

The United Methodist Church

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe



Journal

on the 83rd Meeting of the Executive Committee

from March 13 + 15, 2025 in Winterthur (Switzerland)

&

on the 20th Meeting of the Central Conference

from March 13 - 16, 2025 in Winterthur (Switzerland)

on the theme

«Shalom with you»

and

on the 84th Meeting of the Executive Committee

from November 21 – 23, 2025 in Warsaw (Poland)



The United Methodist Church

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Report on the 83rd Meeting of the Executive Committee
from March 13 + 15, 2025 in Winterthur (Switzerland) and

Report on the 20th Meeting of the Central Conference
from March 13 - 16, 2025 in Winterthur (Switzerland) and

Report on the 84th Meeting of the Executive Committee
from November 21 – 23, 2025 in Warsaw (Poland)

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Our common Agreement for fruitful and respectful Executive Committee Meetings



- Every voice should be heard and has equal value.
- We encourage one another to speak out openheartedly.
- We engage in dialogue with respectful and active listening.



- We are willing to learn and consider what we say.
- Our work builds on mutual trust and we assume good intention.
- We are aware of cultural and language barriers and differences and patiently take time to understand one another.



- We ask, if things are unclear and help one another in understanding.
- We promote a culture in which mistakes are allowed and dealt with constructively.



- We understand our meetings as confidential.
- We are well-prepared for meetings and know the goals and limits of our work.
- We keep an eye on our overarching and connecting goals.
- We are on time or communicate delays in advance.



- We avoid hybrid meetings.
- We foster our relations and show our willingness to learn from one another by participating in devotions and joint activities.



Executive Meeting in Vienna, March 14-17, 2024

Facts of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Date: November 23, 2025

General Information

Annual Conferences of the Central Conference

Provisional Annual Conference Austria
Annual Conference Poland
Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa
Provisional Annual Conference Serbia-North-Macedonia-Albania
Annual Conference Czech Republic
Provisional Annual Conference Hungary-Rumania

Episcopal Supervision since February 1st, 2023

Bishop Dr. Stefan Zürcher

Bishops retired

Bishop Heinrich Bolleter
Bishop Dr. Patrick Streiff

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The »Geneva Area«

The "Geneva Area" was founded in 1936 and assigned to the Southeastern Jurisdiction Conference in the United States. His first bishop, Dr. John Louis Nuelsen, chose Geneva as residence. Since it is customary in the United Methodist Church to name the parish according to the respective residence of the bishop, the new parish was given the name "Geneva Area". Until 1954, all bishops resided in Geneva. In these eighteen years, the "Geneva Area" became a household name. To preserve this connection, the Central Conference in Brussels decided in 1954 to "keep the name of the Genevan Area and let the bishop have a free hand, to choose his residence, where he considers him right according to the circumstances."

The bishops of the Geneva Area

John Louis Nuelsen	1936 - 1940
William W. Peele	1940 - 1941
Arthur J. Moore	1941 - 1944 and 1952 - 1954
Paul N. Garber	1944 - 1952 and 1965 - 1966
Ferdinand Sigg	1954 - 1965
Ralph E. Dodge	1965 - 1966
Franz W. Schäfer	1966 - 1989
Heinrich Bolleter	1989 - 2006
Patrick Streiff	2006 - 2023
Stefan Zürcher	2023 -

The Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

The "Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe" was founded in 1954. It was formed from those Annual Conferences, Provisional Annual Conferences, and Missions left over after the dissolution of the "Central Conference of Central Europe" and the "Central Conference of Southern Europe" and summed up in the "Geneva Area".

The Meetings of the Central Conference

- 1st Meeting from October 14 to 17, 1954 in Brussels, Belgium
- 2nd Meeting from February 7 to 10, 1954 in Geneva, Switzerland
- 3rd Meeting from October 13 to 16, 1960 in Linz, Austria
- 4th Meeting from September 22 to 27, 1964 in Strasbourg, France
- 5th Meeting extraordinary from September 2 to 4, 1966 in Lausanne, Switzerland
- 6th Meeting from March 5 to 9, 1969 in Berne, Switzerland
Theme: »Die Kirche lebt«
- 7th Meeting from March 21 to 25, 1973 in Schaffhausen, Switzerland
Thema: »Es ist in keinem anderen Heil«
- 8th Meeting from March 15 to 20, 1977 in Zofingen, Switzerland
Theme: »Seid dankbar in allen Dingen; denn es ist der Wille Gottes in Jesus Christus an euch.«
- 9th Meeting from March 18 to 22, 1981 in Niederuzwil, Switzerland
Theme: »Dienet einander, ein jeder mit der Gabe, die er empfangen hat, als die guten Haushalter der vielfältigen Gnade Gottes.«
- 10th Meeting from March, 13 to 17, 1985 in Zurich-Zelthof, Switzerland
Theme: »Gott dienen - ein Leben lang.«
- 11th Meeting from March 15 to 19, 1989 in Baden, Switzerland
Theme: »Christus der Weinstock - wir die Reben.«
- 12th Meeting from March 10 to 14, 1993 in Berne-Bümpliz, Switzerland
Theme: »Wo der Geist des Herrn ist, da ist Freiheit«
- 13th Meeting from March 12 to 16, 1997 in Aarau, Switzerland
Theme: »Mit Grenzen leben - in Christus überwinden«
- 14th Meeting from March 14 to 18, 2001 in Bülach, Switzerland
Theme: »Lasst uns aber Gutes tun und nicht müde werden« (Gal. 6,9)
- 15th Meeting from April 13 to 17, 2005 in Berne-Altstadt, Switzerland
Theme: »Furcht ist nicht in der Liebe« (1. Joh. 4, 18)
- 16th Meeting from March 11 to 15, 2009 in Bülach, Switzerland
Theme: »Seek God and Live - the Methodist Way
- 17th Meeting from March 13 to 17, 2013 in Winterthur, Switzerland
Theme: »Faith, Hope and Love - these three«
- 18th Meeting from March 8 to 12, 2017 in Zurich-Zelthof, Switzerland
Theme: »Jesus is Lord«
- 19th Meeting extraordinary from November 16 - 20, 2023 in Basel, Switzerland
Theme: »The fruit of the Spirit is...«
- 20th Meeting from March 13 to 16, 2025 in Winterthur, Switzerland
Theme: »Shalom with you«

Rules of Order of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Paragraph 1 - Foundation

1. The United Methodist Church (Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche) in Central and Southern Europe is part of the United Methodist Church.
2. The United Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe is issuing for its area a *Discipline* in accordance with *the Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church.
3. The United Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe is made up of all annual and provisional annual conferences as laid out by the General Conference of The United Methodist Church.
4. The United Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe is organized in accordance with the powers granted by the 1952 General Conference of the former Methodist Conference and in accordance with the *Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church as the "Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe". (See Constitutional Document from October 14, 1954 in the Minutes of the Central Conference 1954 in Brussels, pp. 39 - 40.)
5. The "Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe" has its office in Switzerland, Badenerstrasse 69, 8004 Zürich. In the following it will be referred to in short as "Central Conference".

Paragraph 2 - The Central Conference

1. The Central Conference shall be composed of the Bishop, of voting delegates, delegates with advisory voice as well as guests, who have received an invitation from the conference chair or secretary. Guests may be restricted to public sessions.
2. Central Conference members with voting rights are the delegates of the annual and provisional annual conferences elected according to the provisions of the *Discipline* and the rules of order. Only regular members have voting rights.
3. Members with advisory voice are:
 - Retired Bishops;
 - Delegates of the associated Churches within the Central Conference borders;
 - The secretary, treasurer, chairperson of the judicial court, chairpersons of the working groups, if they are not already voting members.Advisory members may participate at all sessions of the Central Conference and submit motions to the Central Conference.
4. The delegates of the annual and the provisional annual conferences shall be elected according to the proportion determined by the executive committee. The provisions of the *Discipline* are to be observed.
5. The Central Conference shall convene once every four years within the twelve months following the General Conference. The Central Conference shall be convened by the Bishop in agreement with the executive committee. If the Bishop is prevented from doing this, the secretary may make notice of the conference session. If the Central Conference has not already decided otherwise, time

and place of the upcoming session, the executive committee shall determine time and venue of the upcoming session. If necessary a special session of the Central Conference may be called.

6. The Bishop shall lead the meetings and is chairperson. If he or she is unable to lead the conference, the conference shall elect from the clergy members an interim chairperson.

7. A quorum shall be established when notice of the conference is extended at least one month prior to the conference and at least half of the members with voting rights are present. If there are too few members, the conference shall be postponed from day to day. If on the second day there are still too few members, on the third day without regard to the number of members in attendance the Central Conference shall have a quorum.

8. Without prejudice to specific provisions, the Central Conferences decides with a simple majority of the votes cast. Abstentions are to be ignored.

9. The official languages of the Central Conference shall be German and English. The Central Conference minutes shall be published in one of the two languages only.

10. The rights and responsibilities, which the Central Conference has received from the General Conference, are laid out in the *Discipline*. In the area of the Central Conference it shall have the sole legislative power.

11. Further tasks of the Central Conference shall be:

- To promote the work which has been entrusted to the conference;
- To establish all necessary rules and regulations for administration and supervision;
- To install necessary organs and to elect their representatives;
- To assign the tasks to the organs and to supervise their work;
- To approve the budget for the quadrennium.

12. The Central Conference, where the laws of the land permit, can organize and incorporate itself and its institutions in order to acquire legal status and apply the appropriate legal provisions.

Paragraph 3 - Agents and Organs of the Central Conference

1. The agents of the Central Conference are:

- The Bishop;
- The secretary;
- The treasurer.

Through nomination the Bishop can petition that a voting member of the executive committee be elected vice chair of the executive committee.

2. The Organs of the Central Conference are:

- The Executive Committee;
- The Office;
- The Council on Finances and Administration;
- The Judicial Court;
- The Committee on Investigation;
- The Committee on Appeals;
- The Working Group on Episcopacy;
- Other Working Groups.

Paragraph 4 - The Bishop

1. The Bishop embodies the unity of the Central Conference with the entire United Methodist Church. He or she is supervisor (proctor) of the entire work within the Central Conference (geographical) boundaries. He or she shall represent the Central Conference outside of the conference and determines, if he or she is prevented and deems it to be prudent, a deputy. The Bishop may *ex officio* participate in all meetings of the Central Conference.
2. The Bishop shall be elected through secret ballot with a three-fifths majority of the voting delegates present who take part in that ballot and cast valid votes. Empty ballots shall also count among valid votes. The Executive Committee may establish a preparatory process for the election of a bishop. All ordained elders in full connection, who belong to an annual or provisional annual conference of the Central Conference, may be elected.
3. The newly elected Bishop has a term of four years. When the Bishop's first term of office is closing, the executive committee shall determine whether a re-election for life or an election of a new Bishop shall take place and makes the appropriate motion to the Central Conference. For a re-election for life a three-fifth majority is required.
4. If the office of Bishop becomes vacant (due to death, retirement or resignation) the executive committee in accordance with the *Discipline* shall determine the necessary steps. The executive committee shall decide whether an extraordinary session of the Central Conference shall be announced and makes the motion to elect a new Bishop.
5. A retired Bishop shall be an advisory member of the Central Conference and the executive committee. He or she shall remain member as long as his or her residency is within the Central Conference borders. He or she is to be invited to all meetings of these organs.

Paragraph 5 - The Secretary

1. Based upon the nomination of the executive committee the Central Conference shall elect a secretary for a four-year term. The candidate does not need to be a voting member of the Central Conference. Re-election is possible.
2. The term of office shall begin with the adjournment of the session during which the election occurred and continues until the closing of the next regular session of the Central Conference. The secretary shall *ex officio* be member and secretary of the executive committee and the office.
3. The secretary shall write the minutes of the Central Conference, the executive committee and the office and shall publish and mail these as required through their by-laws. In consultation with the Bishop, he or she shall manage as need dictates the correspondence for these organs and shall administer to the tasks which the *Discipline* places on him or her. The Central Conference, the executive committee, and the office may name additional tasks.
4. If the office of secretary becomes vacant during the quadrennium, an interim secretary may be appointed by the executive committee or by the Bishop.

Paragraph 6 - The Treasurer

1. The Central Conference shall elect following nomination by the executive committee a treasurer for a four-year term. The candidate does not need to be a voting delegate of the Central Conference. Re-election is possible.
2. The term of office of the treasurer shall begin with the adjournment of the Central Conference session, during which the election took place, and continues until the conclusion of the next regular Central Conference session. He or she shall be *ex officio* a member of the executive committee.
3. The treasurer shall manage the finances following the framework of the approved budget. He or she shall annually prepare a fiscal report of all transactions, which is given to the executive committee for review. He or she shall submit motions regarding the budget of the current year as needed. He or she shall write and in consultation with the executive committee submit a budget proposal for the quadrennium to the Central Conference for approval.
4. If the office of treasurer becomes vacant during the quadrennium, an interim treasurer shall be appointed by the executive committee or by the Bishop.

Paragraph 7 - The Executive Committee

1. The executive committee shall be composed of the following members with voting rights: the Bishop, the secretary and the treasurer, as well as one superintendent and one lay delegate from each annual and provisional annual conference, as well as the chairperson of the working group on episcopacy. Lay representatives must be elected members of the Central Conference.

Retired Bishops are members with advisory voice. If a conference consists of more than one country, then beyond the two voting delegates the superintendent of each additional country shall be a member of the executive committee with advisory voice.

Through invitation the Bishop may also invite the chairpersons of the working groups.

2. The representatives of the annual and the provisional annual conferences shall be nominated for election for the executive committee by the Bishop after consultation with the elected delegates of those annual and provisional annual conferences. Vacancies in the interim shall be filled by election of the executive committee upon nomination of the Bishop. If needed, an Annual Conference may elect additional alternate delegates.
3. The term of office for the executive committee shall be four years. It shall begin with the adjournment of the Central Conference session, during which the election took place and continues until the conclusion of the next regular session of the Central Conference.
4. Chairperson of the executive committee shall *ex officio* be the Bishop.
5. The executive committee shall meet at least once a year. The meetings shall be announced by the Bishop, if he or she is prevented in doing this, by the secretary. There is a quorum if half of the voting delegates are present. The executive committee shall decide through majority vote of the voting members present.
6. The executive committee shall manage the business of the Central Conference between sessions. Most particularly:

- To attend to the completion of its resolutions and decisions and to do what is necessary to further the standing and development of the work;
 - To receive the financial statement of the treasurer and to discharge him or her on the basis of the audit report;
 - To make the necessary adjustments and extensions to the Central Conference financial budget;
 - To attend to the preparation of the Central Conference sessions.
7. The executive committee elects through the nomination of the Office the persons who shall represent the Central Conference in the worldwide church bodies, as long as no other voting regulations exist.
8. The executive committee shall report to the Central Conference on its work and make the necessary motions.

Paragraph 8 - The Office

1. The office shall be composed of the Bishop, the secretary and the treasurer. Chairperson shall be the Bishop.
2. The office can through a motion of the Bishop include a fourth person, who is elected by the executive committee from among its members.
3. The office shall have the following responsibilities:
 - Preparation of the executive committee meetings and supervision or administration of its decisions;
 - The determination of the language, in which the minutes of the Central Conference shall be written;
 - Administration of all financial and personnel matters for the office of Bishop and the secretariat of the Bishop, which are not otherwise supervised;
 - Nomination of members to the Council on Finances and Administration passed on to the executive committee, which confirms the nominations;
4. In pressing situations, for which the Central Conference or the executive committee have not made any provisions, the office can act for the interim on behalf of the executive committee.

Paragraph 9 - The Council on Finance and Administration

1. The Council on Finance and Administration shall be composed of three persons to be nominated by the office and confirmed by the executive committee.
2. The council shall annually examine the disbursement of funds of the Central Conference and shall submit the written report of the review to the executive committee.
3. The council shall resolve the budget issues of the Bishop and his or her office with the appropriate bodies of the General Conference. The accounting is done through the association "Hilfe im Sprengel". The council supports the Bishop and the Bishop's office in advisory capacity.
4. The members of the council are also members of the pension board of the Central Conference. The executive committee can elect further members to the pension board.

Paragraph 10 – The Committee on Investigation

1. The Central Conference shall elect a committee on investigation in accordance with the disciplinary and arbitration regulation of the Central Conference, consisting of seven clergy members in full connection (if possible not more than one pastor per annual or provisional annual conference), two laity with advisory voice, and six substitutes (five clergy members in full connection and one layperson). The election takes place upon nomination by the Bishop.
2. The committee on investigation is responsible for any complaint against the Bishop.
3. The committee on investigation constitutes itself and gives itself rules of procedure and by-laws. Seven clergy members in full connection respectively their substitutes build the quorum. Members of the committee on investigation, who might be party to the dispute, are to be replaced by substitutes.

Paragraph 11 - The Committee on Appeals

1. The Central Conference shall vote for a committee on appeals in accordance with the disciplinary and arbitration regulation of the Central Council, made up of five pastoral members (four in full connection and a full-time local pastor) as well as four laity, who have at least six continuous years as a professing member of the United Methodist Church, also as many substitutes. The election takes place after the recommendation of the Bishop.
2. The committee on appeals of the Central Conference is responsible for appeals in disciplinary proceedings against pastoral members.
3. The committee on appeals shall constitute itself and choose its rules of order and bylaws. Committee members, who might be party to a dispute or feel biased, shall be replaced by a substitute.

Paragraph 12 - The Judicial Court

1. The judicial court shall be composed of five persons of which at least two must be clergy members in full connection. At the same time four substitutes shall be elected, two of which shall be clergy members in full connection and two lay members. The candidates shall be persons of integrity and qualified for this task. They must not for the same period of time be members of the Central Conference, the executive committee, the working groups or the organs of the disciplinary and arbitration regulation. Their election follows the nomination prepared by the executive committee.
2. The judicial court shall constitute itself and shall provide its own procedural and working rules. A quorum shall be established by the presence of three members. A tie decision shall be decided by the vote of the chairperson. A member shall be excluded from a judicial process if he or she is a member of a church body, which is party to the case.
3. The judicial court shall meet as necessity calls at a place, which the chairperson shall name. The chairperson or a substitute shall be invited to the meeting of the Central Conference.
4. The judicial court shall make all judicial decisions in accordance with the constitution, excluding the jurisdiction of the Judicial Council of the General Conference.

5. The Central Conference may charge the judicial court with additional tasks.
6. The decisions of the judicial court shall have immediate effect. The option to invoke the judicial council of the General Conference in accordance with the constitution is hereby not affected.
7. The decisions of the judicial court shall briefly outline the facts and points of controversy as well as the rationale for the decision. All parties shall receive this document as well as the secretary of the Central Conference. It shall be published in the minutes of the following Central Conference session.
8. Petitions to the judicial court may be made by:
 - The Bishop of the Central Conference;
 - At least one-third of the voting members of the executive committee;
 - At least one-fifth of the delegates with voting rights present at the Central Conference;
 - At least one-fifth of the voting members present at the annual or provisional annual conference; in provisional annual conferences, which have fewer than 25 members, half of the voting members present.

Paragraph 13 - The Working Group on Episcopacy

1. The Central Conference shall elect a working group on episcopacy, which consists of one executive committee member from each annual and provisional annual conference. The nomination shall be suggested by the office. The Bishop shall choose one fifth of the members.
2. The working group meets at least once a year. It fulfills the tasks in accordance with the *Discipline* and reports directly to the Central Conference and the executive committee.

Paragraph 14 - Other Working Groups

1. The Central Conference can elect further working groups and authorize them to undertake specific tasks. The members of the working groups need not be members of the Central Conference.
2. In general, the working groups shall be comprised of three members. Vacancies shall be filled by the executive committee.
3. The chairperson of the working group shall be determined by the Central Conference. Otherwise the working group shall constitute itself.
4. The chairperson shall report annually to the executive committee on the activities of the working group. The reporting has to take place in writing and in the official languages of the Central Conference.

Paragraph 15 - The Session of the Central Conference

1. The session committee of the Central Committee consists of the chairperson, the secretary, the treasurer, the chairperson of the ushers (counters of votes), and the conference host. This committee shall make all decisions in all procedural or organizational questions, which are not

disciplinary question or which are not otherwise regulated in these rules of order. All members of the Central Conference have the right to appeal a decision made by this committee.

2. The approved program prepared by the preparations committee of the Central Conference is the official program of the session.
3. At the beginning of the first meeting the executive committee shall place a motion for election of the following persons:
 - 6 ushers (vote counters) (3 clergy delegates and three lay delegates) and a chairperson;
 - Two auditors of the conference minutes;
 - The reporters;
4. The Office lays the to do list before the conference for acceptance.

Paragraph 16 - The business meetings

1. No member of the Central Conference may be absent from the business meetings without permission, unless it is due to illness or other legitimate reason. In this case a written note indicating the reasons shall be given to the secretary in a timely manner.
2. The chairperson shall announce the presence of a quorum. The times of opening the meetings, recess, and conclusion of the day's deliberations shall be the decision of the chairperson. He or she shall preside over the deliberations.
3. The meetings of the Central Conference shall generally be public. Visitors shall sit in the area designated to them.
4. The chairperson may for selected business call for a closed meeting. He or she must announce a closed session when at least one-fifth of the members require it. Before the closed meeting begins all guests shall leave the conference room. The business of the closed meeting shall be confidential. The decisions of the closed session shall recorded in writing.

Paragraph 17 - Deliberations

1. Business may reach the Central Conference:
 - By motion of the chairperson
 - Through the reports of the organs of the Central Conference named under paragraph 3;
 - By motion of the annual and provisional annual conferences;
 - By motion of members of the Central Conference.
2. For the business meetings the following rules shall apply:
 - All motions and amendments shall be submitted by a member of the Central Conference and be supported by another member;
 - All motions and amendments shall be written in one of the official languages of the Central Conference and given to the secretary;
 - When an amendment is proposed and has been supported, the chairperson may limit debate to the proposed amendment. The same shall apply to amendments to the amendment. The discussion shall follow the reverse order of the submitted amendments;
 - A motion for reconsideration after the concluding vote on a petition may be made by a member of the majority vote fraction only.

- The following motions must be voted on immediately after consideration of the list of speakers: close of debate and motion to vote, motion to recess and postpone the meeting, point of order, matter regarding the agenda, commit to refer the matter for consideration to a Central Conference organ.

Paragraph 18 - Voting Procedure and Elections

1. Unless otherwise designated, voting is public. Elections may be public or by ballot.
2. Prior to the vote the chairperson shall offer a brief review of the amendments, which are on the table. Amendments to the amendment shall be voted on prior to the vote on the amendment and the vote on the motion itself, which is voted on a last.
3. Voting shall generally be a showing of hands. Only the votes of the delegates present at the time of the vote shall be counted. Abstentions shall be ignored. When there is a tie vote the motion is defeated.
4. When elections are open, the candidates shall be voted on in the order of their nominations.
5. Ballots shall be used for secret elections. Empty and invalid ballots shall not be considered in determining the majority. The ushers shall see that each voting ballot has a different color, format or print. They shall also count the number of voting ballots passed out. If the number of voting ballots turned in to be counted is higher than the number passed out, the vote is invalid and must be repeated. The ushers shall record the result of the election as follows: number of voting members, number of invalid voting ballots, and number of empty voting ballots and distribution of valid ballots.
6. If the election is to take place without nominations, the first two votes shall be open. After the second vote no further candidates must be included. As of the third vote the Central Conference may, following a motion of a member, declare in an open vote that the candidate with the highest number of votes below the absolute majority is elected. For the election of a Bishop paragraph 4 applies.

Paragraph 19 - Thematic Events

1. In regard to the tasks of the Central Conference as defined in the *Discipline* thematic events can be organized in connection with the meetings of the executive committee. The theme is selected by either the Central Conference or the executive committee.
2. Further persons who in their country work in this area or may offer further impulses to the annual and provisional annual conferences may be invited to the thematic events taking place in connection with the meeting of the executive committee. Generally not more than one person per country may be invited in addition to the executive committee members. The additional persons will be invited by the Bishop after consultation with the respective superintendent.
3. At the Central Conference the themes may be taken up again for consolidation and continuation or new themes can be initiated.

Paragraph 20 - The Conference Minutes

1. All Central Conference accepted reports, petitions and decisions shall be integral parts of the conference minutes and shall be included in the minutes in full.
2. After the revision through both of the auditors of the minutes and through the chairperson the minutes are valid and will be published.

Paragraph 21 - Final Provisions

1. Petitions to change these Rules of Order of the Central Conference require a two-thirds majority to pass.
2. These Rules of Order were adopted by the 2013 Central Conference and replace the previous Organizational Structure and Rules of Order from 2009. They shall take effect on March 16, 2013.
3. On March 10, 2017, the Central Conference amended the second sentence of Paragraph 4, point 2. The amendment takes effect immediately.
4. On March 8, 2019, the Executive Committee approves the deletion of the invalid postal address of Paragraph 1, point 5. The amendment takes effect immediately.
5. On November 17, 2022, the Central Conference replaced the first sentence in Article 4, point 2. The amendment takes effect immediately.
6. On November 17, 2022, the Central Conference added a sentence to the end of Article 7, point 2. The amendment takes effect immediately.

Procedural and working rules of the Judicial Court

General provisions

Article 1: Jurisdiction of the Judicial Court

The competences of the Judicial Court shall be those listed in Article 12 of the Rules Order of the CC CSE.

Article 2: Working mode in general

1 Wherever possible, the Judicial Court shall do its work in writing, in particular with the help of electronic communication (e-mail).

2 If special circumstances require so, the Judicial Court shall hold a meeting. In such a case it shall be able to take decisions if at least three members are present. The president shall decide on the order of the day. In principle, meetings of the Judicial Court shall not be public.

Article 3: Procedure

Without prejudice to the present rules, the Judicial Court shall proceed based on its free decision, provided that equality of treatment and fair hearing are guaranteed.

Article 4: Decision-making

The Judicial Court shall decide with the simple majority of the votes cast. Abstentions shall not be taken into account for these purposes. In the case of equal votes, the president of the Judicial Court shall decide.

Article 5: Working languages and languages of procedure

The working languages and the languages of procedure of the Judicial Court shall be German and English.

Procedure for formal decisions of the Judicial Court

Article 6: Standing

Applications for a formal legal decision to be taken by the Judicial Court within the meaning of Article 12(4) of the Rules or Order of the CC CSE shall be brought by the persons and groups of persons listed in Article 12(8) of the same Rules of Order.

Article 7: Written submissions

1 Applications for a formal procedure before the Judicial Court shall be made in writing. The written application is to be sent to the secretary of the CC CSE. An application by e-mail shall be deemed to have been received where the secretary has confirmed its receipt within 7 days after the application was sent.

2 The written application shall in any case contain the following information:

- a) Names of the parties

- b) Addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers and (where applicable) e-mail addresses of the parties
- c) The application
- d) The grounds on which the application is founded.

3 The Judicial Court shall forthwith send to the defendant a copy of the written application. Within 30 days after the receipt of the application the defendant shall to the Judicial Court send a reasoned answer to the application in writing.

4 The Judicial Court shall forthwith send to the applicant a copy of the written submissions of the defendant.

Article 8: Oral procedure and procedure in writing

1 The formal procedure before the Judicial Court shall be conducted in writing. In special cases, the president shall be entitled to decide in favour of an oral procedure.

2 In the case of an oral procedure, the president shall decide on the place of the session and on the order of the day. At the beginning of the meeting, the Judicial Court shall appoint one of its members as secretary.

Article 9: Communication with the parties

1 Without prejudice to section 3 of the present article, the communication of the Judicial Court with the parties to the procedure shall, wherever possible, be carried out by e-mail.

2 Parties who receive e-mail messages shall immediately confirm their receipt. Absent such a receipt, the sending party shall repeat the sending of the message in an appropriate manner. Without prejudice to registered mail, the communication shall be deemed to have been received once its receipt has been confirmed.

3 The following documents shall be sent by registered mail as well, where applicable, by e-mail:

- a) The written submissions by the application (to be sent to the defendant)
- b) The written submissions by the defendant (to be sent to the applicant)
- c) The setting of any additional dates for action by the parties by the president of the Judicial Court
- d) The formal decision by the Judicial Court.

Article 10: Participation of experts

The president of the Judicial Court shall be entitled to appoint experts, in particular from among the members of the United Methodist Church who may be experts in the relevant field.

Article 11: Decisions of the Judicial Court

1 The decisions of the Judicial Court shall contain information about possibilities of appeal. They shall be sent in writing to the parties, the secretary of the CC CSE and to the Bishop of the CC CSE.

2 The decisions of the Judicial Court shall numbered consecutively and shall be published according to Article 12(7) of the Rules of Order of the CC CSE in the next protocol of the CC CSE.

Further procedures

Article 12: Further tasks and informal requests

1 Where the CC CSE assigns further tasks to the Judicial Court based on Article 12(5) of the Rules of Order of the CC CSE, the president of the Judicial Court shall decide on the procedure.

2 The president of the Judicial Court shall decide on informal requests put to it by the Bishop or by other leaders of the church.

Entry into force

Article 13

The present procedural and working rules shall enter into force on 1 January 2009.

Done by the Judicial Court on 21 December 2008 and adapted on 30 March 2013 to the terminology of the Rules revised by the Central Conference 2013.

For the Judicial Court:

The president: Prof. Dr. Christa Tobler, LL.M.

I. Directory of Decisions

of the 83rd and 84th meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Book of Discipline and Regulations

none

Elections

- 83-1 The Executive Committee unanimously approves the following nominations for the attention of the Central Conference:
- As members of the Judicial Court: István Csernák (HU), Philipp Hadorn (CH), Bernhard Pöll (AT), Martin Streit (CH), Christa Tobler (CH)
 - As substitute members of the Judicial Court: Daniel Bator (PL), Regula Dannecker (CH), Wojciech Ostrowski (PL), Milen Stefanov (MK)
- 83-2 The Executive Committee unanimously elects the following persons:
- Andrzej Malicki (PL) as Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee
 - Stefan Hafner (CH) as Chair of the Council on Finance and Administration until 2026
 - Harald Bolleter (CH) as a member of the Council on Finance and Administration and from 2026 as its Chair
 - Jonathan Letsch (CH) as a member of the Council on Finance and Administration
 - Stefan Hafner (CH) as auditor of the treasury of the Central Conference CSE
 - Stefan Hafner (CH) as a member of the Pension Board
 - Harald Bolleter (CH) as a member of the Pension Board
 - Jonathan Letsch (CH) as a member of the Pension Board
 - Vladimir Fazekas (RS) as a member of the European Methodist Council
 - Adrian Myslinski (PL) as a member of the European Methodist Council
 - Anna Shammass (CH) as a member of the European Methodist Council
 - Maria Sonnleithner (AT) as a member of the European Methodist Council
 - Daniel Hänni (CH) as a member of the European Commission on Mission
 - Ulrich Bachmann (CH) as a member of the European Commission on Mission
 - Christa Wichers (CH) as a member of the European Lay Seminar
 - Retired Bishop Patrick Streiff as a member of the Board of the Methodist e-Academy
 - Zoltán Kovács (HU) as a member of the Board of the Methodist e-Academy
 - Christoph Schluemp (CH) as a member of the Board of the Methodist e-Academy
 - Wilfried Nausner (AT/AL) to the CPCE Regional group South-East Europe
 - Sławomir Rodaszyński (PL) to the CPCE Regional group South-East Europe

- 83-3 The Executive Committee unanimously confirms the following appointments:
- Andrzej Malicki (PL) to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters
 - Thomas Fux (AT) to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters
 - Stefan Schröckenfuchs (AT) to the Connectional Table
 - Dániel Vadász (HU) to the Connectional Table
 - Jean-Paul Dietrich (CH) as a member of the General Board of Global Ministries
 - Ueli Frei as a member of the United Methodist Publishing House
 - Judit Lakatos (HU) as a member of the World Methodist Historical Society- Europe
 - Lilla Kardosné Lakatos (HU) as a member of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women
- 83-4 The Executive Committee elects László Khaled (HU) and Erika Stalcup (CH) to the preparatory group for the European Executive Committee meeting in Reutlingen (DE) in March 2026.
- 83-5 The Executive Committee elects Stefan Schröckenfuchs and Andrzej Malicki to participate in the Leadership Gathering 2026. A third person is still open (ideally a younger person and a woman). The Bishop is given the authority to appoint this third person.
- 84-1 The Executive Committee unanimously decides to send Philipp Hadorn to the General Board on Church and Society as representative of the Regional Conference of Central and Southern Europe.

Financial decisions

- 83-6 The Executive Committee unanimously approves the 2024 accounts on the basis of the auditors' report, grants discharge to the treasurer and expresses its sincere thanks to her for her services.
- 83-7 The Executive Committee approves the budget for the 2025-2028 financial year of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe and forwards it to the Central Conference for approval.

Resolutions for the Executive Committee / Central Conference

none

Decisions for Working Groups / Office of the Central Conference

Project Group "Electronic media"

- 83-8 The Executive Committee is setting up a project group to think about how the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe can present itself in the electronic media and thus become more visible. Members of the project group are: Ben Nausner (Convener), Erika Stalcup, Rares Calugar, Urs Schweizer

Directory of Decisions

of the 20th meeting of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Book of Discipline and Regulations

- 20-1 The boundaries of the following Annual Conferences shall be determined unanimously in accordance with the countries designated in the name:
- Provisional Annual Conference Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania
 - Annual Conference Czech Republic
 - Provisional Annual Conference Hungary-Romania.
- 20-2 The Central Conference unanimously resolves to amend the regulations of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe as follows:
- Paragraph 7.5: "The Executive Committee shall meet at least once a year. The meetings shall be announced by the Bishop, if he or she is prevented in doing this, by the ~~Vice Chairperson or the Secretary.~~"
 - Paragraph 8.1: "The Office shall be composed of the Bishop, ~~the Vice Chairperson,~~ the Secretary and the Treasurer. Chairperson shall be the Bishop."
 - Paragraph 8.2: "The Office can through a motion of the Bishop include a ~~fifth~~ fourth person, who is elected by the Executive Committee from among its members."

Elections

- 20-3 The Central Conference CSE unanimously elects as tellers: Pastors: Rares Calugar (HU-RO), Esther Handschin (AT), Josef Červeňák (CZ); Laypersons: Božena Daszuta (Chairwoman, PL), Silja Moll (CH-FR-NA), Emil Zaev (RS-MK-AL)
- 20-4 The Central Conference CSE unanimously elects the following persons and committees:
- Markus Bach (CH) as Secretary of the Central Conference CSE
 - Iris Bullinger (CH) as Treasurer of the Central Conference CSE
 - the voting members of the Executive Committee according to the election list
 - Serge Frutiger (CH) as Chairman of the Working Groupe Episcopacy
 - Members and substitute members of the Investigation Committee according to the electoral list
 - Members and substitute members of the Appeals Committee according to the election list
 - Members and substitute members of the Judicial Council according to the election list
 - Church advocate and his replacement according to the election list
 - Members of the Working Groupe Episcopacy according to the electoral list
 - Chair and members of the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries according to the electoral list
 - Chair and members of the Working Group Church and Society according to the electoral list
 - Co-chair of the Working Group Children and Youth according to the electoral list
 - Chair and members of the Working Group W00men's Work according to the electoral list
 - Chair and members of the Working Group Liturgy according to the electoral list
 - Chair and members of the Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs according to the electoral list

Financial decisions

- 20-5 The Central Conference unanimously approves the budget for the year 2025 to 2028 for the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe treasury.

Resolutions for the Executive Committee / Central Conference

none

Decisions for the Working Groups / Office of the Central Conference

Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries

- 20-6 The Central Conference decides with one vote against that the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries should continue the work it has begun on the question of church membership and develop proposals for the Central Conference and its Executive Committee on the understanding of church membership and its liturgical organization. In doing so, it will take into account existing and new Methodist documents.

Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs

- 20-7 The Central Conference unanimously approves the following approach to the path to autonomy for the Czech Church and instructs the Executive Committee and the Office of the Central Conference to implement it.
- Decision of the Central Conference
 - Confirmation of the jointly agreed petition by the Czech Republic AC with a 2/3 majority
 - Individual decisions for ratification by all Annual and Provisional Annual Conferences of the Central Conference.
 - Preparation of a declaration of autonomy and a petition to GC in cooperation with the Central Conference, the Committee for Central Conference Affairs and the AC CZ.
 - Decision at the next General Conference according to Article 572 of the Church Discipline (BOD)
 - I would like to point out that the AC CZ is free to stop or reverse this process at any time.

Working Group Church and Society

- 20-8 The Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe unanimously adopts the "Guidelines for Responsible Living".

The Secretary:
Markus Bach

II. Minutes

of the 83rd meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Unauthorized translation - Original in German

Minutes of the Executive Committee of Thursday, March 13, 2025

Thursday, March 13, 2025, 9.00 a.m.

United Methodist Church Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Bishop Stefan welcomes all those present and wishes them a good meeting

Erika Stalcup invites us to a time of reflection. We will sing the songs "Peace like a river", "For One Great Peace" and "What Does the Lord Require of You". There will also be readings from 2 Corinthians 13:11 - 13 and 1 Corinthians 14:33. The reflection can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

The following persons are present:

as members with voting rights:

Bishop

Chairman Bishop	Bishop	Stefan Zürcher	present
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Office

Vice-Chairman		vacant	---
Secretary	Pastor	Markus Bach	present
Treasurer	Pastor	Iris Bullinger	present

Executive Committee

Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Sup.	Daniel Sjanta	excused
	Layperson	Emil Zaev	present
Austria	Sup.	Stefan Schröckenfuchs	present
	Layperson	Ben Nausner	present
Poland	Sup.	Andrzej Malicki	present
	Layperson	Bozena Daszuta	present
Switzerland-France-North Africa	Sup.	Serge Frutiger	present
	Layperson	Lea Hafner	present
Czech Republic	Sup.	Ivana Procházková	present
	Layperson	Martina Chlupáčková	present
Hungary	Sup.	László Khaled	present
	Layperson	Dávid Csernák	present
Chair WG Episcopacy	Pastor	Jörg Niederer	present

as advisory members:

Retired bishop	Bishop	Patrick Streiff	present
	Bishop	Heinrich Bolleter	excused

Additional superintendents

France and Belgium	Sup.	Grégoire Chahinian	excused
Romania	Sup.	Rares Calugar	excused
Algeria and Tunisia	Pastor	Freddy Nzambe	excused
North Macedonia	Sup.	Marjan Dimov	present

Chairmen of the working groups

WG Theology and Ord. Ministries	Pastor	Zoltán Kovács	present
WG Liturgy	Pastor	Erika Stalcup	present
WG Discipline and Legal Affairs	Sup.	Wilfried Nausner	present
WG Children and Youth	Layperson	Ivana Pastor	excused
WG Church and Society	Pastor	Marietjie Odendaal	present
WG Women's Work	Pastor	Monika Zuber	present
Coordinator	Layperson	Barbara Büniger	present

Assistant to the Bishop

Urs Schweizer present

Total attendance: 24

Report of the Office (selection)

represented by Bishop Stefan

Bishop Stefan: The report of the office has been uploaded to the dropbox of the Central Conference. We do not discuss everything here, but only what is intended for the Executive Committee.

Re 2. planning for the meetings of the Executive Committee and the Central Conference

Bishop Stefan: There have been some changes to the people responsible for church services:

Thu. March 13, 2025	09.00	Morning prayer / Bible study (new: Erika Stalcup)
	14.15	Communion service (new: liturgy: Erika Stalcup / new: sermon: Bishop Harald Rückert)
	20.45	Evening prayer (new: Esther Handschin)
Fri. March 14, 2025	08.30	Bible study (new: Üllas Tankler)
	12.10	Midday prayer (new: Jana Křížova)
	21.15	Evening prayer (Erika Stalcup)
Sat. March 15, 2025	08.30	Bible study (new: Monika Zuber)
	09.00	Memorial service (Esther Handschin)
	12.10	Midday prayer (new: Jana Křížova)

Bishop Stefan warmly thanks all those involved for their service.

Re 2.3 Assignments for the Executive Committee and the Central Conference

Markus Bach points out an error in section 2.3: The correct wording should be that Lea Hafner has reviewed the minutes of the Executive Committee and the Central Conference since 2014. There were 19 minutes in total.

The Executive Committee unanimously approves the following nominations for the attention of the Central Conference:

- As members of the Judicial Court: István Csernák (HU), Philipp Hadorn (CH), Bernhard Pöll (AT), Martin Streit (CH), Christa Tobler (CH)
- As substitute members of the Judicial Court: Daniel Bator (PL), Regula Dannecker (CH), Wojciech Ostrowski (PL), Milen Stefanov (MK)

The Executive Committee unanimously elects the following persons:

- Andrzej Malicki (PL) as Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee
- Stefan Hafner (CH) as Chair of the Council on Finance and Administration until 2026
- Harald Bolleter (CH) as a member of the Council on Finance and Administration and from 2026 as its Chair
- Jonathan Letsch (CH) as a member of the Council on Finance and Administration
- Stefan Hafner (CH) as auditor of the treasury of the Central Conference CSE
- Stefan Hafner (CH) as a member of the Pension Board
- Harald Bolleter (CH) as a member of the Pension Board
- Jonathan Letsch (CH) as a member of the Pension Board
- Vladimir Fazekas (RS) as a member of the European Methodist Council
- Adrian Myslinski (PL) as a member of the European Methodist Council
- Anna Shammass (CH) as a member of the European Methodist Council
- Maria Sonnleithner (AT) as a member of the European Methodist Council
- Daniel Hänni (CH) as a member of the European Commission on Mission
- Ulrich Bachmann (CH) as a member of the European Commission on Mission
- Christa Wichers (CH) as a member of the European Lay Seminar
- Retired Bishop Patrick Streiff as a member of the Board of the Methodist e-Academy
- Zoltán Kovács (HU) as a member of the Board of the Methodist e-Academy
- Christoph Schlupe (CH) as a member of the Board of the Methodist e-Academy
- Wilfried Nausner (AT/AL) to the CPCE Regional group South-East Europe
- Sławomir Rodaszyński (PL) to the CPCE Regional group South-East Europe

Markus Bach expresses his delight that we finally have a Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee again: Andrzej Malicki. However, this will be on the understanding that the changes to our regulations are adopted by the Central Conference and that the Vice-Chair is not automatically a member of the Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee unanimously confirms the following appointments:

- Andrzej Malicki (PL) to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters
- Thomas Fux (AT) to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters
- Stefan Schröckenfuchs (AT) to the Connectional Table
- Dániel Vadászi (HU) to the Connectional Table
- Jean-Paul Dietrich (CH) as a member of the General Board of Global Ministries
- Ueli Frei as a member of the United Methodist Publishing House
- Judit Lakatos (HU) as a member of the World Methodist Historical Society- Europe
- Lilla Kardosné Lakatos (HU) as a member of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women

Re 4. financial matters and statistics

Annual financial statements 2024:

Markus Bach points out that the four-year financial statement closes with a high deficit due to the high costs of the extraordinary Central Conference in Basel. These were around twice as high as previous Central Conferences due to additional expenses caused by the technology (livestream) and the bishop's election. In the end, however, the deficit was "only" CHF 12,000 higher than budgeted.

The Executive Committee unanimously approves the 2024 accounts on the basis of the auditors' report, grants discharge to the treasurer and expresses its sincere thanks to her for her services.

Budget 2025-2028:

Markus Bach: Only the Annual Conferences are now listed under income, with the exception of Switzerland and France. We leave the allocation of contributions to the respective district conferences to the annual conferences

Andrzej Malicki: We have a four-year bill ahead of us. Don't we expect prices to rise and therefore have to keep increasing the amounts?

Markus Bach: We have not increased the contributions to the annual conferences, as there are still reserves in the expenditure. We have only reduced the contributions from France, as France now only has half of the municipalities. For the meetings of the Executive Committee, we have included an amount for two meetings of at least two days, in the hope that we can stay within the budget. We have also decided that we want to meet at different locations, which is why we cannot simply choose the cheapest locations. However, we are trying to stay within the budget. If we don't succeed, the Central Conference treasury still has reserves in its equity that we can use.

Bishop Stefan: I know that we have to look at finances everywhere. We are therefore not expecting any increases.

Ben Nausner: The expenditure for the working groups varies greatly. Where does that come from?

Markus Bach: The children and youth working group has the largest amount because we want them to hold youth meetings. They can use this amount for this.

Urs Schweizer: The difference lies in the fact that it is important to the CC Office that those responsible for working with children and young people can meet in person; other working groups can also do their work more easily by using electronic communication

Barbara Büniger: The costs of the Women's Service Working Group are borne by the Women's Network of Switzerland. This includes not only the costs of the working group, but also

contributions to consultations or language courses for women. Please let us know if there are any women in your area who would like to benefit from such a language course.

Bishop Stefan: Are you ready to forward the 2025-2028 budget to the Central Conference for approval?

The Executive Committee approves the budget for the 2025-2028 financial year of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe and forwards it to the Central Conference for approval.

Bishop Stefan: Are there any questions about another part of the office report?

There are no queries.

Bishop Stefan warmly thanks Lea Hafner and Jörg Niederer for their helpful and good work on the Executive Committee. They will be officially thanked at the Central Conference. However, their thanks should also be mentioned here, as this is their last meeting on this committee.

Lea Hafner: I was elected to the Executive Committee in 2013 - in the same place where we are now, in Winterthur. It wasn't easy to find my way into this role. But I was able to familiarize myself and learn a lot over the years. I've also made friends. Do you know what the highlight of my time was? It was when we decided to stay together, even though we have different opinions on content. I will miss you. I wish you God's blessing.

Jörg Niederer: I feel the same way as Lea Hafner. I have enjoyed working on this international committee for a long time. It's nice to see that we are not just Swiss. It was also always a special task to review the minutes. Perhaps we were the only ones to read the minutes in full?

Bishop Stefan: Thank you both once again. I would also like to thank those who have made themselves available as successors. Christine Schneider-Oesch will represent the Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa as a lay person. She has extensive experience at international conferences of our church. Serge Frutiger has agreed to chair the Bishop's Office working group. Thank you very much!

Bishop Stefan: I would like to thank not only those who are leaving the Executive Committee, but all of you who will continue to work on this committee. I very much enjoy working with you. Thank you very much.

Urs Schweizer: You will find the conference proceedings from all the sessions last year in the room where we are eating. Please take your copies with you. There are other books that you can take with you. I will also put out communion utensils, so you can help yourselves to those too.

Ben Nausner: There will be a public evening on Friday evening. A small group has prepared it. We need your support. We don't want it to be a top-heavy evening. We want to

hear from each other how migration is perceived in different countries. There will be various opportunities for participation. International guests, who will give us a welcome address on Friday, will also do so as an introduction to the topic of the evening. There will be table groups of ten people. I would ask that there be a member of the Executive Committee at each table. Please listen carefully to what is being said! At the end we will ask what our task as a church is now. I then ask you to write down all the answers in the table group on the paper that will be available. But you don't have to present it. The papers will be compiled and made available in writing.

Bishop Stefan: We will meet again on Saturday afternoon for our next meeting as the newly elected Executive Committee. Please note that you will not be able to participate in the election program in Winterthur.

Bishop Stefan closes with a prayer.

For the record:

Markus Bach, Secretary CC CSE

The present minutes of the 83rd session of the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe held on March 13, 2025 in Winterthur (Switzerland) were examined and declared correct.

The examiners of the minutes:

Lea Hafner and Jörg Niederer

Minutes of the Executive Committee of Saturday, March 15, 2025

Saturday, March 15, 2025, 2 p.m.

United Methodist Church Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Bishop Stefan warmly welcomes all those present to the new composition, even though not much has changed. In particular, he warmly welcomes the new member of the Executive Committee, Christine Schneider. He also welcomes Olav Schmidt, the head of EmK World Mission in Germany, as a guest among us.

Bishop Stefan says a prayer.

We do a short round of introductions.

The following persons are present:

as members with voting rights:

Bishop

Chairman Bishop	Bishop	Stefan Zürcher	present
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Office

Secretary	Pastor	Markus Bach	present
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Treasurer	Pastor	Iris Bullinger	present
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Executive Committee

Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Sup.	Daniel Sjanta	excused
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	Layperson	Emil Zaev	present
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Austria	Sup.	Stefan Schröckenfuchs	present
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	Layperson	Ben Nausner	present
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Poland	Sup.	Andrzej Malicki	present
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	Layperson	Bożena Daszuta	present
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Switzerland-France-North Africa	Sup.	Serge Frutiger	present
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	Layperson	Christine Schneider	present
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Czech Republic	Sup.	Ivana Procházková	present
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	Layperson	Martina Chlupáčková	present
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Hungary-Romania	Sup.	László Khaled	present
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	Layperson	Dávid Csernák	present
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Chair WG Episcopacy	Sup.	Serge Frutiger	(present)
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as advisory members:

Retired bishops	Bishop	Patrick Streiff	excused
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	Bishop	Heinrich Bolleter	excused
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Additional superintendents

France and Belgium	Sup.	Grégoire Chahinian	excused
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Romania	Sup.	Rares Calugar	present
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Algeria and Tunisia	Pastor	Freddy Nzambe	present
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North Macedonia	Sup.	Marjan Dimov	present
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Chairperson of the Working Groups

WG Theology and Ord. Ministries	Pastor	Zoltán Kovács	present
WG Liturgy	Pastor	Erika Stalcup	present
WG Discipline and Legal Affairs	Sup.	Wilfried Nausner	present
WG Children and Youth	Layperson	Ivana Pastor	excused
WG Church and Society	Pastor	Marietjie Odendaal	present
WG Women's Work	Pastor	Monika Zuber	present
Coordinator	Layperson	Barbara Büniger	present
Assistant to the Bishop		Urs Schweizer	present
Guest from the EmK-Weltmission		Olav Schmidt	partly present

Total attendance: 25

Bishop Stefan: The Mission Secretary of the EmK-Weltmission in Germany, Pastor Olav Schmidt, would like to clarify two questions with us. May I ask you to inform us accordingly?

Olav Schmidt: I would like to discuss two things with you. Firstly, as EmK-Weltmission, in cooperation with Tent Mission, we will be holding our annual mission retreat in Braunfels from October 14 to 19, 2025. We would like to invite a guest from each of the two other European Central Conferences to join us for this conference. Of course, other people can also take part in the mission retreat, but they would then have to do so at their own expense.

On the other hand, we would like to further develop the tent mission, sell the tents and instead carry out very different mission outreaches in other European countries. We would like to start in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe in 2026. The central principle of these mission outreaches is that only our partners define the nature of these mission outreaches. We would therefore like to discuss with you what such a missionary assignment could and should look like. Are building missions needed, social missions or classic evangelism in the marketplace? Or are there other possibilities? You could also tell us where we should prioritize.

Bishop Stefan: Urs and I have already discussed how we want to take up these questions. We would now have the opportunity to send a person to the missionary retreat. In addition, we can also talk about where the aforementioned mission assignments would be possible in our Central Conference.

Bożena Daszuta: I think that's a good idea, we're happy to think about it.

Marietjie Odendaal: I haven't really understood that yet. The tents are sold, but are mission trips planned?

László Khaled: Did I understand correctly that the Tent Mission will sell the tents?

Olav Schmidt: Yes. The tent mission sells the tents. If we need tents elsewhere, we will have to get them locally.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I have a hard time with such old images of groups approaching people on the street and singing evangelization songs. Isn't that a thing of the past? Aren't there more contemporary ideas of mission? You said that you are open to models that are in demand and applicable. How should I imagine that? I can no longer do anything with the old images of an evangelization and would therefore be happy if I could get new, helpful images of an evangelization.

Olav Schmidt: That depends very much on where we are. That will make a difference in terms of what evangelization will look like in that place. But perhaps a completely different kind of missionary work is also required.

Rares Calugar: If you come and help me realize my project, I will gladly welcome you. But if I have to take care of your project, this offer won't help me.

Urs Schweizer: Do you first decide which country you want to go to and which project you want to realize, and then put together your mission team based on these needs? Or do you have a team and you need a project that suits this team?

Bishop Stefan: There is certainly interest in such missions in Poland or Romania.

Olav Schmidt: Then it is helpful to find a date for talks - the earlier the better. However, I can't guarantee that we will actually find the people we need for your project.

Bishop Stefan: If you want to get in touch with Emk World Mission as a conference, get in touch with Urs.

Urs Schweizer: We can also plan over a number of years.

Bishop Stefan: It would be helpful if we could find a person for the missionary retreat who knows our countries well. They should be able to say something about the Central Conference. Are there any of you who are interested? Or do you know someone we can ask?

Olav Schmidt: The retreat will take place in Braunfels from October 14 to 19, 2025.

Bożena Daszuta: We should be able to talk about this at our own annual conference.

Bishop Stefan: I will ask again at the end, and otherwise I will send you the job description and you can work with it.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you very much, Olav, for sharing your concerns with us.

Olav Schmidt: I would also like to thank you very much for having me here.

Continuing work on the topic of migration

Bishop Stefan: We now want to return to the topic of "Migration in our Central Conference". How do we continue to work? The original idea was for us to draw up a set of arguments. We put together a lot of thoughts and considerations yesterday. What happens now?

Ben Nausner: I would like to ask what impression you had at the tables. Was there unity, or did you have the impression that there was still a need for clarification? For the most part, I heard that you had good discussions.

Andrzej Malicki: We had different people around the table. We also talked about the problems where migration leads to people leaving and about the fact that people come to other countries as migrants and are sometimes not welcome.

Erika Stalcup: I struggle with the use of language when different people are referred to with a single term "migrants".

Rares Calugar: The question is what we actually want. As a church, we can do something. Many projects in society have been stopped because people no longer want to give their support. We have a richness in our Central Conference that we are connected to other places that support us in this mission.

Marietjie Odendaal: We also talked about the challenge that short-term help is quite possible, but long-term help is not.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: We had a good discussion. It was a good experience of listening and speaking. We had a good mix. Migration has different aspects in different places. In one place, young people are leaving, and in other places there are challenges because these people are coming. Last night was helpful. But I don't know whether it can be used to create a set of arguments. I think we need more input or a document that we can talk about.

Dávid Csernák: We had people from Switzerland and Hungary at our table. We talked about the political dimension and also about the positive and negative aspects of migration. Language and the different cultures are also a challenge.

Serge Frutiger: We were also a diverse group. We talked about different categories of migrants. How do we perceive them - as individuals, as a group or as a problem? As a church, we can implement projects for migrants, such as for people from Ukraine, but then they are not in our neighborhood.

Dávid Csernák: We also talked about the fact that our churches are not always open to other people.

Ivana Procházková: We also talked about the different contexts and came up with the topic of racism. We differentiated between the society of a country and the people of our church - and we discussed how we can help.

Bishop Stefan: I had the impression that we are happy to help in special situations. But there is also the question of how we can live together with migrants over a longer period of time, how they can become part of our church. Is the work with migrants a social project or community development?

Bishop Stefan: The question now is whether we want to continue working on this topic. We can't do this as an executive committee; we need a group to guide us.

Monika Zuber: We have to think carefully about who we are doing something for. We have very different situations: people leave one country and come to another.

Markus Bach: I wonder whether the Central Conference level is a helpful level, or whether this should not be dealt with in the Annual Conferences, precisely because the experiences of migration are so different.

Ben Nausner: We can continue to talk to each other, precisely because we have different experiences with migration. But there is no compelling reason to continue working here. We had a valuable exchange yesterday. That has already helped us move forward. We also got to know this method, which could perhaps also help us with other topics.

Christine Schneider: We don't need another comprehensive document. Is there somewhere where we can discuss such issues?

Emil Zaev: When we were in Budapest, we decided to talk about such issues. There were two people with opposing views at our table yesterday. We needed a lot of time to work on this topic. It would be a shame if we simply moved on to another topic.

Bishop Stefan: We also said in Budapest that it is not the paper that is important, but the conversation about it.

Ben Nausner: We still need to think about what we can give to the outside world from this work on migration. It could be an example, a prayer or something else. We could pass this on to the Church and Society working group.

Marietjie Odendaal: I have two people from Switzerland, Ernst Hug and Stefan Moll, with whom I might be able to work on this issue. So I could imagine continuing to work on it and letting you know again.

The Executive Committee agrees with this.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you very much. I suggest that we now take a 15-minute break and then meet upstairs in the church hall to talk about the reactions to the Bishop's word.

We take a break.

Saturday, March 15, 2025, 3:45 p.m.

United Methodist Church Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Concerns in connection with the bishop's word

We look at the collected results on the Bishop's Word (see minutes of the Central Conference MSE of Friday, March 14, 2025) and consider what assignments we want to formulate in this regard.

Resolution 1:

We are setting up a project group to think about how the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe can present itself in the electronic media and thus become more visible. Members of the project group are: Ben Nausner (Convener), Erika Stalcup, Rares Calugar, Urs Schweizer

Bishop Stefan: At the Central Conference meeting, Donát Gyurkó suggested setting up a working group on the topic of discipleship/discipleship. What do we do with this suggestion?

Ben Nausner: I asked Donát what he meant exactly. He thinks that we should pay more attention to the discipleship process and provide tools for it.

Wilfried Nausner: Discipleship also has something to do with commitment. That is an important question. We live in a world with many opportunities and everyone (especially young people) can choose.

László Khaled: Donát strongly associates discipleship with church membership. I would rather see it in the same way as Wilfried says

Markus Bach: I have to ask again whether the central conference level is actually helpful for this. We have very different contexts and languages, and I can hardly imagine that there is ultimately anything at Central Conference level that is helpful for all settings in our Central Conference. Shouldn't we be much more concerned that the countries can each give helpful impulses to their churches for their situation?

Bishop Stefan: If discipleship also means belonging to the church, then we can also ask the Theology and Ordained Ministries working group to include this topic in their deliberations.

Christine Schneider: Discipleship is an important topic in our church. There should already be a lot of material on this topic. We just need to share all the material that exists.

Rares Calugar: I have also looked for helpful materials for our work on the internet. I haven't found much from our church. But there is other good material from other churches. I need what is helpful and leave out the rest.

Christine Schneider: If I enter UMC and Discipleship on the Internet, I get a wealth of material (see: www.umcdiscipleship.org). It is certainly contextualized in the US, but we can adapt it for ourselves.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I have two thoughts on this: 1. this also has to do with our question of which pastors we need. And secondly, I wonder whether we should discuss this in Warsaw in November.

Zoltán Kovács: In our working group, we work academically and theoretically. However, I believe that this topic should be looked at from a more practical perspective.

Bishop Stefan: Of course, this applies to all our working groups, that they should have a practical relevance.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: Didn't Wilfried Nausner pass on a hint as to what else should be researched or found out in this context?

Wilfried Nausner: I wanted to find out why so few people want to study theology or become ordained pastors. However, such an investigation would have to be carried out externally.

Marietjie Odendaal: Bettina Weller also pointed out at the central conference that we need to work more towards offering an attractive profession. However, we need to think carefully about how we want to do this.

Bishop Stefan: I am already in talks with my fellow bishops in Europe about this - we are also looking for a good way forward here.

Elections

Bishop Stefan Zürcher

Bishop Stefan: We now have to choose a few more people for a task:

2 persons for the preparation of the European Executive Committee meeting in Reutlingen (DE)

The Executive Committee elects László Khaled (HU) and Erika Stalcup (CH) to the preparatory group for the European Executive Committee meeting in Reutlingen (DE) in March 2026.

3 people for the Leadership Gathering 2026

Bishop Stefan: I spoke to Stefan Schröckenfuchs (as a member of the Connectional Table) and Andrzej Malicki (as a member of the Standing Committee for Central Conference Affairs) about this and asked them to take part in the Leadership Gathering 2026. They would both be willing to do so.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: We have to think carefully about why we delegate someone there. Either because they are already on the relevant committees and are familiar with the General Conference level (like Andrzej and I). Or because of the intention and opportunity to develop someone for the General Conference level. There should also not be two from the same Annual Conference.

Bishop Stefan: Please let me know your suggestions so that I can make the requests.

The Executive Committee elects Stefan Schröckenfuchs and Andrzej Malicki to participate in the Leadership Gathering 2026. A third person is still open (ideally a younger person and a woman). The Bishop is given the authority to appoint this third person.

Miscellaneous

Bishop Stefan Zürcher

Information: Interview with Thomas Kemper (pension fund)

We will be holding an online meeting with Thomas Kemper on the pension fund. Those who are affected will receive the information and an invitation to the meeting.

Next meetings / schedule

November 21 - 23, 2025	Executive Committee of the CC CSE in Warsaw (PL)
March 11 - 14, 2026	European meeting of the CC Executive Committees in Reutlingen (DE)

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: Is registration already open for the YouMe in Cluj?

Urs Schweizer: This is being handled by Simon Zürcher. There is still the question of what excess the young people have to pay. However, this should be clarified in the next few weeks.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I can't invite you without more detailed information.

Urs Schweizer: I will bring this to the attention of the co-chairs of the Working Group Children and Youth, Simon Zürcher and Ivana Pastor, after the Central Conference.

Bishop Stefan: We will close the session here, and I ask Andrzej Malicki to lead us in prayer.

For the record:

Markus Bach, Secretary CC CSE

The present minutes of the 83rd session of the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe held on March 15, 2025 in Winterthur (Switzerland) were examined and declared correct.

The examiners of the minutes:

Christine Schneider and Serge Frutiger

III. Minutes

of the 20th meeting of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Unauthorized translation - Original in German

Minutes of the Central Conference on Thursday, March 13, 2025

Thursday, March 13, 2025, 2:15 p.m.

Communion service at the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

The 20th meeting of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe begins with the celebration of a communion service. Erika Stalcup is responsible for the liturgy. The sermon will be preached by Bishop Harald Rückert. Tina Zweimüller will play the organ. Also taking part are: Iris Bullinger, Adrian Myśliński, Martina Chlupáčková. Ecumenical guests from Winterthur will also take part in the service, some of whom will also help with the distribution of communion: Dean Christoph Stebler (Reformed Church Winterthur), Priest Stefan Staubli (Catholic Church Winterthur), Pastor Andi Kleeli (Chairman of Ecumenical Committee Winterthur and representative of the Alliance of Evangelical Churches Winterthur) and retired Bishop Harald Rein (Christian Catholic Church). Liturgy and the sermon can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

After the service, we take a break.

Thursday, March 13, 2025, 4:15 p.m.

Plenary session at the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Manuel Both, Chairman of the OC of the Central Conference 2025 in Winterthur, welcomes the delegates and guests to the Central Conference. He thanks all his helpers, without whom it would not be possible to hold the conference here. Winterthur has 120,000 inhabitants, is a garden city, a cycling city and a city of culture. He wishes the Central Conference that it may experience God's shalom, especially at the current conference. He therefore distributes a shalom chocolate to those present. He also presented Bishop Stefan with a bag of Winterthur specialties and a "magic wand" filled with glucose. He also wishes the Bishop God's shalom.

Bishop Stefan expresses his heartfelt thanks for the warm welcome and the great work that the community of Winterthur has already done and is still willing to do. He then welcomes the ecumenical guests from Winterthur and gives them the opportunity to say a few words of welcome.

Pastor Andi Kleeli brings greetings from the Ecumenical Committee Winterthur. He sees the cooperation between the churches in Winterthur as a richness given to them by God. He sees something similar in the unique composition of the Central Conference of Central

and Southern Europe. He gives us the verse from 1 Peter 4:10: "Serve one another with the gift you have received."

Priest Stefan Staubli expresses his sincere thanks for the invitation. He also emphasized the special relationship between the churches in Winterthur. He expresses his joy that we were able to celebrate communion together and cordially invites us to a return visit.

Dean Christoph Stebler thanks for the invitation, which he sees as a beautiful sign of co-operation between churches in Winterthur and around the world. There are things that Winterthur and have in common with the Methodists: In Winterthur, joint services are celebrated outdoors, which reminds him of the beginnings of the Methodist Church in England with its open-air services.

Retired Bishop Harald Rein is delighted to be here and brings warm greetings from Klaus Gross, the pastor of the Christian Catholic Church in Winterthur. He himself was a Christian Catholic priest in Winterthur from 1993 to 2009, before he was elected bishop and had to take up residence in Bern. Now he can be here again. The Christian Catholic Church has many similarities to the United Methodist Church. The relationships between them are also closely interwoven, both ecclesiastically and personally. He wishes us much of God's Holy Spirit

Bishop Stefan expresses his heartfelt thanks for the greetings. He points out the diversity that we live as a church and in the Central Conference, sometimes more successful and sometimes less.

Bishop Stefan draws attention to the apologies, some of which were made at short notice: Daniel Sjanta, Etienne Rudolph, Ivana Pastor and Daniel Etter are unable to attend the Central Conference for professional or health reasons

When asked who was attending the Central Conference for the first time, seven people stood up.

Attendance is determined by means of an attendance list. This is attached to the minutes.

Report of the Office

represented by Bishop Stefan

Bishop Stefan: We will start with the business work of the Central Conference by discussing the report of the Office.

1. Presence and Journals

There are no queries or comments.

Re 2. Planning for the meetings of the Executive Committee and the Central Conference

Bishop Stefan: There have been some changes in the people responsible for church services:

Thu. March 13, 2025	09.00	Morning prayer / Bible study (new: Erika Stalcup)
	14.15	Communion service (new: liturgy: Erika Stalcup / new: sermon: Bishop Harald Rückert)
	20.45	Evening prayer (new: Esther Handschin)
Fri. March 14, 2025	08.30	Bible study (new: Üllas Tankler)
	12.10	Midday prayer (new: Jana Křížova)
	21.15	Evening prayer (Erika Stalcup)
Sat. March 15, 2025	08.30	Bible study (new: Monika Zuber)
	09.00	Memorial service (Esther Handschin)
	12.10	Midday prayer (new: Jana Křížova)

Re 2.3 Assignments for the Executive Committee and the Central Conference

Markus Bach points out an error in section 2.3: it should correctly state that Lea Hafner has reviewed the minutes of the Executive Committee and the Central Conference since 2014. There were 19 minutes in total.

The Central Conference CSE unanimously elects as tellers:

Pastors: Rares Calugar (HU-RO), Esther Handschin (AT), Josef Červeňák (CZ)

Laypersons: Božena Daszuta (Chairwoman, PL), Silja Moll (CH-FR-NA), Emil Zaev (RS-MK-AL)

Re 3.1 Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee

Bishop Stefan: You have read the Executive Committee's proposal to amend the regulations in the report. It concerns the additional tasks for the Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee. The automatic seat on the CC office and the board of Help in the District is to be abolished. However, it will still be possible for this person to be a member of CC office at their own request. Are there any questions?

Bishop Stefan: If there are no questions, please put this to the vote.

The Central Conference unanimously resolves to amend the regulations of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe as follows:

Paragraph 7.5: "The Executive Committee shall meet at least once a year. The meetings shall be announced by the Bishop, if he or she is prevented in doing this, by the ~~Vice-Chairperson or the Secretary.~~"

Paragraph 8.1: "The Office shall be composed of the Bishop, ~~the Vice-Chairperson, the Secretary and the Treasurer.~~ Chairperson shall be the Bishop."

Paragraph 8.2: "The Office can through a motion of the Bishop include a ~~fifth~~ fourth person, who is elected by the Executive Committee from among its members."

3.2 Decisions on areas and names of annual conferences

Bishop Stefan: There have been some changes to the composition of the Annual Conferences. It is the responsibility of the Central Conference to determine the boundaries of the Annual Conferences. That is why this proposal is before us. It corresponds to current practice and the decisions of the Annual Conferences. Are there any questions?

Bishop Stefan: If there are no more questions, please put this to the vote.

The boundaries of the following Annual Conferences shall be determined unanimously in accordance with the countries designated in the name:

- **Provisional Annual Conference Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania**
- **Annual Conference Czech Republic**
- **Provisional Annual Conference Hungary-Romania.**

Bishop Stefan: These decisions are forwarded to the Secretary of the General Conference via the Bishop's office.

Bishop Stefan: We will deal with the whole area of elections under 3.3 at a later date.

4. Finances and Statistics

Re 4.1 Invoice 2024 of the Central Conference CSE

Bishop Stefan: The Executive Committee approved the 2024 annual financial statements at this morning's meeting on the basis of the auditors' report. You can see the figures in Enclosure 3 for your information. If there are any questions, we will be happy to answer them.

Re 4.2 Budget 2025-2028

Bishop Stefan: As the Central Conference, however, we have to decide on the 2025-2028 budget (Enclosure 5). I would ask the Secretary to explain the budget.

Markus Bach: The income in the budget remains relatively constant. Only in France have we reduced the annual contribution from CHF 4,500 to CHF 3,000, as the UMC has become significantly smaller due to the departure of numerous congregations. We have also dispensed with the distribution within the Annual Conferences and left it up to the respective conferences to decide for themselves which district conference takes on which share of the total amount.

In terms of expenditure, we have budgeted for the Central Conference within the previous framework (CHF 60,000), but we have two meetings of the Executive Committee, each of which should last at least two days. We will see whether the amount of CHF 16,000 will be sufficient.

For the Working Groups, we have earmarked an amount of CHF 4,000 for the Working Group Children and Youth so that they can organize regular physical meetings and also hold a camp. Other Working Groups can do their work more easily by also using digital communication.

The other costs are more or less fixed (contributions to the World Methodist Council or the European Methodist Council, archives and other costs). We have tried to work out an almost balanced budget.

Gunnar Wichers: I don't see a contribution for the lay seminar anywhere. Does it no longer exist?

Bettina Weller: I'm no longer involved, but I think the lay seminar still exists. My successor is Christa Wichers.

Üllas Tankler: Yes, the lay seminar still exists, we expect one to take place in 2026 and GBGM will also be involved.

Gunnar Wichers: I don't see any contribution to this in the Central Conference's accounts. Where do the finances come from?

Markus Bach: Up to now, support contributions for the lay seminar have not been included in the annual accounts of the Central Conference. That is why we have not included any amount in the budget.

Andreas Stämpfli: It is possible to submit a budget application to the Fund Mission in Europe for such events.

Bishop Stefan: I think that's helpful. Can we vote on the budget?

The Central Conference unanimously approves the budget for the year 2025 to 2028 for the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe treasury.

Iris Bullinger draws attention to the reimbursement of expenses. The cash payment is made in Swiss francs, a bank transfer is also possible in euros.

Re 4.3 Statistics

Bishop Stefan: I have taken the figures from the various Annual Conferences. You can also see that the handling of statistical figures is not the same everywhere - that's why there are rounded figures.

Re 5 Amendments to the Book of Discipline of the Central Conference

Bishop Stefan: You can see in enclosures 7a and b the amendments to the Discipline based on the resolutions of General Conference 2024. The German translation of the Social Principles was developed in collaboration with the Central Conference in Germany. At the Central Conference in Germany held a few weeks ago, it was decided that the Social Principles should be revised to include inclusive language.

Esther Handschin: At least the introduction to the Social Principles does not seem to me to be helpful from a linguistic point of view. There are some formulations that should be reviewed and changed - also in view of the fact that the Social Principles are also observed and used outside the UMC.

Wilfried Nausner: Esther, you're right. There is still some other editorial work that needs to be done. But it was not possible to do this in the time available.

Markus Bach: There will be further changes to the Discipline, for example with the ratification process regarding the constitutional amendments (an important topic in this context is regionalization). We are therefore refraining from printing or publishing a new Discipline this year but are collecting all the changes. This will give us enough time to make linguistic improvements.

6. Partnerships and encounters

Bishop Stefan: Some of our partnerships and encounters have fallen asleep, but others are continuing. Perhaps something can be reactivated here and there. It's good if we stay on the ball here.

re 7 Thematic Priorities in the Central Conference CSE

Bishop Stefan: You can see here which topics we have already worked on in the Central Conference. We would like to try to develop arguments on different topics in the future. We will make a start on Friday evening with the topic of migration.

8. Miscellaneous

Bishop Stefan: You can see the dates for the current and next year. Thank you for the invitation from Poland to hold the Executive Committee meeting in Warsaw.

Bishop Stefan: We realized that it has been exactly 20 years since Patrick was elected bishop. How are you today, Patrick? Why don't you tell us a personal word about yourself?

Patrick Streiff: I and we are doing very well. However, I do sometimes wonder how I did everything before. I now have a completely different rhythm of life and don't have to set an alarm clock in the morning. Looking after the grandchildren has become very important to me, and I can easily postpone work that I have planned for one day to the next if the grandchildren are suddenly there and need me. I can still fulfill a few church assignments. I help out on the Standing Committee for Central Conference Affairs and can once again do more work on church history. I am currently working on a complete revision of my book on Methodism in Europe. It will be published again in German and English. I look forward to being with you and having conversations with you here and there.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you also for your support, especially during the time we spent together introducing you to the role of bishop. I think it was also helpful and nice for you to be able to retire completely. However, your e-mail response time is still very short...

Bishop Stefan: Are you prepared to approve the office report without part 3.3 on the elections?

The Central Conference unanimously approves the report of the Central Conference Office.

Bishop Stefan: I would also like to thank Iris Bullinger, Markus Bach and Urs Schweizer for their excellent cooperation in the CC office.

Report 3.2 Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters (Report 3.2)

represented by Bishop Stefan Zürcher, supplemented by Christine Schneider-Oesch

Bishop Stefan: In the report of the Standing Committee for Central Conference Matters, we find reference to the ratification process for the constitutional amendments. Many of these amendments have to do with regionalization. I have asked Christine Scheider-Oesch to inform us about this.

Christine Schneider-Oesch: We will vote on the constitutional amendment on regionalization at every Annual Conference. Up to now, the UMC has been an organization with a center in the USA and worldwide central conference appendages. This has grown historically, but is no longer possible today. De facto, we have always functioned differently in the central conferences than in the USA. The problem was that the church in the USA could not decide on any changes for itself except to convene a General Conference. As a result, we always had to vote at General Conferences on matters that did not affect us at all. A new structure should therefore be introduced - especially with regard to the needs of the church in the USA - to give it the same opportunities that we already have as a central conference.

The regions' right of adaptation is to be regulated more clearly. As Europeans, we have achieved that the right of adaptation can also be extended to AC level and that different regulations are therefore also possible within a central conference (or regional conference in future). However, not much will change for us, except that our name will be changed to Regional Conference - and yet the vote is very important. The world has changed and the changes reflect this. The church in the USA is getting the same rights as the central conferences. It is a good thing for the future of our church. I encourage you to vote in favor of these amendments.

Bishop Stefan: I have already sent the documents on the constitutional amendments to the AC secretaries. There are about 29 constitutional amendments for regionalization. There are four columns in the documents: 1. English original, 2. German translation, 3. empty column for your national language and a 4th column with notes and explanations. The cumulative yes votes must amount to 2/3 of all votes cast worldwide for the constitutional amendments to take effect.

Bishop Stefan: There are reports from the Annual Conferences on the page in the dining room. During the course of the conference, I will approach representatives of yours as and when possible so that you can give us an additional personal impression from your countries.

Manuel Both passes on the latest information.

Thursday, March 13, 2025, 6 p.m.

Dinner at the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Thursday, March 13, 2025, 7:30 p.m.

Plenary session at the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Bishop Stefan greets Ansgar Simon, Town Clerk of Winterthur and member of the UMC congregation in Winterthur, and asks him for a word of welcome from the town of Winterthur.

Ansgar Simon welcomes the Central Conference to Winterthur on behalf of the Mayor of Winterthur. He shows an image film about Winterthur and points out various industrial sectors. Winterthur is also a city of education and culture. The democratic values typical of Switzerland were developed and shaped in Winterthur. Simon Ansgar wishes us much wisdom and, in view of the full program, stamina.

Bishop Stefan expresses his sincere thanks for the greeting.

Connectional Table (Report 3.1)

represented by Stefan Schröckenfuchs

Stefan Schröckenfuchs wrote his report on the Connectional Table in January 2025. He will not repeat it. It is not easy to describe what the task of the Connectional Table is. He wants to add three points. President Biden's apology to the indigenous peoples in October 2024 was a moving moment for some in our church. This shows that value is placed on how we walk with other people. This is also reflected in the way we want to develop as a church so that more people can be integrated. This will make us more colorful. I am telling you this because it shows a different picture of the USA than what we are hearing from the USA these days and weeks.

We have also worked on regionalization, including the impact on the budget. A lot of things in the church are very US-centric and only relevant for the USA. We still have a lot to learn here. But I am optimistic that we are moving in a good direction. There are four of us from Europe at the Connectional Table, but we could do with five seats. We are considering how our mission (leading people to follow Jesus so that the world can be changed) can be developed into a vision for the coming years. What does discipleship actually mean? Discipleship? and what does leadership mean? We want to learn to love boldly, serve cheerfully and lead courageously. I hope that we will continue to develop in this direction and that we will embrace this vision when something along these lines comes along.

Bishop Harald Rückert: There is an interesting development that the Connectional Table is working together with the Standing Committee for Central Conference Matters in the same direction. That gives me confidence. It would be a nice development if the two came together in this way.

Bishop Stefan expresses his sincere thanks for the report.

Working Group Children and Youth (Report 2.5)

represented by Simon Joel Zürcher

Simon Zürcher: I am grateful and happy to be part of this Working Group. For me personally, this Working Group is very valuable because it consists of people from different countries. That is very valuable. I learn a lot. It's different to learn about other countries through direct encounters rather than just reading reports and news items.

The main aim of the Working Group is to stay in touch with each other. We do this with annual meetings of the Working Group. We meet every month in Budapest with a dozen leaders from all countries of the Central Conference. In the summer, we organize a youth camp in Cluj-Napoca for young people aged 16 to 30. There is room for about 50 people. If you know people who might be interested, please contact them and motivate them to attend. The motto of the camp is "Faith, Love, Hope".

Bishop Stefan: Is there any feedback or encouragement on this? When we discussed the budget today, we already talked about the fact that we also want to support youth work financially. We are looking forward to your report from the youth camp. We hope that many more will be able to have this positive experience.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I am very happy that the camp can take place. Please send our best wishes to the Working Group.

General Board of Global Ministries (Report 3.3)

Written by Jean-Paul Dietrich

Bishop Stefan: The GBGM report was written by Jean-Paul Dietrich. He has been responsible for it for the first time (since last year) and knows the work from his previous job as Connexio coordinator and GBGM missionary in Africa

Olav Schmidt: There are three people who represent Europe at GBGM: Anne Ng Forster, Jean-Paul Dietrich and Olav Schmidt. Our next meeting will take place in April. We want to work together and appreciate everyone's cooperation. It is also important for us to make visible that we as European mission organizations - in a valuable cooperation - are doing similar work as the GBGM - just on a smaller scale.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you very much for this insight into the work of GBGM.

European Methodist Council and Fund Mission in Europe (Report 3.4)

written by Lilla Kardosné-Lakatos

Bishop Stefan: This report was written by Lilla Kardosné-Lakatos. Are there any direct questions about the report? Bishop Harald Rückert is (still) the co-chair of the European Methodist Council and can certainly provide answers.

Bishop Harald Rückert: The special thing about the European Methodist Council is that almost all Methodist churches in Europe come together there. Even Uniting Churches, in which the Methodists only form a small branch, part of it. We have learned to reduce the work with minutes and business to two hours in a three-day meeting and to use the rest for substantive issues. What is our mission and contribution as small churches to society in Europe? Identification has increased significantly. It is fun and a pleasure to work here. This is also how we should understand Lilla's report. We were in Ireland and asked what it means to be a Methodist church in such a context. This kind of work is very satisfying and fascinating. I hear that clearly from Lilla's report. We do not want to be administrative, but to encourage each other, to connect and to live out our Methodist calling in Europe. The European Methodist Council also includes the Fund Mission in Europe, where we try to facilitate and support certain projects through financial means. The EMYC has become a forum, the EMYCF, in order to be more active together in terms of content.

Bishop Stefan: We will go straight on to the Fund Mission in Europe. Andreas Stämpfli is the managing director and is happy to give us some information.

Andreas Stämpfli: I am both Secretary and Managing Director and a lot more besides. The fund is a tool of the European Methodist Council to promote Methodist work. Richer churches send money so that less wealthy ones can realize a project. But it is not always easy to raise money. Therefore, an appeal to all. It's not about who pays more or less, but that we all contribute something, no matter how much. It would be nice if everyone made a contribution before they benefit from the fund. Around half of the contributions distributed each year, i.e. around EUR 125,000, go to the CC CSE. The Fund Mission in Europe supports a wide variety of social diaconal projects such as soup kitchens, women's shelters, pastoral care for prisoners, etc. The criteria are to be modified or expanded. We have drawn up a list of what we would like to support in addition to social diaconal projects: new mission projects, exchange of experience between member churches, international projects and networking of leaders. The superintendents will receive the exact details. You can find all the details at

Bishop Stefan: Thank you very much for your information and your work for the Fund Mission in Europe. I would like to emphasize that it is important to get involved here with the opportunities that are available to you as an Annual Conference.

World Methodist Council (Report 3.5)

written by David Field

Bishop Stefan: This report is written by David Field and is very detailed. It is a report from last year in Gothenburg and gives a good insight into the work of the World Methodist Council.

Claudia Haslebacher: I would like to thank all those who write a report in such a way that we understand what is happening. That wasn't always the case. Now we can understand a lot of things better. Thank you very much for that. The report was long, but interesting.

Bishop Stefan: There is also a final report from the CPCE in Sibiu. It can be found on the following homepage: <https://cpce-assembly.eu/documents>

Bishop Stefan: That concludes the discussion of reports for today and we will now celebrate an evening prayer. Thank you to Esther Handschin for preparing and leading us in prayer.

Thursday, March 13, 2025, 8:45 p.m.

Evening prayer in the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Esther Handschin holds the evening prayer. This can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

Unauthorized translation - original in German

Minutes of the Central Conference on Friday, March 14, 2025

Friday, March 14, 2025, 08.30 a.m.

Morning reflection in the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Bishop Stefan welcomes all those present to a new working day.

Üllas Tankler holds the morning reflection. It can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

Bishop Stefan thanks *Üllas* warmly for his helpful thoughts on shalom. As thanks, *Üllas* can choose something musical or sweet to celebrate shalom. *Üllas* chooses the music CD.

Friday, March 14, 2025, 09.15 a.m.

