

*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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 cooperation 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<br>(new: liturgy: Erika Stalcup / new: sermon: Bishop Harald Rückert) |
| Fri. March 14, 2025 | 20.45 | Evening prayer (new: Esther Handschin)  |
|                     | 08.30 | Bible study (new: Üllas Tankler)  |
|                     | 12.10 | Midday prayer (new: Jana Křížova)   |
| Sat. March 15, 2025 | 21.15 | Evening prayer (Erika Stalcup)  |
|                     | 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 Schneider-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. Winter-

thur 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.

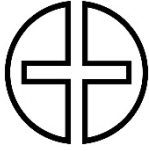
*Bishop Stefan:* There is also a final report from the CPCE in Sibiu. It can be found on the following homepage: <https://cpce-assembly.eu/documents>

*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.



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## **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)**

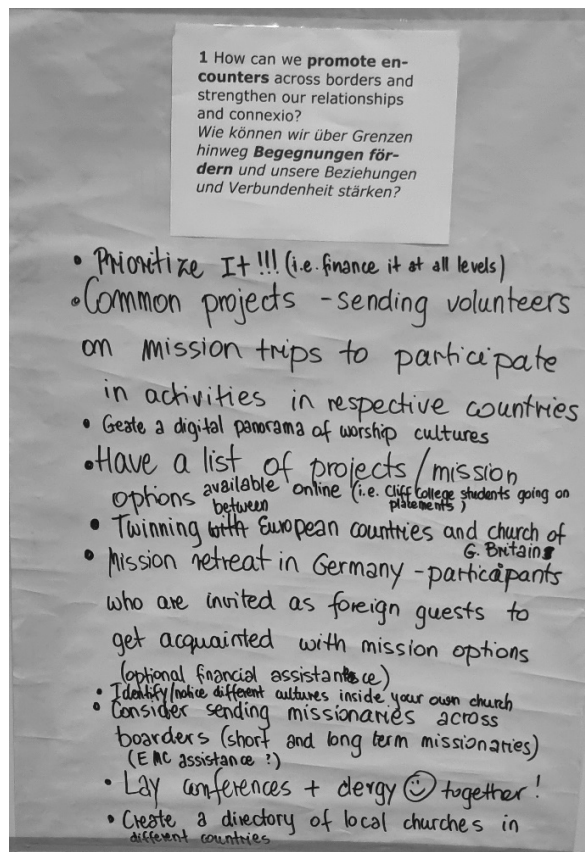
written by Bishop Stefan Zürcher

*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.

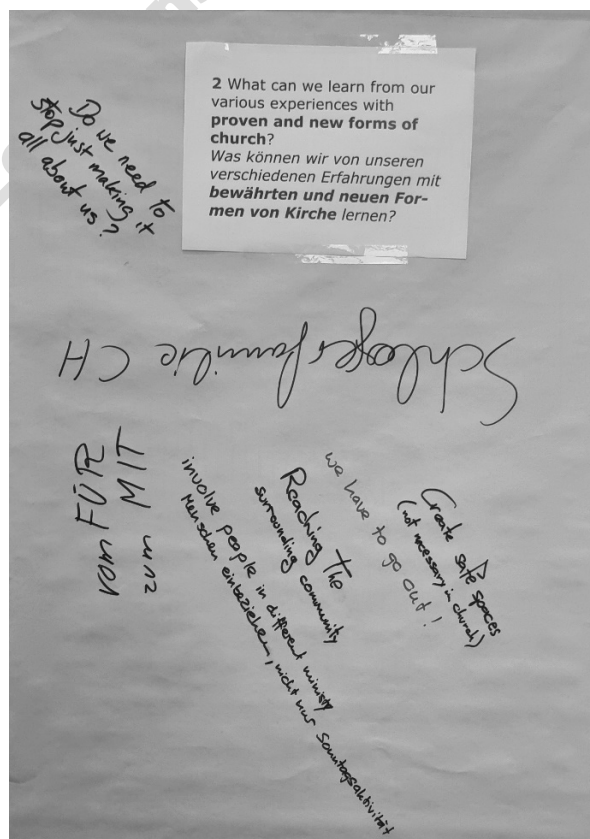
In the first part, I tried to show where and how I experienced these dimensions in the Central Conference. In the second part, I mentioned my experiences and challenges in the first two years. What was exciting about the challenges was that I discovered that there are overlapping topics in some Annual 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:

