

CHARTA OECUMENICA

Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe

An Ecumenical Charter for the Churches in Europe

The **CHARTA OECUMENICA** was published in April 2001 in its final form by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Roman Catholic Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE). It marked the beginning of the century by calling the churches in Europe to dialogue, unity and action, and particularly to their common responsibility in facing issues of peace and justice in Europe.

CEC's membership includes around 120 Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant churches and bodies. Together with CCEE the two organisations represent the vast majority of mainstream churches in Europe.

Although the word 'Charta' has many resonances, most recently in the context of human rights, this is a unique document for the churches in Europe. It is a call to prayer, commitment and action. Many European churches are now beginning to adopt the Charta as a framework for ecumenical encounter and common mission. Its value depends on how the churches see the Charta as a process with *practical* outcomes.

The Charta urges churches to respond to specific challenges which face the peoples of Europe: to work for understanding, healing and reconciliation, for justice and the protection of minorities and the vulnerable, to safeguard creation, and to promote dialogue and co-operation with other faiths and world views.

Origins

After the European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz, Austria, in 1997, with its theme of reconciliation in Europe, CEC and CCEE called on member churches and bishops' conferences to begin work on an ecumenical charter. The final recommendations from Graz had stated:

1.2. We recommend that the churches develop a common study document containing basic ecumenical duties and rights. From this a series of ecumenical guidelines, rules and criteria could be developed which would help the churches, those in positions of responsibility and all members, to distinguish between proselytism and Christian witness, as well as between fundamentalism and genuine faithfulness, and help to shape the relationships between majority and minority churches in an ecumenical spirit.

Rationale: The ecumenical fellowship is currently in a difficult situation as a result of various factors. This requires conscious counter-strategies. It seems necessary to foster an ecumenical culture of living and working together, and to create a firm basis for it.

The Charta is not an abstract document with little practical relevance. It relates directly to the varied reality of community life, with its uneasy co-existence of hopes and tensions, across Europe at the turn of the Millennium. Remarkable dedication enabled the ecumenical drafting team to agree on a short, inclusive text which avoided dogma and vagueness, and which would have meaning and relevance across a huge range of local and national situations.

After the Graz Assembly, the draft text was sent out to the ecumenical bodies of member churches for comment, and then revised. It was signed by the two presidents of CEC and CCEE at a joint ecumenical encounter in Strasbourg shortly after Easter 2001. The Charta has now been sent to the CEC member churches and the Roman Catholic bishops' conferences for distribution and implementation. The Council for Christian Unity has distributed the basic text through its ecumenical networks, and now, alongside partner churches in England, offers this edition of the Charta to support discussion and action in dioceses, deaneries, local churches and sector ministry.

The Charta has no dogmatic character, nor is it legally binding under church law. Its authority derives from the voluntary commitments of the European churches and ecumenical organisations, at local and regional – as well as national - levels.

The Charta now and in the future

The Charta is not a document simply to be read through, solemnly signed and put away in the first years of the century. It is a **call to action for the local church**. The publication of the Charta is the beginning of a continuous process which needs time, prayer, and careful planning. Local Christians already heavily engaged in ecumenical work, for example in Local Ecumenical Partnerships or Churches Together initiatives, will find much that is familiar, but may also be stirred to think afresh about priorities in the wider community. Christians in situations where there is as yet little real or systematic ecumenical cooperation may be encouraged to see the Charta as a framework within which they may seriously set out on the way to unity

The Charta is at **different stages of reception** across Europe: we are gradually absorbing its challenges and agenda into our own ecumenical work, and are well advanced in many of the areas it covers. In the Church of England we have been involved over the last fifteen years or so with formal ecumenical dialogues and relationships with specific partners (Meissen, Fetter Lane, Porvoo, Reuilly, the Methodist Church), many informal dialogues, the deepening of local ecumenical partnerships, participation in the national work of CTE and CTBI, and in the international ecumenical work of the Anglican Communion, CEC and the WCC. Commitment to Christian unity and its practical outworking in common mission and service is a core activity of the Church of England. We now call upon all engaged in this area to review their work in the light of the Charta, and to join with the other churches in Europe to witness to the love and compassion of Christ in the way we order our common life.

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES
CONFERENCE DES EGLISES EUROPEENNES
KONFERENZ EUROPÄISCHER KIRCHEN

CHARTA OECUMENICA

Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe

"Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit"

As the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) we are, in the spirit of the Messages from the two European Ecumenical Assemblies of Basel (1989) and Graz (1997), firmly resolved to preserve and develop the fellowship that has grown up among us. We give thanks to the Triune God for guiding our steps towards an ever deeper fellowship through the Holy Spirit.*

Various forms of ecumenical co-operation have already proved themselves. Christ's prayer is: "...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). If we are to be faithful to this prayer, we cannot be content with the present situation. Instead, aware of our guilt and ready to repent, we must strive to overcome the divisions still existing among us, so that together we may credibly proclaim the message of the Gospel among all people.