Plenary session at the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Shalom bearers - a word from the bishop (Report 1.0)

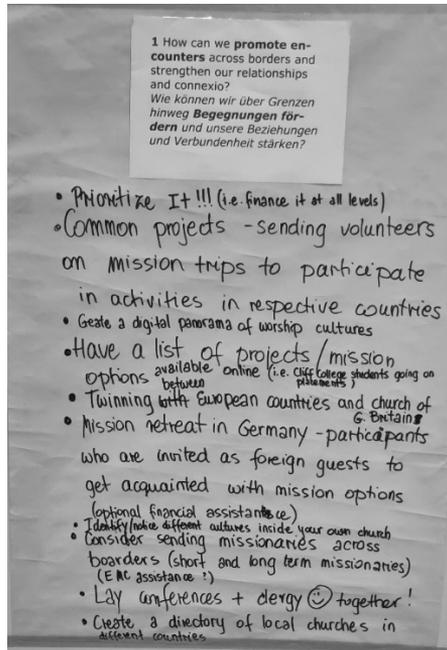
written by Bishop Stefan Zürcher

Bishop Stefan: I have not written a "message from the bishop", but have instead called my thoughts a "word from the bishop". I wanted to give you a little insight into what I have experienced over the past two years. That's why it's now just called "Word", even if it has ultimately become a few "words". It is important to me that shalom consists of relationships. That's why I mentioned the four areas: dimension to God, to oneself, to one's fellow human beings and to co-creation.

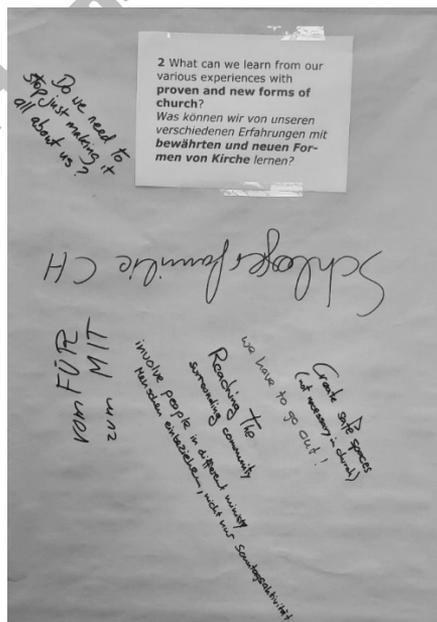
In the first part, I tried to show where and how I experienced these dimensions in the Central Conference. In the second part, I mentioned my experiences and challenges in the first two years. What was exciting about the challenges was that I discovered that there are overlapping topics in some Annual Conferences, for example the lack of ordained pastors. In the third part, I tried to describe what is important to me. These aspects are not necessarily directly related to an Annual Conference or the Central Conference. They are things that are important to me personally. At the end, it was important for me to express my thanks, especially to you. It is important for me to experience the trust that you have placed in me. When the joint induction period with Bishop Patrick came to an end, I said: now I'm on my own. But I quickly realized that I am not alone at all. There are so many who support this ministry.

The Central Conference is now invited to discuss ten topics:

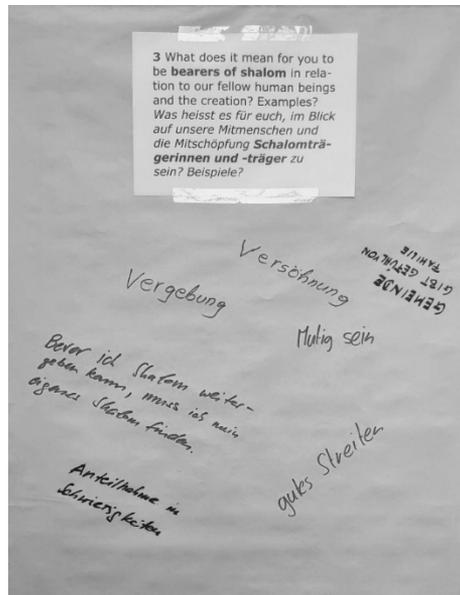
- 1 Wie können wir über Grenzen hinweg Begegnungen fördern und unsere Beziehungen und Verbundenheit stärken? - *How can we promote encounters across borders and strengthen our relationships and connexio?*



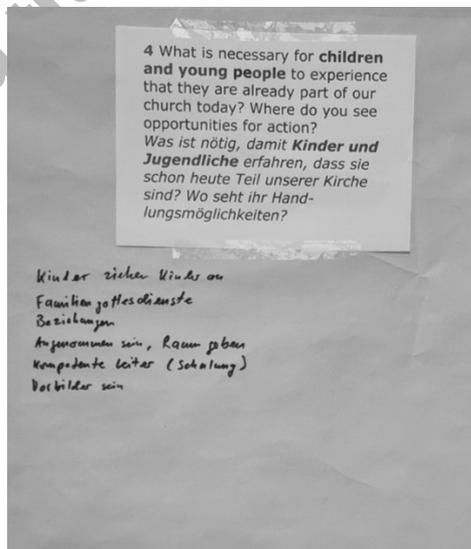
- 2 Was können wir von unseren verschiedenen Erfahrungen mit bewährten und neuen Formen von Kirche lernen? - *What can we learn from our various experiences with proven and new forms of church?*



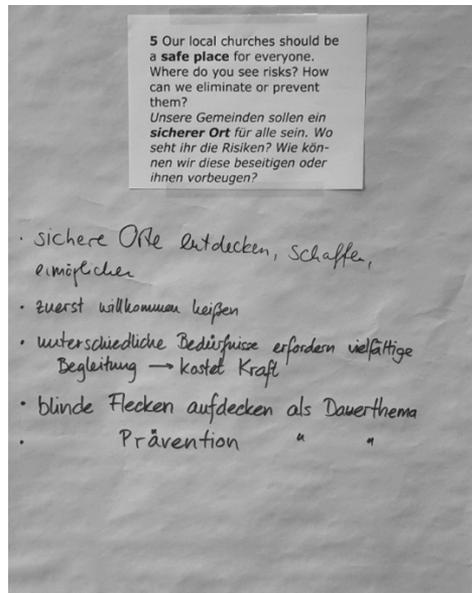
- 3 Was heisst es für euch, im Blick auf unsere Mitmenschen und die Mitschöpfung Schalomträgerinnen und -träger zu sein? Beispiele? - *What does it mean for you to be bearers of shalom in relation to our fellow human beings and the creation? Examples?*



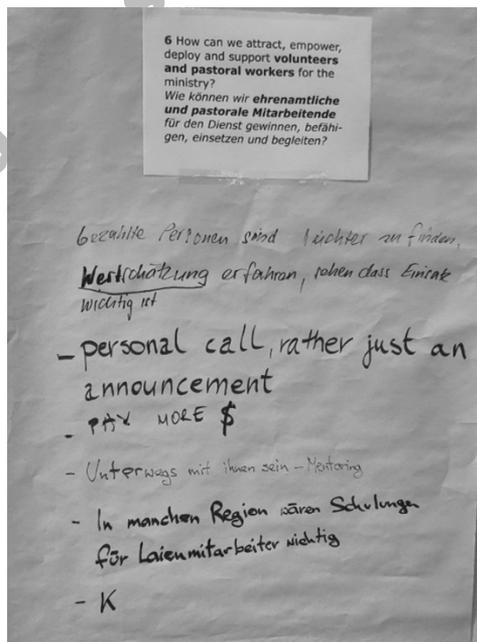
- 4 Was ist nötig, damit Kinder und Jugendliche erfahren, dass sie schon heute Teil unserer Kirche sind? Wo seht ihr Handlungsmöglichkeiten? - *What is necessary for children and young people to experience that they are already part of our church today? Where do you see opportunities for action?*



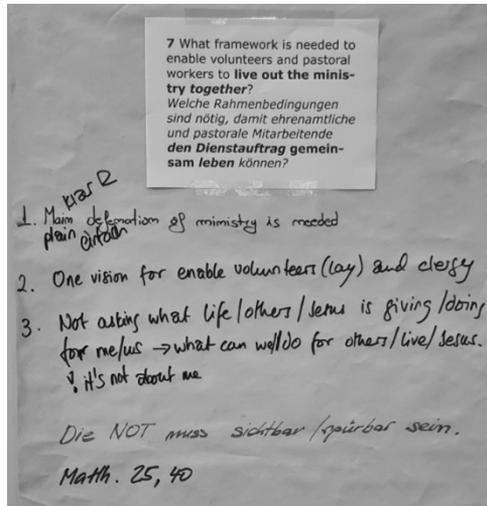
- 5 Unsere Gemeinden sollen ein sicherer Ort für alle sein. Wo seht ihr die Risiken? Wie können wir diese beseitigen oder ihnen vorbeugen? - *Our local churches should be a safe place for everyone. Where do you see risks? How can we eliminate or prevent them?*



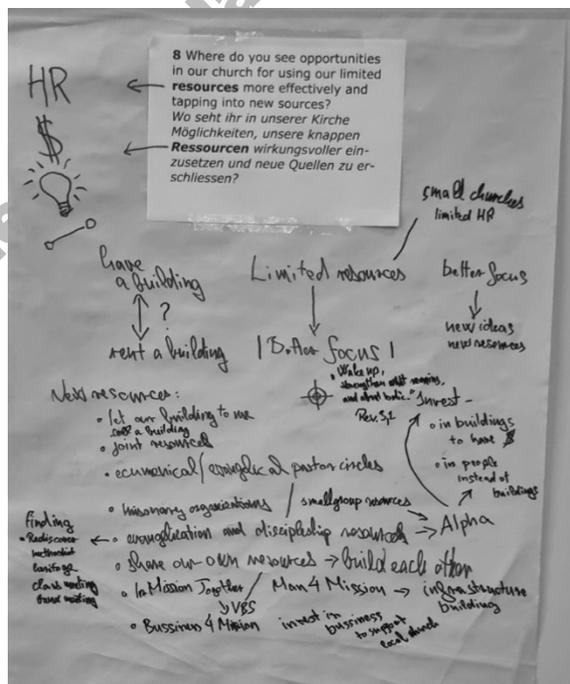
- 6 Wie können wir ehrenamtliche und pastorale Mitarbeitende für den Dienst gewinnen, befähigen, einsetzen und begleiten? - *How can we attract, empower, deploy and support volunteers and pastoral workers for the ministry?*



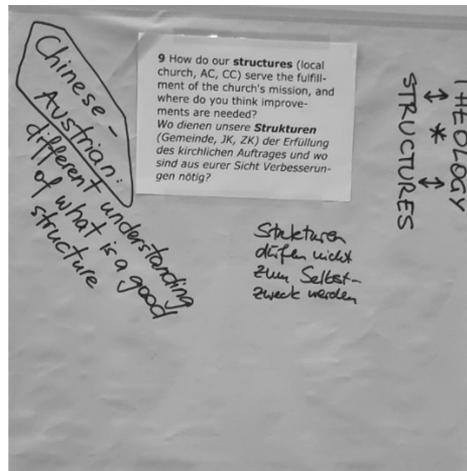
- 7 Welche Rahmenbedingungen sind nötig, damit ehrenamtliche und pastorale Mitarbeitende den Dienstauftrag gemeinsam leben können? - *What framework is needed to enable volunteers and pastoral workers to live out the ministry together?*



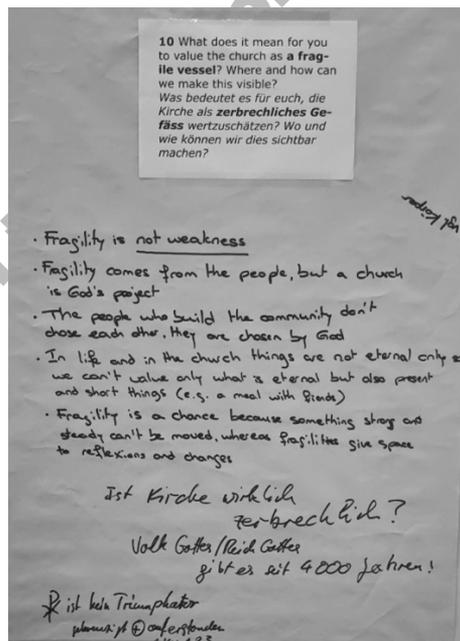
- 8 Wo seht ihr in unserer Kirche Möglichkeiten, unsere knappen Ressourcen wirkungsvoller einzusetzen und neue Quellen zu erschliessen? - *Where do you see opportunities in our church for using our limited resources more effectively and tapping into new sources?*



- 9 Wo dienen unsere Strukturen (Gemeinde, JK, ZK) der Erfüllung des kirchlichen Auftrages und wo sind aus eurer Sicht Verbesserungen nötig? - *How do our structures (local church, AC, CC) serve the fulfillment of the church's mission, and where do you think improvements are needed?*



- 10 Was bedeutet es für euch, die Kirche als zerbrechliches Gefäß wertzuschätzen? Wo und wie können wir dies sichtbar machen? - *What does it mean for you to value the church as a fragile vessel? Where and how can we make this visible?*



After the group work, we take a break.

Friday, March 14, 2025, 11:00 a.m.

Plenary session at the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Bishop Harald Rückert: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share the bishop's word with you. It's not about presenting what you have worked out in the groups, but simply sharing what has become important to you while reading. Who will come forward?

Marietjie Odendaal: Thank you very much for the report. I think it's good that you don't describe the younger generation as the future of the church, but as an important present part of the church. In the same way, the oldest generation is also an important present part of the church and not its past.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I would like to point out the second part. I can see and feel that you, Stefan, are someone who listens well. It is important that you are aware of the challenges. It is interesting to see how we want to tackle them, for example the shortage of ordained pastors. We touched on this topic at a meeting of superintendents about a year ago. I think it would be interesting to talk about it.

Bettina Weller: I have also thought about this shortage. I work in teacher training. It depends very much on our image whether we have new recruits. Perhaps we should also ask those who have left the profession.

Bishop Stefan: Yes, this is an increasingly burning issue. Large numbers of are retiring in several countries. We have decided in the Executive Committee to work on the topic of migration. But perhaps we will also focus this topic in some way. The reasons why pastors leave their ministry vary greatly from country to country.

Regula Stotz: You are a bridge builder. Are there still bridges to the former conferences in the countries that have left us?

Bishop Stefan: I no longer have any official contact with Bulgaria and Slovakia. However, we are still in normal contact with the EMK in the Czech Republic, nothing has changed there.

Gunnar Wichers: You write about the church as a fragile vessel. That concerns me. Is the issue of fragility and the fact that the church is getting smaller of different urgency in different countries? How do you deal with this?

Bishop Stefan: Yes, I wrote that at the very beginning of the keywords because it really concerns me. The church itself is fragile. Then there are other factors, social factors, for example. I then waver back and forth from time to time. I have hope, but it fades again. For a long time, I had a note above my office door that said: "Lord, it's your church, I'm leaving now." It is important to me that God is the ground and that I can also let go. I also tried to express this in the 2024 Christmas message: "My hope and my joy. My

strength, my light. Christ, my confidence, in you I trust and am not afraid." It is important for me to keep reminding myself of this. This hope and joy then always give me the foundation for my work.

Nicole Becher: Over the past six months, I have been thinking about the distinction between hope and confidence. Hope points beyond reality. Confidence is something very realistic. The song takes up this distinction. In Christ, you can move from hope to a very realistic confidence.

Esther Handschin: You wrote about visits. When are you coming to Austria - not just for a vacation at Lake Attersee?

Bishop Stefan: I am planning to come to Austria this fall. Regarding Nicole's vote: I may have made too strong a distinction between hope and reality. I don't always feel that way.

Barry Sloan: Thank you for the inspiration. I would like to emphasize something: You are asking important questions for all churches: We need to have clarity about which pastors we need. It seems very important to me that we really think about this in depth. It's not easy to find answers here.

Bishop Harald Rückert: Before I end the interview, I would like to take the opportunity for a final round.

Rares Calugar: I had a conversation with Daniel Herzog and he told me about partnerships between UMC congregations in Switzerland and Bulgaria. Such partnerships within Europe no longer exist everywhere and in the same way as they used to. The partnership program "In Mission Together" (IMT), which involved relationships between congregations in the eastern part of our CC and in the USA, has also lost its strength and significance. For us in the East, however, such encounters and partnerships are very important. Many people in our congregations do not feel as connected to the CC as I do, standing here now. It would be helpful if we could strengthen these connections.

Urs Schweizer: The question was included in the office report. But it's not just that the people in the eastern part of our CC need such partnerships; we in the western part need you too. You have something important to give us. I would like to get involved in building such partnerships, but they should be based on mutual learning, sharing and encouragement.

Donát Gyurkó: I don't know if I'm in the right place with my request, but I suggest that a working group on discipleship be formed to consider how we can accompany people on their path of discipleship. In 2016, the GBOD (General Board of Discipleship) of the worldwide UMC published helpful documents that can be used in many places. That would certainly help us. This is not a proposal - I'm new here and don't know the procedures. But I just want to point out this important topic.

Bishop Harald Rückert: The question is whether we want to make this a recommendation to the Executive Committee.

Bishop Stefan: We will include this as a strong recommendation in our Executive Committee meeting tomorrow.

Üllas Tankler: Let me come back to IMT. Some of you have heard of it. "In Mission Together" was a program that GBGM was responsible for and supported for many years. I know that this is about your CC, but when we think about partnerships, it could be helpful if we look more at the whole of Europe. To be prepared for the future, we need to think for the whole of Europe and create relationships on a European level.

Wilfried Nausner: I would like to make a further suggestion for the Executive Committee - in relation to the shortage of ordained pastors. We have this shortage everywhere. I propose that we have an investigation carried out into the reasons for the decline the number of people embarking on theological training. We cannot do this ourselves. We have to commission it.

Bishop Harald Rückert: Thank you very much for all the requests to speak. I would now like to leave the last word to Bishop Stefan.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you very much. We have now talked about topics in which we are actually traveling together, whether as an executive committee or as a meeting of superintendents. I ask you to take with you to your congregations what I also take with me. Let them feel that they and we are not alone. It is a privilege to be able to travel with you.

Bishop Harald Rückert: Thank you for your word. At the end, many thanks were expressed. I would like to follow on from this - I would also like to thank you warmly for your service and for our journey together as bishops in Europe. We remain in close contact to support and inspire each other. May God be with you.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you also for your help. As a newcomer, I am very grateful for this support.

Bishop Stefan: We now come to two words of greeting. One is from Bishop Ruby-Nell Estrella from the Philippines. She has sent us a video message, which we will now see. Then Bishop Sifredo Texeira from Portugal will address us. We have asked everyone who is giving a greeting today to say something on the subject of migration.

The greeting from Bishop Ruby-Nell Estrella is shown as a video message. The text can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

Bishop Stefan: I will thank Bishop Ruby-Nell warmly by e-mail this evening for the greeting and will express my regret that we were unable to meet in person.

I would now like to invite Bishop Sifredo Texeira of the Methodist Church in Portugal to give us his greetings.

Bishop Sifredo Texeira passed on a greeting, which can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you very much for the greeting. As a small church, we always feel very connected to the church in Portugal.

Methodist e-Academy (Report 3.6)

written by retired Bishop Patrick Streiff

Retired Bishop Patrick Streiff: I think both reports fit in well with the topics we looked at together this morning.

One concerns the question of new pastors and what profile they should have. This also has to do with training. How should we train them? What is important for their training?

The other theme is that we in Europe live and work in solidarity and support each other in our service.

This question about the content and type of training, when we have practically no Methodist training center of our own anywhere, led to the founding of the Methodist e-Academy around 20 years ago. It is a training center for the whole of European Methodism, not just for the UMC. At the Methodist e-Academy we have two forms of learning. One part is online study, the other part is face-to-face meetings at the block seminars. Twenty years ago, working online was something completely new. That has changed, and all training institutions have taken steps in this direction. For example, we work together with the Theological University in Reutlingen (German language) and Cliff College in the UK (English language). Cliff College in particular is also strong in making the connection between discipleship and training. I will now hand over to Erika Stalcup, the academic coordinator of the Methodist e-Academy.

Erika Stalcup: I have been the academic coordinator of the Methodist e-Academy for two years and am currently taking care of the English-speaking participants - as the German-speaking participants are all taking a break at the moment. It is very positive for me that we can get people to the point where they graduate with a good degree. The highlight of this journey is always the joint meetings (like the last one in Prague, where we talked about burnout). We had very different backgrounds and it was very interesting to see what was different and what we had in common

In addition to the events for students, there are now also public events in which all interested parties can participate.

The students have requested that we take up the topic of dealing with conflict. If you are interested in the Methodist e-Academy, please contact me or retired Bishop Patrick Streiff. The bishops and superintendents have received an email from me with more detailed information. It is important for me that we always know what is on your minds.

Retired Bishop Patrick Streiff: At the Methodist e-Academy, we are constantly asking ourselves how we can help the church. After revising our study program, we would like to think more about how we can also train lay people. We would also like to be in discussion with the bishops on the subject of which ordained pastors we need. And then we need to clarify what training we need to offer for this. When we started 20 years ago, people simply said: study. Now we need more - or something else.

Stefan Weller: Which pastors do we need? I would like to be more specific. Last November, we had a training course for pastors and heard from Professor Holger Eschmann about the types of pastors that are currently in demand:

- Pastor as a professional theologian (academic)
- Pastor as spiritual leader
- Pastor as church leader
- Pastor as the driving force behind community development
- Pastor as a team player
- Pastor as promoter of the social diaconal mission

This makes it clear what challenges future pastors will face. With all these demands, we should not be surprised if they are not encouraged to serve. We must not only ask what we want, we must also say what we do not expect. This is very important in a small, growing church.

Roland Affolter: I would like to broaden the question. It's about how we deploy such pastors in the congregation. As a jack of all trades? We don't work like that in other professional fields, we form teams. We should also apply this in our church and use skills and talents across district boundaries.

Bishop Stefan: This is an issue that we really need to work on urgently. Thank you very much for this report.

CCTEF (Report 3.7)

represented by retired Bishop Patrick Streiff

Retired Bishop Patrick Streiff: The second report is very short CCTEF. You can see what we can support. After the developments of the last few months, the General Conference has significantly less money than in previous years. This support, which currently amounts to US\$ 1 million, is distributed annually. However, it is important for education to be able to plan for the long term. We have therefore set up an endowment fund for which we are collecting money - hopefully we will soon be able to contact you in this matter as part of a campaign. Every amount is important and valuable. The aim is to accumulate sufficient endowment assets so that an annual return of US\$1 million can be invested in theological education in the Central Conferences.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you very much for your great commitment to this educational cause.

Manuel Both passes on information from the local OC.

Esther Handschin: We will hold the memorial service tomorrow. But there are also people who have served in our Central Conference for a long time and whom we want to remember, even if they have not yet died. Helmut Nausner is one of them. I will lay out a card and ask you to sign it.

Jana Křížova leads us in the midday prayer. The prayer can be found in the appendix of the minutes.

Friday, March 14, 2025, 12:30 p.m.

Lunch at the EMK Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Friday, March 14, 2025, 2.0 p.m.

Plenary session at the EMK Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Bishop Stefan: Bishop Christian Alsted has sent us a written greeting. He is unable to be with us these days due to the death of his mother and the funeral taking place today. I have asked Üllas Tankler to read his greeting to us.

Üllas Tankler reads the greeting from Bishop Christian Alsted, Bishop of the Central Conference of Northern Europe, Baltic States and Ukraine. The greeting can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

Bishop Stefan will send Bishop Alsted a heartfelt email thanking him for his message. He will also assure him of God's strength and closeness as he says goodbye to his mother.

We pray for the situation of the Church and the people in Ukraine and Northern Europe.

Bishop Stefan: I would now like to invite Üllas Tankler to deliver his personal greeting.

Üllas Tankler delivers his greeting to the Central Conference with a very personal account of his "possible" migration background. The greeting can be found as a summary attached to the minutes.

Bishop Stefan: The Africa Central Conference is also meeting these days. The delegates are deciding whether they want to split the Central Conference into two conferences, which the General Conference has allowed them to do. Two new bishops would then also have to be elected. I have conveyed our greetings to the bishop in charge.

Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries (Report 2.1; 2.1.1; 2.1.2; 2.1.3)
represented by Zoltán Kovács

Bishop Stefan: I now ask Zoltán Kovács to introduce us to the work of the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries.

Zoltán Kovács: We are a Working Group that has been meeting in this composition for a long time. The annual meetings are a great enrichment for us all. There was only one change when our chairman was elected bishop. We are also very grateful for the long collaboration with Michael Nausner, who has been with us since 2005 and is now leaving us. David Field has joined us as a new member and also as secretary. That is very helpful. My report on the Working Group is short, but we have extensive supplements. You were able to read where we met and where we will be meeting soon.

Bishop Stefan: You were able to read the report and the supplements. Are there any questions?

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I am grateful for the papers on church affiliation. We also had a conversation about it during the break. That shows the interest in it. It has to do with the reasons for our being together. How to become a member of our church is an important question. However, I am unsure how to proceed from here. I would like to ask the working group to continue working on this topic. In the document from the AC Switzerland-France-North Africa there is a proposal on how they would like to deal with this. Is this also the proposal for us in the Central Conference? Can you help us to classify this correctly? The third question in the document talks about evil. But John Wesley spoke of "harm". That is not the same thing.

Bishop Stefan: Would you like to make a proposal on how to proceed?

Andrzej Malicki: I have another question about the Charta Oecumenica document. Did you support the document in principle? Is there anyone present at the conference where it will be adopted? What is the next step?

Zoltán Kovács: We had our questions about the document, but we supported the document as a whole. However, I don't know exactly how much work has already been done on it.

Esther Handschin: I have heard that the document will only be signed at the highest level. The ecumenical body of a country can then decide for itself whether it also wants to sign the revised charter. In Germany, for example, this is due to take place in 2026.

Wilfried Nausner: I still need some help in order to be able to classify the proposal of the Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa.

Bishop Stefan: This request was sent to the Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa, but not to the Central Conference. It is included here for information purposes only.

Markus Bach: We dealt with this request from the Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North in the Executive Committee. The issue was that the conference should be allowed to make special arrangements for the admission questions. We provisionally agreed to this special regulation of extending the number of questions from four to five. However, we have also instructed the Theology and Ordained Ministries Working Group to deal with the issue of church affiliation.

I can now see that they show us how differently church membership and admission are handled in our country. The working group is only at the beginning of its work and should definitely continue to work on this so that we can find a common understanding.

Bishop Patrick Streiff: I was still in active ministry at the time. The aim was to divide up the admission questions in such a way that it became clear what belonging to the holy universal church is and how belonging to and participation in the UMC is to be understood. This is currently included in a single question. Switzerland has only divided up the question, but has not changed the terms.

Philipp Kohli: I am now a little unsure whether we need to vote on this motion.

Bishop Stefan: No, we don't have to vote. This is a motion that was intended for the Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I would like to make the following request for further work on this topic:

I propose that the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries continue the work it has begun on the question of church membership and make proposals to the Central Conference and its Executive committee on the understanding of church membership and its liturgical organization. The Working Group should consider the following aspects:

- **the Book of Discipline (BoD) and the Book of Worship (BoW),**
- **the document "By Water and Spirit" on the understanding of baptism in the UMC,**
- **understanding Wesley's General Rules and the function of classes and gangs,**
- **the (provisional) ecclesiology document "Sent in Love",**
- **the vision statement of the UMC, if this is accepted by the COB.**

The motion is supported.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I think it is important that we recognize what we mean by belonging to the church. It is also important that we develop a common view. And it's about how we want to deal with it.

Bishop Stefan: Let's talk about this motion. What are your thoughts on it?

Lea Hafner: I'm a layperson and when I listen to it, I can follow the first part well, but the second part goes into too much detail for me. I don't know whether something is missing

from the list or whether too much is mentioned. I would prefer it if there wasn't such a detailed list in the application.

Serge Frutiger: I had similar thoughts to Lea Hafner. Couldn't one simply include a reference to "existing Methodist documents"?

Stefan Weller: I support the motion. I also understand it to mean that all existing relevant documents should be included. The wording should be open and yet clear in order to ensure that topics that have been developed to date are taken into account. Work on this should continue. The liturgy working group would then probably also have to be involved in its implementation. In Germany, the liturgy group has already worked on this.

Bishop Stefan: I would like to ask Stefan Schröckenfuchs whether he would like to amend the motion in line with Serge Frutiger's suggestion.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: No, I don't want to change it. The list is important to me, and I want to ensure that work is done on the basis of the theology that has been used so far.

Esther Handschin: The question of membership is a core business of our church. It is about our identity. The content developed by the working group should also be incorporated into the liturgy working group.

Serge Frutiger: **I propose the amendment that the list in the Schröckenfuchs motion be deleted (after: ...developed) and replaced with the following sentence. "It takes into account existing and new Methodist documents."**

Bishop Stefan: I now invite you to vote on the Frutiger amendment.

The amendment is accepted by a majority of those entitled to vote.

Bishop Stefan: This means that we now have the following Schröckenfuchs/Frutiger motion before us:

I propose that the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries continue the work it has begun on the question of church membership and make proposals to the Central Conference and its executive on the understanding of church membership and its liturgical organization. In doing so, it will take into account existing and new Methodist documents.

Bishop Stefan: Are you ready to vote on this Schröckenfuchs/Frutiger motion?

The Central Conference decides with one vote against that the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries should continue the work it has begun on the question of church membership and develop proposals for the Central Conference and its Executive Committee on the understanding of church membership and its liturgical organization. In doing so, it will take into account existing and new Methodist documents.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you all very much for your participation.

The Central Conference adopts the report of the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries.

We take a break.

Friday, March 14, 2025, 3:50 p.m.

Plenary session at the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Bishop Stefan: We start again with a greeting, this time from Olav Schmidt, the head of EmK World Mission in Germany.

Olav Schmidt: I bring you the greetings of the EmK World Mission and am grateful to be here.

The greeting is attached to the minutes.

Bishop Stefan: We will now continue with the reports from the working groups.

Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs (Report 2.3; 2.3.1)

represented by Wilfried Nausner

Wilfried Nausner: The report is available and has been read. I will only briefly address individual points. Firstly, there are the changes to the Church Order, which we wrote about in the report. The text of the Social Principles stored in the Dropbox is the official, now valid text that we can use. We intend to translate the texts that are only valid for us back into English in order to make them accessible to the entire CC.

The second is the petition from the church in the Czech Republic. We have revised this text together. The motion to approve this procedure is formulated in the report. The motion outlines the process by which the Church in the Czech Republic can become autonomous.

Bence Vigh: I would like to express my regret about this process. I can understand the Czech brothers and sisters and would like to respect their decision. But I still regret that they want to leave us.

Thomas Flemming: I have spoken to Czech delegates. We are very sad that you are taking this path. But we are grateful that you are taking this path in accordance with our regulations. Thank you for communicating so openly. We will also give you a warm welcome if you want to come back.

Andrzej Malicki: It's not an easy situation. We have a good relationship between the UMC in Poland and the UMC in the Czech Republic. We had good encounters and meetings. Dear brothers and sisters, if it is possible, think about your decision. We will miss you. We have the opportunity to stay together despite our different attitudes. We hope and believe that we can stay together. It is a painful situation we find ourselves in. This concerns not only Poland, but also the other conferences of our Central Conference.

Roland Affolter: Thank you very much for the forewords. I would like to underline these words. We are all very sad that you are going down this path. But we are grateful that you are taking the official path. The doors remain open for you, however, and we wish you God's blessing.

Retired Bishop Patrick Streiff: Dear Central Conference. When we had the Extraordinary Central Conference 2022 with an election of bishops, we were in a very tense time. Looking back, I am grateful that we had an extra day to discuss it. This allowed us to come to a majority decision on how we could stay together. At the time, we decided on the basis of the 2019 church constitution, but the 2024 General Conference has since taken place and made completely different decisions. How are you dealing with this now? What was decided in 2024 allows us to continue to walk together, despite our differences. We have conceded that we can each go our own way and don't want to put ourselves under pressure. We want to travel together, as is important for our mission in each country. This is a freedom that we give each other. If you really want to go, then the doors are open. But they are also open if you want to come back. Thank you for the respectful path you want to take. We would be very happy if you turned back from the path you have chosen.

Ivana Procházková: I am under a lot of pressure to explain where we stand. I believe that this is a good place to explain our approach. We don't want to break off relations. We hope that we can stay in contact. It's not just about issues of homosexuality. The process for leaving was decided by the Czech Church and we ask that this be respected.

Bishop Stefan: Let us now vote on the Working Group's motion.

The Central Conference unanimously approves this approach to the path to autonomy for the Czech Church and instructs the Executive Committee and the Office of the Central Conference to implement it.

Bishop Stefan: I assumed responsibility in the Czech Republic directly after the vote on autonomy and was very emotionally affected. I respect this path and will walk this path with you as a bishop in the coming period. I would also like to thank the Central Conference for supporting this path. I will inform the secretaries of the Annual Conferences and send them the documents for the votes in the Annual Conferences. Here, too, we will need a 2/3 majority for the UMC in the Czech Republic to go down this path.

Bishop Stefan says a prayer for the brothers and sisters in the Czech Republic and their upcoming journey.

Bishop Harald Rückert: Now that you have passed this resolution, I would like to show you as Chairman of the Standing Committee for Central Conference Affairs how things will proceed. Following the decisions of the Czech Annual Conference and the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe, we as the Standing Committee will submit this motion to the General Conference 2028, provided that the 2/3 majority of the other Annual Conferences is achieved. I can inform you in the Czech Republic that we are forming a small group which will be in discussion with you so that we can walk a common path. I want to assure you that we want to continue to walk in an open and trusting conversation. We want to be led by God.

The Central Conference adopts the report of the Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs.

Working Group Liturgy (Report 2.2)

represented by Erika Stalcup

Erika Stalcup invites you to sing the song "Come, and fill our hearts with your peace, Hallelujah".

In recent years, I have visited various countries and experienced very different forms of Methodism. This is particularly evident in the church services and their elements. How can a liturgy working group help with this? We can learn a lot from each other. In this context, I will mention just two challenges for worship services: how do we celebrate across generations, ecumenically, etc.?

The working group will be reconstituted this year. I am curious to see how we will deal with the application for membership. We are still looking for someone for the working group who speaks good English, German or possibly Serbian. Talk to me if you know someone.

Bishop Stefan: Are there any questions or comments on the report?

Bishop Stefan: Thank you very much, Erika, for your commitment. We will also see the remaining members of this group at this Central Conference in connection with the devotions and worship celebrations.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I would like to thank you very much for the services that you prepare, both for the Central Conference and for the Executive Committee.

Ben Nausner: I would like to comment on one more point in the report: Strengthening Connexio. I find that very worthy of consideration. I would like to encourage us to also use the experience of various church services to strengthen Connexio.

The Central Conference accepts the report of the Working Group Liturgy with applause.

Working Group Church and Society (Report 2.4)

represented by Marietjie Odendaal

Marietjie Odendaal: I would like to thank David Clupaček and Dorothee Bührma for their support in drafting this document. We have also worked intensively on the document with the Executive Committee so that we can now vote on it.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you for the report, the work and the guidelines. Please comment on this motion.

Markus Bach: I have no problem agreeing to the guidelines. But I'm wondering what happens next. What do you do as a working group, and what do we do as annual conferences? I don't want us to have simply produced a document that disappears into oblivion and into folders.

Marietjie Odendaal: We have suggested that this document can be included in discussion groups. We cannot go to all conferences, but in the Executive Committee we can translate it into the other languages. I am dependent on the help of the superintendents.

Esther Handschin: I will include the text in the preparatory courses for professed membership.

Barry Sloan: In England there is the "Methodist Way of Life". There is a lot of material that can be used for this.

Bishop Stefan: If there are no further questions, can we vote?

The Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe unanimously adopts the "Guidelines for Responsible Living".

The Central Conference adopts the report of the Working Group Church and Society.

Working Group on Women's Work (Report 2.6)

represented by Barbara Büniger and Monika Zuber

Barbara Büniger: When we ask the women what is important for their work, we usually hear the same thing: The national women's seminars reach many more women, but the international seminars are also important. Monika Zuber will say something about the international meetings.

Monika Zuber: We organize conferences and consultations that help us to listen to each other and stay in touch. There are also conferences at European level. Last year, for example, we were in Porto (Portugal), which gave us a good time and inspired us.

Barbara Büniger: Sometimes we ask ourselves about our output. I'll tell you about myself personally. We can't cultivate a community beyond our borders without it shaping and changing us. A relationship develops within a very short space of time, even if we only share a small part of our lives together. That's why it's important to me to hold on to these encounters.

Barbara Büniger: If you have any questions about national experiences with women's seminars, you can ask Agata Myślińska from Poland. She is the person responsible for this in Poland.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you very much for your work.

The Central Conference adopts the report of the Working Group Women's Work.

Working Group Episcopacy (Report 2.7; 2.7.1)

represented by Jörg Niederer

Bishop Stefan: You have found the additional report 2.7.1 in the documents, which the secretary has uploaded to the Dropbox. It describes the discussion between the working group and the bishop that took place immediately before the CC meeting.

Jörg Niederer: Most of our meeting on Wednesday was spent talking to the bishop. His "Word from the Bishop" had already provided us with a good insight into his actions. That's why we didn't need as much time as planned. At the meeting, we also considered whether and how we wanted to deal with retired bishops and came to the decision that we would also like to take on this task.

Bishop Stefan: Are there any questions about the Working Group's report?

Jörg Niederer: Then I come to the fun part. We have always thought about how we can say thank you to the bishop. We had the impression that he prefers to be at home with his wife Valérie when he can. You're not on your bike that much at the moment. But you are often out and about in hotels. So we wondered whether there might be a speciality in Winterthur, but we didn't find anything - unless you take the soap from the hotel with you. But so that you don't have to do that, you will now receive two soaps, one for you and one for Valérie. It's the cheapest gift I've ever given a bishop, it only cost one franc. As a bonus - and as a real gift - we're also giving you a voucher for a spa treatment in Baden.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you very much for this original gift. It's something we are very happy to do. Thank you very much!

Judicial Court of the Central Conference (Report 2.8)

Christa Tobler

Bishop Stefan: The last report we have for today is that of the Judicial Court. Are there any questions?

Since there are no questions, let's use the time for two country reports. I have asked Freddy Nzambe to tell us something about Algeria and Tunisia.

Country Report Algeria-Tunisia

We had a meeting in Tunisia three weeks ago - and all the leaders and the bishop were able to attend. That may sound normal to you. For us, it's a miracle, because three of these leaders have been convicted in court.

All Protestant churches in Algeria are closed - with the exception of our church in Constantine. I asked Rachid how we should pray for Algeria. He said that we should not pray for an end to the persecution, but for unity within the church. If the church is internally strong, it can also withstand persecution by the state. That moved me. That is the reality in Algeria. The state has confiscated some houses. We tried to get one building back with the help of a lawyer. The state also wants to seize another building. We from Tunisia cannot get visas for Algeria. Pray for Alain Buléon and me that we will get a visa and also for the bishop. The only one who still gets a visa for Algeria is Daniel Nussbaumer. Please pray for the church in Algeria.

Let me say something else about Tunisia. The situation there is also very difficult. We have an increasingly strong dictatorship. Christian communities are only allowed to meet if they do so in an official church. A Canadian colleague was arrested and locked up in a cell with terrorists. We had to take many steps with our lawyer before he was released. He had to leave the country immediately afterwards. The local Christians are harassed by the police without being charged or arrested. It's all about exerting pressure. We've also had two "courtesy visits" from the police - ostensibly just "for our safety", of course. But this is also a form of pressure like the one we are currently experiencing. Pray for us, that the church in Tunisia can continue to exist. A big problem is that we are often very lonely in Tunisia and Algeria. We often have no opportunity to share with each other what is on our minds. So many people are very alone. Pray for us!

Bishop Stefan: There are pastors who tell me that they are afraid. But I also hear them emphasize: We belong here to proclaim the gospel to people. They experience people giving their lives to Jesus or asking for a Bible. I then ask myself how I would act. I experience it as a great richness when I am together with this person. I ask that we now pray together for the church and the people in Algeria, for our pastor and pastors and also for Freddy. Pray also for the visas so that we can make the trip.

We pray for Algeria and Tunisia.

Bishop Stefan: Now I would also like to invite Novica Brankov to tell us about the current situation in Serbia.

Novica Brankov tells the story from Serbia. On November 8, 2024, the roof of the train station in Novi Sad collapsed. Since then, there has been great tension in our society. Many people demonstrate every day. Roads and bridges are repeatedly blocked by demonstrators. Corruption is behind the roof collapse. Demonstrations are being organized in various places to topple the government. Many people want change and are demonstrating for it. The prime minister announced his resignation at the end of January 2025, but parliament has not yet confirmed the resignation.

In our congregation, it has happened that people have been unable to attend church services because roads or bridges have been blocked. Children have not been going to school for two months because there are no lessons. The whole society is divided. Some are on the side of the government, others on the side of the demonstrators. More than a million demonstrators are expected in Belgrade tomorrow. The government is trying to prevent this. It has decided to stop public transport to Belgrade. That's why people are walking to Belgrade to demonstrate. The Protestant churches have decided to organize an hour of prayer. The government is doing everything it can to stay in power. That's why we are afraid of what awaits us. We don't know what tomorrow will bring. We are not doing so well. Since November 8, there has been no legal system in Serbia. Dušan and I currently don't know whether we'll be able to fly back on Sunday. As a church, we are not so badly affected. But we are very much affected by people's fear.

Bishop Stefan: I invite you to pray for our church in Serbia and the people in this country.

We pray for Serbia.

Manuel Both passes on information from the local OC.

Friday, March 14, 2025, 5:45 p.m.

Dinner at the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Friday, March 14, 2025, 7:15 p.m.

Public participatory evening at the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

The public participatory evening will be led by Marietjie Odendaal, Ben Nausner and Thomas Fux. Guests from the municipalities have also been invited to this evening.

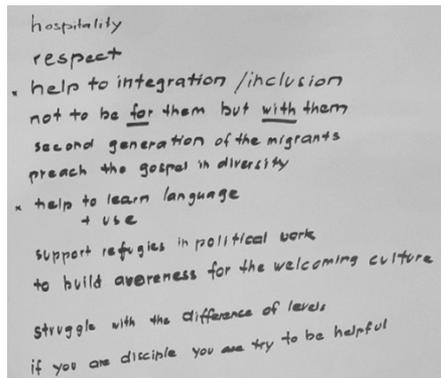
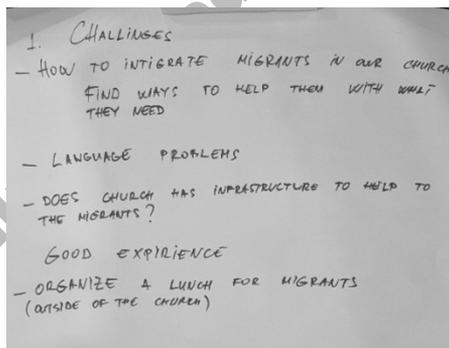
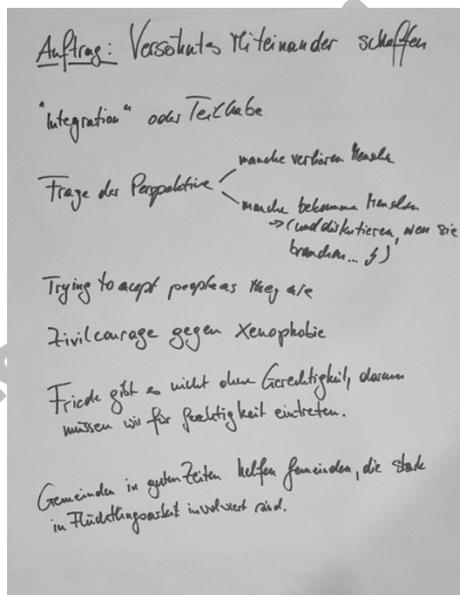
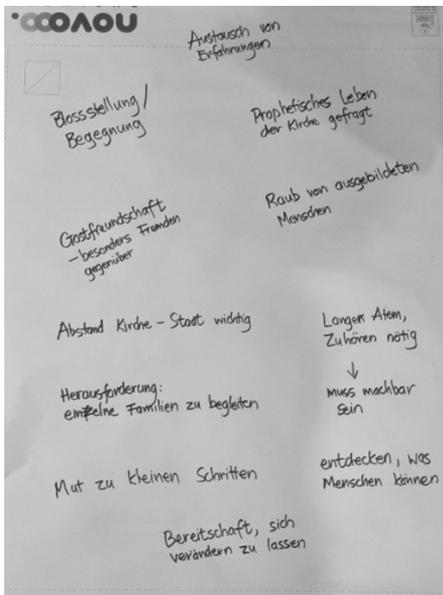
In three steps, those present are invited to turn their attention to the topic of "migration" and to listen to each other:

Warm-up round: Those present are invited to move to the right, left or center based on personal questions, depending on whether their answer is yes, no or yes.

Step 1: In a two- to three-person discussion, the participants talk for 15 minutes about how they are personally affected by migration and their own migration background.

Step 2: In table groups of 8 to 10 people, everyone listens in turn to a person who talks for two minutes about their challenge with the topic of migration. At the end, comments and questions can be exchanged. The discussion continues after 30 minutes.

Step 3: Each table group discusses what the church's mission on migration could look like. What are the positive experiences, challenges, experiences of failure, etc.? The results are recorded on large flipchart sheets. They are shown here in photographs:



- Als Kirchenglieder sich gegenseitig unterstützen und unterstützen im Alltag (Nachbarschaft) als Unterstützungsnetz zu leben. (Aktionen, Offenheit...)

→ Liebe zu Gott / zum Nächsten / zum Fremden

- eigene Erfahrungen vom Fremdsein reflektieren

- konkrete Erfahrung → Nachbarschaftsfeier

- * Offenheit auch gegenüber einem Menschen (z.B. Trauer und Trauerbewältigung)

- Menschenwürde - dafür einsetzen Trauer = Menschlichkeit

↳ kein ohne Würde mit Würde ist, darf nicht verletzt werden

- Jeder Mensch hat eine Geschichte (z.B. Afrikaner)

→ wir müssen zuhören

4

we are called to love

3. Mose 19, 34

Wir müssen uns lösen von der Haltung, dass es nur eine richtige Form zu leben und glauben gibt.

↳ it has to come to practise

Sharing experiences and by prayer

Struggles: Language skills are important

Be welcoming for people with migrant background!

Have to be open for everyone who come.

Support countries where people can't stay within EU.

Openness is a challenge in congregations. → closed groups

Different political opinions. → instead of social

↓

make it a safe place.

Get to know the country specific problems

↳ share with each other the experiences.

Strengthen personal relationships with people from other countries.

What can we do to reach people who don't come to the church?

1. We have to help those who are helping! (elder churches, non profitable organizations and the state.)
2. To involve emigrants to help emigrants.
3. We can help each other by sharing experiences and resources.

What do we do?

- Serve the people in our congregation and in society
- Offer a safe space (non-discriminatory)

... TRAY AND TRAY AND TRAY

How to care for 2nd/3rd generation?

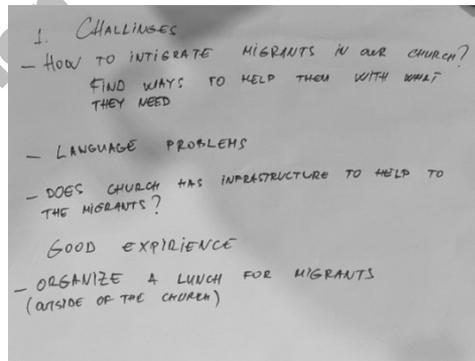
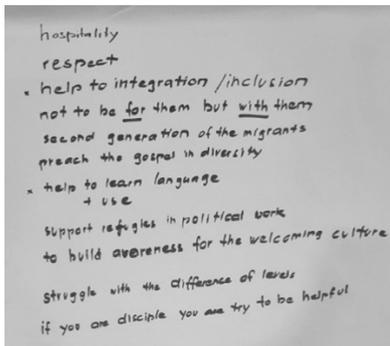
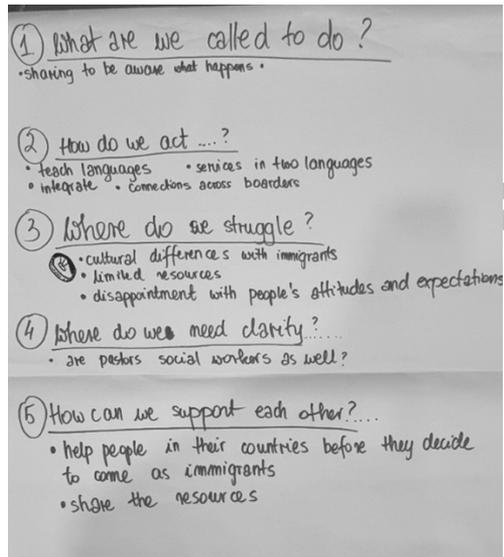
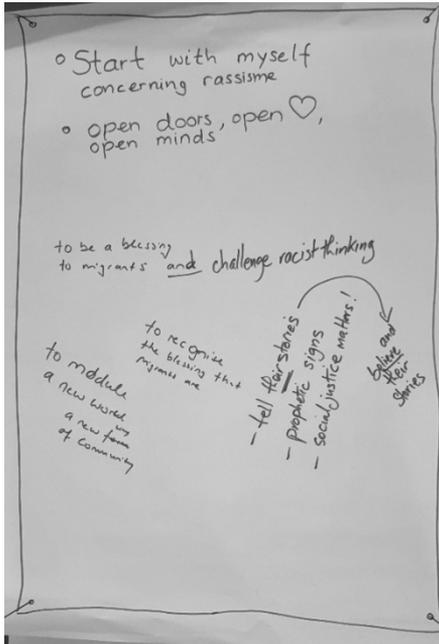
Is there a need to be integrated or is the greater need to have a clear identity?

Create safe spaces

help with daily life

keep empathy alive

be open to learning from "their" spiritual experiences



The public participation evening closes with a musical greeting from Barry Sloan, who performs two of his songs.

Friday, March 14, 2025, 9 p.m.

Evening prayer in the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

The evening prayer is held by Erika Stalcup. It can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

Minutes of the Central Conference on Saturday, March 15, 2025

Saturday, March 15, 2025, 08.30 a.m.

Morning reflection in the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Bishop Stefan welcomes all those present to a new working day.

Monika Zuber holds the morning reflection. She is accompanied on the piano by *Thomas Brunner*. The devotion can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

Bishop Stefan thanks *Monika Zuber* warmly for the morning devotion.

We take a short break until the memorial service.

Saturday, March 15, 2025, 09.15 a.m.

Memorial service at the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Esther Handschin leads the ceremony in memory of the former delegates and employees of the Central Conference who have died since November 2022. The contributions to this memorial service can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

- *Vlastislav Maláč*, deceased on May 10, 2023. He was a delegate to the Central Conferences of 1969, 1981, 1985 and 1989, a member of the Executive Committee from 1989 to 1993 and a member of the Working Group Media and Communications from 1985 to 1993.
His curriculum vitae was read out by *Jana Křížova* and is attached to the minutes.
- *Václav Svidenský*, deceased on June 16, 2023, was a delegate to the Central Conferences of 1969, 1977, 1981, 1985 and 2001, a member of the Executive Committee from 1977-1989 and a member of the Working Group Church and Society from 1985-1997.
- *Gerda Reiser*, deceased on March 26, 2024. From June 1978 she was secretary to Bishop Franz Schäfer in the Bishop's Office in Zurich - even after his retirement in spring 1989.
Her curriculum vitae was read out by *Esther Handschin* and is attached to the minutes.
- *Adrian Wenziker*, deceased on April 20, 2024. He was a delegate to the 2009, 2013, 2017 and 2022 Central Conferences as well as a member of the Council for Finance and Administration from 1993 to 2023 and its Chairman from 1997. He was also auditor of the Central Conference CSE treasury and a member of the pension board of our Central Conference from 2014 to 2023.
His curriculum vitae was read out by *Stefan Hafner* and can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

- Michel Weyer, who died on December 5, 2024, was Professor of Church History and Methodism at Reutlingen School of Theology and delegate to the Central Conference of 1969, 1977, 1989, 1997 and 2001. He was also a member of the Working Groups Mission and Evangelism (1969-1973) and Theology and Ordained Ministries (1981-2005).

We take a break.

Saturday, March 15, 2025, 10:30 a.m.

Plenary session at the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Bishop Stefan would like to thank those who planned and organized the evening of participation yesterday: Ben Nausner, Thomas Fux and Marietjie Odendaal, as well as Esther Handschin, Jana Křížova and Erika Stalcup for the lunchtime and evening prayers and today's commemoration. They too can choose either a physical or acoustic treat.

Report to the Executive Committee of March 13, 2025 (Report 1.2)

Represented by Bishop Stefan Zürcher

Bishop Stefan: You can find the minutes from Thursday morning in the Executive Committee's dropbox. We held the elections and prepared the nominations that the Executive Committee has to decide on. We also prepared the meeting. The Executive Committee also approved the 2024 annual financial statements and thanked the treasurer Iris Bullinger. The 2025-2028 budget was discussed so that it could be presented to the Central Conference.

Report of the Office (Report 1.1; 1.1.2)

Represented by Bishop Stefan Zürcher

Bishop Stefan: We now come to the elections that the Central Conference has to make. You will find section under 3.3 in the office report and in Appendix 1.1.2, where we first find a reference to those who have announced their resignation:

- Lea Hafner, as a lay member of the Annual Conference CH-FR-NA on the Executive Committee
- Jörg Niederer, as Chairman of the Working Group Episcopacy
- Michael Nausner, as a member of the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries
- David Chlupáček, as a member of the Working Group Church and Society
- Esther Handschin, as a member of the Working Group Liturgy
- Jana Křížova, as a member of the Working Group Liturgy

Bishop Stefan: I will go through the elections step by step as we find them in the electoral list. If there are no more questions, I will ask you to cast your votes using your voting cards:

The Central Conference CSE unanimously elects the following persons and committees:

- Markus Bach (CH) as Secretary of the Central Conference CSE
- Iris Bullinger (CH) as Treasurer of the Central Conference CSE
- the voting members of the Executive Committee according to the election list
- Serge Frutiger (CH) as Chairman of the Working Groupe Episcopacy
- Members and substitute members of the Investigation Committee according to the electoral list
- Members and substitute members of the Appeals Committee according to the election list
- Members and substitute members of the Judicial Council according to the election list
- Church advocate and his replacement according to the election list
- Members of the Working Groupe Episcopacy according to the electoral list
- Chair and members of the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries according to the electoral list
- Chair and members of the Working Group Church and Society according to the electoral list
- Co-chair of the Working Group Children and Youth according to the electoral list
- Chair and members of the Working Group W0omen's Work according to the electoral list
- Chair and members of the Working Group Liturgy according to the electoral list
- Chair and members of the Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs according to the electoral list

Bishop Stefan now asks those who will complete their task to come forward:

- Lea Hafner (lay member of Executive Committee of the Annual Conference CH-FR-NA)
- Jörg Niederer (Chairman of the Working Groupe Episcopacy)
- Esther Handschin (member of the Working Group Liturgy)
- Jana Křížova (member of the Working Group Liturgy)
- David Chlupáček (member of the Working Group Church and Society)
- Michael Nausner (member of the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries) unfortunately cannot be there for geographical reasons, he lives in Sweden.

Bishop Stefan thanks all those who have stepped down from their office or task and presents them with a chocolate toast as well as a musical greeting in the form of a shalom CD. The Central Conference gives a frenetic round of applause and expresses its gratitude acoustically.

Bishop Stefan also thanks all those who continue their commitment to the Central Conference. There are an impressive number of people who make themselves available and dedicate their time and energy.

Greetings from Bishops Harald Rückert and Werner Philipp

Bishop Harald Rückert: It is a long and good tradition that we European bishops support each other and are present at the central conferences. We have a close relationship with

each other in Europe. In addition to our meetings, there are also meetings of superintendents, and in recent years we have also accompanied each other at least online at the meetings of the Executive Committee. At our last Central Conference, we elected a new bishop as my successor. The choice fell on Werner Philipp. My graduation will take place on June 1, 2025. Werner Philipp will then pass on the greeting from Germany. I have been traveling with some of you for 25 years. These contacts have always been valuable to me and I will miss them.

Bishop Stefan thanks Bishop Harald Rückert for being here with us and for taking his successor with him. He also greatly appreciated the cooperation with Bishop Harald Rückert.

Afterwards, the new *Bishop Werner Philipp* gives us his greeting. It can be found attached to the minutes.

Bishop Stefan thanks Bishop Werner Philipp very warmly and expresses his joy at being able to walk a path with him.

Future of the UMC in Europe

Bishop Stefan: We want to take time now to pass on information about the future of the UMC in Europe and exchange ideas. Bishop Harald Rückert will give us an insight into the current situation and how we want to deal with it. I will then pass on some information about the situation in our Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe.

Bishop Harald Rückert: At our last Central Conference, we had an intensive discussion about the future of the UMC in Europe. We are already working closely with the other Central Conferences but will have to work even more closely together in the future. This is because the situation in Europe has changed due to the fact that various Annual Conferences have decided to become autonomous. We spoke about this yesterday with regard to the Annual Conference in the Czech Republic, but this also affects four Annual Conferences in the Central Conference of Northern Europe/Eurasia. We would therefore like to examine how we can promote dialogue with one another in order to prepare ourselves for a future that will be even more of a common future than it is today. We want to know what our path in Europe can look like before a particular path is imposed on us from outside.

The pandemic has repeatedly prevented us from actively dealing with this. As bishops, we have occasionally participated in the meetings of the executive authorities of the other central conferences. We are aware that the German Central Conference is a special case as a national central conference. There are historical reasons for this. This is not only an advantage. What you have in terms of diversity and European and global connections, we lack. We have given a lot of thought to structural changes. The question of how our own changes would fit in with the Central Conferences of Central and Southern Europe or Northern Europe/(Eurasia) came up again and again. We always kept each other informed about what was happening in the other Central Conferences. So, it was important for us to hear what is happening with you, but also what Bishop Christian Alsted tells us about his Central Conference, which starts in a few weeks. There, four Annual Conferences will

leave the UMC to become independent. With Russia, a whole episcopal district will suddenly no longer be part of it. We also heard yesterday that Estonia has left the UMC. Bishop Christian Alsted said that the Central Conference of Northern Europe/Eurasia will probably elect a bishop for the last time because it will no longer fulfill the criteria necessary for its own Central Conference in the future.

We will and want to clarify together what this means for us in Europe and how we want to organize ourselves. With regard to the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe, we would prefer not to cause any disruption because you have found a way to stay together despite your differences. Compared to the other European Central Conferences, we in Germany as the EmK are large in number, even if we are small compared to other churches. With regard to our cooperation, it should not primarily be about structural issues. Rather, it is about questions such as: How can we work together with other countries and support each other? What does that look like in concrete terms? This will not happen by itself; we have to talk to each other. We also need to define the goal we want to aim for. I think there is a time window of six to eight years to find a common path. After that, a new bishop would probably have to be elected again in Northern Europe-Baltic Ukraine, but this will hardly be possible due to the requirements of canon law. We are aware that there are great differences between all the countries in Europe, and we would therefore like to proceed with great sensitivity in order to find the best for Europe and the UMC in Europe. We would like to invite our brothers and sisters from the Methodist Church in Great Britain to be process observers as we discuss our new structures together.

Bishop Stefan: I would now like to give you an insight into my thoughts on our Central Conference. For me, it is important that we do not start with the structures but think about our mission. We live relationships with each other and ask each other again and again how we can support each other. For this to succeed, relationships are important and these should be maintained. Structures do not come first. Over the past few years, we have struggled with how we can move forward together, even if we have different opinions. I wrote in my report that I have the impression that we are now in a more stable phase together. Methodism in Europe is now facing new challenges due to the situation in the Central Conference of Northern Europe(/Eurasia). In terms of statistics, we in our Central Conference are not currently in danger of no longer being able to be an independent Central Conference. But I am convinced that we as the UMC in Europe must find a common path. We cannot and do not want to simply describe this as a problem for the other central conferences. Next spring, we will meet in Reutlingen with all the executive authorities of the UMC in Europe to exchange ideas, make an overview and determine the next steps. But we also want to have time for meetings to strengthen what we have in common. It is important to me that we treat each other with care.

Bishop Stefan: Perhaps these remarks have triggered questions, in which case you are welcome to ask them now. You are also welcome to comment on them.

Esther Handschin: I would recommend that we consider the historical background to the current situation with regard to the boundaries of the central conferences. We should also ask ourselves whether a process of reconciliation is needed.

Stefan Weller: You mentioned that there is a certain size to be able to be an independent central conference. How secure are we really?

Bishop Stefan: The required number does not concern the members of a central conference, but the number of pastors (clergy). For example, at least 180 clergy are required for an independent central conference. We currently have 266 clergy members.

Markus Bach: Bishop Patrick Streiff drew my attention to another error in the statistical presentation in report 1.1.6. It is precisely this figure that is at issue. I will edit the document and upload the correct version to the Dropbox and include it in the negotiation report.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I'm listening to you with a concerned ear. It's good that we are reflecting on the current situation and actively moving forward. But it is also fair to point out that we have spent a lot of time and energy planning our common future. Now I finally have the impression that we can turn our attention to other topics at the Central Conference. I am therefore somewhat concerned about what this will cost in terms of money, resources and time. You have said that it is not only about questions of structures, but also about questions of common mission in Europe. Six to eight years is a long time, but in terms of the history of the Church, it is the blink of an eye. I hope that we will focus on the right things. However, I am concerned that we will need a lot of energy and time for the process described. We will probably have to set up a separate working group for this.

Üllas Tankler: As I mentioned yesterday, I have visited the UMC in many places around the world. When we have talked about the unity of the church in Europe, I have always emphasized that structure and mission must be in balance. We need two things to be able to look ahead: Trust and interest. In recent years, we have lost trust in each other in many places. We are seeing this loss of trust in many places. It is therefore important that we rebuild trust. We cannot have a future if we do not trust each other. But we also need interest in and for each other. Many churches isolate themselves so that they can be who they want to be. But it is important right now that we are interested in each other.

Bishop Harald Rückert: I also think that trust is the most important currency in Europe. We need to strengthen mutual trust. Based on my global experience, we need to ask ourselves where and how we have learned to trust each other. When I look around here, I know many of you. We can build on this basis of knowledge and encounter, which does not exist in many other places in the world. We can build on what we have learned together. Now we face the challenge of how we want to deal with each other. The bad thing is not if we lose or change structures. However, it is important that we do not lose mutual trust. It's all about emotions, including mine.
And: Yes, Esther, you're right, we have a history that we need to reflect on. We must strive for reconciliation and make it possible.

Christine Schneider: I am very pleased that we are engaging in this process. I have already experienced this at a global level and I have always found it a shame that we have not done this in our Central Conference. I hope that we will not simply create a new structure. It is a great opportunity that we can now learn from each other. We are not starting

from scratch. At the last General Conference, we were able to achieve something through good cooperation between the European delegations. We were noticed. At the 2012 General Conference, there was a proposal from Europe that was met with voices saying that it didn't need to be supported because it "only" came from Europe. Since then, we have made good progress together and are taken seriously.

Wilfried Nausner: First of all, I would like to say that I support all cooperation in Europe. Secondly, I would like to say that this involves difficulties. We have to take these steps with the question of what is social at heart. We are very challenged here. I am telling you that the differences in Europe are great. We have to bear that in mind. We will be very challenged, but we will also benefit.

Andrzej Malicki: We are living in a difficult time in Europe, which also affects our church. I don't want to and don't need to mention everything there is to mention. On the one hand, we need to rethink our European structures and, secondly, our overall role as the Methodist Church in Europe. I believe that the meeting of the executive authorities next spring is important for this path. You, Bishop, also mentioned the path of reconciliation. It is important that we talk about it, walk the path of reconciliation, but also dare to take further steps forward. How can we help shape it ourselves? We need mutual trust in order to find a way forward. It is important that we sit down together and look for a common path as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Erika Stalcup: I would like to emphasize two things: I think it is important that we talk about this now - especially at a time when ecumenical organizations are finding it difficult. We should also make sure that connections are made at different levels. It could therefore also be helpful if joint meetings of pastors could take place.

Olav Schmidt: It's helpful that we talk about it. Our cultures are different, which is challenging. But diversity also represents valuable potential. We could also be an indication of how it is possible for such different conferences and cultures to belong together. That is very valuable potential and would be so important for today.

Retired Bishop Patrick Streiff: I know the history of Europe very well. I know the structure that is given to us by the church order. Perhaps we even have the opportunity to open a window on what it means to be a Central Conference. What really helps to perceive the mission in Europe? And then we need to adapt the structures accordingly. This could also be important for the General Conference. Let's also think outside the box!

Bishop Harald Rückert: When I was elected, the Central Conference commissioned me and a working group to completely rethink the work. We also wanted to think in a completely new way. I said at the time: Let's forget the VLO (constitution/doctrine/order)! We need to ask an entirely new question: What helps us in our mission? When we come together as executive authorities, let's not start complaining about what restricts us and what is given to us. Instead, let's work with what is given to us, what our strengths are. We don't want to live without order, but we don't want to be bound by it either. Soon there will be an "i.R." after my title of bishop. I like to translate it as bishop "within calling distance".

Bishop Stefan: This exchange has really encouraged me to think and walk a path that can also be "out of the box". I trust us to walk a common path. Let us know if you continue to have good ideas for our future as European Methodists. This concludes this whole complex and the thematic work at the Central Conference.

Bishop Stefan: I would like to express my sincere thanks to our translators: Claudia Haslebacher, Peter Caley, Marietjie Odendaal, Urs Schweizer, Christine Schneider and Stefan Ilg. You provide a very valuable service.

The Central Conference gives a hearty round of applause.

We thank the OC and the staff of the EMK Winterthur over lunch.

[Addendum: The Bishop's thanks to the OC and the staff at lunch were followed by a long and hearty round of applause from the Central Conference].

Bishop Stefan: I would also like to thank our secretary, Markus Bach, for all his work, which continued even when we were all enjoying a good night's sleep. Thanks also to those who check the minutes afterwards, Christine Schneider and Serge Frutiger.

Here too, the Central Conference joins in with a strong and long round of applause.

Manuel Both provides up-to-date information on lunch, the afternoon program and the festive evening.

Saturday, March 15, 2025, 12:10 p.m.

Midday prayer in the EMK Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

The midday prayer is held by *Jana Křížova*. It can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

Before we go to lunch, we take a photo of all the delegates at the Central Conference.

Saturday, March 15, 2025, 12:30 p.m.

Lunch at the EMK Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

Saturday, March 15, 2025, 2 p.m.

Winterthur election program, Trollstrasse 10

While the members of the newly elected Executive Committee meet for a first session, the other Central Conference participants are invited to an election program in Winterthur in the afternoon:

- Creation walk
- City tour in Winterthur
- Visit to Technorama Winterthur
- Visit to the Winterthur Art Museum

Saturday, March 15, 2025, 6:30 p.m.

Festive dinner at the EMK Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

During the festive dinner, which this time is served to the Central Conference delegates, *Manuel Zolliker* (piano) and *Basil Zinsli* (vocals) play in a very entertaining way, not exactly for dancing, but nevertheless create a cheerful and exuberant atmosphere.

Unauthorized translation - original in German

Minutes of the Central Conference on Sunday, March 16, 2025

Sunday, March 16, 2025, 10:00 a.m.

Closing service at the UMC Winterthur, Trollstrasse 10

One of the final services will take place in the UMC Winterthur under the direction of Pastor *Markus Bach*. *Christoph Landert* is responsible for the music. The theme of the service is: Crossing borders. The sermon on Acts 1:8 will be preached by *Bishop Harald Rückert*. It can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

Following the service, the congregation meets with delegates and guests of the Central Conference for a church coffee.

There will be further services in the nearer and wider region of Winterthur with Central Conference participation:

- in Schaffhausen 09.45 a.m. Wilfried Nausner (German)
- in Solothurn 10.00 a.m. Bishop Sifredo Teixeira (Portuguese/German translation)
- in Uzwil (region) 10.30 a.m. Üllas Tankler (German)
- in Turbenthal 09.45 a.m. Donát Gyurkó (German)
- in Zürich Altstetten 10.00 a.m. Bence Vigh (English)
- in Zürich Nord 10.00 a.m. Marjan Dimov (German)
- in Zürich Bethanien 10.00 a.m. Esther Handschin (German)
- in Heiligenschwendi 10.00 a.m. Novica Brankov, Dušan Tordaj (German)
- in Bülach 10.00 a.m. Olav Schmidt (German)
- in Baden 10.00 a.m. Gjergj Lushka, Shyqyri Muço (English)
- in Embrach 10.00 a.m. Zoltán Kovács (English)

For the minutes:

Markus Bach, Secretary CC CSE

These minutes of the 20th Meeting of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe from March 13 - 16, 2025 in Winterthur (Switzerland) was examined and declared correct.

The examiners of the protocol:

Christine Schneider and Serge Frutiger

**Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe
Opening Worship with Communion
Thursday, March 13 at 14:15**

GATHERING

Prelude

GREETING

CALL TO WORSHIP

God of unity, God of togetherness,
We come to this time and this space just as we are.

We come hesitantly,
weighed down by the disappointments and sorrows of the past.

**Grace to you and peace,
from the God who is and who was
and who is to come.**

We come wearily,
Carrying many responsibilities and worries of the present.

**Grace to you and peace,
from the God who is and who was
and who is to come.**

We come hopefully,
knowing that the presence of God will not be limited by our human constructs.

**Grace to you and peace,
from the God who is and who was
and who is to come.**

We come thankfully,
discovering abundance that comes not from power, status or achievement, but
from love.

**Grace to you and peace,
from the God who is and who was
and who is to come.**

Adapted from Katherine Hawker, <http://liturgyoutside.net/>

HYMN: 109, Creating God, Your Fingers Trace to Danish tune

Creating God, your fingers trace
The bold designs of farthest space;
Let sun and moon and stars and light
And what lies hidden praise your might.

Sustaining God, your hands uphold
Earth's myst'ries known or yet untold;
Let water's fragile blend with air,
Enab'ling life, proclaim your care.

Redeeming God, your arms embrace
All now despised for creed or race;
Let peace, descending like a dove,
Make known on earth your healing love.

Indwelling God, your gospel claims
One fam'ly with a billion names;
Let every life be touched by grace
Until we praise you face to face.

PRAYER – Iris Bullinger in French

God who creates, sustains and remakes:

We have crossed rivers, seas, mountains and valleys to arrive at this place.

We are grateful for the privilege of being physically together at one body: one conferencing body, one visible manifestation of Christ's body.

Yet we do not arrive empty-handed.

We arrive with our ideas, our energy, our creativity, our hopes and our dreams.

We also bring with us our fatigue, our worries, our anxiety.

In sum, we arrive with our whole humanity.

Our scriptures remind us that you came to us in your full humanity—as Jesus Christ who experienced the pleasures and pain of living in the flesh—and that you blessed the whole of humanity which you lovingly crafted in your image.

We dare to ask that you come to us once more, in this moment, in this space.

Touch our brokenness, heal our wounds, refresh our worn-out bodies and souls.

Fortify our hearts, enliven our spirits, sharpen our minds and soften our speech.

Bless our work: our common work of worship, as well as our work of holy conferencing.

May your unconditional love guide us in all things.

Amen.

PROCLAMATION

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

Holy God, our human ways are insufficient and unsustainable. We are weary of our ways. Open our hearts and minds to your way as we turn our attention to your message to us. Soften our resistance and continue calling us to the way of peace and justice. Amen.

PSALTER – Psalm 34

Refrain:

Come and Fill Our Hearts, *The Faith We Sing* 2157

Come and fill our hearts with your peace. You, alone, O Lord, are holy.
Come and fill our hearts with your peace. Alleluia!

- ¹ I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
- ² **My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
let the humble hear and be glad.**
- ³ O magnify the Lord with me,
and let us exalt his name together.
- ⁴ **I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.**
- ⁵ Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.
- ⁶ **This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord,
and was saved from every trouble.**
- ⁷ The angel of the Lord encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.
- ⁸ **O taste and see that the Lord is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him. Refrain**
- ⁹ O fear the Lord, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.
- ¹⁰ **The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.**
- ¹¹ Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
- ¹² **Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?**
- ¹³ Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.

14 Depart from evil, and do good;

seek peace, and pursue it. Refrain

¹⁵ The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their cry.

**16 The face of the Lord is against evildoers,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.**

¹⁷ When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears,
and rescues them from all their troubles.

**18 The Lord is near to the broken-hearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.**

¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the Lord rescues them from them all.

**20 He keeps all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.**

²¹ Evil brings death to the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

**22 The Lord redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned. Refrain**

EPISTLE READING: Ephesians 2:11-22, Martina Chlupáčková (czech)

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called 'the uncircumcision' by those who are called 'the circumcision'—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—¹²remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

SUNG RESPONSE: Meine Hoffnung und meine Freude (EMK 361)

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful, in the Lord I will rejoice!
Look to God, do not be afraid;
lift up your voices: the Lord is near,
lift up your voices: the Lord is near.

Meine Hoffnung und meine Freude, meine Stärke, mein Licht
Christus meine Zuversicht
Auf dich vertrau ich und fürchte mich nicht
Auf dich vertrau ich und fürchte mich nicht

GOSPEL – John 14:23-29, Adrian Mysliński (Polish)

²³Jesus answered him, 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. ²⁵ 'I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. ²⁸You heard me say to you, "I am going away, and I am coming to you." If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

SUNG RESPONSE: Meine Hoffnung und meine Freude (EMK 361)

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful, in the Lord I will rejoice!
Look to God, do not be afraid;
lift up your voices: the Lord is near,
lift up your voices: the Lord is near.

Meine Hoffnung und meine Freude, meine Stärke, mein Licht
Christus meine Zuversicht
Auf dich vertrau ich und fürchte mich nicht
Auf dich vertrau ich und fürchte mich nicht

SERMON: **Bishop Harald Rückert**

Interlude

RESPONSE

HYMN: Come Now, O Prince of Peace, *The Faith We Sing* 2232
Come now, O Prince of Peace, make us one body,
Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile your people.

Come now, O God of love, make us one body,
Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile your people.

Come now and set us free, O God our Savior,
Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile all nations.

Come, Hope of unity, make us one body,
Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile all nations.

INTERCESSORY PRAYERS BEN NAUSNER IN GERMAN

Refrain

Give Peace, *The Faith We Sing* 2156

Give peace to every heart.
Give peace to every heart.
Give peace... Lord.
Give peace... Lord.

Gracious God, you are the one who speaks peace to the wind and storms. Today we pray for our friends, neighbors, and family members suffering from the storms of life.

For those suffering from financial storms, we pray for provision, opportunity, and help.

For those swirling in storms of conflict, we pray for good counsel, cool heads, and humility. **Refrain**

For those tossed in the waves of addiction, we pray for healing, restoration, and resources.

For those living with the thunder of domestic violence, we pray for safety, escape, and relief.

For those discouraged by the constant storms of prejudice and injustice, we pray for justice, equality, and liberation. **Refrain**

For those children growing up in perilous times and changing weather, we pray for guidance, assurance, and a sense of purpose.

For those living along coastlines all over the globe, affected by hurricanes, tsunamis, rising water temperatures, and rapidly changing geography, we pray for rescue. **Refrain**

You are the calmer of the storm. The wind and waves obey you.
Deliver your people from trouble today and guide us into safe harbor.
Amen. **Refrain**

INVITATION

CHRIST OUR LORD INVITES TO HIS TABLE ALL WHO LOVE HIM,
WHO EARNESTLY REPENT OF THEIR SIN
AND SEEK TO LIVE IN PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER.
THEREFORE, LET US CONFESS OUR SIN BEFORE GOD AND ONE ANOTHER.

CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

God of Justice, God of Compassion,
God of Sacred and Scandalous ways,
We have so much still to learn.
By your grace, we have come to know love more deeply –
its mess, its complexity, its stubborn and tender truths transform us more each day.
Through fires that refine and valleys of death, you have guided us.
You draw us into the heart of Wisdom,
Turning us towards hope that liberates.
But still, O God, we struggle to trust in you.
And so, when we are afraid. Or hurt. Or weary...
We betray the very One who brought us thus far.
We confess, we still shame Jesus, when he turns over tables.
We confess, we still condemn Jesus, when he breaks the rules to which we are loyal.
Our priorities are not always your own.
Search our hearts, O God, and see if there is any fear within us.
Meet us there with your good news that sets the captives free.
Forgive us from the harm we have done as we seek to harm no more.

(pause in silent prayer)

Beloveds, God does not abandon us to the systems that destroy.
God does not bind us to our regrets.
Or forever hold us to what we once believed.
God says, come and follow!
Know forgiveness and sin no more.
Love abounds. And Justice shall be manifest!
Wherever new life is desired,
may the peace of Christ be welcomed among us.
Thanks be to God who leads us on paths of resurrection.

THE PEACE

May you be at peace in mind, peace in body, and peace with your neighbors,
family, and friends. May the peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Take this moment to pass the peace of Christ.

HYMN OF PREPARATION: *Singing Grace 23, You are holy / Du bist heilig*

COMMUNION

The Holy One be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to God.

Let us give thanks to God, in whose image we are made.

To the Creator of all, we give thanks and praise.

Divine Protector, Defender of Life, your love for this world is everlasting. As oceans burn and species go extinct, our children are made vulnerable at school and our neighbors are denied at our borders, there is so much reason to despair. But you, O God, refuse to abandon us to destruction. Christ takes on flesh. In the midst of struggle, you are glimpses of hope, encounters of freedom, tastes of what satisfies when so much leaves empty. In these incarnate moments, we sense the closeness of your Kindom.

**Holy, Holy, Holy One
God of justice and love
Heaven and earth are full of your wonder
Hosanna, among us**

You, O God, reorder the world into right-relationship.

You lift high those made low.

You humble the arrogant.

You hear the earth groaning under capitalism and consumption
and your fire burns in the hearts of your prophets.

With this hope and assurance, we turn to the witness of Jesus whose teachings reveal the way to liberation. We seek his wisdom. We practice his courage. We remember his radical commitment to love.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus shared a meal with his companions.

He took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to his disciples and said:

“This is my body which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.”

After the meal, he took the cup, blessed it, and shared it saying:

“This cup that is poured out is the new covenant.”

In remembrance of the love that saves us,
we proclaim the mystery of our faith:

**Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.**

May the Spirit come and settle upon these gifts. Making this bread and this cup be for us a Holy Encounter. Reminding us that Christ is with us. That Resurrection is a promise granted to us. That the Kingdom is always closer than we can imagine. May we be nourished, that we might nourish others.

In collective longing for a taste of your Kingdom on earth,
we join together in echoing the prayer of Jesus in the language of our heart:

Our Father / Unser Vater

Because there is one loaf,
we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.
The bread which we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

The cup over which we give thanks is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

[Invitation to Table]

Music during distribution

Prayer after receiving

Beloved One, if we grow weary in love, may this meal live on as a reminder of what sustains us. In seeking the flourishing, you intend for us, our neighbors, and this planet, keep our hearts tender, our spirits alive, and our senses aware of the beauty that surrounds. With gratitude for your abiding presence, we pray. Amen.

SENDING FORTH

HYMN: *Singing Grace 30*, Komm, Herr, segne uns

BENEDICTION – **Bishop Harald Rückert**

Postlude

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe
Opening Worship with Communion
Sermon of Bishop Harald Rückert

"Shalom" - John 14:27

Opening service ZK-MSE 2025, Winterthur

Preaching about "peace" - relevant, not just somehow "right" - is a particular challenge these days. There is a lot of talk about peace at the moment, precisely because there is no peace (in Ukraine, in Congo, in the Holy Land and its neighboring countries, in so many other places in the world). The brutal war of aggression in Ukraine is now in its third year in our immediate vicinity.

The biblical mandate to be peacemakers and the condemnation of war as a means of politics are beyond question. But how can this peace mission be lived out in the concrete situation?

The assessment of arms deliveries to Ukraine for self-defense and to protect the civilian population from a merciless aggressor has led to strong disputes. Talks about peace are being conducted in a rather unpeaceful and aggressive manner in some places (if people are still talking to each other at all). The role of the USA under an unpredictable president, for whom deals for his own benefit are more important than humanity, basic liberal values and honesty, makes everything even more explosive.

This and much more is buzzing through my mind as I prepare the sermon. People suffer. People are hurt - physically and mentally. People die. All this and much more must occur when dealing with the topic of "Shalom" if we don't want to hide away in pious inwardness! The members of the CC are entitled to hear something clear and groundbreaking about all this! - The pressure I am under is growing and growing. I almost regret agreeing to give this sermon at short notice: *"What have you got yourself into!"*

Dear all, from this struggle with the topic and the reality in which we find ourselves, a first, clear aspect for this sermon has emerged for me: The matter of peace - on a large and small scale - overwhelms me, hopelessly overwhelms us all. So I formulated the first sentences of my sermon to you as sentences to me, the preacher: *"Bishop Harald, become humble! Remain humble in what you demand of yourself and others when it comes to peace. Put aside your earth-shattering thoughts for a moment. Hold your anger about inhuman injustice in check for a moment. Put the pain you feel in the face of thousands of people suffering and dying out of your own hands for a moment and into the hands of God, who hurts at least as much as you do."*

Not an easy exercise. But I have felt how it has gradually opened up spaces that were previously inaccessible to me. And that's *what* I want to try to do *with you* in this sermon. It is my prayer that God's shalom will flow into our hearts, into our community and into this Central Conference meeting and that it will touch and fill us.

1. Looking from the future to the present

Shalom - this biblical term is usually rendered as "peace". In the Luther Bible (2017), the word "peace" appears almost 400 times. "Shalom" therefore plays a very important role in the Bible. But what exactly does shalom mean?

When a person can say: I am well all round, in body, soul and spirit. And not just for me alone, but also for all living beings near and far - then there is shalom.

Shalom is much more than the absence of war or even just the absence of strife.

Shalom is the great vision of a life together in which violence is overcome, in which injustice ceases, in which relationships are healed, in which all human activity is balanced with the rest of the Sabbath.

