

Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)
– Leuenberg Church Fellowship –



Press release 16/2008

Intercultural dialogue: not without the religions

The Council of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) welcomes the “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue” recently adopted by the Council of Europe.

The statement:

2008 is the European year of intercultural dialogue. On 7 May the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, to which 47 European states belong, adopted a “white paper” on intercultural dialogue which describes the principles of the European states for intercultural dialogue. The Council of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), which is meeting in Paris from 30 May to 1 June, welcomes the efforts of the Council of Europe over intercultural dialogue.

The Council of the CPCE declares that the increasing cultural diversity of Europe confronts us with new social and political challenges. Intercultural dialogue is therefore not a marginal phenomenon for European societies but a process which belongs at the centre of society.

The Protestant churches in Europe take it for granted that human rights, democracy and the rule of law form the state framework for intercultural dialogue. We welcome the fact that all 47 member states of the Council of Europe have made this unmistakably clear by adopting the white paper in the Committee of Ministers.

The CPCE Council welcomes the fact that in the white paper the Council of Europe goes at length into the importance of the religions for intercultural dialogue. We are convinced that certainty about one's own religious identity and understanding of the convictions and views of others are important elements in intercultural dialogue. It is important that the religions should not just be seen as factors of conflict in intercultural dialogue. We want to encourage the Council of Europe to note the positive contribution that faith communities make in everyday life to the common good in European societies.

The identity of the other must be respected in intercultural dialogue. But intercultural dialogue also includes the right to criticize the other. The churches of the Reformation grew out of criticism of existing church conditions and doctrines and feel particularly committed to freedom of faith and conscience. The claim of the religions to be able to criticize other religions or social conditions in public must include the readiness to allow themselves to be put in question.

In intercultural dialogue the Council of Europe begins with the human dignity of the individual. That accords with the Protestant view. The right to individual freedom is inseparably bound up with responsibility for society. The forces which hold our societies together must be strengthened.

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) made an important statement on the deliberations of the Council of Europe in the process of preparing the white paper. Through the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches the CPCE took place in the process of producing the white paper. You can find the CPCE statement at www.leuenberg.eu

A “white paper” contains background information and proposals for action for the member states of the Council of Europe on particular political themes. It is the end-product of a process of consultation in which all important social groups are involved.

Paris, 1 June 2008

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At present 105 Protestant churches in Europe (including five South-American churches originating from Europe) belong to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist along with pre-Reformation churches such as Hussites and Czech Brethren grant each other pulpit and table fellowship on the basis of the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973. A 13-member Council carries out ongoing business between two general assemblies, headed by a 3-member Presidium: Revd Thomas Wipf (President), Council President of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches in Bern , Prof. Michael Beintker (Co-President), Director of the Seminary for Reformed Theology at the University in Munster , and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stephanie Dietrich (Co-President), Diakonhjemmet University College Oslo. The Secretariat, which operates under the direction of the Council, is housed in the Severin-Schreiber-Gasse 3, A-1180 Vienna, office@leuenberg.eu, tel. +43.1.4791523.900, fax .580. Its director is Bishop Prof. Dr. Michael Bünker. The CPCE press officer is Dipl.theol. Thomas Flügge (Bern), tel. +41.31.3702502, t.fluegge@leuenberg.eu.