Listening together to God's word in Holy Scripture, challenged to confess our common faith and to act together in accordance with the perceived truth, let us bear witness to the love and hope which are for all people.

Europe - from the Atlantic to the Urals, from the North Cape to the Mediterranean - is today more pluralist in culture than ever before. With the Gospel, we want to stand up for the dignity of the human person created in God's image and, as churches together, contribute towards reconciling peoples and cultures.

In this spirit, we adopt this charter as a common commitment to dialogue and co-operation. It describes fundamental ecumenical responsibilities, from which follow a number of guidelines and commitments. It is designed to promote an ecumenical culture of dialogue and co-operation at all levels of church life, and to provide agreed criteria for this. However, it has no magisterial or dogmatic character, nor is it legally binding under church law. Its authority will derive from the voluntary commitments of the European churches and ecumenical organisations. Building on this basic text, they can formulate their own local addenda, designed to meet their own specific challenges and resulting commitments.

** To the Conference of European Churches (CEC) belong almost all Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, Old-Catholic and independent churches in Europe. In the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) are represented all Roman Catholic Bishops' Conferences in Europe.*

I.

WE BELIEVE IN "ONE HOLY CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH"

"(Make) every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:3-6)

1. Called Together to Unity in Faith

With the Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to the witness of Holy Scripture and as expressed in the ecumenical Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, we believe in the Triune God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because we here confess "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church" our paramount ecumenical task is to show forth this unity, which is always a gift of God.

Fundamental differences in faith are still barriers to visible unity. There are different views of the church and its oneness, of the sacraments and ministries. We must not be satisfied with this situation. Jesus Christ revealed to us on the cross his love and the mystery of reconciliation; as his followers, we intend to do our utmost to overcome the problems and obstacles that still divide the churches.

We commit ourselves

- to follow the apostolic exhortation of the Letter to the Ephesians and persevere in seeking a common understanding of Christ's message of salvation in the Gospel;
- in the power of the Holy Spirit, to work towards the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ in the one faith, expressed in the mutual recognition of baptism and in eucharistic fellowship, as well as in common witness and service.

II.

ON THE WAY TOWARDS THE VISIBLE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCHES IN EUROPE

**"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another" (John 13:35)**

2. Proclaiming the Gospel together

The most important task of the churches in Europe is the common proclamation of the Gospel, in both word and deed, for the salvation of all. The widespread lack of corporate and individual orientation and falling away from Christian values challenge Christians to testify to their faith, particularly in response to the quest for meaning which is being pursued in so many forms. This witness will require increased dedication to Christian education (e.g. catechism classes) and pastoral care in local congregations, with a sharing of experiences in these fields. It is equally important for the whole people of God together to communicate the Gospel in the public domain, which also means responsible commitments to social and political issues.

We commit ourselves

- to discuss our plans for evangelisation with other churches, entering into agreements with them and thus avoiding harmful competition and the risk of fresh divisions;
- to recognise that every person can freely choose his or her religious and church affiliation as a matter of conscience, which means not inducing anyone to convert through moral pressure or material incentive, but also not hindering anyone from entering into conversion of his or her own free will.

3. Moving towards one another

In the spirit of the Gospel, we must reappraise together the history of the Christian churches, which has been marked by many beneficial experiences but also by schisms, hostilities and even armed conflicts. Human guilt, lack of love and the frequent abuse of faith and the church for political interests have severely damaged the credibility of the Christian witness.

Ecumenism therefore begins for Christians with the renewal of our hearts and the willingness to repent and change our ways. The ecumenical movement has already helped to spread reconciliation.

It is important to acknowledge the spiritual riches of the different Christian traditions, to learn from one another and so to receive these gifts. For the ecumenical movement to flourish it is particularly necessary to integrate the experiences and expectations of young people and actively encourage their participation.

We commit ourselves

- to overcome the feeling of self-sufficiency within each church, and to eliminate prejudices; to seek mutual encounters and to be available to help one another;
- to promote ecumenical openness and co-operation in Christian education, and in theological training, continuing education and research.

4. Acting together

Various forms of shared activity are already ecumenical. Many Christians from different churches live side by side and interact in friendships, in their neighbourhoods, at work and in their families. Couples in interdenominational marriages especially should be supported in experiencing ecumenism in their daily lives.

We recommend that bilateral and multilateral ecumenical bodies be set up and maintained for co-operation at local, regional, national and international levels. At the European level it is necessary to strengthen co-operation between the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) and to hold further European Ecumenical Assemblies.