"Shalom" is therefore not simply the opposite of "war". Rather, it is an antithesis to "chaos". In the story of creation, chaos is described as the original state; God then intervenes in an orderly fashion. The beginning of shalom is thus set by him.

"Shalom" concerns all dimensions of life: living together as a family, the community of peoples, the relationship with nature and creation as a whole, the relationship with oneself and, last but not least, a good relationship with God. "Shalom" is a very comprehensive term.

This great term also has a very simple and beautiful meaning in everyday life. All greetings in Hebrew express the wish for peace: *"Peace be with you"* - "Shalom" in Hebrew (*"Salam aleikum" in Arabic*). This greeting shows how deeply rooted the desire for peace and all-round happiness is in people's everyday needs. Fascinating: shalom as a big concept also finds its place in "small" everyday life!

Shalom is the great promise of God; God's future for us, his creatures, and the whole of creation. God created us and our world with this future in mind. He himself is unswervingly committed to this future. Shalom - that is what everything strives towards for God's sake. And since the death and resurrection of Jesus at the latest, it has been clear that neither death nor the devil, neither malice nor lies can change this. *"Christ is our peace"* (Eph 2:14). He is God's shalom in person. He, the Risen and Living One, is the guarantor of the promise.

Many biblical passages make one thing unmistakably clear: shalom is something that we humans can never bring about on our own. The OT in particular tells us that we humans can do a lot to hinder, disrupt or even destroy peace. But in order to actually realize shalom, God must act. This clearly marks the limits of our human abilities. *How did I have to preach to myself at the beginning? - "Bishop Harald, become humble! Remain humble in what you demand of yourself and others when it comes to peace."* Shalom - that is God's great vision and God's great promise for us. He personally vouches for this future.

Dear sisters and brothers, instead of staring anxiously and spellbound at the horrors and wickedness of the present, we can widen our gaze. We can look at our present from God's future. This perspective changes our today. This promise shapes our actions here and now. With God's future before our eyes and with an unwavering longing for shalom in our hearts, we can acknowledge that there is war, injustice and great suffering. But we do not need to stand still. And we do not need to hopelessly overwhelm ourselves; we do not need to sink into despair.

Shalom - We can look from the goal of all things to the present. This liberates. That relieves. It gives hope far beyond our human comprehension.

2. Grow from the inside out

Comprehensive, just peace - shalom - cannot be decreed from outside and certainly not enforced by force of arms. Peace can only come from within. Only then is it lasting. Peace begins within us. Those who live in peace with themselves and with God, i.e. those who have tasted shalom - the holistic well-being and salvation bestowed by God - can pass on peace to those around them. This is exactly what the post-Easter encounter is all about, as recorded in the Gospel of John (John 20: 19-23):
19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. **21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.** As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

After Jesus' death, the disciples had lost their inner peace. Fear, despair, helplessness and disappointment had taken them captive. They were crammed together in a small room. Then Jesus steps into their midst. The one they thought was dead is alive and well! *"Peace be with you!"* says Jesus. He says it twice with great emphasis. Twice he speaks peace to their sore souls; *his* peace, shalom. Twice. Peace is so difficult to believe and to live. But twice Jesus asks them at the same time: *"Stop your self-reproach! Stop your self-pity. Let go of your doubts. Let the peace of God be yours. Stand up. Take courage."* And then:

(...) Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld. Peace grows from the inside out. Reconciled with one's own life and with God, peace can be passed on, peace can be established among people.

Whoever looks from the goal of all things - God's shalom - to the present, and whoever allows themselves to be touched and filled by God's shalom again and again, will be granted the happiness that Jesus speaks of in the Sermon on the Mount: **"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God."** (Mt 5:9)

Peace grows from the inside out.

3. Searching and chasing

Making peace? - A Russian poet tells the following story:

One day, he sees children playing in the street. He goes over and asks: "What are you playing?" "We're playing war," they reply. "Do you think that's a good game?" he asks back. "If you injure or kill each other in the game, if you destroy and annihilate - do you think that's right? I've got an idea: why don't you play peace?" The

children look at him with wide eyes and finally they are enthusiastic. "Oh yes, that's what we want to play!" they shout in unison. The poet walks on happily - but only as far as the next street corner. There the children catch up with him with an important question: "Father, tell us how to play peace!"

That's a really good question: how do you play peace? Peace among us doesn't just happen. And there are no universal rules for peace that work at the touch of a button. No one simply knows how peace works in a particular situation. No one is able to make peace just like that. A word from Psalm 34:15 reminds us: **"Seek peace and pursue it."** When it comes to peace, it is often a matter of seeking and pursuing. When fronts are hardened in a dispute over an inheritance or over the "right" music in a church service, it is not always immediately apparent what leads to peace. What is true on a small scale is even more true on a large scale. In so many places in our world, people are tormented by brute force and arbitrariness. Efforts to bring peace there often resemble a race of hares and hedgehogs. As soon as a little peace is in sight in one place, the next conflict erupts all the more powerfully in another. Not to mention the realization that a peaceful life in one region of our world is often "bought" with injustice and discord in other areas. The prayer of Psalm 34 certainly did not have these global challenges in mind. He is speaking to people who live in manageable contexts. But the terms "seeking" and "pursuing" still seem appropriate to me.

"Playing" peace instead of war is no easy task. We need others to join us in searching and struggling for what truly brings peace. In this context, the psalm refers to wide-awake senses; open eyes and ears. It speaks of disciplined speech that is committed to the truth and refrains from agitation. Being peacemakers is a great task. We need perseverance and an undaunted heart to help make peace and justice kiss (Ps 85:11), because justice and shalom can never be separated. None of this is easy or comfortable. Nevertheless, this is exactly what we are called to do.

"Seek" and "pursue" - a passion for peace is needed. It must spread. It needs a deep longing that the struggle of some against others, the scourge of war, which in the end only produces losers, will finally come to an end. The longing for peace is much more than just an expression of a need for harmony that avoids conflict at all costs. Pursuing peace means: desperately wanting to finally overcome all suffering that is associated with obstruction, restriction or destruction of life. Passion for and longing for peace are nourished by God's shalom, by God's great vision for his creation, which is already unfolding its power among us.

At this point, let me briefly tell you a story that shows how creative "seeking and pursuing" together can be; how, despite all seriousness, God's shalom also contains a good pinch of humor:

It has now become a sad routine. As usual, right-wing extremists have announced a march in Wunsiedel, a small town in Upper Franconia, to mark the Volkstrauertag. As always, there will be a torchlight procession through the town to commemorate so-called "heroes". Wunsiedel is the town where Rudolf Hess (Adolf Hitler's deputy) was buried until 2011 and therefore still attracts neo-Nazis and right-wing extremists today. In 2014, something new happened: without it being known beforehand,

the people of Wunsiedel turned this march into a charity run. For every meter that a right-wing extremist marcher ran, sponsors were found who donated money to the EXIT drop-out program. EXIT is an organization that supports people leaving the neo-Nazi scene. The "brown" demonstrators were quite surprised when they saw posters around them cheering them on during their march: "March even further! Every meter counts and brings money!"

Other banners read: "Nimble as greyhounds, tough as leather - and generous as never!"

Or: "Final sprint instead of final victory". There were even refreshment stations with bananas under the heading "Mein Mampf" (in reference to Hitler's book "Mein Kampf"). In the end, around 10,000 euros were raised to help people from the right-wing extremist scene leave the scene.

Seek peace and pursue God's shalom - it can obviously be fun to do this together.

4. Close

Shalom - that is God's great vision and God's great promise for us. We should look to the present from this goal of all things.

Peace grows from the inside out. Those who allow themselves to be touched and filled by God's shalom again and again will become people of peace. And: "**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God**"

Of searching and pursuing together. God's shalom nourishes our passion for and longing for peace and is already unfolding its power among us.

Dear brothers and sisters, *"May the peace of God, which surpasses all our understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."* (Phil 4:7)

Amen.

Bishop Harald Rückert, March 2025

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe Evening Prayer Thursday, March 13, 2025

Quiet entrance piece
Welcome and opening prayer
Short refrain "Christ is our peace" Singing Grace #29 2x DE/EN
Text Psalm 4
"Christ is our peace" 2x DE/EN
Reflection
Moment of silence
Blessing
Closing song / refrain EM 641/ UMH 685

OPENING PRAYER

Good Lord,
after a long day where we might have gotten up at the crack of dawn,
we want to pause and come to rest.

We put aside what occupies our minds.
What has heated up our minds, we let cool down.
What makes our hearts restless, we entrust to you.

Let your peace come to us,
when we pray to you now.
Let Christ be our peace
and the light that illuminates our darkness.
We ask this of you through him, our Lord. Amen.

SOME THOUGHTS ON PSALM 4

When I agreed to take part in this evening prayer a few weeks ago, I immediately had a thought and a song in my head: "Abendfrieden" (Evening Peace).
Evening peace: For me, that means coming to rest. Looking back on the day. What did I do? Who did I meet? What conversation moved me?
To end the day, to gradually become tired, to formulate a prayer in one's mind, to drift off to sleep.

This has not been going so well for some time now.
The question always hangs in the air: How will I wake up tomorrow?

What will have changed overnight?

What will the morning news report about new tariffs, crazy ideas to buy countries in a colonialist way and the repetition of old lies?

Yes, there are people who are very fond of vanity and lying and carry them around in front of them. They not only upset my order of the world, quite contrary to my sense of justice.

How do I find my way back to evening peace?

The psalmist calls for calm and serenity:

"In your anger, do not sin; when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be still." (V5)

So, seek the evening peace.

Don't be confused by the new things that are announced overnight.

Carry the certainty within you:

Above all those who govern, there is another who governs.

He will protect and preserve me, my loved ones

and all those who seek him in this night.

He makes sure that we sleep in peace.

We can live safely with him. Amen.

SILENCE

PRAYER OF BLESSING

God, my Father,

put your hand under my head

and let your light shine over me.

Hide my soul in your peace

and be with me today and tomorrow

and in every dark hour,

until your day, radiantly beautiful,

rises over this world. Amen.

Esther Handschin

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe
Bible study by Üllas Tankler - March 14, 2026
"Shalom with you" (John 20:21)

Taize "The Kingdom of God is Justice and Peace"

Introduction: My personal background

I have to admit that I have a bit of a problem with the term PEACE. You could say that I grew up with this word.

But because Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union until 1991, the word did not mean shalom, but was rather a weapon of communist ideology. One of the foundations of this ideology was the message that the Soviet Union was the only country in the world that stood and fought for peace.

Lilli Promet, Primavera (1971)

Namely "fights"! An example from fiction. In a novel in Estonia from the Soviet era, 1971, there is such a dialog:

Saskia says: "There will be no more war, Märten. Everyone wants peace." The man replies: "Sure. Everyone is demanding peace so aggressively that it creates an atmosphere of war. Listen to how threatening the peace songs sound."

Maybe that sounds a bit familiar to my friends from Eastern Europe - but you're mostly younger than me.

1. basic meaning

Various Old Testament scholars are fairly unanimous on the basic meaning of shalom. According to Schmidt and Delling's definition, it means:

"intact, whole, complete, well preserved, healthy, whole. The range of meanings is extremely broad. Peace therefore only covers a single aspect of intact wholeness. This wholeness is particularly present when there is no state of war or no mood of war.

A man of peace is someone with whom there is fellowship, trust, that is, a friend. [...]."

And also: "well-being", "collective wellbeing", "life-enhancing orderliness of the world". It also refers to the "state that leaves no unfulfilled wishes unfulfilled". But the basic meaning of the word almost always refers to the idea of "wholeness".

Jenni/Westermann show that here are two apparently related ideas involved,

On the one hand, "peace, friendliness", often in clear contrast to war and enmity, on the other hand, "well-being, prosperity, happiness", whereby the emphasis is often very strongly on concrete material goods.¹

According to Pedersen², shalom means everything that belongs to a healthy, harmonious life, the full development of the powers of the healthy soul.

¹ Gillis Gerleman, 1912-1993, a Swedish Lutheran theologian and Old Testament scholar (Wikipedia)

² Johannes Pedersen (1883-1977). Imselt viidatud tema suurele teosele "Israel : its life and culture".

It can also be said that shalom is characterized by the fact that it means more than what is just exactly enough. Shalom is more than "enough" according to ample measure - in contrast to another, related word *daj*, which means "exactly enough", the scarce need.

Jacob Neusner points out that, for the sake of peace, behaviors are permitted that otherwise would be forbidden.

e.g. helping non-Jews who do not adhere to the Israelite agricultural rules, or lending household items to Jews that they could use unlawfully.

In Jewish tradition, *shalom* is also one of the **names of God** and, according to extremely strict rules, the word may not be pronounced in an unclean place or a toilet.

According to Jewish scholars, shalom is the ultimate purpose of the Torah (*Tanhuma Shofetim* 18) and all major Jewish prayers conclude with the prayer for peace and with the hope that the same peace that reigns in heavenly spheres shall also reign on earth. ³

Rabi Hillel defines **the heart of Judaism** with the maxim: "Love peace and pursue it."⁴

A term that means too much?

And that is also a problem. If a term already means too much, we are in danger of losing the actual meaning altogether.

Like love: we love children and skiing, we love salami and classical music, we love Nutella and Facebook...

This does not help us if we only add meanings.

2. Old Testament

AT: Justice - social aspect

Jeremiah

Let us first take a closer look at the OT. The prophets, especially Jeremiah, help us to see the importance of peace in social relationships. We don't just hear about the sweet beauty of shalom. What we hear is that talk of peace without concrete action, without justice, is a lie.

Peace becomes an empty word (as in Soviet ideology!). The prophets such as Amos and Jeremiah "consider the proclamation of salvation to be dreams of the heart, wishful thinking and lies."⁵

Jr 6:14 They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying: Peace, peace [=shalom, shalom], when there is no peace. [= Jr 8:11; 23:17; 29:8-9; Hs 13:10; Mi 3:5]

³ The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion, 523. Jacob Neusner: "Achieving peace is the purpose of the entire Torah." - Dictionary ..., p. 574

⁴ Jacob Neusner, Dictionary ..., p.574: "For the sake of peace, behaviors that might otherwise be forbidden are permissible, for example, assisting Gentiles who do not follow Israelite agricultural rules or lending domestic items to Jews who might use them illicitly (Mishnah Shebiit 5:9). To assure peace, even truth may be sacrificed (B. Yebamo |65b). Hillel defines the heart of Judaism with the maxim, "Love peace and pursue it" (M. Abot 1:12)."

⁵ Schmidt, Delling, "Wörterbuch zur Bibel" 'Frieden/Heil'. S.152

Jeremiah 23:17 They keep saying to those who despise me, "The Lord says: You will have peace."

That is precisely the problem, says Jeremiah: the empty slogans of peace without a commitment to justice in society. Shalom, shalom! in this context sounds something like "Everything is fine!"⁶ A proclamation of salvation in such a situation is just a "self-conceived deception" (Jr 14:14, vrd 23:16.26)⁷

The absence of peace must be taken seriously!

God does not expect us to talk *more* and *louder* about peace. We are currently experiencing a war in Europe. Even if you have not visited Ukraine in recent years - we are all experiencing this war in one way or another. The absence of peace must be taken seriously!

It does not mean that salvation is impossible. The prophets of Scripture also promise salvation - at least after the judgment (Jer 29:11).

The question of a just peace

Example from Ukraine

I have observed several times that when we are together with our brothers and sisters from Ukraine, they ask us to pray for victory. We from the West often talk about peace and pray for peace: "The main thing is that peace comes". They answer: "No. Please pray for victory."

What lies behind this is the understanding that peace at any price is not sustainable. Peace is only real peace if it is a **just** peace. There cannot be peace at the cost of someone's discord or misfortune.

This is actually in the spirit of biblical shalom

Jenni/Westermann explain: "The [word shalom], which is usually understood as "wholeness, integrity" or as "peace", is closely related to the basic idea of payment and retribution, and as with the other word forms, the "retribution" is also ambivalent here: it can be positive (1) or negative (2)."⁸

This means that sometimes you have to do something positive and good in order to achieve shalom, but elsewhere punishment is necessary in order to (re)create a just harmony (Mic 5; Isa 53:5).

Quite simply, shalom depends on righteousness (Ps 85:9-11; Isa 32:17) - both for individuals and for nations. Consequently, as Isaiah says, the wicked have no shalom:

"There is no peace for those who are evil, says the Lord" (GNB, Js 48:22; =57:21; Js 32:17).⁹

⁶ Explanations from the Jerusalem Bible.

⁷ 23:26 "who prophesy the deceit of their own heart?"; 14:14 "deceit of their own minds"

⁸ Jenni/Westermann, p.927

⁹ "For individuals and nations, shalom depends on righteousness (Ps 85:10; Isa 32:17), consequently, the wicked have no shalom (Isa 48:22). Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period, p.574.

Talk: 2 sculptures at the United Nations

Image 1: Swords into plowshares¹⁰

In the garden of the United Nations headquarters in New York City stands a bronze sculpture by Yevgeny Vuchetich. It is called "Swords into Plowshares" - based on the biblical motif from Isaiah

Js 2:4 "... They will hammer their swords into ploughs. They'll hammer their spears into pruning tools. Nations will not go to war against one another. They won't even train to fight anymore."

This was a gift from the Soviet Union to the UN in 1959. With this gift to the UN, the Soviet party and state leadership reaffirmed in the person of Nikita Khrushchev¹¹ its then officially declared readiness for peaceful coexistence with the "class enemy".

What did I just tell you about my youth? And here you can see the gift from the communist head of state: a sculpture that speaks of peace in a biblical sense...!

FIG 2: The knotted pistol¹²

Here is another sculpture, also in front of the UN building. It was created by the Swedish artist Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd (1934 - 2016). He created the sculpture in 1980 after his friend, the legendary Beatles singer John Lennon, was shot dead in New York. The oversized pistol sculpture is called "Non-Violence" and is considered a reminder of non-violence.

Brief discussion with the neighbor

Take a look at these two pictures. I invite you for a short exchange with your neighbor:

How are they similar in their meaning?

And what are the differences between the two sculptures

3. New Testament

Meaning in the NT: *eirene*

We know that the New Testament is written in Greek. The word there is *eirene*. And although in the LXX (Greek version of the OT) *shalom* is translated as *eirene*, the meaning of this word is much narrower. '*eirene*' only has a negative meaning: war is absent, enmity is not present.¹³

But - this is not about Greek language or literature. The Jews of Jesus' time thought in Old Testament categories. Their world of thought comes from the OT and Judaism. This means that although we read in the NT *eirene*, we must bear in mind that they thought ***shalom***. According to Schmidt and Delling:

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/ungifts/let-us-beat-swords-ploughshares>; https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schwerter_zu_Pflugscharen

¹¹ From 1953 to 1964 as First Secretary of the CPSU

¹² <https://www.un.org/ungifts/non-violence-0>

¹³ The word *eirene* (peace) in classical Greek is primarily negative, denoting absence or end of war. - A Theological Word Book of the Bible.

"The Old Testament breadth of meaning also affects the NT. [...] Salvation can mean in particular the position before God and the relationship to him [...] It is God's or Christ's action that makes man whole, that he is brought out of the enmity against God."¹⁴

Jacob Neusner sums it up like this:

"The lexical range of *eirene* [in LXX] is extended in Jewish-Greek literature and in the New Testament to that of *shalom*".¹⁵

NT: Shalom as a personal experience

Shalom as a gift: John 14:27

What particularly inspires me personally is that peace in the NT is first and foremost a gift and not primarily a task. I believe that many of us have seen peacemakers who have not experienced shalom in their own hearts.

It begins with the gift. Jesus says:

Jn 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

Jesus did not speak Greek with his disciples. So, shalom sounds here at first too commonplace, like a greeting at a meeting - or now at a farewell. Shalom was both a word for "Hello!" and "Goodbye".

But here it was definitely not meant as "Bye-bye, shalom with you". That would be "peace as the world gives". The everyday wish for peace would actually just be a *wish*, just a human hope. What Jesus means here is something else.

Jesus speaks of peace as a gift. In any case, this gift is not a "thing", not something that is finished and complete. This gift of peace is not something about which we can say: "Now I've got it. I've got it, you haven't".

Peace as a living fruit

This gift of peace, the true shalom of Jesus, is living and dynamic. According to Paul's words in Gal 5:22, peace is a "fruit of the Spirit". So, it is not something that exists or does not exist, but an organic gift that can grow.

Growth begins within us, in our hearts. And if this spiritual gift really and truly grows, it will **be greater than ourselves**. Experiencing shalom does not simply mean that we now feel good, that we can maintain beautiful harmony within ourselves. For example: nothing bothers us anymore, life is as beautiful as a flower...

No, the fruit of peace in this case would still be far too small. If it grows properly, it will - as I said - be bigger than we are. We will be able to pass on this gift of shalom. Then Jesus will "call us blessed" - with words from the Sermon on the Mount:

Mt 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁴ Schmidt, Delling, p.153. 154

¹⁵ Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period, p.574. "The lexical range of *eirene* [in LXX] is expanded to that of *shalom* in Jewish-Greek literature and in the New Testament."

But once again: first, this peace of Jesus must find a good place and good soil in our hearts. Henri Nouwen, the Catholic theologian who wrote a lot about spirituality, said in an interview in 1995, a year before his death:

"The problem is, as soon as you sit down and get quiet, you think: Oh, I forgot this ... Your inner life is like a banana tree full of monkeys jumping up and down."¹⁶

Is our inner soil ready to accept this peace and allow it to grow?

NT: Social issues (again)

We must not forget that *shalom as a gift* wants to grow into *shalom as a task*. It cannot simply remain hidden within us. This living spiritual gift changes us in order to be there for others.

Polarization in society

Our society - as far as I can see in all our countries - needs peacemakers who have embraced shalom and let it grow from their hearts. The big keyword is polarization...

I recently heard about a joke:

There are only two kinds of people in the world: some think there are only two kinds of people, others don't think so.

Of course, all people are different. Nevertheless, I hear more and more often in various countries that many people feel a strong sense of confrontation and polarization in their society. The world seems to be too complicated. In order to cope with life and relationships, many find a solution in simplification. Black or white. For or against...

Recently (2022) a scientist in Estonia told how he was invited to a TV program. The program was a discussion between celebrities about a certain hot topic. He was already ready to agree, but then the program host asked him whether he was for or against this topic. He replied that, as a scientist, he wanted to put forward arguments both for and against. The head of the television program replied that unfortunately the format of this program does not allow that...

If there are only two voices - for and against - this in no way can represent shalom as a whole. Light is only light if it contains several colors. Visible light is actually a mixture of electromagnetic waves of different wavelengths that correspond to different colors. Have you noticed that colors of objects in colored light are distorted?

EXAMPLE: Harmony - King's Singers mp3

I don't want to tell you anything here, but rather let us all feel how beautiful a harmony of different voices can actually be. Let's take about 2 minutes to just be in silence and listen:

¹⁶ The trouble is, as soon as you sit and become quiet, you think, Oh, I forgot this ... Your inner life is like a banana tree filled with monkeys jumping up and down. - Henri Nouwen, Leadership, Spring 1995, p.83.

Result of the polarization

The well-known Franciscan Richard Rohr points out what happens when we live too long in a polarized world of thought and fight the "other":

"We all become a well-disguised reflection of everything we fight too long or too directly. After a while, what we reject determines the energy and frames the questions, and we lose our inner freedom."¹⁷

If we retain our inner freedom, we have "a spectrum of answers, and they are not all predictable," says Richard Rohr.

Paul reminds us that Christ came to free us exactly from this polarization:

[14] For Christ himself is our peace, who has made Jews and Gentiles one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility through his body on the cross. [15] ... His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, [16] and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility ... [17] He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. [18] For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Ephesians 2:14-17)

4. Peace and Climate

Shalom in and for creation

I would like to now conclude with the thought of how beautiful God meant shalom to be for all of creation and how we should strive for this ecological harmony. Do you remember how we started? Shalom as wholeness, integrity, well-being, collective wellbeing ...

Genesis 1:31 God looked at everything he had made, and behold, it was very good.

Paraphrase: God looked at everything he had made: And behold, it was shalom

Of course, we all know that this shalom has been broken. Many books have been written, scientific studies have been carried out, major climate conferences have been convened, agreements have been signed. We can say: we are working with the issue.

We sort our garbage and feel good about it. And at the same time, there seems to be a consensus in our countries that we now need to dramatically increase arms production

How does that fit together? Will we produce climate-friendly armor and ecological ammunition? How does it help if I throw my plastic bag in the right bin or travel by train instead of plane? t

¹⁷ "We all become a well-disguised mirror image of anything that we fight too long or too directly. That which we oppose determines the energy and frames the questions after a while, and we lose our inner freedom. [...] We have a spectrum of responses now, and they are not all predictable." Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011, 2024), 75-77.

If shalom is missing - in our hearts, in our relationships, in society - all efforts to preserve the way of life come to nothing.

In his article on climate change, our Methodist pastor Ole Birch from Denmark referred to James Speth. Speth is a well-known environmental lawyer and has been head of the UN Development Program. Speth writes:

"I used to think that the biggest environmental problems were the loss of biodiversity, the collapse of ecosystems and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could tackle these problems. But I was wrong. The biggest environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with them we need a spiritual and cultural transformation - and we scientists don't know how to do that."¹⁸

At the end

PHOTO: Konstantin in Lviv

The one in the middle of the picture is Konstantin in Lviv, Ukraine. At the beginning of the war in 2022, he lived for a short time in the Methodist shelter in Uzhgorod. Then he was mobilized and sent to the front. He was only able to fight for a month until he was seriously wounded by a rocket attack. He lost his leg and had then to go from operation to operation and various rehabilitations.

For me, this picture sums up what we have discussed here today.

Constantine was not a Christian, and he lost all human hope because of his enormous physical and psychological suffering. But he accepted the shalom of Christ in his heart. Without any great emotional experience - but he felt that he could now go on living. And that was something.

I can see how the church can establish shalom in such situations in these two people, Yulia and Oleg, next to Konstantin. They simply accompanied him, without any big words. They simply were with him, next to him

Yes, the war is much, much worse in reality than we see in this picture. And yet you can sense here the power of shalom. I have sensed this and want to bear witness here to the possibility of shalom.

PRAYER and SONG

¹⁸ "How to Speak Wesleyan and Biblically about Climate Changezu " - "Wesleyan und biblisch über Klimaveränderungen sprechen". <http://fore.yale.edu/news/item/religion-rejuvenates-environmentalism/> [link pärit Ole artiklist, aga tegelikult ei tööta]. Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, article "Religion rejuvenates environmentalism". "I used to think the top environmental problems where biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation - and we scientists don't know how to do that."

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe
Friday, midday prayer, March 14, 2025

Greeting

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1Co 1:3 NIV)

Hymn

Psalm 29 (NIV)

A psalm of David.

Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones,

ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;

worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters;

the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.

The voice of the LORD is powerful;

the voice of the LORD is majestic.

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;

the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,

Sirion like a young wild ox.

The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning.

The voice of the LORD shakes the desert;

the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

The voice of the LORD twists the oaks

and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;

the LORD is enthroned as King forever.

The LORD gives strength to his people;

the LORD blesses his people with peace.

Dear friends,

I have read a poem. Poetry, like music or visual art, expresses through its means something that descriptive language cannot express.

In the age of science and technology, we sometimes need to remind ourselves that there is much more in our world than what we can measure, weigh, document. What we have in front of our eyes is not really everything. What we can touch is not everything. The realm of human emotion alone exceeds the possibilities of material description. What is a smile or a hug? What is - beauty? What is love?

And I'm still on earth. In an old creed we say: I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. God created the visible and commissioned us to subdue it, to explore it, to care for it. God created man in His image, created him to love. The people around us are there to be loved.

Nature and culture are areas of visibility.

However, God also created the invisible that He did not make available to us. We are not surprised, we confess it.

What is surprising is the fact that the invisible God reveals Himself to man. God enters into a relationship with man. The relationship is mutual. It is personal. Then it is understandable that we talk about God. But how can we talk about someone who is beyond the created world? One has no choice but to speak of him in images.

Those who wrote the Bible usually said what God did. In those stories we learn how God acts in the history of nations and individuals.

The psalms are poems. They do not tell stories. They communicate something important to us in a metaphoric language. I'm not sure we always fully understand the images, because they come from a very different background than our own. But perhaps, after all... I won't go into details, I'll just mention a few motifs.

At the beginning of the psalms there are usually exhortations to praise:

Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

Glory is the manifest and powerful presence of God.

God is present and man praises Him.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters;

the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.

Waters, especially in large quantities, are enemies, they are forces of chaos. The voice of the Lord is heard over the chaos that surrounds and threatens man. The LORD is able to control that chaos, to organize it, to define and limit the field of action for the enemy forces.

The LORD's voice sounds mightily over the waters, and in this his glory is manifested.

The voice of the LORD is powerful;

the voice of the LORD is majestic.

The Lord speaks with great authority.

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;

the LORD is enthroned as King forever.

The LORD manifests Himself as Lord over nature (mountains, deserts, forests), but the psalm is there for the sake of the people. The LORD, as king, administers his kingdom well and cares for the well-being of his people.

The LORD gives strength to his people;

the LORD blesses his people with peace.

The mighty LORD, as he has just been introduced, gives strength to his people. And after all the excited and very action-filled descriptions of God's works – *the LORD blesses his people with peace.*

It means: God is powerful enough to establish his peace. We can rely on that. And we are invited to cooperate.

Prayers

Benediction

Hymn

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe
Evening Prayer by Erika Stalcup
Friday, March 14, 2025

Quiet prelude

Welcome

Welcome to this brief evening prayer. Let us gather the joys and worries of the day and offer them to God. As we finish our daily work, let us trust God to continue God's good work while we rest. Let us pray.

Prayer

Loving God, we come to the end of this day. For what has filled our hearts, we give you thanks. For what is still missing, we pray we might find. For what weighs too heavily, we pray for relief. These are dark times, and yet sometimes the darkness reveals unexpected blessings, unexpected courage, and a strange but profound peace that is independent of our surroundings. Grant us this peace in the darkness of the night.

Hymn: 2156, "Give Peace" (x3)

Give peace to every heart.

Give peace to every heart.

Give peace... Lord.

Give peace... Lord.

Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

¹ O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

³ You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night',

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

To the God who dwells in darkness

*Despite much thought and imagery around darkness being evil and something to be ashamed of, human testimony and sacred texts point to a God who is able to be with us in the dark. Consider this prayer that dances around the themes of Psalm 139.

Where can I go that You don't inhabit?

Does the dark intimidate you?

Are You afraid of the dark as I often am?

Do the shadowy places cause You to take pause and carefully consider

Whether You will help me, support me, and guide me?

The words of the psalmist come to my mind as I remember that

"Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day;

The darkness and the light are both alike to you." (Ps. 139:12)

I remember that the dark and the light mingle together for You and

That they are surely terrain that you can cross through.

On the night days, when grief, depression, anxiety weigh me down

Or the lonely days that pierce my soul

I pray to the God that creates in the dark

That moves in the dark

That can play in the dark

That can surely find me in the dark places

At all times knowing, shakily confident at least,

That You're listening and willing.

-Robert Monson

One minute of silence

Hymn: 2156, "Give Peace" (x3)

Give peace to every heart.

Give peace to every heart.

Give peace... Lord.

Give peace... Lord.

Prayer

Loving God,

for the things this day that have brought us joy,

We give you thanks.

Healing Christ,

for the things this day that have brought us sorrow,

Bring peace.

Spirit of life,

in the closing of this day,

Give us rest.

Amen.

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe
Bible study by Monika Zuber - March 15, 2025
"Shalom with you"

Gospel of Luke 6:27-36

- ²⁷ `But to you who are listening I say: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you.
²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.
³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.
³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.
³² `If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.
³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.
³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full.
³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.
³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Introduction

God's message of peace runs through the whole history of salvation. Peace in the biblical sense is not only the absence of conflicts, but a deep sense of harmony, unity and reconciliation with God, oneself and other people.

The eschatological dimension of waiting for God's reign in the peace and blessing of the Kingdom of God can sometimes "put us to sleep". It all depends on how we understand "waiting"? For some people, waiting is associated with a passive attitude of perseverance. It can be associated with a scene in a doctor's waiting room, with a row of chairs or even a comfortable sofa. We don't do anything interesting then, maybe we look at the phone, or look through the newspaper, read a book.

However, this is not the attitude of the Church expecting eschatological salvation. For, God calls us to act, to follow Christ.

An Active Peacebuilding Attitude

Jesus taught that true peace comes from a heart transformed by God's love. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Mt 5:9). Jesus called for forgiveness, love of enemies and reconciliation as ways to peace.

The Holy Spirit as a giver of peace

The Holy Spirit, which Jesus promised to his disciples, is also a source of peace. In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul mentions peace as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). The life of the Church full of the Spirit leads to a deep inner and outer peace.

Peace in interpersonal relationships

Embracing God's peace means pursuing peace in our relationships. Paul encourages believers to live in peace with all as far as it depends on them (Romans 12:18). Forgiveness, patience, and love are key elements of building peace in our families, workplaces, and communities. The way of the Church is a way of peace – it means building creative solutions in many social and ecumenical areas.

Questions to ponder in groups:

How can the Church support the path of reconciliation between man and others in private relationships?

How can we build good bonds in the ecumenical environment, between those who do not always want to talk to each other, or how can we build bonds?

To what extent can the Church play a conciliatory role in the situation of political wars, armed wars or international conflicts?

What are the peaceful ways of building social changes in a situation of social injustice, the phenomenon of modern (economic) slavery, colonialism, global migration?

Conclusion

Peace as a Witness

A life of peace is a powerful witness to the world. Jesus said that all will know us as His disciples if we have love for one another (Jn 13:35). Peace in our relationships and attitudes can draw others to Christ and His Gospel.

Peace is a gift from God that brings deep joy and harmony to our lives. The Holy Scripture encourages us to seek and bring peace in every area of life.

Blessing

Let us be God's co-workers – called by God the Father, supported by the power of the Holy Spirit, following Christ. Let us strive for peace, tirelessly seeking creative solutions and opposing evil, violence and contempt.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, is to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7).

Amen.

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe
Memorial service by Esther Handschin
Saturday, March 15, 9:30 a.m.

GREETING

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Dear sisters and brothers,

This morning we remember five people who have been called away from their ministry here on earth to a heavenly ministry in the years since the last Central Conference meeting in November 2022. In their own way, they have all sought the shalom that the kingdom of God promises us. They have done their utmost to avoid evil and do good, just as Psalm 34:14 says: "Turn away from evil and do good. Look for peace, and go after it."

Of some, we can say that they had a long and fulfilling life. With others, we feel our own pain and the pain of their loved ones that death came too soon or was associated with an aggressive illness. Through death, they no longer walk this earth, but have their home in the heavenly Jerusalem, in the city of God. We hear about this city of God in the reading from Revelation 21:1-6.

REVELATION 21:1-6 (Emil Zaev?)

1 I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth.' The first heaven and the first earth were completely gone. There was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem. It was coming down out of heaven from God. It was prepared like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 I heard a loud voice from the throne. It said, 'Look! God now makes his home with the people. He will live with them. They will be his people. And God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death." And there will be no more sadness. There will be no more crying or pain. Things are no longer the way they used to be.' 5 He who was sitting on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down. You can trust these words. They are true.' 6 He said to me, 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give water to anyone who is thirsty. The water will come from the spring of the water of life. It doesn't cost anything!

THOUGHTS ON THIS

In many ways, the Book of Revelation unfolds images of a kind of counter-world to the world experienced by the first recipients of this biblical book. These images of a different world were intended to help them endure the difficulties, obstacles and misery they experienced.

At a time when they felt abandoned by God, the seer John tells them about the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. In this city, God has pitched his tent, his dwelling place, in the midst of mankind. The distance that had previously prevailed has been overcome. The people of God and God belong together.

At a time when the first Christians had to endure persecution and executions, they hear in the Book of Revelation about a world without death, without suffering, without crying and without pain. What belongs to this world has been overcome. There are different rules in the new world. And God himself will wipe away the tears that cause suffering and hardship.

At a time when everything threatens to collapse, we hear a voice saying: "Behold, I am making all things new! ... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the thirsty from the spring of living water freely." Despite all the parting that we are expected to do again and again, this is a promise that strengthens us: Look to the new that lies in God's possibility! Entrust yourself to the one who gave your life a beginning! He will also give you a good end! Look to him for the source that quenches your thirst!

That is the promise we expect (Rolf Schweizer, EM 681):

God will wipe away all tears.
There will be no more suffering or pain,
no hunger will kill the children,
when Christ appears with the reign of joy.

God will wipe away all tears.
There will be no more war nor strife,
No hatred will divide the peoples,
when Christ appears with the reign of love.

God will wipe away all tears.
There will be neither misery nor death,
no poison will corrupt creation,
when Christ appears with the reign of life.

READING OF THE NAMES OF THE DECEASED

I read out the names in the order of the dates of death:

Vlastislav Maláč, deceased on May 10, 2023. He was a delegate to the Central Conferences of 1969, 1981, 1985 and 1989 and was a member of the Executive Committee from 1989 to 1993 and a member of the Media and Communications Working Group from 1985 to 1993.

Václav Svidenský, deceased on June 16, 2023, was a delegate to the Central Conferences of 1969, 1977, 1981, 1985 and 2001, a member of the Executive Committee from 1977-1989 and a member of the Church and Society Working Group from 1985-1997.

Gerda Reiser, deceased on March 26, 2024. From June 1978 she was secretary to Bishop Franz Schäfer in the Bishop's Office in Zurich - even after his retirement in spring 1989.

Adrian Wenziker, deceased on April 20, 2024. He was a delegate to the 2009, 2013, 2017 and 2022 Central Conferences as well as a member of the Council for Finance and Administration from 1993 to 2023 and its Chairman from 1997. He was also an auditor of the MSE Central Conference treasury and a member of our Central Conference pension board from 2014 to 2023.

Michel Weyer, who died on December 5, 2024, was Professor of Church History and Methodism at Reutlingen School of Theology and a delegate to the Central Conferences of 1969, 1977, 1989, 1997 and 2001. He was also a member of the working groups Mission and Evangelism (1969-1973) and Theology and Ordained Ministries (1981-2005).

In memory of Adrian Wenziker (Stefan Hafner)
Music (song?)

In memory of Vlastislav Malac (Jana Krizova, in english)
Song EM 82,1.3.4

In memory of Gerda Reiser (Esther Handschin)
Song EM 370,1-5

PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Good Lord,
give us the tears we need,
to say goodbye.

Give us the strength to let go inwardly,
so that we ourselves can go on in peace and comfort.

Give us the love we long for,
that make life rich and worth living.

God, you are love, and those who love remain in you and you in them.
You are so close to us, your grace is enough.
Help us to believe that. Amen.

Song EM 395 The Church's One Foundation

BLESSING

Go in peace, for the Lord will strengthen you
with His strength and comfort.

Go in peace, for the Lord accompanies you,
He keeps you in all your ways.

Go in peace, for the Lord is with you
in joy and in sorrow.

Go in peace, for the love of God
does not cease for all eternity.

Amen

Music

In memory of Adrian Wenziker – October 28, 1962 – April 20, 2024

Adrian Wenziker was born on October 28, 1962, as the second of six children in St. Gallen, in eastern Switzerland. Three years later, the family moved near Basel, where his father took over a dental practice. He grew up at a time when there were many children in kindergarten and school and the Sunday school of the United Methodist congregation in the Neubad quarter of Basel was also well filled.

Adrian was a child and a person who quickly came into contact with other people. This was also the case in the vacation colonies in Kandersteg. He was given the name "Schtereo" and anyone who had ever been in conversation with him knew why. You could hear his voice unmistakably above all the others. His enthusiasm for sporting activities such as cycling and playing soccer, he also lived out in the youth work of the Church, with friends and later with his sons. Several cycling tours took him across Europe and one trip even took him as far as Greenland.

As far as his professional career was concerned, he learned the banking business at the Swiss Bank Corporation. Sportswear was now joined by a suit and tie. The child and teenager, who was often late, who was usually the last to pack his luggage and for whom relationships were more important than punctuality, became a precise and focused employee. In addition to this work, Adrian was a great volunteer, first in church youth work and preaching and later, among other things, on the Council on Finance and Administration of our Central Conference from 1993-2023 and, since its foundation in 2014, as a member of the Central Conference Pension Board. He was also a delegate to the Central Conference several times between 2009 and 2022.

Many of my personal encounters with Adrian also took place during this time. Be it encounters in the joint further training at the Swiss Bank Corporation, in his role as auditor of the Central Fund of the Scout movement of the UMC in Switzerland, and, of course, the almost 30 years together on the Council on Finance and Administration and the Pension Board of the Central Conference. From these encounters, Adrian's mischievousness and humor, indeed his almost impish manner – but always combined with serious, responsible work – remain in my best memories.

What many of those who grew up with Adrian could not imagine was that, as a die-hard Basel citizen, he would ever move to Zurich. But love conquers all and so, towards the end of the 1990s, he moved to Zurich to his future wife Käthi. The new surroundings in Zurich also encouraged his desire for a career change. Adrian left the big bank behind and trained as a social worker. His big heart for people and his sense of justice as a social worker for the fourth district of the city of Zurich benefited the people who needed a strong voice.

As a father, he was not only happy about the birth of his two sons. He was also a committed father and a role model in many areas to them, especially through his church and social commitment. It came as a great shock when he was diagnosed with cancer in the fall of 2023, and when it was clear that he only had very little time left to live.

I was able to meet Adrian for the last time at the end of January 2024. Already severely affected by his illness, he dutifully made his way to the Bishop's Office on Badenerstrasse to hand over his duties as Chairman of the Council on Finance and Administration of the Central Conference. For decades, Adrian has served in this function responsibly and prudently. The confidence he had in life after his time in this world, borne by his faith, made a deep impression on me during this last meeting and is a lasting memory of this great man.

The last few months and weeks were reserved for family and friends. Adrian passed away on April 20, 2024. The love and passion for the people he lived for and the faith that sustained him will remain. The biblical words of the prophet Jeremiah stood over his farewell: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* (Jer 29:11)

Source: from notes taken by the family and a friend at the funeral service and memories of Stefan Hafner

(6./8.3.2025 Esther Handschin/Stefan Hafner)

In memory of Vlastislav Maláč (December 22, 1921 - May 10, 2023)

Vlastislav Maláč was born in Vienna. When he was 6 years old, the family moved to Czechoslovakia. His father was a Methodist minister and worked in Vienna (in a Czech-speaking congregation), Bratislava, Pilsen, Slany and Jihlava. Among other things, he translated many hymns from the Methodist hymnal into Czech.

His son Vlastislav Maláč was married, had four sons and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, five generations of descendants. After World War II, he graduated from the School of Electrical Engineering at the Czech University of Technology in Prague and worked at the Research Institute for Communication Technology.

He worked in speech analysis and synthesis. In other words, he taught computers to talk. That was 50 years ago. He actually taught also young preachers, including me, to speak. (His advice was really valuable.)

Throughout his life, he volunteered at the United Methodist Church, and when he retired, he devoted himself fully to that volunteer work. He had forty years to do it. He was a lay preacher. He served as a conference lay leader. He repeatedly represented the United Methodist Church in Czechoslovakia at Central and General Conferences. He translated books on Methodist themes from English into Czech, which was much needed during the Communist era. He took care of the printing of church materials - magazines, books, minutes. He played the organ, piano, mandolin, and sang in the choir. He influenced the lives of many people. He had friends not only among his peers, but also among those much younger. He died at the age of one hundred and one. At the service at which we said goodbye to him, people ranging in age from nineteen to ninety-nine remembered him.

He was a member of my church in Prague. For many years, he came regularly to services and Bible classes, only in the last two weeks of his life he could no longer do so. Until his last days he kept in touch with us. He was interested in what was going on in the church. He knew the joys and concerns of the people around him and prayed for them. I didn't hear him say anything unkind about another person. Likewise, he did not speak of private things that people shared with him in confidence. That's why he was a support to us.

He was a witness of God's grace. I believe he heard:

Well done, good and trustworthy servant... enter into the joy of your master.' (Mat 25:23)

In memory of Gerda Reiser (October 17, 1935 - March 26, 2024)

Gerda Reiser was the youngest of three siblings. She grew up in a Methodist family and was shaped by the life of the congregation in Olten. Sunday school as a child and choir as a teenager was a matter of course. However, she had to go to Zofingen for choir, as the congregation in Olten did not have a choir. When she was old enough, she became a Sunday school teacher herself and helped out at the vacation camps for children and young people.

Later - when she was already in Zurich - she took organ lessons to support the congregational singing at Zurich-Altstetten UMC. And in retirement, she took over naturally the treasury of the small Zurich-Wollishofen congregation, visited elderly church members in retirement homes and organized a large monthly meeting for senior citizens.

Her professional career began with a commercial apprenticeship in Olten. She later changed to Zurich to work for CVB, the printing and publishing house of the UMC. In the same building at Badenerstrasse 69, she took on tasks in Bishop Schäfer's office in 1978, initially part-time and then full-time from January 1, 1979. This varied, intensive work enriched and fulfilled Gerda Reiser greatly. She gave her whole heart to this service. This included more than just general secretarial work. She accompanied people who were passing through Zurich with their shopping if necessary. She helped people in need wherever and however it was necessary. And last but not least, she also organized trips for the bishop to the Eastern Bloc countries, which were difficult to access at the time.

When Bishop Schäfer ended his service as bishop in the spring of 1989, he wrote at the end of his last bishop's message: "Hardly anyone can measure or imagine the tireless dedication with which Miss Gerda Reiser has served our Central Conference and worked in the Bishop's Office over the last ten years. She deserves a special word of thanks and recognition at this point." After Bishop Schäfer's retirement, Gerda Reiser did all kinds of secretarial work for him, but increasingly also took care of his household. She made sure that guests seeking a conversation with the retired bishop's and his advice found a warm atmosphere and were entertained at table.

After the early death of Bishop Schäfer's wife, Gerda Reise increasingly became a surrogate grandmother to the grandchildren - or, as the descendants of Bishop Schäfer themselves affectionately put it, a "cheerful actual grandmother". Despite the fact that her relationship with the Schäfer family had long since become familial, she always called Franz Schäfer affectionately "Mr. Bishop". She, who herself remained single and without children, became a mother for many, allowing them to experience God's kindness in a tangible way.

The interest, concern, and also the intercession for people with whom she was in contact in the bishop's office remained long after that. She was deeply shaped by a cheerful, helpful and grateful nature during her time, which could not be concealed by increasing dementia at the end of her life. Her faith gave her stability. As it she put it in a portrait in the magazine of her last place of residence "My support is God. I know God is with me. He is always with us. Even when we don't notice or don't want to notice."

Secure in this trust, she finished her earthly journey of life on March 26, 2024.

Esther Handschin, partly after Urs Schweizer

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Winterthur, Sunday March 16, 2026

Acts 1:8 – Crossing Borders

Sermon by Bishop Harald Rückert, Germany

Access

"*Crossing borders*" - that's what I want to preach about this morning. You may be surprised by this phrase. It is expected that the church is about **overcoming** boundaries that separate people from others. It is good that the church talks about **breaking down** boundaries that restrict development opportunities or withhold opportunities in life. But "**crossing** boundaries"? - The term "**crossing boundaries**" often resonates with something very unpleasant: Something gets much closer to me than I would like. [*For example, if someone touches me even though I don't want them to, my personal boundaries are being crossed.*] An area is entered that should not actually have been entered. [*When Russia invaded Ukraine and Crimea before that, a red line was crossed; not to mention Hamas' inconceivably inhumane terrorist attack on Israel*]. An unwritten agreement that was previously considered inviolable is simply broken. [*When the Capitol in Washington was stormed two years ago after being cheered on by President-elect Trump, a democratic boundary that was considered sacrosanct was crossed. And Trump remains true to himself to this day, breaking one taboo after another*]

"*Crossing boundaries*"? - Just hold on to these unpleasant feelings and situations for a moment. They are the foil to understand more clearly and sharply what the Bible is about to impose on us. For it is impositions that we are going to think about this morning; impositions in connection with the spread of the gospel.

1. BOOK OF Acts

The so-called "Book of Acts" is the book of the Bible that reports from beginning to end on the crossing of borders - in the literal and figurative sense. It tells of the spread of the Gospel. It tells of how the Holy Spirit blows and blows and how "red lines" are crossed and conventions are turned upside down. The book of Acts describes how the gospel of Jesus Christ comes closer to people than they could ever have imagined; and how the gospel takes hold of them. It talks about how general religious, social and cultural boundaries, which had previously been unquestionable and guaranteed security and reliability, were simply ignored. In the book of Acts, we are confronted with a vastness that comes threateningly close to *us*. The book of Acts leads us into a freedom that *leaves us* breathless. It forces *us* to be agile and willing to take risks that are actually hopelessly overwhelming and unsettling. The "Book of Acts" tells of the spread of the Gospel. By doing this, it tells of a constant stream of outrageous "border crossings" - both literally and figuratively.

However, with all these "border crossings", no one is harmed; on the contrary: it's about new perspectives on life! No one is restricted; on the contrary: it's about freedom! No one is abused; on the contrary: it is about unconditional acceptance! The book of Acts is an

incomparable testimony to the blowing and working of the Holy Spirit and at the same time an incomparable testimony to the permanent violation and crossing of boundaries for the sake of the Gospel. Because: nothing and no one is allowed to hold back or limit, diminish or restrict, domesticate or imprison the message of God's saving love in Jesus Christ. This message is for everyone! No one is excluded!

At the very beginning (Acts 1:8), we read that Jesus himself - shortly before his ascension - had promised his disciples this dynamic of the Holy Spirit: "*You will receive the power of the Holy Spirit ... and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.*" What sounds so simple and unspectacular is really something! From Jerusalem to the ends of the earth - how many geographical borders have to be crossed! How many external and internal obstacles have to be overcome?

> *Jerusalem:*

- *Center of the Jewish (!) faith*
- *Place where decisive events of the new "Christian" faith took place*
faith took place (death and resurrection ...)

> *Judean hinterland:*

- *where Jesus and his followers had worked during his lifetime*

> *Samaria:*

- *Area of the modified, "apostate" Jewish faith*
- *Land of the Jewish sectarians*

> *Ends of the earth:*

- *World of the most diverse religions, cults; of paganism, ...*

How much faith, hope, and love, movement, passion and awakening are needed? From Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. That's quite something! But we who are here today are living proof that all these borders have indeed been crossed. Otherwise the Gospel would never have reached us. Otherwise we would not be here for this service.

2. internal developments

From Jerusalem to Winterthur. Many barriers had to be overcome by the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts tells of these absolutely fascinating inner "border crossings". A few examples:

2.1 Language barriers (Pentecost - 2:1-14.37)

First of all, the events of Pentecost are described to us in the NT as a 'miracle of speech'. Peter preaches a very long sermon. By today's standards of rhetoric and homiletics, it was not particularly good. He probably wouldn't have passed the exam at a School of Theology with it! But - his point is understood! His listeners understand beyond rhetoric and knowledge of foreign languages: The living God speaks to us in these words. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for them to understand the language of God. They begin to understand that God's love means them personally and wants to change their lives. A light is shed on their transgressions and wrongdoings in life. But even more: they can understand that their lives are nevertheless accepted and supported by Jesus. They realize that all of this has to do with the person of Jesus, who was executed but has since proved to be alive and well. That which no one can say to themselves, that which could not be

expected under any circumstances, that "*which no ear has ever heard*" - this message goes straight through their hearts and they are baptized.

The Holy Spirit overcomes the "language barrier" between God and us and gives understanding.

2.2 Eunuch from Ethiopia is baptized (8:26f)

There is a man on the road: not Jewish, just close and "God-seeking". He probably has dark skin. He is a eunuch. The necessary manipulations that made him a eunuch also excluded him - at least in Jewish terms - from religious, worship life. Philip, one of the first Christians, is urged and pushed by the Holy Spirit to go and meet this very man (a chamberlain from Ethiopia): Philip witnesses the gospel to him. The eunuch realizes: "*I can belong! The message of the gospel also applies to me; without restriction!*" And faster than you can imagine today, on the spot and without a liturgy, without consecrated water, without a course of faith: the eunuch is baptized. He belongs to the church of Jesus Christ - inwardly and outwardly! Completely.

The Holy Spirit does not tolerate exclusion and transcends all man-made religious barriers.

2.3 Peter is summoned to Cornelius (10)

What Paul had experienced on his own body shortly before him, the Jew Peter must now also experience on his own body. Peter receives a shocking dream through the Holy Spirit, in which all kinds of "unclean creatures" appear and the unmistakable instruction to go to a man named Cornelius. With great inner scruples and presumably rebelling against much of what he had been taught as a pious Jew, the Jew Peter finally enters the pagan house of Cornelius. There he testifies to the gospel and has to witness how Gentiles are filled with the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit urges us to make contact with other people beyond the boundaries of traditional, proven, theological definitions!

2.4 Apostles' Council in Jerusalem renounces church law (15)

There were disputes in the early church - even back then! The question was: How do we deal with pagan people becoming Christians? What are the prerequisites? What is the spiritual impact? What are the conditions and the consequences? Don't the Gentiles first have to become Jews (with everything that goes with it, e.g. circumcision) in order to become Christians? Or is there a shortcut?

There is a lot of tension. The positions are fixed. The Jewish "church law" is very clear. Intense discussions, harsh words, reproaches - fierce arguments. But in the end: "*... it pleases the Holy Spirit and us not to impose any more burdens on you - the Gentiles.*" (Acts 15:28) No conditions for the Gentiles to join the church of Jesus Christ. No boundary, no fence, no special requirements. Nothing but trust and faith. The apostles had the courage to ignore church law in order to follow the gospel as it spread into the Gentile world.

The Holy Spirit pushes open the door for the Gospel far beyond national, cultural and religious boundaries. What a crossing of borders - for the sake of the Gospel!

2.5 Lydia organizes the community (16)

The first Christian in Europe - according to the book of Acts - was a woman. A woman and a business "man" at the same time. That is extremely remarkable. The emancipation of women was not yet an issue at that time. Women did not really have equal rights in everyday life, women as businesswomen, as merchants - neither of which were very common. But one such woman was the first Christian on the new continent of Europe. What a border crossing! Not to mention the enormous challenge of entering a completely new realm of thought, culture, philosophy ... by jumping from the Middle East (Asia) to Europe. And once again, this was done with the support of an ancient businesswoman named Lydia.

For the sake of people and for the sake of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit crosses boundaries drawn by what is considered "normal".

2.6 Boundless

These are just a few examples. The whole of Acts is a moving and breathtaking story of the Holy Spirit crossing boundaries. For the spread of the gospel, for the validity of the good news, for the offer of new life from God ⇒ **there are no restrictions!** Not "race" or culture, morals or customs, tradition or theological subtleties, gender or sexual orientation, language or skin color. None of this can or should be an obstacle to receiving the new life from God and living in communion with God. The love of God cannot be stopped by all of these human barrier; it cannot be confined and limited to human areas that we define. Isn't that quite a challenge for us?

3. starting point

From Jerusalem to Winterthur - what was the starting point for this dynamic process? The starting point was a catastrophe; the catastrophe of Good Friday. For the disciples, all their hopes had collapsed. *"Hoped in vain!"* said one of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. This catastrophe had led the disciples into an absolute corner: Huddled in a corner of the city of Jerusalem. Barricaded doors. Brooding dully to themselves. Locked in. Filled with fear.

But the doors are opened by Jesus. A fresh breeze blows towards them as the Risen One confronts them: *"Peace be with you!" "As the Father has sent me, so I also send you!"* Jesus calls the disciples to Bethany (Luke 24:50). He takes 40 days (Acts 1:3) to explain everything and put the past in a new light. Then he speaks words of farewell. But it is not a sad farewell. On the contrary!

Jesus is taken up into heaven. He crosses the border and is immersed in the unclouded presence of God. Nevertheless, the disciples are happy. They have realized: Jesus is and remains close to us anyway. *"With great joy"* the disciples return to Jerusalem; back to the place of the catastrophe. No more barricaded doors ⇒ every day in the temple. No more dull emptiness ⇒ great joy fills their lives. No more dull fear that awakens ⇒ the praise of God moves them.

A movement is set in motion that can no longer be stopped. The message of the Gospel spreads irresistibly. No external border can stop it. From Jerusalem to the Jewish land; from Samaria in the north to Asia Minor (today's Turkey). Finally, the crossing over to Europe with the first church in Philippi. And finally on many winding paths to Rome, the center of the then known world, and then to Winterthur.

4. Conclusion

The Lord transcends borders - even today. He blows the wind of the breadth and freedom of the Gospel around our ears! He wants to set **us** in motion. He expects **us** to courageously and energetically cross borders in order to reach people with the Gospel.

We live in a time in which there is an increasing tendency in our society to isolate ourselves from one another, to exclude others, to polarize, to see and accept almost only what is our own and to denigrate everything else. Even in churches and communities, disputes are becoming tougher and more merciless in some areas (corona, climate, gender, homosexuality, war and peace ...).

Dear sisters and brothers, what the people in our communities and the people in our city and in our country need are

- Christians who allow themselves to be involved in God's mission.
- Christians who share a great passion for the transformative dynamics of the Gospel.
- Christians who dare to loudly and clearly contradict man-made borders, fear-based demarcations and inhuman exclusion and simply defy them.
- Followers of Jesus who encourage, empower and, if necessary, cover the backs of others when it comes to overcoming boundaries, bridging gaps and preventing the gospel from being minimized and imprisoned.
- Christians who defiantly hold on to the Easter hope that new life can arise from catastrophe and destruction.

Dear sisters and brothers,

Let yourselves be infected with passion for the unconditional love of God. Let us live together in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us become barrier-breakers and border-crossers again and again for the sake of the Gospel.

Amen.

Bishop Harald Rückert, Germany

Video Greeting from Bishop Ruby-Nell M. Estrella
Resident Bishop, Manila Episcopal Area
Philippines Central Conference of The United Methodist Church

Greetings

Mabuhay! Grace and Peace to you all!

Beloved United Methodists of the Central and Southern Europe Central Conference, led by Bishop Stefan Zürcher, I bring you heartfelt greetings from your siblings in the Philippines Central Conference and the Council of Bishops, led by Bishop Tracy Smith-Malone.

It is with deep regret that I am unable to be with you in person due to visa challenges. However, I thank God for the gift of technology, which allows us to connect despite the miles that separate us. Please know that we are with you in spirit and prayer, lifting you up for a meaningful and fruitful holy conferencing. May God's grace abound as you gather in faith and discernment.

The Church's Call in a Broken World

As we navigate the challenges of our respective contexts, the Lord calls us to be a church that embodies the love and compassion of Christ in a broken world. May we remain steadfast in pursuing God's shalom in our communities. In the midst of strife and injustice, may we be bearers of Christ's mercy and justice, even in the most difficult places where we are sent.

Together, we make a difference. Together, we can do more as we faithfully make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The Philippines and Migration

Now, allow me to share something about the Philippines and migration.

In 2024, approximately 2.47 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are employed across the globe. These migrant workers are often hailed as "modern-day heroes" by the government due to the substantial remittances they send home, which bolster the Philippine economy. Filipino workers are highly valued by foreign employers for their dedication, reliability, and strong work ethic. They are known for their resilience, cheerful disposition, and ability to adapt to diverse work environments and cultures. These qualities have solidified their reputation, increasing the global demand for their talents. However, behind this recognition lies a harsh reality—many OFWs face human rights violations, contract breaches, maltreatment, and, in some tragic cases, even brutal and senseless deaths. These individuals leave the Philippines not out of choice, but out of necessity, driven by the urgent need to provide for their families.

While some OFWs succeed in securing a better future for their loved ones, the root issue remains: the Philippines lacks sufficient opportunities for decent, stable employment. Economic justice is not merely about acknowledging the contributions of migrant workers but also about ensuring that Filipinos can thrive in their own country without being forced to seek livelihoods abroad.

A Biblical Vision for Justice and Hope

As people of faith, we stand in solidarity with all migrant workers, trusting in a just and compassionate God. We hold on to the vision of a transformed world as described in Isaiah 65:17, 19–25 (CEB):

“Look! I’m creating a new heaven and a new earth ... No one will ever hear the sound of weeping or crying in it again. No more will babies live only a few days or the old fail to live out their days ... They will build houses and live in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They won’t build, for others to live in, nor plant for others to eat. They won’t labor in vain, nor bear children to a world of horrors, because they will be blessed by the Lord... Before they call, I will answer, while they are yet speaking, I will hear. Wolf and lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox ... They won’t hurt or destroy at any place on my holy mountain, says the Lord.”

May this vision inspire us to work toward a society where everyone can live with dignity, security, and hope—at home, or abroad.

The Growth of United Methodism in the Middle East

In 2007, Knox United Methodist Church sent a missionary to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, to gather and minister to United Methodist Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). By 2009, this effort led to the establishment of The First United Methodist Church, Dubai—the very first UMC congregation in the Middle East.

Eighteen years later, the movement has grown significantly. There are now seven United Methodist Churches across the UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait, with more congregations continuing to emerge despite the many challenges they face. Wherever there are Filipino UMC migrants and immigrants, they come together to worship and build faith communities, carrying the spirit of United Methodism wherever they go.

Conclusion

As we continue our journey as one Church, may we remain steadfast in our commitment to pursuing peace and shalom—God’s vision of wholeness, justice, and flourishing for all.

In a world marked by conflict, displacement, and inequality, the Church is called to be a beacon of hope and reconciliation. We are called to stand with the oppressed, uplift the weary, and advocate for justice—not just in words, but through faithful action. Wherever there is brokenness, we bring healing. Wherever there is division, we build bridges. Wherever there is despair, we proclaim Christ’s peace.

May we continue to embody the shalom of God in our communities, transforming lives through love, justice, and mercy. Let us journey together with unwavering faith, knowing that our mission is not just to send workers into the world but to create a world where all can live with dignity, security, and peace.

May the Lord bless us as we labor for His kingdom, striving for a future where God's peace reigns in every land, every heart, and every home. Amen.

Greeting from Bishop Christian Alsted

Dear bishop Zürcher,
dear united methodists in central and southern Europe

Shalom to you and warm greetings from the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference. As you gather in Christian conferencing during these days in Winterthur, I pray you will experience the guiding and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference is recalibrating after a challenging time of pandemic followed by separations. During the upcoming central conference, we will say goodbye to the four Eurasia annual conferences leaving to form an autonomous Methodist church. We have already said goodbye to the Estonia district and to some local churches in Norway.

The many separations affect the number of pastors at the Central Conference which makes it uncertain whether we in the future will be able to maintain the status of Central Conference.

It is our desire to begin conversations about how we can reorganize the work of the UMC in Europe and explore possibilities of becoming one or two central conferences with the right to elect the number of bishops authorized by the General Conference.

We are as previously stated recalibrating to focus on mission. I see a renewed and rekindled desire for unity in mission and a commitment to give each other space to live with integrity. In early April I will retire as bishop and a new bishop will be elected. To offer our new bishop a strong start and to help the church to align in mission, we will have a School of Congregational Development in Oslo in September focusing on leadership, youth, church development, new church starts, fresh expressions and diaconal community outreach.

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the central conference decided to add Ukraine to the Nordic and Baltic area. I would like to sincerely thank you for your prayers and support for Ukraine, and for the radical hospitality you have provided to Ukrainian refugees. In particular I wish to thank the leaders and churches in the bordering countries – your help and friendship continues to be a great encouragement.

Despite the very demanding situation the church in Ukraine is developing well, ministering to the people, constantly looking for new opportunities to share and live the gospel. We have established a new social spiritual church center with the aim of caring for people suffering from PTSD, and we have shelters for internally displaced people. We continue to have children's and youth events and camps, and we offer teaching events for our leaders. The church is in the process of establishing formal relations with the ecumenical bodies in the country, and we aim to have a memorandum of understanding in place with Ukraine Evangelical Theological Seminary in Kyiv to be able to offer robust theological education in Ukrainian – the first two students are already enrolled. We are looking at establishing faith communities among Ukrainian refugees in Europe, one of them is a faith community in Bispingen outside Hamburg.

The current situation is challenging in a number of ways - there is a general fatigue 11 years after the beginning of the war, and 3 years after full scale invasion. The ongoing bombings and missile and drone attacks put the population under significant stress. Many spend the night in bomb shelters or sleeping in the bathroom to put a wall between themselves and the windows.

Fear is always in the background, worrying about whether or when they will be hit by a drone or worse by a ballistic missile - while at the same time trying to live and manage everyday life.

In all our churches there are people who have lost loved ones on the battlefield or in attacks on civilians, and many have family members who have fled the country. Most of the people in our shelters have had terrible experiences of death and loss. In every cemetery there are many Ukrainian flags marking the grave of a fallen soldier.

There is significant fear that Trump and Putin will want to put a quick end to the war - without a solid foundation for a just and sustainable peace, which undoubtedly will lead to a new war in a few years. The developments during the past weeks have only added to the concerns.

In all of this, I have the deepest respect for our pastors and leaders in Ukraine - they are shining examples of what church can be, when church is at its best.

We have hope, not optimism and positive thinking, but hope rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ who is able to do far more than we are even able to pray about or understand.

Pray that you and all the people of Europe may experience God's Shalom in all its fullness.

Christian Alsted

Greeting from Bishop Werner Philipp

Dear sisters and brothers,

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to have been invited to your Central Conference as the newly elected Bishop of the German Central Conference. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I have known some of you since the early days of my studies and ministry in the church, and I have worked with some of you on international committees over the years. Other faces are still unknown to me, but I am looking forward to new encounters and fraternal exchange.

You have taken the Risen Lord's greeting of peace as your theme: "Shalom with you" (John 20:21). "Shalom" is far more than a greeting. It is an expression of the wholeness, peace and reconciliation that Jesus promises his disciples. This message calls on us as Christians to receive peace and actively pass it on.

A story comes to mind on the subject of peace: a journalist asks an old Jewish scholar: "When will there be peace in the world?" The wise man thinks for a moment and answers: "My son, when all people are united." The journalist continues: "And when will that be?" The scholar replies: "As soon as everyone agrees that they will never agree."

This little anecdote makes us smile, but it also contains a profound truth. Peace cannot be taken for granted. It is not simply the result of human effort, but first and foremost a gift from God. It is the peace of the one who overcame death and is himself peace - crucified, risen, alive.

Peace does not come from the fact that we all agree, but from the fact that we have learned through Christ to deal with our differences in respect and love. This is precisely the core of the biblical "shalom" - not just the absence of war or strife, but the holistic peace of God that permeates our lives, our relationships and our society. As a church, we can and should carry this peace out into the world. May your Central Conference help to strengthen this peace within and outside the church.

I would also like to report briefly on the Central Conference of The United Methodist Church in Germany, which took place in Würzburg a few weeks ago, from February 12 to 16, 2025.

Our outgoing Bishop Harald Rückert left us with an impressive message entitled "New things grow". He looked back on his eventful time in office and invited us to venture into the new with trust in God's guidance instead of holding on to the old. Change is often challenging, but it is also a sign of God's work.

One particularly important topic was the adoption of a new protection concept for dealing with sexualized violence. This concept is based on four pillars: prevention, intervention, reappraisal and reparation. The UMC in Germany is thus setting a clear sign for the protection of people of all generations and for a church that takes responsibility and actively stands up for justice.

The delegates also approved the translation of the new globally applicable "Social Principles". These were adopted at the General Conference in May last year. The new version is more condensed and more openly formulated in order to enable global application and make them more practicable for different cultural and social contexts.

The discussion about a possible reorganization of European UMC structures was also exciting. Bishop Stefan Zürcher reported on developments in your Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe, while Bishop Christian Alsted outlined the situation in Northern Europe, the Baltic States, Ukraine and Moldova. The changes within the church and in world politics indicate that new structures and forms of cooperation between Methodists in Europe may become necessary. The delegates of the German Central Conference signaled great interest in actively helping to shape this process.

These topics show: As a church, we are facing major challenges and new developments together. But if we make room for God's "shalom" - in our hearts, in our communities and in the world - then this peace will determine our thoughts and actions.

The incident with the Jewish scholar at the beginning had another deeper truth: we humans, including us Methodists, will never be in complete agreement on some issues. But that is precisely why we as a church are called to receive the peace of Christ anew and to build bridges out of it, to live reconciliation, and to be peacemakers.

The diversity of our opinions and characters - when lived in a higher unity established by Christ - can be an expression of hope in this world. Martin Luther King once said: "The hope of a safe and livable world lies in disciplined nonconformists who are dedicated to justice, peace, and fraternity."

I wish you that God's "shalom", which is able to unite all that is contradictory, will come alive in your conversations, decisions and service.

Amen.

Only the spoken word is valid

Methodist greetings from Portugal from Bishop Sifredo Teixeira

Dear Bishop Stefan,
Dear brothers and sisters,

It is a pleasure to be here to thank you for your invitation and to convey greetings from the Methodist Church in Portugal.

Since the Central Conference has addressed the topic of migration, I am happy to point out that the Methodist Church was founded by immigrants from Great Britain who worked and lived in the Porto metropolitan area. They began their activities in 1854. Small groups in homes. Sunday school for children. Joint worship services when conditions and opportunities allowed.

The first Methodist clergyman to come to Portugal in 1871 to organize and build up the church was Rev. Robert Moreton. He married shortly before his departure for Porto. During this time, he did excellent work to help the church fulfill its mission of sharing the gospel not only with the British population but also with the Portuguese people.

Words and deeds were always connected. Preaching and acting according to the gospel provided an opportunity to help the Portuguese people, for example, by establishing elementary schools to learn to read and write, which gave people the opportunity to read the Bible and find a better way of life and work.

Thus, from the beginning, migration was a blessed contribution to church life and the mission of the church.

This is a characteristic that still benefits the church today. Migrants make a valuable contribution to the maintenance of local churches and the continuation of the mission of the Methodist Church. People who come from Angola, Mozambique, Brazil, Sweden, China, the United States, and other countries.

The local congregation in Lisbon has the most worshipers. There, the Methodist Church has rented a small room, a room for about 80 people and a very small adjoining room. Two services are held in this church every Sunday, each attended by more than 100 people, and sometimes people have to stand outside because there is no room for them inside. These people come mainly from Angola. Yes, it is true that we have Africa in Portugal, but it was very difficult for a small and financially limited congregation to get help to find better conditions for these local church activities.

Today, we realize that migration is a blessing for the church, but also a challenge, because we have to face the needs and find solutions so that these people feel as good as possible, feel that they belong to the family and are at home.

For a long time, the Church was understood as an institution, which means that there are people who have power over this and that, but we must affirm and practice that the Church is the people, and therefore we are not concerned with power, but with caring for the people and sharing in solidarity.

"... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40.

We live in a time when the church must be ready to welcome people, listen to them, care for them, share God's love, and be in solidarity with them.

We, the Methodists in Portugal, continue to pray that God will help and guide us all to share Jesus through words and deeds.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts and feelings. May God bless this conference and give us all the confidence to continue acting in his name to help the world believe in him, believe in his love, which will bring the peace we are all seeking.

Zurich, March 14, 2025

Sifredo Teixeira, Bishop

Greeting Üllas Tankler

I will do this in English.

I am not able to prepare its text in writing. It will be more a free sharing, which is going to include some of the following:

Bring greetings from Global Ministries, affirm our partnership in many areas and appreciation for the connection.

While trying to answer the questions related to migration – my personal case is kind of messy (like with many people in migration!). My first answer to "Do you have a migration background?" is a German "Jein" (yes and no) – which means that I don't know how to continue with either option of the next questions...

I was born and lived in Estonia as part of the Soviet Union, I have lived in Russia for 2 years, I have lived in Germany (both East and West and united Germany) for 2,5 years, I have lived in England for 3 months and in United States for 2 years. And in independent Estonia the rest of my life. Does this make me a migrant?

Most of my relocations have come from my free will – except one, to Russia (I was forced by the Soviet government).

But I have always been able to return to Estonia. There was one exception when this became questionable. When in August 1991 the old Communists organized a coup in Moscow and tanks rolled into Estonia as well, I happened to be with my whole family (wife and three kids) in the United States. We lost every contact with our home and relatives in Estonia and we were seriously considering applying for asylum in Canada. We had relatives in Toronto who escaped Estonia after the II WW, when the Russians came to take over Estonia. Was the history to repeat itself for us as well...? This was a different side of migration question: we were not fleeing our home country. We realized that we may not be able to return to our home.

This is my story in summary.

Greeting from Olav Schmidt, EmK-Weltmission

After introducing myself, I'd like to share the following thoughts:

a) My mother and her family were among the displaced people fleeing the Russian Army to the remaining parts of Germany, later my mother's parents fled from East-Germany to the West to evade the communist regime.

b) I myself am a "uprooted" person - born in West-Berlin, pursuing a church internship at Weimar (East-Germany), studied at Büsingen, an Alemannic German village completely surrounded by Switzerland (an exclave from the German point of view and an enclave from the Swiss point of view), worked in the Frankfurt area in Central Germany, served in a Black Forest village (1.500 inhabitants) church for 5 years, then moved to a Palatine town in the very West of Germany (40.000 inhabitants) in the middle of serious economic structural change, moved to Malawi for 7 years and then to Wuppertal, a town of 400.000 inhabitants in the (semi-)North of Germany. In other words, I moved from Jerusalem to Samaria, Judea and the ends of the earth - whereas I leave it up to you, which location you tag with the respective term (some of my fellow students considered Büsingen, which is just an hour away from where we are right now, as the ends of the earth ...)

c) My wife, who's from the South, not too far from the Black Forest to call that Judea for her, followed this movement from the placement at the Frankfurt area onwards. My daughter moved from Malawi to the UK and then back to Germany, while my son is now in Germany but intends to study in the UK after finishing his training as a carpenter. (And in addition, we moved two of our five Malawian dogs to Germany, so we definitely have migrants in our family, and it took them weeks in dog school to adapt to the new environment.)

This may not count as having a migration background but definitely helps to feel in part how migrants feel: Anxiety over visa issues, feeling like a stranger, struggle with languages and dialects - I married, so to say, a wife from a different tribe and had to learn her language!

Personally, I am convinced that migration is key to world evangelism and the future of the church. In Acts 19, in what is called the Ephesian Pentecost, 12 men (sorry, no women here) were equipped in the same way as the Jewish apostles in Jerusalem - in other words there is no distinction remaining between the Gentile and the Jewish church in terms of their contribution to the task of world-mission. So, I am convinced that it's about time to equip our partner churches to achieve equity in the task of mission. This includes what is commonly called "reverse mission", the sending of missionaries from the Global South to the Global North. And there are already movements in that direction: In Malawi there's a response to the idea to reach the unreached by 2033 (after the AD 2000 movement did not achieve that) by starting a mission mobilisation movement equipping Malawians for cross-cultural missions. In India, 200 Christian

nurses are trained not only as professionals but also as church planters, including learning German, to enter as tent maker church planters, their number aiming at reaching 2000 within the next 10 years.

Thanks for allowing me to be part of this wonderfully already international and multi-cultural Central Conference. In Germany we are still working on that.

IV. Report from the Bishop and of the Office to the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Shalom bearers – a word from the bishop To the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe from March 13-16, 2025

Dear delegates

Dear members with an advisory vote

Dear guests

"Shalom with you!" With this blessing, I greet you at the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe. May God grant us his shalom during these days. And may this be reflected in our conferencing here and afterwards in our ministry in everyday life.

I am not presenting you with a bishop's message, as was the case at the previous Central Conferences, but with this "Word from the bishop". In it I give you a little insight into my experiences over the past two years or so (Part II) and share with you what is important to me in my ministry (Part III). At the beginning, however, there are thoughts on the Central Conference motto "Shalom with you" and observations in the conference area (Part I).

I. "Shalom with you"

"Shalom with you!" (John 20:21) This is how the resurrected Jesus greets his deeply unsettled disciples. They had locked themselves in out of fear after his death. This traditional greeting is reminiscent of the promise of peace from Jesus' farewell speech: "I give you peace, *my* peace, not the peace that the world gives. Do not be afraid, do not be dismayed!" (John 14:27) Peace, *shalom* in Hebrew, means comprehensive blessing, the fullness of life from God's hand for individuals and the community. It comes from God, who longs for healed relationships with people, and it exceeds the possibilities of human efforts to achieve peace. It is the fruit of the transforming encounter with Jesus Christ, who is "our peace" (Ephesians 2:14).

The followers of Jesus receive the Holy Spirit, who takes them anew into God's shalom and makes them bearers of shalom. This is how Jesus sends them. He sends them to carry God's shalom out into the world, into the cities, towns and homes. (Luke 10:5) For that is God's mission in this world: to create shalom, comprehensive well-being for all people and creatures. His disciples were involved in this, we are involved in this as individuals and as a church. We are called to embody God's shalom in this world through our presence and actions and thus participate in God's shalom actions.



How can we respond to this call? God's shalom has four dimensions. I will illustrate them with the image of the vine and give examples of how we, in our Central Conference, help to spread God's shalom.

God's shalom has a spiritual dimension. This is directed towards a healthy relationship with God. Every year, our church in Poland organizes renewal days in which more than 300 people of all ages take part. Services and times of worship, lectures, and group discussions, as well as table fellowship and other activities create a space for an encounter with God.

Through this encounter, participants experience the renewal and deepening of their personal relationship with God. The net monastery in Switzerland is part of the "Kirche anders" circuit and uses the digital tools to organize daily communal times of silence and prayer. At evangelization evenings in North Macedonia, our pastors invite listeners into a relationship with Jesus Christ and guide them in letting him shape their lives. Under the most difficult conditions, our pastors in North Africa find ways to strengthen Christians in their faith and tell people about the Gospel. Men and women come to faith and are baptized.



The branches are firmly attached to the vine.



The branch is healthy and bears fruit.

God's shalom has an individual, personal dimension. This is aimed at a healthy relationship with oneself. With the Faces of Courage project, our church in Romania supported women who had fled Ukraine in coming to terms with their experiences. It accompanied them on the rocky road to reconciliation with their own history. And the work with orphans helps to strengthen their identity so that they can courageously follow their path in life. In France and other countries, pastors provide pastoral care to elderly people in retirement homes on their last earthly journey. Our church in the Czech Republic commissions pastors to provide pastoral

care in prisons and helps young drug addicts to find a way out of their addiction with the Point 14 project in Pilsen.

God's shalom has a social, societal dimension. This is aimed at healthy relationships with fellow human beings and a life-enhancing human community. A few years ago, our church in Budapest, Hungary, was given two public schools by the state. Our church runs these schools on the basis of Christian values, and pastors and lay people from our church provide religious education and also supportively accompany the teachers. Like the two schools in Hungary, the Korab Kindergarden in Pivnice, Serbia, gives children important values and experiences of community on their journey through life. The lunch table in Vrbas, Serbia, the Miss Stone Center in Strumica, North Macedonia, or the potato project in Buzaishtë, Albania, and many other social-diaconal offers in our countries,



Many branches grow together on the vine.

especially those with refugees, help to provide those in need with the necessities of life, such as food, but also with the experience of human community and warmth. They all contribute to a life-enhancing society.



Animals find food in the vines.

God's shalom has a cosmic dimension. This is aimed at healthy relationships with co-creation. At the annual conference (AC) 2023, our church in Austria set up a "Climate" working group to develop principles and assistance for the church in dealing with the resources of creation. It adopted a resolution on climate change for the attention of the federal government. In 2024, a person responsible for the area of *responsibility for creation* was

elected. In Switzerland, the "Environmental Justice" working group was set up at the AC 2023. Its task is to clarify what contribution we as a church can make to a more careful and sustainable use of limited natural resources. It is to develop suggestions on how this can be done in concrete terms.

More examples could be listed. I am thinking of the *Diakonie Zentrum Spattstrasse* in Linz, Austria, or the *Early Intervention Center* in Tirana, Albania. Through all of them, our local churches are making God's shalom tangible, and God's shalom is spreading. At the same time, we are constantly faced with the challenge of keeping our eyes and hearts open. In doing so, we recognize the changing social situations and learn to embody God's shalom in other ways, to be a "different" church. In this way, with our possibilities and special talents as Methodists, we are bearers of shalom.

II. Experiences and challenges

I want to *build bridges* through my service. The building material for this are encounters. They are an indispensable and valuable part of my ministry, especially in the first few years. I want to get to know and understand the pastors and leaders and our church and local churches in the 13 countries of our CC with their respective cultural, social, political, historical and, of course, religious contexts better. I hope that at the same time I will also become a little more tangible for our brothers and sisters. Relationships develop and grow in the process. Through encounters, a fruitful exchange of information and honest experiences as well as spiritual impulses, I would like to contribute to connecting people with each other, to continue building a sustainable network of relationships and to deepen trust among each other. As a consequence of the many challenges we face, I sense uncertainty, fears, frustration or discouragement here and there. I would like to help strengthen our hope, encourage and empower us to participate confidently, calmly and joyfully in God's mission.

Experience

On my travels over the past two years, I have had the opportunity to visit many of the projects and branches of work I have described. I have met committed and talented women and men who joyfully give their time, energy and love to our mission of passing on God's shalom. This is true even if the associated difficulties and people's need sometimes give rise to resignation rather than joy.

As I mentioned, an essential and wonderful part of my ministry is the travel, the meetings and the many conversations with leaders, employees, church members, ecumenical representatives and political leaders in the countries of our Central Conference. I am always impressed by the hospitality I encounter. I experience table fellowship and eating together or praying and celebrating together as moments of shared life and faith and also enjoyment. At the same time, I don't want to underestimate the fact that in some situations, this also involves struggling together for clarity, solutions, and the next steps.