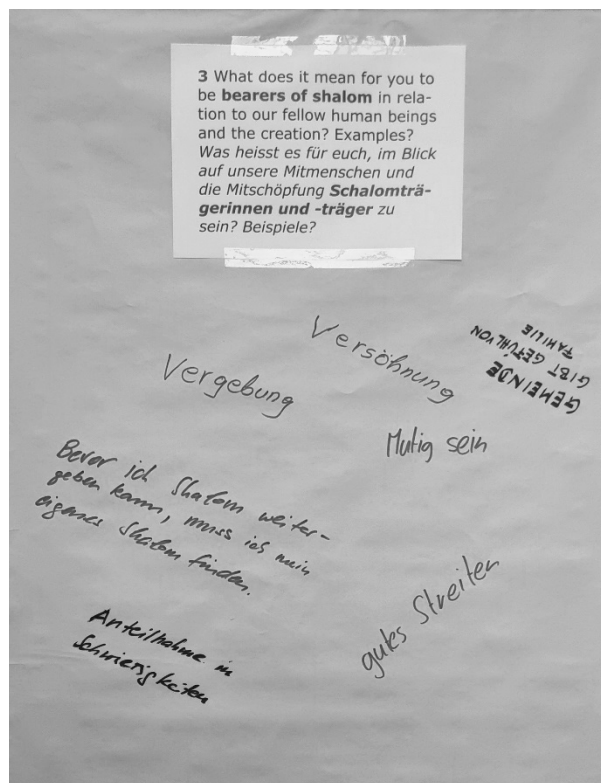
- 1 Wie können wir über Grenzen hinweg Begegnungen fördern und unsere Beziehungen und Verbundenheit stärken? - *How can we promote encounters across borders and strengthen our relationships and connexio?*



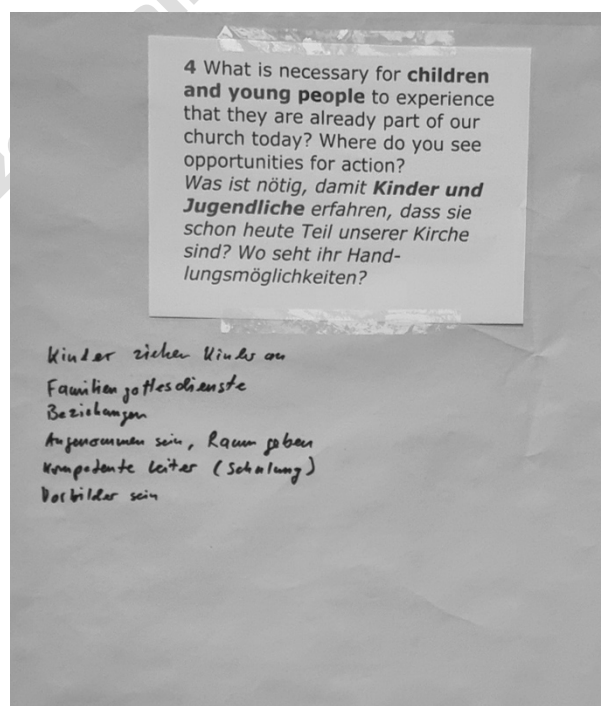
- 2 Was können wir von unseren verschiedenen Erfahrungen mit bewährten und neuen Formen von Kirche lernen? - *What can we learn from our various experiences with proven and new forms of church?*