In the event of conflicts between churches, efforts towards mediation and peace should be initiated and/or supported as needed.

We commit ourselves

- to act together at all levels of church life wherever conditions permit and there are no reasons of faith or overriding expediency mitigating against this;
- to defend the rights of minorities and to help reduce misunderstandings and prejudices between majority and minority churches in our countries.

5. Praying together

The ecumenical movement lives from our hearing God's word and letting the Holy Spirit work in us and through us. In the power of this grace, many different initiatives now seek, through services of prayer and worship, to deepen the spiritual fellowship among the churches and to pray for the visible unity of Christ's Church. A particularly painful sign of the divisions among many Christian churches is the lack of eucharistic fellowship.

In some churches reservations subsist regarding praying together in an ecumenical context. But we have many hymns and liturgical prayers in common, notably the Lord's Prayer, and ecumenical services have become a widespread practice: all of these are features of our Christian spirituality.

We commit ourselves

- to pray for one another and for Christian unity;
- to learn to know and appreciate the worship and other forms of spiritual life practised by other churches;
- to move towards the goal of eucharistic fellowship.

6. Continuing in dialogue

We belong together in Christ, and this is of fundamental significance in the face of our differing theological and ethical positions. Rather than seeing our diversity as a gift which enriches us, however, we have allowed differences of opinion on doctrine, ethics and church law to lead to separations between churches, with special historical circumstances and different cultural backgrounds often playing a crucial role.

In order to deepen ecumenical fellowship, endeavours to reach a consensus in faith must be continued at all cost. Only in this way can church communion be given a theological foundation. There is no alternative to dialogue.

We commit ourselves

- to continue in conscientious, intensive dialogue at different levels between our churches, and to examine the question of how official church bodies can receive and implement the findings gained in dialogue;
- in the event of controversies, particularly when divisions threaten in questions of faith and ethics, to seek dialogue and discuss the issues together in the light of the Gospel.

III.

OUR COMMON RESPONSIBILITY IN EUROPE

**"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God"
(Matthew 5:9)**

7. Participating in the building of Europe

Through the centuries Europe has developed a primarily Christian character in religious and cultural terms. However, Christians have failed to prevent suffering and destruction from being inflicted by Europeans, both within Europe and beyond. We confess our share of responsibility for this guilt and ask God and our fellow human beings for forgiveness.

Our faith helps us to learn from the past, and to make our Christian faith and love for our neighbours a source of hope for morality and ethics, for education and culture, and for political and economic life, in Europe and throughout the world.

The churches support an integration of the European continent. Without common values, unity cannot endure. We are convinced that the spiritual heritage of Christianity constitutes an empowering source of inspiration and enrichment for Europe. On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail. We likewise insist on the reverence for life, the value of marriage and the family, the preferential option for the poor, the readiness to forgive, and in all things compassion.

As churches and as international communities we have to counteract the danger of Europe developing into an integrated West and a disintegrated East, and also take account of the North-South divide within Europe. At the same time we must avoid Eurocentricity and heighten Europe's sense of responsibility for the whole of humanity, particularly for the poor all over the world.

We commit ourselves

- to seek agreement with one another on the substance and goals of our social responsibility, and to represent in concert, as far as possible, the concerns and visions of the churches vis-à-vis the secular European institutions;>
- to defend basic values against infringements of every kind
- to resist any attempt to misuse religion and the church for ethnic or nationalist purposes.

8. Reconciling peoples and cultures

We consider the diversity of our regional, national, cultural and religious traditions to be enriching for Europe. In view of numerous conflicts, the churches are called upon to serve

together the cause of reconciliation among peoples and cultures. We know that peace among the churches is an important prerequisite for this.

Our common endeavours are devoted to evaluating, and helping to resolve, political and social issues in the spirit of the Gospel. Because we value the person and dignity of every individual as made in the image of God, we defend the absolutely equal value of all human beings.

As churches we intend to join forces in promoting the process of democratisation in Europe. We commit ourselves to work for structures of peace, based on the non-violent resolution of conflicts. We condemn any form of violence against the human person, particularly against women and children.

Reconciliation involves promoting social justice within and among all peoples; above all, this means closing the gap between rich and poor and overcoming unemployment. Together we will do our part towards giving migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers a humane reception in Europe.

We commit ourselves

- to counteract any form of nationalism which leads to the oppression of other peoples and national minorities and to engage ourselves for non-violent resolutions;
- to strengthen the position and equal rights of women in all areas of life, and to foster partnership in church and society between women and men.

9. Safeguarding the creation

Believing in the love of the Creator God, we give thanks for the gift of creation and the great value and beauty of nature. However, we are appalled to see natural resources being exploited without regard for their intrinsic value or consideration of their limits, and without regard for the well-being of future generations.