On the road at annual conferences and Districts

Pastors' meetings are held at the annual conference and District level. Last year I attended all of them except for those of our Austrian brothers and sisters: France, North Africa, Poland, Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania, the Czech Republic, Switzerland and Hungary-Romania. Celebrating together, Bible studies and thematic workshops, walks, excursions and, of course, table fellowship are good opportunities to get to know each other better, but also to share the joys and challenges of ministry

Church visits, sometimes combined with preaching or a Bible study, give an insight into the diversity of how our church lives and shapes its mission. For example, I like to remember the twelve-day trip to North Macedonia, Albania and Serbia in September 2024, on which my wife Valérie accompanied me. In addition to the pastors' meetings, we visited various local churches, including Buzaishtë in the mountains of Albania - an adventurous experience with four-wheel drive vehicles - or in Serbia Vrbas and Pivnice with the Korab kindergarten. The children there had prepared a fun animal quiz for us and wanted to know what the animals were called in German. The highlight of the trip was the ordination of Florian Çela and Gjergj Lushka in Pogradec, Albania. This was attended by pastors from the entire annual conference. In Poland, we first visited Elk in beautiful Masuria at the beginning of August and then the Renewal Days in central Poland with Adam Hamilton as speaker, as well as local churches in southern Poland at the end of October as part of the journey with Connexio Governing Board.

Trips like those to the Balkans, where we often spend many hours in the car, always offer a good opportunity to discuss current issues with the *superintendents*, but above all to talk about everyday and personal matters. I also try to hold a Zoom call with them every two months or so, which works quite well. If the opportunity arises, I also attend *cabinet and church board meetings* (regularly in the AC CH-FR-NA) or meetings of the Board of Ordained Ministry.

The second quarter is characterized by the *annual conferences*. Thanks to the great and patient support of those responsible and the generosity of all those present, I believe we not only managed to get them off to a good start, but also took important steps towards the future. The contacts with the lay members, who I hardly ever meet otherwise, are also valuable. One highlight was the decision at the AC Hungary-Romania to form a joint AC in the future.

Meetings at Central Conference level

At *Central Conference (CC)* level, I would like to mention the *Roma consultation* that takes place every few years, most recently at the end of March 2024 in Budapest. Under the

leadership of Corinna Bütikofer from Connexio, participants from seven countries learned from their respective experiences of working with Roma communities. The meeting of leaders from the *work with children and young people* in September 2023 was also valuable. This was linked to the relaunch of this work at CC with the formation of a new working group. The international youth camp in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, next July is a great first result.

Superintendents' meetings and the *Executive Committee* meetings include working sessions in which we advance the issues at stake in the CC's work, but also times of celebration and sharing experiences. We strive to make the meeting parts methodically varied and interactive. In addition to personal exchanges, this includes, for example walks, creative activities and singing. In the last two years, we have met twice physically and additionally via Zoom. In March 2024 in Vienna, we focused on the content and structure of our working groups, among other things. In September in Budapest, we decided to take a closer look at the topic of migration and develop a set of arguments that shed light on various aspects and perspectives of this theme. The themed evening at the CC will provide us with impetus for this. We also decided on the motto for the CC.

Both at these meetings and at pastors' meetings, the issue of human sexuality and how our church deals with it was a topic of discussion. However, first-hand information, a sympathetic ear and an atmosphere of discussion that allowed fears and hopes to be shared helped to shift the focus more and more to other topics and challenges. The fact that the extraordinary CC 2022 set out a forward-looking path for how we want to move forward together with our different convictions proved to be helpful. Most annual conferences and Districts formulated a statement in which they describe and record their attitude and practice. This provides clarity both internally and externally, even if these documents do not simply end discussions in some local churches or ecumenical bodies. With the exception of our church in the Czech Republic, all JKs see a further common path in the CC. Mindfulness, listening to one another and mutual appreciation are still necessary.

Encounters in Europe and worldwide

I should not forget to mention the *ecumenical encounters*. As part of annual conferences, my travels and the General Assembly of the *Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)* in Sibiu, Romania, in September, I had the opportunity to meet a large number of ecumenical partners. Last August, the *World Methodist Council (WMC)* and the Methodist World Conference took place in Gothenburg, Sweden, with participants from 80 Methodist churches from over 130 countries. The *European Methodist Council (EMC)*, which unites ten European Methodist churches, should also be mentioned. It is very encouraging to experience connexion beyond one's own church. As the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe, we receive, but we also have something to contribute, such as our experience in dealing with a wide variety of different social, political and religious contexts.

Finally, trips to the USA also took up some of my time: trips to the *Council of Bishops* (in November 2024, however, I sent my apologies), to *General Conference 2024* and at the end of January 2025 to a meeting of the *Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters* in Atlanta. I also experience this networking as support for my and our work here. Nevertheless, my focus for the time being is on our CC and on the pan-European level.

Challenges

Over the past two years, I have encountered various challenges. Interestingly, they are quite similar in almost all parts of our CC, albeit to varying degrees. Let me name a few:

- In many areas of our CC, the majority of our local churches are made up of people in the second half of life, and membership numbers are stagnating or declining. We are experiencing growth in the young parts of our church in Romania and Albania, for example, or where we succeed in building a church with people from an international background. The challenge is twofold: on the one hand, it consists of allowing people who have grown up in our church to participate in it in such a way that it also becomes *their* church. The other challenge is to build church *with* people who are not socialized in church. This means building friendships with them, accompanying them on *their* path to discipleship and shaping church community together with them.
- Almost everywhere in our CC, we are struggling with the *shortage of pastors*. We need to clarify what kind of pastors we need. What tasks and requirements do they have to fulfill, and what gifts and skills do they need for this? Then, how can we accompany (young) people on their journey of faith, support them in hearing God's call to (full-time) ministry and then accompany them on this journey in an encouraging and empowering way? And finally, how can we give (younger) people who are willing to take on tasks and responsibilities the freedom to shape their own lives
- One consequence of the shortage of pastors or very small local churches is an excessive time and energy burden on those responsible for leadership and staff. How can relief be provided? How can the tasks be spread over more shoulders or reduced? Are there things that need to be let go?
- Finances and properties are a major topic at all annual conferences. Resources are scarce and not everything that needs to be done can be done. What priorities need to be set and where? How can new resources be found?
- Social developments are leading to an increase in plurality in some parts of our CC. What does this mean for the church? How can we deal fruitfully with this diversity? Secularization, as a movement critical of institutions, is contributing to the church's loss of significance. In many places, it has become a marginal phenomenon and the distance between the church and the people is increasing. Points of contact are disappearing. How does the church need to change in order to overcome this distance? Where are new points of contact? How can we make God's shalom tangible now and here, where we are and live as a church - in the midst of society? We are concerned about the increasing nationalism in Europe, which we are also confronted with. What can we do to counter this? What does it mean to participate in God's mission in this context?
- We also have social issues in common, such as the topic of migration mentioned above. We experience migration differently. Some countries, for example in Western Europe, are experiencing refugees and people looking for work coming in. Others, for example in the Balkans, are experiencing young, well-educated people in particular leaving. What can we learn from each other here? How can we support each other?

III. What is important to me

What is important to me in my ministry? What do I want to pay particular attention to?

- *Appreciate our church as a fragile vessel:* The church, including ours, is a fragile vessel (2 Corinthians 4:7). Social and political developments do not make things easy for it. It also has to contend with internal developments, circumstances and challenges such as a lack of young pastors, stagnating or declining membership figures, a lack of finances, expensive properties and other issues. When I'm out and about, I sometimes feel uncertainty and discouragement. I sometimes feel it in myself too. But the church is firmly grounded on the foundation that is the living Jesus Christ. It lives from the power of God. We are aware of its limitations. But the fact remains, and I hold fast to this: the church, with all its limitations, is God's church. It is a living creature that he needs for his mission as an instrument and foretaste of his new world, where it is aware of its mission. This is a reason for me to value it and to rejoice in it, despite everything. I give thanks for it and pray for it. I want to receive it from God's hands again and again with hope, help to shape it with my gifts and also put it back into his hands again calmly. I want to infect others with this hope and confidence.
- *Connecting across borders:* At the end of a CC meeting of leaders working with children and young people, a participant from Romania said: "It is so valuable for us to feel that there are other Methodists and to be connected with each other". Several attendees emphasized how important it is for them personally and for their young people to be and remain an international church, especially in the tense times in which we find ourselves, and to experience our diversity as an enrichment for life and faith. This commitment to our connexion across borders made me very happy! I have heard this from time to time on my travels since then. Connexion through sustainable relationships, through shared experiences, through common tasks and, of course, through faith in Jesus Christ is the cement of our community of faith and service across borders. I want to strengthen this connexion with my travels.
- *Experimenting with diverse forms of church:* For me personally, the Sunday morning service attended by the core congregation is a very important part of my faith practice and a tried and tested means of grace in our Methodist tradition too. At the same time, it is clear that social developments are changing people's habits and needs in many places, including in relation to the church. I have been concerned about this for many years and have had the opportunity to deal with it time and again in recent years. In addition to the tried and tested forms of church, we need other, new, unconventional forms. They are shaped by the respective context in our countries, but also by the milieus within our societies with which we come into contact. I am happy to help network interested people and facilitate the exchange of experiences - so that more people can be touched by God's shalom
- *Let children and young people experience that they are already part of our church today:* In conversations, I sometimes come across the statement: "Young people are the future of the church". It's true, children and young people are important for the future of the church. The leaders and employees of tomorrow are our children and young people of today. But above all, they are part of the *present*, part of our church today. They and we together are church - even now! They should experience

this by having freedom in our local churches and taking responsibility for it, by meeting them as equals and shaping the church together at all levels. I encouraged the youth leaders from our CC who were present at the meeting in Budapest in September 2023 to do this. And I told them how grateful I am to them for their commitment and for helping to raise awareness of this in our church in their countries.

- *Encourage (young) people so that they develop into dedicated leaders:* Being commissioned with a full-time, part-time or even volunteer ministry in the church is a beautiful thing. I would go down the path of serving the church again. I pray that people, including young people, will hear the call from God to serve the church. And I want to approach gifted people about the possibility of getting involved in our church. They should experience us - me - as role models who encourage them to help shape our church and take on responsibility through their actions. I want to help ensure that they are given space to discover and develop their gifts and potential; that they experience how they are valued and encouraged on their journey into and in ministry, so that they develop into devoted leaders, some also into local pastors and ordained elders or deacons.

I will only briefly mention three other areas to which I would like to contribute. As a *shalom bearer*, I want to be committed to the well-being of all creatures, especially those who tend to be overlooked in our society. This also includes ensuring that everyone around our church experiences it as a safe place. This means that they experience that their dignity is protected and that violations of boundaries of all kinds have no place in the church. *Lay people and pastoral staff live the church's mission together.* I want to help create a framework in which God's spirit finds space for its work and our church is built and led in the brotherly connexion of *all* believers. Finally, it is important to me that *the organization, its structures and resources* actually serve *the fulfilment of the church's mission* in practice. This includes the sustainable use of available resources - also with a view to preserving creation as the basis of life for all creatures.

IV. Thank you!

Finally, my heartfelt thanks! I would like to thank you, dear superintendents, for the trust and openness with which you have welcomed me into my new role. Thank you for the time we have spent together and for your varied service, which you perform with impressive dedication and great experience. I could not do my job without you.

Thank you in the Bishop's Office, dear Urs and André. Thank you for your presence. Even if it's not every day, I love coming to the office in Zurich! Thank you for your work, your dedication and love for people and for our church. Thank you for your patience with me and for your support

I would like to thank the members of the CC office, Iris and Markus. You are valuable advisors and important supports for me, especially with regard to the preparation of this CC.

I would like to thank you, retired Bishop Patrick Streiff, for the helpful introductory period in the first half of 2023 and the trips we took together. The months of handover were very valuable for me and enabled me to get off to a good start. Thank you for your time and patience, for your many good tips and for sharing your experiences to this day

I would like to thank the members of the Executive Committee. We have the wonderful task of steering the Central Conference ship together. It is a pleasure to be on board with you and to work together!

Finally, I would like to thank all of you, here and beyond, who support our Central Conference in one way or another and enrich it with your gifts.

Together, as a community of Methodists, we are bearers of shalom. We are so in good times as well as in challenging times, in joy and sorrow, in moments full of energy and in moments of weakness. How good that we live from God's shalom and receive and fulfill our common mission from it. I thank God, who connects us with one another through his shalom, who equips and guides us through his Holy Spirit, and who encourages and protects us.

Bishop Stefan Zürcher

Report of the Office of the Central Conference

1. Presence and Journals

1.1 Meetings of the Office of the Central Conference

The Office of the Central Conference has met twice since the last meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Conference: on October 30, 2024, and on February 10, 2025, in preparation for the meetings of the Executive Committee and the Central Conference in Winterthur.

1.2 Journals of the 80th to 82nd meeting of the Executive Committee CSE

The journals of the 80th to 82nd meeting of the Executive Committee from March 14 to 17, 2024, in Vienna (Austria), from July 4, 2024 (online), and from September 27 to 28, 2024 in Budapest (Hungary) were published jointly. They are available for download on the website of the CC CSE (<https://www.umc-cse.org/en/downloads--links/documents-studies-and-lectures/minutes-cse.html>). The previous Journals since the last ordinary respectively extraordinary Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe can also be found there.

1.3 Commemoration of the deceased

In the last few years since the extraordinary Central Conference meeting in Basel in November 2022, the following people who have been involved in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe, passed away:

- Vlastislav Maláč, deceased on May 10, 2023. He was a delegate to the 1969, 1981, 1985, and 1989 Central Conferences and was a member of the Executive Committee from 1989 to 1993 as well a member of the Working Group Media and Communication from 1985 to 1993.
- Václav Svidenský, deceased on June 16, 2023, was a delegate to the 1969, 1977, 1981, 1985, and 2001 Central Conferences, a member of the Executive Committee from 1977-1989 and a member of the Working Group Church and Society from 1985 to 1997.
- Gerda Reiser, deceased on March 26, 2024. From June 1978, she was secretary to Bishop Franz Schäfer in the Bishop's Office in Zurich – even beyond his retirement in spring 1989.
- Adrian Wenziker, deceased on April 20, 2024. He was a delegate to the 2009, 2013, 2017 and 2022 Central Conferences as well as a member of the Council on Finance and Administration from 1993 to 2023 and its Chair from 1997. He was also an auditor of the CSE Central Conference treasury and, from 2014 to 2023, a member of our Central Conference pension board.
- Michel Weyer, deceased on December 5, 2024, was Professor of Church History and Methodism at Reutlingen School of Theology and delegate to 1969, 1977, 1989, 1997, and 2001 Central Conference. He was also a member of the Working Groups Mission and Evangelism (1969-1973) and Theology and Ordained Ministry (1981-2005).

2. Planning for the meetings of the Executive Committee and the Central Conference in Winterthur

2.1 Meetings of the Executive Committee in Winterthur

The 83rd meeting of the Executive Committee will take place on the morning of March 13, 2025, at Winterthur UMC (Switzerland), just prior to the 20th meeting of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe. Its main purpose is to prepare and plan the Central Conference gathering, prepare for the elections, and approve the 2024 annual accounts.

Lea Hafner (Executive Committee Member CH-FR-NA) and Jörg Niederer (Chair of the Working Group Episcopacy) will be attending this meeting for the last time. We would like to thank them both most sincerely for their great commitment to the Executive Committee and the Central Conference.

The 84th meeting of the Executive Committee will take place in Winterthur on March 15, 2025, at the end of the Central Conference – with a new composition. The main focus will be on defining the new objectives and dates for the work of the Executive Committee.

2.2 Meeting of the Central Conference in Winterthur

The 20th meeting of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe will take place from March 13 to 16, 2025, in Winterthur (Switzerland). The conference program can be found in Attachment 1 to the Office report. We would like to thank Winterthur UMC and the organizing committee under the leadership of Manuel Both for hosting this gathering on their premises.

Rough program:

Wed. March 12, 2025	14.00	Meeting WG Episcopacy
Thu. March 13, 2025	09.00	Meeting of the old Executive Committee
	14.15	Start of the meeting of the Central Conference CSE
	19.30	Meeting of the Central Conference CSE
Fri. March 14, 2025	08.30	Meeting of the Central Conference CSE
	19.15	Public participatory evening on the topic of "Migration"
Sat. March 15, 2025	08.30	Meeting of the Central Conference CSE
	14.00	Meeting of the new Executive Committee and Optional program in Winterthur*
	18.30	Festive evening at Winterthur UMC
Sun. March 16, 2025	10.00	Church services in Winterthur and the region

The public evening on the topic of "Migration" will be organized by Marietjie Odendaal, Ben Nausner, and Thomas Fux. This evening will also refer to greetings from the guests.

**For the election program on Saturday afternoon, we ask the CC members and guests who are not members of the new Executive Committee to sign in on the corresponding lists displayed in the foyer.*

Worship at the Central Conference:

Thu. March 13, 2025	08.30	Morning prayer / Bible study
	14.15	Communion service (Sermon: Bishop Ruby-Nell Estrella)
	20.45	Evening prayer (Erika Stalcup)
Fri. March 14, 2025	08.30	Bible study (Bishop Harald Rückert)

	12.10	Midday prayer (Erika Stalcup)
	21.15	Evening prayer (Erika Stalcup)
Sat. March 15, 2025	08.30	Bible study (Bishop Christian Alsted)
	09.00	Memorial service (Esther Handschin)
	12.10	Midday prayer (Erika Stalcup)

We would like to thank Erika Stalcup and the Working Group Liturgy as well as all those who made themselves available for a Bible study.

Worship services on Sunday, March 16

Winterthur	10.00	Bishop Harald Rückert (German/English translation)
Schaffhausen	09.45	Wilfried Nausner (German)
Solothurn	10.00	Bishop Sifredo Teixeira (Portuguese/German translation)
Uzwil (region)	10.30	Üllas Tankler (German)
Turbenthal	09.45	Donát Gyurkó (German)
Zurich Altstetten	10.00	Bence Vigh (English)
Zurich Oerlikon	10.00	Marjan Dimov (German)
Zurich Bethanien	10.00	Esther Handschin (German)
Heiligenschwendi	10.00	Novica Brankov, Dušan Tordaj, Ivana Pastor (German)
Bülach	10.00	Olav Schmidt (German)
Baden	10.00	Gjergj Lushka, Shyqyri Muço (English)
Embrach	10.00	Zoltán Kovács (English)

If you would like to attend a worship service outside of Winterthur, you can find out about travel options at the information desk.

2.3 Assignments for the Executive Committee and Central Conference

The office of the Central Conference issues the following assignments:

As assistant to the secretary:	Urs Schweizer
As conference treasurer:	Iris Bullinger
As reporter:	Urs Schweizer
For the examination of the minutes:	Christine Schneider-Oesch and Serge Frutiger

Since 2009, Jörg Niederer has reviewed a total of 24 minutes of the meetings of the Central Conference and the Executive Committee, and Lea Hafner has reviewed a total of 11 minutes for accuracy and completeness since 2021. The Central Conference would like to thank them warmly for this long, or rather very long, time. Two new auditors could be found for the new quadrennium. We would also like to thank them warmly for their hidden service for the Central Conference.

The Central Conference CSE elects as tellers:

Pastors: Rares Calugar (HU-RO), Esther Handschin (AT), Josef Červeňák (CZ)

Laypersons: Božena Daszuta (Chair, PL), Silja Moll (CH-FR-NA), Emil Zaeu (RS-MK-AL)

3. Decisions of the Executive Committee for the attention of the Central Conference

3.1 Vice-Chairperson of the Executive Committee

The position of vice-chairperson has been vacant since Helene Bindl stepped down in May 2021. Since then, the Office of the Central Conference and the General Assembly of the "Hilfe im Sprengel" association have met and worked without this additional person, which was feasible. Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to nominate and elect a person for the deputy chair of the Executive Committee. This is due to the fact that this person must be a full member of the Executive Committee and therefore already performs some tasks for the Central Conference. Further additional tasks often have to be rejected in view of the existing tasks (also at AC level). On the other hand, the language of correspondence and meetings of the Office of the Central Conference and the General Assembly of the "Hilfe im Sprengel" association is German. This significantly restricts the circle of possible persons. It would also be desirable if the Office of the Central Conference were not only staffed by people from Switzerland. The Office is now used to meeting in hybrid form. However, a presence in Zurich is helpful for sensitive and difficult issues.

The Rules of Order of the Central Conference formulate this:

Art. 3.1: "Through nomination the Bishop can petition that a voting member of the Executive Committee be elected Vice Chair of the Executive Committee." and

Art. 8.1: "The Office shall be composed of the Bishop, the Vice-Chairperson, the Secretary and the Treasurer. Chairperson shall be the Bishop."

The only task of the Vice-Chairman stated in the Rules of Order of the Central Conference is as follows:

Art. 7.5: "The Executive Committee shall meet at least once a year. The meetings shall be announced by the Bishop, if he or she is prevented in doing this, by the Vice-Chairperson or the Secretary."

The Office of the Central Conference has determined that it is possible to work without a vice-chairperson. This corresponds to the "can" formulation in Art. 3.1. A vice-chairperson may be elected, but does not have to be. The situation is different with the secretary or treasurer. However, it would be important for the Executive Committee to have a vice-chairperson in case the supervising bishop is unable to chair a meeting. This position should, therefore, not remain vacant.

The Executive Committee, therefore, proposes that the mandatory link between the position of Vice-Chairperson of the Executive Committee and membership of the Office of the Central Conference be removed. This would also result in eliminating a mandatory membership of the "Hilfe im Sprengel" association. All that would remain would be the task of deputy chairing meetings (not mentioned in the Rules of Order) in the event of the Bishop being unable to attend. According to Art. 8.2, the vice-chairperson could nevertheless be elected to the Office: "The Office can through a motion of the Bishop include a fifth person, who is elected by the Executive Committee from among its members." The Office of the Central Conference therefore proposes that the mention of the vice-chairperson in Art. 8.1 and 7.5 of the Rules of Order be deleted.

Motion of the Executive Committee to the Central Conference:

The Executive Committee proposes to the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe that the Rules of Order of the Central Conference be amended as follows:

Paragraph 7.5: "The Executive Committee shall meet at least once a year. The meetings shall be announced by the Bishop, if he or she is prevented in doing this, by the ~~Vice-Chairperson or the Secretary.~~"

Paragraph 8.1: "The Office shall be composed of the Bishop, the ~~Vice-Chairperson,~~ the Secretary and the Treasurer. Chairperson shall be the Bishop."

Paragraph 8.2: "The Office can through a motion of the Bishop include a ~~fifth~~ fourth person, who is elected by the Executive Committee from among its members."

3.2 Decisions on Areas and Names of Annual Conferences

In accordance with Art. 543.8, the Central Conference determines the boundaries of the Annual Conferences and Provisional Annual Conferences. Based on the decisions taken in recent years, the following areas and designations have been created:

- Provisional Annual Conference Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania
- Annual Conference Czech Republic
- Provisional Annual Conference Hungary-Romania

Motion of the Executive Committee to the Central Conference CSE:

The borders of the following Annual Conferences shall be determined according to the countries indicated in their names: Provisional Annual Conference Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania, Annual Conference Czech Republic, Provisional Annual Conference Hungary-Romania.

3.3 Elections for the Term of Office 2025 - 2029

The Secretary of the Central Conference wrote to all office holders and representatives of the Central Conference CSE last summer and asked whether they would continue to perform their office or task in the new quadrennium from 2025 to 2029. We are delighted that so many were willing to continue in their role next year. We would like to thank everyone for their willingness to commit to the Central Conference.

The following have announced their resignation:

- Lea Hafner (lay member of the Executive Committee CH-FR-NA)
- Jörg Niederer (Chair of the Working Group Episcopacy)
- Michael Nausner (member of the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministry)
- David Chlupáček (member of the Working Group Church and Society)
- Esther Handschin (member of the Working Group Liturgy)
- Jana Křížova (member of the Working Group Liturgy)

The following new people have been found. They are standing for election at the Central Conference:

- Andrzej Malicki (PL - as Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee)
- Christine Schneider-Oesch (as lay member of the Executive Committee CH-FR-NA)
- Serge Frutiger (CH - as Chair of the Working Group Episcopacy)
- Stefan Hafner (CH - Chair of the Council on Finance and Administration until 2026)
- Simon Joel Zürcher (CH - Co-Chair of the Working Group Children and Youth)
- Harald Bolleter (CH - Member of the Council on Finance and Administration and Pension Board, Chair of the Council on Finance and Administration from 2026)
- Jonathan Letsch (CH - member of the Council on Finance and Admin. and Pension Board)
- John Calhoun (AT - as a member of the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministry)
- Matthias Joseph (FR - as a member of the Working Group Liturgy)

- Dragan Trajčevski (RS - as a member of the Working Group Liturgy)
- Wilfried Nausner (AT/AL - representative in the CPCE regional group South-East Europe)
- Sławomir Rodaszyński (PL - representative in the CPCE regional group South-East Europe)
- Various persons for the Investigation Committee, Appeals Committee and the Judicial Court

The complete list of elections 2025 - 2029 is attached to the Office report as Attachment 2. The Executive Committee and Central Conference have different nomination and election tasks.

The Executive Committee decides on the following nominations for the attention of the Central Conference:

- **As members of the Judicial Court: István Csernák (HU), Philipp Hadorn (CH), Bernhard Pöll (AT), Martin Streit (CH), Christa Tobler (CH)**
- **As substitute members of the Judicial Court: Daniel Bator (PL), Regula Dannecker (CH), Wojciech Ostrowski (PL), Milen Stefanov (MK)**

The Executive Committee elects the following persons:

- **Andrzej Malicki (PL) as Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee**
- **Stefan Hafner (CH) as Chair of the Council on Finance and Administration until 2026**
- **Harald Bolleter (CH) as a member of the Council on Finance and Administration and from 2026 as its Chair**
- **Jonathan Letsch (CH) as a member of the Council on Finance and Administration**
- **Stefan Hafner (CH) as auditor of the treasury of the Central Conference CSE**
- **Stefan Hafner (CH) as a member of the Pension Board**
- **Harald Bolleter (CH) as a member of the Pension Board**
- **Jonathan Letsch (CH) as a member of the Pension Board**
- **Vladimir Fazekas (RS) as a member of the European Methodist Council**
- **Adrian Myslinski (PL) as a member of the European Methodist Council**
- **Anna Shammass (CH) as a member of the European Methodist Council**
- **Maria Sonnleithner (AT) as a member of the European Methodist Council**
- **Daniel Hänni (CH) as a member of the European Commission on Mission**
- **Ulrich Bachmann (CH) as a member of the European Commission on Mission**
- **Christa Wichers (CH) as a member of the European Lay Seminar**
- **Retired Bishop Patrick Streiff as a member of the Board of the Methodist e-Academy**
- **Zoltán Kovács (HU) as a member of the Board of the Methodist e-Academy**
- **Christoph Schluep (CH) as a member of the Board of the Methodist e-Academy**
- **Wilfried Nausner (AT/AL) to the CPCE Regional group South-East Europe**
- **Sławomir Rodaszyński (PL) to the CPCE Regional group South-East Europe**

The Executive Committee confirms the following appointments:

- **Andrzej Malicki (PL) to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters**
- **Thomas Fux (AT) to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters**
- **Stefan Schröckenfuchs (AT) to the Connectional Table**
- **Dániel Vadászi (HU) to the Connectional Table**
- **Jean-Paul Dietrich (CH) as a member of the General Board of Global Ministries**
- **Ueli Frei as a member of the United Methodist Publishing House**
- **Judit Lakatos (HU) as a member of World Methodist Historical Society- Europe**
- **Lilla Kardosné Lakatos (HU) as a member of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women**

The Central Conference CSE elects the following persons and committees:

- **Markus Bach (CH) as Secretary of the Central Conference CSE**
- **Iris Bullinger (CH) as Treasurer of the Central Conference CSE**
- **Serge Frutiger (CH) as Chair of the Working Group Episcopacy**
- **the voting members of the Executive Committee according to the election list**
- **Members and alternate members of the Committee on Investigation according to the election list**
- **Members and alternate members of the Committee on Appeals according to the election list**
- **Members and alternate members of the Judicial Court according to the election list**
- **Counsel for the church and his alternates according to the election list**
- **Members of the Working Group Episcopacy according to the election list**
- **Chair and members of the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries according to the election list**
- **Chair and members of the WG Church and Society according to the election list**
- **Co-Chairs of the Working Group Children and Youth according to the election list**
- **Chair and members of the WG Women's Work according to the election list**
- **Chair and members of the Working Group Liturgy according to the election list**
- **Chair and members of the Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs according to the election list**

4. Finances and Statistics

4.1 Account 2024 of the Central Conference CSE

Treasurer Iris Bullinger presents the 2024 annual financial statements to the Executive Committee (see Attachment 3). These close with an income surplus of CHF 6,143.85. The Office would like to thank Iris Bullinger most sincerely for her work. The 2021-2024 quadrennium closes with an expenditure surplus of CHF 82,086.90. The budget envisaged an expenditure surplus of CHF 69,500.00. The significant additional costs are mainly due to the high costs of holding the extraordinary central conference.

The 2024 annual financial statements were audited by the auditor Stefan Hafner. He recommends the annual financial statements for approval (see Attachment 4).

Motion to the Executive Committee

The Executive Committee approves the 2024 accounts on the basis of the auditors' report, grants discharge to the treasurer and expresses its sincere thanks to her for her services.

4.2 Budget 2025-2028

The Office submits the budget for the years 2025-2028 to the Executive Committee (see Attachment 5). It envisages a balanced account over the four years.

Following its deliberations, the Executive Committee submits the budget for the coming quadrennium to the Central Conference for approval.

Motion to the Central Conference CSE:

The Central Conference approves the budget for the quadrennium 2025-2028 of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe treasury.

4.3 Statistics

The statistics based on the figures from the Annual Conferences 2024 are attached as Attachment 6.

5. Changes to the Book of Discipline of the Central Conference

At the extraordinary Central Conference in November 2022, seven motions on how to deal with the issues of human sexuality and marriage were adopted on the basis of the final report of the Round Table. As a result, "overarching texts" were added to our existing Book of Discipline. The "overarching texts," which protect the various beliefs represented in our Central Conference, will remain in effect even after the changes to the Book of Discipline by the 2024 General Conference¹. All reports, proposals and minutes of the proceedings can be found in the report of the proceedings of the extraordinary Central Conference 2022 in Basel: <https://www.umc-cse.org/en/downloads--links/documents-studies-and-lectures/minutes-cse.html> and select "CC Executive Committee Fall 2022 / CC 2022 Basel.

The constitutional amendments adopted by General Conference are still undergoing a ratification process in the Annual Conferences (see the report of the Standing Commission on Central Conference Matters). The Social Principles, on the other hand, are already available in German translation. When changes were made to the Social Principles and the texts of the Book of Discipline, we always tried to use the same German text as the Central Conference of Germany whenever possible. The present translation was therefore again produced in cooperation with the Central Conference of Germany and presented to it in February 2025. The Office of the Central Conference and the Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs (Wilfried Nausner) then adapted the Social Principles in accordance with the intention of the extraordinary Central Conference 2022. Attachment 7a shows the German translation of the Social Principles with the corresponding adaptations, which are marked in color for better comprehension, and with footnotes that also contain the adaptations in English. Attachment 7b contains the Social Principles with the adaptations in the final version without highlighting.

Because the adaptation and translation work are to be carried out carefully and together with the Central Conference of Germany, and because the text of the Book of Discipline will undergo further changes after the ratification of the constitutional texts by the Annual Conferences, there are no changes to the constitutional texts yet, with one exception. Based on the actions of the 2024 General Conference and the 2022 Special Central Conference, only Art. 341.6 and the footnote explaining this sentence will be deleted. These adjustments implement the intention to continue to insert the "overarching texts" into our Book of Discipline as valid texts for our Central Conference after General Conference.

6. Partnerships and encounters

The fact that many congregations in the USA have left The United Methodist Church has also had an impact on the number of church partnerships within the "In Mission Together" program. The fact that the UMC in Bulgaria and Slovakia are no longer part of our Church has not remained without consequences in this respect either. There is currently no overview of which

¹ The changes made by the 2024 General Conference include, in the Social Principles, the expansion of the understanding of marriage and the deletion of the qualifying statements on homosexuality, as well as, in the regulatory texts, the prohibition against marrying same-sex couples (deletion of Art. 341.6). At the same time, the GC has given the Central Conferences and the Annual Conferences the authority to set the requirements for marriage ceremonies and for candidacies for the pastoral ministry (Articles 543.15 & 543.16).

church partnerships still exist. However, it is undisputed that there are fewer than there used to be - as is the decline in the financial resources transferred within the framework of such partnerships. However, there are still very lively and hopeful relationships between people and churches in the USA and those in our Central Conference. Some are lived out in the context of previous IMT partnerships. Some have endured, even though the people and local churches in the USA and in Central and Southern Europe now belong to different Churches. And there are also individuals in whom a very special interest in the work of our Church in Central and Southern Europe has been reawakened, and who - alone or with a congregation in the background - maintain contacts and also provide support.

The number of partnerships within the Central Conference is stable at best but is also declining overall. This is often due to age, which no longer allows meetings in the form of trips in particular. But what applies to IMT partnerships also applies here: They still exist, the hopeful and encouraging relationships and encounters across borders.

As the Office of the Central Conference, we believe that such partnerships and individual encounters and relationships are important. They enable us to experience our Central Conference not only as a structural organization, but as an enriching reality. We would therefore like to take this opportunity to point out other ways in which this connectedness can be discovered and experienced:

- in the longstanding, very lively and sustainable work of women at Central Conference level.
- in the newly awakened relationships at the level of those responsible for working with children and young people, culminating in the Youth Camp in Cluj-Napoca (RO) in July 2025.
- with the help of the Connexio Mission Talks, which take place approximately every two months and make use of the technical possibilities and connect interested parties with people in our Central Conference and beyond for a one-hour ZOOM encounter.
- with the help of Bishop Stefan Zürcher's monthly Dash of thought (which can be found on the home page of the CC website → www.umc-cse.org).
- with the help of the Connexio monthly prayer, which again and again focuses on a country from our Central Conference, as well.

Make use of these networking opportunities!

7. Thematic Priorities in the Central Conference CSE

In the recent past, the Executive Committee has held so-called theme days at its meetings where they were not restricted by the pandemic:

- Theme day 2014: "Mission in today's world" (Sofia)
- Theme day 2015: "There is room at the table - sharing the gifts together" (Warsaw)
- Theme day 2016: "Methodist worship service" (Mulhouse)
- Focus topic 2018: "Communication / team building" (Budapest)
- Theme day 2019: "Rich and poor in the Central Conference" (Monospitovo)
- Theme day 2020 has been canceled (Vienna)
- Theme day 2021 has been canceled (online, Budapest)
- Topic in 2022: "Exchange on work with refugees in the CC" (Mulhouse)
- Theme day 2023: "Functioning of the Executive Committee" (Cluj-Napoca)
- Theme day 2024: "Working with children and young people in the CC CSE" (Vienna)

At the 2024 meeting in Budapest, the Executive Committee agreed to draw up a "set of arguments" on various current topics in society and in the Church. The aim is to draw up statements on a topic in concise and precise sentences that say something about our being church in Central and Southern Europe. This set of arguments is to be made known within our Church. The individual topics can be developed in very different ways:

- as a result of the work of a Working Group of the Central Conference,
- as a result of a theme day on the occasion of a meeting,
- as a result of an event at the Central Conference, etc.

The aim of this future work is not primarily to hold an event, but to make our attitudes, questions and arguments on a topic visible. This will be exemplified at the Central Conference 2025 in Winterthur with the public evening as an introduction to the topic of "Migration". Marietje Odendaal, Ben Nausner, and Thomas Fux have thankfully agreed to organize this evening. It will take place on Friday, March 14, 2025, at 7.15 pm at Winterthur UMC. At its meeting on Saturday, March 15, 2025, or at its meeting in Warsaw in November 2025, the Executive Committee will decide how we want to proceed and plan in the new year based on the experience gained.

8. Miscellaneous

Dates 2025-2026

A list of dates from 2025-2026 is also attached to the report of the Office of the Central Conference (Attachment 8). Three events in particular should be mentioned here:

- We would like to thank our brothers and sisters in Poland for inviting the Executive Committee to Warsaw from November 21-23, 2025.
- There will be a European meeting of the Executive Committees in Reutlingen (DE) in March 2026. Two people from each of the Central Conferences are needed to prepare the meeting. Bishop Stefan will ask for one person each from the western and eastern part of our Central Conference. The new Executive Committee will receive and confirm these nominations.
- There will definitely be no General Conference in 2026. Instead, a Leadership Gathering will take place, to which our Central Conference can send four people (including Bishop Stefan). Bishop Stefan will submit a proposal to the new Executive Committee.

20 years of Bishop Patrick Streiff

Twenty years ago, at the 2005 Central Conference in Bern, Patrick Streiff was elected Bishop of The United Methodist Church for the "Geneva Area". The following year, he took over responsibility for this episcopal area from his predecessor, Bishop Heinrich Bolleter, and exercised this leadership until the handover of office to his successor Stefan Zürcher in summer 2023. However, Patrick Streiff is still committed to the global church as a (un)retired bishop and cannot and will not hide his love and commitment to "his" Church. In the USA, the Secretary experienced that people could not categorize "Switzerland". But when he told them that this was Bishop Patrick Streiff's home, they were able to relate to it. We are grateful that we have been able to journey with you, Patrick, for such a long time and wish you God's rich blessing on your milestone birthday and anniversary of office and the continued experience that God is with you, your wife Heidi and your whole family.

Markus Bach, Secretary

Attachment 1

Supplementary Program

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

until noon

Arrival of the members of the WG Episcopacy

12:30	Lunch
14:00-17:00	Meeting of the WG Episcopacy
17:00	Meeting of the Office CC CSE
18:00	Dinner
<i>until evening</i>	<i>Arrival of the members of the old Executive Committee</i>

Thursday, March 13, 2025

09:00-12:00	Meeting of the old Executive Committee (approx. 10:30 Break)
12:30	Lunch
<i>until 14:00</i>	<i>Arrival of the other CC delegates and guests</i>
14:15	Opening Worship Service with communion
16:00	Break
16:30	Plenary session I
18:00	Dinner
19:30	Plenary session II
20:45	Evening prayer

Friday, March 14, 2025

08:30	Bible study
09:15	Plenary session III (approx. 10:30 Break)
12:30	Lunch
14:00	Plenary session IV (approx. 15:45 Break)
17:45	Dinner
19:15	Public participation evening on the topic of "Migration"
21:15	Evening prayer

Saturday, March 15, 2025

08:30	Bible study
09:15	Memorial Service
10:00	Break
10:30	Plenary session V
12:30	Lunch
14:00	Meeting of the new Executive Committee <i>For the other delegates and guests: "The Winterthur Choice"</i>
18:30	Festive evening

Sunday, March 16, 2025

<i>morning</i>	Various Worship Services in the Winterthur area with the participation of Central Committee delegates and guests
<i>afterwards</i>	<i>Departure</i>

Wahlen 2025-2029 ZK MSE - Elections 2025-2029 CC CSE

Pfarrperson / clergy

Laie / lay

Büro - Office

Wahl von Sekretär und Kassier durch Zentralkonferenz - Personen müssen nicht Mitglieder der Zentralkonferenz sein; Wiederwahl ist möglich.

Election of Vice-chair by the executive committee on nomination by bishop - person is member of the executive committee. Election of secretary and treasurer by Central Conference; persons do not have to be members of Central Conference; re-election possible.

Bischof, Vorsitz - <i>Bishop, chair</i>	Stefan Zürcher
Sekretär - <i>Secretary</i>	Markus Bach (CH)
Kassierin - <i>Treasurer</i>	Iris Bullinger (CH)

Exekutivkomitee – Executive Committee

Wahl Stellvertretung Vorsitz durch Exekutivkomitee auf Wahlvorschlag durch Bischof - Person ist Mitglied des Exekutivkomitees.

1 Superintendent und 1 Laie je Jährliche Konferenz. Wahl durch Zentralkonferenz auf Wahlvorschlag durch den Bischof nach Konsultation mit Delegationen.

1 superintendent and 1 lay from each annual conference. Election by the Central conference on nomination by the bishop after consultation with the delegations.

Stimmberechtigte Mitglieder – members with voting rights:

Bischof, Vorsitz - <i>Bishop, chair</i>	Stefan Zürcher	
Stv. Vorsitz - <i>Vice-chair</i>	Andrzej Malicki	
Sekretär - <i>Secretary</i>	Markus Bach	
Kassierin - <i>Treasurer</i>	Iris Bullinger	
JK Österreich	Sup. Stefan Schröckenfuchs	Ben Nausner
JK Schweiz-Frankreich-Nordafrika	Sup. Serge Frutiger	Christine Schneider
JK Tschechien	Sup. Ivana Procházková	Martina Chlupáčková
JK Ungarn-Rumänien	Sup. László Khaled	Dávid Csernák
JK Polen	Sup. Andrzej Malicki	Bozena Daszuta
JK Serbien-Nordmazedonien-Albanien	Sup. Daniel Sjanta	Emil Zaev
Vorsitz AG Bischofsamt	Sup. Serge Frutiger	

Mit beratender Stimme – members with voice, but not vote:

Bischöfe im Ruhestand - *retired bishops*

Bischof / Bishop Heinrich Bolleter
Bischof / Bishop Patrick Streiff

Je 1 Superintendent aus jedem Land, sofern nicht bereits im Exekutivkomitee mit Stimmrecht.

1 superintendent from each country, if not yet member with voting rights in the executive committee.

Frankreich und Belgien	Sup. Grégoire Chahinian
Algerien und Tunesien	Sup. Freddy Nzambe
Albanien	Sup. Wilfried Nausner
Rumänien	Sup. Rares Calugar
Nordmazedonien	Sup. Marjan Dimov
Koordinatorin des Frauendienstes	Barbara Bünger

Auf Einladung des Bischofs können die Räte und Arbeitsgruppen der Zentralkonferenz durch ihre Vorsitzenden mit beratender Stimme vertreten sein.

On invitation by the bishop, the councils and working groups of the central conference may be present with voice but not vote:

Rat für Finanzen und Administration	(Stv. Vorsitz / Vice Chairman)	Stefan Hafner (CH - bis / until 2026)
Rechtsrat		Christa Tobler (CH)

AG Theologie u. Ordinierte Dienste	Zoltán Kovács (HU)	
AG Kinder und Jugend (Co-Vorsitzende / Co-Chairs)		Ivana Pastor (RS) Simon Zürcher (CH)
AG Kirche und Gesellschaft	Marietjie Odendaal (CH)	
AG Frauendienst	Monika Zuber (PL)	Barbara Bünger (CH)
AG Liturgie	Erika Stalcup (CH)	
AG Kirchenordnung u. Rechtsfragen	Wilfried Nausner (AL)	

Rat für Finanzen und Administration – Council on Finance and Administration

3 Personen; Nomination durch das Büro; Wahl durch das Exekutivkomitee.

3 persons; nominated by the office; elected by the executive committee.

Vorsitz - <i>Chair</i>		Stefan Hafner (CH) Harald Bolleter (CH) Jonathan Letsch (CH)
Revisor der Kasse Zentralkonferenz - <i>Auditor of the CC accounts</i>		Stefan Hafner (CH)

Pensionsbehörde – Pension Board

Mitglieder des Rats für Finanzen und Administration. Zuwahl durch Exekutivkomitee von Pensions-Fachpersonen.

Members of the council on Finance and Administration. Additional person with knowledge in pension elected by the executive committee.

Vorsitz - <i>Chair</i>	amtsführender Bischof / active Bishop	Stefan Hafner (CH) Harald Bolleter (CH) Jonathan Letsch (CH)
Zusätzliche Fachperson – <i>additional person</i> :		Markus Hafner (CH)
Pension Benefits Officer (voice, no vote):		André Töngi (CH)

Untersuchungsausschuss – Committee on Investigation

7 pastorale Mitglieder in voller Verbindung; 2 Laien beratend; Nomination durch Bischof nach Konsultation mit der Arbeitsgruppe für das Bischofsamt, Wahl durch die Zentralkonferenz.

7 clergy in full connection; 2 lay without vote; nominated by bishop after consultation with working group on episcopacy, election by the central conference.

JK Österreich	Stefan Schröckenfuchs	Roland Siegrist
JK Schweiz-Frankreich-Nordafrika	Jörg Niederer (Einberufer - <i>convener</i>)	
JK Tschechien	Petr Procházka	
JK Ungarn-Rumänien	László Khaled	Grethe Jenei
JK Polen	Sławomir Rodaszyński	
JK Serbien-Nordmazedonien-Albanien	Ana Palik-Kunčak	
	<i>vakant - vacant</i>	

Ersatzmitglieder: 5 pastorale Mitglieder in voller Verbindung; 1 Laie beraten; Nomination durch Bischof nach Konsultation mit der Arbeitsgruppe für das Bischofsamt, Wahl durch die Zentralkonferenz.

Reserve: 5 clergy in full connection; 1 lay without vote; nominated by bishop after consultation with working group on episcopacy, election by the central conference.

JK Österreich	Martin Obermeir-Siegrist	
JK Schweiz-Frankreich-Nordafrika	Gunnar Wichers	
JK Tschechien	Pavel Procházka	
JK Ungarn-Rumänien	Zoltán Kovács	
JK Polen		Olgierd Benedyktowicz
JK Serbien-Nordmazedonien-Albanien	Marjan Dimov	

Berufungsausschuss - Committee on Appeals

4 pastorale Mitglieder in voller Verbindung; 1 vollzeitlicher Lokalpfarrer; 4 Laien; Nomination durch den Bischof, Wahl durch die Zentralkonferenz.

4 clergy in full connection; 1 local pastor in full-time; 4 lay; nominated by the bishop, election by the central conference.

JK Österreich	Wilfried Nausner (Einberufer - convener)	Gerhard Weissenbrunner
JK Schweiz-Frankreich-Nordafrika	Etienne Rudolph	
JK Tschechien	Pavel Hradský	
JK Ungarn-Rumänien		Henrik Schauermann
JK Polen	Józef Bartos	Bozena Daszuta
JK Serbien-Nordmazedonien-Albanien		Maria Parnicki
Lokalpfarrer - Local pastor	Ruedi Stähli (CH)	

Ersatzmitglieder: 4 pastorale Mitglieder in voller Verbindung; 1 vollzeitlicher Lokalpfarrer; 4 Laien; Nomination durch den Bischof, Wahl durch Zentralkonferenz

Reserve: 4 clergy in full connection; 1 local pastor in full-time; 4 lay; nominated by the bishop, election by the Central Conference

JK Österreich		Hayford Boateng
JK Schweiz-Frankreich-Nordafrika	Andreas Steiner	Marc Berger
JK Tschechien		Josef Thal
JK Ungarn-Rumänien	Márton Hecker	
JK Polen		
JK Serbien-Nordmazedonien-Albanien	Lila Balovski (RS)	Christina Cekov (NMK)
Lokalpfarrer	Christine Moll (CH)	

Rechtsrat – Judicial Court

5 Personen, mindestens 2 pastorale Mitglieder in voller Verbindung; dürfen nicht Mitglieder der Zentralkonferenz und ihrer Organe sein. Nomination durch das Exekutivkomitee, Wahl durch die Zentralkonferenz. Konstituiert sich selbst, inkl. Vorsitz.

5 persons, at least 2 clergy in full connection; may not be members of the central conference other their organs. Nomination by the executive committee, election by the central conference. Organizes itself, incl. chair.

Martin Streit (CH)	Christa Tobler (CH)
István Csernák (HU)	Philipp Hadorn (CH)
	Bernhard Pöll (AT)

Ersatzmitglieder: 2 pastorale Mitglieder in voller Verbindung und 2 Laien; Nomination durch das Exekutivkomitee, Wahl durch die Zentralkonferenz.

Reserve: 2 clergy in full connection and 2 lay. Nomination by the executive committee, election by the central conference.

Milen Stefanov (MK)	Regula Dannecker (CH)
Wojciech Ostrowski (PL)	Daniel Bator (PL)

Anwalt – Counsel for the Church

1 Anwalt und 4 Ersatzpersonen gemäss Disziplinar- und Schiedsgerichtsordnung; Wahl durch die Zentralkonferenz

1 Counsel and 4 reserve persons according to rules of judicial administration; election by the central conference

Anwalt	Markus Bach (CH)
Ersatz	Stefan Schröckenfuchs (AT)
	Petr Procházka (CZ)
	Gábor Szuhánszky (HU)
	Etienne Rudolph (FR)

Arbeitsgruppe Bischofsamt – Working Group Episcopacy

1 Mitglied aus jeder Jährlichen Konferenz. Person muss Mitglied des Exekutivkomitees sein; Nomination durch Büro bzw. ein Fünftel durch den Bischof; Wahl durch die Zentralkonferenz.

1 member of each annual conference. Person has to be member of the executive committee; nominated by the office respectively one fifth by the bishop; elected by central conference.

JK Österreich	Stefan Schröckenfuchs
JK Schweiz-Frankreich-Nordafrika	Serge Frutiger (Vorsitz - <i>chair</i>)
JK Tschechien	Ivana Procházková
JK Ungarn-Rumänien	László Khaled
JK Polen	Bozena Daszuta
JK Serbien-Nordmazedonien-Albanien	Daniel Sjanta

Weitere Arbeitsgruppen, die die Zentralkonferenz bilden kann –

Other working groups which the central conference can organize

In der Regel nur 3 Personen. Mitglieder müssen nicht Delegierte an die Zentralkonferenz sein; Nomination durch die Arbeitsgruppe, Wahl von Mitgliedern und Vorsitzenden durch Zentralkonferenz.

Usually only 3 persons. Members do not have to be delegates to the Central Conference; nomination by the working group. Members and chairperson elected by central conference.

Arbeitsgruppe Theologie und Ordinierte Dienste –

Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries (ENGLISH)

Zoltán Kovács (HU), Vorsitzender - *chair*
David Field (CH)
John Calhoun (AT)
Daniel Sjanta (RS)
Edward Puślecki (PL)
Jana Daněčková (CZ) (+ 1 Vertretung aus der Zentralkonferenz Deutschland)

Arbeitsgruppe Kirche und Gesellschaft – Working Group Church and Society (ENGLISH)

Marietje Odendaal (CH), Vorsitzende – *chair*
Dorothee Bührma (AT)
Krzysztof Klusek (PL)

Arbeitsgruppe Kinder und Jugend – Working Group Children and Youth

Ivana Pastor (RS), Co-Vorsitzende - *co-chair*
Simon Zürcher (CH), Co-Vorsitzender - *co-chair*
und die Delegierten aller Länder – *and the delegates of all countries*

Arbeitsgruppe Frauendienst – Working Group Women's Work (ENGLISH)

Monika Zuber (PL), Vorsitzende - *chair*
Maria Đurovka-Petraš (RS)
Murielle Rietschi Wilhelm (CH)
Zentralkonferenz-Koordinatorin – *Central Conference Coordinator*: Barbara Büniger (CH)

Arbeitsgruppe Liturgie – Working Group Liturgy (ENGLISH)

Erika Stalcup (CH), Vorsitzende - *chair*
Matthias Joseph (FR)
Dragan Trajčevski (RS)

Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenordnung und Rechtsfragen –

Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs (GERMAN + ENGLISH)

Wilfried Nausner (AL), Vorsitzender - *chair*
Petr Procházka (CZ)
Serge Frutiger (CH)
László Khaled (HU)

Vertretungen über Zentralkonferenz hinaus –
Representatives beyond the Central conference (pro memoria)

European Level:

Soweit keine anderen Wahlbestimmungen bestehen: Wahl durch das Exekutivkomitee auf Vorschlag des Büros.
Unless other rules prevail: election by the executive committee after nomination by the office.

European Methodist Council (EMC) and Joint Commission of UMC in Europe

Bischof / <i>Bishop</i>	Stefan Zürcher	
	Adrian Myslinski (PL)	Anna Shammass (CH)
	Vladimir Fazekaš (RS)	Maria Sonnleithner (AT)

European Commission on Mission (ECOM)

Connexio Co-Vorsitzender – <i>Co-President</i>	Daniel Hänni (CH)
Connexio Geschäftsleiter – <i>General Secretary</i>	Ulrich Bachmann (CH)

Fund for Mission in Europe (FMIE)

Bischof / <i>Bishop</i>	Stefan Zürcher	1 Person vakant / <i>vacant</i>
Geschäftsführer, beratend - <i>Manager, with voice but not vote:</i>		Andreas Stämpfli (CH)

Europäisches Laienseminar – *European Lay Seminar*

Christa Wichers (CH)

Methodist e-Academy (Governing Board)

Bischof / <i>Bishop</i>	Patrick Streiff, Vorsitz - <i>Chair</i>
	Zoltán Kovács (HU)
	Christoph Schluep (CH)

Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa - GEKE (Regionalgruppe Süd-Ost-Europa)

–

Community of Protestant Churches in Europe - CPCE (South-East Europe regional group)

Sławomir Rodaszyński (PL)
Wilfried Nausner (AL)

United Methodist Church – World Wide Level:

Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters

Zentralkonferenz MSE: 1 Bischof, 1 Pfarrperson; 1 Laie - *Central Conference CSE: 1 bishop, 1 clergy, 1 lay*

Bischof / *Bishop*

Patrick Streiff / Stefan Zürcher

Andrzej Malicki (PL)

Thomas Fux (AT)

Connectional Table

Zentralkonferenz MSE: 1 Person - *Central conference CSE: 1 person*

Stefan Schröckenfuchs (AT) Dániel Vadászi (HU)

GBGM – General Board of Global Ministries

Von der ZK MSE zu wählen - *To be elected by CC CSE*

Jean-Paul Dietrich (CH)

IMT – In Mission Together

Partnerschaften zwischen USA und Mitteleuropa-Balkan; gewählt von den Jährlichen Konferenzen

Partnership between US and Central Europe and Balkan; elected by Annual Conferences

JK Tschechien

Jana Křížova (CZ)

JK Ungarn-Rumänien

Rares Calugar (RO)

Laura Tordaj-Szuhánski (HU)

JK Polen

Adrian Myslinski (PL)

JK Serbien-Nord-Mazedonien-Albanien

Maria Đurovka-Petraš (RS)

Jennifer Moore (MK)

Mitglied im Koordinationsteam – *member of Coordinating Committee* Urs Schweizer

United Methodist Publishing House

Ueli Frei (CH)

World Methodist Council:

World Methodist Historical Society – European Section

Vize-Vorsitzende - *vice-chair*

Judit Lakatos (HU)

WFMUCW – World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women

Wahl bzw. Ernennung durch den Weltbund.

Election respectively appointment by World Federation.

Vorsitzende Kontinentaleuropa – *Chair Europe Continental*

Lilla Kardosné Lakatos (HU)

Financial Statement 2024

Einnahmen	Rechnung 2024		Konsolidiert 2021 - 2024	
Beiträge Jährliche Konferenzen				
Schweiz	45 000.00		180 000.00	
Frankreich	4 500.00		18 000.00	
Österreich	3 238.00		12 952.00	
Bulgarien	0.00		1 875.00	
Nord-Mazedonien	750.00		3 000.00	
Serbien	750.00		3 000.00	
Ungarn	1 500.00		6 000.00	
Slowakei	0.00		1 500.00	
Tschechien	1 500.00		4 500.00	
Polen	1 500.00		6 000.00	
Nordafrika	0.00	58 738.00	0.00	236 827.00
Gaben und Zinseinnahmen		309.55		582.60
Total Einnahmen		59 047.55		237 409.60
Ausgaben				
Zentralkonferenz	0.00		130 513.60	
Sitzungen Exekutivkomitee	24 068.66	24 068.66	68 177.26	198 690.86
AG Theologie und Ordinierte Dienste	2 329.39		2 329.39	
AG Kirche und Gesellschaft	0.00		3 043.00	
AG Kinder und Jugend	0.00		2 848.00	
AG Liturgie	0.00		0.00	
AG Kirchenordnung und Rechtsfragen	0.00		0.00	
AG Frauendienst	0.00*		0.00	
AG Bischofsamt	0.00		366.30	
Reserve für a.o. Aufträge	0.00	2 329.39	25 623.04	34 210.93
Superintendententreffen	5 073.20		5 073.20	
Weitere Tagungen	0.00	5 073.20	0.00	5 073.20
Beiträge der Zentralkonferenz an:				
Weltrat	2 666.52		11 107.01	
Europäischer Rat	5 583.15		23 493.12	
Jugendrat (EMYC)	0.00	8 249.67	0.00	34 600.13
Verschiedenes				
Druckkosten	629.40		2 434.75	
Bibliothek / Archiv	7 500.00		30 000.00	
Übrige Kosten	5 053.38	13 182.78	14 486.63	46 921.38
Total Ausgaben		52 903.70		319 496.50
Einnahmen		59 047.55		237 409.60
Ausgaben		52 903.70		319 496.50
Einnahmen-Überschuss		6 143.85		
Ausgaben-Überschuss				- 82 086.90

Balance sheet as per Dezember 31, 2024

	Fr.	Fr.
Aktiven		
Zahlstelle EMK	91 364.16	
Guthaben	3 883.60	
Passiven		
Kreditoren / Trans. Passiven		338.00
Rückstellungen		0.00
Eigenkapital		88 765.91
Ergebnis		6 143.85
Total	95 247.76	95 247.76

Plan-les-Ouates, 4. Februar 2025, Iris Bullinger

Attachment 4

Auditors Report

Financial statements 2024 Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

As auditor, I audited the accounts (balance sheet and income statement) for 2024.

I checked the opening and closing balance sheets, reviewed the annual transactions on the income statement accounts and found that the accounts are clean and correct.

The 2024 accounts close with a revenue surplus of CHF 6'143.85.

As at December 31, 2024, the reported equity amounted to CHF 94'909.76.

The undersigned confirms the accuracy of the 2024 annual financial statements and the balance sheet as at December 31, 2024 and proposes that discharge be granted to the Treasurer, Iris Bullinger, and that she be thanked for her clean and conscientious work.

Schaffhausen, February 6, 2025

*The auditor:
Stefan Hafner*

Budget 2025 - 2028

Einnahmen	Budget 2025 - 2028		Budget 2021 - 2024	
Beiträge Jährliche Konferenzen				
Schweiz	180'000.00		180'000.00	
Frankreich	12'000.00		18'000.00	
Österreich	13'000.00		13'000.00	
Bulgarien	0.00		3'000.00	
Serbien-Nordmazedonien-Albanien	6'000.00		6'000.00	
Ungarn-Rumänien	6'000.00		6'000.00	
Slowakei			3'000.00	
Tschechien	6'000.00		3'000.00	
Polen	6'000.00	229'000.00	6'000.00	238'000.00
Gaben und Zinseinnahmen		2'000.00		2'000.00
Total Einnahmen		231'000.00		240'000.00
Ausgaben				
Zentralkonferenz	60'000.00		60'000.00	
Sitzungen Büro/Exekutive	58'000.00	118'000.00	55'000.00	115'000.00
AG Theologie und Ordinierte Dienste	6'000.00		8'000.00	
AG Kirche und Gesellschaft	2'000.00		3'000.00	
AG Kinder und Jugend	16'000.00		3'000.00	
AG Liturgie	2'000.00		3'000.00	
AG Kirchenordnung und Rechtsfragen	2'000.00		3'000.00	
AG Frauendienst	0.00*		0.00	
AG Bischofsamt	1'000.00		1'000.00	
Reserve für a.o. Aufträge	5'000.00	34'000.00	21'500.00	42'500.00
Superintendententreffen	0.00		30'000.00	
Weitere Tagungen	0.00	0.00	0.00	30'000.00
Beiträge der Zentralkonferenz an:				
Weltrat	12'000.00		15'000.00	
Europäischer Rat	24'000.00		29'000.00	
Jugendrat (EMYC)	0.00	36'000.00	20'000.00	64'000.00
Verschiedenes				
Druckkosten	2'000.00		2'000.00	
Bibliothek / Archiv	30'000.00		30'000.00	
Übrige Kosten	10'000.00	42'000.00	26'000.00	58'000.00
Total Ausgaben		230'000.00		309'500.00
Einnahmen		231'000.00		240'000.00
Ausgaben		230'000.00		309'500.00
Einnahmen-Überschuss		1'000.00		
Ausgaben-Überschuss				-69'500.00

Statistics based on the Annual Conferences 2024

* kursive Zahlen = 2023

Bezirke Gemeinden Glieder Gottesdienste										
	Bezirke	Gemeinden	Bekennende Glieder	Getaufte Glieder	Freunde	Total Pers.	Gottesdienstbesuch Erwachsene	Gottesdienstbesuch Kinder	Bekennende Glieder pro Bezirk	Bekennende Glieder pro Gemeinde
nach Ländern										
Albanien*	3	6	248	2	80	330	200	60	82.7	41.3
Algerien	4	6	170	0	45	215	99	8	42.5	28.3
Belgien	1	1	23		9	32	10	0	23.0	23.0
Frankreich	16	16	988	6	792	1'786	834	227	61.8	61.8
Nord-Mazedonien*	7	10			2'000	2'000				
Österreich	7	7	633	441	511	1'585	247	33	90.4	90.4
Polen*	20	38	1699	242	260	2'201	1'400	141	85.0	44.7
Rumänien*	2	3	59	17	107	183	69	45	29.5	19.7
Schweiz	68	97	4'127	442	5'900	10'469	3'244	471	60.7	42.5
Serbien*	9	14	379	110	209	698	278	47	42.1	27.1
Tschechische Republik	14	19	809	199	462	1'470	978		57.8	42.6
Tunesien	1	1				0				
Ungarn	11	27	488	681	756	1'925	1'236	339	44.4	18.1
Total	163	245	9'623	2'140	11'131	22'894	8'595	1'371		
<i>Vorjahr 2023</i>	163	251	10'106	2'123	7'833	20'062	8'239	1'333		
<i>Differenz +/-</i>	0	-6	-483	17	3'298	2'832	356	38		
nach Konferenzen										
Prov. JK Österreich	7	7	642	441	511	1'594	247	33	91.7	91.7
JK Schweiz-Frankr.-NA	89	121	5'475	448	6'746	12'669	4'187	706	61.5	45.2
JK Tschechien ohne SK	14	19	830	199	462	1'491	978	0	59.3	43.7
Prov. JK Ungarn-Rum.*	13	30	569	698	863	2'108	1'305	384	43.8	19.0
JK Polen*	20	38	1'725	242	260	2'227	1'400	141	86.3	45.4
Prov. JK RS-NMK-AL*	19	30	648	112	2'289	3'028	478	107	34.1	21.6
Total	162	245	9'889	2'140	11'131	23'117	8'595	1'371	376.6	266.6

**Pfarrpersonen
Mitarbeitende**

nach Ländern	Personen in voller Verb. zur JK aktiv	Mitglieder auf Probe + a.o. Mitglieder aktiv	Lokalphstoren aktiv	Laienmitarbeiter aktiv	Volle Verbindung + a.o. Mitgl. i. Ruhestand	Clergy aktiv	Clergy total	Beginn der Arbeit
Albanien	1	2	0	1	0	3	3	1922/1990
Algerien	0	1	1	2	3	2	5	1886
Belgien	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1920/2008
Frankreich	9	4	2	1	11	15	26	1791/1868/1907
Nord-Mazedonien	2	0	3	4	2	5	7	1873/1921
Österreich	6	1	1	0	1	8	9	1870
Polen	21	0	0	2	5	21	26	1895/1920
Rumänien	3	0	0	0	0	3	3	2011
Schweiz	45	4	31	1	55	80	135	1840/1856/1866
Serbien	7	0	3	1	1	10	11	1898
Tschechische Republik	10	3	4	1	4	17	21	1920
Tunesien	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	
Ungarn	9	1	2	0	7	12	19	1898/1905
Total	114	16	47	14	89	177	266	
<i>Vorjahr 2023</i>	118	17	41	11	84	178	264	
<i>Differenz +/-</i>	-4	-1	6	3	5	-1	2	

Bekennende Glieder:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Differenz
Prov. JK Österreich	746	744	646	642	617	633	+16
JK Schweiz-Frankreich-NA	6 407	6 215	6 138	5 924	5 676	5 308	-368
JK Tschechien	1 179	1 131	1 078	834	789	809	+20
Prov. JK Ungarn-Rumänien	509	516	521	508	519	547	+28
JK Polen	1 925	1 924	1 978	1 787	1 705	1 699	-6
Prov. JK RS-NMK-AL	434	631	595	639	618	627	+9
Total	12 564	12 353	12 069	10 334	9 924	9 623	-301
+ Makedonien	1'200	1'200	1'200	1'200	1'200	1 200	0
+ Total Past. Mitglieder					264	266	+2
Total Gesamt	13 764	13 553	13 269	11 534	11 388	10 823	
<i>Änderung in %</i>	-2.62		-2.10	-13.08	-1.27	-6.16	

Social Principles 2025 (in German)

of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

based on the Social Principles 2020/2024

INHALTSVERZEICHNIS

Berufen zur Einheit in der Zentralkonferenz von Mittel- und Südeuropa

VORWORT

PRÄAMBEL

GEMEINSCHAFT DER GESAMTEN SCHÖPFUNG

Vorwort

Schöpfung in Gefahr

- A. Zerstörung von Ökosystemen
- B. Globale Erwärmung und Klimawandel
- C. Abhängigkeit von fossilen Brennstoffen

Verantwortung für die Schöpfung

- A. Umweltbedingter Rassismus
- B. Nachhaltige Politik und Praxis
- C. Recht auf angemessene Ernährung
- D. Fürsorge für alle Geschöpfe
- E. Schutz des Weltraums
- F. Die Bejahung von Wissenschaft und von traditioneller Weisheit

DIE WIRTSCHAFTLICHE GEMEINSCHAFT

Vorwort

Wirtschaftliche Herausforderungen

- A. Globalisierung
- B. Armut und Einkommensungleichheit
- C. Menschenhandel und Sklaverei
- D. Bestechung, Bestechlichkeit und Korruption

Wirtschaftliche Gerechtigkeit

- A. Verantwortungsvoller Konsum
- B. Ackerbau und landwirtschaftliche Produktion
- C. Die Würde der Arbeit
- D. Sonntag und Zeit für Erneuerung
- E. Soziale Verantwortung von Unternehmen

DIE SOZIALE GEMEINSCHAFT

Vorwort

Die fürsorgliche Gemeinschaft

- A. Die Familie

- B. Singles
- C. Menschliche Sexualität
- D. Ehe
 - D. 1 Kinderehe
 - D. 2 Vielehe
 - D. 3 Ehescheidung

Andere soziale Themen

- A. Drogenmissbrauch, Alkohol und Tabak
- B. Mobbing und andere Formen von Gewalt
- C. Kolonialismus, Neokolonialismus und ihre Folgen
- D. Sterben in Würde
 - D. 1 Treue Fürsorge für Sterbende
 - D. 2 Sterbehilfe und Suizid
- E. Glücksspiel
- F. Geschlechterfairness und Diversität
- G. Medien und Kommunikationstechnologien
- H. Pornographie
- I. Medizinisches Experimentieren und Forschung
- J. Organspende und Transplantation
- K. Reproduktionsmedizin und Abtreibung
- L. Rassismus, Ethnozentrismus und Tribalismus
- M. Sexuelle Belästigung, Missbrauch und Gewalt

DIE POLITISCHE GEMEINSCHAFT

Vorwort

Aufgaben des Staates

- A. Kirche und Staat
- B. Ziviler Ungehorsam
- C. Opferorientierte Justiz
- D. Todesstrafe
- E. Strafrecht
- F. Krieg und Militärdienst

Grund- und Bürgerrechte

- A. Gesundheitsversorgung
- B. Kinder und Jugend
- C. Ältere Menschen und das Altern
- D. Frauen und Mädchen
- E. Männer und Jungen
- F. Indigene Gemeinschaften
- G. Migranten, Einwanderer und Geflüchtete
- H. Menschen mit Behinderungen
- I. Sexuelle Orientierung und Geschlechtsidentitäten
- J. Religiöse Minderheiten

Berufen zur Einheit in der Zentralkonferenz von Mittel- und Südeuropa²

Jesus hat für seine Jüngerinnen und Jünger gebetet: «Ich bitte aber nicht allein für sie, sondern auch für die, die durch ihr Wort an mich glauben werden, dass sie alle eins seien. Wie du, Vater, in mir bist und ich in dir, so sollen auch sie in uns sein, auf dass die Welt glaube, dass du mich gesandt hast.» (Johannes 17,20-21)

Sowohl in der Kirche insgesamt als auch in der Zentralkonferenz von Mittel- und Südeuropa sind wir uns nicht in allen Teilen über die Sozialen Grundsätze und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Ordnung und Praxis der Kirche einig. Trotz intensiven Zuhörens, Beratens und Prüfens der Heiligen Schrift sind wir uneins, welche Formen der menschlichen Sexualität sowie treuer, verbindlicher Beziehungen wir gutheißen und segnen können. Wir wertschätzen jedoch das Gebot Jesu zu Einheit und gegenseitiger Liebe als Kern unseres Glaubens, der uns trotz unterschiedlicher Auffassungen zusammenhält.

Wir verzichten darauf, uns gegenseitig unter Druck zu setzen. Wir vertrauen darauf, mit Hilfe des Heiligen Geistes gute Entscheidungen für das Wohl unserer Kirche und derer, zu denen wir gesandt sind, in unseren Jahres- bzw. Distriktkonferenzen zu treffen.

Die Zentralkonferenz von Mittel- und Südeuropa wertschätzt die Sozialen Grundsätze als einen wohl überlegten, von Gebet begleiteten Dialog über Glauben und Handeln, und anerkennt zugleich die länderspezifischen Unterschiede in Bezug auf einzelne Themen. Sie erlaubt jedem Land, das dies wünscht, sein Verständnis von Ehe und menschlicher Sexualität beizubehalten und in seinen internen Regelungen zu bezeugen³. Auf diese Weise will die Zentralkonferenz den gemeinsamen Weg in gegenseitigem Respekt, verbindlichem Konferenzieren und Unterstützung in der Mission fortsetzen.

² Gemäss Beschluss der ausserordentlichen Tagung der Zentralkonferenz, November 2022.

³ Ein Land kann als Distriktskonferenz oder Jährliche Konferenz folgendes beschließen:

Die Evangelisch-Methodistische Kirche in [Name des Landes] behält das folgende Verständnis der Ehe und der menschlichen Sexualität bei, wie es in der Kirchenordnung [oder: in den Sozialen Grundsätzen] der Generalkonferenz von 2016 erklärt wurde:

Sie bekräftigt die Heiligkeit der Ehe, die ihren Ausdruck in Liebe, gegenseitiger Unterstützung, persönlicher Hingabe und beidseitiger Treue zwischen Mann und Frau findet. Sie feiert die Ehe als Verbindung eines Mannes mit einer Frau.

Sie kann die praktizierte Homosexualität nicht gutheißen und betrachtet diese Handlungsweise als unvereinbar mit ihrem Verständnis der christlichen Lehre. Sie bekräftigt, dass Gottes Gnade allen Menschen gilt. Sie ist darum bestrebt, in christlicher Gemeinschaft zusammenzuleben und einander willkommen zu heißen, zu vergeben und zu lieben, so wie auch Christus uns geliebt und angenommen hat. Sie fleht Familien und Gemeinden an, lesbische und schwule Kirchenglieder und Kirchenzugehörige / Personen aus dem Freundeskreis nicht abzulehnen oder zu verurteilen. Sie verpflichtet sich zum Dienst an und mit allen Menschen.

Vorwort

Das Anliegen der sozialen Gerechtigkeit ist in der Geschichte der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche und ihrer Vorgängerkirchen tief verwurzelt. Ihre Kirchenglieder haben immer wieder klar und deutlich zu kontroversen Themen Stellung bezogen, die christliche Grundüberzeugungen berühren. Der Gründer des Methodismus, John Wesley, übte nicht nur Taten der Barmherzigkeit, sondern sprach sich gegen Tierquälerei, die Ausbeutung der Armen und einen unwürdigen Umgang mit Menschen aus. Im Sinne Wesleys betonten schon die ersten Methodisten ihre Ablehnung des Sklavenhandels, des Schmuggels und der grausamen Behandlung Gefangener. Dementsprechend verurteilte die Kirche der Vereinigten Brüder in Christo die Sklaverei.

Im Jahr 1908 nahm die Bischöfliche Methodistenkirche (Nord) als erste Kirche ein soziales Bekenntnis an, das „gleiche Rechte und vollkommene Gerechtigkeit für alle Menschen in allen Lebenssituationen“ einfordert. Im folgenden Jahrzehnt verabschiedeten die Bischöfliche Methodistenkirche (Süd) und die Methodistische Protestantische Kirche ähnliche Erklärungen. 1946, beim Zusammenschluss der Kirche der Vereinigten Brüder in Christo und der Evangelischen Gemeinschaft, nahm die Evangelische Gemeinschaft eine Erklärung zu sozialen Grundsätzen an. 1972 – vier Jahre nach dem Zusammenschluss der Methodistenkirche und der Evangelischen Gemeinschaft im Jahr 1968 – beschloss die Generalkonferenz der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche eine Neufassung der Sozialen Grundsätze, die 1976 und dann durch jede nachfolgende Generalkonferenz revidiert wurden. Im Jahr 2008 fügte die Generalkonferenz dem Sozialen Bekenntnis ein liturgisches Wechselgebet hinzu.

Die Sozialen Grundsätze gelten nicht als Kirchenrecht. Sie sind eine von Gebet und Ernsthaftigkeit getragene Bemühung der Generalkonferenz, von einer soliden biblischen und theologischen Grundlage aus auf Fragen der gegenwärtigen Welt einzugehen und dabei unsere guten methodistischen Traditionen zu bewahren. Sie sind ein Aufruf zu Treue und sozialem Engagement und sollen in gutem prophetischen Geist aufklären und überzeugen. Darüber hinaus fordern die Sozialen Grundsätze alle Mitglieder der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche auf, reflektierte Entscheidungen anzustreben, und ermutigen zu einer bewussten Zwiesprache von Glaube und Praxis.

Die Sozialen Grundsätze sind ein lebendiges Dokument. Angesichts der wichtigen Veränderungen, die in der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche während der vergangenen 50 Jahre stattgefunden haben, eingeschlossen die bedeutsamen Entwicklungen in Afrika, Europa und auf den Philippinen, hat die Generalkonferenz 2012 beschlossen, die Sozialen Grundsätze zu revidieren, um ihr theologisches Fundament, ihre Prägnanz und ihre weltweite Bedeutung zu erhöhen. Um dies zu erreichen, hat das General Board of Church and Society zunächst durch Konsultationen in den fünf Jurisdiktionen in den USA und einer Mehrheit der Zentralkonferenzen Vorschläge und Empfehlungen eingeholt. Der erste Entwurf der revidierten Sozialen Grundsätze wurde von sechs Autorenteamen vorgelegt, deren Mitglieder die breite Vielfalt der Gesamtkirche darstellen. Danach fertigte ein Redaktionsteam weitere Überarbeitungen an, gestützt auf Rückmeldungen, die durch Online-Umfragen, umfassende Konsultationen mit Zentralkonferenzen und Jährlichen Konferenzen und Stellungnahmen von evangelisch-methodistischen Gelehrten, Bischöfen, Gremien und Führungspersonen der Kirche eingeholt wurden.

Redaktioneller Hinweis

Überall in den Sozialen Grundätzen verweist die Bezeichnung „wir“ zunächst auf die Generalkonferenz und in allgemeiner Hinsicht auf Glieder der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche.

Wenn nicht ausdrücklich anders gesagt, bezieht sich die Bezeichnung „Kirche“ auf die Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche und nicht etwa auf die weltweite christliche Kirche.⁴

Präambel

Wir Menschen aus der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche bekräftigen unseren Glauben an den lebendigen Gott, der alles erschaffen hat, was existiert, der es gut nannte und der den Menschen nach seinem Bilde schuf. Wir sind dankbar für Jesus Christus, die Inkarnation der Liebe Gottes und unseren Retter, der unsere Beziehung zu Gott erlöst und heilt. Wir vertrauen auf das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes, der Menschenleben und die ganze Schöpfung verwandelt. Wir bekennen außerdem unseren Glauben daran, dass Gottes Gnade allen Menschen gilt und „dass weder Tod noch Leben, weder Engel noch Mächte noch Gewalten, weder Gegenwärtiges noch Zukünftiges, weder Hohes noch Tiefes noch irgendeine andere Kreatur uns scheiden kann von der Liebe Gottes, die in Christus Jesus ist, unserm Herrn.“ (Röm 8,38-39).

Von Anfang an hat Gott uns in seinen Bund berufen, durch den wir mit ihm, miteinander und mit Gottes wunderbar vielfältiger Schöpfung verbunden sind. Weiter hat Gott uns dazu berufen, liebevoll in diesen Beziehungen zu leben und Verwalter der Schöpfung Gottes zu sein, seinen Garten zu hegen und zu pflegen. Indem wir unsere Aufgabe wahrnehmen, uns um die Schöpfung zu kümmern, ermöglichen wir allen anderen Teilen der Schöpfung, die ihnen zugeordneten Rollen im Bund mit Gott zu erfüllen (Gen 2,7-15). Nach dem Gebot Jesu sollen wir einander lieben: „Wie ich euch geliebt habe, so sollt auch ihr einander lieben. Daran werden alle erkennen, dass ihr meine Jünger seid, wenn ihr einander liebt“ (Joh 13,34-35).

Geschaffen nach Gottes Ebenbild, um in einem Bund mit ihm und mit der Welt zu leben, erkennen wir die Würde aller Geschöpfe an und bekräftigen, dass das Leben gut ist. In der Gewissheit, von Gottes Gnade gehalten zu sein, können wir unsere Sünden bekennen: Wir haben es nicht geschafft, Gott mit ganzem Herzen, ganzer Seele, ganzem Verstand und aller unserer Kraft zu lieben und unseren Nächsten wie uns selbst. Wir hatten Teil an ungerechten und lebensfeindlichen Gesellschaftssystemen. Wir waren nicht immer treue Verwalter von Gottes Schöpfung und haben die Rolle nicht wertgeschätzt, die jeder Teil der Schöpfung für das Gedeihen von Gottes Welt spielt. Außerdem sind wir Jesus Christus nicht darin nachgefolgt, Gottes verschwenderische Liebe zu teilen und „einem von diesen Geringsten“ zu dienen (Mt 25,45). In unserem täglichen Umgang mit allen Menschen wie auch mit der Erde haben wir uns der Leitung durch Gottes Geist verschlossen. Wir haben das Ziel verfehlt - und trotzdem: Gott liebt uns immer noch.

Wir sind dankbar für Gottes vergebende und heiligende Liebe, die uns und allen gegeben ist und die uns zur vollkommenen Liebe hinzieht. Durch Gottes Gnade sind wir dazu berufen, Christus ähnlicher, also barmherzig, gerecht und mitfühlend zu sein. Als Antwort auf diesen Ruf wollen wir Jesus nachfolgen, der alle grenzenlos geliebt hat – die Kinder, die Außenseiter, die Verurteilten und die Verwirrten. Jesus ruft jede Generation in eine Nachfolge aus vollem Herzen, damit wir unsere Herzen für die Menschen öffnen, denen wir täglich begegnen; damit wir mit unseren Familien und Nachbarn barmherzig umgehen; damit wir die Würde und den Wert aller Menschen nah und fern anerkennen; damit wir die Systeme durchschauen, die Menschenleben durch Armut, Krieg und Ausgrenzung zerstören; und damit wir Gerechtigkeit

⁴ Mit dem Ziel, die Lesbarkeit und die Verständlichkeit der Sozialen Grundsätze mit ihren vielen Aufzählungen (oft von Substantiven) zu erhalten, ist eine gendergerechte Sprache nicht konsequent angewendet worden. Ausdrücke wie "Methodisten und Methodistinnen" oder "Pastor" meinen jeweils sämtliche Geschlechtsidentitäten.

und Fürsorge in unseren Gemeinden, Gemeinwesen und gesellschaftlichen Strukturen einfordern. Gott beruft uns außerdem zu Verwalten der Schöpfung, damit wir uns um Luft und Wasser, Boden und Pflanzen und alle Lebewesen kümmern.

Wir danken für Gottes gute Gabe der weltweiten Kirche und für die christlichen Werte, die in der wesleyanischen Tradition und der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche verkörpert sind. Wir erkennen, dass der Leib Christi viele Glieder hat – und alle sind wertvoll. Deshalb erkennen wir innerhalb des Leibes Christi Unterschiede an, eingeschlossen die Unterschiede im Verständnis und im Ausdruck des Glaubens, in den Begabungen und der Ausübung des pastoralen Dienstes, in unterschiedlichen Lebenserfahrungen, wie sie durch Herkunft, Kultur, Gemeinschaften, Fähigkeiten, Alter, sexuelle Orientierung und Geschlecht geprägt sind. Wir bekräftigen unseren Glauben an den unschätzbaren Wert jedes Einzelnen: Jedem Individuum schenkt Gott einzigartige Gaben. Wir erneuern unsere Verpflichtung, in unserem täglichen Leben und unserer Arbeit treue Zeugen des Evangeliums zu sein und unser Zeugnis als Kirche zu verstärken.

Unterschiede sind eine kostbare Gabe, aber auch eine gewaltige Herausforderung. Sie können die Fähigkeit der Kirche, treu zu leben und zu dienen, sehr beeinträchtigen. Aber Gott ruft unsere Kirche auch zu einer schwierigen Nachfolge auf, mit Jesus als unserem Anführer und dem Heiligen Geist als unserer täglichen Kraft. Mit Gottes Hilfe nehmen wir die Herausforderung dieser anspruchsvollen Aufgabe an, nämlich „Gerechtigkeit zu üben und Güte zu lieben und demütig zu gehen mit deinem Gott“ (Micha 6,8). John Wesleys Allgemeine Regeln inspirieren die Methodisten und Methodistinnen immer noch, gewissenhaft so zu handeln: Niemandem schaden, Gutes tun und Gottes Geboten folgen. Wir erkennen die Herausforderungen, vor denen die Kirche steht: Sich mit Aufrichtigkeit und Mitgefühl engagieren durch genaues Aufeinanderhören, Gespräche, auch wenn sie schwierig sind, und gemeinsamen Dienst, auch ohne in allem übereinzustimmen.