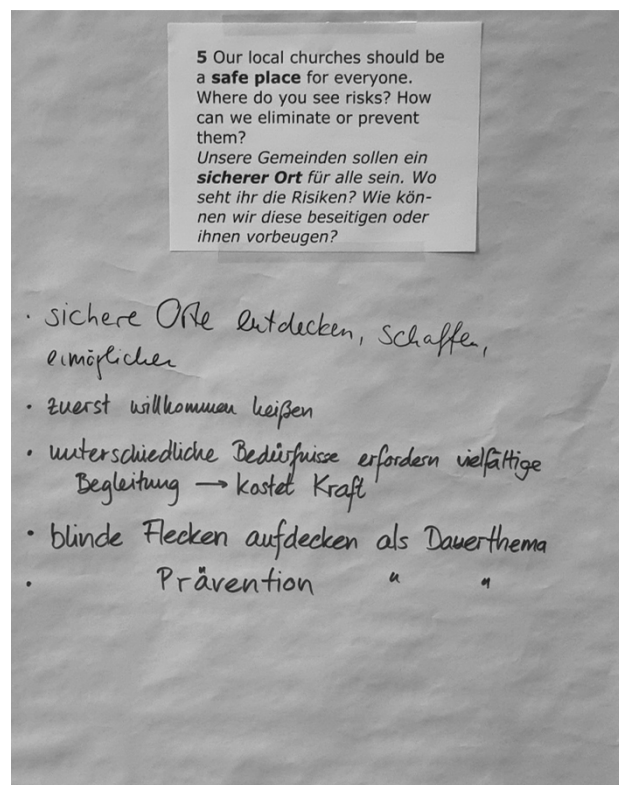
- 3 Was heisst es für euch, im Blick auf unsere Mitmenschen und die Mitschöpfung Schalomträgerinnen und -träger zu sein? Beispiele? - *What does it mean for you to be bearers of shalom in relation to our fellow human beings and the creation? Examples?*



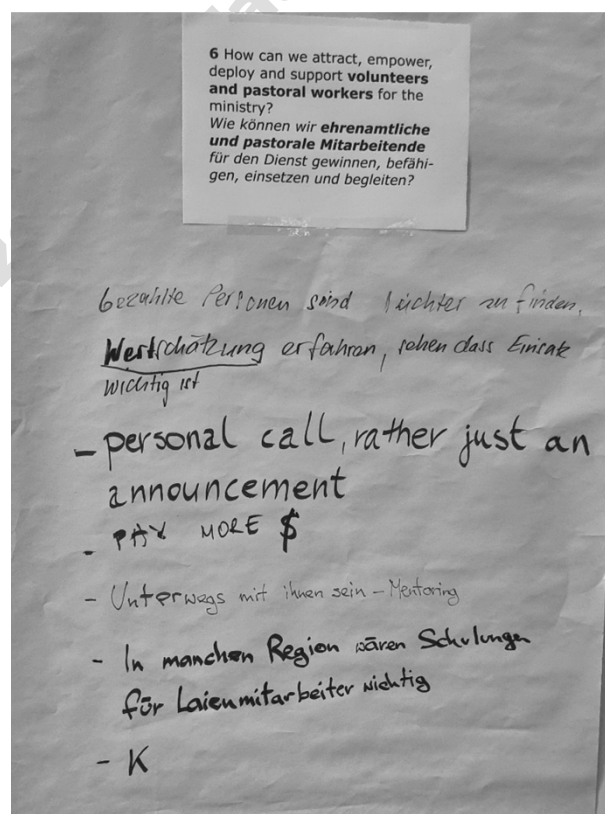
- 4 Was ist nötig, damit Kinder und Jugendliche erfahren, dass sie schon heute Teil unserer Kirche sind? Wo seht ihr Handlungsmöglichkeiten? - *What is necessary for children and young people to experience that they are already part of our church today? Where do you see opportunities for action?*



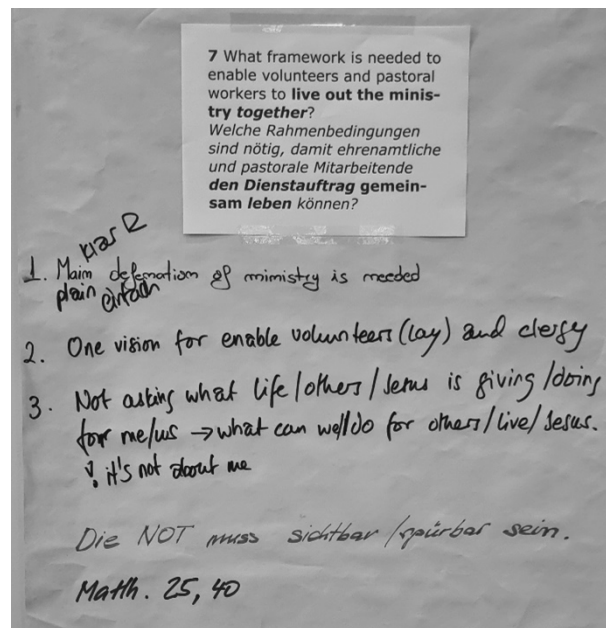
- 5 Unsere Gemeinden sollen ein sicherer Ort für alle sein. Wo seht ihr die Risiken? Wie können wir diese beseitigen oder ihnen vorbeugen? - *Our local churches should be a safe place for everyone. Where do you see risks? How can we eliminate or prevent them?*