Together we want to help create sustainable living conditions for the whole of creation. It is our responsibility before God to put into effect common criteria for distinguishing between what human beings are scientifically and technologically capable of doing and what, ethically speaking, they should not do.

We recommend the introduction in European churches of an Ecumenical Day of Prayer for the Preservation of Creation.

We commit ourselves

- to strive to adopt a lifestyle free of economic pressures and consumerism and a quality of life informed by accountability and sustainability;
- to support church environmental organisations and ecumenical networks in their efforts for the safeguarding of creation.

10. Strengthening community with Judaism

We are bound up in a unique community with the people Israel, the people of the Covenant which God has never terminated. Our faith teaches us that our Jewish sisters and brothers "are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11.28-29). And "to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah" (Rom 9.4-5).

We deplore and condemn all manifestations of anti-Semitism, all outbreaks of hatred and persecutions. We ask God for forgiveness for anti-Jewish attitudes among Christians, and we ask our Jewish sisters and brothers for reconciliation.

It is urgently necessary, in the worship and teaching, doctrine and life of our churches, to raise awareness of the deep bond existing between the Christian faith and Judaism, and to support Christian-Jewish co-operation.

We commit ourselves

- to oppose all forms of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in the church and in society;
- to seek and intensify dialogue with our Jewish sisters and brothers at all levels.

11. Cultivating relations with Islam

Muslims have lived in Europe for centuries. In some European countries they constitute strong minorities. While there have been plenty of good contacts and neighbourly relations between Muslims and Christians, and this remains the case, there are still strong reservations and prejudices on both sides. These are rooted in painful experiences throughout history and in the recent past.

We would like to intensify encounters between Christians and Muslims and enhance Christian-Islamic dialogue at all levels. We recommend, in particular, speaking with one another about our faith in one God, and clarifying ideas on human rights.

We commit ourselves

- to conduct ourselves towards Muslims with respect;
- to work together with Muslims on matters of common concern.

12. Encountering other religions and world views

The plurality of religious and non-confessional beliefs and ways of life has become a feature of European culture. Eastern religions and new religious communities are spreading and also attracting the interest of many Christians. In addition, growing numbers of people reject the Christian faith, are indifferent to it or have other philosophies of life.

We want to take seriously the critical questions of others, and try together to conduct fair discussions with them. Yet a distinction must be made between the communities with which dialogues and encounters are to be sought, and those which should be warned against from the Christian standpoint.

We are committed

- to recognise the freedom of religion and conscience of these individuals and communities and to defend their right to practise their faith or convictions, whether singly or in groups, privately or publicly, in the context of rights applicable to all;
- to be open to dialogue with all persons of good will, to pursue with them matters of common concern, and to bring a witness of our Christian faith to them.

Jesus Christ, the Lord of the one Church, is our greatest hope of reconciliation and peace. In his name we intend to continue on our common path in Europe. We pray for God's guidance through the power of the Holy Spirit.

"May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Rom 15.13)

As Presidents of the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, we commend this Charta Oecumenica as a Basic Text to all the churches and Bishops' Conferences in Europe, to be adopted and adapted in each of their local contexts.

With this commendation we hereby sign the Charta Oecumenica, on the occasion of the European Ecumenical Encounter, on the first Sunday after the common celebration of Easter in the year 2001.

Strasbourg, 22 April 2001

Metropolitan Jérémie
President
Conference of European Churches

Cardinal Vlk
President
Council of European Bishops' Conferences

A COMMENTARY ON THE CHARTA

From the Council for Christian Unity

1. THE CONTENT OF THE CHARTA

The Charta is a document of around three thousand words with an introduction and three main sections of text, containing some twenty six commitments for the churches. The headings of the subsections indicate the ground covered:

I. We believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic church.

1. Called together to unity in faith

II. On the way towards the visible fellowship of the churches in Europe

2. Proclaiming the gospel together

3. Moving towards one another

4. Acting together

5. Praying together

6. Continuing in dialogue

III. Our common responsibility in Europe

7. Participating in the building of Europe

8. reconciling peoples and cultures

9. safeguarding the creation

10. strengthening community with Judaism

11. cultivating relations with Islam

12. encountering other religions and world views

Each of the chapters begins with verses from Scripture, goes into a discussion of the theme, and ends with commitments for the churches in Europe. The document ends with

the assurance that “Jesus Christ, the Lord of the one Church, is our greatest hope of reconciliation and peace. In his name we intend to continue on our common path in Europe. We pray for God's guidance for the power of the Holy Spirit.”

COMMENTARY ON INDIVIDUAL SECTIONS

The following paragraphs, to be read alongside the text of the Charta, offer a basic guide to the content of the document. After each section, issues and questions are listed, as a stimulus to reflection, discussion and prayer.