Wir erkennen an, dass die Kirche ein lebendiger Körper ist, zusammengerufen aus vielen und ganz unterschiedlichen Teilen der menschlichen Gemeinschaft. Daher war Einigkeit im Glauben, in Meinungen und in der Praxis von Anfang an niemals Kennzeichen der Kirche. Seit frühesten Zeiten – wie in den Evangelien, den Briefen des Paulus, der Apostelgeschichte und in anderen neutestamentlichen Schriften sichtbar – waren verschiedene Meinungen und Auseinandersetzungen über viele Fragen schlicht Realität. Deshalb sollten sich treue Christen immer dann, wenn signifikante Unterschiede in ihren Ansichten aufkommen – von denen manche die Kirche bis zum heutigen Tag tief spalten – ihren Meinungsverschiedenheiten oder auch ihrer Verzweigung stellen und nicht versuchen, die Unterschiede durch falsche Behauptungen von Konsens oder Einigkeit zu übertünchen. Im Gegenteil: Die Kirche soll Konflikte mit Mut und Beharrlichkeit annehmen und gemeinsam versuchen, Gottes Willen zu erkennen. In diesem Verständnis und dieser Verpflichtung sichern wir uns gegenseitig zu, dass wir Meinungsverschiedenheiten, die unter uns entstehen, anerkennen und mit Mut, Vertrauen und Hoffnung annehmen. Wir nehmen sie als einen Beweis dafür an, dass Gott noch nicht damit fertig ist, uns als sein Volk zu formen.

Weil wir Gott als Schöpfer, Erlöser und Erhalter anerkennen, versuchen wir unser Leben und Zeugnis an Gott auszurichten. Wir sind zuversichtlich, dass nichts uns von Gottes Gnade trennen kann; das soziale Engagement der Kirche legt Zeugnis von dieser Gnade ab. Mit Gottes Hilfe versprechen wir, gemeinsam zu dienen und jedes Menschen Würde anzuerkennen, selbst wenn wir unterschiedlicher Meinung sind, nach der Gesinnung Christi zu streben und Gottes Willen in allen Dingen zu folgen.

GEMEINSCHAFT DER GESAMTEN SCHÖPFUNG

VORWORT

Die wichtige Lektion, die unser gepriesener Herr uns an dieser Stelle einschärfen will [...], besteht darin: Gott ist in allem und wir sollen den Schöpfer im Spiegel jedes Geschöpfes sehen; wir sollen nichts als von Gott getrennt gebrauchen und betrachten [...], der die ganze Schöpfung durchdringt und in Bewegung setzt und in wahren Sinn die Seele des Weltalls ist.⁵

Wir bekräftigen, dass die ganze Schöpfung dem Herrn gehört und dass sie von Gottes Güte und Fürsorge zeugt. Menschen, Tiere, Pflanzen und andere empfindungsfähige und nicht-empfindungsfähige Wesen nehmen an der Lebensgemeinschaft der Schöpfung teil, und ob sie blühen und gedeihen, hängt von einem fürsorglichen Umgang mit der ganzen Schöpfung ab. Statt die Schöpfung so zu behandeln, als wäre sie nur zum Gebrauch und Verzehr für den Menschen geschaffen, sind wir dazu berufen, verantwortliche Haushalter zu sein und in einer guten Beziehung mit dem Schöpfer und mit der ganzen Schöpfung zu leben (Gen 1,26-31; Mt 6,26-30; Röm 8,22-24). Ebenso sind wir dazu berufen, die Rolle, die jeder Teil der Schöpfung für die Heilung des Ganzen spielt, zu würdigen. Deshalb loben wir unseren Gott zusammen mit der ganzen Schöpfung (Ps 148) und erkennen, dass wir Teil komplexer Ökosysteme sind, die alle von Gott wertgeschätzt sind.

Wir bekräftigen unsere heilige Berufung, verantwortungsvolle Haushalter zu sein und uns liebevoll um all das zu kümmern, was Gott geschaffen hat. Wir erkennen den innewohnenden Wert von Gottes Schöpfung an und feiern die Fülle und Diversität der Erde und zusammen mit dem ganzen Kosmos preisen wir den Schöpfer. Wir erkennen, dass wir miteinander in komplexen Ökosystemen verbunden sind, verschlungenen Netzen des Lebens, die ihren Ursprung alle in Gottes gnädigem Schöpfungsakt haben.

SCHÖPFUNG IN GEFAHR

Wir erkennen an, dass nicht-nachhaltiges menschliches Handeln Gottes gesamte Schöpfung in Gefahr gebracht hat. Wir bekennen, dass die Abwertung und weitgehende Zerstörung der natürlichen Umwelt nie dagewesene Schäden nach sich zieht und ohne Unterschied menschliches wie nicht-menschliches Leben in Gefahr bringt.

A. Zerstörung von Ökosystemen

Ob wir Menschen uns dessen bewusst sind oder nicht: Wir sind Teilhaber an und Nutznießer von komplexen natürlichen Ökosystemen, die aus unzähligen symbiotischen Beziehungen zwischen lebenden Organismen wie Tieren, Pflanzen, Insekten und Mikroorganismen und ihren Lebensräumen wie Luft, Wasser und Erde bestehen.

Überkonsum, kurzsichtige Politik, schlechte Verwaltung der natürlichen Ressourcen und andere nicht-nachhaltige Praktiken haben die zerbrechlichen natürlichen Ökosysteme, von denen das Leben abhängt, schwer getroffen. Zu oft ist die Menschheit mit der Schöpfung so umgegangen, als könne sie frei darüber verfügen, und hat die ungebremste Zerstörung anderer Lebewesen und ihrer Lebensräume zugelassen. Ferner wurden die Erfahrungen und Stimmen der am meisten bedrohten Menschen weithin überhört.

⁵ John Wesley, Sermon... Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount.", 23 I 11 (deutsch: ...)

B. Globale Erwärmung und Klimawandel

Globale Erwärmung und Klimawandel führen bereits jetzt zu extremen Bedingungen, die das ganze Leben auf der Erde bedrohen. Überindustrialisierung, weitverbreitete Abholzung und zu große Abhängigkeit von fossilen Brennstoffen sind nur einige der menschlichen Aktivitäten, die zur Produktion von Treibhausgasen wie Kohlendioxid, Methan und Stickoxid in der Erdatmosphäre beigetragen haben.

Eine starke Zunahme von Treibhausgasen in den letzten Jahrzehnten hat schon zu ständigem Ansteigen der Meeresspiegel, wachsender Übersäuerung der Ozeane, Häufung von Dürren und Hungersnot und einer Vermehrung von extremen Wetterereignissen geführt. Klimaforscher warnen, dass das Zeitfenster, um bei den negativen Auswirkungen von globaler Erwärmung und Klimawandel umzusteuern, sich schnell schließt. Ohne abgestimmtes Handeln von Einzelnen, Kirchen, Kommunen, Aktionären, Unternehmen, Regierungen und internationalen Organisationen werden die negativen Auswirkungen unumkehrbar werden.

C. Abhängigkeit von fossilen Brennstoffen

Das Verbrennen fossiler Brennstoffe wie Kohle, Öl und in geringerem Maße Erdgas ist hauptverantwortlich für die Zunahme der Treibhausgase und die daraus folgende Erderwärmung. Um die gegenwärtige Entwicklung der globalen Klimaveränderung umzukehren, muss verstärkt in Forschung, Entwicklung und Vertrieb von alternativen Energiequellen investiert werden wie Sonnenenergie, Windenergie, Erdwärme und wasserstoffbasierte Energiequellen, ohne andere auszuschließen.

Bei der Suche nach Alternativen zu fossilen Brennstoffen ist es wichtig, Lösungen zu vermeiden, die gegenwärtige Probleme noch verschärfen oder neue, unvorhersehbare Umwelt Herausforderungen schaffen. Abhängigkeit von Kernkraft zum Beispiel ruft erhebliche Bedenken bezüglich der Lagerung von Atommüll hervor.

In ähnlicher Weise riskieren neuere Vorschläge, die Zunahme von Treibhausgasen durch Geo-Engineering der Biosphäre der Erde zu verringern, unvorhergesehene Nebeneffekte und eine weitere Destabilisierung der natürlichen Ökosysteme, von denen alles Leben abhängt.

Die Abkehr von einer starken Abhängigkeit von fossilen Brennstoffen kann nachteilige Wirkungen auf Individuen und Gesellschaften haben, deren Existenzgrundlage in Produktion und Handel mit diesen Gütern besteht. Soweit irgend möglich, sollten Pläne für die Entwicklung und den Betrieb alternativer Energiequellen negative finanzielle Auswirkungen gering halten. Das kann geschehen durch die Entwicklung von Strategien, die betroffenen Menschen helfen, neue Arbeitsplätze zu finden; die das Netz der sozialen Absicherung stärker machen; die den Umgang mit dem Verlust von Arbeit und Einkommen abfedern; und die ein breites Angebot an Ausbildung und Umschulung fördern.

VERANTWORTUNG FÜR DIE SCHÖPFUNG

In Genesis 1 lesen wir, dass Gott die Schöpfung für gut erklärt (Gen 1,4.10.12.18.25.31), und in Genesis 2, dass „Gott, der HERR, den Menschen nahm und ihn in den Garten Eden setzte, dass er ihn bebaute und bewahrte“ (Gen 2,15). Das Gutsein von Gottes Schöpfung und der Wert, der jedem Teil der Schöpfung zugesprochen wird, rufen Menschen dazu auf, die Schöpfung und alles, was zu ihr gehört, zu respektieren, zu schützen und für sie zu sorgen.

A. Umweltbedingter Rassismus

Wir bekennen, dass die negativen Auswirkungen, die von der Abwertung der natürlichen Umwelt herrühren, unverhältnismäßig stark marginalisierte Menschen betreffen wie indigene Völker, religiöse und ethnische Gemeinschaften, Menschen in Armut und andere verletzte Menschen. Deshalb versprechen wir, allen Formen der Umweltausbeutung, -vernachlässigung und -ungerechtigkeit entgegenzutreten. Solche Praktiken verurteilen verarmte Gemeinschaften und Entwicklungsländer dazu, die Hauptlast an der Bedrohung von Lebensräumen zu tragen, an industrieller Luftverschmutzung, Giftmülldeponien und städtischem Verfall. Solches Verhalten stellt umweltbedingten Rassismus dar. Wir stellen uns einer Politik und einer Praxis entgegen, die marginalisierte Menschen und Gruppierungen in einen unabänderlichen Unterklassenstatus versetzen und die Weisheit von indigenen Völkern und anderen Gemeinschaften ignorieren, welche verlangen, dass Luft, Wasser und Land mit großem Respekt behandelt werden.

Auch leiden diese Gruppen unverhältnismäßig häufig an Asthma, Krebs, Geburtsfehlern, und anderen vermeidbaren Erkrankungen. Diese Gesundheitsprobleme werden mit Schadstoffen und anderen Chemikalien in Boden, Wasser und Luft in Verbindung gebracht, die Auswirkungen auf unser Trinkwasser, unsere Nahrungsmittel und unsere Umwelt haben. Wir drängen Regierungen, Unternehmen und zivilgesellschaftliche Institutionen dazu, einen verbesserten Zugang zu Präventions- und Behandlungsmöglichkeiten zu ihrer Priorität zu machen.

Wir fordern die Einführung von umweltgerechten Grundsätzen, Richtlinien und Praktiken. Wir bekräftigen, dass indigene Völker und marginalisierte Bevölkerungen die Weisheit und die Handlungsfreiheit haben, selbst die Praktiken und Richtlinien festzulegen, die am besten ihre Grundbedürfnisse sicherstellen wie Nahrung, Wasser, Wohnen und ein Land frei von giftigem Abfall. Selbstbestimmung erfordert unter anderem den Zugang zu relevanten Informationen und eine maßgebliche Entscheidungsbefugnis bei Entwicklungen in der Industrie, in der Landwirtschaft und in anderen Bereichen, die erheblichen Schaden für Boden, Luft und Wasser anrichten können.

B. Nachhaltige Politik und Praxis

Nachhaltigkeit ist entscheidend für die Entwicklung von ökologisch einwandfreien Richtlinien und Praktiken, die in der natürlichen Welt eine Balance wieder herstellen und die zerstörerische Beziehung zwischen der Menschheit und dem Rest der Schöpfung Gottes beenden wollen.

Nachhaltige Richtlinien und Praktiken zielen darauf ab, die gegenwärtigen Bedürfnisse des Menschen zu befriedigen und zugleich sicherzustellen, dass künftige Generationen die nötigen Ressourcen haben, um gut zu leben. Nachhaltige Richtlinien und Praktiken stellen den Schutz jeglichen Lebens und natürlicher Ökosysteme an erste Stelle, während sie auf der anderen Seite Menschen helfen, in einem gesunden Gleichgewicht mit der Erde zu leben.

Wir ermahnen evangelisch-methodistische Christen und Christinnen, nachhaltige Gewohnheiten und Praktiken anzunehmen und von Überkonsum abzulassen, sich Wiederverwendung und Recycling von Wertstoffen anzugewöhnen, Produkte zu vermeiden, die die Umwelt verschmutzen oder anders schädigen, und den CO₂-Fußabdruck von Einzelnen und Familien zu reduzieren, indem die Abhängigkeit von fossilen Brennstoffen für Heizung, Verkehr und andere Zwecke weitgehend vermindert wird.

Weil eine bloße Veränderung von persönlichen Gewohnheiten nicht dazu ausreicht, Umweltschäden aus Jahrzehnten rückgängig zu machen, unterstützt die Kirche lokale, regionale, nationale und internationale gemeinsame Anstrengungen mit dem Ziel, die globalen Umweltschäden zu beseitigen, die die Menschen angerichtet haben. Solche gemeinsamen Anstrengungen umfassen die Entwicklung und Durchsetzung von Richtlinien und Praktiken, die alle empfindungsfähigen Wesen schützen, und die Förderung nachhaltiger wirtschaftliche Entwicklung. Ferner ermutigen wir zu verantwortungsvollem Konsumverhalten und zu sofortigem Handeln gegen Erderwärmung und Klimawandel.

C. Recht auf angemessene Ernährung

Ernährungssysteme, die ökologisch nachhaltig sowie regional ausgerichtet sind und Nahrungsmittel fair verteilen, sind dringende Prioritäten. Wir befürworten Richtlinien und Praktiken, die den Zugang zu gesunder Nahrung und sauberem Trinkwasser sicherstellen, besonders für Gemeinschaften, die unter Umweltzerstörung zu leiden haben oder von den notwendigen Ressourcen abgeschnitten worden sind, um selbst Nahrungsmittel zu produzieren oder zu erwerben.

Ferner treten wir für eine Nahrungsmittelhoheit ein, die das Recht aller Menschen auf gesunde und kulturell passende Ernährung befördert, die durch umweltgerechte und nachhaltige Methoden produziert wird.

Wir unterstützen die regionale Kontrolle über die Nahrungsmittelproduktion. Das schließt ein, dass lokale Gemeinschaften bei der Entscheidung über die Wahl von Nutztieren und Kulturpflanzen mitzureden haben. Wir lehnen landwirtschaftliche Richtlinien und Praktiken ab, die Nahrungsmittel für die landwirtschaftlichen Arbeiter und die Gemeinschaften, in denen das Nahrungsmittel produziert wird, unzugänglich machen. Wir treten für strengen Schutz der Rechte indigener Völker an Land, Nahrungsmitteln und Wasser ein.

Wir lehnen die Patentierung von Saatgutsorten und anderen Organismen ab, die traditionell in der Landwirtschaft verwendet werden. Die rasch expandierende Praxis, Saatgutsorten zu patentieren und dann Landwirte für ihre Verwendung zur Kasse zu bitten, hat den Zugang zu traditionellen Kultursorten erschwert und die Schulden von kleinen Betrieben vergrößert. Deshalb unterstützen wir alle Bemühungen, traditionelle Saatgutsorten für Landwirte, die sie brauchen, kostenfrei verfügbar zu machen.

Ebenso rufen wir dazu auf, Richtlinien zu schaffen, die kohlenstoffintensive landwirtschaftliche Methoden, die den Klimawandel begünstigen, verringern. Die Produzenten müssen die Verantwortung für negative Folgen durch Verpackung, Verteilung und Transport von Nahrungsmitteln tragen und müssen für Sicherheit und Wohlbefinden der landwirtschaftlichen und lebensmittelverarbeitenden Arbeiter sorgen.

D. Fürsorge für alle Geschöpfe

Wir unterstützen die respektvolle und humane Behandlung von Tieren, die wichtige Teilhaber an Gottes fortdauernder Schöpfung und von eigenständigem Wert sind. Wir lassen uns leiten von den biblischen Lehren, die von einer Zeit erzählen, in der Menschen und andere Geschöpfe in Frieden und Harmonie in einer wiederhergestellten Schöpfung leben (Jes 11,6).

Diese Verpflichtung zu einem respektvollen und humanen Umgang mit Tieren bedeutet zum Beispiel, Schutzmaßnahmen zu ergreifen, die sicherstellen, dass Tiere, die von der Landwirtschaft und zu anderen Arbeiten gebraucht werden, nicht grausam und missbräuchlich behandelt werden und ihre Ruhezeiten und ihre Nahrung bekommen. Auch lehnen wir es ab, Tiere zu zwingen, einander zu bekämpfen.

Tiere, die aufgezogen werden, um als Nahrung für Menschen zu dienen, sollen gesunde Lebensbedingungen vorfinden mit ausreichend Nahrung und Wasser. Tiere, die aufgezogen werden, um als Nahrung für Menschen zu dienen, müssen in humanen Lebensbedingungen gehalten und so geschlachtet werden, dass Schmerzen und Leid so gering wie möglich gehalten werden.

Im Hinblick auf Wildtiere regen wir gemeinsame Anstrengungen durch internationale Organisationen, Regierungen, staatliche Stellen, Kirchen und betroffene Gruppen und Individuen an, das Wildern zu bekämpfen, gefährdete Tierarten zu schützen und verschwindende Lebensräume zu erhalten. Wir beklagen die massenweise Auslöschung, die jetzt im Gange ist, und rufen zur Annahme von nachhaltigen Richtlinien und Praktiken auf, die dafür sorgen, dass Menschen und Tiere leben können.

E. Schutz des Weltraums

Gottes Schöpfung umfasst nicht nur die Erde, sondern den ganzen Kosmos und auch den Weltraum. Unsere Aufgabe, verantwortungsvolle Haushalter zu sein, bezieht sich also nicht nur auf unsere unmittelbare Umgebung, sondern auch auf den gesamten Kosmos. Deshalb lehnen wir die Ausbeutung, die Kommerzialisierung und die Militarisierung des Weltraums ab. Wir drücken unsere Hoffnung aus, dass die Erforschung und Besiedlung des Weltraums einschließlich des Mondes und anderer Planeten friedlich und kooperativ vonstatten geht und in solcher Weise, dass die Güter und Ressourcen, die aus weiterer Weltraumforschung gewonnen werden, allen Menschen zugute kommen.

F. Die Bejahung von Wissenschaft und von traditioneller Weisheit

Wir bejahen den Wert von Wissenschaft und Vernunft, die uns ein tieferes Verständnis des Ursprungs und der Funktionsweise des Kosmos vermitteln. Aber wir erkennen ebenso an, dass die Wissenschaft wie alles, was Menschen betreiben, zweckentfremdet und missbraucht werden kann. Deshalb verlangen wir von allen, die mit wissenschaftlichen Untersuchungen zu tun haben, bei ihrer Forschung und der Anwendung ihrer Ergebnisse die höchsten ethischen Maßstäbe einzuhalten.

Ebenso bejahen wir die traditionelle Weisheit, die sich bei indigenen Völkern findet, und ganz besonders die Bedeutung, die die Ureinwohner dem Leben in Harmonie und Gleichgewicht mit der Erde und anderen Lebewesen beimessen und die Notwendigkeit, Luft, Boden und Wasser zu schützen.

DIE WIRTSCHAFTLICHE GEMEINSCHAFT

VORWORT

Als der Eigentümer des Himmels und der Erde dich ins Dasein rief und in diese Welt setzte, hat er dich nicht als Eigentümer, sondern als Verwalter eingesetzt. Als solchen hat Gott dich für eine bestimmte Zeit mit Gütern verschiedener Art betraut. Aber das alleinige Eigentumsrecht an ihnen bleibt bei Gott und kann ihm nie aberkannt werden. Wie du selbst nicht dein Eigen bist, sondern Gott gehörst, so alles, was du besitzt.⁶

Als Methodisten und Methodistinnen bekennen wir, dass alles, was wir sind, und alles, was wir haben, Gott gehört. Wir sind nur vorübergehende Haushalter der Ressourcen und der materiellen Güter, die wir angesammelt haben. In unseren finanziellen Angelegenheiten und Beziehungen sind wir nicht weniger als sonst in der Nachfolge dazu angehalten, Gott und den Menschen zu dienen in allem, was wir tun.

Nur wenige biblische Themen sind so markant und zahlreich wie die biblischen Aufrufe, mit „diesen Geringsten“ fest in Solidarität zu stehen: mit den Armen, den Waisen, den Witwen, den Fremden und mit allen anderen verletzlichen Mitgliedern der Gesellschaft (Amos 5,7-13; Mt 25,3-46; Jak 2,15-16). Dementsprechend verpflichten wir uns, gerechte, faire und nachhaltige Wirtschaftssysteme einzurichten, die für alle funktionieren.

WIRTSCHAFTLICHE HERAUSFORDERUNGEN

A. Globalisierung

Wir glauben, dass globale Kooperation oft dazu beiträgt, dass Menschen und die Umwelt gedeihen. Wir bedauern aber, dass Globalisierung in zu vielen Fällen zum Hindernis für die Herstellung von wirtschaftlicher Gerechtigkeit geworden ist. Globalisierung ist gekennzeichnet durch die wachsende Verflechtung nationaler Wirtschaftssysteme und das Entstehen multinationaler Konzerne, die eine zu große Rolle im globalen Markt spielen.

Während Globalisierung unzweifelhaft zu gewissen finanziellen und sonstigen Vorteilen verhalf, hat sie auf der anderen Seite bewährte Lohn- und Arbeitsstandards unterlaufen, den Umweltschutz geschwächt und die Konzentration des Reichtums der Welt in den Händen weniger Menschen befördert. Außerdem hat die Globalisierung durch den einfachen Zugang zu billigen Gütern den Überkonsum verstärkt und die Landrechte von Indigenen unterwandert durch einen Sturm auf Rohstoffe, die für eine ausgeweitete Produktion benötigt werden.

Als Kirche erkennen wir die Wichtigkeit, gerechte, faire und nachhaltige Wirtschaftssysteme zu schaffen, die allen Mitgliedern der Gesellschaft zugute kommen, insbesondere den marginalisierten und gefährdeten Völkern. Und weil die Globalisierung unmöglich von einer einzelnen Person, einer Gemeinschaft oder einer Regierung reguliert werden kann, rufen wir internationale Institutionen wie die Vereinten Nationen, die Welthandelsorganisation, den Internationalen Währungsfonds und andere dazu auf, die multinationalen Konzerne und die nationalen Regierungen in die Pflicht zu nehmen, Wirtschaftssysteme zu unterstützen, in denen Menschen wichtiger sind als Profite und die die Umwelt schützen.

B. Armut und Einkommensungleichheit

⁶ John Wesley, Sermon ... The use of money 50 III 2 ...

Als Methodisten und Methodistinnen treten wir in die Fußstapfen unseres Gründers John Wesley, der bestrebt war, das Leben derer zu verbessern, die unter lähmenden Lebensumständen zu leiden hatten wie Armut, Hunger, Analphabetismus, Gefangenschaft, Sklaverei, Abhängigkeiten und Krankheit.

Wir beklagen die immer größer werdende Kluft zwischen Arm und Reich und die Konzentration von Reichtum in den Händen eines immer kleiner werdenden Teils der globalen Bevölkerung. Wir bedauern, dass es zu vielen Menschen in der Welt an grundlegenden Ressourcen zum Überleben fehlt, und wir verpflichten uns, an der Beseitigung der Gründe und der Folgen von Armut mitzuwirken. Ferner beklagen wir die verschiedenen Ursachen für Armut wie Krieg, Hungersnot, Krankheit und Wüstenbildung.

Wir verwerfen religiöse Lehren, die die Anhäufung von Reichtum als Zeichen der Gunst Gottes und die Armut als Zeichen seiner Ungnade ansehen. Wir bekennen, dass wir nicht immer die Worte Jesu beherzigt haben, der das Evangelium jenen Menschen predigte, die in Armut lebten, der sie lehrte, dass sie nicht weit vom kommenden Reich Gottes waren, und der den reichen Jüngling dazu aufforderte, alles, was er hatte, aufzugeben, um ihm nachzufolgen (Lk 6,20; Mt 19,23-25).

Wir verpflichten uns, im tätigen Dienst mit verarmten Gruppen zu sein, indem wir das Evangelium von Jesus Christus mit ihnen teilen und indem wir ihre Anstrengungen unterstützen, faire Möglichkeiten zu bekommen und ihre menschlichen Bedürfnisse zu befriedigen wie Nahrung, Wasser, Gesundheitsfürsorge und Bildung. In der Kirche lehnen wir eine bevorzugte Behandlung aufgrund von Reichtum und Einkommen ab. Wir verpflichten uns, auf die Beseitigung von ungerechten Praktiken, Richtlinien und Systemen hinzuwirken, die ganze Generationen zu einem Leben in unerbittlicher Armut verurteilt haben.

C. Menschenhandel und Sklaverei

Wir verurteilen Menschenhandel und Sklaverei als tiefgreifende Verletzungen der angeborenen Würde und des Werts einer jeden Person und ihrer fundamentalen Rechte, die aus einer Autonomie erwachsen, die die Möglichkeit jedes Individuums einschließt, persönliche Lebensentscheidungen zu treffen. Wir sehen in der Sklaverei einen Verstoß gegen die grundlegende christliche Sicht, nach der alle Menschen nach dem Bild Gottes geschaffen sind.

Menschenhandel bedeutet, dass Menschen gekauft und verkauft werden zum Zweck der Zwangsarbeit, einschließlich privater oder gewerblicher sexueller Ausbeutung. Wir halten einen solchen Handel für abscheulich, weil er gegen fundamentale Menschenrechte verstößt und die Verletzlichkeit der schwächsten Mitglieder der Gesellschaft ausbeutet. Besonders verletzlich sind Kinder und Frauen, Migranten, Vertriebene und andere, die in Armut leben.

Wir unterstützen die Abschaffung jeglicher Art von Menschenhandel oder Sklaverei. Wir verpflichten uns, auf die Beseitigung sozialer und wirtschaftlicher Ungleichheiten hinzuwirken, die der Nährboden für diese Missstände sind. Ebenso lehnen wir die Praxis ab, versklavte oder gefangene Menschen oder Zwangsarbeiter zur Gewinnung von Rohstoffen oder in der Produktion von Handelswaren einzusetzen. Wir rufen Einzelne, Familien, Kirchengemeinden und Einzelhändler dazu auf, einen sozial verantwortungsvollen Konsum zu pflegen, indem sie sich über die Arbeitskräfte und die Produktionsbedingungen informieren, die hinter dem Produktionsprozess stehen.

D. Bestechung, Bestechlichkeit und Korruption

Wir stellen uns gegen Bestechung, Bestechlichkeit und andere Formen der Korruption, denn sie stellen eine Verletzung des öffentlichen Vertrauens dar und verhindern, dass sich gerechte und faire Gesellschaften entwickeln. Wir beklagen die Beteiligung von Staatsbeamten, Geschäftsleuten, Kirchenführern und anderen Autoritätspersonen an solchen Praktiken nicht nur wegen deren Illegalität, sondern auch weil sie das Vertrauen der Öffentlichkeit in legitime Formen der Autorität untergraben. Außerdem zerstören sie elementare Prinzipien der Gleichheit vor dem Gesetz und werden zum Hindernis bei der Schaffung von gerechten und fairen Wirtschaftssystemen. Folge ist die Umleitung von Staatsgeldern und die Manipulation von öffentlichen Verträgen. Das wirkt sich nachteilig auf Projekte und Dienstleistungen aus, die der ganzen Gesellschaft zugute kommen sollen.

WIRTSCHAFTLICHE GERECHTIGKEIT

Ich bitte euch eindringlich im Namen des Herrn Jesus: Handelt der Würde eurer Berufung gemäß! Keine Trägheit mehr! Was immer eure Hände zu tun finden, das tut mit eurer Kraft! Keine Verschwendung mehr! Schluss mit jeder Ausgabe, die Mode, Laune oder Fleisch und Blut verlangen! Schluss mit Habsucht! Verwendet vielmehr alles, was Gott euch anvertraut hat, um Gutes zu tun, alles mögliche Gute in jeder möglichen Art und Größe, den Glaubensgenossen und allen Menschen!⁷

Unsere Verpflichtung, wirtschaftliche Gerechtigkeit zu erreichen, wurzelt in unserem Verständnis von Gottes Bund, wonach Gottes Schöpfung allen Menschen und empfindungsfähigen Lebewesen gleich gehört. So wie im Altertum der *oikos* (Haushalt) als das Herz der Wirtschaft diente, motiviert unser Glaube an das inklusive Wesen von Gottes globalem Haushalt unser Streben nach gerechten, fairen und nachhaltigen Wirtschaftssystemen.

Als Mitglieder von Gottes *oikos* und Nachfolger Jesu, der uns gelehrt hat: „Gib dem, der dich bittet, und wende dich nicht ab von dem, der etwas von dir borgen will“ (Mt 5,42), nehmen wir den Auftrag an, die Fülle der Schöpfung Gottes gerecht und fair zu teilen. Deshalb richten wir die dringende Bitte an Regierungen, Unternehmen und gesellschaftliche Gruppen, dafür zu sorgen, dass Einzelne, Familien und Gemeinschaften nicht nur überleben, sondern gut leben können.

A. Verantwortungsvoller Konsum

Sozial verantwortungsvoller Konsum ist in der heutigen Zeit ausschlaggebend. Wir bitten Einzelne, Familien und Kirchengemeinden dringend, Lebensgewohnheiten anzunehmen, die unnötigen Müll vermeiden, gerechte und faire Entlohnung fördern, Nachhaltigkeit voranbringen und die Abhängigkeit von fossilen Brennstoffen reduzieren.

Wir bitten Konsumenten, ihre wirtschaftliche Macht dafür einzusetzen, die Herstellung von Waren zu fördern, die für die Menschen nützlich sind, aber doch eine Produktion durch ausbeuterische Arbeit zu vermeiden. Wir unterstützen friedliche und gewaltlose Aktionen wie Boykotts, Briefkampagnen und Appelle zum Verkauf von Aktien. Wir halten dies für effektive Methoden, die kollektive Unzufriedenheit mit Firmen zur Sprache zu bringen, die ungerechte oder schädliche Praktiken pflegen. Auch rufen wir Aktionäre und Mitarbeiter auf, ihre moralische

⁷ John Wesley, Sermon... The Use of Money 50 III 7 ...

Kraft dazu zu nutzen, Einfluss auf die Firmenpolitik zu nehmen. Wenn solche Aktionen notwendig werden, bitten wir dringend, dass sie im Einklang mit den Lehren des Evangeliums stehen und mit der Verpflichtung der Kirche zu Würde und Wert aller Lebewesen.

In Anerkennung der Tatsache, dass die entwickelten Länder derzeit den größten Teil der Ressourcen der Welt verbrauchen, unterstützen wir internationale Richtlinien und gemeinsame Anstrengungen, die auf die Entwicklung von Wirtschaftssystemen zielen, die gerechter sind und das menschliche Gedeihen fördern.

B. Ackerbau und landwirtschaftliche Produktion

Die Betonung des „täglichen Brots“ im Vaterunser (Mt 6,11) erinnert uns an die entscheidende Bedeutung unseres täglichen Lebensunterhalts und die entscheidende Rolle, die Ackerbau und andere Formen landwirtschaftlicher Produktion bei der Erfüllung des Ernährungsbedarfs einer stark wachsenden Weltbevölkerung spielen. Deshalb rufen wir zur Schaffung von Richtlinien und Praktiken auf, die die Sicherheit und Zuverlässigkeit dieser Lebensnotwendigkeit garantieren und sicherstellen, dass die Entscheidungsprozesse in Bezug auf die landwirtschaftliche Produktion und der Zugang zu den Produkten für alle offen sind.

Wir unterstützen lokale Bauernhöfe in Familienbesitz und schätzen die Rolle, die sie bei der Ernährung des größten Teils der Weltbevölkerung spielen. Wir beklagen die wachsende Monopolisierung der Mittel in der landwirtschaftlichen Produktion durch Konzerne und die Agrarindustrie. Diese Monopolunternehmen lassen erhebliche Sorgen über den Verlust an lokaler Mitsprache und Entscheidungskompetenz entstehen und beschleunigen den Abbau von Ökosystemen wie Boden, Wasser und Wälder.

Besonders die großen Agrarkonzerne haben Praktiken verschärft, die das beste Land der exklusiven Produktion von exportierbaren Nutzpflanzen vorbehalten, statt dass solche Ressourcen für die Ernährung der örtlichen Bevölkerung verwendet werden. Auch haben sie durch Monokulturen die Verarmung des Bodens beschleunigt, die Freisetzung von Methangas durch Nutzvieh gesteigert, zur Umweltverschmutzung beigetragen und Arbeiter in bedenklichem Maße Pestiziden und Herbiziden ausgesetzt.

Wir unterstützen Maßnahmen, die die Weiterführung von lokalen landwirtschaftlichen Betrieben im Besitz von Familien oder Kommunen ermöglichen. Wir rufen zur Beendigung von Regierungsprogrammen auf, die überproportional Großkonzernen und der Agrarindustrie zugute kommen. Wir befürworten Bestrebungen, das lokale Mitspracherecht und die Entscheidungskompetenz vor Ort wiederherzustellen, wenn es um Bodennutzung, Produktion von Nutzpflanzen, Viehwirtschaft und den Schutz von lokalen Naturräumen geht. Dies in der Hoffnung, dass lokale Gemeinschaften auf diese Weise einen größeren Gewinn durch Ackerbau und andere Formen der landwirtschaftlichen Produktion erzielen.

Wir bitten Landwirte - mit großen oder kleinen Betrieben -, sich auf nachhaltige Praktiken einzustellen, die die Integrität der Nahrungskette bewahren, dafür zu sorgen, dass Mitarbeiter einen fairen Lohn bekommen, und die natürliche Umwelt zu schützen.

C. Die Würde der Arbeit

Wir glauben an die Würde der Arbeit - nicht nur als Mittel zur Existenzsicherung, sondern auch als Weg für den Einzelnen, zum Wohlergehen der Familien und zum Gemeinwohl beizutragen. Diese Bekräftigung der Würde der Arbeit bringt uns dazu, das Recht auf sichere und zuverlässige Arbeitsbedingungen zu befürworten, frei von Gesundheits- und Sicherheitsrisiken. Ebenso unterstützen wir die Einrichtung und Überwachung von Richtlinien, die eine faire und gerechte Entlohnung garantieren, auch *auskömmlicher Lohn* genannt. Wir erkennen, dass Vollbeschäftigung für viele Gemeinschaften und Kulturen ein ferner Traum ist und dass in solchen Situationen die Herausforderungen für die Schaffung von Arbeitnehmerrechten bedeutsam sind. Trotzdem setzt sich die Kirche für eine faire und anständige Behandlung von Arbeitern ein und unterstützt Richtlinien, die mehr Menschen Chancen geben, eine sinnstiftende Arbeit mit ge- rechtem Lohn und Sozialleistungen zu finden.

Wir lehnen die weitverbreite Gewohnheit von Kinderarbeit ab. Sie beraubt Kinder unter 18 Jahren ihrer Kindheit, verwehrt ihnen Bildungsmöglichkeiten und zwingt sie stattdessen, in gewerblicher Landwirtschaft, industrieller Produktion oder im Rohstoffabbau zu arbeiten.

Wir unterstützen die Vereinigungsfreiheit von Arbeitern, die das Recht einschließt, sich gewerkschaftlich zu organisieren, gemeinsam Tarifverhandlungen zu führen und gegen unsichere Arbeitsbedingungen und ungerechte Beschäftigungsrichtlinien und -praktiken zu protestieren. Wir unterstützen das Recht der Arbeiter auf Streik. Wir lehnen Versuche von Unternehmen ab, streikende Arbeiter dauerhaft zu ersetzen oder organisierte Arbeitsniederlegungen illegal zu machen.

Wir unterstützen Maßnahmen, die die Länge des Arbeitstags und der Arbeitswoche begrenzen und befürworten Regelungen, die jedem Arbeiter bezahlte Freizeit garantieren - nicht be- schränkt auf Krankschreibung und Beurlaubung im Todesfall, Gelegenheit, wählen zu gehen oder anderen Bürgerpflichten nachzukommen, Feiertage, Urlaub und Elternzeit für diejenigen, die Neugeborene oder Adoptivkinder versorgen.

D. Sonntag und Zeit für Erneuerung

Wir erkennen den Sonntag als eine Gabe Gottes für alle Menschen an - in Erinnerung daran, dass Gott am siebten Tag der Schöpfung geruht hat (Gen 2,2; Ex 20,8-11). Wir bekräftigen die Wichtigkeit, eine Auszeit von der Arbeit zu haben, um sich auszuruhen und Körper, Seele und Geist erneuern zu lassen, Zeit mit Spiel und Erholung zu verbringen und dem Gemein- schaftslieben zu dienen.

Wir ermutigen alle Methodisten und Methodistinnen, den Sonntag durch die aktive Teilnahme am Gottesdienstleben einer lokalen Kirchengemeinde zu ehren. Wir bitten Regierungen und Unternehmen, Regelungen und Praktiken zu fördern, die Menschen aller religiösen Glaubens- richtungen erlauben, genügend arbeitsfreie Zeit zu haben, um Gottesdienste und Gelegenhei- ten für Erneuerung und Gemeinschaft wahrzunehmen.

E. Soziale Verantwortung von Unternehmen

Wir glauben, dass Unternehmen und Betriebe wie alle anderen menschlichen Einrichtungen den Auftrag haben, Gutes zu tun, Fairness und Gerechtigkeit zu fördern und das Gemein- schaftslieben mit positiven Beiträgen zu fördern. Statt nur Profite für die Aktionäre anzustreben spielen Unternehmen und Betriebe - so glauben wir - eine bedeutende Rolle bei der Förderung von sozialer und wirtschaftlicher Gesundheit und der Wohlfahrt einer Gesellschaft.

Wir rufen Unternehmen und Betriebe dazu auf, Menschen über den Profit zu stellen und bei der Führung ihrer Geschäfte die höchsten ethischen Standards zu beachten. Deshalb richten wir die dringende Bitte an alle Unternehmensführer und Aktionäre, alle Gesetze, Regelungen und internationalen Abkommen zum Schutz der Umwelt, zur Sicherheit und Zuverlässigkeit am Arbeitsplatz und zur Wahrung der Grundrechte zu erfüllen.

Wir bedauern eine lange Geschichte der Ungerechtigkeit und der Verletzung von formalen Verträgen und Abkommen. Wir machen Unternehmen, Betriebe und Regierungen haftbar für jegliche Verletzung oder Beeinträchtigung der Rechte oder des Grundbesitzes von Individuen und Gemeinschaften und verpflichten uns, für Gerechtigkeit einzutreten und zu kämpfen.

Wir loben sozial verantwortungsvolle Geldanlagen als ein gutes Instrument, um Konzerne in die Pflicht zu nehmen, das Gemeinwohl zu fördern. Deswegen bitten wir Einzelne, Familien, Kirchengemeinden und andere Kirchenorganisationen, sich über die Anlage ihrer Investmentgelder zu informieren und ihre wirtschaftliche Macht zu nutzen und dafür zu sorgen, dass ihre Gelder nicht mehr bei Firmen investiert werden, die einen negativen Einfluss auf Menschen oder die Umwelt haben. Wenn diese Möglichkeiten ausgeschöpft sind, sind andere wirksame Strategien das direkte Gespräch, von Aktionären verabredete Maßnahmen, Boykott und Aktienverkauf.

DIE SOZIALE GEMEINSCHAFT

VORWORT

O es ist ein lebendiges, geschäftiges, tätiges, mächtiges Ding um den Glauben, dass es unmöglich ist, dass er nicht ohne Unterlass Gutes wirken sollte. Er fragt auch nicht, ob gute Werke zu tun sind, sondern ehe man fragt, hat er sie getan und ist immer im Tun. Wer aber nicht solche Werke tut, der ist ein glaubensloser Mensch.⁸

Das Evangelium Christi kennt Religion nur als soziale Religion und Heiligung nur als soziale Heiligung.⁹

Als Methodisten und Methodistinnen bekräftigen wir, dass die Menschen für Gott und für einander geschaffen sind (Gen 1,26-27.31; Phil 2,3-8). Wir leben unser Leben, wachsen im Glauben, betätigen uns in der Nachfolge und bezeugen unseren Glauben im Kontext einer Vielfalt von verbundenen Gemeinschaften wie Familien, Schulen, Nachbarschaften, Arbeitsstellen und der weiteren Gesellschaft.

Die Kirche ist berufen, eine unverwechselbare Gemeinschaft zu sein, gekennzeichnet durch die Verkündigung des Evangeliums, das Studium der Bibel, das Feiern des Abendmahls und das Bezeugen der Macht der Erlösung mitten in einer gebrochenen Welt. Wir antworten auf Gottes Ruf in der Welt, indem wir die verändernde Macht des Evangeliums bezeugen, Taten der Barmherzigkeit vollbringen und nach Gerechtigkeit und Frieden als Kennzeichen für

⁸ Martin Luther, Vorrede auf die Epistel S. Pauli an die Römer, 1546, Weimarer Ausgabe, Abteilung 3: Die Bibel, Band 7, S. 11.

⁹ John Wesley, The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Volume 14, London: Wesleyan Conference Office 1872, 321. (dt. ????)

Gottes kommende Herrschaft streben. In allen diesen Anstrengungen werden Christen daran erinnert, dass wir alle - so unterschiedlich wir auch sein mögen - Teil des einen Leibes unter der Herrschaft Christi sind (1Kor 12,12-31).

DIE FÜRSORGLICHE GEMEINSCHAFT

A. Die Familie

Wir nehmen wahr, dass Familien verschiedene Größen und Formen haben, und erkennen die maßgebliche Rolle an, die sie bei der Fürsorge für die körperliche, moralische und geistige Entwicklung von Kindern, Jugendlichen und Erwachsenen spielen. Fürsorge und Unterstützung sind grundlegend für ein gelingendes Zusammenleben von Familien. Deshalb leiten wir Familienglieder dazu an, einander mit Liebe und Respekt zu begegnen. Wir ermutigen Eltern und andere Bezugspersonen, ihre Aufgabe mit Sorgfalt auszuüben und ihre Kinder so zu erziehen, dass ihr körperliches, geistiges, emotionales und moralisches Wachstum begünstigt wird.

Kinder sind eine Gabe Gottes, sie sollten willkommen geheißen und aufgenommen werden. Wir bedauern, dass in manchen Fällen die leiblichen Eltern nicht in der Lage oder nicht willens sind, ihre fürsorglichen Pflichten zu erfüllen. Unter solchen Umständen begrüßen wir die Bereitschaft von Großfamilien und Pflege- oder Adoptiveltern, als Hauptfürsorger einzuspringen. Aber selbst in diesen Fällen erkennen wir an, dass durch die Trennung der Kinder von ihren ursprünglichen Familien ein Trauma entstehen kann, und dringen darauf, dass solche Handlungen angemessen, sensibel und mitfühlend durchgeführt werden. Wo es passend und möglich ist, empfehlen wir die offene Adoption, so dass die Kinder alle medizinischen oder herkunftsmäßigen Informationen haben, die für sie wichtig sind.

B. Singles

Wir wertschätzen die Leistungen von Singles und lehnen alle gesellschaftlichen Praktiken ab, die sie diskriminieren oder Voreingenommenheiten und Vorurteilen aussetzen. Wir respektieren die Entscheidung von Singles in Bezug auf die Ehe und bejahen die vielen Wege, durch die sie an Familienleben und Gesellschaft teilhaben können. Dieses tiefe Gefühl der Achtung erstreckt sich auch auf alleinerziehende Eltern. Wir erkennen die zusätzlichen Lasten und Herausforderungen an, die eine Elternschaft von Singles nach sich zieht, und bieten unsere Liebe, Unterstützung und Fürsorge bei der Erfüllung dieser besonderen Berufung an.

C. Menschliche Sexualität¹⁰

Wir bejahen die Sexualität als gute Gabe Gottes für alle Menschen. Wir rufen jede einzelne Person zu einem verantwortungsbewussten Umgang mit dieser geheiligten Gabe auf.

Obwohl Sexualität zu jedem Menschen gehört, ob verheiratet oder nicht, finden sexuelle Beziehungen nur innerhalb des Bundes einer Ehe volle Zustimmung.

Wir missbilligen alle Formen der Kommerzialisierung und Ausbeutung der Sexualität. Wir rufen nach einer strengen weltweiten Durchsetzung von Gesetzen, die die sexuelle Ausbeu-

¹⁰ «C. Menschliche Sexualität» weicht gemäss Beschluss der ausserordentlichen Tagung der Zentralkonferenz vom November 2022 vom englischen Text des Book of Discipline ab.

tung von Kindern verbieten, wie auch nach angemessenem Schutz, Beratung und Behandlung missbrauchter Kinder. Alle Menschen haben ungeachtet ihres Alters, ihres Geschlechts, ihres Zivilstandes oder ihrer sexuellen Orientierung das Recht auf die Gewährleistung ihrer Menschen- und Bürgerrechte und auf Schutz vor Gewalt. Die Kirche sollte die Familie mit altersgemäßen Bildungsangeboten für Kinder, Jugendliche und Erwachsene zum Thema Sexualität unterstützen.

Wir bejahen, dass alle Menschen von heiligem Wert und nach dem Bilde Gottes geschaffen sind. Alle benötigen den Dienst der Kirche in ihrem Ringen um menschliche Erfüllung wie auch die geistliche und emotionale Fürsorge einer Gemeinschaft, die versöhnende Beziehungen zu Gott, zu Anderen und zu sich selbst ermöglicht. Wir verpflichten uns zum Dienst an und mit allen Menschen.

D. Ehe¹¹

Wir bekräftigen die Heiligkeit der Ehe, die ihren Ausdruck in Liebe, gegenseitiger Unterstützung, persönlicher Hingabe und beidseitiger Treue findet, und die im Christentum traditionell als Vereinigung eines Mannes und einer Frau verstanden wird. Wir glauben, dass auf einer solchen Ehe Gottes Segen ruht, auch wenn sie kinderlos bleibt. Wir lehnen gesellschaftliche Normen ab, die Frauen in der Ehe einen anderen Rang zuweisen als Männern.

Wo Gesetze in der Zivilgesellschaft die Ehe als Verbindung zwischen zwei Erwachsenen definieren, hat jedes Land (Distrikts- oder Jährliche Konferenz) die Vollmacht, seine internen Regelungen zu treffen. Kein Pastor / keine Pastorin der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche ist verpflichtet, eine gleichgeschlechtliche Verbindung zu segnen.

D. 1 Kinderehe

Wir lehnen Ehebeziehungen mit Kindern und Jugendlichen unter 18 Jahren ab, auch an Orten, wo solche Beziehungen kulturell und gesetzlich erlaubt sind. Kinderehen und verfrühte sexuelle Aktivitäten stören den normalen Lauf der emotionalen, biologischen und sozialen Entwicklung von minderjährigen Kindern. Insbesondere bei minderjährigen Mädchen können verfrühte sexuelle Aktivitäten – und die Schwangerschaften, die daraus folgen – dauerhaft innere Organe schädigen, zu lebenslangen gesundheitlichen Problemen führen und andere Möglichkeiten für ihr Leben zunichtemachen. Indem junge Menschen bis zu einem angemessenen Alter warten, um sich zu verhelichen, haben sie bessere Chancen, gesunde Erwachsene und verantwortungsvolle Mitglieder der Gesellschaft zu werden. Wir glauben deshalb, dass junge Menschen volljährig sein sollten, bevor sie ihre Zustimmung zur Heirat geben.

D. 2 Vielehe

Wir können die Praxis der Vielehe nicht befürworten, d.h. ein Verhältnis mit einer Mehrzahl von Ehepartnern. Gleichwohl erkennen wir an, dass die erzwungene Auflösung von solchen Beziehungen erhebliche Probleme verursacht. Viel zu oft finden sich Frauen und Kinder durch die erzwungene Auflösung solcher Verhältnisse in Armut ohne irgendwelche Unterstützung wieder.

¹¹ «D. Ehe» weicht gemäss Beschluss der ausserordentlichen Tagung der Zentralkonferenz vom November 2022 vom englischen Text des Book of Discipline ab.

Deshalb bitten wir Kirchenführer, die mit der Auflösung solcher Verlehen zu tun haben, dringend, mit höchster Sorgfalt vorzugehen und der Gesundheit und dem Wohlbefinden abhängiger Frauen und Kinder eine hohe Priorität einzuräumen.

Wir verwerfen Versuche, Familien, die in polygamen Beziehungen sind oder waren, auszugrenzen, besonders Frauen und Kinder, oder ihnen die Dienste der Kirche, einschließlich der Teilnahme an den Sakramenten, zu verweigern. Stattdessen bitten wir Pastoren und Gemeinden, alle Menschen in Not herzlich willkommen zu heißen und Gastfreundschaft auszuüben.

D. 3 Ehescheidung

Wir erkennen an, dass Ehescheidung eine bedauerliche, aber unvermeidliche Alternative werden kann, wenn Eheverhältnisse hoffnungslos zerrüttet sind oder zerstörerisch werden oder Eheleute einander unwiderruflich fremd geworden sind. In solchen Fällen raten wir Eheleuten, eine passende Eheberatung aufzusuchen und sich, wenn ein Scheidungsverfahren unausweichlich wird, so zu verhalten, dass schädliche Wirkungen auf alle Familienmitglieder möglichst vermieden werden.

Treue zu dem Ehegelübde verlangt nicht, dass Ehepartner in einem psychischen oder physischen Missbrauchsverhältnis bleiben müssen. Wir unterstützen Bemühungen nicht, geschiedenen Menschen Dienste der Kirche vorzuenthalten oder ihnen Leitungsfunktionen in der Kirche zu verweigern, ob Pastoren oder Laien. Wir legen es Pastoren und Gemeinden ans Herz, Dienste und Programme anzubieten, die geschiedenen Menschen helfen, gesellschaftliche und religiöse Stigmatisierung zu überwinden, die sie oft erleben. Scheidung schließt Wiederheirat nicht aus.

ANDERE SOZIALE THEMEN

A. Drogenmissbrauch, Alkohol und Tabak

Drogenmissbrauch kann sowohl verheerende psychische und physische Folgen einer Abhängigkeit wie auch umfassende soziale Konsequenzen haben. Als Antwort auf die weit verbreitete Realität von Suchtkrankheiten erkennen wir zunächst die zerstörerischen Folgen an, die Sucht, Gebrauch und Missbrauch von legalen und illegalen Substanzen in das Leben von einzelnen Konsumenten, Familienverbänden und ganzen Gemeinschaften bringen.

In vielen Teilen der Welt hat Missbrauch von Opioiden und anderen Substanzen krisenhafte Ausmaße angenommen. Die Kirche unterstützt Programme und Richtlinien, die in umfassender Weise Gründe und Heilungsansätze für zerstörerische Suchterkrankungen untersuchen. Wir rufen die Gesellschaft dazu auf, Menschen mit Suchterkrankungen nicht zu verurteilen, und wenden uns an alle Ebenen der Regierung, Ressourcen zur Verfügung zu stellen, die der Größe des Problems angemessen sind.

In Anerkennung der Zerstörung, die Drogenmissbrauch bei Einzelnen, Familien und ganzen Gemeinschaften angerichtet hat, bitten wir Methodisten und Methodistinnen dringend, vom Gebrauch legaler oder illegaler Rauschmittel Abstand zu nehmen, von Drogen oder anderen Substanzen, die zur Sucht führen, geistige und körperliche Fähigkeiten beeinträchtigen und langfristige Schäden bei Einzelnen, Familien und Gemeinschaften nach sich ziehen.

Im Hinblick auf den Konsum von Alkohol verweisen wir auf die traditionelle Haltung der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche, die die Abstinenz als Absicherung gegen die psychischen, physischen und geistlichen Schäden durch übermäßiges Trinken ansieht. Demzufolge bitten wir dringend alle, die sich dafür entscheiden, alkoholische Getränke, einschließlich Wein und Bier, zu sich zu nehmen, das umsichtig und maßvoll zu tun. Eine weitere wichtige Überlegung bezieht sich auf den Einfluss unseres Alkoholkonsums auf diejenigen, die gerade versuchen, vom Alkoholkonsum loszukommen.

Wegen der zunehmenden medizinischen Evidenz zum hohen Suchtpotential und den schwerwiegenden gesundheitlichen Folgen durch die direkte oder indirekte Aufnahme oder Inhalation von Nikotin oder anderen Chemikalien aus kommerziellen Tabakerzeugnissen empfiehlt die Kirche vollständige Abstinenz. Bei dieser Empfehlung ist uns bewusst, wie schwer es sein kann, eine Nikotinabhängigkeit zu überwinden, und wir bitten Gemeinden, Wege für eine sinnvolle Unterstützung derjenigen zu finden, die versuchen, von Nikotin los zu kommen.

B. Mobbing und andere Formen von Gewalt

Wir verurteilen Mobbing in allen Formen, also unerwünschtes und aggressives Verhalten gegenüber Kindern, Jugendlichen und Erwachsenen und auch Spott, körperliche Gewalt, emotionale Manipulation und soziale Einschüchterung. Besonders gegenüber Kindern und Jugendlichen kann Mobbing die emotionale und intellektuelle Entwicklung hemmen und verwandelt Schulen, Nachbarschaften sowie virtuelle und Online-Situationen in gefährliche und unsichere Umgebungen. Mobbing hat oft langfristige traumatische Auswirkungen auf das psychische, physische und emotionale Wohlbefinden der Opfer. Wir unterstützen die Inkraftsetzung von Richtlinien, die darauf zielen, Kinder, Jugendliche und Erwachsene vor Mobbing zu schützen. Wenn minderjährige Kinder und Jugendliche betroffen sind, empfehlen wir dringend die Entwicklung und Umsetzung von Antimobbing-Richtlinien, die den Entwicklungsprozess von Opfern wie auch Tätern berücksichtigen.

C. Kolonialismus, Neokolonialismus und ihre Folgen

Wir erkennen an, dass die verwickelten und komplexen Hinterlassenschaften von Kolonialismus und Neokolonialismus schwer auf der weltweiten Gemeinschaft der Methodisten und Methodistinnen lasten. Kolonialismus meint den Versuch, durch Eroberung und Ausbeutung völlige oder teilweise Kontrolle über andere Länder, Stammesgruppen und Völker zu erlangen. Neokolonialismus setzt das historische Vermächtnis des Kolonialismus fort, indem er wirtschaftliche, politische oder soziale Kontrolle über ehemals kolonisierte Nationen oder Völker aufrecht erhält.

Manche von uns kommen aus Ländern und Gruppen, die von der Unterwerfung ganzer Völker und von der Beschlagnahme von Ländern und anderen Ressourcen erheblich profitiert haben. Andere von uns leben in Ländern oder gehören Gemeinschaften an, die mit der sich fortsetzenden Geschichte und den Wirkungen der verschiedenen Formen von Kolonialismus weiterhin zu kämpfen haben, wozu soziale, wirtschaftliche und politische Instabilität, verbreitete Mangelernährung, Analphabetismus, Krankheit und fortdauernde Rechtsverletzungen in Ländern von indigenen Völkern und Stämmen zählen.

Weit davon entfernt, nur unschuldige Zuschauer zu sein, erkennen wir an, dass die Kirche in Kolonialismus and Neokolonialismus oft tief verwickelt war. Wir rufen deshalb Einzelne

und Gemeinden dazu auf, sich über die beunruhigenden Vermächtnisse des Kolonialismus zu informieren und - wo angezeigt - Buße zu tun für unsere anhaltende Beteiligung. Wir fordern Methodisten und Methodistinnen dazu auf, Wege zur Unterstützung derjenigen zu finden, die immer noch unter den Folgen der kolonialen Hinterlassenschaften leiden, was handfeste Taten der Wiedergutmachung und aktive Unterstützung für nachhaltige Entwicklungsinitiativen einschließt.

D. Sterben in Würde

Wir wissen, dass jedes Leben vergänglich ist und mit dem Tod endet, und wir bekräftigen, dass Gottes fortdauernde Liebe und seine Fürsorge bei uns bleiben, wenn wir vom Leben in den Tod und dann zu einem größeren Leben übergehen. Diese Bekräftigung, zusammen mit unserem ausdrücklichen Bekenntnis zum heiligen Wert eines jeden Menschen, lässt uns darauf bestehen, dass jeder sterbende Mensch mit Würde und Respekt zu behandeln ist.

Die Betonung eines Sterbens in Würde bedeutet, dass die Entscheidungen von Einzelnen und Familien gehört und respektiert werden müssen, dass der Einsatz von medizinischer Technik maßvoll und angemessen sein muss und unnötige Schmerzen und Leid gering zu halten sind. Wir bejahen das Recht der Menschen, die im Sterben liegen, sich aktiv an Entscheidungsprozessen zu beteiligen. Als Glaubensgemeinschaften sind wir dazu berufen, Einzelne und Familien zu unterstützen, die der Wirklichkeit von Leid und Tod gegenüberstehen. Auf sensible und fürsorgliche Weise bezeugen wir Gottes bleibende Liebe und Gnade selbst dann, wenn sie nicht unmittelbar gefühlt oder erfahren werden können.

D. 1 Treue Fürsorge für Sterbende

Unser Umgang mit Tod und Sterben bewegt sich im Rahmen unseres Glaubens an die angeborene Würde und den Eigenwert des Menschen, unserer Sorge um die Patientenautonomie und unserer Überzeugung, dass unser Leben letztlich Gott gehört. In diesem Rahmen unterstützen wir nachdrücklich alle Anstrengungen, Patienten und ihre Lieben in die Lage zu versetzen, informierte Entscheidungen über eine Fortsetzung der Behandlung oder das Lebensende zu treffen, die den geltenden gesetzlichen Regelungen und den etablierten medizinischen Abläufen und Standards entsprechen.

Solches informierte Entscheiden kann Patienten und ihre Lieben dazu bewegen, Behandlungen fortzusetzen, die versprechen, den Gesundheitszustand wesentlich zu verbessern oder die Lebensqualität zu erhöhen. Andererseits können solche Entscheidungen die Patienten und ihre Lieben dazu bewegen, medizinische Maßnahmen abzubrechen, die keinen wesentlichen Nutzen mehr haben.

Wir bekräftigen den Nutzen von Palliativmedizin in Fällen, in denen die Entscheidung für eine Beendigung der medizinischen Behandlung getroffen worden ist. Palliativmedizin betont die Wichtigkeit, es den Patienten so erträglich wie möglich zu machen, Schmerz und Leid gering zu halten und den Sterbeprozess ungehindert voranschreiten zu lassen. Ebenso befürworten wir den Gebrauch von Patientenverfügungen, die den Willen der Patienten klar zum Ausdruck bringen, sollten sie so beeinträchtigt sein, dass sie den Ärzten keine Mitteilungen mehr machen können.

D. 2 Sterbehilfe und Suizid

Unsere Überzeugung, dass Leben eine heilige Gabe ist, zusammen mit bleibenden Fragen und Bedenken über möglichen Missbrauch, veranlasst uns als Kirche dazu, aktive Sterbehilfe und Suizid abzulehnen und gleichzeitig unseren Dienst der Barmherzigkeit an betroffenen Familien fortzuführen. Sterbehilfe findet aber auch statt als Sterbenlassen durch Behandlungsbeendigung, als lebensverkürzend wirkende, leidenslindernde Therapie am Lebensende und auch als Beihilfe zum Suizid durch Assistenz wie die zur Verfügungstellung von tödlichen Medikamentendosierungen.

Suizid bezieht sich allgemeiner auf Handlungen, die Menschen vollziehen, um dem eigenen Leben ein Ende zu setzen. Beweggründe für Suizid haben oft mit Depressionen oder anderen psychischen Erkrankungen, aber auch mit Drogenmissbrauch zu tun. Weltweit gesehen erfolgen Suizidversuche oft nach einschneidenden persönlichen oder familiären Krisen, wie Verlust der Existenzgrundlage, erzwungene Migration und Vertreibung, kulturelle Unterdrückung und das Erleben von lang anhaltendem Mobbing oder anderen Formen von Gewalt.

Auch wenn weder aktive Sterbehilfe noch Suizid gebilligt werden können, bekennen wir demütig, dass das Verständnis und die Reaktion der Kirche oft unangemessen sind. Wir bitten die Gemeinden, sich über die komplexen Beweggründe und Faktoren, die hinter diesen Taten stehen, zu informieren. Wissend, dass das letzte Urteil nicht in unseren, sondern in Gottes Händen liegt, weisen wir alle Versuche zurück, Dienste und Hilfen der Kirche denen vorzuenthalten, die durch aktive Sterbehilfe oder Suizid gestorben sind, oder ihren trauernden Familien und Bekannten.

Wir glauben, dass ein Suizid Menschen nicht von der allumfassenden Gnade Gottes trennt. Wir bitten Pastoren und Ortsgemeinden, angemessene Verfahren zu entwickeln für den Umgang mit Menschen, die mit Suizidgedanken kämpfen oder einen Suizidversuch überlebt haben. Solche Verfahren sollten Hinweise auf erfahrene Berater oder medizinisches Fachpersonal enthalten. Wir bitten Pastoren und Gemeinden, statt Überlebende oder von Suizid betroffene Familienmitglieder auszugrenzen oder zu verurteilen diesen Menschen mit Mitgefühl zu begegnen und ihnen Unterstützung anzubieten.

E. Glücksspiel

Wir lehnen Glücksspiel ab, denn es lenkt die Aufmerksamkeit der Gesellschaft auf den Erwerb von Geld unter Ausschluss von allem anderen und bereichert eine kleine Minderheit auf Kosten der Mehrheit. Für zu viele Menschen wird Glücksspiel zu einer zerstörerischen und abhängig machenden Praxis, die das wirtschaftliche Wohlergehen der Glücksspieler wie auch ihrer Familien gefährdet.

Wir wissen, dass in manchen Gegenden indigene Völker und Ureinwohner als Akt der Selbstbestimmung und als wichtigen Schritt zum wirtschaftlichen Überleben Casinos und ähnliche Einrichtungen eröffnet haben. Statt solches Handeln zu verurteilen sehen wir es als die Rolle der Kirche an, Dialog und Bildung über die Hoffnungen und Bestrebungen dieser Gemeinschaften anzuregen und ein tieferes Verständnis für ihre Geschichten und ihr fortgesetztes Streben nach Selbstbestimmung und Überleben zu entwickeln.

Wir versprechen, auf die Ausrottung von Armut und eine fairere Verteilung der finanziellen Möglichkeiten hinzuwirken. Darin sehen wir einen konstruktiven Weg, die finanzielle Attraktivität des kommerziellen Glücksspiels wie Lotterien, Casinos und Online-Glücksspiele zu reduzieren.

F. Geschlechterfairness und Diversität

Wir unterstützen Geschlechterfairness wie Geschlechterdiversität als wichtige Ziele, die gewährleisten, dass die Bestrebungen von Frauen und Mädchen ernst genommen werden, und die sicherstellen, dass bezahlte Arbeitsstellen und Führungspositionen gleich vergeben werden. Wir beklagen das Fortbestehen von Sexismus und Frauenfeindlichkeit in der Kirche durch ihr Handeln und ihre theologischen Lehren wie auch in der Gesellschaft im Allgemeinen. Wir bedauern, dass solche Vorurteile zu oft zu Verunglimpfung und Zurückweisung von weiblicher Führung und Teilhabe geführt haben.

Als Folge davon verwerfen wir alle Glaubenssätze, Richtlinien und Praktiken, die Frauen und Männer im religiösen wie im säkularen Umfeld als ungleich ansehen. Wir fordern Gemeinden, Pastoren, Kommissionen für ordinierte Dienste, Bischöfe und andere Kirchenvertreter auf, konkrete Maßnahmen einzuführen, die die Leiterschaft von allen Menschen unabhängig von ihrem Geschlecht fördern und nach vorne bringen. Außerdem bitten wir Regierungen, Unternehmen und die Zivilgesellschaft, Gesetze und Richtlinien zu erlassen, die allen Mitgliedern der Gesellschaft gleichen Zugang, gleiche Möglichkeiten und gleiche Absicherungen gewähren.

G. Medien und Kommunikationstechnologien

Wir unterstützen das Recht auf freie Meinungsäußerung, was Pressefreiheit und das Recht aller Mitglieder der Gesellschaft einschließt, ihre Sichtweisen und Meinungen zu äußern. Wir verlangen, dass alle Medienunternehmen mit Anstand und Respekt agieren und anerkannte journalistische Maßstäbe einhalten. Wir bejahen die positive Rolle der Medien und Kommunikationstechnologien bei der Information der breiten Öffentlichkeit; sie ziehen Regierungen und andere Führungspersonen in der Gesellschaft zur Rechenschaft und fördern das Gemeinwohl.

Wir sind besorgt über Medienmonopole und die Tendenz, nach der die Medienkontrolle in die Hände von wenigen Konzernen gerät, und wir ermutigen Einzelne, Gemeinden und Regierungen, aufmerksam darauf zu achten, dass Kartellgesetze eingehalten werden.

Weiter erkennen wir, dass skrupellose Menschen - wie bei allem menschlichen Tun - Medien benutzen, um die öffentliche Meinung zu manipulieren, Fakten zu verdrehen und Falschinformationen, Feindseligkeit und Angst zu verbreiten. Wir beklagen die Ausbreitung von Hassrede quer durch Soziale Netzwerke, Rundfunk- und Zeitungsnachrichten und andere Plattformen und wir rufen Bürger und Aufsichtsbehörden dazu auf, das Menschenmögliche zu tun, um dem ein Ende zu setzen. Ebenso ermutigen wir alle dazu, Vorsicht walten zu lassen, wenn sie ihre Meinungen in den sozialen Medien kundtun, im Wissen, dass Mitgefühl vonnöten ist, und dass anderen viel Schaden zugefügt werden kann, wenn solches Mitgefühl fehlt.

Schließlich fehlt es in den Medien und anderen Kommunikationstechnologien an einer angemessenen und vielfältigen Repräsentation von marginalisierten Gesellschaftsgruppen wie Frauen, ethnischen Gruppen, Menschen mit Behinderungen, verarmten Menschen und anderen. Wir glauben, dass Medien und Kommunikationstechnologien für alle Menschen offen und zugänglich sein sollten, Standards entwickeln sollten, die Anstand und Respekt fördern, und Würde und Wert aller Menschen schützen sollten, einschließlich der Verletzlichsten der Gesellschaft.

H. Pornographie

Wir lehnen Pornographie strikt ab und beklagen ihren zerstörerischen Einfluss auf Kulturen, Familien und Einzelne. Pornographie ist ein Angriff auf unsere tief empfundene Überzeugung, dass die menschliche Sexualität eine kostbare Gabe Gottes ist. Pornographie ist ein Thema, das viele Menschen sowohl innerhalb wie auch außerhalb der weltweiten Kirche auf dramatische Weise betrifft. Obwohl graphische Darstellungen schon seit vielen Jahrhunderten im Umlauf sind, haben die weite Verbreitung und Verfügbarkeit von sexuell expliziten und aggressiven Bildern für viele zu einem zunehmenden Problem mit Sucht geführt, auch für junge Menschen, die mit dem Internet zu Hause und auf den Handys aufgewachsen sind. Wir rufen alle Methodisten und Methodistinnen dazu auf, Maßnahmen zu unterstützen, die darauf zielen, effektive gesellschaftliche und staatliche Regelungen zu entwickeln, die vor allem Kinderpornographie, aber auch Ausbeutung und Versklavung von Erwachsenen ausrotten. Außerdem rufen wir die Kirche dazu auf, Menschen, die in ihrem Leben von den schädlichen Wirkungen von Pornographie betroffen sind, nicht zu verurteilen, sondern ihnen Rehabilitation und Fürsorge zuteil werden zu lassen.

I. Medizinisches Experimentieren und Forschung

Wir unterstützen medizinisches Experimentieren und Forschung, die das Potential haben, Krankheiten und Seuchen auszurotten, das Leben zu verlängern oder die Lebensqualität zu erhöhen. Wir bestehen darauf, dass medizinisches Experimentieren, einschließlich Gentechnologie, sich innerhalb der etablierten bioethischen Parameter vollzieht. Diese Parameter, die sich aus der ärztlichen Verantwortung herleiten, keinen Schaden zu tun, schließen folgendes ein: Sicherstellung der Autonomie des Patienten und der informierten Einwilligung; Zusagen, dass Kosten und Nutzen des medizinischen Experimentierens fair auf verschiedene soziale Gruppen verteilt sind; die Erwartung eines erkennbaren Nutzens für Patienten, die an solchen Experimenten teilnehmen; und, im geringeren Maße, die Möglichkeit eines spürbaren medizinischen Fortschritts.

Wir sprechen uns für eine sorgfältige Aufsicht über alle Formen des medizinischen Experimentierens aus, um sicherzustellen, dass die höchsten ethischen Parameter angewendet werden. Wir empfehlen enge Kooperation zwischen Regierungen, akademischen Einrichtungen, Unternehmensforschern und dem medizinischen Berufsstand, um geltende Standards der medizinischen Forschung durchzusetzen. Darüber hinaus bestehen wir darauf, dass sichergestellt wird, dass Menschen, die in Armut leben oder in Entwicklungsländern und weniger reichen Ländern wohnen, in solchen medizinischen Untersuchungen nicht über- oder unterrepräsentiert sind und ihnen dann der Nutzen der Forschung vorenthalten wird.

J. Organspende und Transplantation

Mit Nachdruck unterstützen wir die Organspende als Ausdruck der Aufforderung Christi, seinen Nächsten zu lieben. Die weltweite Knappheit von transplantierbaren Organen bedeutet, dass hunderttausende Kinder, Frauen und Männer unnötigem Leid und vorzeitigem Tod ausgesetzt sind. Angesichts dieser Tatsache ermutigen wir die Methodisten und Methodistinnen, die bereit und in der Lage dazu sind, sich freiwillig als Organspender registrieren zu lassen.

Wir glauben, dass alle Spenden freiwillig sein sollten und dass sie in einem sicheren medizinischen Umfeld durchgeführt werden müssen, in dem Gesundheit, Wohlbefinden und Privatsphäre von Spendern wie Empfängern geschützt sind. Ferner betrachten wir Kauf und Verkauf von Organen und Blut - besonders wenn sie durch Diebstahl oder Zwang gewonnen wurden - als grundlegende Verstöße gegen die angeborene Würde menschlichen Lebens und gegen moralische Prinzipien, die davor warnen, Menschen als Ware anzusehen.

Wir bitten Regierungen und medizinische Organisationen, Gesetze und Richtlinien zu befürworten, die die Organspende befördern, aber gleichzeitig die Schwachen in der Gesellschaft vor missbräuchlicher Praxis schützen und dafür sorgen, dass transplantierbare Organe fair und ohne Rücksicht auf die soziale Stellung des potentiellen Empfängers verteilt werden.

K. Reproduktionsmedizin und Abtreibung

Wir unterstützen die Bereitstellung von umfassender und altersgemäßer Sexuaufklärung wie auch den Zugang zu zuverlässiger, effektiver und erschwinglicher Empfängnisverhütung. Ebenso unterstützen wir Dienste und Initiativen in ihrem Ziel, Reproduktionsmedizin zu fördern und die Lebensqualität von Frauen und Mädchen zu verbessern. Wegen der inhärenten Gefahren und Risiken des Kinderkriegens vertreten wir die Ansicht, dass Frauen und Mädchen zuverlässigen Zugang zu gynäkologischer Versorgung haben sollten. Deshalb bitten wir Regierungen, Unternehmen, Kirchen und andere zivilgesellschaftliche Institutionen, dass sie den Zugang zu vorbeugender Aufklärung, medizinischer Vorsorgeuntersuchung, Behandlung und Beratung für Frauen und Mädchen im gebärfähigen Alter als hohe Priorität erkennen.

Unser Bekenntnis zur Heiligkeit menschlichen Lebens hindert uns daran, Abtreibungen zu befürworten. Als Form der Geburtenregelung, als Mittel der Geschlechtswahl oder aus eugenischen Gründen lehnen wir Abtreibung bedingungslos ab. Wir unterstützen Maßnahmen, die die Zustimmung oder Benachrichtigung der Eltern, Erziehungsberechtigten oder anderer zuständiger Erwachsener verlangen, bevor eine Abtreibung bei Minderjährigen durchgeführt wird, ausgenommen sind Fälle von mutmaßlichem Inzest.

Wir lehnen Spätabtreibungen ab. Wir setzen uns für deren Beendigung ein, es sei denn, das Leben der Mutter steht auf dem Spiel und kein anderes medizinisches Verfahren ist anwendbar, oder schwere Anomalien bedrohen die Lebensfähigkeit des Fötus. Wir wissen um tragische Konflikte, in denen Leben gegen Leben steht, die die Entscheidung, das Leben des Fötus zu beenden, rechtfertigen mögen. In diesen begrenzten Fällen unterstützen wir die Möglichkeit eines legalen Abbruchs durch anerkannte medizinische Einrichtungen in sauberer und sicherer Umgebung.

Wir rufen all jene, die eine Abtreibung in Erwägung ziehen, dazu auf, angemessene medizinische Beratung und kirchliche Seelsorge in Anspruch zu nehmen und gründlich und im Gebet nach Alternativen zu suchen, etwa, das Kind zur Adoption freizugeben. Wir beten für diejenigen, die ungewollt schwanger geworden sind, und bieten unsere Unterstützung und Gebete an, wenn sie Gottes Willen erkennen und Gottes Weisheit und Führung suchen wollen. Ungeachtet der Umstände, in denen jemand eine Abtreibung erwägt, akzeptieren wir weder Mobbing noch Anprangern der Person wegen ihrer Entscheidungen oder ihres Handelns.

Wir nehmen wahr, dass junge Frauen im gebärfähigen Alter häufig berichten, dass ihnen die Möglichkeit fehlt, wichtige Lebensentscheidungen zu treffen oder effektive Kontrolle über ihr eigenes Leben auszuüben. Wir fordern Pastoren, Gemeinden, christliche Hochschulgruppen und andere auf, besonderes Engagement zu zeigen bei dem Versuch, diese jungen Frauen zu

stärken. Außerdem unterstützen wir Anlaufstellen, die fürsorgliche Barmherzigkeit bieten und Frauen helfen, Alternativen zur Abtreibung kennenzulernen.

Wir erkennen, dass der Zugang zu Dienstleistungen im Bereich der reproduktiven Medizin zu oft durch wirtschaftliche Faktoren eingeschränkt ist. Frauen, die in Armut leben, sind oft nicht in der Lage, Entscheidungen über den Zeitpunkt einer Schwangerschaft oder über die Größe ihrer Familien zu treffen. Es fehlt ihnen der Zugang zu vor- und nachgeburtlicher Versorgung. Das Fehlen solcher Versorgung setzt den Armutskreislauf fort, weil die Möglichkeit der Frauen, Arbeit aufzunehmen, eingeschränkt und die Belastung des knappen Familieneinkommens erhöht wird. Wir unterstützen Regelungen und Programme, die Dienstleistungen im Bereich der reproduktiven Medizin zu Frauen in wirtschaftlich schwachen Gebieten bringen.

Wir unterstützen Methoden der Reproduktionsmedizin für Menschen mit Kinderwunsch.¹² Wir meinen, dass die Entscheidung über den Einsatz alternativer Reproduktionsmöglichkeiten am besten in den Händen derjenigen liegen soll, die selbst über den Gebrauch dieser Möglichkeiten nachdenken, wobei sie auch Rat bei einem Anbieter von Gesundheitsleistungen suchen. In jedem Fall sollte die Anwendung von reproduktiven Alternativen im Einklang mit den höchsten ethischen Standards stehen, und Gesundheit und Wohlbefinden von Frauen und Kindern sollten die höchste Priorität haben.

L. Rassismus, Antisemitismus¹³, Ethnozentrismus und Tribalismus

Wir verurteilen Rassismus, Antisemitismus, Ethnozentrismus und Tribalismus sowie jegliche Ideologie oder gesellschaftliche Praxis, die von der falschen und irreführenden Annahme oder Idee ausgeht, dass eine Gruppe von Menschen allen anderen Gruppen von Menschen überlegen ist. Darüber hinaus verwerfen wir grundsätzlich Gesetze, Richtlinien und gesellschaftliche Praktiken, die Einzelne, Gemeinschaften oder andere gesellschaftliche Gruppen aufgrund von vermeintlichen rassistischen, ethnischen oder stammesspezifischen Unterschieden marginalisieren, diskriminieren oder zur Gewalt gegen sie aufstacheln.

Wir rufen Gemeinden, Pastoren, Bischöfe und andere Kirchenautoritäten dazu auf, sich zu informieren über die Ursprünge und Erscheinungsformen von Rassismus, Antisemitismus, Ethnozentrismus und Tribalismus innerhalb von Glaubensgemeinschaften und Strategien zu entwickeln, gesellschaftliche Spaltungen dieser Art zu überwinden. Ebenso bitten wir Regierungen, Unternehmen und zivilgesellschaftliche Einrichtungen, sich von Aussagen, Richtlinien und Handlungen zu distanzieren, die Ausgrenzung, Diskriminierung und Gewalt fördern.

M. Sexuelle Belästigung, Missbrauch und Gewalt

Da wir den angeborenen Wert und die Würde aller Menschen anerkennen, verurteilen wir sexuelle Belästigung, sexuellen Missbrauch und sexuelle Gewalt und halten sie für schwerwiegende Verletzungen von geltenden Verhaltensnormen sowohl innerhalb der Kirche wie auch in der ganzen Gesellschaft. Unter sexueller Belästigung verstehen wir jede unerwünschte oder unangemessene sexuelle oder geschlechtsspezifische Äußerung oder die

¹² Adapt.: Orig.: We support the use of a variety of reproductive strategies for those desiring to have children, including fertility treatments, in vitro fertilization (IVF), embryo or sperm donation, surrogacy, and others.

¹³ Adapt.: dreimalige Einfügung von "Antisemitismus".

körperliche Annäherung am Arbeitsplatz, im beruflichen Umfeld oder in anderen sozialen Zusammenhängen.

Sexueller Missbrauch meint jede ungewollte sexuelle Aktivität, die durch Anwendung von Gewalt oder Drohungen geschieht oder aber durch das Ausnutzen derer, die nicht in der Lage sind, ihre Zustimmung zu geben, oder sich in der schwächeren Position befinden gegenüber jemandem in einer Machtposition. Sexuelle Gewalt schließt alle Drohungen und Formen von gewaltsamem sexuellen Kontakt oder Körperverletzung ein, einschließlich Vergewaltigung. Ganz besonders beklagen wir die sexuelle Ausbeutung von Kindern und Jugendlichen und erkennen, dass sexueller Missbrauch besonders schädlich und verabscheuenswürdig ist, wenn er im Kontext der Kirche geschieht.

Wir bitten Pastoren, Gemeinden und andere Kirchengruppen, eindeutige Richtlinien und Praktiken festzusetzen, um Fälle von sexueller Belästigung anzugehen oder zu verhindern. Diese Richtlinien und Praktiken sollten enthalten: obligatorische Schulung für Geistliche und kirchliche Mitarbeiter, gedruckte Richtlinien dazu, welches Verhalten sexuelle Belästigung darstellt, eine zuverlässige und vertrauliche Methode der Berichterstattung und einen klaren Prozess für den Umgang mit Beschwerden, einschließlich steigender Strafen bis hin zur Entlassung bei Wiederholungstätern, die ihr Verhalten nicht ändern.

Wir treten ein für die Entwicklung und Verwirklichung von umfassenden Richtlinien und Praktiken bei Fällen des Verdachts auf sexuellen Missbrauch oder sexuelle Gewalt, insbesondere wenn minderjährige Kinder oder andere Menschen betroffen sind, die nicht in der Lage sind einzuwilligen. Auch scheinbar unbegründete Berichte von Gewalt oder Missbrauch müssen sofort untersucht werden. Ferner bitten wir Pastoren und Gemeinden, uneingeschränkt alle Gesetze zu befolgen, die solche Angelegenheiten regeln, und Kenntnis von allen gesetzlichen Pflichten zur Berichterstattung zu haben.

DIE POLITISCHE GEMEINSCHAFT

VORWORT

"So ist nun die Liebe des Gesetzes Erfüllung", "das Ziel der Unterweisung". Großartiges wird über die Liebe gesagt: Sie ist das Wesen, der Geist, das Leben aller Tugend. Sie ist nicht nur das erste und große Gebot, sondern sie ist alle Gebote in einem. Was gerecht ist, was rein ist, was liebenswert oder ehrenwert ist, sei es eine Tugend oder ein Lob, das alles ist eingefasst in dieses eine Wort - Liebe.¹⁴

Unsere Beteiligung am Staatswesen wurzelt in der Aufforderung des Evangeliums, unsere Nächsten zu lieben, Gerechtigkeit zu üben und für die Schwachen zu sorgen. Als Methodisten und Methodistinnen erkennen wir, dass Liebe verantwortungsvolles politisches Handeln und Engagement verlangt, das darauf zielt, die Gesellschaft zu verbessern und das Gemeinwohl zu fördern. Wir erkennen, dass solches politische Engagement Demut verlangt und Aufmerksamkeit für unsere eigenen Verwicklungen in die Aufrechterhaltung von Ungerechtigkeit. Ebenso verlangt es Barmherzigkeit, Gebet und die Bereitschaft, Gottes Willen wahrzunehmen.

¹⁴ John Wesley, Sermon ... The Circumcision of the Heart 17 I 11 (dt.: ...)

Wir glauben an den angeborenen Wert aller Menschen, der in Gottes gnädigem Schöpferakt gründet und umfassend in der Macht von Jesu Leben, Tod und Auferstehung offenbart ist. Das Verständnis, dass der Mensch nach Gottes Bild geschaffen ist, ist ein zentrales Thema in der Lehre John Wesleys.