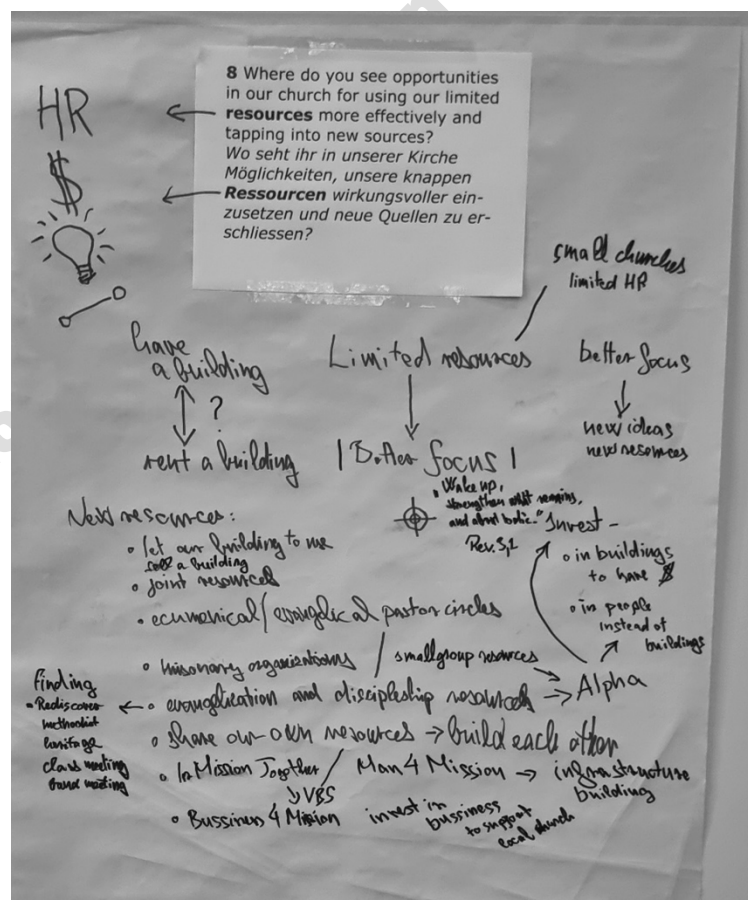
- 6 Wie können wir ehrenamtliche und pastorale Mitarbeitende für den Dienst gewinnen, befähigen, einsetzen und begleiten? - *How can we attract, empower, deploy and support volunteers and pastoral workers for the ministry?*



- 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?*

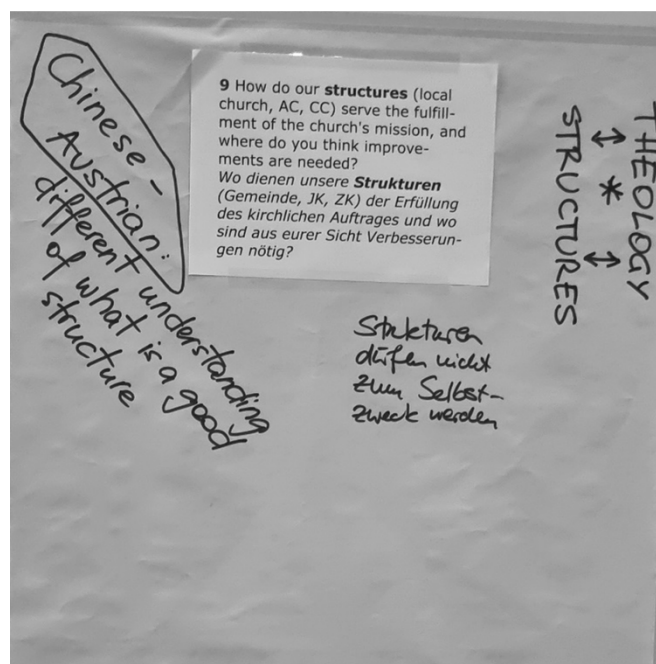


- 8 Wo seht ihr in unserer Kirche Möglichkeiten, unsere knappen Ressourcen wirkungsvoller einzusetzen und neue Quellen zu erschliessen? - *Where do you see opportunities in our church for using our limited resources more effectively and tapping into new sources?*