The **Introduction** roots the Charta clearly in the two European Ecumenical Assemblies of Basel (1989) and Graz (1997). It reminds us of our common call to unity in faith through the prayer of our Lord that we may be one. The Charta is born of a new impetus, based on repentance, for the reconciled peoples of Europe to carry out our Lord’s commission to proclaim the gospel. Cultural diversity makes this task of reconciliation difficult, but the churches are urged to work together on fundamental ecumenical responsibilities. The Charta provides guidelines for common life together and a common set of values, and gives examples of the type of commitments that need to be made. The key to the commitments lies at the local level, where additional issues may be added. This is now our task in parishes, deaneries, dioceses and local ecumenical networks.

ISSUES:

What does fellowship (*koinonia*) mean for local churches?

What issues which undermine human dignity do we see in our area?

To what extent do we live in a pluralist culture, and what evidence is there of dialogue and cooperation on specific challenges which people in our community face?

Section 1: We believe in “One holy catholic and apostolic church”

The first section of the Charta clearly states its theological foundation. It affirms the basic marks of the Christian church and the fundamental call to common life and mission (Nicene Creed; Ephesians 4.3-6).

The theme of unity rooted in the Trinitarian faith is the starting point for the Charta. Our ecumenical task is to show forth this unity, despite the barriers caused by our different perceptions of the church, its sacraments and ministers. The commitments exhort us to seek a common understanding of Christ's message of salvation in the gospel, and to work towards mutual recognition of baptism and eucharistic fellowship, as well as to promote common witness and service.

These goals are amplified in the second part of the Charta, which deals with the separate steps which need to be undertaken on the way to full visible unity.

ISSUES:

What is our understanding of the passage from Ephesians?

Does 'oneness' exist within our own church?

What does it mean to be holy, catholic, and apostolic?

How might these questions be answered by members of other churches?

To what extent do local churches display unity?

Are the signs of unity given in the second commitment (mutual recognition of baptism and eucharistic fellowship, common witness and service) an adequate description?

Section 2: On the Way towards the Visible Fellowship of the Churches in Europe

The second section covers basic ways in which the churches should relate to each other and act together if the call to unity and common mission is to be heard and be effective (John 13.35).

Mission lies at the heart of our visible fellowship. In Europe, the context for mission is a society where people have lost confidence in institutions and yet are searching desperately for value and meaning. The Charta calls on the churches to work together, not in competition, but in common mission and evangelisation, and to guarantee freedom of religious affiliation.

In order for mutual trust between the churches to grow, we have to appraise the past and make a commitment to repentance. Reconciliation involves recognition of the spiritual treasure in other churches, and its success depends on how we can enthuse new generations for mission. The Charta makes a strong plea for ecumenical openness in all aspects of the church's work

Ecumenical encounter and activity takes place within and outside of, church structures: for example in friendship and social contact, at work, and within interdenominational marriages. Many countries do not have high-profile ecumenical bodies, and the Charta calls for greater cooperation between CEC and other organisations at the European level. The document urges common action at all levels of church life, and emphasises the need to defend the rights of minorities, and to break down prejudices among church members.

Spiritual fellowship between the churches should be founded on a new commitment to common prayer and eucharistic fellowship. The Charta urges the churches to make a major commitment to this end. In turn, the coming together of the churches depends on continued dialogue in order to achieve a consensus in faith, and as a safeguard when doctrinal and ethical questions threaten to divide the church. In many situations such questions still represent a fundamental challenge to the churches.

ISSUES:

The section calls for a more detailed evaluation of our local situation and common mission. How we see the situation locally may be influenced by our perception of the situation nationally or even internationally.

What evidence can we find of the lack of corporate and individual orientation and falling away from Christian values?

What are we doing to promote Christian education, pastoral care, the sharing of experience, the communication of the gospel, and commitment to social and political issues?

What is the common agenda for evangelisation?

Are there issues of freedom of belief in our context?

What means are we using to review the past, and how well do we know other churches in our community? Can we see our own church through their eyes?

What practical measures are being taken ecumenically to integrate young people in discussion and action on these issues?

Are we in general prepared to be inter-dependant, open, ready to encounter and help people from other churches?

How are these issues experienced and interpreted in the context of interdenominational families?

How are the issues seen through the eyes of minority churches in our community?

What prejudices exist regarding majority and minority churches?

What is our commitment to common prayer: who, how, when, and where?

What strategies can we use to familiarise ourselves with the spirituality of others, and what possibilities exist for regular common eucharistic fellowship?

Are parishes already implementing what is possible in the provisions of the Ecumenical Canons (B43/44)?

What resources, training and support do we need for these initiatives?