Außerdem glauben wir, dass Gott alle Mitglieder der Menschheitsfamilie dazu beruft, die Würde und den Wert aller Menschen zu erkennen und zu schützen und sich für das Wohlergehen von Gottes gesamter Schöpfung einzusetzen. Deshalb unterstützen wir Strukturen in der Kirche und in der Zivilgesellschaft, die den grundlegenden Freiheiten und Rechten aller Menschen Respekt zollen und Gottes Schöpfung schützen. Insbesondere bejahen wir die wichtige Tätigkeit der Vereinten Nationen, die Frieden und Sicherheit fördern, Menschenwürde und Menschenrechte verfechten und für nachhaltige Entwicklung eintreten.

AUFGABEN DES STAATES

A. Kirche und Staat

Wir bekräftigen, dass Kirche und Staat unterschiedliche und entscheidende Rollen im Blick auf die ganze Gesellschaft zu spielen haben. Obwohl die formalen Beziehungen zwischen Regierungen und religiösen Gemeinschaften sich von Land zu Land unterscheiden, bejahen wir grundsätzlich die Unabhängigkeit und Integrität beider Institutionen und treten für eine Beziehung von gegenseitiger Achtung ein, in der keine der beiden versucht, die andere zu dominieren oder unangemessen zu beeinflussen.

Wir bekräftigen, dass jede Regierung unter dem Urteil Gottes steht und deshalb für rechenschaftspflichtig zu halten ist für den Schutz der Unschuldigen, die Sicherstellung von Grundrechten und Freiheiten, den Schutz der natürlichen Welt und die Errichtung von gerechten, fairen und nachhaltigen Wirtschaftssystemen.

Wie bitten gewählte oder beauftragte Amtsinhaber oder Menschen, die andere staatliche Positionen innehaben, verantwortungsvolle Führer und Verwalter der Befugnisse und der Mittel zu sein, die ihnen anvertraut wurden. Wir rufen alle Staatsbeamten dazu auf, die höchsten Standards von Professionalität, Ehrlichkeit und Integrität anzustreben. Außerdem bitten wir alle Regierungen, Richtlinien und Praktiken anzunehmen, die Rechenschaft und Transparenz sicherstellen und so das öffentliche Vertrauen aufbauen und bewahren.

Wir lehnen den staatliche Einsatz von Drohungen, Erpressungen, illegalen Verhaftungen, außergerichtlichen Tötungen und anderen Formen der Nötigung ab, um politische Kontrahenten und Gegner von ungesetzlichen oder unmoralischen Regierungsrichtlinien oder Praktiken zum Schweigen zu bringen. Im Einklang mit internationalen Gesetzen und Regelungen protestieren wir vehement gegen die Ausübung von Folter, Sklaverei, Genozid, Kriegsverbrechen, Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit und Verbrechen der Aggression durch jegliche Regierung, und wir verlangen, dass in solchen Fällen die strengsten internationalen Sanktionen verhängt werden.

Auch wenn wir nicht glauben, dass Kirchen mit bestimmten politischen Parteien verbunden sein sollen, ermutigen wir Kirchen, zu sozialen Fragen mutig vom Evangelium her Stellung zu nehmen. Weiterhin glauben wir, dass Kirchen das Recht und die Verantwortung haben, ihre Mitglieder zu informieren und sie dazu auszurüsten, wirkungsvolle Fürsprecher für Gerechtigkeit in der Welt zu sein.

B. Ziviler Ungehorsam

Wir unterstützen diejenigen, die sich aus Gewissensgründen oder aus religiöser Überzeugung und nach Ausschöpfung aller Rechtsmittel gezwungen sehen, ungerechten und unmoralischen Gesetzen den Gehorsam zu verweigern und Protest einzulegen. Wir bitten diejenigen, die zivilen Ungehorsam ausüben, auf Gewalt zu verzichten und Würde und Wert aller Beteiligten zu wahren. Auch appellieren wir an alle Regierungsstellen, besonders die Polizei und alle anderen Institutionen, deren Aufgabe die öffentliche Sicherheit ist, für angemessene Ausbildung zu sorgen und mit Zurückhaltung vorzugehen und in einer Weise, die die Grundrechte schützt und psychischen und physischen Schaden bei denjenigen vermeidet, die zivilen Ungehorsam ausüben.

C. Opferorientierte Justiz

Die Evangelien legen besonderen Wert auf die Wiederherstellung von gerechten Beziehungen (Mt 18,15-20). Wenn Beziehungen durch Verbrechen oder Fehlverhalten beeinträchtigt oder zerstört wurden, ist solche Wiederherstellung von entscheidender Bedeutung. Deshalb bitten wir die Regierungen, Verfahren zu entwickeln, die opferorientierte Justiz betonen, die von den Menschen, die ein Verbrechen begangen haben, verlangt, dass sie für ihr Verbrechen Wiedergutmachung leisten, und die Opfern erlaubt, wenn sie das denn wollen, dem Täter mitzuteilen, wie sie geschädigt worden sind. Opferorientierte Justiz möchte das Opfer und die Familie des Opfers in den Vordergrund stellen. Sie strebt danach, Schäden zu reparieren, Unrecht wiedergutzumachen und dem Opfer, dem Täter und den Familien und der Gemeinschaft Heilung zu verschaffen.

Wir bitten Gemeinden, Regierungen und Unternehmen, Resozialisierungsprogramme zu unterstützen, die denjenigen, die ein Verbrechen begangen haben, erlauben, Beratung, Bildung, Ausbildung, gemeinnützige Arbeit und andere Hilfe zu bekommen, damit sie voll integrierte Mitglieder der Gesellschaft werden. Wir ermutigen Bürger, sich mit den örtlichen Vollzugsbehörden zusammenzutun, um Alternativen zu Praktiken zu finden, die Vergeltung statt Wiederherstellung betonen.

D. Die Todesstrafe

Unsere Verpflichtung zur angeborenen Würde und zum Wert jeder Person und unsere Haltung als Evangelisch-methodistische Christen und Christinnen bewegen uns dazu, Todesstrafe und Vollzug des Todesurteils abzulehnen.¹⁵

Auf tragische Weise will die Todesstrafe den Verlust eines menschlichen Lebens mit der absichtlichen Vernichtung eines weiteren ausgleichen. Darüber hinaus trifft die Verhängung der Todesstrafe unverhältnismäßig oft Menschen, die in Armut leben, die wenig gebildet sind, die in marginalisierten ethnischen Gemeinschaften leben, oder Menschen mit geistigen Beeinträchtigungen. Außerdem zeigen modernste Technologien, dass eine bedeutende Zahl von Menschen fälschlicherweise eines Vergehens für schuldig gesprochen wird. Solche Ungerechtigkeiten lassen uns die faire Anwendung der Todesstrafe und ihre Vereinbarkeit mit dem grundlegenden Recht auf Gleichbehandlung vor dem Gesetz in Frage stellen.

¹⁵ Adapt.: Streichung von "The death penalty is a sentence of execution imposed upon a legally convicted individual."

Aus diesem Grund rufen wir zur Abschaffung der Todesstrafe auf und drängen Einzelne und Gemeinden dazu, sich über die historische Haltung der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche und ihrer Vorgängerkirchen zu informieren. Ferner bitten wir Pastoren und Gemeinden, sich zu verpflichten, Dienst an denen zu tun, die Angehörige durch Gewaltverbrechen verloren haben, und Familien vorbehaltlos zu unterstützen, die zwischen den konkurrierenden Forderungen nach Gerechtigkeit, Barmherzigkeit und Heilung hin- und hergerissen sind.

E. Strafrecht

John Wesley kämpfte unermüdlich für verbesserte Haftbedingungen. Einmal hat er über einen Zeitraum von neun Monaten, 67 mal in verschiedenen Gefängnissen gepredigt. Er beklagte die erbärmlichen Zustände, unter denen die meisten Gefangenen zu seiner Zeit zu leiden hatten. In Bezug auf dieses Erbe bejahen wir rechtsstaatliche Prinzipien, die Garantie von bürgerlichen Freiheiten und Rechten und fairen Zugang zur Justiz für alle Menschen. Wir verurteilen diskriminierende Vollstreckung oder Machtmissbrauch aus Gründen von Stammeszugehörigkeit, ethnischer Herkunft, Muttersprache, Geburtsort, wirtschaftlicher Benachteiligung, Geschlecht, sexueller Orientierung, Behinderung oder Nationalität. Wir befürworten ein systematisches Monitoring von Vorurteilen und Voreingenommenheiten in allen Strafjustizsystemen. Schließlich unterstützen wir den Zugang zu kompetentem Rechtsbeistand für Menschen, die angeklagt oder wegen krimineller Taten verurteilt sind.

Wir meinen, dass Straftäter für ihre kriminellen Handlungen zur Rechenschaft gezogen werden müssen, insbesondere für Handlungen, die zum Verlust des Lebens oder der Existenzgrundlage führen. Deshalb unterstützen wir Maßnahmen, die Verbrechen vorbeugen, sie verhindern oder ganz eliminieren und mit denen gefährliche Straftäter festgesetzt werden. Zwar bestehen wir auf Zurechenbarkeit, treten aber zugleich für faire und angemessene Strafurteile ein und für einen humanen Umgang mit denen, die ins Gefängnis kommen. Wir unterstützen mit Nachdruck Programme in den Gefängnissen, die auf die Rehabilitation und Resozialisierung der Gefangenen zielen. Wir meinen nicht, dass Gefängnisse kommerziell betrieben werden sollen.

In unseren Gemeinden unterstützen wir Maßnahmen, die die eigentlichen Ursachen von Kriminalität ins Auge fassen wie Armut, einen Mangel an Bildungsmöglichkeiten und Freizeitaktivitäten, Behandlung und Beratung bei Drogenmissbrauch, Dienstleistungen im Bereich der psychischen Gesundheit und Berufsausbildung. Wir empfehlen Initiativen, die positive Begegnungen zwischen der Polizei und Menschen in der Gesellschaft fördern. Ferner ermutigen wir zu Anstrengungen, die Menschen, die aus der Haft entlassen wurden, wieder in die Gemeinschaft eingliedern wie Angebote von Beschäftigungsmöglichkeiten und, wo angemessen, die Streichung aus dem Strafregister.

Wir ermutigen Kirchen, Dienst an den Gefangenen zu tun. Sie sollten sich für die Menschen einsetzen und auch für eine Reform des Strafjustizsystems. Als Menschen, denen vergeben worden ist, sollten Christen und Christinnen das Stigma bekämpfen, mit dem Menschen, die im Gefängnis waren, oft behaftet sind. Wir applaudieren dem Engagement vieler Methodisten und Methodistinnen mit Diensten im Gefängnis wie Gottesdienst, Bildung und Rehabilitation.

F. Krieg und Militärdienst

Die Kirche beklagt Krieg und alle anderen Formen von gewaltsamen Konflikten und mahnt eine friedliche Beilegung aller Konflikte an. Wir sehnen uns nach dem Tag, wenn es keinen Krieg mehr gibt und Menschen in Frieden und Gerechtigkeit zusammen leben, und halten an der Erkenntnis fest, dass Krieg nach Gottes Willen nicht sein soll¹⁶.

Wir lehnen Krieg als Werkzeug der Außenpolitik ab und bestehen darauf, dass alle friedlichen und diplomatischen Mittel der Konfliktlösung ausgeschöpft sein müssen, bevor zur Waffe gegriffen wird. In ähnlicher Weise lehnen wir die zunehmende Drohung mit einem Erstschatz ab, es sei denn, es kann gezeigt werden, dass er eine verhältnismäßige Reaktion zur Begrenzung des Verlusts von Menschenleben ist oder dass er nur als Antwort auf eine klare und unmittelbare Gefahr für Menschenleben ausgeübt wird. Wir sind betrübt, dass in einer Welt, in der so viele in Armut leben, Regierungen damit fortfahren, umfangreiche Ressourcen der Vorbereitung und Durchführung von Kriegen zu widmen. Wir sind besonders bekümmert über die Ausbreitung von Atomwaffen und rufen nicht nur zu einem Produktionsstopp, sondern zu ihrer vollständigen Eliminierung auf.

Christen haben mit der Frage des Krieges seit den Tagen Jesu gerungen. Manche Christen haben historisch argumentiert, dass Krieg und andere Gewaltanwendung niemals akzeptabel sind, während andere behaupten haben, dass Waffengewalt zur Selbstverteidigung oder zum Schutz Unschuldiger manchmal unvermeidlich ist oder um ungebremste Aggression, Tyrannei und Genozid zu verhindern.

Wir bitten alle Methodisten und Methodistinnen, das eigene Gewissen zu erforschen und aufrichtig Gottes Führung zu suchen, wenn es um den Militärdienst geht. Voller Respekt bieten wir denen Unterstützung an, die aus persönlicher Überzeugung den Militärdienst wählen, und bitten sie, ihre Pflichten im Einklang mit den Grundsätzen des christlichen Glaubens und in Übereinstimmung mit den Gesetzen der Genfer Konvention erfüllen.

Ebenso respektieren und unterstützen wir das Zeugnis von Pazifisten, deren Gewissen und deren religiöse Überzeugungen sie daran hindern, im Militär zu dienen, oder sie zwingen, sich nicht am Kriegsgeschehen zu beteiligen. Die Wurzeln solcher pazifistischer Überzeugungen sind in der Geschichte der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche und ihrer Vorgängerkirchen wohlbekannt. Wir lehnen die Zwangswehrpflicht ab und bitten Regierungen, diese Praxis abzuschaffen und stattdessen denen, die gegen den Militärdienst entscheiden, zu erlauben, einen Zivildienst zu absolvieren oder auf anderen kreativen Wegen ihren Beitrag zu leisten.

Als Kirche verpflichten wir uns, alle Menschen zu unterstützen bei ihrer Suche nach dem besten Weg, Jesu gewaltloses Beispiel im eigenen Leben zu verwirklichen. Die Kirche unterstützt und begleitet diejenigen, die Militärdienst leisten, die Wehrdienstverweigerer, die Veteranen, die mit physischen, psychischen, seelischen oder moralischen Schäden leben müssen, und die Familien von Menschen, deren Leben vom Militärdienst betroffen ist. Wir fordern die Kirche dazu auf, sich systematisch für Gerechtigkeit für Menschen einzusetzen, die vom Krieg betroffen sind, und für sie zu arbeiten und sich in globalen und lokalen Konflikten für Friedensgespräche und gewaltfreie Konfliktbearbeitung auszusprechen.

¹⁶ Adapt.: Zufügung von "und halten an der Erkenntnis fest, dass Krieg nach Gottes Willen nicht sein soll".

GRUND- UND BÜRGERRECHTE

Wir erklären, dass jedem einzelnen ohne Rücksicht auf die Umstände seines Lebens oder seine soziale Stellung Grund- und Bürgerrechte zustehen. Diese Rechte gründen in Gottes gnädigem Akt der Schöpfung (Gen 1,27) und sind vollständig in Jesu Inkarnation der Liebe Gottes offenbart worden. Als Kirche wollen wir daran arbeiten, diese Grund- und Bürgerrechte innerhalb der Kirche zu schützen und die Strukturen der Gesellschaft so zu reformieren, dass jeder Mensch gut leben kann.

Wie in der Allgemeinen Erklärung der Menschenrechte und anderen wichtigen internationalen Abkommen dargelegt, schließen die Grund- und Bürgerrechte das Recht auf Leben, Freiheit und Sicherheit ebenso ein wie Gleichheit vor dem Gesetz und Freiheit vor unrechtmäßiger Inhaftierung. Weitere Freiheitsrechte sind das Recht auf faire Verfahren, Privatsphäre, Versammlung, Meinungsfreiheit, Demokratie, Nahrung und Obdach. Ferner haben Arbeiter das Recht, sich in Tarifverhandlungen zu engagieren, eine gerechte Bezahlung zu bekommen und in einer sicheren und gesunden Umgebung zu arbeiten.

Rechte hängen mit Pflichten zusammen. Wir bitten Einzelne, Gemeinden und andere kirchliche Institutionen, kraftvoll nicht nur für die eigenen Rechten einzutreten, sondern auch für die Rechte derer, die keine Stimme haben oder deren Stimme in der Gesellschaft nicht gehört wird. Regierungen müssen für die Garantie von Grund- und Bürgerrechten für verantwortlich erklärt werden. Zu diesen Verantwortlichkeiten gehört die Sicherstellung des Zugangs zu erschwinglicher und hochwertiger Bildung für alle Menschen, ohne Rücksicht auf Alter, Geschlecht, ethnische Herkunft, wirtschaftliche Lage oder ein anderes diskriminierendes Merkmal.

Wir verurteilen alle Versuche, Einzelnen Grund- und Bürgerrechte zu verweigern oder Menschen ihre angeborene Würde und ihren Wert zu nehmen. Deshalb verwerfen wir sowohl in der Kirche wie auch in der Gesellschaft im allgemeinen jeglichen Akt von Diskriminierung, Hass oder Gewalt, der sich gegen Einzelne richtet oder gegen Gruppen aufgrund von Nationalität, Stammeszugehörigkeit, ethnischer Herkunft, Alter, Geschlechtsidentität, Behinderung, wirtschaftlicher Lage, sexueller Orientierung, Religionszugehörigkeit oder anderen Faktoren. Darüber hinaus rufen wir angesichts des geschichtlichen Unrechts, verübt an indigenen Völkern, versklavten afrikanischen Völkern und anderen marginalisierten Gruppen, zu offenem Geständnis und Reue auf, sowie zu konkreten Reparationsleistungen, um vergangene und jetzige Formen sozialer Ungerechtigkeit wiedergutzumachen.

A. Gesundheitsversorgung

Wir bekräftigen, dass Gesundheitsversorgung ein grundlegendes Menschenrecht ist, und versprechen, für einen erweiterten Zugang zu allen Formen medizinischer Versorgung zu arbeiten, einschließlich präventiver, therapeutischer und palliativer Versorgung. Der Hälfte der Weltbevölkerung fehlt es an einem Zugang zu medizinischer Versorgung, und eine wachsende Zahl von Menschen, die Zugang haben, erleben für sich und ihre Lieben steigende Ausgaben für die Medizin, die sie in die Armut treiben. Um diesen schmerzhaften Realitäten zu begegnen, bitten wir Methodisten und Methodistinnen, sich an Bestrebungen zu beteiligen mit dem Ziel, Systeme zu schaffen, die eine umfassende Gesundheitsvorsorge für alle zur Verfügung stellen. Darüber hinaus meinen wir, dass jeder das Recht auf menschenwürdige Lebensbedingungen hat, einschließlich ausreichend Nahrung und Wasser, sicheres Wohnen und eine gesunde Umwelt.

Gesundheitsversorgung als Menschenrecht bedeutet auch, dass Kliniken, Krankenhäuser und medizinische Dienste und Behandlungen zugänglich, erschwinglich und von guter Qualität sein müssen. Sie müssen zur Verfügung stehen, wann und wo sie gebraucht werden, und müssen auf fairer Basis angeboten werden. Wir rufen Regierungen, Unternehmen, Kirchen und die Zivilgesellschaft dazu auf, gemeinschaftlich sicherzustellen, dass jeder Mensch Zugang zu medizinischen Diensten und Behandlung hat.

Darüber hinaus rufen wir nationale Regierungen und internationale Gesundheitsorganisationen sowie medizinische Gruppen dazu auf, gemeinschaftlich und zügig globale Pandemien wie HIV/AIDS und Ausbrüche von Seuchen anzugehen, die die Gesundheit und das Wohlergehen von ganzen Ländern und Regionen bedrohen. Als Kirche unterstützen wir weitere Maßnahmen und Initiativen, um die Gesundheit der Menschen zu verbessern, wie Investitionen in Präventivmedizin, gesunde Ernährung, fortdauernde Forschung in der Prävention und Behandlung von Infektionskrankheiten, vor- und nachgeburtliche Versorgung und bei Drogenmissbrauch Behandlung auf Verlangen. Wir werben für Gemeinden, die auf lokaler Ebene im Bereich der Gesundheitsversorgung arbeiten.

B. Kinder und Jugend

Wir rufen Kirche und Gesellschaft dazu auf, das Wohlergehen aller Kinder und Jugendlichen sowie ihre Sicherheit, Begleitung, Handlungsfähigkeit, Bildung und Teilnahme an kirchlichem und gemeinschaftlichem Leben zu unterstützen und dafür einzutreten. Wir verurteilen die zerstörerischen Praktiken von Vernachlässigung, Missbrauch, Entführung, Ausbeutung, Menschenhandel, Einsatz von Kindern in bewaffneten Konflikten und Inhaftierung. Wir erkennen, dass die Verursacher von Missbrauch oder Gefährdung meist in Machtpositionen sind. Wir halten sie für verantwortlich für ihre Taten, ob sie Eltern und Familie, Lehrer, Geistliche oder kirchliche oder öffentliche Führungspersonen sind. Wir rufen die Kirche dazu auf, sich entschieden gegen die Festnahme von Kindern zu stellen, und wir stellen Richtlinien in Frage, die jungen Menschen Grundrechte verwehren oder sie diskriminieren wegen Geschlecht, ethnischer Herkunft, Fähigkeiten, wirtschaftlicher Situation, sexueller Orientierung, Aufenthaltsstatus, Religion oder Nationalität. Schließlich bitten wir Personen in Autoritäts- oder Machtpositionen, junge Menschen zu unterstützen, sie in Entscheidungsprozesse einzubeziehen und sie ihre Gaben auf allen Ebenen von Kirche und Gesellschaft beizubringen zu lassen.

C. Ältere Menschen und das Altern

Ältere Menschen haben viele Gaben weiterzugeben. Wir rufen die Kirche, Regierungen und zivile Institutionen dazu auf, ihnen Möglichkeiten zu geben, weiterhin an der Menschheitsfamilie teilzuhaben und einen Beitrag zu Gottes Werk in der Welt zu leisten. Ältere Menschen haben auch das Recht auf Unterstützung und Schutz vor den Verletzlichkeiten des Alterns, wie wirtschaftlicher Ungleichheit, ungerechtem Erbrecht, ungenügender öffentlicher Gesundheitsversorgung und systematischer Vernachlässigung aufgrund von Geschlecht, ethnischer Herkunft, Fähigkeiten und wirtschaftlicher Lage.

Wir drängen die Kirche, Regierungen und die Zivilgesellschaft dazu, gesellschaftliche Regelungen und Programme zu entwickeln und zu verwirklichen, die für die Bedürfnisse und Rechte älterer Menschen sorgen. Wir unterstützen gesellschaftliche Regelungen, die ältere Menschen in die Gesellschaft integrieren und Ressourcen für ihr Wohlergehen garantieren

wie nicht-diskriminierende Beschäftigungsmöglichkeiten, Möglichkeiten zu Bildung und Dienst, Zugang zu medizinischer Versorgung und Wohnen, Schutz vor wirtschaftlicher und psychischer Ausbeutung und Seniorenbetreuung von hoher Qualität aus der öffentlichen Hand. Wir bejahen die Selbstbestimmung von älteren Menschen, ob sie allein, in Familien oder in Einrichtungen leben, und wir verurteilen Verstöße gegen ihre Lebensqualität durch unnötige Medikation oder die Einschränkung ihrer Teilhabe an der Gesellschaft oder ihres Handlungsspielraums.

D. Frauen und Mädchen

Wir bejahen, dass die Gaben von Frauen und Mädchen für Gottes Schöpfung lebenswichtig sind und wichtige Beiträge für Kirche und Gesellschaft erbringen. Wir fördern Chancengleichheit und gleiche Rechte für alle Frauen und Mädchen, ohne Rücksicht auf ihre Nationalität, Farbe, ethnische Herkunft, sexuelle Orientierung, Religion, körperliche Fähigkeiten oder andere Merkmale.

Um diese Rechte sicherzustellen, bitten wir Kirchen, Regierungen und gesellschaftliche Einrichtungen inständig, gleichberechtigte Strukturen und Regelungen zu entwickeln und Wert, Weisheit und Sorgen von Frauen anzuerkennen. Alle Frauen haben das Recht auf gleiche Bildungschancen, Schutz ihrer Körper, Gerechtigkeit in Fortpflanzungsfragen, elterliche Rechte und Verantwortlichkeiten, Arbeit und faire Bezahlung, Lohn und Beförderung.

Wir bejahen Würde und Wert aller Frauen und Mädchen und bitten die Kirche, Regierungen und gesellschaftliche Einrichtungen, ihr Führungspotential zu fördern, ihre Möglichkeiten zu verbessern und ihre Führungskraft in allen Bereichen des kirchlichen und gesellschaftlichen Lebens wahrzunehmen. Wie bitten dieselben Einrichtungen, ihr Recht sicherzustellen, frei von geschlechtsspezifischen Erwartungen zu leben, die ihre volle Entwicklung als Menschen begrenzen, und frei zu sein von Belästigung, Diskriminierung, Gewalt, Missbrauch zu Hause oder bei der Arbeit, Menschenhandel und anderen Formen von geschlechtsspezifischer Gewalt zu jeder Zeit und überall. Mit allergrößtem Nachdruck bitten wir die Kirche und alle politischen und zivilen Einrichtungen, Regelungen einzuführen, die die Stellung und die Rolle von Frauen und Mädchen in allen Facetten des Lebens fördern und schützen, damit sie gut leben und ihre Gaben zum Wohlergehen der Gesellschaft erbringen können.

E. Männer und Jungen

Wir bejahen, dass Männer und Jungen wichtige Beiträge für Kirche und Gesellschaft erbringen. Wir fördern Chancengleichheit für alle Männer und Jungen, ohne Rücksicht auf ihre Nationalität, Farbe, ethnische Herkunft, sexuelle Orientierung, Religion, körperlichen Fähigkeiten oder andere Merkmale.

Um Rechte, Chancen und Schutz zu sichern, bitten wir Kirchen, Regierungen und gesellschaftliche Einrichtungen, faire Strukturen und Regelungen zu entwickeln, die sicherstellen, dass Würde und Wert aller Männer und Jungen anerkannt und bejaht werden. Ferner rufen wir dazu auf, die Rechte von Männern und Jungen in Bildung, Arbeit, Bezahlung und Beförderung und elterlichen Rechten und Verantwortlichkeiten zu schützen.

Wir bejahen die Rechte von Männern und Jungen, frei von Belästigung, Gewalt, Diskriminierung, Missbrauch zu Hause oder bei der Arbeit, Menschenhandel und geschlechtsspezi-

fischen Erwartungen zu leben, die ihre volle Entwicklung als Menschen begrenzen. Wir ermutigen dazu, das Führungspotential von Männern und Jungen zu fördern, damit sie gut leben und ihre Gaben zum Wohlergehen der Gesellschaft erbringen können.

F. Indigene Gemeinschaften

Wir unterstützen die Rechte indigener Gemeinschaften und bejahen, dass ihnen wie allen anderen Menschen die Grundrechte zustehen, die in der Allgemeinen Erklärung der Menschenrechte festgesetzt sind. Wir verurteilen Fälle von Genozid an indigenen Völkern und verlangen, dass Regierungsvereinbarungen und -verträge mit indigenen Völkern eingehalten und durchgesetzt werden.

Mit indigenen Völkern und Stämmen stimmen wir in der Forderung überein, dass die Rechte zur Ausübung ihrer nationalen Souveränität von Regierungen und Gerichten aufrecht erhalten werden. Wir unterstützen die Anstrengungen indigener Völker, ihre Sprachen und Kulturen wiederzubeleben angesichts aller Bemühungen, sie den Mainstream-Gesellschaften zu assimilieren. Wir erkennen das Recht indigener Völker an, ihr Land, ihr Wasser und ihre anderen Ressourcen zu kontrollieren, und wir prangern alle Versuche an, diese Ressourcen unter Zwang zu beschlagnahmen oder indigene Völker mit Zwang aus ihren Gebieten zu vertreiben.

G. Migranten, Einwanderer und Geflüchtete

Wir bejahen die Würde, den Wert und die Rechte von Migranten, Einwanderern und Geflüchteten, einschließlich vertriebener und staatenloser Menschen. Indem wir das tun, erkennen wir an, dass die Welt heute einer beispiellosen Krise gegenübersteht, die durch die Vertreibung einer großen Zahl von Menschen aufgrund von Kriegen und anderen Feindseligkeiten, von ausländischen Interventionen, weitverbreiteter Hungersnot, Erderwärmung und Klimawandel und durch das Versagen von Nationalstaaten, ihre Bevölkerung angemessen zu schützen und zu versorgen, ausgelöst wurde.

Wir erkennen, dass vertriebene Menschen besonders verletzlich sind, denn ihr uneindeutiger Status lässt sie mit wenig Schutz- und Sozialleistungen allein, so dass sie Ausbeutung, Gewalt und Missbrauch ausgesetzt sind. Wir bitten alle Methodisten und Methodistinnen, Migranten, Geflüchtete und Einwanderer in ihren Gemeinden willkommen zu heißen und sich zu verpflichten, ihnen konkrete Unterstützung unter anderem dabei anzubieten, sich im Dickicht der restriktiven und oft langatmigen Einwanderungsrichtlinien zurechtzufinden, und sie bei praktischen Dingen wie Ernährung, Wohnen, Bildung und Arbeit und anderem zu unterstützen.

Wir lehnen alle Gesetze und Richtlinien ab, die versuchen, vertriebene Einzelne und ihre Familien aufgrund ihres Status' als Migranten, Einwanderer oder Geflüchtete zu kriminalisieren, zu entmenschlichen oder zu bestrafen. Ebenso prangern wir alle Versuche an, vertriebene Menschen zu inhaftieren und sie unter menschenunwürdigen und unhygienischen Bedingungen festzuhalten. Wir stellen Richtlinien in Frage, die sich für die Trennung von Familien - besonders bei minderjährigen Kindern von ihren Eltern - aussprechen, und wir sind gegen die Einrichtung von kommerziellen Lagern für diesen Zweck.

H. Menschen mit Behinderungen

Wir bejahen die volle Humanität von Menschen mit Behinderungen und erkennen ihre Gaben an. Wir rufen dazu auf, Barrieren abzubauen, die Menschen mit Behinderungen davon abhalten, ganz am Leben von Gemeinden und der Gesellschaft im allgemeinen teilzuhaben. Obwohl kein bestimmter Ausdruck allgemeine Akzeptanz in unserer globalen Gemeinschaft gefunden hat, bezieht sich „Menschen mit Behinderung“ auf eine größere Gruppe von Menschen, die mit unterschiedlichen kognitiven, körperlichen, entwicklungsmäßigen, sinnesbezogenen, neurologischen, intellektuellen und psychischen Zuständen und Herausforderungen leben.

Wir beklagen, dass die Kirche Menschen mit Behinderungen oft stigmatisiert und diskriminiert hat, indem sie sie mit Begriffen mit negativen Konnotationen belegt und es versäumt hat, im kirchlichen Leben Raum für die ganze Vielfalt von Gottes Volk zu schaffen, und Worte wie „blind“, „lahm“ und „taub“ abwertend verwendet hat. Aus diesem Grund werden Menschen mit Behinderungen oft übergangen und unterschätzt, sowohl in der Kirche wie auch in der Zivilgesellschaft. Als Reaktion darauf rufen wir die Kirche auf, Buße zu tun, mit Ernsthaftigkeit zuzuhören und gemeinsam mit Menschen mit Behinderungen Dienst zu tun, damit sie ihre Weisheit und ihre Gaben in die Mission und den Dienst der lokalen Gemeinden und anderer Kirchengruppen einbringen können.

Ebenso rufen wir die Zivilgesellschaft, Unternehmen und Regierungsführer dazu auf, die Abschaffung aller Barrieren anzustreben und Möglichkeiten für Menschen mit Behinderungen zu schaffen, damit sie ihren einzigartigen Beitrag zur Gesellschaft erbringen können. Wir verlangen den Schutz der Rechte für alle Menschen mit Behinderungen, einschließlich der Rechte auf Gesundheitsversorgung, Arbeit, Bildung, Wohnen, Transport und Freiheit von Diskriminierung.

I. Sexuelle Orientierung und Geschlechtsidentitäten

Weil alle Menschen von heiligem Wert sind und weil grundlegende Menschenrechte jedem zustehen, sind wir verpflichtet, gleiche Rechte, Freiheitsrechte und Schutz für alle Menschen ohne Rücksicht auf sexuelle Orientierung oder Geschlechtsidentität einzufordern. Wir betrachten es als eine Selbstverständlichkeit, dass Rechtsansprüche auf materielle Ressourcen bei Vormundschaften oder gegenseitigen Vollmachten und die Gleichheit vor dem Gesetz von der sexuellen Orientierung oder der Genderidentität Betroffener unberührt bleiben.¹⁷ Weil in vielen Ländern sexuell und geschlechtlich begründete Minderheiten überproportional oft von gesellschaftlichen Stigmata, Diskriminierung, Nötigung und Gewalt betroffen sind, rufen wir Kirchen, Regierungen, Unternehmen und gesellschaftliche Einrichtungen dazu auf, alles in ihrer Macht Stehende zu tun, solche ungerechte Behandlung zu bekämpfen und gleiche Rechte und gleichen Schutz für alle zu fördern.

J. Religiöse Minderheiten

Wir bejahen das Recht von religiösen Minderheiten, ihre Gottesdienste in Frieden zu feiern und ihre Religion frei von Angst vor Diskriminierung oder Verfolgung auszuüben. Wir ver-

¹⁷ Adapt.: Dieser Satz überträgt den folgenden: "We see clear issues of equality and justice in protecting the rightful claims of those with shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, mutual powers of attorney, and other lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships that involve shared contributions, responsibilities and liabilities, and equal protection before the law".

urteilen Handlungen von Einzelnen, Gruppen oder Organisationen, die Menschen verleumdern oder erniedrigen, die einer anderen Religion angehören. Als Christen und Christinnen halten wir solche Einstellungen und Handlungen für unvereinbar mit Jesu Ermahnung, den Nächsten zu lieben.

Wir bitten Regierungen, Unternehmen, Kirchen und andere Einrichtungen der Zivilgesellschaft, abgestimmte Maßnahmen zu ergreifen, um die Rechte aller religiösen Menschen zu schützen und zu erhalten. Wie sind gegen jegliche Form von Diskriminierung und Intoleranz gegenüber religiösen Minderheiten, auch gegen Gesetze, die religiöse Kleidung und Symbole verbieten, und gegen Aussagen öffentlicher Personen, die zu Intoleranz, Hass und Gewalt aufhetzen. Wir fordern eine verantwortungsvolle Berichterstattung über Religionen und verurteilen die Verbreitung von Stereotypen und Unwahrheiten über religiöse Minderheiten.

Wir unterstützen die Rechte aller religiösen Menschen, ihren Glauben frei von ungerechtfertigten und überflüssigen gesetzlichen, politischen oder finanziellen Einschränkungen zu praktizieren. Ebenso unterstützen wir das Recht von Einzelnen, eine eigene Religion zu wählen, und lehnen Versuche ab, Menschen einen bestimmten Glauben aufzuzwingen oder sie unter Druck zu setzen oder zu manipulieren, einer religiösen Tradition beizutreten oder darin zu bleiben, wenn sie sich schon entschieden hatten, sich davon loszulösen. Individuelle religiöse Glaubensüberzeugung darf nicht dazu missbraucht werden, grundlegende Menschenrechte zu verwehren.

Termine / Dates 2025-2026

2025

12.-16.2.	CC Germany	DE-Würzburg
22.-25.2.	North Africa Gathering	TN-Tunis
13.3.	Executive Committee CC CSE	CH-Winterthur
13.-16.3.	Central Conference CC CSE	CH-Winterthur
15.3.	Executive Committee CC CSE	CH-Winterthur
22.-23.3.	General Assembly of the UMC in France	FR-Landersen
27.-30.3.	Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania Provisional AC	AL-Pogradec
2.-6.4.	CC Nordic, Baltic + Ukraine Area / Eurasia Area	DK-Copenhagen
27.4.-2.5.	Council of Bishops	US-Chicago
8.-11.5.	Hungary-Romania Provisional AC	RO-Cluj-Napoca / HU-Budapest
13.5.	European Methodist Council	ONLINE
16.-18.5.	Czech Republic AC	CZ-Prague
22.-25.5.	Poland AC	PL-Katowice
29.5.-1.6.	Austria Provisional AC	AT-Vienna
11.6.	Fund for Mission in Europe	ONLINE
16.-17.6.	Platform North Africa	CH-Langenthal
18.-22.6.	Switzerland-France-North Africa AC	CH-Langenthal
24.-28.7.	YouMe Central Conference Youth Camp	RO-Cluj-Napoca
2.-6.10.	European Methodist Council	DE-Hamburg
21.10.	Fund for Mission in Europe	ONLINE
2.-7.11.	Council of Bishops	ONLINE
21.-23.11.	Executive Committee CC CSE	PL-Warsaw

2026

11.-14.3.	Europäisches Treffen der Exekutivkomitees	DE-Reutlingen
April/May	Global Leadership Gathering (instead of General Conference)	???
26.4.-1.5.	Council of Bishops	???
28.7.-6.8.	STR 2026 (National Tent Camp of Jungschar EMK)	CH-Brittgau
13.-15.8.	World Methodist Council	???
2.-6.11.	Council of Bishops	ONLINE

IV. Reports of the Working Groups and other Groups

Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries

1. General informations

During the last quadrennium the Working Group had some changes. After the extraordinary meeting of Central Conference CSE Zoltán Kovács was elected as a chair and David Field as a member instead of Stefan Zürcher. Members of the Working Group are Jana Danečková, Michael Nausner, Edward Puślecki, Daniel Sjanta, Christof Voigt (contact person from the Central Conference Germany), David Field and Zoltán Kovács (chair).

2. Tasks

The Central Conference 2017 has not given specific tasks to the Working Group. We had an online meeting in 27th November 2023. Every member of the Working Group gave a brief report on personal and ecclesial theological matters. Between 19th and 22nd September 2024, the Working Group has met in Miskolc (HU). We dealt with the topic of church membership how we interpret and practice it in our Annual Conferences (Attachment 1 and 2.). We discussed the document of Revised Charta Oecumenica (Attachment 3.). Finally we started to clarify our mandate and form of the Working Group.

3. Plans

- The next meeting is scheduled between 16th and 19th October, 2025 in Reutlingen (DE).
- Establishing relationship with each Annual Conference of the CC CSE, through a delegate member or a contact person.
- Electing new member from AC Austria to replace Michael Nausner (AT).

4. Acknowledgements

The members of Working Group is grateful to Michael Nausner former member for his committed work since 2005.

Zoltán Kovács / Miskolc, 12.2.2025

Church membership - Overview in various countries

United Methodist Church in Austria. (Mitglied werden - Über uns - EmK)

What Does it Mean to Become a Member in the United Methodist Church in Austria?

Member of the UMC in Austria are a part of a Christian community that shares the fellowship of life by walking together (Lebens- und Weggemeinschaft). We are connected worldwide with Methodists and Christians from other denominations in an ecumenical community. Membership is expressed in a lived Christian community in service to the world. Through baptism and confession of faith children and grownups become member in the UMC.

Membership in the Uniting Church in Sweden (the ecumenical church that was founded in 2012 with the participation of the UMC in Sweden)

One can become a member of a congregation in several ways:

- by confessing a personal belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
- by being baptized
- by transferring one's membership from a different congregation
- by becoming an associate member, i.e., by remaining a member in a different denomination than the Uniting Church in Sweden

The congregation welcomes each person who is baptized and confesses Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The congregation welcomes even members waiting to be baptized.

Membership in Church of Sweden (Medlemskap - Svenska kyrkan)

In the Church of Sweden there is room for you who believes – or who doubts. For you who are longing for a just and better world, who wants to sing in a choirs, who wants to care for buildings and cultural heritage and who wants to have fellowship.

Membership – More than you think

You have probably come across the Church of Sweden at some point in your life. Perhaps at one of life's big events, such as baptism, confirmation, wedding or funeral.

Or in your everyday life, like when we go on a night walk, visit your old grandmother or invite you for coffee when your football team wins at home.

You are welcome to the church whether you are a member or not. But as a member you help the Church of Sweden to work for

- the young
- the elderly
- refugees
- cultural heritage and church buildings
- peace in the world
- a better planet.

We do this twelve months a year, in Sweden and around the world.

Not sure if you are a member?

If you don't know whether you are a member of the Church of Sweden, contact your parish - they can answer the question. You can find out which parish is yours on the 'Find parish' page .

Become a member

Baptism is the basis for membership. You become a member by being baptised - unless you have already been baptised in a Christian church. If you have already been baptised, you can contact the church and ask to become a member.

Everyone is welcome in church - but sometimes membership is needed

You are always welcome in church, whether you are a member or not. But there are some rules about when you do, or do not, need a membership.

Church elections and funerals - you need to be a member.

Membership is a prerequisite for

- you have the right to vote in church elections
- you are eligible to stand for election in church elections
- your future funeral service must follow the order of the Church of Sweden.

Weddings - one of you needs to be a member

Discussion – Youth confirmed if not baptized they are baptized in a small ceremony before confirmation. In German Landeskirche – confirmation required for membership. UMC differs from context to context in Austria UMC – no confirmation but a ceremony of acceptance in full membership.

Church membership UMC Czech Republic

It is still influenced by the history of our church.

During the communist regime, we used the old Czech version of the Book of Discipline, with the distinction of preparatory membership and full membership. Even when the Book of Discipline changed, the new concepts took many years to become integrated, and sometimes they are still not part of the essential thinking about the church. What the old concept did is that baptism of the children had no effect for their church membership. They were preparatory members along with the not-baptized people.

Another historical issue is the fact that during the 90' there was a renewal time for most Czech and Slovak churches, and many youth and adults, formerly atheists, became Christians, some of them in charismatic churches, or as part of the charismatic movement in the UMC. Their religiosity was that of the charismatic movement, and traditions, history and theology of the Methodism was not important for them, some of them never integrated it to their image of the church. This factor brought to UMC many people who had "a Baptist" concept of the baptism (not founded on the Baptist theology, but the desire for biblical Christianity). The infant baptism was (and sometimes still is) regarded with suspicion or outright refused.

In the aftertime of these upheavals, UMC in the Czechoslovakia, and later in joined Czech and Slovak Annual Conference, tried to come closer to the global UMC. Parts of the process included attempts to justify the Methodist practice of infant and child baptism to the Methodists who originally came to faith in the charismatic and free church environment. That process is still not finished today, and some congregations, pastors, and other leadership figures left due to the issue.

There are in most of our congregations people who are active in the church life, but do not desire to become members, but usually the reason is prior commitments, even though such commitments might be very tenuous: a baptism, and thus membership, in the Roman Catholic church, or membership in another church from their previous place of living.

Confirmation/service of affirmation means of becoming a member. If a person is baptized on the basis of confession of the faith, they automatically become a professing member. Younger members unofficially only become eligible for role church leadership only at 18. For people baptized as infants there is a ceremony of becoming a professing member – short ceremony. No tradition of confirmation.

Many people who participate in the church but are members of other churches. Some are reluctant to become professing members – unofficially but active part of the church. Some wish to remain part of their original church even if only in name, some from Catholic church do not

wish to inform the Catholic church of becoming a member of another church. New converts are agreeable to becoming members.,

Discussion – different contexts membership developed in different countries. Church of Jesus Christ is one therefore membership can you only be a member of one church (Edward). Multiple belonging in times of migration. One body of Christ therefore multiple belonging possible (Michael). Membership first in the universal church then in denomination – implantation in the body of Christ via Methodist church. (E) Many people see themselves as members of the Body of Christ and not member of a denomination therefore do not see it as necessary denominational membership. Some people do not see a point in being committed to a particular denomination. People moving to new places join churches according to what best suits their personal or family situation.

Poland

UMC came into existence in the 1920's – in the BOD of 1922 – when persons offer themselves for church membership let the preacher in charge enquire into their spiritual condition, let him receive them if they give evidence of their desire to flee from wrath to come – (ME Church South) 1944 Disciplines all persons seeking to be saved from their sin and desiring to live the Christian life – Pastors must instruct them. Baptism played an important role.

Faith sharing the NT. Who are Welcome in the UMC – all those who accept LJC are welcome as full members, if not baptized they will be baptized (CF BOD)

Methodists in Poland are in Agreement with Lutheran and Reformed Churches – as the third protestant/evangelical church of Poland – there are cities where there is only one protestant church. A person moving to a such place is taken into membership of the local protestant church regardless of their original membership based on baptism. In old east Prussia after WW2 members of the Church of the Old Prussian Union could transfer their membership to Methodist church. And they did it!

“I am the vine and you are the branches” said Jesus to be baptized is to be a member of His the universal church.

After many decades of ecumenical cooperation we should be moving towards a common understanding of membership in the universal Church.

Historically in the Methodist association one was first a member of the Church of England and then of the associations. A member of the society did not automatically become a member of the Church of England!

Membership in the UMC should be considered in the context of the teachings of the Church of England and Episcopal Church of USA and take into account the agreements already reached on this topic.

In short, membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is accomplished exclusively through baptism. Other forms of existence in the Church are possible but not equal to membership in the mystical body of Jesus Christ. Other terms for participants in services are possible but not as members. Friends, associate member or a person belonging to a fellowship are not equal with “the branches” Jesus spoke about.

Friends, supporters, co-participants in worship and church events, and participants of the local community can become members only through baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Membership in UMC Hungary-Roumania

1. STATISTICS 2023/24

- Announced at Annual Conference 2024.
- Baptized members - ROU: 60, HU: 681
- Professing members - ROU: 59, HU: 488

People who are active but not professing members and vice versa

2. BAPTISM

Infant baptism (traditional) - baptism of children born into families in the congregations. Baptism of children arriving in the communities as a result of school ministries - desire to attend or join the church/programmes (there is an opportunity to teach students at elementary schools).

Adult baptism - baptism of new converts and newcomers to the church. Possibly: "making up" for "missed" baptisms, or: fulfilling "prerequisites" for membership, weddings, being a godparent in an infant baptism (right/correct pastoral attitude is important).

"Re-baptism" - young pastors, as a result of evangelical biblical influences, in missional communities, baptizing people who have already been baptized as a child. Alternatively: memorial baptism or in UMBOW (92) Act of Confirmation or Reaffirmation of faith. Not so common and in some communities is ambiguous or easily misunderstandable. Practice to prevent re-baptism.

Discussion – In P there is no baptism – in US there is a use immersion as a memorial of baptism. BOD § 341.7 no rebaptism - suggestion of renewal of baptism. See BoW people want to experience – influence of charismatic evangelical movements.

3. CONFIRMATION

In the Reformed tradition, in practice, this is a halfway point between baptism and professing membership, which often leads no further towards commitment.

In Hungary - because of the effect of historical churches (catholic, reformed, Lutheran) - this act is the first confession of natural faith, but not the act of commitment to church. It's a kind of act of finishing or completion of the studies at church as children.

4. RECEPTION INTO THE CHURCH - MEMBERSHIP

Reception of adults - ROU: they are not received from among the baptized members, but probably as a fruit of mission find the ways to the congregation and became a professing member (46 >> 59 people, 28% increase) HU: 2 from the congregation (people who belong there earlier), 2 by transfer, while there were 3 withdrawals and 8 deaths. 1% decrease.

Challenge - the big question is how to communicate the issue of membership to visitors (ROU: 107 people, HU: 556 people) and baptized members (ROU: 60 people, HU: 681 people). It is difficult for people to commit themselves to the church. Some of the friends were baptized as child in one of the historic churches, and baptized children often "fall away" and do not integrate into the local church.

German Context:

Baptism – church education with blessing, then later becoming a professing member through public confession of faith.

Church in Germany is the Landeskirchen, Assumed membership due state registration and taxation.

Confirmation – relates to Landeskirche at age of 14 is confirmation of the baptism. By baptism you are a member of the church become full members of church in methodist church do not confirm as a mark of distinction from Landeskirche. Confirmation in LK is equivalent of professing faith in UMC. Non confirmation is an identity marker.

Baptism is a necessary condition of baptism, but baptism is not sufficient condition of membership.

In the church there is a feeling that the blessing service is not the best way of doing things - often associated with becoming an adult rite of passage. There are some who want to move closer to Landeskirche.

Some pastors hesitate to baptize infants despite the official position of the church.

Switzerland

See the paper: "Additional Report Commission 11 Theological and Ecclesial Topics for the attention of the Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa" in Appendix 2.

Attachment 2

Church membership

Report Commission 11 Theological and Ecclesial Topics for the attention of the Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa

Long-standing organisations tend to clarify the core of their concerns with many rules or to express them in unchanging forms. But precisely because of this, one often loses the actual content. Bishop Patrick Streiff and the Commission for Theological and Ecclesial Topics also see this danger for the whole complex of questions about church membership, baptism, admission to the church, etc. It is therefore important to the Commission to sharpen the content and at the same time to encourage an appropriate implementation in different forms.

There are different perspectives from which one can look at church membership. The different aspects are definitely in tension with each other, which cannot always be resolved. But there are also views that we want to overcome: either because they smuggle extraneous content into our understanding of church membership or because they have fallen out of time and are no longer understood today.

Extraneous content

At this point we can only repeat what we have already said at the last conferences: The framework for our understanding is the Book of Discipline and not Swiss association law. These two things are sometimes mixed up. That is why we speak of "church membership / participation" (German: Kirchengliederung) and avoid the term "membership" (German: Mitgliedschaft), which always evokes in a Swiss context becoming member of an association (German: Vereinsmitgliedschaft). Moreover, we believe that church membership marks a beginning rather than the goal of our missionary efforts. It is not to be understood statically (much less statistically) ("He/she is now a member"), but dynamically: "We are together on the path of following Christ".

Church membership in our time

The environment in which we live out our missionary mandate is changing greatly. The church has become much more diverse. Four examples: a) Many young adults no longer feel they belong to any Circuit of the UMC, but to UMC Young. Can you belong to the church there too? b) Increasingly, migrants are also part of our local churches. Many of them cannot understand the questions of acceptance in the current wording. But especially for them, belonging plays a big role. c) Countless people who have no church (and certainly no Methodist) socialisation belong to the circuit for New

expressions of church. Many of them bring with them hurtful, violent church experiences. They find it hard to find their way around the current ways we determine church membership. d) Long-time friends of the UMC who are involved in local churches find it hard to become 'members'. What counts for them is following Christ and church life (locally). Everything structurally beyond it and formal seems unnecessary or even a hindrance to them. Moreover, they can hardly imagine coming forward as people who have been involved in congregational life for a long time and now confessing their faith in order to be accepted. This seems artificial.

How can the commitment of church membership be celebrated or affirmed in such situations? Hardly anyone today wants to belong to a church for the sake of keeping an outward form or because it comes with the privilege of being able to vote at the circuit conference.

The Commission has dealt with such situations. We believe that we can make church membership quite attractive by a) reflecting on our roots and asking what the first Methodists understood by belonging to the movement, and by b) using the wide scope that the Book of Discipline leaves open for forms of implementation. In this way we can respond well to today's attitude to life.

Necessity must be based on faith in Jesus Christ

We understand church membership as a decidedly joyful thing. After all, the Christian local church is the place where one grows together in trust in Christ and at the same time stands together to make room for the love of Christ in the world. The more diverse (and therefore exhausting) a community is, the more inspiring the conversations and discussions are. Concrete Christian community is a means of grace without which we cannot believe.

(Also) in church membership God communicates his grace. Christ leads us into a community with people who understand and live their discipleship very differently. The faith of others thus also becomes a unique source of inspiration. That is why we also see ourselves as a connective church, as a community of binding connectedness. It is not mere decoration that we see ourselves as a worldwide church. This corresponds to our most important convictions about the Church's means of grace.

It is about more than just a formal affiliation, even if this remains connected with becoming a professing member. For church is where people meet to shape their lives together out of Christ. That is why they trust in him. For this they want to leave evil and do good. For this purpose they orientate themselves on the Bible. And to do this, they integrate themselves into a Christian community. Church membership is a dynamic process. It is about growing in the love of Christ.

From the work of the UMC Board comes an impulse that can help us: the discipleship cycle. We see that for each of the four transitions the reference to church membership can be made. In particular, the questions of becoming a professing member have their own meaning in each of these transitions. However, this connection still needs to be clarified and formulated.

Very briefly by way of illustration: When we get in touch with people who are new to our church, we are naturally asked who we are and what we do. It makes sense to link our answers to the promises of professing members. What it says, that's what we want to live together. Or: In the step of someone belonging to the community, the questions can guide us to orientate ourselves to Christ as the centre of this community. In the step of following Christ, we will naturally answer the questions of acceptance with "yes, I will..." etc. The discipleship cycle is closely connected to the reception into the church, since both, belonging to the church and growing in faith, are designed and dependent on community.

The appendix contains theological reflections on the content of church membership. We recommend it for study or discussion in the local churches.

Concrete measures

Division of the 4th question: In order to clarify the difference between belonging to the church of Christ and its concrete implementation in a local church of the UMC, the commission requests that a separate question be asked at the time of professing the membership about belonging to the church of Christ and to the UMC (See request at the end of the report).

Celebration of Renewal of Confession: Each year we intentionally celebrate a service in which we renew our yes to the welcoming questions for professing members. This can be celebrated through a remembering of our baptism, a deepening of the questions, the celebration of renewal of our covenant, etc. This is a way for new people in our communities to learn about the questions and for those who have been committed for many years to have an opportunity to reflect on their past and continuing journey in faith. The Commission plans to provide an exchange of ideas and templates for this in the coming year. (Last year at the annual conference we discussed the possibility of a temporary affiliation to the UMC. The Commission did not pursue this idea further).

More flexibility in the designing and wording of becoming a professing member in the church: We reflect on the (theological) core of church membership and take it seriously. And conversely, we are becoming much more versatile in the forms with which we implement this core among ourselves. For example, we have to ask ourselves whether it is really so inevitable to answer the questions of admission in front of the gathered local church. Especially for people who have belonged to the UMC for a long time, a kind of 'facilitated form of naturalisation' is recommended - whereby the formal procedure is meant and not the content of the admission questions.

Baptism: Baptism also raises similar questions: In terms of content, it is firmly linked to admission into the church. Baptism and church membership belong together. But do we always have to make such a big deal out of it when someone wants to be baptised because they have experienced God's grace? That could also happen in a more simple setting. Or can we meet the desire to be baptised again through a more regular celebration of remembering our baptism?

Reformulation of the admission questions: Already last year we presented the admission questions in a more modern language. Some found these formulations too watered down, even alienating. Many others liked them. We invite you to further develop this language with the necessary expertise and to work with adapted forms. We are very interested in receiving new formulations to make them available to others. We recommend that our proposal be taken up and, if necessary, further developed:

1. God's love is shown to us in Jesus Christ. - Do you entrust yourself to him?
2. Jesus Christ gives us the fellowship of his church. - Do you want to be called?
3. Jesus Christ enables us to put love for God and our fellow human beings at the centre. - Do you want to grow in this?
4. God tells us about Himself in the Bible. - Do you want to listen?
5. The Church of Christ is becoming concrete, also in the United Methodist Church. - Do you want to be part in its mission?

Motion to divide the last of the four question

At the last annual conference, it was not possible to vote on the proposal to split the previous question 4. This proposal was hardly contested. That is why we are putting it to a vote this year. However, we cannot make the final decision because this is the responsibility of the Central Conference. However, it is helpful if the annual conference expresses its position on this division now and requests a corresponding change from the Central Conference. The Executive Committee of the Central Conference can decide at its meeting at the end of June whether the new version can already be introduced provisionally in five questions.

Why do we want to divide the questions? - We see that belonging to the Church of Christ is a very fundamental question. You cannot leave it - but you can leave the UMC. The UMC is part of the Church of Christ, but it is not congruent with it. With the new division we want to signal that it is not primarily about a formal and institutional affiliation. Rather, it is primarily about belonging to the body of Christ - and as a consequence of the first four questions, also about belonging to the UMC. A formal and institutional affiliation comes in a second place.

Motion on the new wording in five questions (retranslated from German)

Motion (to the Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa):

The Annual Conference agrees to the division from four to five questions in becoming a professing member of the UMC and requests the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe to approve the following rewording:

1. Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour and trust in His grace alone?
2. *Do you wish to remain a faithful member of Christ's holy Church and participate in its ministry in the world?*
- ~~2.~~ 3. Will you follow Jesus Christ and therefore renounce evil and do good?
- ~~3.~~ 4. Do you acknowledge the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the God-given foundation and guide of our faith and life?
- ~~4.~~ 5. Will you ~~remain a faithful member of Christ's holy Church and~~ participate in the ministry of the United Methodist Church through prayer, cooperation and regular offerings?

Further work on the topic

We will continue to work on this theme in the coming year. We will work out ideas for the design of an annual confession celebration. Our goal remains to a) place church membership entirely under the aspect of God's transforming and sanctifying grace, b) understand it dynamically rather than statically, c) simplify access to it and allow for more diversity, and d) convincingly present the connection with the discipleship cycle.

In addition, it has become important for us to further explore the relationship between "baptised members" and "professing members".

We feel that we are on the right path when we give first place to the aspect of grace and when joy grows: the joy of God's work among us and also the joy of being part of a local church of the worldwide UMC.

Appendix - a theological essay on church membership (Stefan Moll)

Church membership as grace

In the beginning is grace - and nothing but grace. God gives his salvation to this world through Jesus Christ, mediated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Individuals, groups and ultimately the whole world are transformed in his salvation. Any notion of church membership that envisages anything other than God's gracious provision and its effects brings in something inappropriate, extraneous.

By grace, God creates Christian community. It is colourful, diverse, multicultural. It is itself an expression of the salvation that God works, also because in it very different people find a reconciled togetherness. The community is a concrete expression of God's grace. When we Christians celebrate Christ in this community, it should not be a burden, but pure joy.

The Christian community is a **means of grace**. In it, the mysterious and unavailable God mediates salvation. And this is precisely because different people meet. We all recognise only as much of God as is possible for us at the moment. To others, the love of God opens up from completely different perspectives. Cultural and human diversity is a great richness. In togetherness, the insight into God's grace matures in us - and together we live it and carry it into the world.

We must take seriously our limitation to grasp the goodness of God. Our own knowledge remains piecemeal. We need others. Above all: the very others. This is the reason why the UMC sees itself as a worldwide church. Being a connectional church is a necessity in order to grasp the goodness of God with appropriate breadth and to live a new community in solidarity. The connectional understanding of the church is not merely a decoration in the doctrine of the church. It is a core concern. It needs new approaches, how it becomes a living experience for all Methodists.

God's grace also works in **baptism**: it is the sign of the covenant. Through baptism, Christ takes the individual into this salvific community. The death and resurrection of Christ becomes visible in the baptised. As a means of grace, this sacrament communicates God's goodness. Baptism is the starting point for following Christ and becoming part of the Christian community. Baptism and church membership are therefore inseparable.

Baptism reveals the goodness of God and lets it shine in our lives and in the Christian community. This is especially visible in the baptism of minors. Infants / children cannot contribute anything in their own strength to earn salvation. This is of course also the content of the baptism of grown-up persons. However, the responding yes of the baptised is more in the foreground. There is a danger that the primacy of grace is overlaid by human performance, such as a profession of faith, giving testimony, or emphasising personal decision, etc. At the same time, we as a church celebrate the baptism of minors only where the legal guardians consciously allow the baptised to grow up in the community of believers and are themselves positively inclined towards it.

We humans can only react to God's gracious attention. By entrusting ourselves to God's goodness and allowing ourselves to be transformed by Him. Through our devotion and our lifestyle. And: through participation in the community of Christians. Human re-action is not an achievement. It is also due to God's grace working in us (prevenient grace).

Belonging to the church thus takes on two meanings. On the one hand: It is the appropriate re-action that belongs inseparably and also quite naturally to trust in Jesus Christ. Not to belong to this community born of God's grace would be absurd. Practically, it means joining a church congregation.

On the other hand, belonging to the church is also understood as a space to live more deeply in the grace shown by God. "You set my feet on a wide space" (Psalm 31.9): We belong to the church in order to inhabit this wide space more and more. Belonging to the church is therefore not something static and formal. We place ourselves in the church in order to discover and practise the breadth of God's goodness in our common learning. Church membership is something dynamic and powerful.

We avoid the term membership (German: Mitgliedschaft). It is static; Inside or outside; no way of further development. In Switzerland, it is also overlaid with the association mentality. That is why we speak of membership / participation (German: Zugehörigkeit). In our understanding, church membership means that we are on a path in the community of God's people.

The practice of reception into the Church

Our welcoming practice should be guided by these core ideas. This means: it should express the grace shown by Christ and revive the means of grace of communion in such a way that we grow in Christ.

It follows from the understanding outlined above that baptism and belonging to the church cannot be separated. This arises from the biblical witness and also corresponds to the church tradition. And of course we maintain that the promise of God's grace, as it happens in baptism, remains unique. Because God's covenant promises do not need to be repeated.

However, we believe that we people should always remember what is at the heart of the matter. That is why we recommend that services of remembering our baptism be held annually, and that the confession of faith in Christ and the Church be renewed.

In all of this we discover a close connection to the discipleship process. This leads us through encounters into community, from community into discipleship, into dedication and then again into mission into new encounters. For each of these transitions, the questions of professing membership / participation have their own relevance. And baptism should also be made visible in this way of describing the development of faith.

Use free spaces

We are experiencing that our local churches are becoming much more diverse. This may lead to disputes here and there. But it is precisely the goal of the Christian local church to engage with the "other" in such an appreciative way that we recognise how the One Lord has called us into community. It is an extremely important development when diversity in faith, thought and cultural background increases. Church is diversity by definition; in overly homogenous local churches, arguments often revolve around externals such as music styles and ministry details.

This growing diversity is changing local churches. Due to the increasing diversity, local traditions are being questioned or filled anew. But faith is also changing in this community.

Accordingly, our understanding of the church and of belonging is also changing. We need more diversity in the forms. These must be measured against the grace that God shows us in belonging to the church. Church membership that is not rooted in the reception of God's grace in us people and therefore does not trigger joy and courageous acts of love has missed its core.

The forms must also do justice to this. We should celebrate belonging - and it should be joyful. Since the local churches are becoming more and more diverse not only within themselves but also

among themselves, we have to be creative with the forms. They should appropriately express the grace shown in belonging to the church - and the joy and love it brings. More creativity in dealing with the forms therefore also requires a high level of theological expertise.

Contested pastors and responsible persons

However, this theological core, with which grace brings about joy and world-changing love, is contested. For pastors and those responsible in the local churches are under great pressure. Many local churches are experiencing a decline in membership and financial strength. Then it often happens that acceptance into the church is associated with requirements rather than emphasising grace. Almost everywhere there is a lack of staff. It is therefore natural to emphasise obligations in connection with becoming a professing member in the church rather than the joy of active participation.

We are not to be irritated by such pressures: Belonging to the Church should first and foremost be a consequence of the grace shown to us. That is in the foreground. Devotion and gifts, combined with prayers, remain part of belonging to the UMC. But they must not be given so much weight that they overshadow the joy of experiencing God's grace.

Access to church membership must not fail because of forms, language or habits that have become incomprehensible. Professing the faith and participating in the life of a community are at the core. Not everything that is new is suitable. Critical discussion is needed. We should talk first and foremost about the joy and love we have experienced. And about the grace shown through Jesus Christ to which they refer back.

Attachment 3

Comments on the revised Charta Oecumenica of the Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries (WGTh) and of the "Kommission 11" of the UMC Switzerland (K11)

Page 3:

- Use of untranslated Greek words (kerygma, koinonia) need translations or explanations. (WGTh)

Page 4:

"We need to repent and seek forgiveness and reconciliation."

- Changing the sequence, because we seek reconciliation as priority, then repentance and forgiveness. (WGTh)
- The clarification of what repentance and forgiveness refer to. (WGTh)

"We commit ourselves"

- - Original wording is shorter and adequate, 2 bullet points against 3. (WGTh)

"to do our utmost to overcome the problems and divisions that still separate the churches;"

- How much is it a fruitful path forward to challenge us with overcoming all these problems and divisions? Wouldn't it be more helpful to commit ourselves to keep walking and keep sharing and working together, knowing that we will never get to fully

agree on everything? Maybe similar to the pilgrimage metaphor that the WCC uses. (K11)

Page 5:

"..., through services of prayer and worship,..."

- Change it to "through services of prayer, worship and acts,...". We do not only pray and worship together but also work together as an ecumenical community. This has a deep impact on our spiritual fellowship. This aspect could be strengthened in the whole section, so as not to deepen the misunderstanding that acting together and praying together are inherently different things. (K11)

"We commit ourselves to walk together, listening to the Holy Spirit and exchanging spiritual gifts;"

- The clarification of the meaning of "spiritual gifts". (WGTh)
- How can we exchange gifts which the Holy Spirit gives? (sounds like a party game and maybe fun, but doesn't make sense) – rather "sharing"? (K11)

Page 6:

"We have overcome mutual condemnations and walk together..."

- Change it to "We have overcome the condemnations of the Past and walk together..." (WGTh)

Page 7:

"We commit ourselves to recognise religious freedom not only as fundamental to respond to the call of the Gospel, but also as a civil right of every person"

- "Civil rights" is a political concept, should not we focus on a "Theological view of the Gospel"? (WGTh)

Page 10:

Title: "Spheres of Encounter in Europe"

- This title, especially in light of the former wording, is confusing. Why do we describe where we encounter each other, without any call about what we are called to do within those encounters? We would argue to keep the former title. (K11)

"Participating in the Building of Europe"

- Aspects of previous paragraphs on Europe is more critical and better. We would keep these paragraphs: "Through the centuries Europe has developed a primarily Christian character..." and "Our faith helps us to learn from the past..." (WGTh)

"The Church understands its commitment in the building of Europe as part of its mission in the midst of European peoples."

- What is meant by being Europe and European people? (WGTh)

"The churches support the integration of the European continent."

- What is meant by integration and integrity (p11)? (WGTh)

Page 11:

"worthier of the human person"

- what does this mean, "worthier of the human person"? (K11)

Section: "Strengthening Community with Judaism"

- In our view, some of these additions are unclear and theologically problematic. In general, they ascribe to (all) Jews certain Christian views and conceptions. (K11)

"people of Israel"

- Modern Israel or biblical Israel? The Jewish community is much larger than the Israeli community (and I don't see myself religiously affiliated to modern (or ancient, for that matter!) state of Israel). (K11)
- Do we also have the obligation to be guardians, with many Jewish people all over the world, of peace and justice? (K11)
- In the light of the Nakba and the ongoing ethnic cleansing in Palestine, words need to be chosen more carefully. (K11)

„Our Jewish sisters and brothers are the people of the Covenant which God has never terminated.“

- The terminology here is not clear. It seems that all Jews are included by the term „Jewish sisters and brothers“. Yet the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible speaks of God's covenant with Israel or the Israelites, not with „the Jews“. Moreover, Paul in Romans 9 distinguishes between „children of the flesh“ and „children of the promise“ and claims that not all Israelites who stem from Abraham have a share in the promise to Abraham. We must also remember that, according to Paul, the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ. All believers in Christ are thus „children of the promise“, irrespective of their ethnic or religious background. (K11)

Page 12:

„They have never been replaced but fulfilled.“

- Here, the reference of „They“ is unclear. The sentence concludes a string of statements about the „Jewish people“, the „Hebrew Bible“, and the „first Covenant“. What exactly has been „fulfilled“? Is something missing here? (K11)
- Moreover, the expression „first Covenant“ is confusing. Previously, the draft simply speaks of „the“ Covenant. Is there a second Covenant? (K11)

"We acknowledge as a gift of the Holy Spirit the growing awareness of the deep familial bond existing between the Christian faith and Judaism. In this Spirit, the Jews are our parents in faith and our living and sustaining root (Rom 11:18)."

- Certainly, there exists a „familial bond“ between Judaism and Christianity. But does this bond resemble a parent-child relationship or rather a relationship of siblings, as Daniel Boyarin, a preeminent scholar of contemporary Judaism, has suggested? (K11)
- However that may be, the claim that „the Jews“ (all Jews) are „our parents in faith and our living and sustaining root“ is a misinterpretation of the parable of the olive tree in Romans 11. The parable would not make sense anymore if the metaphor of the „root“ referred simply to „the Jews“ (all Jews). Who then would be the „noble branches“ that are cut off? In all likelihood, the „root“ here is God's promise to Abraham (cf. Romans 9), not a collective group of persons. Finally, is it appropriate to make claims supposed to be valid for all Jews, notwithstanding their own self-understanding – like the claim that „the Jews“ (all Jews) are our parents in faith“? (K11)

"share not only the same Scriptures but also their understanding."

- I would argue that we cannot fully share their understanding, nor should it be a goal of this relationship. We will always read the texts from different perspective; this should be especially clear when it comes to the messianic texts and our interpretations of them. (K11)

Page 13:

"to resign from the institutional mission"

- Change it to: "to withdraw from the institutional mission" (WGTh)

For the whole section of "Cultivating Relations with Islam"

- To be more critical Islam, because the relationship is not reciprocal. E.g. Pastors in North Africa imprisoned. (WGTh)
- People need to have agreement as to how to live in Europe an acceptable way. (WGTh)
- The differences with Islam also apply to Judaism, don't they? (K11)

"Muslims and Christians share both a history and a present in Europe,..."

- Is "presence" meant? (K11)

"we encourage an intensification of encounters between Christians and Muslims"

- We should add one word the text: "we encourage an intensification of sincere encounters between Christians and Muslims (WGTh)

"We commit ourselves to oppose Islamophobia in the Church and in society; to work together with Muslims in the cause of peace against any forms of extremism or misuse of religion."

- How do you define: "Islamophobia"? Who defines "extremism or misuse of religion"? (WGTh)
- Add a new point: "to recognise the freedom of religion and the freedom of conscience and to defend the right to practise faith or belief, whether individually or in groups, privately or publicly, within the framework of rights common to all;" (WGTh)

Page 15:

Section: "Striving for Peace in Europe"

- We should go back the old title: "Reconciling Peoples and Cultures" (WGTh)
- Why was the call on reconciliation lost? This is central to our work towards a long-lasting peace, without it being dependent on the divide between the "losing" and the "winning" side. We could change one sentence to: "There is no true peace without fairness, truth, justice, solidarity and reconciliation." And then add: "Reconciliation involves promoting social justice within and among all peoples; especially in ares of former or ongoing conflict. Reconciliation is a way forward after times of war and conflict, which uses truth as a way to shed light on past and present injustices and it will be integral to our common work in the years to come." (K11)
- Why was "Because we value the person and dignity of every individual as made in the image of God, we defend the absolutely equal value of all human beings" taken out? (WGTh)
- "There is no true peace without fairness, truth, justice, solidarity and reconciliation." And then add: "Reconciliation involves promoting social justice within and among all peoples; especially in ares of former or ongoing conflict. Reconciliation is a way forward after times of war and conflict, which uses truth as a way to shed light on past and present injustices and it will be integral to our common work in the years to come." (WGTh)

"Furthermore, our Christian faith does not allow us to despair of our opponents. Inspired by faith, we do not equate our opponents with their error and do not lose hope for them."

- Change the whole paragraph to: "Furthermore, our Christian faith requires us to love our enemies. Inspired by faith, we do not equate our opponents with their political opinions and errors and do not lose hope for them." (WGTh)

"Peace causes minds to come together, to be ready for sincere and continual dialogue, preparing the ground for fresh advances in justice within the peaceful coexistence of all human beings."

- Begin this paragraph with the sentence: "We also recognize that we might be in error in our political opinions." Then: "Peace causes minds..." (WGTh)

"We commit ourselves to work for peace in Europe and in the whole world"

- Change it to: "to work for democratisation in Europe and peace in the whole world" (WGTh)

Page 16:

Generally for the whole section of "Safeguarding Creation"

- Some concepts: "season creation", "ecological conversion" not commonly used and not understandable to all. Need to have a clarification or an explanation. (WGTh)
- Feeling of an "Ecological hypocrisy" in the text. We should guard against merely making statements. (WGTh)

"what is threatening planetary boundaries"

- Is "threatened" the right word? Could we name certain players which threaten these boundaries? Esp. oil and gas corporations and the capitalist economic system as a whole, as well as political parties or leaders, which are prioritizing their own wealth and well-being over the safety and future of the people. (K11)

"We commit ourselves"

- Add a commitment towards education on the intersectional effects of the Climate Crisis. Churches should help understand people that this is not "one of many" issues, but a crisis which will negatively impact many different areas of our work, esp. migration, the equality between women and men, peace building in areas affected by droughts, floodings, heat waves, extreme temperatures, etc. (K11)
- Add a commitment to call on political leaders to understand the risk of the Climate Crisis and act accordingly, as well as hold our economic system accountable. An economic system based "unlimited growth" (K11)

Page 17:

"Migration and People on the Move"

- We should recognize of the complexity of the situation. (WGTh)
- Rejection of migrants, fear of the others. We should change our attitude. Approaches need to be more rational without hate. (WGTh)

"We commit ourselves to express unity with migrants"

- What does "express unity" mean? Could we change the wording to "express respect and compassion"? (WGTh)
- Add: "Criticize the political misuse of migrants." "Deal with the causes of migration." "Reject the misuse of migrants through people smugglers and human traffickers." (WGTh)
- Problem of crime in migration – news media often magnify criminal activities but ignore crime by indigenous inhabitants. (WGTh)
- What is the role of the Church in the political spheres? Do we see people in need? Do we see men, women, and children? Is our task political? (WGTh)

Page 18:

"We commit ourselves"

- Commitments #1-3. are very broad and do not only apply to technology. (WGTh)
- Add to commitments: "The use of technologies to spread misinformation, propaganda, inhuman denigrating, conspiracy theories, power without legitimization." (WGTh)

- We should add a reference to transhumanism and an application of Ten Commandments to this topic. (WGTh)

Page 18-19:

"Europe and the World"

- First sentences need reformulation. Needs more recognition of the role of colonization in shaping Europe's relationship with the rest of the world. (WGTh)

"We commit ourselves"

- First bullet point is meaningless (WGTh)

"To defend human rights and the rights of minorities"

- Aren't the rights of minorities "human rights"? (K11)
- Change it to: "To defend human rights and the civil rights of minorities." (WGTh)

Working Group Liturgy

The current Working Group has been on pause for the past two years for the following reasons: 1) there was no mandate, 2) two of the three members wanted to wait until the situation within the UMC and certain annual conferences stabilized (one was concerned that there would no longer be a UMC) before attempting to create more work for ourselves, and 3) the Executive Committee has been changing its culture of work and reevaluating the utility of its Working Groups.

In 2025, Esther Handschin will resign, as she feels she has served long enough. Jana Křížova will resign, as her annual conference is leaving the UMC. Several individuals have been approached about joining the Working Group, two of which have expressed a willingness to participate: Matthias Joseph (France) and Dragan Trajčevski (Serbia). One additional member would be helpful, particularly a woman who speaks both German and English. After new members are confirmed at the Central Conference in March 2025, the new group will plan a meeting to begin our work, using the ideas below as a starting point if no particular mandate comes from the Executive Conference meetings during the Central Conference.

ADDRESSING OUR NEEDS

- Worship webinar series:
Online events can be offered which respond to challenges common to many worshipping contexts, for example: worshipping across generations, equipping laity to lead congregational prayer (building confidence and exploring different ways of praying), intercultural worship (not just for visibly multicultural communities!), and other issues as proposed to the Working Group
- Consultation:
Working Group members may be able to facilitate finding relevant resources and assistance in the event of specific questions or needs

STRENGTHENING THE CONNEXIO

The Central Conference Working Group could act as an umbrella group for Annual Conference worship groups, not in the sense of surveillance but in the sense of facilitating communication and the sharing of needs. This could be done by:

- Establishing a list of worship contacts in each Annual Conference
- Communicating any events or resources which may be relevant to worship leaders
- Creating a fellowship of worship leaders for the purpose of mutual support

DRAWING ON THE RICHNESS OF OUR DIVERSITY

- Twinning congregations from different countries:
Communities of a similar size could be paired together with the goal of sharing their worship practices, learning from one another, exchanging about common challenges, and problem-solving together
- Panorama of our worshipping traditions
A website or other online platform could be established to showcase worship cultures of each country (which will likely have multiple subcultures). For instance: examples of

well-loved songs and hymns, video clips of worship services, descriptions of particular traditions, expectations of the service, role of youth, how the sacraments are celebrated, etc.

*Respectfully submitted,
Erika Stalcup, Chair
February 9, 2024*

Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs

A brief summary of my work as chair of the Working Group

1. Preparation for the upcoming changes for church discipline

After consultation with Bishop Stefan, we will wait with the translation and adaptation of the church discipline until the main tasks that the General Conference has set itself have been decided: This concerns the regionalization process and the form of the future church discipline. Both are still in progress.

The corrected revision of the church discipline from 2023 currently applies to the Central Conference. We are aware that this version still needs to be linguistically edited. This is planned in connection with the adaptation of the new church discipline.

2. Towards a new worldwide church discipline

2.1 The report of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Affairs refers to the constitutional amendments intended and adopted at the 2024 General Conference. The ratification process is underway and has been forwarded to the Annual Conferences for decision.

2.2 A new church discipline is on the way and will hopefully be decided at the next General Conference. It will have a common part that applies to the entire UMC and parts that are decided and voted on regionally. The latter parts will be decided either at the regional conferences or the annual conferences. How this will be regulated remains to be seen. Compare with Report 3.2 Committee for Central Conference Matters

3. The Social Principles

They are presented as information in the report of the executive office. As the Working Group for Church Discipline, we have cooperated with the Central Conference Germany working team. They have thankfully translated the text into German. I worked with them on the final text and adapted it for the decisions of our Central Conference. It is now available.

At its last meeting the Central Conference of Germany accepted the text on its last meeting and has decided that a linguistically inclusive version should be published. A team was set up for this. In our Central Conference this work only affects the German-speaking countries. I therefore recommend waiting for this editorial work and then, if necessary, use it with the adaptations for our Central Conference.

One of the tasks we have set ourselves is to produce an English text that is adapted and aligned with the Central Conference resolutions.

4. Autonomy Process of the Annual Conference of the Czech Republic

4.1 A modified petition (changes in the historical section in red) was drawn up in consultation with Superintendent Ivana Prohaskova. This petition is presented to the Central Conference for further decision-making.

It must be pointed out at this point that the CC 2022 decided that the AC CZ, like all other annual conferences, can keep the old definition of marriage and is not forced to change the comments on homosexuality. Unfortunately, this is not part of the petition.

4.2 The next steps would be:

- Decision of the Central Conference
- Confirmation of the jointly agreed petition by the Czech Republic AC with a 2/3 majority
- Individual decisions for ratification by all Annual and Provisional Annual Conferences of the Central Conference.
- Preparation of a declaration of autonomy and a petition to GC in cooperation with the Central Conference, the Committee for Central Conference Affairs and the AC CZ.
- Decision at the next General Conference according to Article 572 of the Church Discipline (BOD)
- I would like to point out that the AC CZ is free to stop or reverse this process at any time.

I would like to mention that the AC CZE may at any time reverse the process if they wish to do so.

Motion:

The Central Conference follows this plan and commissions the Executive Committee and its Office to follow this process as scheduled.

We will meet as a Working Group once the General Conference decisions on reorganization of the UMC are available.

Wilfried Nausner

Chairman of the Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs

Attachment 1

ANNUAL CONFERENCE PETITION

Revised petition for acceptance at Central Conference CSE

Draft version 14/2/25

The Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church in the Czech Republic (CZE UMC) expresses its desire to become an autonomous Methodist Church according to ¶ 572 of the UMC Book of Discipline. The conference asks the bishop to act according to the above-mentioned paragraph and authorizes the District Council and the Superintendent to take further steps towards the transformation of the UMC in the Czech Republic into an autonomous Methodist Church.

HISTORICAL RECORD WITH REASONS FOR THE REQUEST OF THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC TO BECOME AN AUTONOMOUS METHODIST CHURCH HISTORICAL RECORD

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South in the USA began missionary work among Czech immigrants in Texas in late 1907. Soon several Czech-speaking congregations were established in Texas. In June 1912, Czech pastors and students asked the Mission Board in Nashville, Tennessee, to "not forget Bohemia and Moravia." In March 1920, the Missionary Council sent pastor Josef Dobes to Czechoslovakia. In the same year, Bishop J. Atkins also visited Czechoslovakia. In response, it was decided that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South would send additional workers to Czechoslovakia and begin mission work there. Thanks to the efforts of Josef Dobes, Josef P. Bartak, Vaclav Vancura and other clergy and lay co-workers, the ministry of the church grew, and congregations were established in Czechoslovakia (Bohemia, Slovakia, and Subcarpathian Rus). The Annual Conference for these newly established congregations was established in 1927.

World War II cut the Methodist Church in Czechoslovakia off from its mother church in the United States. Superintendents Josef Dobes, Josef P. Bartak, and other church employees with American citizenship were forced to return to the USA. The church was experiencing very difficult times, and several members were even taken to concentration camps. In Slovakia, the Methodist Church lost its state approval in 1940, and thus all its work was banned. It was restored again in 1946.

Subcarpathian Rus was occupied by the Hungarian army in 1939, and after the war, it was annexed to the Soviet Union. Thus, the congregations in Subcarpathian Rus did not return to the union of the Czechoslovak Annual Conference after the war.

The communist coup in 1948 brought persecution of all believers and suppression of the work of all churches. The Methodist Church in Czechoslovakia gradually lost some churches, church buildings and properties. The Methodists in Czechoslovakia were isolated for many years. Despite the problems, the Annual Conference of Czechoslovakia became part of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe. Relationships were kept between the Church Leadership in Czechoslovakia and the Central Conference. The Superintendent and other church leaders took part in international ecumenical relationships and encounters. The Bishop of the Central Conference was respected and sent his representatives when he was denied entry of the country. This fact supported the Church leadership in difficult times and made the state authorities aware that the Czechoslovakian Church had prominent support. This is most probably the main reason why the church in Czechoslovakia survived these difficult times. On top of these visits a theological exchange took place in both directions. Publications were made with mutual support. Due to the courage of some of the church representatives on both sides a connexion was established that was the foundation of the church after 1989.

