European Gathering of Synod Members. The synod members look forward to this meeting and thank the Protestant Church in Baden for its kind invitation.

Berne, 12 March 2017