Section 3: Our Common Responsibility in Europe

The third section of the Charta takes up the second half of the document. Outward-looking and referring to many serious issues which affect contemporary European society, it is introduced by reference to Matthew 5.9. The section considers the European context, and reviews ethical, political, social, cultural, environmental, and inter-faith issues and opportunities in which the common witness and action of the churches is called for.

Underpinning the separate fields of activity is the search for common Christian values ‘in the spirit of the Gospel’ (para 8).

The Charta is published at a time when Europe is engaged in a profound self questioning about the political shape of the continent, and when whole societies are questioning their identity, their values, and their relations with others, in particular how to deal with the presence of minority groups in their midst. All this takes place against a background of increasing world tension and continuing concern about the globalised economy and stewardship of the environment.

The Charta calls on the churches to work together to shape the values which underpin European unity and the conduct of the European institutions. This means active engagement in issues of justice, freedom, sanctity of life, family values, the protection of the disadvantaged and marginalised. The churches are urged to work to prevent a new East-West divide, to create a new sense of European unity, but to avoid the danger of Eurocentricity, or the abuse of religion in political, ethnic or nationalistic confrontation.

Central to this engagement is reconciliation between peoples and cultures, along with commitment to the democratic process, to the peaceful resolution of conflict, and to social justice. The Charta calls on the churches to counteract nationalism, violence and oppression, and to promote the position and equal rights of women and men in all areas of life.

Specifically, the Charta commits the churches to the safeguarding of the creation, recommending an ecumenical day of prayer and a strong involvement in environmental questions.

The inter-faith dimension of our common life in Europe is stressed with a commitment to opposing anti-Semitism, and to increased dialogue and/or encounter with the Jewish and Muslim communities. In a Europe of many faiths and where many people have no faith, the churches are urged to listen carefully to what others are saying and to pursue matters of common concern.

The Charta concludes with a prayer for God's guidance through the power of the Holy Spirit.

ISSUES:

Effectively, the section is a challenge to be an outward looking, engaged church with a European vision.

Are we able to consider our share in the failings and responsibility for the troubled past of the continent?

What does it mean to our church to support the integration of the European continent?

How are the values expressed in the second paragraph of section 7 visible in our community, and what priorities need to be worked out to make these values visible?

How do we avoid Eurocentricity, and develop the values of the Charta in world terms, through other partnerships?

Does our preaching, praying, worship and action reflect concern for refugees and asylum seekers, issues of security and defence, agriculture and the environment, bioethics, North-South issues?

How do our local churches relate *together* to local secular institutions?

Is there any evidence of infringements against basic values, or of the misuse of religion?

How can the churches work together to reconcile peoples and cultures, to safeguard the creation and to strengthen community and relations with other faiths?

What provision is there for an ecumenical day of prayer for the preservation of creation and local action by the churches on environmental issues?

What challenge to lifelong learning in the church emerges from the Charta's call to improve relations with members of other faith communities?

How can we work together on issues of common concern with Jewish and Islamic members of our community, and develop our general attitude and response to international issues involving members of these faiths?

How are we working with other churches to equip local Christians to cope with other religions and world views represented in the community?

How do we understand together the role of the Holy Spirit in renewing the church's potential to act in turn as a force for renewal in the community?

2. THE PROCESS BEGINS

A consultation organised by CEC in September 2002 brought out the following issues which have emerged so far after the original publication of the Charta:

- There is wide agreement among the churches on the importance of issues like poverty and social exclusion, the effects of migration and refugee policies, the environment and integrity of creation, but without tying these issues to particular political agendas.
- The Charta may be a useful basis for continuing theological dialogue, especially on the nature and mission of the church and the sacrament of the Eucharist, although the document is not a specialist ecclesiological text.
- The Charta raises questions about the bonds between churches: how strong are the bonds of communion between the churches in and beyond Europe, and how should they influence our responses to troubled areas in Europe and elsewhere?
- In addition, the churches need to acknowledge the witness in all traditions of those who have died for Christ - particularly in the 20th century - so that it may be more clearly seen that 'Jesus Christ... is our greatest hope of reconciliation and peace.' (CO 12)

The Charta ‘process’ is only just beginning. In most European countries the churches are still beginning to study the document, and resource materials and support to help this process are still in short supply. The Charta is meant to be adapted to the needs of local circumstances: in adapting it to the English context, we need to be sensitive to our own ecumenical history and priorities (and those of our partners), to the demands of local mission, and the wider spiritual, historical and cultural contexts.

CEC reports that in many parts of Europe the Charta is one of the few documents being discussed by the churches together. It may indeed be the impetus for new dialogue and healing of memories. For all churches, the Charta is meant to be a framework, which can be augmented and adjusted according to local situations. The Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England hopes that over the next few years, parishes, dioceses and others will be able to share resources on implementing the Charta, and will feed back evidence of how it has helped shape the agenda for ecumenical cooperation.