At that time the church was administered by superintendents elected by the Annual Conference, but the election was subject to the approval of the state authorities. Between 1948 and 1989, therefore, the church functioned "officially" as an autonomous Methodist church with the broth-

erly support of the bishops of the Central Conference (since 1954). The church recalls the personal courage of many clergy and laity who persevered in faith and service in very difficult circumstances.

After the so-called Velvet Revolution in 1989, a new period of Methodist work in Czechoslovakia began. The Evangelical Methodist Church was incorporated into the Central Conference for Central and Southern Europe as early as 1954 but did not become fully involved in its life and work until 1989. Its social work was restored, and an Institute of Education for clergy, laity, and lay preachers was established. In 1993, after the split of Czechoslovakia into two independent states, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, two districts were created in one Annual Conference: the Czech District and the Slovak District. The Slovak District Conference, as a separate legal entity in Slovakia, decided to leave the United Methodist Church in 2022.

Currently the Annual Conference of the UMC in the Czech Republic has 21 congregations, social work includes 9 Christian Help Centers (community for drug and other addicts, shelters for mothers with children, homeless people, and socially weak families), a kindergarten and a primary school.

From 1920 to 1939 and from 1946 to 1947 the Annual Conference in Czechoslovakia was presided over by bishops from the USA. From 1939 to 1946 and 1948 to 1989 the Annual Conference in Czechoslovakia was essentially autonomous and governed by its own Book of Discipline.

Nevertheless, it was an autonomy imposed by political circumstances. Since 1990, the Annual Conference has always been presided over by bishops from Switzerland.

THE REASONS FOR THE REQUEST

In an effort to live and serve in the spirit of Christ's gospel in our context as best we can at this time, we desire to become an autonomous Methodist Church according to ¶ 572 of the UMC Book of Discipline. We desire to leave peacefully and to implore upon those who remain in the UMC and those who leave the UMC the blessings of God as our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

1. The 2019 General Conference approved by vote the so-called Traditional Plan, which was also supported by a large majority by the Czech District Conference at its meeting on November 3, 2018. The Western Jurisdictional Conference, however, declared that it does not intend to follow the decision of the 2019 General Conference¹. In the months that followed, some Annual Conferences and some bishops, including the Central Conference Germany, refused to respect and acted contrary to the decision of the 2019 General Conference. This has eroded our confidence that we as a church are able to uphold the agreements we make by vote of the General Conferences in the current situation.
2. Although the One Church Plan was rejected at the 2019 General Conference, its adoption was de facto in the works in our Central Conference (CC CSE)². This was fully reflected in

¹ We cannot comply with the actions of the 2019 General Conference." <https://westernjurisdictionumc.org/as-we-make-our-way-back-home/>

² 4a Report of the Round Table to the extra meeting of the Central Conference CSE 2022, #4a.2 Final Report of

the vote on the direction of the CC CSE approved by the CC CSE held in Basel in 2022 in the form of footnotes in the CC CSE Book of Discipline.³

The Czech Methodist Church does not wish to join in this direction of the CC CSE.

Statement of the Czech Methodist Church

1. We find the original One Church Plan and its new variants to be inherently unrealistic, especially since the UMC's divisions on the issues of ordination and church marriage have become part of secular cultural and political struggles for rights and freedoms. As a consequence of the discourse of human rights, church policy that uncritically adopts it, has resulted in a stalemate:
 - The so-called liberal-minded Christians cannot in good conscience ultimately tolerate what they consider to be the intolerance (fundamentalism, homophobia, sexism, etc.) of traditional (conservative) Christians.
 - And the so-called traditional (conservative) Christians cannot in good conscience ultimately tolerate what they consider to be teachings and practices contrary to Scripture and the apostolic teaching of the Church (sin).

The Czech Methodist Church professes to the understanding of marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman⁴ and wishes to adhere in the future to the intent of the current UMC Book of Discipline (BOD 2016) regarding ordination.⁵

We are aware of our common roots in the apostolic faith and our common Methodist heritage. We are grateful for our years of life and ministry together. We are grateful for the support we have received from individuals, congregations and bishops who have administered the CZ UMC, and we are grateful for the support of the CC CSE. We give thanks for the work of committees and agencies working together, and for participating in the mission of the worldwide UMC.

We want to remain part of the family of Methodist churches in the future, and the existing UMC BOD will become the foundation of our adapted new BOD.

the Round Table the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe (CC CSE) 2022

³ Motions of the Executive Committee to the extraordinary meeting of the Central Conference 2022 (1-6), Information and motions from the meetings of the Executive Committee, 19th Central Conference CSE 2022 in Basel (Switzerland) Report #5a, p. 5.

⁴ We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We believe that God's blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. Book of Discipline 2016, Social Principles, ¶ 161, II. The Nurturing Community, C) Marriage, p. 111.

⁵ ¶ 304.2 For the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world and the most effective witness to the Christian gospel, and in consideration of the influence of an ordained minister on the lives of other persons both within and outside the Church, the Church expects those who seek ordination to make a complete dedication of themselves to the highest ideals of the Christian life. To this end, they agree to exercise responsible self-control by personal habits conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, integrity in all personal relationships, fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, social responsibility, and growth in grace and in the knowledge and love of God. Book of Discipline 2016, p. 226. Executive Committee CC CSE in Cluj-Napoca Attachment 3 Page 3 of 3

Working Group Church and Society

The working group Church and Society met during the past two years to rework the "Guidelines for a responsible way of life". After feedback from the Executive Committee, we now offer the Central Conference the accompanying version for approval.

Motion to the Central Conference CSE:

The Central Conference CSE adopts the "Guidelines for a responsible way of life".

With this assignment David Chlupáček ends his collaboration in the Working Group. We thank him very heartily for his longtime contributions and wish him God's blessing for his further engagements.

*David Chlupáček (Czech Republic), Dorothee Bүүрма (Austria)
and Marietjie Odendaal (Switzerland, chair)*

Attachment 1

Living with the "Guidelines for a responsible way of life"

How can the tradition of Wesley's General Rules speak to our lives?

John Wesley wrote the General Rules for people in need of hope. By keeping three simple rules, people could live into hope and find orientation:

1. Doing no harm
2. Doing good
3. Seeking the space of God's grace.

We are invited to live in the space of God's grace. We are responsible for the choices we make. That is why Wesley asked people, how well they were doing with the General Rules.

We translated them for our time and now speak of guidelines. These guidelines invite us to look at the world and see God's grace around and in us. They encourage us to count on God's grace in our daily lives.

- Look at the guidelines individually and in groups.
- See how far God's grace extends in your life and in the world.
- Make a choice to live in ways that match that grace.
- Let other people help you be committed and accountable.

Try it with colleagues, in small groups in the congregation or when people are joining the congregation.

Think about these questions:

- What do the guidelines have to do with your life?
- What do you want to try out in your life?

Guidelines for a responsible way of life

(Following John Wesley's General Rules)

We affirm the Good News of Jesus Christ. We hold to the creeds and statements of our Christian tradition. We believe that faith grows and that it changes the way we live.

These guidelines invite us into conversation. They help us look at how we live in the world. They can become stepping stones for our faith journey.

1 Do no harm

- I take responsibility for my actions and choices.
- I change my way of living where it harms God's Creation. That includes all other forms of life and relationships between people.
- I resist things and people that put me under pressure and bind me. Instead, I offer my life and talents for God's use. This includes a rhythm of life that makes room for rest.
- I seek to be informed, so that I can act freely, responsibly and joyfully in the interests of peace.
- I unlearn habits of addiction and support people who want to overcome their addictions.
- I treat all people with dignity and in a hospitable manner. I Speak and act lovingly and use the power I have carefully.

2 Do good

- I discover the wonders and beauty of God's gifts in creation. As a follower of Jesus Christ I care for and protect them. For example, I work against everything that endangers life.
- I love where it is difficult. Try new ways to see, act and think, to love God and neighbour.
- I live simply and find habits that set me free to do good.
- I do good to all people, as I am able.
- I learn to make peace, even when it takes courage.
- I am faithful and hopeful in all things.

3 Seek the space of God's grace

I experience God's grace in many ways, for example:

- Through church services and celebrations, the Lord's Supper, individual and communal prayer.
- By studying the Bible and learning with and from other Christians.
- Through fasting: taking a step back from everyday routines (food, media, shopping, etc.).

The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all.

Working Group Children and Youth

The Working Group Children and Youth, currently numbers 10 regular and 8 substitute members. The newly renewed Working Group is still undergoing changes regarding the representatives of each country. We hope that the Working Group's structure will stabilize in the long run to enable better connections, collaborations, and cooperation.

After the departure of Cedric Zangger (CH), Simon Zürcher (CH) took the position of the co-chair of the Working Group.

Events during the past year and plans for this year:

- The Working Group regular members' meeting during the Executive Committee meeting (March 2024, Vienna). During this occasion, the Working Group had a brief gathering where all members had the opportunity to meet, get acquainted with each other, and make final preparations for the theme day of the Executive Committee. The main goal of the group's gathering was in fact the theme day of the Executive Committee. This event provided an opportunity for personal introductions, presenting the Working Group, as well as showcasing the children's and youth work in different countries, making contacts, and sharing ideas and visions on how the Working Group Children and Youth could contribute to the Central Conference of CSE.
- After the meeting in Vienna during the Executive Committee summit, the Working Group did not organize any in-person gatherings throughout the year, instead, all communication was carried out through emails and Zoom meetings. After the decision was made to organize an international camp for teenagers and young people during the summer of 2025 at the Central Conference level, the main focus of the Zoom meetings was on the initial preparations for this event. By the end of 2024, Working Group held three Zoom meetings in total. To ensure better planning and communication, the Working Group has also formed a team to prepare for the camp, where all the members were given the chance to volunteer to be a member of the team.
- Even though, most of its activities are currently focused on preparing for the upcoming camp, the Working Group has not lost sight of its main purpose, which is mutual connection, exchange, communication and support. With the intent to provide all its members, both regular as well as substitutes, with the opportunity to connect, share experiences, concerns, ambitions, goals, and desires, at the end of the last year, the Working Group began planning for the meeting of the Working Group Children and Youth. This meeting is scheduled to take place on 11-13th April 2025 in Budapest. We are thankful for the opportunity to have such meetings and look forward to the upcoming gatherings.

Despite the fact that we are blessed with the opportunity to have a large number of members within the group, sometimes, the drawbacks of such a large group can include difficulties in communicating with everyone. Additionally, it can be challenging to obtain feedback from all members and the exchange of information flows more slowly. With the mutual respect and understanding of various life circumstances and conditions, the group members are always invited to volunteer their time for specific events. It is a great blessing and joy to see members willing to join, help, offer advice, and share their experiences and skills. With time, we hope this atmosphere will spread through the entire group enabling opportunities for connection and interaction both within and outside the Working Group.

We are grateful for the Executive Committee's support and the opportunity we have been offered to organize the camp at the level of our Central Conference.

The working group has its own email address: childrenandyouth@umc-cse.org. Everyone is invited to send concerns or questions to the working group via email. This email address may also be published. For the Working Group Children and Youth

Simon Zürcher and Ivana Pastor

Working Group Women's Work

We are convinced that shared experiences will deepen our understanding of each other and strengthen our togetherness and identity as the United Methodist Church in CC CSE. In this way, we want to be co-workers in the kingdom of God.

WE WANT...

- that women share their faith in God with each other.
- that women discover and develop their gifts.
- that women take their role and their life situation seriously, that they support each other when they seek and break new ground.
- that women are courageous and involved at various levels, including in leadership roles.
- that women use their knowledge and experience in church, society and state.

We try to implement this by supporting national women's seminars and organizing or participating in international women's seminars.

With this in mind, here is a brief review and outlook:

Review

1. Working Group (WG) Women's Work

Currently, the Working Group Women's Service consists of the following members: Monika Zuber (Poland, Chair), Maria Durovka Petras (Serbia), Murielle Rietschi Wilhelm (Switzerland), Barbara Büniger (Switzerland, Coordinator). Gabriela Kopas (Slovak Republic) resigned as a member of the WG Women's Work.

2. Leadership development

Events or activities financially supported by the AG took place in North Macedonia, Serbia, Romania, Hungary, Poland and France.

3. Language Courses

Language courses were funded for woman from Hungary, Serbia and North Macedonia.

4. Consultation from 24. – 26.07.2022 in Vienna

The theme of the consultation, "Time for Community," emphasized "togetherness" and also addressed the pain of the "split". What will our path as women of the Central Committee look like in the future when individual Annual Conferences or local congregations leave the United Methodist Church? The suffering from these situations was palpable. Also, fear of what it will entail specifically for the respective women's organizations of our church. Women from Bulgaria and the Slovak Republic were present for the last time as members of our Central Committee. We very much hope that they can and want to be present as guests at further meetings.

5. 11. Joint Area Seminar from 13. – 17.06.2024 in Porto/Portugal:

It was a conference of all Methodist women in Europe. The Area Seminar is always colorful, joyful and meaningful! It takes place every 4 or 5 years. The Seminar is organized by the Area Presidents and Vice Presidents of the two European areas in the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women (WFMUCW).

The title of the seminar was "Rooted and Grounded in Love" . The program was shaped by worship, with a service of Holy Communion at the beginning and a Love Feast at the end. Each of the three days took the theme in a different way, looking at roots of faith, the shoots of new growth and the fruits of our growth, developing as we go back to our everyday lives. There were Bible studies, keynotes and workshops, panel discussions and a special speaker, Deacon Kerry Scarlett. In between there were opportunities for craft and activity and visits in the lovely city of Porto.

This was a place to meet and grow with other Methodist women from across Europe!

Outlook

1. CC Seminar and Consultation

A CC seminar is planned for 2026 in Poland.

Thanks

Shared experiences continue our common history. This shared history shapes us.

We would like to thank everyone who contributes to this in any way. In particular, we would like to mention the members of the WG Women's Work and the FrauenNETZwerk in Switzerland, who support this work in many ways.

Thank God for your blessing in this diverse work with and for women.

*Monika Zuber, Barbara Büniger
February 2025*

Working Group Episcopacy

The following persons of the Executive Committee are members of the Working Group Episcopacy:

Stefan Schröckenfuchs (AT)
Jörg Niederer, Vorsitz / Chair (CH-FR-NA)
Ivana Procházková (CZ)
László Khaled (HU-RO)
Bozena Daszuta (PL)
Daniel Sjanta (RS-NMK-AL)

The members of the Working Group will hold their meeting on Wednesday, 12 March 2025. The Committee will concentrate upon the following points:

1. To prepare the meeting and conversation with the bishop
2. The conversation with the bishop
 - setting the priorities of the bishop
 - longer-term issues in the Central Conference
 - personal and professional conditions
 - Planning of further support for the bishop by the Working Group Episcopacy.
3. Changes in the Working Group Episcopacy
4. Various matters

The members of the Central Conference will receive a summary of the most important results of this meeting at the Central Conference.

Jörg Niederer
January 2025

[Attachment 1](#)

Working Group Episcopacy from March 12, 2025

In the forefront of the Central Conference, the Working Group Episcopacy met on 12 March 2025 on the premises of the United Methodist Church in Winterthur.

The members of the Working Group in attendance were Bozena Daszuta (PL), László Khaled (HU-RO), Jörg Niederer, Chair (CH-FR-NA), Ivana Procházková (CZ) and Stefan Schröckenfuchs (AT). Daniel Sjanta (RS-NMK-AL) had to apologize for his absence.

The focus of the work was the exchange with Bishop Stefan Zürcher. All kinds of topics were discussed, such as the transition period together with Bishop Patrick Streiff, building relationships in the various conferences, the impact of political changes on work, the situation in the bishop's office, work-life balance, Valérie's well-being and much more. According to Bishop Stefan, there were also difficult situations in the last two months. Original quote: 'I have now arrived in reality as a bishop'.

It is appreciated that Bishop Stefan responds quickly to requests and concerns. He will soon be the longest-serving bishop in Europe. This will probably bring additional tasks with it. It was noted with satisfaction that the church's focus is now shifting away from human sexuality towards other topics, which is also evident in the bishop's report to the Central Conference.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the bishop's assistants, Urs Schweizer and André Töngi.

Thanks also go to Valérie. It is great that she can regularly attend the annual conferences in the various countries of the Central Conference.

In addition to this discussion, Jörg Niederer informed us that he had met with the bishop once a year for a discussion in Zurich, as is customary. This year, the meeting took place on 17 January. Afterwards - also as a small sign of gratitude to Bishop Stefan and his wife Valérie - they went to a restaurant for a delicious dinner together with their wives.

The support of retired bishops was also addressed. In the coming years, the Working Group Episcopacy will be more aware of this task, for example in the form of birthday greetings and support in difficult situations.

There are personnel changes in the Working Group. Jörg Niederer has chaired the Working Group Episcopacy since 2014. He will now be retiring. Serge Frutiger is planned as his successor in this role. He is to be elected at this meeting.

On a personal note, I would like to thank everyone with whom I was able to work in the Working Group Episcopacy during this time. These were eventful times full of good encounters.

Jörg Niederer

March 12, 2025

Judicial Court of the Central Conference CSE

1. Composition

According to Para. 12(1) of the "Rules of Order of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe - CC CSE", the Judicial Court is composed of five members and four reserve persons. At present, there are two vacancies at the level of the reserve persons.

2. Activities

According to the "Rules of Order of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe - CC CSE", the Judicial Court has the following tasks:

- a) According to Para. 12(4), the Judicial Court "shall make all judicial decisions in accordance with the constitution, excluding the jurisdiction of the Judicial Court of the General Conference." This concerns legal questions that arise in the application of the rules and by-laws as well as in the application changes made thereto by the Central Conference.

In the reporting period, the Judicial Court has not been applied to.

- b) According to Para. 12(5), the Central Conference shall be entitled to assign further tasks to the Judicial Court.

In the reporting period, no such tasks have been assigned to the Judicial Court.

Zurich, January 14, 2025

Prof. Dr. Christa Tobler, LL.M.
(President of the Judicial Court CC CSE)

Connectional Table

On the recommendation of our bishop, I was appointed to the Connectional Table (henceforth “CT”) and have been serving on this body since September 2024 as one of a maximum of five members from Europe. Since I was not too familiar with the tasks of this body myself, I will start with a few brief words about the role and composition of this instrument of connectional for our global church.

The Tasks of the Connectional Table

The CT's mandate is derived from the UMC's mission, “to call people into discipleship with Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The Connectional Table is amenable to the General Conference.

According to The Book of Discipline (§905), the CT:

- Provides a forum for understanding and implementing the vision, mission and ministries of The UMC in consultation with the Council of Bishops and consistent with the actions of the General Conference;
- Enables the flow of information and communication;
- Coordinates the program life of the church with the mandates of the Gospel.

In simpler words, the CT represents the worldwide connection of our church in a small way and promotes, shapes and guides it.

Composition

The CT is basically composed of three groups of people:

- max. 20 people representing the areas of Europe, Asia, Africa and the US jurisdictions
- 4 bishops also representing these areas
- numerous representatives who represent the various committees, agencies and subdivisions of our global church (for example, General Board of Church and Society, United Woman in Faith, Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, Commission on the General Conference, GCFA, Young Adults, Black Methodists for Church Renewal and many more).

Meetings of the Connectional Table

As a member of the CT, I have attended the following meetings since September 2024

- October 7, 2024: “Europe Regional Visioning Conversation”: A two-hour online meeting in which the European members named at that time (Christine Flick, D, and myself) were interviewed by Judy Kenaston, Chief Connectional Ministries Officer, about European perspectives for the worldwide UMC.
- October 24-27, 2024: In-person meeting of the Connectional Table in Dallas, TX. This was the CT's constitutive meeting for the new quadrennium. Since the CT's tasks, orientation and composition have changed as a result of the decisions of the 2024 General Conference, about two-thirds of the members, like myself, were attending a CT meeting for the first time. One of the changes is that, as of 2024, there should be five members each from Europe, Africa, Asia and the jurisdictions, instead of the previous two, to ensure bet-

ter representation of the worldwide church. Due to late communication and visa difficulties, the non-American delegates were nevertheless clearly underrepresented or could only participate virtually (but it is hoped that this could be different at the next in-person meeting in 2025).

Substantive work

- Due to the large number of new members, a good portion of the meeting time was spent on training and instruction regarding the tasks and responsibilities of CT members, and the numerous committees and agencies of the worldwide church were presented.
- Another focus was on theological lectures and discussions on the topics of “regionalization” and “(post-)colonization”, under the guidance of Dr. David Scott (Director of Mission Theology at General Board of Global Ministries).
- Subgroups worked on the topics of “visioning”, “regionalization”, “communication” and other assignments from the General Conference.

Visioning Team of the Connectional Table and the Council of Bishops

This small working group is composed of members of the CT and the Council of Bishops and is responsible to develop the basic formulation of the vision of the United Methodist Church for the coming years. A result of a comment on the low number of non-American members in this working group, I now have the privilege to be part of this working group.

This working group met online in December and January. The process of developing this vision is inspired by our church's efforts to take its own internationality and diversity seriously and to strengthen the regions. At the same time, the vision should reflect the UMC's mission, do justice to our church's understanding of ecclesiology (cf. the document “Sent in Love”, which has not yet been finally adopted by the General Conference) and incorporate the process of the “Four Areas of Ministry”⁶.

The content of this work is not yet ready for reporting at the time of writing my report; however, I expect to be able to provide the central conference in March with an oral report.

General observations on the work of the CT and the worldwide Connexio

As far as I can see, attitudes towards and understanding of the internationality of our church have changed in a positive way in many areas of our worldwide church in recent years. I particularly notice a clear desire and effort among U.S. representatives of our church to move away from a previously more U.S.-centered attitude in order to enable participation and learn from each other. This is expressed, for example, in the increase in the number of delegates from Africa, Asia and Europe in the CT; but also in the substantive engagement with the topics of (post-)colonialism and the theological reflection of regionalization.

Of course, there are a number of challenges that hinder this process

- The invitation to participate often leads to the question of how the necessary resources are to be raised in the much smaller structures of the central conferences
- Visa issues, time differences, weak internet and language barriers make it difficult for some to attend the meetings

⁶ <https://www.umc.org/en/content/four-areas-of-focus-overview>

- Numerous committees and agencies of the worldwide UMC are almost exclusively relevant to the US context. Nevertheless, bodies such as the CT or the General Conference are responsible for all these bodies. There is still a lot of “sorting work” to be done here.
- Despite all the good will, there is a danger that the old, US-typical decision-making patterns will be applied again in the decision-making processes at the latest. The fact that these decision-making processes often differ significantly from the different decision-making cultures in other regions of our church has not yet been reflected upon.

Despite these challenges, I am optimistic about the development of our global church. After a period in which conflicts were in the foreground, it seems that a time has begun again in which the willingness to work together is noticeable and the focus can be directed to exploring our common mission, which can be derived from the gospel and our Wesleyan heritage.

The next in-person meeting of the CT is expected to take place in Manila, Philippines, in October 2025.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs
January 2025

Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters

The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters is a committee of General Conference, but it also meets during the quadrennium between the sessions of General Conference. All matters that particularly affect the church's work outside the United States must be addressed by this committee before they can be submitted to the plenary session of General Conference for a vote. Currently, Bishop Harald Rückert (Germany) is the chairperson, and Bishop Gaspar Domingos is the vice-chairperson. Deanna Stickley-Miner (USA) is the secretary. In addition to me, Andrzej Malicki (Poland) and Thomas Fux (Austria) are further members of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe. Bishop Patrick Streiff continues to serve in an advisory capacity.

The committee met in Atlanta from February 27-29, 2025. One of its tasks is to develop a worldwide Book of Discipline that more clearly distinguishes between the parts that can be adapted by the Central Conferences and those that cannot. The goal is a Book of Discipline with a slim, non-adaptable part that is valid for the UMC worldwide. This part should clearly describe what connects the worldwide UMC at its core, while at the same time increasing the freedom for adaptations. The adaptable part should make it possible to better adapt the regulations in the various regions of the world to the requirements of the mission in the respective context. This work began more than 10 years ago. General Conference 2024 decided that the draft should be sent to all annual conferences for consultation. The consultation has been completed. The feedback will now be reviewed, and the draft will be further developed. General Conference 2028 should then be able to decide on it.

The committee was also informed about the status of preparations for voting on the constitutional amendments proposed by General Conference. The annual conferences will vote on these this year. They cover four topics: regionalization, fighting racism, clarification of who is allowed to elect the pastoral GC and CC delegates, and membership rules. In December, all secretaries of the annual conferences received the relevant documents. Ratification of constitutional amendments requires a 2/3 majority of cumulative yes votes worldwide. The result is expected by the end of the year. The results of the individual annual conferences will not be communicated.

Celebrations, prayers, table fellowship and many conversations during the breaks were also part of it. The diverse contexts from which the members of the committee come, their experiences and interests enriched the meeting, which took place in a very good atmosphere.

The next on-site meetings are planned for February 2026 and 2027. Between these, the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters will meet online. Work will also continue in sub-groups.

Bishop Stefan Zürcher

General Board of Global Ministries

Beginning of a new quadrennium of the boards of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) and the General Board of Higher Education (GBHEM).

The first joint board meeting of GGBM and GBHEM took place in Nashville from October 14 to 17, 2024. And of course, a quadrennium brings with it the usual fluctuation in the boards, committees, commissions and other bodies. One third of the members already have previous experience on one of the boards. The GBGM board has 39 members, including three non-voting members of United Women in Faith (UWF) and the general secretary, while the GBHEM board has 23 members. The first meeting in this constellation offered an opportunity to pause and reflect on what we see in the world around us, where we stand as a church and where we can find hope amid the hardship and challenges of our time.

Below are the most important points from various agenda items of this conference:

- In the midst of conflict and change, this new quadrennium is a new opportunity, a new chance to examine our commitment to a spirit of connection and our approach to strengthening our connection. For both organizations, it is about measuring the impact of their work in order to focus even more on better, stronger partnerships with dioceses, annual conferences, congregations, other UMC entities, ecumenical partners, educational institutions and other partners around the world.
- General Conference earlier this year was a significant event. However, responses to the key changes that General Conference ushered in have varied by location. Across the church, there is hope that regionalization will be ratified and move us toward a less colonial way of being church together. In the United States, there was great joy at the lifting of restrictions in the Book of Discipline that had previously excluded members of the LGBTQ+ community from full participation in the church. Elsewhere, particularly in Africa, the same changes have sparked distrust and conflict. While most United Methodists in Africa have indicated that they will remain United Methodist and use the freedom provided by regionalization to maintain their traditional views on marriage and sexuality, others have expressed their intention to leave the church.
- While GBGM is responsible for mission initiatives, GBHEM has been a close partner in accreditation and training for years. Agency staff are currently in discussions with several Central Conferences to develop contextual and sustainable training and certification programs and to ensure that those called to their region are equipped and empowered to thrive in their ministry. We support the changes decided at General Conference, but also recognize the need and right for different regional expressions of the church. We respect the desire to live fully in the local, cultural and theological context.
- GBGM and GBHEM are primarily intended to support the mission and ministry of the United Methodist Church and its partners, working together. However, this requires a holistic understanding of mission, and this encompasses the entire work of both organizations .
- We must also have a common vision of mission and ministry that is not divided by geographic or administrative structures. Both GBHEM and GBGM have long but distinct histories of work in the United States and in other countries. For most of that history, there was a strong distinction between work in the United States and work in other countries. That time is now over. We must look at our work holistically and include work in all places.

- There are important differences in context and culture from one place to another, and these must be taken into account. But considering the United States as a special category or as the center of the Church has never been an appropriate model and is an expression of colonialism. We must move beyond that model and, in some cases, learn to think anew with a view to the whole world. Likewise, we must learn to think beyond the administrative structures of the Church and especially the agencies (GBGM and GBHEM). It is important that there are structures and that it is clear who is responsible for what - because that is how we organize ourselves for mission.
- In the short to medium term, the goal is to bring the two agencies closer together, with a unified approach and an integrated structure. We need this approach to ensure that the flow of information between the agencies works smoothly when we work with our partners around the world. This is the best way to respond to them and support them on their behalf. We need an integrated structure so that the direction is shared by all those involved in both organizations, the directors, staff and missionaries, and not just by the Secretary General of both organizations (Roland Fernandez). We will work towards this goal in the coming months and years.
- At GBGM, we have two main categories in our work: connecting the church in mission and alleviating human suffering. In the last quadrennium, we talked about 17 programs in four major program areas. That work will continue in this quadrennium under those two main focuses. Connecting the church in mission includes our work in missionary sending and mission engagement. In the last quadrennium, we used the term "evangelism and church revitalization," but we have moved away from that phrase, not because we believe evangelism is unimportant, but because we recognize that it is our partners who are primarily doing this work of evangelism. GBGM is here to engage with them and support them in their work. Alleviating human suffering includes our work through UMCOR and Global Health, or more accurately, in the areas of humanitarian relief and recovery and global health. We have combined our international and domestic disaster relief efforts into a single program, recognizing that our work should not be divided by geographic boundaries.
- Like GBGM, GBHEM has two main categories for its work. These categories are linking church with research and teaching in a common mission and developing leaders for church service and moral leadership in the world. Broadly speaking, these two categories summarize the educational side of our work and the ministry side of our work. We are working to create a list of programs similar to GBGM's list of programs so that both organizations have clearly identifiable programs that we focus on. This list will be completed in time for the Spring Board Meeting in Atlanta, April 8-10, 2025.
- GBGM has about 130 staff members, GBHEM 40. There are support services in both organizations, including program support, finance, communications, and fund development with various functions. We are working on staff structures within the two agencies, which are heavily influenced by our adaptation work and the evolving role of each of the two agencies. In both bodies, there are a number of committees that drive the work of the agencies, and both bodies have program committees that oversee the programmatic work of the agencies. On the GBHEM side, the two program committees are the Education Committee and the Service Committee. At GBGM, the two program committees are the Mission Program Committee, which is responsible for the areas of mission engagement and mission service, and the UMCOR Committee, which deals with humanitarian assistance and reconstruction and the work of Global Health.

- For both organizations, the 2025 budgets have been changed only minimally compared to 2024. GBGM's budget will be \$48 million, GBHEM's \$30 million, and UMCOR's, including Global Health, \$39 million. This is despite the fact that 2025 is the first year in which apportionments, a key source of income for both organizations, will be cut by more than 50%. As this development was to be expected after the General Conference, both organizations have acted prudently in recent years and reduced their expenditure. Therefore, reserves are in place to cover the short-term deficits. The use of these reserves will help to maintain important programs of both agencies. In 2025, work must be done on how to balance the budget in the long term. This will be a difficult task, affecting both the mission and the staff.

*Jean-Paul Dietrich,
January 30, 2025*

European Methodist Council

The European Methodist Council Meeting in Lisburn (Northern Ireland) from October 4th to 7th, 2024

Reconciliation: a call for all Christians

I wonder why the Christian religions have produced so few peacemakers over the centuries? I wonder why Christians were involved in war at all over the last centuries? Jesus Christ's message is clear: "Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9)

These thoughts are in my head as I sit down and look back to the recent EMC consultation in Lisburn, Northern Ireland.

What is our calling as Methodists in Europe? Last year (2023) in Oslo we reflected on the fact that God has given us a variety of gifts and that we are invited to support each other as Methodists in Europe. We are bridge builders, often a minority, we are invited to be part of God's ministry of peace-making and justice seeking. During this year's meeting in Lisburn, and in Belfast we have focused on how we might act as justice seekers and peace builders, both together, as Methodists in Europe and in our local contexts.

Our thinking as Methodist leaders and lay people in Europe on seeking reconciliation and building peace was sparked by visits to the East Belfast Mission and the Clonard Monastery (a home for roman catholic redeptorist priests). I can tell you that both visits were in-depth, stirring, challenging and thought-provoking experiences. East Belfast Mission is one of four inner city missions of the Methodist Church in Ireland. As a mission they exist to share God's love in the widest possible sense by recognising, supporting and advocating for the needs faced by those in the community. Appartements for homeless people, Refresh Café and Restoring shops are there at a critical point not far from the Freedom Corner of East Belfast. Rev. Brian Anderson, methodist minister in this area took the council members around the locality where loyalist murals are much in evidence. The tension is still tangible. The peace wall is still standing. It is a bit like knowing that a bad word or action can provoke gun-violence at any time. Rev. Anderson has given us a short introduction to the very complex political, religious and ethnic context. It is clear, that the Methodist ministry there is working for peace, reconciliation and for a better future. „I believe in partnerships“ said Rev. Anderson, and his statement remained with me.

When we returned to Lisburn, and sat down, formed discussion groups, and simply shared our feelings and impressions. I enjoyed the very methodist way of reflection. One has rarely the time to sit quietly and reflect, ponder and meditate upon certain deep life-experiences. We have followed this cycle: experience – explore – reflect – respond – have a new experience.

Is God calling us to do something similar in our own „Belfasts“? Are there any good examples, any practical advices? What attitude is needed? Are there any answers at all?

Hans Küng said:

“No peace among the nations
without peace among the religions.

No peace among the religions
without dialogue between the religions.

No dialogue between the religions
without investigation of the foundation of the religions.”
— Hans Küng, Christianity: Essence, History, and Future

On Sunday afternoon we have made our way to a roman catholic community, on the other side of the peace wall. Of course, „on the Irish part” you could also find commemorations of the Irish victims and the text on the wall: „We’ll never forget” – many have paid with their own life. The troubles of the past were there, they just seemed to be very alive. During this visit the Redemptorist brother of Clonard Monastery Father Ed Peterson was our guide. He introduced us to the Italian priest St Alphonsus, the founder of the so called Redemptorist Mission in Italy in 1732. „We could easily refer to him as a spiritual twin brother of John Wesley” – Father Peterson said. They both saw an importance of caring for the poor and marginalized so that the full redemption of God could be realized near and far.

Rev. David Carpton (Methodist), and Father Martin Magill (Roman Catholic) have joined our EMC group in Clonard Monastery for a very unique round table discussion about reconciliation in Belfast. It turned out very quickly that they also believe in partnerships, as Rev. Anderson stated the day before on the other side of the wall. Father Peterson talked about the so-called Unity Pilgrims movement. It touched me, and challenged me, so I asked him to give more information about it. This is a group of Christians, originally from Clonard Monastery, who felt God’s calling and obeyed boldly in visiting other churches and worshipping together. They are just inspired by Jesus Christ’s words from John 17. Fr Gerry Reynolds (1935 – 2015) was a Redemptorist priest who lived and worked at Clonard Monastery and his ministry focused on bringing people of Christian faith together. Fr Gerry believed: „A divided Church has little or nothing to offer towards leading a divided people into the way of peace. In the Northern Ireland conflict, divided churches have cost lives.” Unity pilgrims were and are simply catholic church members who intentionally go to celebrate Christian unity and worship together with protestants in humble spirit (not with the intention to convert them or criticize them). In this approach, I have to say, I see a lot of goodness, kindness and fruitfulness.

Unity is already a reality; the problem is that we do not see it and do not practice it. Unity Pilgrims are faithful to the Christian calling: reconcile with each other. We often prefer our good old church pews, inside our familiar church buildings, but are we ready to be a „Unity Pilgrim”?

Along with fellow Redemptorist Fr Alec Reid, Fr Gerry helped facilitate secret peace talks among key political and religious leaders which assisted in bringing the Troubles to an end. Not just catholic groups but protestant women also had a key role in ending violence. Also, the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition has to be mentioned if we talk about the peace process.

The Rev. David Carpton said about his childhood that if he knew more about the Catholic Church from the inside as a boy and young adult, it would have helped him a lot to dismiss prejudices.

What about you? What about your own context? Are you infused by Christ’s words and attitude? Do you believe in forgiveness and reconciliation as a Christian way of live? Do you see visible or virtual walls between churches or nations in your area? Do you want to work for peace not just praying for peace? Start it in your own heart and own life, and let God leads you to go beyond those walls!

Lilla Kardosné Lakatos

Representative of the CC of CSE, Continental European Area President of the WFMUCW

World Methodist Council

Report on the World Methodist Council Meetings, August 11 – 18, 2024 in Gothenburg, Sweden

The twenty-second World Methodist Council met in August of 2024 in Gothenburg, Sweden at the Gothia Towers and conference center under the theme, "On the Move: Migration, Pilgrimage, Guiding Light." Several meetings were a part of the gathering, including:

- 1. A gathering of about 25 youth and young adults aged 18-35 coordinated by Young Adult Chair Rev. Sam Murrillo of the Methodist Church in Mexico,*
- 2. The annual IMASCU meeting of educational leaders and professors from Methodist institutions around the world coordinated by Dr. Amos Nascimento of GBHEM,*
- 3. The World Methodist Council (WMC) Nominating Committee to make recommendations for the incoming Council leadership, led by co-chairs David Bush and Yvette Richards,*
- 4. The out-going WMC, who were completing their term and met to make transitional decisions, led by President JC Park of the Korean Methodist Church and General Secretary Ivan Abrahams,*
- 5. The World Methodist Conference, which is the quinquennial gathering of all interested Wesleyan/Methodist/Uniting leaders for worship, fellowship and learning, and*
- 6. The in-coming WMC, who began their five-year term (2024-2029) of service and met to organize.*

The following is offered as a report from each of the above areas:

1. The youth and young adult gathering was held away from the hotel campus August 11 and 12. It was coordinated by Rev. Sam Murrillo of the Methodist Church in Mexico, and many of the young adults who participated were offered partial scholarships from the WMC. There was very little overlap between those particular young adults and the young adult delegates to the council, and I received several requests for information from young adults and several people voiced concern that the young adult delegates to the council were not invited to the gathering.
2. The International Methodist Association of Seminaries, Colleges and Universities (IMASCU) met on the hotel campus at various times from August 11 through 13. They meet annually to talk about Methodist education globally, and are led by UM GBHEM leader Dr. Amos Nascimento. Their theme had to do with connectionalism, and their keynote theologian on August 12th was Dr. Jørgen Thaarpe, who spoke about the history of Methodism in Scandinavia. Other topics addressed included regionalization, Wesleyan perspectives on politics, and human rights.
3. The WMC Nomination Committee met August 12 and 13 to set the nominations for the new officers, regional officers, committee chairs and at-large members to the council. These persons will serve from 2024 to 2029:

Officers:

- President – Bishop Debbie Wallace-Padgett, USA, UMC
- Vice President – Rev. Joshua Rathnam, India, Church of North India
- Treasurer – Rev. Myron Howie, USA, AME

Staff:

- General Secretary – Rev. Dr. Reynaldo Ferreira Leao Neto, Brazil/England, MCB
- Geneva Secretary – Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, Germany, UMC

Regional Officers:

- Asia Region – Mr. Richard Tsang, Hong Kong
- Africa Region – Bishop Bannie Manga, Gambia
- Europe Region – Mr. Doug Godfrey-Swanney, England
- North America Region – Rev. Dr. Jean Hawxhurst, USA
- South America Region – Ms. Andrea Gutierrez, Uruguay
- Pacific – Rev. Brett Jones, New Zealand
- Caribbean Region – Mr. John Delaney, Barbados
- Young Adult Chair – Rev. Sam Murillo, Mexico

Committee Chairs:

- Education and Theological Education – Rev. Dr. Connie S. Mella, Philippines
- Ecumenical and Interreligious Relationships - TBD
- Social and International Affairs – Rev. Dogbeda Kpavuvu – Tonga
- Evangelism – Bishop Darryl Starnes – USA, AMEZ
- Youth and Young Adult Coordinator – Ms. Stephanie Gabuyo- Filipina, Methodist
- Church in Ireland

At Large:

- Rev. Tara Tautari - New Zealand
- Rev. Miguel Ulloa - Chile
- Rev. Samuel Murillo - Mexico
- Ms. Stefanie Gabuyo – Ireland/Philippines

Operational Committees:

- Budget and Finance – TBD
- Achieving the Vision – Ashi Parikh - India
- Audit – Kriby Hickey - USA
- Personnel – TBD
- Communications and Publications – TBD

As obvious from the above list, the Nominations Committee did not complete their work. Consensus was not met on the Chair of the Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations Committee, and it was determined that position and the additional unnamed positions above would be filled by an incoming Nominations Committee.

4. The out-going council, who have held their roles for longer than the traditional five years, due to the COVID pandemic, met August 13 and 14. The time began with worship and welcomes. An opening keynote address on migration and the environment by Dr. Upolu from Tonga in the Pacific, who insisted that “a gospel based on growth spiritual and ecological values,” and that:
 - a. God is not an abstract theory; God is a relationship,
 - b. God’s identity is dirt, and people are connected to dirt and dust, and
 - c. By moving into the dirt God moves into restraint and pause.

He concluded that “a church that is not ‘dirtified’ enough is not fit to carry the Gospel.”

Attendance was registered, council members who have died since the last meeting were remembered, Jackie Bolden and Michaela Bryson were named as recorders, the consensus process was explained in general, and Tara T??? was named as parliamentarian (which seemed a bit oxymoronic, since we are supposed to make decisions via consensus). President Dr. J. C. Park offered his address, going through the three phases of his eight years served as president. This last phase, according to Dr. Park, is like a spread-out Third World War or Cold War, with conflict and supremacy throughout the world. He called the council to continue to stand with people, like people in Korea, who are on the margins and in need.

Rev. David Bush presented the "New Patterns of Working" document. The report calls for fewer committees, an expectation of monthly meetings, participation by all council members, additional participation by persons with particular expertise Program Committees going forward will be:

- a. Ecumenical and interreligious relationships
- b. Theological and Christian education
- c. International social affairs
- d. Evangelism
- e. Youth and young adults

The Nominations Committee will recommend a chair for each of the above, and it is recommended that each committee appoint a Vice Chair and Secretary from their membership. A few changes were made:

- a. Since we have been working on the document since 2012 we will refer to it not as "New Patterns of Work," but as "Patterns of Work for the Future."
- b. The committee having to do with formation will be called "The Education and Theological Education" Standing Committee.
- c. An ad hoc working group on worship and liturgy will be created in order to complete the work begun by the previous committee. They will relate to the Steering Committee and present at their next meeting.

With those edits, the document was approved by consensus.

President JC Park invited the Thailand Union Methodist Church's application for membership. It was approved by consensus and their representatives were celebrated.

General Secretary Ivan Abrahams reported that there have been many applications for membership in the WMC. They have been scrutinized and several did not meet the requirements. Only the Thailand Union Methodist Church met those requirements. Because of this process a revision of the guidelines for membership was undertaken. In summary the document now includes the category of churches who have separated from a member church, and in that case both churches must be consulted in the membership process.

Rev. Matthew Lafferty asked that in the coming quinquennium that the council work on reviving the document of essentials in Wesleyan theology. It was recommended that churches seeking membership be vetted through their regional Methodist council, but not all regions have such an organization, so this recommendation was received as a suggestion to the officers in their discernment. Some edits were made to the document and it was re-presented the next day.

Mr. Kirby Hickey presented the Treasurer's report. As of June 30th 2024 the balance of total assets was \$10,974,390.51. The endowment was approximately \$8,600,000 (Achieving the

Vision). Total Payroll was \$213,600 to date. Total member church giving was \$286,840 and total revenue was \$465,040. There was a request to always note what currency is being used in the report. A question was asked about the Young Adult Coordinator budget and why it was not used, and the treasurer responded he did not know but would find out. Mr. Hickey was appreciated for his fourteen years of service.

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner presented her Geneva Secretary's report and began by sharing that August 13 is the birthday of the Moravian Church. She shared that she began her service in this role in Houston, Texas in 2016. She has focused on migration and its ecumenical implications with two consultations, one in 2019 in England and one in 2023 in the Philippines, and many zoom meetings. She is also working on NIFEA (New International Financial and Economic Architecture) which works ecumenically on an economy of life, with an annual training (GEM). She is also working on the Weekend of Prayer and Action against Hunger, which is always the second weekend in October, on Thursdays in Black, which is a campaign to promote awareness of violence against women, and on the leadership group of the Global Christian Forum, which is a large, global ecumenical table.

Bishop Ivan Abrahams offered his General Secretary's report. He spoke about this being "the cut flower generation," who are cut and separated from our roots. He spoke about the Methodist Office in Jerusalem, the Methodist Office in Rome, how he has focused particularly in the last eighteen months on Africa and inequity there, funerals for Eddie Fox and Sunday Mbang, the WMC Peace Awards, the Korean roundtables for peace, preparations for the Nicene Creed anniversary, and many other things. He offered thanks to several people for accompanying him on his journey. Recommendation was made to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the WMC in the next few years.

Tony Franklin-Ross presented the ad hoc task force on the MEOR. Heather Morris from Ireland asked that the report be received instead of being adopted, as much more work needs to be done. She noted that OPCEMI needs to be contacted, that adding migration work takes the ministry in a different direction, and that the Steering Committee needs to be one to do the work going forward. Her suggestions were well received, and the document goes to the Steering Committee, not as an adopted document but as a received report. MEOR Director Matthew Laferty also asked to have the Vatican-WMC dialogue report be received, and it was.

A document updating the guidelines for membership in the WMC was presented. There was discussion and a few wording edits were suggested. The edited document will need to come back before the new council for approval.

Bishop Wenner presented the resolution from the Second WMC Consultation on Migration in Manila, Philippines in September of 2023. The use of "nationalism" was changed to "xenophobic nationalism," and it was approved by consensus.

She then presented a resolution on the NIFEA work. It continues the work on the economy of life over an economy of growth. It was approved by consensus.

Vice President Kingston presented a resolution entitled "The World Methodist Council Joins the Call for a Permanent Ceasefire in Gaza and the Occupied Palestine Territory." It endorses ceasefire, a week of peace in September, a call to study the WCC parallel resolution. Bishop Abrahams noted that two young adults will be presenting a workshop on the topic and then make a final consideration of the resolution. Bishop Christian Alsted asked that

the resolution didn't refer to another resolution, as it does not allow the document to stand on its own.

Bishop Wenner presented a resolution entitled "The Conflict in Sudan also Known as 'The Forgotten War'." It expresses concern, urges ceasefire, encourages advocacy and commits to working to facilitate an end to war. It will be discussed further after its parallel workshop. Rev. Amelia Koh Butler recommended congregations, like the ones in Australia, who have persons from both sides of the conflict in it, would be good to help create a Methodist response.

Vice President Kingston presented a resolution on the war in Ukraine. Bishop Alsted, who serves in the region, affirmed the resolution, entitled "Statement on the War in Ukraine." Rev. Levi Bautista asked for some word tweaking and it was accepted by consensus.

Vice President Kingston presented the resolution, "1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea," which proposes a series of webinars (faith, unity and mission) and study materials be created for 2025.

President Park presented a resolution on peace in the Korean Peninsula. It calls for advocacy, prayer and urging governments to seek peace. Rev. Levi Bautista recommended adding that denuclearization of the peninsula would be a gift to the world. Christine Elliott asked how the WMC can urge North Korea to do anything. Additionally a question about what "trust-building" measures are. Dr. Park's response was a suggestion for a six-way talk.

A report on the Epworth Old Rectory was offered. It is a place of pilgrimage, learning and inspiration and contains a museum with a staff of six. Its work is overseen by a board made up of WM Council members. The rectory offers tours, hosts meetings and recitals, and offer dramas and garden parties. They are also working with women, children and persons with dementia. They ask for volunteers for the board and funding. The board member request will be sent to the Nominations Committee.

5. The World Methodist Conference met the evening of the 14th through the 17th, with approximately 3,000 persons in attendance. Participants were from the 80 countries in which Methodist/Wesleyan/United churches exist and from the Uniting Church in Sweden, who co-hosted the gathering. There were over 325 United Methodists from across the connection registered for the conference, which was co-sponsored by the Uniting Church and the United Methodist Church in the Nordic/Baltic Episcopal Area.

Worship was led by the hosting churches from the Uniting Church of Sweden, with musical help from the Kwanglim Korean Methodist Church and preachers from around the world. Comments were mixed about the worship and music being led by one, European group.

The prestigious Methodist Peace Award was presented. The 2023 recipient was United Methodist Bishop Christian Alsted for his leadership in Ukraine during the Russian invasion. The 2024 recipient was United Methodist Deaconess Norma P. Dollaga for her ministry of justice and peace in the Philippines, particularly with those effected by extrajudicial killings.

There were several panel conversations, including sharing about migration, about our ecumenical commitments, and about engaging young adults in the church. These were held daily just after the morning times of worship.

Several participants went to "worship in the archipelago." These pilgrimages

included a bus ride to the coast, a ferry ride to an island, and a walk up the hill to a congregational building. The members welcomed the groups, offered fika, and led in a time of worship in a beautiful setting.

There were also several seminars from which participants could choose. For example, Bishop Kennetha Bigham-Tsai led a presentation on the story of Hagar through the lens of African American oppression. Dr. Hawxhurst and Rev. Tony Franklin-Ross led a presentation on Receptive Ecumenism and how it is applied practically in ecumenical dialogue. And, two Palestinian young adult women led a presentation about what it is like to be a Palestinian in the Gaza Strip and the West

Bank today. Rev. Dr. Martin Mujinga spoke on Hybrid Christianity dealing with the issues raised by people of different cultures and backgrounds in the same church. Bishop Mande Muyombo and Rev Greg Bergquist addressed regionalization and connectionalism. These were powerful times of learning.

In the evenings worship and "late night" activities were offered. One of the evenings GBGM and GBHEM offered a gathering for those associated with their ministries. One of the evenings participants were invited to walk to a local concert hall to hear a concert. And, on the last evening of the conference the Swedish church offered a party which included videos, music and games. (For example, Bishop Wenner and Rev. Tankler had to taste foods and determine from which country they came. Dr. Leo Neto had to put together an Ikea stool, sit on it, and offer his favorite Scripture passage.)

The conference concluded on Sunday morning with closing worship and Communion led by the Uniting Church in Sweden (including an African song leader), during which eleven deacons and twenty pastors were ordained. Additionally, three clergypersons from other denominations were welcomed. Outgoing President Lasse Svenssen preached and Communion was offered. The incoming President Bishop Karin Wiborn was consecrated for her new role and welcomed.

About the conference Council of Bishops President Tracy S. Malone said: "God is truly on the move! I give thanks for this global, connectional experience! It has been wonderful, connecting with old friends and establishing new relationships.

6. The incoming World Methodist Council met Sunday afternoon for about four hours. After lunch together the new council gathered in the same space in which the outgoing council met. President Bishop Debbie Wallace-Padgett offered a welcome, and the new officers were installed. Those delegates who were present were named as a quorum and Rev. Tara Tautari offered some thoughts about discernment through consensus. It was noted there were no interpreters, and council members were asked to speak slowly.

A report on behalf of the youth and young adults was offered. Rev. Sam Murillo introduced Stefanie Gabuyo. They reported seeing a generational gap, a North/European way of working together, a political correctness that does not allow deep conversation, and a lack of young delegates. They noted each delegation has a space for a young adult delegate and recommended an annual school for inter-generational justice, peacebuilding and reconciliation formation to take place each year. World Methodist Evangelism offered to work with the young adults and help coordinate such a school. The idea of this was affirmed, and the young adults will go back, create a definite plan and present it to the Steering Committee for implementation. There was a recommendation to do the training regionally and online.

President Wallace Padgett offered to put her written comments on the website to save time for continued work and commended the website in general. Usually there are between 250 and 500 delegates elected to the council. There were about 200 present for this meeting. There will be another in person meeting in 2026 and another in 2029 prior to the next conference. Additionally, there will be an annual zoom meeting offered.

New General Secretary Leao Neto also offered to put his written comments on the website and offered a few verbal comments. He voiced hope that the WMC will be rooted in Christ and grounded in love, that the WMC will create a connection of connections, and that the WMC will hold fellowship as a sacramental means of grace, so that "I" will be able to relate to "Thou."

He then facilitated a conversation about the theme for this quinquennium. "On the Move" was suggested, but more specificity was requested. Comment was made that no conversation about migration be had without migrants being present. Comment was made that peace be a part of the theme. "On the Move to Where God is Needed" was recommended. The Steering Committee will take this up and offer more specificity.

Six members were elected to the Nominating Committee in addition to the officers and regional officers. This group will work on filling in the incomplete slate for the Steering Committee. The votes were still being voted on at the end of the meeting, so the names will be added to the webpage.

1. Heather Morris (Ireland)
2. Isabel Thomas Dobson (Australia)
3. Kim Seah (Singapore)
4. Annie Solis (Peru)
5. Megan Dean Tobola (USA)
6. Tie: Jacqui King (USA), Todd Stepp (Nazarene), Darin Moore (AMEZ)

The following persons were named to serve on the Old Epworth Rectory board:

1. Gilian Kingston
2. Joshua Rathnam
3. Shayla Jordan
4. Joe Kenaston
5. Bishop Teresa Snorton

A list of persons were affirmed for the Oxford Institute. These names were sent by the Oxford Committee, including Dr. David Field, and were approved by consensus.

The resolutions, as amended by the previous Council, were presented:

- a. "The World Methodist Council Joins the Call for a Permanent Ceasefire in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territories." A few editorial changes were made, including the addition of a sentence about antisemitism in order to make clear separation between the Jewish people and the Israeli government. A letter from the two Palestinian Christian women who shared three seminars during the conference was read. With their permission, it will be posted on the WMC website. An additional short statement will be created about antisemitism and presented to the full council (via email) for approval in September.
- b. "The Conflict in Sudan also Known as 'The Forgotten War'." One change was made from the previous council. It was passed by consensus.

- c. "Statement on the War in Ukraine." No revisions were made from the previous council, but a couple typos were corrected.
- d. "Resolution on the Korean Peninsula." It was adopted by consensus.
- e. "Guidelines for Membership in the World Methodist Council." A few edits were made, and it was adopted by consensus.
- f. "Resolution on WMC Visa Denials." This was a new resolution, which expressed disappointment that so many persons, including at least ten young adults, were denied visas to participate in this council meeting. An additional sentence was added urging embassies to approve our participants. The Steering Committee was also urged to consider meeting in locations where visas are easier to obtain. It was affirmed
- g. A request was received to write a statement on the war in Congo. The Steering Committee will take this up.

The delegates were thanked for their participation. Standing Committees were invited to meet. Delegates were invited to participate in whatever committee interested them most for the 15 minutes remaining before the building closed.

Jean Hawxhurst and David Field

Methodist e-Academy Europe

1. New concept for 2025/2026

*"Enriching minds &
uniting hearts to serve"*



The MeA programme has been revised and redesigned based on the wealth of experience gained since its launch in 2008 and in view of the changes at Methodist theological schools in Europe.

As in the past, MeA continues to offer a hybrid programme with online distance learning courses and intensive in-person block seminars. The courses are still running in two languages, English and German, with one course per trimester or semester.

In the new concept, the basic programme is designed at Master's level and can now be completed in just two years alongside other studies or professional activity. The English-language programme is now fully embedded in the courses offered at Cliff College, Calver (UK) and the German-language programme by the School of Theology, Reutlingen (D). In both languages, this makes it possible to complete a MA-degree in Theology at the respective institution with additional courses. The MeA courses offer the foundational topics for pastoral ministry in the United Methodist Church. They promote a reflective, Methodist identity and create relationships in a European study context.

The new course will start in English this autumn 2025. Please promote it and register for the new courses. Further information can be found in the attached flyer or on the website

<https://methodist-e-academy.org/>

2. New coordinators

After the previous coordinator Dr David Field was appointed to a new role as Ecumenical Staff Officer for Theological Dialogues in the Council of Bishops in summer 2021, we were grateful to have found within short notice two people with a lot of experience in Meeli Tankler (former rector of the seminary in Estonia) and Peter Caley (retired pastor, Switzerland). They were able to continue the work - still in Covid times - with the administrative support of Tina Manuelli.

In summer 2023, it was possible to find two new employees, Dr Erika Stalcup (ordained deacon, Switzerland) as academic coordinator and Susanne Schwarz (lay, Germany) as administrative coordinator, both in smaller part-time positions. Together with me as chairperson, the redesign of the training programme approved by the supervisory board was then implemented. We concluded cooperation agreements with both theological schools (Cliff and THR).

3. Finances and budget

In addition to regular donations from the USA, there has been substantial support from the British Methodist Church for the costs of the coordinator for many years. The latter has ended. Global Ministries has provided scholarships for students over the years, but this amount will probably be significantly smaller in the future. We will therefore be submitting a new application for scholarships to the central conference theological education fund of the general church.

The training costs per person now include the full expenses (including coordinators and study fees at the respective institution). They have therefore become significantly higher but are still lower than in the very early days of MeA. We still have the option of scholarships. Depending on the student's background, scholarships cover the full cost of education with the exception of a small self-contribution.

4 Outlook and further plans

The MeA would like to try again to offer additional modules on specific topics. However, this is dependent on clear needs that are reported to us by the churches or Boards of Ordained Ministry.

We are also considering strengthening lay training. The British Methodist Church, in collaboration with Cliff College, has broken interesting new ground here. With the rapid progress of language modules, we are looking at how such programmes can be offered in languages other than English.

5. Governing Board

The MeA is a joint training platform of the Methodist churches in Europe. Accordingly, these churches (per episcopal area of the UMC or the MCB) are also represented on the governing board with two persons each, one from a Board of Ordained Ministry and one from a training centre or teaching ministry. As chairperson, I have led the MeA since its beginnings and hope that the task can be taken over by another bishop in the course of the quadrennium.

For the episcopal areas of the UMC (excluding Eurasia), the following representatives are currently on the governing board:

CC Northern Europe: Hilde-Marie Movafagh (Theol Edu); Thomas Risager (BOM)

CC Germany: Ulrike Schuler (Theol Edu); Christoph Klaiber (BOM)

CC Central and Southern Europe: Christoph Schluep (Theol Edu); Zoltan Kovacs (BOM).

We ask the Central Conferences to elect their representatives for the new quadrennium!

Patrick Streiff, Bishop (retired)

Chairperson of the MeA Governing Board

Commission for Central Conference Theological Education Fund

The 2012 General Conference created a Commission for Theological Education in Central Conferences, which manages and disburses project support from the fund of the same name. Together with Bishop Yemba, I was responsible for the creation and organisation of this new commission. The money comes from the "World Service Fund" which is entirely fuelled by apportionments from the annual conferences in the USA. In the first quadrennium of 2013-16, the goal was to raise \$ 5 million during the quadrennium. The average contribution rate of the US conferences then resulted in an amount of approximately \$ 1 million per year for distribution to projects in the Central Conferences. In the second quadrennium, which then stretched from 2017 to 2024 due to the Covid pandemic and postponement of General Conference, the goal per quadrennium was doubled. The average contribution rate of the US conferences declined but still resulted in between just under \$ 2 million and just over \$ 1.5 million being disbursed to projects each year. In spring 2025, the funds from 2024 will be disbursed. For the new 2025-28 quadrennium, the collection target has been set at around \$ 5 million, which gives hope for an annual payout of just under \$ 1 million.

According to the Book of Discipline, the fund can be used for the following purposes:

1. Development of theological institutions;
2. Development of training plans for local pastors;
3. Development of libraries and contextually relevant resources;
4. Scholarships and support for teachers;
5. Support for associations and networks of faculties and theological schools;
6. Support for new and innovative approaches to theological education.

Buildings/real estate and salaries for teachers are excluded from support.

As three small Central Conferences in Europe, we each have one seat on the Commission out of a total of 19 voting members. Each of the original four Episcopal Areas in Europe was able to receive an annual support of up to \$ 50,000 (the amount was doubled for 2017-24). Projects can be submitted by UMC theological institutions and Boards of Ordained Ministry, but not by bishops. Whether the amount per episcopal area will be reduced again to \$ 25,000 for 2025-28 must be decided by the new commission. Since this fund was established in 2017, all requests for support for theological education within our Central Conference have been channelled through the CCTEF fund. As Central Conference, we are very grateful for this. It has also taken a lot of pressure off Connexio hope so that their contributions can be used elsewhere.

In the quadrennium 2017-24, the Commission proposed to all regional groups that they donate 10% of their contributions to the Endowment Fund for Theological Education in the Central Conferences. The Endowment Fund was established by the Council of Bishops in 2014 with the goal of raising \$ 25 million for distributing approximately \$ 1 million annually to the Commission. The Endowment Fund has also opened an additional fund for the salary support of Professors in Methodism with a target of \$ 10 million. The endowment fund allows for regular and long-term support for theological education, independent of the fluctuations in support from apportionment funds from the US conferences. After reaching the first million, the Endowment Fund began to pay the Commission an annual "first-fruits" of 1%, with the remaining income helping to increase the endowment.

I have played a key role in the creation of this endowment fund, chair its supervisory committee and campaign for support both in and outside the USA. There is already earmarked capital for distributions to the CC-CSE should the Commission's other funds not be sufficient. We have now

begun support for earmarked capital for distributions to Professors in Methodism in Europe (Methodist e-Academy or other Professors in Methodism at UMC institutions). I will be delighted if this initiative makes it possible to train – in a sustainable, long-term approach - a new generation of Methodist pastors for their ministry.

Bishop Patrick Streiff

VI. Minutes

of the 84th meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Unauthorized translation – Original in German

Minutes Executive Committee Friday, November 21, 2025

Friday, November 21, 2025, 2:00 p.m.

Plenary session at the Hotel Gromada, Warsaw

Bishop Stefan welcomes all those present and wishes them a good meeting. He warmly thanks *Bożena Daszuta* and *Andrzej Malicki* for organizing the meeting in Warsaw. *Andrzej* cannot be with us today as he is organizing the funeral of the deceased former Polish superintendent *Jan Ostryk*.

Bożena Daszuta warmly welcomes us on behalf of *Andrzej Malicki* as well. They have prepared a welcome bag for everyone with products from the UMC Poland. They are delighted that we are here.

The following people are present:

as members with voting rights:

Bishop

Chairman Bishop	Bishop	Stefan Zürcher	present
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Office

Secretary	Pastor	Markus Bach	present
Treasurer	Localpastor	Iris Bullinger	present

Executive Committee

Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Sup.	Daniel Sjanta	present
	Layperson	Emil Zaev	present
Austria	Sup.	Stefan Schröckenfuchs	present
	Layperson	Ben Nausner	present
Poland	Sup.	Andrzej Malicki	partially present
	Layperson	Bożena Daszuta	present
Switzerland-France-North Africa	Sup.	Serge Frutiger	present
	Layperson	Christine Schneider	present
Czech Republic	Sup.	Ivana Procházková	present
	Layperson	Martina Chlupáčková	present
Hungary-Romania	Sup.	László Khaled	present
	Layperson	Dávid Csernák	present
Chair WG Episcopacy	Sup.	Serge Frutiger	(present)

as advisory members:

Retired bishops	Ret. Bishop	Patrick Streiff	excused
	Ret. Bishop	Heinrich Bolleter	excused

Additional superintendents

France and Belgium	desig. Sup.	Cyriane Rohner-Ouvry	excused
	Sup.	Grégoire Chahinian	excused
Romania	Sup.	Rares Calugar	present
Algeria and Tunisia	Pastor	Freddy Nzambe	present
North Macedonia	Sup.	Marjan Dimov	present
Albania	desig. Sup.	Gjergj Luskha	present

Chairpersons of the Working Groups

WG Theology and Ord. Ministries	Pastor	Zoltán Kovács	present
WG Liturgy	Pastor	Erika Stalcup	present
WG Discipline and Legal Affairs	Sup.	Wilfried Nausner	present
WG Children and Youth	Layperson	Simon J. Zürcher	present
AG Church and Society	Pastor	Marietjie Odendaal	present
WG Women's Work	Pastor	Monika Zuber	present
Coordinator	Layperson	Barbara Bünger	excused
Assistant to the Bishop		Urs Schweizer	present
European Secretary GBGM	Pastor	Üllas Tankler	present
Methodist Archive Zurich	Layperson	Ueli Kindlimann	present
guest		Sylvie Nzambe	partially present

Friday, November 21, 2025, 2:05 p.m.

Reflection at the Hotel Gromada, Warsaw

Erika Stalcup invites to a reflection. All three reflections of this conference are based on the new vision statement of the UMC. The first takes up the theme "Love boldly". It can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

Bishop Stefan expresses his sincere thanks for the reflection.

Friday, November 21, 2025, 2.30 p.m.

Plenary session at the Hotel Gromada, Warsaw

Bishop Stefan asks the Executive Committee to discuss the current situation in groups of three, which they dutifully do.

Bishop Stefan gives an overview of the program of the meeting in Warsaw. He also refers to the agreement on cooperation in the Executive Committee. This was attached to the documents for the meeting.

We then take a break.

Friday, November 21, 2025, 4 p.m.

Plenary session at the Hotel Gromada, Warsaw

Bishop Stefan points out that at the Executive Committee meeting in Winterthur, we set up a working group on the digital presence and visibility of the MSE Regional Conference. Ben Nausner and Urs Schweizer remained from the working group and will now work with the Executive Committee to develop the options for the digital presence. He expressed his sincere thanks for this.

Ben Nausner looks back at the task that was decided at the end of the Central Conference in Winterthur. It was not so clear where the various countries stood and how they were progressing in this area. What works? What exists, but is not really reaching people? He invites people to discuss the following questions in small groups:

1. what is the current situation

1. what are we doing to be visible at regional conference level?
2. what is happening at country level? → What is working in your countries, what is not?
3. where is your expertise?

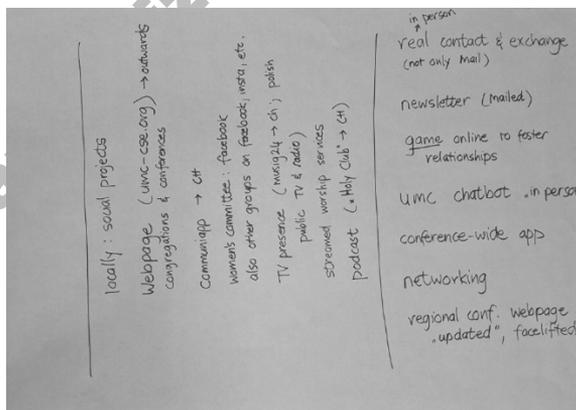
2. expectations/vision

1. what are your expectations regarding a stronger visibility and communication of the regional conference?
2. what would be a common vision - what ideas do you have for networking the regional conference in the digital space?

3. our contribution

1. what could my country's contribution look like?
2. how can we support and participate in the work of such a group from different countries?

Four groups thought about this and wrote it down on a flipchart:



No French-language website
 Visibility/communication in AG with multiple countries & languages
 Central platform for European resources
 Visibility for working groups to share the work done by WG.
 Storytelling for trust-building

Standard for common national/pending transition

ANNUAL THEME for Regional Conference
 (our best idea* from this group!)

*Ullas' personal thought about Europe's idea 12

~~information~~
 information on every local congregation's website about the UTC as an international church

Plattform for Exchange
 e.g. like the 'CommuniApp' in Switzerland

focus on the benefits of being an international church
 → e.g. you can travel and visit other UTC-churches

Websites
 · Regional Conference → sharing information for insiders (primary)
 · Macedonia
 · Hungary
 · Poland
 · Switzerland
Facebook / Instagram / Youtube (Livestreams)
 · Hungary
 · Switzerland
 · Macedonia (weekly)
 · Poland
Newsletter
 Upper Room - Email (daily)

Expectations/needs
 · Info/News/Pictures (regional/worldwide)
 · for the level of leaders to share with the congregations (and interested persons). Links websites/soc. medias

Contributions
 · Connexio-prayer
 · Newsletter every Friday (Switzerland)
 · News from events
 · Articles from magazines
 · Devotion (Upper Room, daily)

Ben Nausner thanks everyone for their cooperation. He gives the opportunity to comment on the results of the groups and, above all, to make suggestions as to what the project group should work on in concrete terms. Are there any ideas, impulses or needs? It also needs to be clarified what is "important" and what is "nice to have". Do we need that?

Erika Stalcup: I could imagine a platform where we can see what the various working groups of the regional conference are doing. Something where we can see what has been developed and what resources are available. I now have the impression that I have to look in lots of different places to get my bearings. It would be handy to have it all in one place.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: Of course, it's also a question of how technical developments will continue, especially with regard to AI. How is the internet developing (and is it still needed?), which apps are in demand and how is artificial intelligence developing? Do we as a regional conference still need a homepage at all in view of AI? AI could also be used with regard to the different languages. However, I have the impression that we don't have much drive to work on this. Now I mainly go to the website of our regional conference, to get addresses, but hardly for information. It seems to me that personal contacts are more important for us.

Bishop Stefan: We said that we are interested in mutual information. We also want it to be better known that we as a church are more than just a single congregation. But there are so many opportunities outside of us to get information or be influenced. It's not easy to find a good way. We can certainly share resources, but how do we do that technically and concretely?

Bożena Daszuta: We would like to know what is happening in the different countries. I don't think it's necessary to make a new offer. We need newsletters like the one from Connexio, for example. This could then be distributed by one person in one country to the whole country. We can't always burden the pastors with this. It needs someone who has the heart for it. I believe that it is important that we inform each other and that we experience that we are a larger community.

Urs Schweizer: When I hear your feedback, I get the impression that it doesn't seem to you to be of fundamental necessity that we invest heavily in technical innovations and build something completely new, but rather that this seems to be something in the area of "nice to have", also because a lot of money and manpower would be required. I hear that at the moment it's more about improving or making better use of what already exists.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: The feeling and the conversation today are different to the one at the regional conference in Winterthur. Can we pinpoint the reason for this?

Ben Nausner: In Winterthur, we realized in our discussions that it would be helpful if we could have a strategy for joint communication. But now we are in a different place, where we are asking ourselves more fundamentally whether a concept is actually needed. In

Winterthur we asked what could be helpful (but even then we couldn't answer directly), and now in Warsaw we are asking what we need (and the answer isn't any easier).

Urs Schweizer: If we leave it as it is now, I would like to point out some existing things that we can use: First of all, there is the Connexio Monthly Prayer, which Connexio publishes every month. This could easily be used in several countries and would only need to be translated. I also send it to all superintendents when it concerns our episcopal area. This would make information and prayer requests from our regional conference known among us. Another joint project is the Prayer Handbook of the British Methodist Church, for which I will soon be asking you again for prayer requests. The UMC in Hungary, for example, has used such texts for its own publication. This would also be possible for other countries. And thirdly, there is a regular Connexio Mission Talk in which anyone who wants to can take part. In January, Bożena Daszuta will be a guest at one of these Mission Talks. My aim is to publicize the resources that are already available.

Marietje Odendaal: I would like the prayer requests in the Connexio monthly prayer to include as many concrete examples and situations as possible. I sometimes get the impression that they are formulated in very general terms and therefore sound quite similar regardless of the country and situation.

Urs Schweizer: Thank you for your help.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you Urs and Ben for helping us with this question.

Bishop Stefan: We would now like to hear what has happened in your working groups over the last 6 months since the Central Conference in Winterthur. We'll start by hearing from the Working Group Children and Youth.

Working Group Children and Youth

Represented by Simon J. Zürcher

Simon J. Zürcher: You have read the report written by Ivana Pastor. Some of you attended the YouMe, it was a good time and a good experience. The biggest challenge now is what to do next. At the moment, we are thinking of holding a meeting like this every two or three years. It's not easy to find a suitable location. That's why we will probably switch to a three-year cycle. Secondly, we would like to send young people to the EMYCF. It is not easy for the working group to always find the time for this work, which is why we would also like to send other young people to the EMYCF. We are therefore dependent on you giving us names.

Gjergi Luskha, Rares Calugar, Zoltán Kovács and Bishop Stefan were at the YouMe in Cluj-Napoca and talk about their positive impressions. They emphasize that it is important that there is a new edition. It was a first step and needs further steps. It was also good that pastors were there. The encounters were very natural. It is also possible that there could be bilateral visits by young people from two countries, for example.

Üllas Tankler: GBGM supported the project and I am very grateful and happy about it. It is money well spent. In future, however, it will probably be difficult to get money from GBGM for such events, because there will no longer be any direct support, but it will flow into the Mission in Europe fund. In future, the way forward will therefore be to apply to the Mission in Europe Fund for such money.

Markus Bach: We have seen the YouMe statement and realized that no money from the regional conference was needed for this. However, we have earmarked a budget item for the coming years. This means that funding will continue to be available from the regional conference. The money is available, it can (and should!) be used. Please continue, we are happy to support you.

Bishop Stefan: I was there too and enjoyed both the church services and the workshops. I was also very inspired by the talks. Many thanks to the people who were involved here.

Rares Calugar: I also think that the Sunday service in particular was a very good experience, especially for our own UMC congregation.

Bishop Stefan: How else can we from the working group support you?

Gjergj Lushka: That's not easy to say. We already feel a lot of support. The working group will meet in spring 2026 and Martin Obermeir-Siegrist has invited us.

Bishop Stefan: We would very much like to encourage the Working Group Children and Youth to organize more camps like this. Please also note section 5.2. in the office report on GYPC. If you have young people in your conference, please register them with Simon. The number of participants is not limited.

Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs

Represented by Wilfried Nausner

Wilfried Nausner: We haven't done much so far. We have been waiting for the decision on regionalization. We will discuss the next steps with the Regional Conference Germany.

Bishop Stefan: In the Bishops' Council at the beginning of November 2025, we were able to ratify the result in favour of regionalization based on the votes in all Annual Conferences. Regionalization will come into force immediately after the announcement. I have therefore made the superintendents aware of this. And we will also change our use of language and occasionally revise the documents. At a global level, we are also in the process of revising the Church Order with regard to regionalization and the associated terminology. However, it will still be a while before the whole thing can be implemented in the USA. It has less of an impact on us.

Wilfried Nausner: Another concern of our working group is the question of who decided that the Social Principles cannot be adapted. I can't find any such decision. I don't think that's true. We will take a closer look at this.

Working Group Episcopacy

Represented by Serge Frutiger

Serge Frutiger: I have nothing to report. Our last meeting was in March 2025 at the regional conference in Winterthur. We will have a discussion with Bishop Stefan over dinner this evening.

Working Group Liturgy

Represented by Erika Stalcup

Erika Stalcup: We have communicated by email in the working group. We have drawn up a list of seven work opportunities for the working group that could be of interest to the regional conference. I will pass the list through the ranks. Please mark on the list what you think is important or helpful.

Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries

Represented by Zoltán Kovács

Zoltán Kovács: We met in October. Two members from Austria and Serbia have unfortunately left us. I will clarify their successors with the bishop.

There were various topics that we talked about. We talked about the General Conference document "By Water and Spirit". Essentially, however, we talked about the meaning of membership. We realized that there is a difference in German between "Bekennendem Glied" (member of the body of Christ) and membership as a legal affiliation to the church as an institution. How is this to be assessed?

There are also practical questions to clarify about how baptism is to be understood and applied as the basis for membership. We also discussed the difference between the use of the admission questions of the Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa and the Regional Conference Church Order. It seems to us that a certain consistency is needed.

Our next meeting will take place in March 2026.

Working Group Women's Work

Represented by Monika Zuber

Monika Zuber: We are preparing a consultation for women leaders of the Regional Conference. This consultation is to take place in Poland. I therefore ask you to send your responsible persons to the consultation and motivate them. I have been in the working group for 13 years and would like to be replaced. We will see if we can find a person.

Bishop Stefan: Many thanks to all of you in the working groups for the work you are doing. I would now like to invite you to pray before we go to dinner.

Friday, November 21, 2025, 6:15 p.m.

Dinner at the Hotel Gromada, Warsaw

Friday, November 21, 2025, 8:00 p.m.

Listening and sharing at Hotel Gromada, Warsaw

Urs Schweizer is organizing an evening in memory of Wilfried Meyer, Jan Ostryk, Robert Seitz and Hugh Johnson. We will sing the songs "In the Lord I'll be ever thankful" and "In God alone". We then listen to a report on the situation in North Africa by *Freddy Nzambe*, which we conclude with a time of prayer. We share other stories in which we were able to experience God's closeness and accompaniment.

Urs Schweizer thanks and bids farewell to *Üllas Tankler* after two decades as European Secretary of the GBGM. *Bożena Daszuta* and *Rares Calugar* express their special thanks from their respective countries. *Üllas Tankler* thanked them warmly for their kind words and pointed out that he had always enjoyed coming to our conferences and was happy to come again now. Now he also knew why Bishop Stefan had specially invited him again.

Urs Schweizer presents *Üllas* with small paving stones made of Swiss chocolate, because he has paved many paths and will continue to do so. In gratitude, he sings him his self-composed song "My friend".

Bishop Stefan thanks *Urs Schweizer* for organizing the evening. The detailed text can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

Friday, November 21, 2025, 9:00 p.m.

Evening prayer at the Hotel Gromada, Warsaw

Erika Stalcup leads the evening prayer on the "serve joyfully" part of the vision statement. It can be found attached to the minutes.

Minutes Executive Committee Saturday, November 22, 2025

Saturday, November 22, 2025, 08:30 a.m.

Morning reflection at Hotel Gromada, Warsaw

Erika Stalcup invites us to a morning reflection. She takes up the theme of "lead courageously" from the vision statement. The devotion can be found in the appendix to the minutes.

Saturday, November 22, 2025, 09.00 a.m.

Plenary session at the Hotel Gromada, Warsaw

Bishop Stefan introduces Ueli Kindlimann. He is the person responsible for the archives of the Regional Conference of Central and Southern Europe. He asks him to give us an overview of his activities.

Ueli Kindlimann thanks us for allowing him to be here and gives us an overview of his work. It is the archive of the Regional Conference of Central and Southern Europe. So it is *our* archive! It is located at the Bishop's headquarters in Zurich at Badenerstrasse 69.

Ueli Kindlimann introduces the European archives of the UMC. He talks about the general work of an archivist, which he does all day long. He describes his work as collecting, organizing, making available and preserving for the long term. He then gives a brief insight into the archives of the Regional Conference of Central and Southern Europe. Finally, he refers to the homepage of the archive and the library, which is also located at Badenerstrasse 69 in Zurich: www.bibliothek.emk-schweiz.ch

Bishop Stefan thanked Ueli Kindlimann warmly for the insight into the archives. The Executive Committee gives a warm round of applause.

We then take a break.

Saturday, November 22, 2025, 10:30 a.m.

Plenary session at the Hotel Gromada, Warsaw

Bishop Stefan gives the opportunity to ask questions about Ueli Kindlimann's report.

Andrzej Malicki: I am very interested in what documents are available on Poland. Are there any ways of finding out about them? I would also be interested in receiving the whole of today's presentation.

Markus Bach: I'll upload the document to our Dropbox.

Ueli Kindlimann: Send me an e-mail with your specific concerns or questions. This is the easiest way for me to record and answer your concerns.

Üllas Tankler: How do you deal with documents in other languages that are not readable for us?

Ueli Kindlimann: I have the privilege that Ueli Frei can read the Cyrillic characters, so we can also have an idea of them.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I am interested in how we should deal with documents that we have also archived here. Every conference has its own archive. There are certainly also documents that we have archived twice. How should we deal with them?

Ueli Kindlimann: It is quite possible that there is duplication. The church constitution obliges the annual conferences to keep an archive. If it happens that we have collected duplicates, this is not a problem. Then the original belongs in the archive of the respective country, and I archive a copy of it.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you very much, Ueli, for your comments and your work in our archives.

Report of the Office of the Regional Conference

Represented by Bishop Stefan Zürcher

Bishop Stefan thanks the Office of the Regional Conference and in particular Markus Bach, who wrote most of the report, and Urs Schweizer for preparing the report.

We will go through the office's report section by section.

Re 3.3 Publication of the Social Principles, the Social Creed and the Guidelines for a responsible Way of Life

Emil Zaev: What exactly is published in the Social Principles? How extensive is this document?

Bishop Stefan: The Social Principles contain about 25 pages. In addition, there is also the Social Creed, and we would also like to publish the Guidelines for a responsible Way of Life.

Markus Bach: The Regional Conference Germany has already published a booklet with the Social Principles. However, it does not contain our additional texts and footnotes. I am in the process of creating a digital version that can then be translated in the various countries. I hope to be able to do this soon.

Re 3.4 Representation of the Regional Conference of Central and Southern Europe on the General Board on Church and Society (GBCS)

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: Can you say something else about Philipp Hadorn? And wouldn't we then also have to elect him to our Working Group Church and Society?

Bishop Stefan: Philipp Hadorn is a layperson and belongs to the local church of Gerlafingen. He is well integrated there. He is 58 years old. It is certainly possible that we could elect him to a Working Group. But that still needs to be discussed with him.

Markus Bach: Philipp Hadorn is currently a member of our Judicial Council. As such, he is not allowed to be in a committee or Working Group of the regional conference. However, we will certainly find a way with him to ensure that GBCS issues find their way into our Working Group.

Bishop Stefan: Does this information help us to make a decision? Let's vote on the Office proposal.

The Executive Committee unanimously decides to send Philipp Hadorn to the General Board on Church and Society as representative of the Regional Conference of Central and Southern Europe.

Re 4.1 Endowment Fund

Bishop Stefan: The superintendents have received a letter from me about the Endowment Fund. The Connectional Table and the Council of Bishops have done a lot of work on this. It has frightened some of them as to what needs to be done. I suggest that we take this up in a way that suits us. We do not have the same situation and the same opportunities as the church in the USA. But it is good if we also take part in the collection. After all, we also benefit from it. Whether and how you can take up the vision statement at the same time is up to you to decide. I'm not so happy about the link that was made.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I would like to emphasize two things. Firstly, the Connectional Table worked on the vision statement, and I was surprised that this has now been linked to the Endowment Fund collection. The Connectional Table knew nothing about this. Secondly: The Endowment Fund is important for us. It is good when it is well filled. But the question remains as to which pastors we will need in the future, what role the pastors will have in the future and what we will train them for? I'm not sure that we really need people with a Master's degree.

Andrzej Malicki: I agree with you, Stefan. We have to be able to handle it in our own way. Training is important, especially for our seminar in Warsaw.

Emil Zaeve: What exactly is meant by the Endowment Fund?

Bishop Stefan: In 2014, the "Endowment Fund¹ for Theological Education" was established to ensure the long-term financing of theological education outside the United

¹ An "endowment fund" is a sum of money that is invested in order to finance charitable activities from the proceeds. As a rule, the initial capital comes from donations. The aim of the planned collection is to increase this fund.