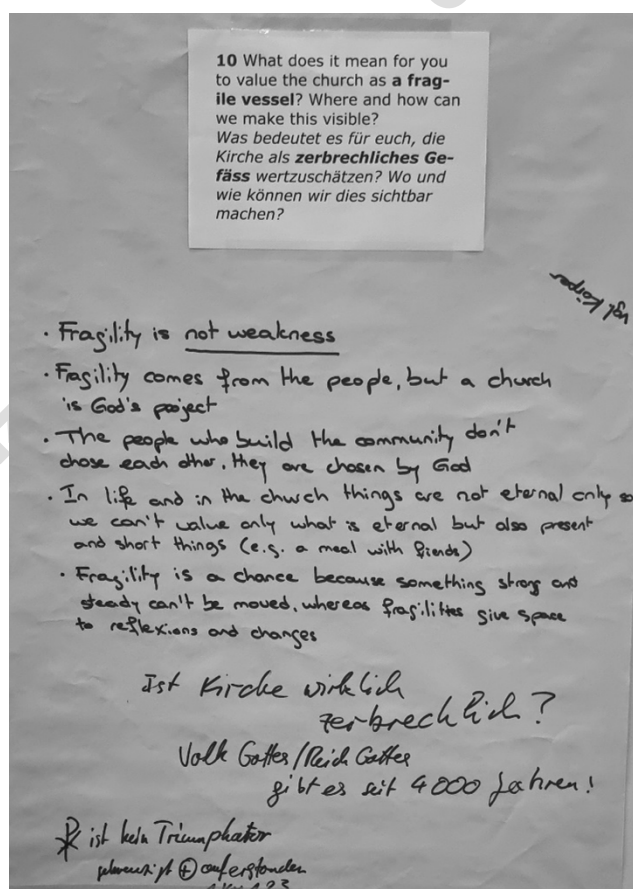


- 9 Wo dienen unsere Strukturen (Gemeinde, JK, ZK) der Erfüllung des kirchlichen Auftrages und wo sind aus eurer Sicht Verbesserungen nötig? - *How do our structures (local church, AC, CC)*

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 Teixeira 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 Teixeira of the Methodist Church in Portugal to give us his greetings.

Bishop Sifredo Teixeira 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.

*Marietje 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 specialty 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.