We are asked to use the Charta as a resource in the various fields of the Church’s work. The Charta’s arrival is timely at the beginning of the new century: it is a challenge where there is complacency or inactivity, and a tremendous encouragement where the foundations of this work are already well established.

3. HOW MIGHT WE USE THE CHARTA IN PARISHES, DEANERIES, DIOCESES AND CHURCHES TOGETHER GROUPS?

Although the Charta may appear on the grand scale to be a sort of spiritual constitution for Europe, the starting point for implementing it at local level is for us to find opportunities to **pray regularly with other Christians**. The heart of the Charta is a common ecumenical prayer, which people may already have experience of through local prayer breakfasts and other meetings, or internationally, through Taizé. Alongside prayer, it is clear that Christians from different churches should **study the Bible together**.

Much of the Charta is about **reconciliation**, about recognising the value of other people, particularly in other churches and religious groups. For example, this may express itself in the welcome we give to asylum seekers and immigrants in our community. Newcomers may well be Christians themselves, or have urgent material needs which we can help to meet in collaboration with relief agencies. But there are many other local contexts for reconciliation whereby we can encounter Christ in the ‘other’.

Our awareness of the church in other parts of Europe may be rather fragmentary, and resources which would inspire a greater contact with, and interest in, churches in Eastern Europe would be helpful. The Charta may inspire us also to build **multicultural and multiconfessional experiences** into the life of our church community, appropriate to the local situation. The final part of the Charta enjoins us to learn more about the communities of other faiths around us. In so doing we can exchange ideas and visions and make a genuine effort to familiarise ourselves with what at first sight may seem very strange, dissolving prejudices and fixed ideas. But it is important to engage in activities which have a realistic chance of success, and not take on too much at once. The key point is that this is a **commitment** – its success depends on the support of people in local churches and ecumenical networks.

Publicity and communication are major factors in the success of any such ecumenical activity. Churches Together groups may be the right forum to drive the Charta agenda locally. All these activities is that they reflect a genuine commitment, building on the ecumenical work that is already going on. Indeed, this should ideally involve the whole community of the church, and not just small groups, bringing together people of all generations, interests and backgrounds. A major local task will be to interpret the Charta in terms relevant to different cultures within our communities: children and young people will have an important and distinctive part to play in this process, as the new Europe is being shaped.

The **process** might be for a local church, group of churches or churches together network to set up a **steering group** on the Charta. Publicity, including posters and magazine articles could be put together. Charta issues can be presented on church web sites. Apart from liaising with the local Churches Together programme, the steering group would need to publicise the Charta Oecumenica process in the diocese, deaneries and parishes, and perhaps also partner dioceses and parishes abroad. During and at the end of the process people should have the opportunity to evaluate what has been achieved.

SOME IDEAS FOR ACTION BY CHURCH GROUPS

a. On the way towards visible fellowship

1. Research the extent of genuine ecumenical co-operation at local level. The Charta can first function as an 'ecumenical audit' of existing local and international parish or diocesan fellowship, partnerships and collaboration.
2. Make copies of the Charta available in all languages spoken in the community.
3. Help people understand what the Charta is saying to them. Discuss some of the language/comprehension issues – is the language accessible or 'insider-speak'?
4. In what ways are we genuinely listening to the other's point of view on issues like the sanctity of life, sexuality, bioethics, debt, etc.?
5. Invite other churches/groups to share prayer with and for one another, worship, open meetings, Bible study, hospitality, discussions and other occasions, on a regular basis.
6. Promote information about the work of other churches, religious communities and groups in the local area, and arrange opportunities for people of all ages to get to know each other.
7. Encourage the exchange of information among different groups in the community such as magazines and information sheets, publicise events and group meetings.
8. Set up spaces in church buildings, specially dedicated to ecumenical encounter, prayer and Charta issues.
9. Decide on an action plan for the Charta. Will we as a local church sign it, and with which partners? Will it be formally owned by our Churches Together network?, deanery, diocese? How can the commitments be specifically focused and outcomes evaluated?

b. Our Common Responsibility in Europe

1. Increase awareness of the key reconciliation issues locally: for example reception of strangers and incomers, issues requiring repentance, healing of local ‘wounds’, relationships and memories?
2. Review what the church is doing for the vulnerable groups/individuals in our midst.
3. Consider how we in the local church can talk of/act with a common responsibility for Europe – for example by relating these issues to Bible study.
4. Increase awareness of issues of religious freedom in other parts of Europe and encourage support for suffering minorities.
5. Think about how non-Christians might read or react to the Charta. What is the significance of the Charta seen through the eyes of those engaged in politics, business, education, local and national institutions?
6. Review the relevance of the Charta, and develop a common strategy and sharing of resources for:
 - church and non-church schools and religious education
 - theological education and training for ministry
 - youth work
 - inter-faith relations in the community
 - contact with local, national and European political representatives
 - local environmental, rural and agricultural issues
 - existing and potential European and world links and exchange programmes

Bible Study Suggestions

At the Strasbourg meeting which launched the final version of the Charta, some key passages on common witness and reconciliation were studied. The following are suggestions for Bible study within one’s own church, but preferably together with people from other churches and groups, to help us explore Charta issues.