States. The fund supplements the "Central Conference Theological Education Fund", which was established by the General Conference in 2012 and is financed by contributions from local churches. These contributions fluctuate and have decreased from 10 million dollars to 5 million dollars in the 2025-2028 budget. The Endowment Fund for Theological Education is now intended to create a more reliable basis for the "Central Conference Theological Education Fund".

The Endowment Fund currently has 2 million dollars and a further 1 million dollars in pledged donations. Of this, four percent interest income is distributed annually via the "Theological Education Fund of the Central Conference". This money is used to finance scholarships, digital learning opportunities, specialist literature and teaching staff. In the last distribution round, the Central Conference Theological Education Fund supported 83 projects with a total of USD 1.26 million. Several of these belong to our Central Conference. The Endowment Fund is to be increased to USD 30 to 35 million through the worldwide special collection in order to be able to support more and more reliable projects in the future through interest income.

Rares Calugar: I have already been able to benefit several times from the "Theological Education Fund of the Central Conference", for myself or for the Roma work of our church in Romania. It really is a good thing.

Re 5.2 Global Young People Convocation (GYPC)

Urs Schweizer: Next summer there will be a Swiss meeting of the Jungschar in Switzerland. We have sent out the information that you can send 1 or 2 delegates who can bring the experiences back to your countries. The invitation is still valid, even if we have not yet received any registration from you. Please take advantage of this and send leaders so that they can benefit from it. This exchange is also supported by the Mission in Europe Fund.

Re 6.3 Connectional Table

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: Our main work currently consists of the question of how the vision statement can be translated and implemented in the various boards, agencies and cultures. Bishop Harald Rückert is very much involved here. In the USA, our people are very busy with the other financial issues. From my point of view, it is not always clear what we can actually talk about and decide at the Connectional Table.

Christine Schneider: The General Conference is currently being prepared, and it has been determined that for the first time there will be fewer US participants than other participants. It will be more difficult in terms of finances, so we will also have to ask ourselves whether we could give more. At the moment, the regional conferences contribute practically nothing to the General Conference budget.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: In the long term, it will probably become increasingly difficult to hold such global meetings in the USA due to the entry restrictions. Next year's Gathering will be held in Canada because not all countries would be able to obtain a visa for the

USA. The fear of reprisals in the USA against non-white people is increasing alarmingly. In our conversations, people are very careful about what they say so as not to fear reprisals. I would also like to point out what is happening in the Philippines. The Connectional Table meeting took place there. There are major problems there, such as corruption, mismanagement and human trafficking. A number of human rights are not respected, especially when dealing with people working abroad. In some cases, this is a new form of slavery. Our church is working very hard to help the people affected.

Urs Schweizer: With regard to the finances of the global church, I would like to mention that we pay into two funds: the General Administration Fund and the Episcopal Fund. We are already paying more than we should according to the established formula. It would therefore be necessary to adjust this key. And because these contributions are offset against the Connexio project support, I would like to add another piece of information: The Connexio Board will meet at the beginning of December so that we will then know what the budget for the next few years will look like.

Re 7 Miscellaneous

Bishop Stefan points out the importance of the European meeting of the Executive Committees in Reutlingen: We start on Wednesday, March 11, 2026 as the Executive Committee of the MSE Regional Conference. It is good if you can arrive the day before. We are planning the joint meeting from Thursday to Saturday lunchtime. Afterwards, we will talk to the countries that receive pastor salary support about funding in the coming years. In terms of content, it is about the future organization of the UMC in Europe. The question arises as to how many bishops we can still count on in the future and how the regional conferences should be divided up so that it is helpful for our church. We want to be proactive and not simply wait and see what is decided in the USA.

Ben Nausner: Are there ways in which we can prepare for this? That would be helpful.

Bishop Stefan: Yes, we will send you documents in advance. There is a preparatory group that includes László Khaled and Erika Stalcup from our side.

Marietjie Odendaal: Are the chairs of the working groups also invited?

Bishop Stefan: Yes. We will be the largest delegation. It seemed important to us that we could be together with all of the Executive Committee. It is important that we are all involved in the process.

Andrzej Malicki: Is the date for our meeting in fall 2026 in Prague already known?

Bishop Stefan: We are currently still clarifying which date is possible.

Markus Bach: I would ask that we make sure that Eternity Sunday remains free. This will help me with the planning in my parish. Others probably feel the same way.

Bishop Stefan thanks Ivana Procházková warmly for the prompt and uncomplicated invitation to Prague. We are happy to come and accept the invitation.

Bishop Stefan: Christine Schneider has asked me about the languages at the regional conference. Please let us know your request.

Christine Schneider: Language is very important. I know that the Executive Committee decided a few years ago to hold its meetings in English. I am now wondering why we don't do the same for the meetings of the Regional Conference, which take place every four years. It would be an act of fairness, because it would be a foreign language for almost everyone. We would all be able to discuss with each other on an equal footing. I am rather surprised that this is not already the case. We could also save money. The Executive Committee can't decide this for the regional conference, it has to do it itself. But we would have to decide whether we want to vote on it in 2029 so that we can implement it from 2033. I would just like to ask what you think about this question.

Andrzej Malicki: From my point of view, that would be perfect. I have no problem with such a change. But it would be up to the German speakers to decide, as it affects them.

Bożena Daszuta: I would also like to mention that the translation in Winterthur was a big and difficult job. The translators couldn't always follow.

Markus Bach: The regulations stipulate that the regional conference must be held in German and English. There could perhaps still be a way to avoid having to wait until 2033 by deciding to give it a try in 2029 to see if this is possible. At the end of the meeting, we could then vote on whether the regulations should be changed or not.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I am against it. It's not just German speakers who would be affected by such a change. I also wonder how it will be possible to understand a foreign language if the translators can't even keep up. Thirdly, we would then also have to consider in which language our church constitution should be written. I am not in favor of making such a change.

Emil Zaev: I am glad that we can speak in English. I would like to support that. The majority speak another language. Basically, I think that the English language should be pushed back and that German should be strengthened. But the reality is different.

Wilfried Nausner: I look at it from two sides: We have the problem that we are dealing with different countries and languages. We always have translation problems, no matter how we do it. We have to pay careful attention to how we translate. We also have to distinguish between interpretation and translation. Minorities are always at a disadvantage. With regard to the Church Order, we have the problem that our people don't look at our Church Order when they have questions, but at the Book of Discipline - and that's not the same thing.

Ben Nausner: We also have to learn to use the new modern translation possibilities (AI).

Erika Stalcup: It's not easy dealing with minorities and majorities. With my English mother tongue, I am one of those who can express myself well. In my Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa, however, I belong to the minority. We also need to clarify why we don't have an English-language church constitution.

Christine Schneider: Thank you for the feedback, it helps me. I am a language nerd and love German. The different languages are also a richness. So I am well aware that we also pay a price if we only speak in English.

Bishop Stefan: We are taking up the issue in the Regional Conference office and considering how we will proceed.

Stefan Schröckenfuchs: I was surprised that we are talking about "Regional Conference" instead of "Central Conference". I have not received any official notification.

Bishop Stefan: I wrote to all superintendents in November 2025 after the Bishops' Council had ratified the constitutional amendments. I probably didn't make the consequences clear enough and also didn't make it clear enough that they apply immediately.

Christine Schneider: For us, it's really just a name change, but in the United States it's much more than that. It's about the question of how we can become more regional as a church. There are several interesting articles on this by Lui Tran, which I will send to the secretary (in German and English) for those who are interested. It is also about how we can continue to be a common church even with regionalization.

Bishop Stefan: Thank you very much for your participation. That concludes the office report. I would now ask Rares Calugar to pray with us before we go to the photo session and lunch.

Rares Calugar says a prayer.

Afterwards we take a group photo with the bishop.



Saturday, November 22, 2025, 12:15 p.m.

Lunch at the Hotel Gromada, Warsaw

Saturday, November 22, 2025, 1.30 p.m.

Plenary session at the Hotel Gromada, Warsaw

Bishop Stefan: We still have the Working Group Church and Society left, whose concerns we would like to take up now. I ask Marietje Odendaal to take the floor.

Working Group Church and Society

Represented by Marietje Odendaal

Marietje Odendaal: In our working group, we talked about a topic from Winterthur. It's about how we view people who seek asylum here and end up in our communities. How do we deal with them? I would like to invite us to talk about this in small groups. One person said that they had invested time and energy in accompanying an asylum seeker or refugee, and when they had settled down, they left. That was a frustrating experience. It also happens that people have subsequently turned to other churches. We ask ourselves how we can help the churches and such people. It takes a lot of strength to accompany such people. What is your experience of providing long-term support to asylum seekers? What is important to you and what would help you? Discuss it in small groups and then we'll talk about it.

We discuss the question in small groups.

Marietje Odendaal: Thank you for the discussion. Please share what has been on your minds.

Erika Stalcup: It's similar to our question about language. It also has to do with majorities and minorities - and the reasons why these people come to us. How do we accept that? How do we perceive them as minorities in our communities? We often formulate our prayers from the perspective of the rich and hardly from that of people in such difficulties. We need to ask ourselves how we can pray so that these people are also included and feel addressed.

Gjergj Lushka: I spoke from the perspective of Albania. We are affected by people leaving Albania. In Tirana, we also had to learn how to welcome people with a migration background when a family from Ireland came to our community. They felt welcome, but it was also difficult for us as they didn't speak Albanian. However, we also benefited from learning together how to praise God in other languages. There are also people from other countries, and we have to learn how to live with them.

Ben Nausner: There are also people in our congregations who get involved and are then disappointed when these people leave us again. But it's not up to us what they decide. It is important that they also have the freedom to decide for or against us. We also want families to come.

Marietje Odendaal: Thank you for your cooperation.

Bishop Stefan: With regard to the date in November 2026, I have been in discussions and consulted my diary. No other week seems to fit than the same as this year, with Eternity Sunday. Would it therefore help if we ended the meeting on Saturday? We would then already start on Thursday noon, November 19, 2026 and end on Saturday noon, November 21, 2026.

Bishop Stefan: I don't hear a strict no. We will take a closer look at this in the Office of the regional conference and will let you know the date. Keep the time from Thursday free for the Executive Committee meeting.

Bishop Stefan: That concludes our deliberations and we will take a walk through the old town of Warsaw.

Saturday, November 22, 2025, 2:30 p.m.

Walk in Warsaw

Saturday, November 22, 2025, 6:15 p.m.

Dinner at Restaurant Wiesz Co Zjesz

Saturday, November 22, 2025, 7:00 p.m.

Concert in the UMC Warsaw

The pianist Vinayak Chaturvedi plays works by Frédéric Chopin:

- Polonaise in C sharp minor, Op. 26, No. 1
- Waltz in C sharp minor, Op. 64, No. 2
- Nocturne in D flat major, Op. 27, No. 2
- Nocturne in C minor, Op. 48, No. 1
- Ballade in A major, Op. 47

and an original composition after the interval:

- The River of Chopin

Minutes Executive Committee Sunday, November 23, 2025

Sunday, November 23, 2025, 11:00 a.m.

Worship service in the UMC Warsaw

The worship service at the end of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Regional Conference of Central and Southern Europe will take place in the United Methodist Church in Warsaw together with the local congregation.

The sermon will be preached by *Bishop Stefan Zürcher* on Micah 5 and can be found in the appendix to the minutes. The Polish liturgy will be led by *Superintendent Andrzej Malicki* and *Pastor Wojciech Ostrowski* of the Warsaw congregation. *Pianist Vinayak Chaturvedi* will accompany them on the piano.

Following the service, the members of the Executive Committee and the congregation are invited to lunch.

These minutes of the 84th session of the Executive Committee of the Regional Conference of Central and Southern Europe, held in Warsaw, Poland, from November 21 to 23, 2025, were examined and declared correct.

The examiners of the minutes:
Christine Schneider and Serge Frutiger

84th meeting of the Executive Committee
Regional Conference Central and Southern Europe
Warsaw, November 21, 2025

FRIDAY AFTERNOON MEDITATION

Love Boldly:

We passionately love God and, like Jesus, embrace and include people of every age, nation, race, gender, and walk of life.

Sometimes reading scripture is like peeling back the layers of an onion. One passage leads to another, which was inspired by another, which changes our interpretation of another... The two readings build on Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which commands us to love God with all our being. To this core is added another layer – to love our neighbor as ourself.

In order to love my neighbor like I love myself, I need to love myself. Not in an egoistic way that sets me above others, but in a way that recognizes that I have been made in the image of God, and that I matter to God. This is already a challenge for many of us, to realize how beloved we are.

But the text doesn't actually say, "Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself," but "love your neighbor AS YOURSELF," meaning I think "as though your neighbor was yourself, as though you and your neighbor are the same self, as though you and your neighbor are united in one body." This is something different... for this means that my neighbor and I are one being. What hurts my neighbor hurts me, and what helps my neighbor helps me.

This seems quite natural if my neighbor is someone who already lives close to me. Of course the thunderstorm that damaged my house will probably also damage my neighbor's house. If local taxes are reduced, both my immediate neighbors and I will also benefit. We have many experiences in common because we live and exist near each other, and so our destinies are linked because of this geographical closeness. But in Luke's gospel, the commandment to love neighbor as self is followed by another question, "Who is my neighbor?" Is it the person who is like me? Is it the person I already like? And Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan shows us a very different kind of neighbor. Who was the neighbor to the man who was beaten and left to die by the side of the road? The neighbor was a foreigner, a despised foreigner, someone considered as an enemy. How will the man lying by the side of the road love this neighbor? Will his ideas about his "enemy" change? Will he be grateful for the compassion he received? Will he follow the commandment to love this neighbor as though they shared one body? What I take away from this is that loving is not dependent on liking.

The first part of the UMC vision statement calls us to love boldly. Why might we need to be bold to love? Is it maybe because we are called to love people who are not like us? Even people who we don't like? Even to treat people we don't like as though we share

one body? As though we *are* one body, the body of Christ? I think so. And I think the call is more radical than that. I think we are called not only to love people whose circumstances force us to be with, but also to intentionally look for people we don't like – and find ways to love them.

I think it's interesting that the vision statement asks us to love passionately. This is perhaps not a word that all of us would use in everyday life. But the word passion comes from the Latin *passionem*, meaning "enduring" or "suffering" – something that we have to go through. This is why we speak of Christ's suffering on the cross as the *passion* of Christ. Further evidence that loving and liking are not always the same thing. If I were to change the vision statement, I might replace the word "passionately" with "sacrificially." Certainly sacrifice sounds much less exciting than passion, but at least it explains why we need boldness to do it.

Learning how to love people we do not like is so important. Because when we only love people we like, and who are like us, we can start to believe that some lives are worth more than others, that some people are more God's children than others. And this lie opens the door to all kinds of violence and abuses of power.

I invite us to continue this reflection individually, taking time to consider the questions listed in the program. You may use this time to write or simply to meditate and pray. Who do you find it easy or hard to love? How do you express your love for God? How might God be calling you and your community to love boldly, and what does that look like?

BENEDICTION

Go forth to love deeply, widely, boldly. May God's blessing be upon our living, our loving and our learning. Amen.

Erika Stalcup

<p style="text-align: center;">84th meeting of the Executive Committee Regional Conference Central and Southern Europe Warsaw, November 22, 2025</p>
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SATURDAY MORNING DEVOTION

Lead Courageously:

Following Jesus' example, we resist and dismantle all systems of evil, injustice, and oppression, striving for peace, justice, and reconciliation.

Ever since I began officiating at baptisms, I have always been struck by the intensity of United Methodist baptismal vows. They do not begin by a commitment to be kind or generous or gentle. They begin by renouncing wickedness, rejecting evil and resisting injustice and oppression.

On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you:
Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,
reject the evil powers of this world,
and repent of your sin?

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves?

I notice that in the many churches, it is easier to pray for people who suffer than to act to eliminate the cause of suffering. With the children of my church, we talk about things to which we say yes (like listening, respecting others, being helpful and loving), and things to which we say no (like selfishness, hurtful language and violence). I worry sometimes that in church we are slow to say “no” because we are afraid of being “political.” I have never understood this fear. Just because people debate particular issues in the political arena doesn’t mean that we can’t talk about them in church or that they are somehow not polite. Our baptismal vows remind us that we not only have the right to say “no” to evil and injustice, but that it is our duty. The language is strong – renouncing the spiritual forces of wickedness and rejecting the evil powers of this world – and we might have the impression that these are tasks for superheros, or people with a lot more power and influence than you and I have. And yet... these vows are for all of us, people of all ages and stages. How does church equip us to do this? How do our language and our worship practices and our holy habits teach us to resist evil and oppression, especially those of us who fear conflict and who do not feel called to be activists?

At this time, I invite you to into a time of group reflection on this theme of leading courageously by actively resisting evil and oppression. In groups of 3-4, share where you see systemic injustice or oppression in your context. How does your church address these situations? How do you wish your church could address these situations? Take time to pray with and for one another.

BENEDICTION

May God bless our saying yes and our saying no. May we be filled with a courage beyond our own, and may each word and action reveal something of God’s realm, where all are safe and where all are free to flourish. Amen.

Erika Stalcup

84th meeting of the Executive Committee
Regional Conference Central and Southern Europe
Warsaw, November 23, 2025

Sermon on Micah 5:1-5

Introduction

The Ruler to Be Born in Bethlehem (ESV)

1 Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.

2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.

4 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.

5 And he shall be their peace. When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men;

6 they shall shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its entrances; and he shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and treads within our border.

- Lately, I have been asked repeatedly: How can one live and celebrate as a Christian in the face of all the hardships and crises in the world—celebrate worship services or, soon again, Christmas?
- In this passage, I discovered three characteristics of an attitude as believers in this time, namely: mourning, hopeful, peacemaking.

I) Mourning

- Micah wrote this during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.
 - The king is treated with particular disgrace. An incredible humiliation and degradation.
 - That was the situation: a captive people, a humiliated king—a catastrophically desolate state of God's people.
- Verse 5:1 describes elements of a mourning ritual in ancient Israel. Micah calls on to mourn.
 - Collective mourning is the appropriate response.
- What about the situation in our world today? Just two examples:
 - The terrible wars in the Ukraine, Sudan, and other parts of the world, with all the suffering they cause.
 - They reveal what humans are capable of and how helpless they are in finding solutions.

- The *climate crisis*, which is largely man-made. Many people, especially younger people, are afraid of the future.
 - But there is no sign of any serious willingness on the part of those who have the means and the opportunity to make a difference.
- The prophet calls on his listeners at that time to *mourn*, to mourn *collectively*.
- What does it mean to mourn?
 - Mourning is not simply the feeling of sadness.
 - Mourning is an active way of dealing with events that cause fear or uncertainty, or emptiness.
- A *loss* can trigger these. Of course, the loss of a loved one.
 - But also, for example, the loss of the certainty that in 50 or 100 years, creation will still be a basis for life that makes life worth living.
- Another trigger can be an *insight*. For example, the insight that we fail in our claim to love, and become guilty.
- Grief helps us to cope with fear, uncertainty, and emptiness.
 - It means alternating between distancing oneself and confronting oneself.
- From time to time, we need to distance ourselves.
 - No one can withstand constant exposure to negativity. We would become ill.
 - But we must not simply repress it either. That would also make us ill.
 - It is therefore necessary to confront them again and again, even emotionally.
 - Sometimes distance, sometimes confrontation—this alternation enables us to deal with and overcome fear, uncertainty, and emptiness in a healthy way.
- Grieving helps us learn to face the reality which is sometimes simply terrible, without letting it overwhelm us.
 - Mourning enables us to remain capable to begin to change situations.
- In this respect, mourning also is a source of comfort and hope.
 - Psalm 126 tells us about this. And perhaps *Jesus* also had this in mind when he said: "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*"
- This brings us to the second characteristic:

II) Hopeful

- In verse 5:2, a new ruler is announced. He will come from *Bethlehem Ephrathah*, a small village, the birthplace of King David.
 - So the future ruler will not come from the current royal dynasty in Jerusalem.
- In the place, where a great story began around 1000 BC, with a shepherd boy, David, another great story will begin.
 - God is planning a new beginning, proclaims the prophet.
- Great things begin small and inconspicuous with God. That is God's way.
 - So it is not surprising that to become human, God chose the insignificant town of Bethlehem.
 - And it is not surprising that shepherds—people who were considered worthless in society—were the first to spread the Christmas message.
- That was also *Jesus'* way: the insignificant ones were the focus of his attention:
 - those without influence or a lobby, those considered unfit for society, including children,
 - the spiritually poor and sinners, and the sick, the burdened and those who suffered and mourned in the world...

- Even in his parables, in which Jesus spoke of the coming of God's new world, the insignificant were at the center.
 - For example, in the parable of the mustard seed and in all the other parables of growth.
 - Jesus made it clear: 'What you see now is only the beginning, the first signs of what is to come.
 - Unspeakably terrible things are happening in the world, but do not give up hope. Expect great things from God.'

- Verse 3 ties in with 4:9f. There it is said that the people cry out in their distress like a woman in labor pains.
 - The meaning is: once the child is born, the labor pains and the time of distress are over.
 - It is limited. A new era is coming.
- The woman and the birth of a child—soon the young Christian community saw the birth of Jesus as a sign of the turning point in history:
 - *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."* (Mark 1:15)
- God has the reins firmly in his hands, says the prophet, and the first Christians bear witness to this in the face of a reality that contradicts it.

- Verse 4 brings us back to the expected ruler. He is characterized as a shepherd – typical for that time.
 - Leading, protecting, and providing for his people describe the *ruler's* tasks.
 - The one who is coming will exercise the office of the good shepherd on God's behalf. And people will find peace.
- Here, too, our thoughts turn to Jesus, who says of himself: *"I am the good shepherd"* (John 10:11),
 - the shepherd who leads the sheep to lush pastures and from the pasture to the safe stable.
- Various images and signs of hope come to us in these verses:
 - God's preference for the inconspicuous; the birth of the child as the beginning of a new era; the good shepherd.
- Hope is "seeing through the horizon." – A beautiful image!
 - The message of Micah, but also the life of Jesus, tear open the horizon,
 - and the eyes of faith see through it into the divine reality.
 - A reality that is very close, and that has the power to transform us from hopeless to hopeful people who pass on hope,
 - to people who don't give up, but act in this world as if the new one were already here – for example, by making peace.
- This brings us to the third characteristic.

III) Peacemaking

- The first sentence in *verse 5* can also be read as: *"There will be peace"* instead of *"he shall be their peace"*.
 - If we translate it this way, the prophet is predicting that peace with Assyria will not come through the expected Prince of Peace, but...
 - through rulers of flesh and blood and armed force!

- Welcome back to the reality of the present! That is our world.
 - Violence is used to try to achieve one's own goals. The stronger side wins.
 - The promised peace of God has not yet filled the world.
- Grief characterizes a Christian attitude, grief that does not repress reality, but also does not allow itself to be paralyzed by it.
 - That is why hope also characterizes the lives of Christians. Hope that discover signs of God's peace beyond the horizon.
 - Sorrow and hope guide us to act in this world in the power of his peace as if the new world were already here, and to make peace.
- Can we do that? Not on our own, but with God, Christ, the longed-for bringer of peace.
 - We can and should join him, because—as the prophet also knows—ultimately, it is He alone who brings peace—in *verse 6*, "we" changes to "He."
 - *He*, not a human being, not even us. But with us!
- Like a seed, he plants his peace in our hearts.
 - There it germinates and grows and, if all goes well, becomes strong and begins to transform the world.
 - That must suffice for us at the moment.
 - But that is not nothing. Signs of God's coming, of his new world. Small beginnings of God's great story.
- Mourning, hopeful, peacemaking—this is how we can live in the footsteps of Jesus Christ in this world. Amen.

Stefan Zürcher

84th meeting of the Executive Committee
 Regional Conference Central and Southern Europe
 Friday, November 21, 2025
 Listening and Sharing

The time we are together tonight is meant to be a time of sharing about joys and sorrows of our Church in the various countries. A time of sharing where we have seen and where we do see God at work. A time of sharing experiences from our own personal lives. But first, we would like to commemorate two men who have left traces of blessings – and who have also served as members of the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe, as it was still called back then. (*light a candle*)

*Christ,
 an educated man in Capernaum
 said to you:
 Just say one word,
 and my servant will be healed.
 Just one word.
 Not two words.
 Not a hundred words.*

*Not avalanches of words.
We speak in a thousand tongues
in tens of thousands of words
into this world
and change it
so little.
But you
with one single word
and with a single glance of your love.
change everything.*

This poem was written by Robert Seitz, who was born in 1940.

Robert Seitz served as pastor of various local churches of The United Methodist Church – and during 8 years as Superintendent of the Basel district, as well.

Being involved with the Jungschar, the Methodist scouts, if you want, he had a formative influence on many children and youth. For some years, he was even president of the Jungschar.

His last appointment before retirement led him to Zurich, where he was also involved in street work. For him, this was much more than a project or a ministry of a local church. It was simply about encountering people as they were. Wherever they might have lived. Especially those on the margins of society. And this last appointment was somehow typical for him, as his life was marked by a deep commitment to people. All people.

It was typical for him, because he did not categorize people. Being a follower of Christ meant to him to speak of a God who sees all people with eyes of love, who embraces all people – and who excludes no one.

Some Christians pretend to have answers to all questions. However, even as a pastor, Robert Seitz remained a person with questions, with doubts – a seeker. He was not satisfied with ready-made answers, but struggled to find a credible, honest way of being a Christian.

He wrestled with the world and its abysses – and sometimes he also struggled with a Church investing into the preservation of an institution while at the same time failing to be a Church existing for the others.

This became visible in his sermons that opened up new horizons and touched the hearts of many people. It also became visible in his poems, which were one expression of his reflections on the beauty of creation.

Robert Seitz passed away in June 2025.

We thank God for his life, for his service, for his courage, for his questions—and above all for the love with which he treated so many people.

*A man had a diary
a beautiful one, bound in red artificial leather
with a silver year number on it
A5 format and large enough
for every hour of the day and every day of the year
And on the lines of this diary,
he wrote, with a silver pen,*

*his appointments and meetings and conferences,
his group sessions,
his evaluation and qualification discussions,
his business lunches and his fitness program,
the schedules of his clubs, and his board meetings
And a sacred ritual took place
when, at the end of a meeting, he was asked
when he could have a next one,
and he had to say:
I'm already booked then, and then too,
and after half an hour, luckily, he found a forgotten slot.
And he wrote and wrote on the lines and complained about
how quickly time was passing,
and the more he wrote, the faster time passed.
And the faster time passed,
the more he wrote in his red diary, A5 format.
And more and more often he began to say he had no time,
and the more he said he had no time,
the more his time actually shortened.*

*And so, his red diary with the silver year number on it was in fact
a time-shortening notebook.
A sophisticated machine in which 24 hours
were much less than 24 hours.
Just endless fragments of time strung together.
Precisely divided times.
Trained and compressed time.
And the man killed time.
Not by doing nothing, but by doing too much.
And while he did so, the birds sang joyfully in the trees,
sharpened their beaks merrily, fell in love, and enjoyed the spring.
And it's hard to believe:
they didn't care about clocks and schedules
and just lived their lives.*

I invite you to sing the Song «In the Lord I'll be ever thankful» – and let us sing it as a prayer of hope.

Hugh Johnson was born in 1934 in Virginia (USA). With 28 years already, he and his wife Fritzi went as missionaries to North Africa.

While Fritzi Johnson helped to organize humanitarian aid to Sahrawi refugees living in desert camps west of Algeria and trained young women in building and conducting kindergarten classes, her husband Hugh was responsible for a «circuit covering 86'000 square miles», as Thomas Kemper, former General Secretary of Global Ministries once said.

For more than forty years, Hugh and Fritzi Johnson operated under a simple motto: The Church must be where the needs are the greatest. This conviction carried their ministry.

Aiming to connect the gospel with the lives of the people of the Maghreb region, Hugh Johnson became fluent in Arabic and in Kabylia (a Berber language), and he also preached in French. He did not want to see any barriers between the Gospel and the people.

He served during times of great unrest and turbulences in Algeria.

In 1972, the government closed orphanages, hospitals, and other diaconal institutions of the Church.

When the region dealt with a rising tide of religious extremism, the couple's home and church were often attacked and targeted by militant groups.

Once, Hugh Johnson was even stabbed with a knife – but his faith and commitment to his ministry never wavered. He continued standing up for his faith and church family, often at great risk to himself.

He also faced restrictions limiting the church's ability to worship and evangelize. As a result, he held meetings in his home between various Christian denominations and worked together in the spirit of ecumenism.

In spite of numerous disputes with the government and even expulsions from the country, Hugh Johnson always returned to Algeria to help the small Christian community that lived there.

His voice was one that served as a calming influence within the small community of believers in the country as well as an open ear and voice to Muslims in the area.

Hugh Johnson also regularly appeared on Algerian Radio, often in dialogue with a Muslim representative. He was a mediator who crossed the lines for the cause of reconciliation and mutual understanding.

Hugh Johnson left behind many traces of blessing in North Africa. God granted him great compassion, peace, and love – and this compassion, peace, and love shaped his words and actions. Even in most difficult times, he followed his calling with admirable faithfulness. He built countless bridges – because he saw people first and foremost as human beings, not as members of a particular religion. And anyone who had the privilege of receiving a hearty hug from Hugh could feel this love for people – and then had to check afterwards to see if all ribs were still in place.

Hugh Johnson passed away in October 2025.

We thank God for him, for his faithfulness, for his humility, for his love.

I invite you to sing with me «In God alone» – and let us do this as a prayer of faith and trust.

We have now heard about a servant of Christ who spent decades of his life in North Africa. I have asked Freddy Nzambe to build on that and to share with us about the situation of our Brothers and Sisters in North Africa today.

Report of Freddy Nzambe about North Africa

In the beginning, I said that this would be a time of sharing about joys and sorrows of our Church in the various countries. A time of sharing where we have seen and where we do see God at work. A time of sharing experiences from our own personal lives. This time is now. And I believe that this sharing will strengthen our togetherness and deepen our relationships. You do not need to be long – short experiences and thoughts offer a space to

others to share what they have on their hearts, as well. Thank you for your sharing and for your listening.

Prayer Time

Open Sharing with Stefan Schröckenfuchs, Rares Calugar Markus Bach, Erika Stalcup

I invite you to once again sing the Song «In the Lord I'll be ever thankful».

The United Methodist Church is a Church with many abbreviations. One of these abbreviations is CSE for **C**entral and **S**outhern **E**urope.

But CSE could also stand for many **C**onferences **S**urvived and **E**ndured.

But to be a bit more serious:

CSE could also stand for a **C**hurch that **S**hares **E**ternal hope.

Or for **C**hristian faith, **S**olidarity and **E**mpathy.

Or for a person with a **C**redible **S**pirit of **E**ncouragement.

Of course, we can also read CSE backwards.

Then it has a bit a different meaning... (*ESC → photo of computer key*)

You have certainly realized – I am talking about **Üllas Tankler**.

After two decades, his time as – I keep it simple – our most appreciated ambassador with Global Ministries comes to an end.

We are grateful that you are here so that we can say «Thank You» in person.

I invite Bozena and Rares to say a few words.

Words of Gratitude of Bozena Daszuta

Words of Gratitude of Rares Calugar

Many years ago I wrote a song. Not for Üllas. But when I thought about tonight, I realized how well it describes Üllas. Because Üllas was for sure not an insensitive bureaucrat living in the kingdom of Far Far Away. He was not only a GBGM representative. And he was more than a pastor. I think that for many of us, he was just a true friend. And for this, we are very, very grateful. This song shall be an expression of this thankfulness.

My Friend

Sometimes I'd like to tell somebody how I really feel,
to call things as they are instead of trusting time will heal,
to clothe my thoughts in words without a deep anxiety,
to be the one I am and not the one I ought to be.

Sometimes I need to keep silent when I face misery
and when all the words I know would not be more than mockery.
To admit my helplessness when something's more than I can take
but to trust that there's no wall on earth God's hope cannot break.

And in times like these you're near, love me though you know me and
you make me feel that I can count on your heart and helping hands.
You rejoice and mourn with me, and you truly understand.
I am so glad that I may call you my friend.

Sometimes I long to change the world, to be brave and bold and strong,
to make a difference, where I see that too much has gone wrong,
to serve the poor, the needy and the people in despair,
to share God's love and grace with words and deeds just everywhere.

But sometimes I just need a place where I may say: "I'm weak."
A place, where I don't fail if I allow my tears to speak.
A place, where there's no need to hide my face behind a mask,
that lies and says: "Thanks, I am fine, and I am ready for my task."

And in times like these you're near, love me though you know me and
you make me feel that I can count on your heart and helping hands.
You rejoice and mourn with me, and you truly understand.
I am so glad that I may call you my friend.

Sometimes I dare to dream how our world could one day be,
if open minds and hearts and doors would become a reality.
Then I'd like to wake up knowing what we have to do:
We're called to jointly make this dream of love and justice true.

And in times like these you're near, love me though you know me and
you make me feel that I can count on your heart and helping hands.
You rejoice and mourn with me, and you truly understand.
I am so glad that I may call you my friend.

Closing words from Bishop Stefan Zürcher

Urs Schweizer

	18.15	Dinner
	20.00	Listening and Sharing
- Saturday, November 22, 2025	08.30	Plenary session part 2
	12.30	Lunch
	14.00	Plenary session part 3 with tour and dinner in Warsaw
	19.00	Piano concert
- Sunday, November 23, 2025	11.00	Worship service
	14.00	Closing of the Executive Committee meeting

2.2 Reports to the Executive Committee

Due to the proximity to the previous Central Conference and the fact that most of the Working Groups have only just begun their work, the Office of the Central Conference decided not to request a report from the Working Groups in general. However, they are, of course, free to submit an oral or written report on their work. This will be possible during the gathering.

2.3 Devotional Times

Erika Stalcup was again asked to prepare and lead the devotional times during the Executive Committee meeting. Warsaw UMC will be responsible for the Sunday worship service (with a sermon from Bishop Stefan Zürcher).

2.4 Central archive with Ueli Kindlimann

Ueli Kindlimann is in charge of the Central Archives of the UMC in Central and Southern Europe in Zurich. He will take part in the Executive Committee meeting in Warsaw and present the archive and its work.

2.5 Farewell to Üllas Tankler

Üllas Tankler has been the European Secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) for more than 20 years. He will hand over this task at the end of 2025 and go into well-deserved retirement. Üllas will be present at the Executive Committee meeting, and we will be able to bid him farewell. As the Office of the Central Conference, we are very grateful for your service to our Church over the many years. We as the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe have benefited from it. You have invested a lot of time and energy in being with people, talking to them, listening to them and getting to know their situation and needs. You were a helpful and valued partner in our cooperation with the global Church. We thank you wholeheartedly for this and wish you God's blessing for your future path.

The European bishops are in contact with GBGM to find a successor in the first quarter of next year. In our view, the establishment of a European Secretary from and in Europe has proved very successful. Whether it will continue to be a 100% appointment is uncertain due to the financial challenges. If suitable persons are available in our Annual Conferences, their names can be reported to the Bishop.

2.6 Appointments to the Executive Committee

The Office of the Central Conference makes the following appointments:

As assistant to the Secretary:	Urs Schweizer
As conference treasurer:	Iris Bullinger
For the examination of the minutes:	Christine Schneider and Serge Frutiger

3. Assignments to the Office of the Central Conference

3.1 Summarizing the voting results regarding the path into the future of Czech Republic Annual Conference

The six Annual Conferences of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe have voted on the motion with regard to the autonomy process of Czech Republic Annual Conference at their gatherings in 2025 (RS-MK-AL: March 27-30, 2025 / HU-RO: May 8-11, 2025 / CZ: May 16-18, 2025 / PL: May 23-25, 2025 / AT: May 29-June 1, 2025 / CH-FR-NA: June 19-22, 2025).

The summary of all voting results is as follows:

YES votes: 295

NO votes: 10

The necessary conditions have thus been created for the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters to continue working on this process. The Office of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe has taken note of the clear result.

Bishop Stefan Zürcher has informed Bishop Harald Rückert as Chairman of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters about this and has also sent him the relevant documents (historical statement, wording of the motion, extract from the minutes of the Central Conference).

3.2 Visibility of the Central Conference

During its meeting on March 15, 2025, in Winterthur, the Executive Committee had set up a project group working on the visibility of the Central Conference (→ Digital Platform). In a reduced form, this group consists of Ben Nausner and Urs Schweizer. The Office of the Central Conference asked the group to inform the Executive Committee in Warsaw about the current status.

3.3 Publication of the Social Principles, the Social Creed and the Guidelines for a Responsible Way of Life

The Office of the Central Conference has decided, together with the UMC Switzerland, to facilitate the publication of a German-language brochure containing the Social Principles, the Social Creed, the Litany to the Social Creed, and the Guidelines for a Responsible Way of Life. The text of the Social Principles is to be largely taken over from Germany, including the additions decided by the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe. This brochure does not have the character of an official document, but that of a working aid. The Secretary of the Central Conference and the Assistant to the Bishop will take care of its implementation. The Office of the Central Conference encourages the non-German speaking Annual Conferences to realize a similar project (as print or pdf). Funds of our Central Conference can be applied for this purpose.

3.4 Representation of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe on the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS)

The General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) sent a direct request to the Bishops' Office, stating that although the number of Board members had been reduced, there had been a shift at the expense of the US members and that the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe could send a representative as a result. When asked about this, Philipp Hadorn (CH) confirmed that he was still interested in this task. Philipp Hadorn had already made himself available for this task once before. However, he was not elected at the 2024 General Conference due to the aforementioned reduction.

Proposal to the Executive Committee:

The Executive Committee decides to send Philipp Hadorn as representative of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe to the General Board of Church and Society.

4. Finances

4.1 Endowment Fund

The Council of Bishops, together with the Connectional Table, has called on all UMC congregations worldwide to take up an offering for the Endowment Fund for Theological Education in the Central Conferences. This is to take place after Easter 2026. In connection with this, the Council invites you to use the six weeks until May 17, 2026, to engage more intensively with the UMC's vision statement. Various materials will be made available to the congregations for this purpose from the beginning of 2026. In each Annual Conference or (where an Annual Conference consists of several districts in different countries) in each district, a coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the information provided is passed on and the collection is carried out.

As Central Conference CSE, we regularly benefit from contributions to seminars, training centers, or scholarships. We therefore strongly encourage you to attach great importance to this offering out of gratitude and solidarity, to publicize it carefully in the local churches, and to invite active participation. Ultimately, it is not the amount that matters, but the fact that our gifts show that this fund is also supported by the central conferences, which benefit from it. Further information on the Endowment Fund, the situation of theological education in the central conferences and the Vision Statement campaign, as it has been or will be made available to pastors, can be found in Appendix 1.

4.2 Financial support for pastors' salaries in East Central Europe/Balkans

In view of the rising cost of living, Connexio's salary support for pastors in East Central Europe/ Balkans remains necessary at the same level. However, the donations received for this purpose have declined in recent years - as have donations to the Fund for Mission in Europe and Connexio in general. The additional support for 2025 was provided by a massively increased contribution from the salary fund of the "Hilfe im Sprengel" association, but also by an extraordinary gift from the "Zahlstelle" of the UMC in Switzerland.

A look at the coming years shows that the additional financial contributions in particular can no longer be raised, or at least not at the same level, and that reduced amounts must

be expected as a result. It is a concern of the Office of the Central Conference that salary support continues to be possible over a longer period of time. We must therefore look for new ways and methods to achieve this goal without losing sight of the reality that support is likely to decline in the coming years.

The Office of the Central Conference is in discussions with the Connexio Board about the future direction. The Office has also asked the Council on Finance and Administration of our Central Conference to be part of this conversation and to help preparing a meeting before or after the Gathering of the European Executive Committees of the UMC in Europe in March 2026. At this meeting with the relevant countries, long-term solutions are to be considered despite reduced contributions. The aim is to develop sustainable and realistic target formulations.

4.3 Fund for Mission in Europe

The Fund for Mission in Europe (FMiE) is an important source of financial support for various projects. At the October meeting 2025, a considerable sum was once again allocated to projects in our Central Conference for 2026. We are very grateful for this. We encourage our Annual Conferences to also participate - also as a sign of gratitude - in the offerings for the FMiE.

5. Working Group Children and Youth

5.1 YouMe 2025

The YouMe 2025 (camp for youth and young adults of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe) took place in Cluj-Napoca from July 24 to 28, 2025. 61 participants (AL 9 / AT 6 / HU 7 / MK 7 / PL 7 / RO 16 / RS 4 / CH 3 / Bishop Stefan / Supt. Rares) from eight countries took part. The feedback was very positive. There was a good and helpful atmosphere. The program included a mixture of fun, spiritual depth and the deepening of existing and the making of new contacts. The consensus was that there should be a similar camp in two to three years' time; the young people are keen to capitalize on the momentum and further strengthen the bond within the Central Conference.

Ivana Pastor provided a personal report on the camp (see Appendix 2). She states, among other things: *"For my part, I can say that the preparation of the camp and the realization of the camp itself brought not only new acquaintances, but also really close friendships among the people who were on the team with me. Now the contact is no longer just "business" with the aim of exchanging information about our working group, but also personal, and it really is a great blessing to have that in life."* The positive experiences will help to ensure that such camps can also be held in the future. We ask the Working Group Children and Youth to stay on the ball.

The costs for the program, food, and accommodation (EUR 200/person) were largely covered by the individual contributions by country and a GBGM grant of USD 7,500. The travel costs that could not be covered by personal contributions (CHF 3,380) were taken from the Fund "Building Bridges" (Hilfe im Sprengel). However, some countries covered 100% of the travel costs. No funds from the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe were used.

5.2 Global Young People's Convocation (GYPC)

The Global Young People's Convocation (GYPC) takes place every four years. It is a worldwide meeting for young people between the ages of 12 and 35 who belong to the UMC, an ecumenical partner church or a denomination associated with the UMC. The next meeting will take place in Dublin from July 7-11, 2026. It is an opportunity to network with young people from all over the world, to learn from and with each other, to have lasting experiences (culture, faith...), and to develop statements and petition proposals for General Conference 2028. Due to the chosen location, the event is very expensive. However, those responsible have held out the prospect of granting subsidies to enable young people from as many countries as possible to take part. Contributions from the Central Conference funds can also be applied for.

6. Global connectedness

6.1 Mutual visits

The Office of the Central Conference considers the solidarity between the Annual Conferences of our Central Conference to be something very important for our Church. It cannot be maintained by the bishop alone. We therefore invite you to renew and live this connection in different ways – for example through mutual participation in the Annual Conferences.

6.2 European Methodist Council

The European Methodist Council took place in Hamburg from October 3 to 6, 2025. Maria Sonnleithner has written a report on this (see Appendix 3).

6.3 Connectional Table

From October 16 to 18, 2025, the Connectional Table meeting took place in Manila (Philippines). Dániel Vadászi has written a report on this (see Appendix 4). Stefan Schröckenfuchs, who attended, as well, will also be able to provide information orally.

6.4 Vision Statement

In cooperation with the Connectional Table, the Council of Bishops invites all 30,000 local UMC congregations worldwide to participate, if possible, in the six-week initiative "Love Boldly, Serve Joyfully, Lead Courageously" (from the vision statement of the worldwide UMC → <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/umc-resources/vision-of-the-umc>) from April 12 to May 17, 2026. The Office of the Central Conference encourages Annual Conferences to consider and motivate local churches to participate in this initiative (see Appendix 5). More information and materials will be available in the coming weeks and months. The themes of the six-week series are:

	Disciples, ...
April 12	... formed by Jesus Christ
April 19	... empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit
April 26	... love boldly
May 3	... serve joyfully
May 10	... lead courageously
May 17	... transform the world

7. Miscellaneous

Dates 2025/2026

A list of dates from 2025/2026 is also attached to the report of the Office of the Central Conference (Appendix 6). Three events should be particularly mentioned here:

- There will be a **Gathering of the European Executive Committees of the UMC in Reutlingen (DE) from** March 11 to 14, 2026. Arrival is planned for Tuesday, March 10, 2026, so that we can plan a meeting of our own Executive Committee (CSE) on Wednesday, March 11, 2026. The joint meeting will then take place from Thursday, March 12, to Saturday noon, March 14, 2025. The discussion regarding pastors' salaries in East Central Europe and the Balkans might take place on Saturday afternoon.
- The global **Leadership Forum 2026**, originally planned for April 2026, will now take place in October 2026 - in Calgary (Canada). This choice was made with the aim of facilitating the largest possible global participation. The Office of the Central Conference has decided on the final composition of the CSE delegation as follows: Bishop Stefan Zürcher, Supt. Andrzej Malicki, Supt. Stefan Schröckenfuchs, Johanna Pasztor.
- Prague is planned as the **venue for the Executive Committee meeting in fall 2026**. In terms of timing, a date in mid-November 2026 is preferable to an earlier fall date.

Markus Bach, Secretary

Appendices to the report of the Office of the Central Conference:

Appendix 1	Letter from the Bishop on the Endowment Fund dated October 25, 2025
Appendix 2	Report by Ivana Pastor on YouMe 2025
Appendix 3	Report by Maria Sonnleithner on the European Methodist Council
Appendix 4	Report by Dániel Vadászi on the Connectional Table
Appendix 5	Vision Statement UMC
Appendix 6	Dates 2025/2026



Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche Gebiet von Mittel- und Südeuropa
Eglise Méthodiste Unie Région de l'Europe du Centre et du Sud
United Methodist Church Area of Central and Southern Europe

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Beilage 1

Zurich, October 25, 2025

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ

The Council of Bishops, together with the Connectional Table, calls on all UMC local churches worldwide to take up a special offering on May 17, 2026, or on another Sunday between April 12 and May 17, 2026, for the benefit of theological education in the Central Conferences. The proceeds will go to the Endowment Fund for Theological Education in the Central Conferences. This fund supports educational programs in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines, in which 500 students participate each year.

The reason for this collection is the importance and need for well-trained pastors. While more than 70 percent of pastoral workers in the US have a master's degree or comparable qualification, this proportion is currently less than 5 percent in the Central Conferences. The long-term goal is to increase this proportion to at least 50 percent.

In 2014, the "Endowment Fund for Theological Education" was established to secure long-term funding for theological education outside the United States. The fund supplements the "Central Conference Theological Education Fund," which was established by the General Conference in 2012 and is financed by contributions from the local churches. These contributions fluctuate and fell from \$10 million to \$5 million in the budget for 2025–2028. The Endowment Fund for Theological Education is intended to create a reliable foundation.

The fund currently has \$2 million at its disposal, as well as a further \$1 million in pledged donations. Four percent of this is distributed annually. This money is used to finance scholarships, digital learning opportunities, specialist literature, and teaching staff. In the most recent round of distribution, 83 projects were supported with a total of \$1.26 million. Several of these belong to our Central Conference. This fund is to be increased with the worldwide special collection in order to be able to support more projects in the future.

This collection is not just about large donations. The goal is to involve as many people from across the church as possible, regardless of the size and scope of the donation. It is important to have as broad participation as possible, including in the Central Conference.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you and your local churches to participate in this collection. We ourselves in our Central Conference benefit from the support of various projects, training courses, and seminars from the Fund for Theological Education. Even if our contributions are not huge, they will be an expression of our gratitude and solidarity and are also an important signal to the local churches in the USA, which will certainly contribute the largest amount to the collection. Thank you in advance for your support!

In connection with this collection, the Council of Bishops also invites all 30,000 UMC local churches worldwide to join, if possible, the **six-week initiative "Love boldly, serve joyfully, lead courageously"** from April 12 to May 17, 2026 (from the vision statement of the worldwide UMC). I warmly encourage you to consider whether you and your local churches would like to participate in this initiative.

Further information will be available in the coming weeks and months. NN (email: ...) will coordinate both the collection and the six-week campaign in your annual conference or district.

Materials that will be made available:

- Suggestions and guidelines for worship services and small groups
- Thematic materials on the UMC vision statement
- Stories and videos from graduates of theological training institutions in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines, which will also highlight the urgent need for theological training outside the United States

The themes of the six-week series are:

	<i>Disciples –</i>
April 12	<i>formed by Jesus Christ</i>
April 19	<i>empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit</i>
April 26	<i>love boldly</i>
May 3	<i>serve joyfully</i>
May 10	<i>lead courageously</i>
May 17	<i>transform the world</i>

You will receive further information and materials from your coordinator at the beginning of the new year. I would be delighted if you would join this campaign in the six weeks after Easter, and I pray that you, your local churches, and our worldwide church will be blessed by it and strengthened and matured in following Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Shalom in Christ



Bishop Stefan Zürcher



Evaluation of YouMe 2025 (Camp for Youth and Young Adults of the Central Conference CSE)

1. Briefly describe the activities implemented by your project in this past year towards the overall achievement of your project's goals.

The beginning of the project was based on the formation of a team for the camp, which planned this camp with its several months of work, defined the important elements and points needed for the realization of this camp and solved them step by step. From the beginning, the preparations flowed in a slow rhythm, and as the camp term approached, the rhythm became more fulfilling and livelier. The team was in charge of establishing contact with the accommodation and providing all necessary details in the accommodation, discussed and defined the theme of the camp, defined and collected registrations, etc.

The preparation of the program of the camp itself took place at the regular annual meeting of the members of the Working Group for Children and Youth, where the types of activities, ideas, workshops, selection of lecturers, taking part in the program as an activity implementer, etc. were discussed.

The program was set up so that the morning hours were dedicated to lectures and workshops that allowed the youth to experience the theme of the camp more deeply in accordance with their interests (deeper discussion on the theme, art or movement games). The afternoon time is focused on fellowship and connecting young people through five different workshops that were prepared so that their main goal was the preparation of the Sunday service. The workshops were: message/service, prayer, worship, film and art. In addition to the primary goal for young people to participate in the preparation of the Sunday service, the secondary goal was to get to know and connect young people. The workshops gave the youth the opportunity to express their spiritual talents or even try something completely new, with the support and help of leaders. Each workshop was extremely beautifully presented at the Sunday service, a message about love, faith and hope through acting and the story of the youth from Albania about the hope of the people that sustained them through a difficult period, a prayer in silence at the very beginning of the service and a prayer at the end where the youth and the community participated by writing prayer needs and lighting candles as a symbol of the hope that burns in us. The worship led by the formed group of young people at the camp itself was also a great blessing and encouragement, and the representation of what the young people felt during all the moments spent at the camp resulted in the created art and film that were shown during the service.

Our goals set from the beginning (connecting young people at the CC level, spiritual growth, connecting leaders and creating new leaders) have been achieved, and perhaps it could be said that they have begun their full realization, because, we believe that the contacts of young people from different countries will continue through networks and communications, and even visits, that the spiritual growth through the lectures and preaching that the young people experienced will grow even more as they pass on that knowledge to those who were not present but want to hear the story of the camp.

2. How many people did you serve? How many activities did you complete? Provide totals of your work in serving people and implementing activities (identify key constituents).

The camp itself was attended by 60 people, of which 11 were official leaders and 49 youth who were direct participants in the camp. In addition, a part of the community from Romania (about 15 people) who was present at the Sunday service was touched and encouraged by the message that our camp carried. Many actively participated in prayer for the youth from our CC at the end of the service by writing prayers. Also, each of those present took with them wonderful memories, blessings and messages that they conveyed to their country, their families, communities, youth groups, and the impact of our meeting touched the hearts of hundreds of people, and we believe that the testimonies of young people about this event will create a desire for others to be participants in the following events.

A report was also written about our meeting, which will surely be read and printed in church magazines and thus reach another large group of people. We are looking forward to spreading the word about the camp, it is our prayer that the youth who were present and felt God's love, faith and hope at this camp, experience spiritual growth and change and pass it on to their loved ones.

All the planned activities that were part of the program of our meeting were successfully realized by the wonderful involvement of the leaders, but also by the positive participation and reactions of the youth.

3. What were your greatest challenges? How did your project address those challenges?

The preparation and implementation of this project did not have any major challenges that could have slowed down the process. There were situations in which it was actually necessary to gain experience and new skills, which arose due to the fact that for many, this was the first time that they prepared and managed a project at such a large level (CC level). Namely, such situations brought the leaders in the camp team even closer, their communication was always open and cooperative, they solved point by point with shared ideas, knowledge and experiences in order to prepare a program and camp that will be safe, comfortable and a blessing for the youth.

For my part, I can say that the preparation of the camp and the very course of the camp realization brought not only new acquaintances, but really close friends among the people who were with me in the team, now the contact is no longer only "business" with the aim of sharing information about our Working Group, but also personal and it is really a great blessing to have that in life.

4. Please share one success story that resulted from this grant. We also welcome photos and/or videos which can be used for reports and promotion of our programs.

As one of the leaders of the camp preparation, it was very important for me to establish communication with some young people in order to hear how they felt during the camp itself, whether this was a positive experience for them, whether it helped them in their spiritual life, whether they managed to connect with young people from other countries and

how much they liked it. In a conversation with a young man from Albania, Fabjo Pashollari, he shared the situation he went through to be at that camp. From the very beginning he had the desire to come, but the work he was working on required his full presence at that moment, it was really a big question whether he would be able to come or not. Just a few days before his arrival, he firmly decided that this camp was the place where he should be, and with that decision he went to his bosses asking them for days off, which he got. He told me that on the first day of the camp, he turned on the Internet, where he was flooded with emails from work with various problems and questions that he began to answer and burden himself, and then he realized that he did not come to this camp to answer emails, but to enjoy God and the youth, and by the end of the camp, the email was turned off, and his joy of presence could be seen in the enjoyment of all the activities that we had in the program. We talked then on the last morning of the camp, and in his words, you could feel the joy that he decided to come and be a part of this camp, he was delighted with the activities, spiritual content and fellowship and he gladly wished to come again. As a leader, this feedback was a great blessing, that one meeting like this helped to set the right priorities in life and to see God's blessing in someone else's life from the right priorities, that is a great grace!

Also, one of the details that touched me was the prayer of thanks written on the last night of the camp. The evening prayer was designed so that all participants wrote on paper one thing they experienced at the camp and for which they are grateful to God. The pieces of paper were eventually collected and saved, they are anonymous, but no matter who wrote what, reading them I felt the great action of God, the biggest impression was left by the piece of paper on which it was written "Thank you for saving me thro this camp."

August 25, 2025

Ivana Pastor, Serbia

*Co-leader of the Working Group Children and Youth
of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe*

Report on the European Methodist Council meeting, October 2025

From October 2025, 3rd to 6th, the European Methodist Council (EMC) met in Hamburg. About 30 church leaders from the Wesleyan, Methodist, and United traditions took the opportunity to reflect on migration and pilgrimage during this time. The focus was primarily on migration because it affects all churches. Conversations were held with the state councilor of Hamburg, with Martin Mujinga, chair from the African Methodist Council and Leo Reynaldo Ferreira, the general secretary of the World Methodist Council. I would like to highlight the conversation with Martin Mujinga, who demonstrated that the Bible is a story of migration and emphasized that God is a migrant, God who supports migrants.

I also want to share the following reflections and information with you:

The EMC sees itself as a leadership forum. This means that the leaders of each member church were present, including bishops, general secretaries, and presidents, as well as other leaders. However, due to the nature of leadership in our church, two things were apparent: few women and even fewer laity who were not employed by their own churches were present. As a female layperson who volunteers her time for the church, I was surprised and shocked by this. The council is aware of this and hopes that it will change in the future. This is especially important since the EMC is in the process of changing as many long-standing members have retired from their positions.

Ullas Tankler held his retirement party at the EMC because it was the organization with which he had worked most closely during his time at GBGM. The GBGM sent a letter to the EMC promising to elaborate on the future of Ullas's position in the first quarter of next year.

The ecumenical office of the Global Methodist Church inquired with the European and African Methodist Councils about membership. Both councils contacted the WMC regarding this matter and reiterated the WMC's stance that reconciliation with the UMC is necessary before the GMC can join the WMC and its regional councils, such as the EMC.

The Fund for Mission in Europe (FMIE), the EMC's organization that distributes funds for projects throughout Europe, received a large one-time donation from the British Methodist Church (about £ 500,000) to fund projects. The British Methodist Church specifically requested that the money be used for international Methodist connections, among other things. I am highlighting this because the successor organization to the EMYC, the EMYCF, is struggling to reach its former potential, which was lost during the pandemic. This is mostly because it is relying on already overworked personal resources throughout the connection. For many years, our General Conference has benefited from the work and leadership development that occurred through the EMYC. Specifically, it fostered international connections and supported the processes of building an international identity, which are part of our Methodist DNA. I urge the Executive to take this into consideration when discussing the future of young people (and young leaders) in our Central Conference.

Lastly, I would like to mention the European Lay Seminar, which will take place from October 9th to 14th in Velettri, Italy. The theme will be "Peace, Justice, and Creation: Is There Still

Hope?" Please spread the word and encourage laity to attend. I personally want to emphasize that this is an opportunity to support young adults who have missed out on international youth events in the past five years. These opportunities for international connections are rare and must be supported by our church. The cost of the event will be available as soon as funding from GBGM and FMiE is secured.

Thank you for trusting me with this seat on the European Methodist Council. It was a valuable experience, and I hope you can use the information in this report to further our church's work and strengthen our Methodist connections.

*Blessings,
Maria Sonnleithner*

Attachment 4

Report about the 2025 in-person meeting of the Connectional Table

Before I was asked last year to represent the Central Conference, I had never heard of the Connectional Table (CT). Even in the Hungarian translation of the Book of Discipline, it is mentioned only in one sentence: Every Annual Conference should send two printed copies of its "journals of proceedings" to the General Council on Finance and Administration, and one printed copy each to the Connectional Table and United Methodist Communications.

During the year, we had three online meetings, and between October 16-18 we met in person in Manila, the Philippines, with about 60 participants. Since 2021, the CT has been working on rethinking the mission vision, and on May 1, 2025, the new Vision Statement was announced <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/umc-resources/vision-of-the-umc>. It has three main points:

- Love Boldly
- Serve Joyfully
- Lead Courageously

During the sessions members approved the CCMO report and LDCL staff policies and adopted the 2026 spending plan based on the 2024–2028 Connectional Table budget. Through the days we heard presentations and testimonies related to these three points and tried to formulate an identity statement in light of them. The main message was that we shouldn't simply fit this Vision Statement into our current ministries, but instead rethink our work starting from this new vision.

In addition, five subgroups examined different areas of putting the Vision Statement into practice:

- Visioning
- Regionalization
- Communications
- Innovations for Missional Effectiveness
- General Book of Discipline & Petition

I was part of group 4, where we discussed questions such as: How does the new vision direct/inform the Connectional Table in how it communicates, finances, and determines budget allocations and processes for denominational mission and ministry? What does CT need to communicate to GCFA and how can the new vision inspire collaboration and renewed approaches in the Church's financial and budgeting process? What new strategies for CT's financial and budgetary responsibilities need to be implemented: what; by whom; on what timeline; and for what purpose or to what end?

For me, this conference was mostly about learning. I felt I had many more questions than thoughts - let alone answers. But at least now I know what to expect in the future and how to prepare. I'll try to be a good steward of the task entrusted to me.

At the same time, the CT fulfills the role of connectionalism as well. It's always inspiring to meet new people working for the Church and to get closer to others who are already not far from us, like the Austrians or Germans. One morning we learned about different areas of the missions in the Philippines UMC and heard powerful testimonies from those involved. It was eye-opening to see how different poverty and need look there compared to Europe.

Next year we will again have three online meetings, and the plan is to meet in person once more, between October 2026, 29 - 31.

Dániel Vadászi

Vision Statement UMC/EMK 2025

Die Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche leitet Menschen dazu an, Jesus Christus nachzufolgen. Der Heilige Geist befähigt sie dazu, kühn zu lieben, bereitwillig zu dienen und entschlossen voranzugehen.

«**Kühn lieben**» heisst: Gott leidenschaftlich lieben und sich wie Jesus den Menschen zuwenden, sie annehmen und sie mit einbeziehen. Also Menschen jeden Alters, jeder Nationalität und Herkunft, jeden Geschlechts und jeder Gesellschaftsschicht.

Matthäus 22,37-39: ³⁷Jesus antwortete: ›Du sollst den Herrn, deinen Gott, lieben mit deinem ganzen Herzen, mit deiner ganzen Seele und mit deinem ganzen Denken.‹ ³⁸Dies ist das größte und wichtigste Gebot. ³⁹Aber das folgende Gebot ist genauso wichtig: ›Liebe deinen Mitmenschen wie dich selbst.‹

Johannes 13,34-35: ³⁴Ich gebe euch ein neues Gebot: Liebt einander! Genauso wie ich euch geliebt habe, sollt ihr einander liebhaben. ³⁵Daran werden alle erkennen, dass ihr meine Jünger seid: wenn ihr einander liebt.

«**Bereitwillig dienen**» heisst: Sich am Beispiel Christi orientieren und voll Freude mit den Schwächsten in gegenseitiger Fürsorge auf den Weg machen.

Psaln 100,1: Heißt den Herrn willkommen, alle Länder! Stellt euch fröhlich in den Dienst des Herrn! Kommt mit Jubel vor sein Angesicht!

Nehemia 8,10: Geht, esst fette Speisen und trinkt süße Getränke! Gebt auch denen etwas, die nichts haben. Denn dies ist ein heiliger Tag für unseren Herrn. Seid nicht traurig, denn die Freude am Herrn gibt euch Kraft!

Johannes 13,14-15: ¹⁴Ich habe euch die Füße gewaschen – ich, der Herr und Lehrer. Also sollt auch ihr einander die Füße waschen. ¹⁵Denn ich habe euch ein Beispiel gegeben. Ihr sollt das tun, was ich für euch getan habe.

1. Petrus 4,10: Dient einander – jeder mit der Gabe, die er erhalten hat. So erweist ihr euch als gute Verwalter der Gnade, die Gott vielfältig schenkt.

«**Entschlossen vorangehen**» heisst: Dem Beispiel Jesu folgen, indem wir den Strukturen des Bösen, der Ungerechtigkeit und Unterdrückung widerstehen und sie überwinden und uns für Frieden, Gerechtigkeit und Versöhnung einsetzen.

Josua 1,9: Ich habe dir doch gesagt, dass du stark und mutig sein sollst! Fürchte dich nicht und schrecke vor nichts zurück! Denn der Herr, dein Gott, ist mit dir bei allem, was du unternimmst!

Epheser 6,10: Und schließlich: Werdet stark durch eure Verbundenheit mit dem Herrn. Lasst euch stärken durch seine Kraft.

Dates 2025-2026

2025

11.11.	European Methodist Council (Executive Committee)	ONLINE
20.-21.11.	Cabinet South	PL-Warsaw
21.-23.11.	Executive Committee CC CSE	PL-Warsaw

2026

17.-21.1.	North Africa Gathering	TN-Tunis
22.1.	European Methodist Council (Executive Committee)	ONLINE
5.-9.2.	Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters	DK-Copenhagen
6.-7.3.	European Methodist Council (Executive Committee)	CH-Zurich
11.-12.3.	Executive Committee CC CSE	DE-Reutlingen
12.-14.3.	Gathering of European Executive Committees of the UMC	DE-Reutlingen
14.3.	Meeting Superintendents of East Central Europe/Balkans	DE-Reutlingen
26.-30.3.	Visit of European UMC Bishops to Ukraine	UA-Ukraine
16.-19.4.	Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania Provisional AC	RS-Serbia
25.4.-2.5.	Council of Bishops	US-Jacksonville
7.-10.5.	Hungary-Romania Provisional AC	HU-Budapest
11.5.	European Methodist Council	ONLINE
12.5.	Fund for Mission in Europe	ONLINE
14.-17.5.	Austria Provisional AC	AT-Salzburg
17.5.	Endowment Fund for CC Theological Education Sunday	WORLDWIDE
28.-30.5.	Poland AC	PL-Paprotnia
4.-7.6.	Czech Republic AC	CZ-Prague
15.-17.6.	Plateforme North Africa	CH-Hunzenschwil
18.-21.6.	Switzerland-France-North Africa AC	CH-Hunzenschwil
7.-11.7.	Global Young People's Convocation	IE-Dublin
28.7.-6.8.	STR 2026 (National Tent Camp of Jungschar EMK)	CH-Britttnau
13.-17.8.	World Methodist Council	ES-San Salvador
1.-5.10.	European Methodist Council	GB-London
9.-14.10.	European Lay Seminar	IT-Velletri
20.-24.10.	Leadership Gathering	CA-Calgary
30.10.	Fund for Mission in Europe	ONLINE
2.-6.11.	Council of Bishops	ONLINE

VIII. Finances and Statistics

Financial Statement 2023

Einnahmen	Rechnung 2024		Konsolidiert 2021 - 2024	
Beiträge Jährliche Konferenzen				
Schweiz	45 000.00		180 000.00	
Frankreich	4 500.00		18 000.00	
Österreich	3 238.00		12 952.00	
Bulgarien	0.00		1 875.00	
Nord-Mazedonien	750.00		3 000.00	
Serbien	750.00		3 000.00	
Ungarn	1 500.00		6 000.00	
Slowakei	0.00		1 500.00	
Tschechien	1 500.00		4 500.00	
Polen	1 500.00		6 000.00	
Nordafrika	0.00	58 738.00	0.00	236 827.00
Gaben und Zinseinnahmen		309.55		582.60
Total Einnahmen		59 047.55		237 409.60
Ausgaben				
Zentralkonferenz	0.00		130 513.60	
Sitzungen Exekutivkomitee	24 068.66	24 068.66	68 177.26	198 690.86
AG Theologie und Ordinierte Dienste	2 329.39		2 329.39	
AG Kirche und Gesellschaft	0.00		3 043.00	
AG Kinder und Jugend	0.00		2 848.00	
AG Liturgie	0.00		0.00	
AG Kirchenordnung und Rechtsfragen	0.00		0.00	
AG Frauendienst	0.00*		0.00	
AG Bischofsamt	0.00		366.30	
Reserve für a.o. Aufträge	0.00	2 329.39	25 623.04	34 210.93
Superintendententreffen	5 073.20		5 073.20	
Weitere Tagungen	0.00	5 073.20	0.00	5 073.20
Beiträge der Zentralkonferenz an:				
Weltrat	2 666.52		11 107.01	
Europäischer Rat	5 583.15		23 493.12	
Jugendrat (EMYC)	0.00	8 249.67	0.00	34 600.13
Verschiedenes				
Druckkosten	629.40		2 434.75	
Bibliothek / Archiv	7 500.00		30 000.00	
Übrige Kosten	5 053.38	13 182.78	14 486.63	46 921.38
Total Ausgaben		52 903.70		319 496.50
Einnahmen		59 047.55		237 409.60
Ausgaben		52 903.70		319 496.50
Einnahmen-Überschuss		6 143.85		
Ausgaben-Überschuss				- 82 086.90

Balance Sheet as per December 31, 2024

	Fr.	Fr.
Aktiven		
Zahlstelle EMK	91 364.16	
Guthaben	3 883.60	
Passiven		
Kreditoren / Trans. Passiven		338.00
Rückstellungen		0.00
Eigenkapital		88 765.91
Ergebnis		6 143.85
Total	95 247.76	95 247.76

Plan-les-Ouates, 4. Februar 2025, Iris Bullinger

Auditor's report on the Annual account 2024 Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

As auditor, I audited the accounts (balance sheet and income statement) for 2024.

I checked the opening and closing balance sheets, reviewed the annual transactions on the income statement accounts and found that the accounts are clean and correct.

The 2024 accounts close with a revenue surplus of CHF 6'143.85.

As at December 31, 2024, the reported equity amounted to CHF 94'909.76.

The undersigned confirms the accuracy of the 2024 annual financial statements and the balance sheet as at December 31, 2024 and proposes that discharge be granted to the Treasurer, Iris Bullinger, and that she be thanked for her clean and conscientious work.

Schaffhausen, February 6, 2025

*The auditor:
Stefan Hafner*

Budget 2025 - 2028

Einnahmen	Budget 2025 - 2028		Budget 2021 - 2024	
Beiträge Jährliche Konferenzen				
Schweiz	180'000.00		180'000.00	
Frankreich	12'000.00		18'000.00	
Österreich	13'000.00		13'000.00	
Bulgarien	0.00		3'000.00	
Serbien-Nordmazedonien-Albanien	6'000.00		6'000.00	
Ungarn-Rumänien	6'000.00		6'000.00	
Slowakei			3'000.00	
Tschechien	6'000.00		3'000.00	
Polen	6'000.00	229'000.00	6'000.00	238'000.00
Gaben und Zinseinnahmen		2'000.00		2'000.00
Total Einnahmen		231'000.00		240'000.00
Ausgaben				
Zentralkonferenz	60'000.00		60'000.00	
Sitzungen Büro/Exekutive	58'000.00	118'000.00	55'000.00	115'000.00
AG Theologie und Ordinierte Dienste	6'000.00		8'000.00	
AG Kirche und Gesellschaft	2'000.00		3'000.00	
AG Kinder und Jugend	16'000.00		3'000.00	
AG Liturgie	2'000.00		3'000.00	
AG Kirchenordnung und Rechtsfragen	2'000.00		3'000.00	
AG Frauendienst	0.00*		0.00	
AG Bischofsamt	1'000.00		1'000.00	
Reserve für a.o. Aufträge	5'000.00	34'000.00	21'500.00	42'500.00
Superintendententreffen	0.00		30'000.00	
Weitere Tagungen	0.00	0.00	0.00	30'000.00
Beiträge der Zentralkonferenz an:				
Weltrat	12'000.00		15'000.00	
Europäischer Rat	24'000.00		29'000.00	
Jugendrat (EMYC)	0.00	36'000.00	20'000.00	64'000.00
Verschiedenes				
Druckkosten	2'000.00		2'000.00	
Bibliothek / Archiv	30'000.00		30'000.00	
Übrige Kosten	10'000.00	42'000.00	26'000.00	58'000.00
Total Ausgaben		230'000.00		309'500.00
Einnahmen		231'000.00		240'000.00
Ausgaben		230'000.00		309'500.00
Einnahmen-Überschuss		1'000.00		
Ausgaben-Überschuss				-69'500.00

Statistics based on the Annual Conferences 2024

* kursive Zahlen = 2023

Bezirke Gemeinden Glieder Gottesdienste										
	Bezirke	Gemeinden	Bekennende Glieder	Getaufte Glieder	Freunde	Total Pers.	Gottesdienstbesuch Erwachsene	Gottesdienstbesuch Kinder	Bekennende Glieder pro Bezirk	Bekennende Glieder pro Gemeinde
nach Ländern										
Albanien*	3	6	248	2	80	330	200	60	82.7	41.3
Algerien	4	6	170	0	45	215	99	8	42.5	28.3
Belgien	1	1	23		9	32	10	0	23.0	23.0
Frankreich	16	16	988	6	792	1'786	834	227	61.8	61.8
Nord-Mazedonien*	7	10			2'000	2'000				
Österreich	7	7	633	441	511	1'585	247	33	90.4	90.4
Polen*	20	38	1699	242	260	2'201	1'400	141	85.0	44.7
Rumänien*	2	3	59	17	107	183	69	45	29.5	19.7
Schweiz	68	97	4'127	442	5'900	10'469	3'244	471	60.7	42.5
Serbien*	9	14	379	110	209	698	278	47	42.1	27.1
Tschechische Republik	14	19	809	199	462	1'470	978		57.8	42.6
Tunesien	1	1				0				
Ungarn	11	27	488	681	756	1'925	1'236	339	44.4	18.1
Total	163	245	9'623	2'140	11'131	22'894	8'595	1'371		
<i>Vorjahr 2023</i>	163	251	10'106	2'123	7'833	20'062	8'239	1'333		
<i>Differenz +/-</i>	0	-6	-483	17	3'298	2'832	356	38		
nach Konferenzen										
Prov. JK Österreich	7	7	642	441	511	1'594	247	33	91.7	91.7
JK Schweiz-Frankr.-NA	89	121	5'475	448	6'746	12'669	4'187	706	61.5	45.2
JK Tschechien ohne SK	14	19	830	199	462	1'491	978	0	59.3	43.7
Prov. JK Ungarn-Rum.*	13	30	569	698	863	2'108	1'305	384	43.8	19.0
JK Polen*	20	38	1'725	242	260	2'227	1'400	141	86.3	45.4
Prov. JK RS-NMK-AL*	19	30	648	112	2'289	3'028	478	107	34.1	21.6
Total	162	245	9'889	2'140	11'131	23'117	8'595	1'371	376.6	266.6

**Pfarrpersonen
Mitarbeitende**

nach Ländern	Personen in voller Verb. zur JK aktiv	Mitglieder auf Probe + a.o. Mitglieder aktiv	Lokalpastoren aktiv	Laienmitarbeiter aktiv	Volle Verbindung + a.o. Mitgl. i. Ruhestand	Clergy aktiv	Clergy total	Beginn der Arbeit
Albanien	1	2	0	1	0	3	3	1922/1990
Algerien	0	1	1	2	3	2	5	1886
Belgien	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1920/2008
Frankreich	9	4	2	1	11	15	26	1791/1868/1907
Nord-Mazedonien	2	0	3	4	2	5	7	1873/1921
Österreich	6	1	1	0	1	8	9	1870
Polen	21	0	0	2	5	21	26	1895/1920
Rumänien	3	0	0	0	0	3	3	2011
Schweiz	45	4	31	1	55	80	135	1840/1856/1866
Serbien	7	0	3	1	1	10	11	1898
Tschechische Republik	10	3	4	1	4	17	21	1920
Tunesien	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	
Ungarn	9	1	2	0	7	12	19	1898/1905
Total	114	16	47	14	89	177	266	
<i>Vorjahr 2023</i>	118	17	41	11	84	178	264	
<i>Differenz +/-</i>	-4	-1	6	3	5	-1	2	

Bekennende Glieder:	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Differenz
Prov. JK Österreich	746	744	646	642	617	633	+16
JK Schweiz-Frankreich-NA	6 407	6 215	6 138	5 924	5 676	5 308	-368
JK Tschechien	1 179	1 131	1 078	834	789	809	+20
Prov. JK Ungarn-Rumänien	509	516	521	508	519	547	+28
JK Polen	1 925	1 924	1 978	1 787	1 705	1 699	-6
Prov. JK RS-NMK-AL	434	631	595	639	618	627	+9
Total	12 564	12 353	12 069	10 334	9 924	9 623	-301
+ Makedonien	1'200	1'200	1'200	1'200	1'200	1 200	0
+ Total Past. Mitglieder					264	266	+2
Total Gesamt	13 764	13 553	13 269	11 534	11 388	10 823	
<i>Änderung in %</i>	-2.62		-2.10	-13.08	-1.27	-6.16	

IX. Institutions of the Central Conference

elected for the quadrennium 2025 - 2029

Clergy:

Laypeople:

Office

Bishop, Chair	Stefan Zürcher
Secretary	Markus Bach (CH)
Treasurer	Iris Bullinger (CH)

Executive Committee

Members with voting rights:

Bishop, Chair	Stefan Zürcher	
Vice-Chair	Andrzej Malicki	
Secretary	Markus Bach	
Treasurer	Iris Bullinger	
AC Austria	Sup. Stefan Schröckenfuchs	Ben Nausner
AC Switzerland-France-North Africa	Sup. Serge Frutiger	Christine Schneider
AC Czech Republic	Sup. Ivana Procházková	Martina Chlupáčková
AC Hungary	Sup. László Khaled	Dávid Csernák
AC Poland	Sup. Andrzej Malicki	Bozena Daszuta
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Sup. Daniel Sjanta	Emil Zaev
Chair WG Episcopacy	Sup. Serge Frutiger	

Members with voice, but not vote:

Bishop in retirement	Bishop Heinrich Bolleter	
	Bishop Patrick Streiff	
France and Belgium	Sup. Grégoire Chahinian	
Algeria und Tunesia	Sup. Freddy Nzambe	
Albania	Sup. Wilfried Nausner	
Rumania	Sup. Rares Calugar	
North-Macedonia	Sup. Marjan Dimov	
WG Theology and Ordained Ministries	Zoltán Kovacs (HU)	
WG Children and Youth		Ivana Pastor (RS) or Simon J. Zürcher (CH)
WG Church and Society	Marietjie Odendaal (CH)	
WG Women's work	Monika Zuber (PL)	
Coordinator of the Women's work		Barbara Bünger (CH)
WG Liturgy	Erica Stalcup (CH)	
WG Discipline and Legal Affairs	Sup. Wilfried Nausner (AL)	

Council on Finance and Administration

Chair (until 2026)	Stefan Hafner (CH)
Chair (from 2026)	Harald Bolleter (CH)
	Jonathan Letsch (CH)
Auditor of the Treasury of the Central Conference	Stefan Hafner (CH)

Pension Board

Chair:	Bishop Stefan Zürcher	
Members of the Council on Finance and Administration:	Stefan Hafner (CH)	
	Harlad Bolleter (CH)	
	Jonathan Letsch (CH)	
Additional person:	Markus Hafner (CH)	
Pension Benefits Officer:	André Töngi (CH)	

Committee on Investigation

AC Austria	Stefan Schröckenfuchs	Roland Siegrist
AC Switzerland-France-North Africa	Jörg Niederer (convener)	
AC Czech Republic	Petr Procházka	
AC Hungary	László Khaled	Grethe Jenei
AC Poland	Sławomir Rodaszyński	
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Ana Palik-Kunčak	
	1 Person vakant	
Reserve:		
AC Austria	Martin Obermeir-Siegrist	
AC Switzerland-France-North Africa	Gunnar Wichers	
AC Czech Republic	Pavel Procházka	
AC Hungary	Zoltán Kovács	
AC Poland		Olgierd Benedyktowicz
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Marjan Dimov	

Committee on Appeals

AC Austria	Wilfried Nausner (convener)	Gerhard Weissenbrunner
AC Switzerland-France-North Africa	Etienne Rudolph	
AC Czech Republic	Pavel Hradský	
AC Hungary		Henrik Schaueremann
AC Poland	Józef Bartos	Bozena Daszuta
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania		Maria Parnicki
Local Pastor	Ruedi Stähli (CH)	

Reserve:

AC Austria		Hayford Boateng
AC Switzerland-France-North Africa	Andreas Steiner	Marc Berger
AC Czech Republic		Josef Thal (CZ)
AC Hungary	Márton Hecker	
AC Poland		Bozena Daszuta
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Lila Balovski (RS)	Christina Cekov (NMK)
Local Pastor	Christine Moll (CH)	

Judicial Court

Members	Martin Streit (CH) István Csernák (HU)	Christa Tobler (CH) Philipp Hadorn (CH) Bernhard Pöll (AT)
Reserve:	Milen Stefanov (MK) Wojciech Ostrowski (PL)	Regula Dannecker (CH) Daniel Bator (PL)

Counsel for the church

Counsel	Markus Bach (CH)
Reserve	Stefan Schröckenfuchs (AT) Petr Procházka (CZ) Gábor Szuhánszky (HU) Etienne Rudolph (FR)

Working Group Episcopacy

AC Austria	Stefan Schröckenfuchs	
AC Switzerland-France-North Africa	Serge Frutiger (Chair)	
AC Czech Republic	Ivana Procházková	
AC Hungary	László Khaled	
AC Poland		Bozena Daszuta
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Daniel Sjanta	

Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministries

Zoltán Kovács (HU - Chair)
David Field (CH)
John Calhoun (AT)
Daniel Sjanta (RS)
Edward Puślecki (PL)
Jana Daněčková (CZ)
(and 1 person of the Central Conference Germany)

Working Group Church and Society

Marietjie Odendaal (CH - Chair)

Dorothee Bührma (AT)

Krzysztof Klusek (PL)

Working Group Children and Youth

Ivana Pastor (RS - Co-Chair)

Simon Joel Zürcher (CH - Co-Chair)

and the delegates of the countries of the CC

Working Group Women's work

Monika Zuber (PL - Chair)

Maria Đurovka-Petraš (RS)

Murielle Rietschi Wilhelm (CH)

Coordinator of the Women's work in the Central Conference: Barbara Büniger (CH)

Working Group Liturgy

Erika Stalcup (CH - Chair)

Matthias Joseph (FR)

Dragan Trajčevski (RS)

Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs

Wilfried Nausner (AT/AL - Chair)

Petr Procházka (CZ)

Serge Frutiger (CH)

László Khaled (HU)

Representatives beyond the Central Conference CSE in Commissions and Working Groups

European level:

European Methodist Council (EMC) and Joint Commission of UMC in Europe

Bishop	Stefan Zürcher	
	Adrian Myslinski (PL)	Lilla Kardosné Lakatos (HU)

European Commission on Mission (ECOM)

Connexio Co-Chair	Peter Hilty (CH)
Connexio General Secretary	Ulrich Bachmann (CH)

Fund for Mission in Europe (FMiE)

Bishop	Stefan Zürcher	
		Lilla Kardosné Lakatos (HU)
Manager FMiE, with voice, but not vote		Andreas Stämpfli (CH)

European Lay Seminary

vacant

Methodist e-Academy (Governing Board)

Bishop	Patrick Streiff, Chair
	Zoltán Kovács (HU)
	Christoph Schluep (CH)

Community of Protestant Churches in Europe - CPCE (South-East Europe regional group)

Wilfried Nausner (AT/AL)
Laszlo Khaled (HU)

Worldwide level:

Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters

Bishop	Stefan Zürcher	
	Andrzej Malicki (PL)	Thomas Fux (AT)

Commission on General Conference

Lea Hafner (CH)

Connectional Table

Stefan Schröckenfuchs (AT) Dániel Vadász (HU)

General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM)

Jean-Paul Dietrich (CH)

In Mission Together (IMT)

AC Czech Republic	Jana Křížová	
AC Hungary-Rumania	Rares Calugar	Laura Tordaj-Szuhánski
AC Poland	Adrian Myslinski	
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania		Jennifer Moore (NMK)
		Maria Đurovka-Petraš (RS)
Coordinator		Urs Schweizer

General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH)

Judit Lakatos (HU)

The United Methodist Publishing House)

Ueli Frei (CH)

World Methodist Historical Society – European Section

Vice-Chair	Judit Lakatos (HU)
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World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women (WFMUCW)

Vice-Chair Continental Europe	Lilla Kardosné Lakatos (HU)
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World Evangelism

Regional Secretary Central and Southern Europe	vacant
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X. Addresses

Last update: December 2025

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