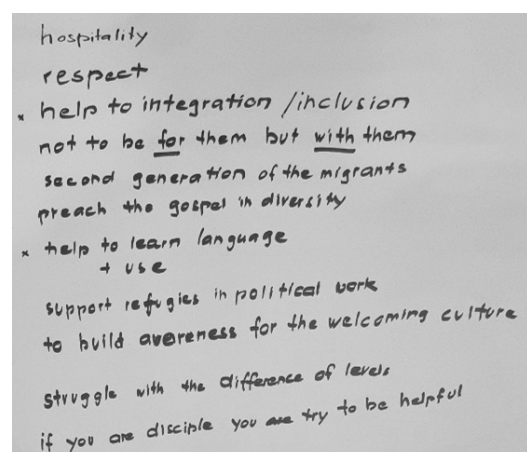
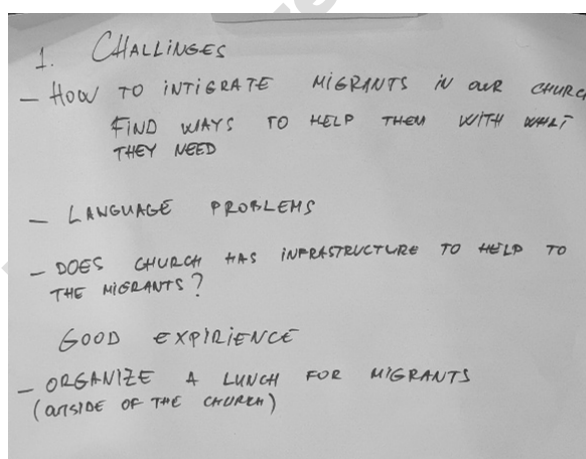
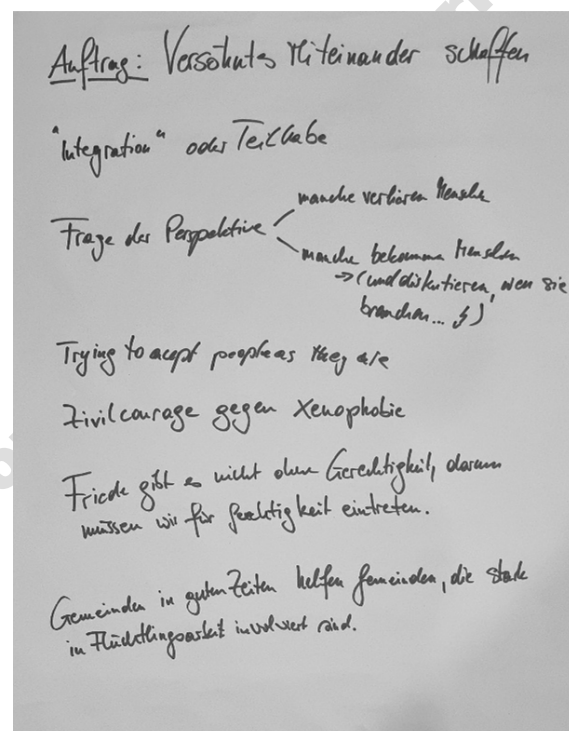
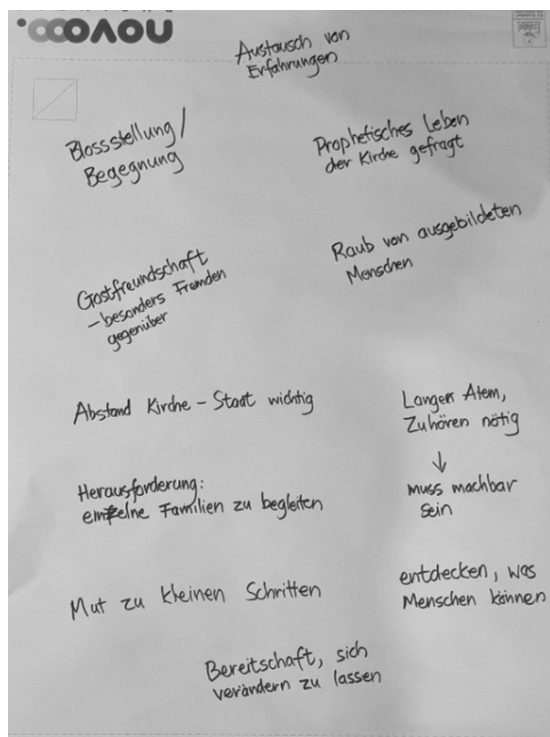
In three steps, those present are invited to turn their attention to the topic of "migration" and to listen to each other:

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 sensibilisieren und ermutigen im Alltag (Nachbarschaft) als Brückenbauer zu leben. (Aufmerksamkeit, Offenheit, ...)

3. Punkt: Liebe zu Gott / zum Nächsten / zum Fremden

- eigene Erfahrungen vom Fremdsein reflektieren

- konkrete Erfahrung → Nachbarschaftsfest

- \* Offenheit auch gegenüber neuen Menschen (z.B. Flüchtlinge, Ausländer, ...)

- Menschenwürde - dafür einstecken. Themen = Menschenwürde

↳ wir diese Würde mit Freude teilen, darf kritisiert 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

Do nothing for people with migrant background

Have to be open for everyone who came.

Support countries where people can't stay within CC.

Openness is a challenge in congregations. → closed groups

Different political opinions. → instead of said

person at 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, more 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?