Luke 24.13-35 The Road to Emmaus – reviewing what the risen Christ means to us, what task we have as his disciples, and looking at both questions through the eyes of others.

John 13.31-38 How difficult is Christian discipleship and how can the love of Christ be shown forth in our communities?

Acts 17.16-34 Paul at the Areopagus in Athens – engaging with the local context, making the Gospel fresh and relevant. What are our local challenges, what is our response?

John 4.7-30 Jesus and the Samaritan woman – meeting the stranger in our midst, relationships healed by the Gospel.

Amos Chapter 5 – the prophetic voice of the Church: how do we balance the need for radical change with the need to reconcile?

John 17.6-24; 1Corinthians Ch. 12; Ephesians 4.3-6 – the classic ecumenical texts: but how seriously do we take them in our own church life?

4. WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

CEC

The **Conference of European Churches** (CEC/KEK) is a fellowship of 126 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches along with 43 associated organisations from all countries on the European continent. CEC was founded in 1959 and has offices in Geneva, Brussels and Strasbourg.

Christians from different confessions are committed to live and witness together in a spirit of ecumenism, sharing, understanding and mutual respect. All are committed in spite of the historic divides, many languages, geographical and economic barriers which exist on the European continent. Together, the churches work to promote the unity of the church and to present a common Christian witness to the people and the institutions of Europe. The common desire to live in peace and to promote justice and reconciliation has enabled the churches to maintain their fellowship throughout the years of CEC's existence.

The Conference of European Churches
P.O. Box 21 00, 150 route de Ferney
CH-1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

Tel: 00 41 227916228
Fax: 00 41 227916227

Homepage: www.cec-kek.org/English/index.html

Email: cec@cec-kek.org

CCEE

The **Council of European Bishops' Conferences** (*Consilium Conferentiarum Episcoporum Europae = CCEE*) The Council was founded in Rome in 1971 and brings together 34 conferences of Roman Catholic Bishops from across Europe. The secretariat is based in St Gallen, in Switzerland. COMECE, the Commission of the European Bishops' Conferences in the European Union, is based in Brussels.

CCEE
Gallusstrasse 24,
CH-9000 St. Gallen
Switzerland

Tel. 00 41 712273374

Fax 00 41 712273375

Homepage: www.ccee.ch/english/default.htm

Email: ccee@ccee.ch

COMECE - Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community

42 Rue Stévin,

1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32/2/2350510

Fax: +32/2/2303334

Homepage: www.comece.org

E-mail: comece@comece.org

The Council for Christian Unity

Church House, Great Smith Street

London, SW1P 3NZ

Tel: 020 7898 1000

Fax: 020 7898 1483

Email (European Secretary): charles.hill@ccu.c-of-e.org.uk

Web site: www.cofe.anglican.org/ccu/index.html

Churches Together in England

27 Tavistock Square

London WC1H 9HH

Tel: 020 7529 8141.

Fax: 020 7529 8134.

Email: gill@cte.org.uk

Homepage: www.churches-together.org.uk/Home.htm

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Inter-Church House

35-41 Lower Marsh

London SE1 7SA

Tel: 020 7523 2121

Email: info@ctbi.org.uk

Homepage: www.ctbi.org.uk

Partnership for World Mission (PWM)

Partnership House

157 Waterloo Road

London SE1 8XA

Tel: 020 7928 8681

Email: pwm@c-of-e.org.uk

Homepage: www.pwm-web.org.uk

European Commission Representation in the UK

8 Storey's Gate

London SW1P 3AT

Tel: 020 7973 1992

Fax: 020 7973 1900/1910

E-mail: Jim.Dougal@cec.eu.int

Homepage: www.europe.org.uk

The European Parliament United Kingdom Office

2 Queen Anne's Gate

London SW1H 9AA

Tel: 020 7227 4300

Fax: 020 7227 4302

Fax: 020 7227 4301 (Library)

Fax: 020 7227 4327 (Press)

Email: eplondon@europarl.eu.int

Homepage: www.europarl.org.uk/office/TheOfficeMain.htm

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