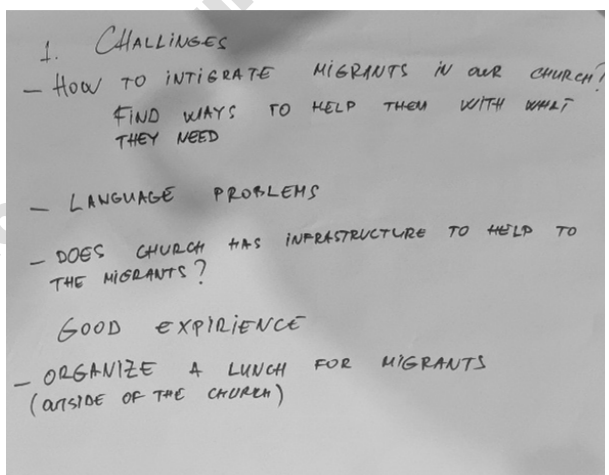
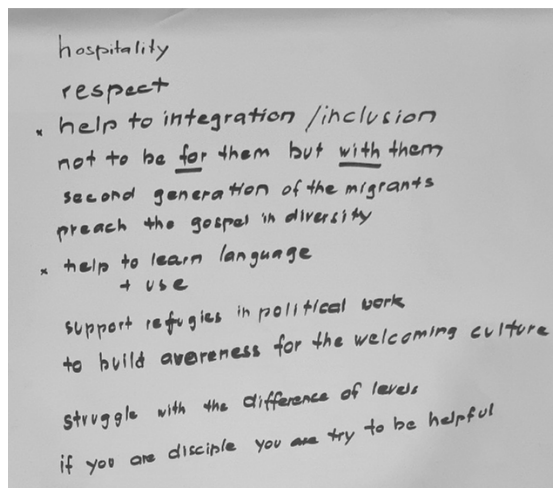
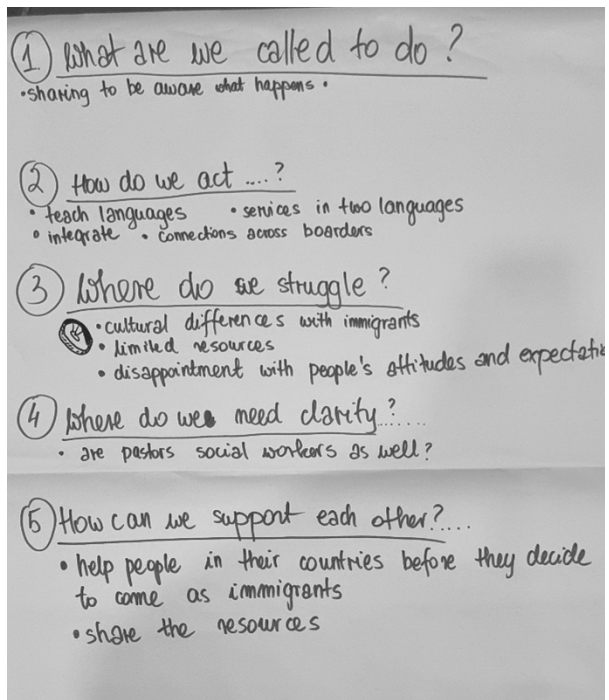
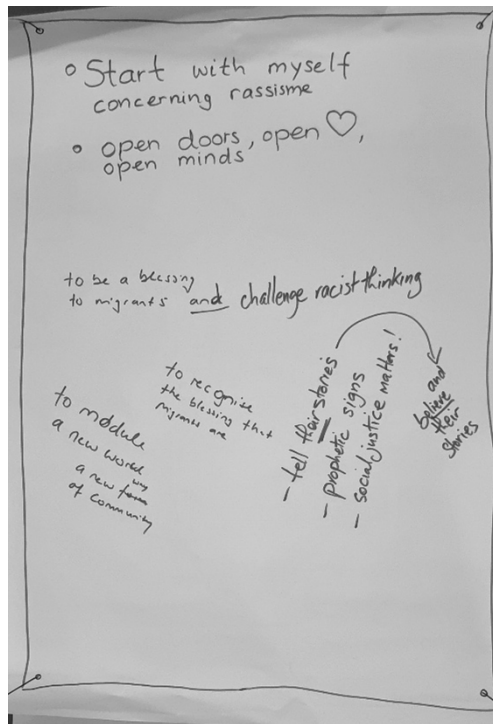
Is there a need to be integrated, or is the greater need to have a clear identity?

Create safe spaces

help with daily life

keep empathy alive

be open to learning from "their" spiritual experiences



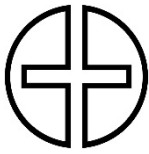
The public participation evening closes with a musical greeting from Barry Sloan, who performs two of his songs.

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.





*Unauthorized translation - Original in German*

## **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 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 Group 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 Group 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 Group 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 Křížová*. 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**

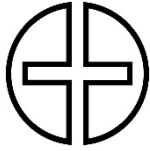
While the members of the newly elected Executive Committee meet for a first session, the other Central Conference participants are invited to an election program in Winterthur in the afternoon:

- 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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*