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Ecumenism after the year 2017

Statement

by the General Assembly
of the Council of Churches
in Germany (ACK)



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The year of the Reformation anniversary, 2017, was a good year for Christian ecumenism. There was ample opportunity in all churches to reflect on the need for enduring return to Jesus Christ, to mourn the suffering inflicted on one another, and to affirm their common mission to today's world.

At its spring meeting in Mainz in March 2018, the General Assembly of the Council of Churches in Germany took stock of the commemorations and adopted this statement on ecumenical perspectives after 2017. The General Assembly would like to thank all those who have contributed on various levels to the 2017 celebrations in broad ecumenical fellowship.

1. Lasting joy: the churches celebrated 2017 in ecumenical fellowship

During the Reformation commemoration, all churches focused jointly on Jesus Christ as the source of our faith. The churches did not celebrate their divisions, but rather their common faith in Jesus Christ, which the Reformers had revitalised on the basis of Scripture. In 2017, many ecumenical worship services were held under the joint responsibility or at least participation of all churches: at the national level there was the opening service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Lutherstadt Wittenberg on January 22, the penance and reconciliation service in Hildesheim on March 11 and the service for the Feast of the Cross in Trier on September 14. Regional and local services were celebrated in multilateral Christian fellowship all over Germany. These were also opportunities to mourn before God the manifold injuries that Christians have inflicted on one another. Time and again, representatives of the churches pledged publicly that they would venture to take further steps towards the visible unity of all Christian churches. We welcome the rapprochement between the Protestant Church and the Roman Catholic Church in our country. We are grateful for the many signs of close bonds, but we wish for an even stronger cooperation between all Christian churches.

2. Spiritual depth: the unity of the churches in their witness to Jesus Christ was confirmed in 2017

In 2017, the churches celebrated a festival of Christ, thereby emphasising that they are all members of the one body of Jesus Christ. It became visible that the denominations are deeply connected with one another in their commitment to God's work in creation, in their faith in Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Together, the churches measured themselves according to the Biblical injunction "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:2–3). The Charta Oecumenica¹, basis of the common ecumenical orientation, was filled with life and bore much fruit. In the Charta, the churches commit themselves to prayer for and with one another, to theological dialogue and practical cooperation.

The ACK has contributed a great deal to the Reformation anniversary year. With an academic conference in Munich on Reformation from a multilateral perspective², a booklet on how all ACK member churches understand the Bible³, with the daily prayer for Christian unity at the World Reformation Exhibition and the liturgical texts used worldwide for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity⁴, the ACK consciously set multilateral ecumenical accents. In the fellowship of all ACK member churches we can be "Reconciled with one another" as we look to the future, which was the quintessence of the statement issued by the General Assembly of the ACK on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation⁵.

3. Lasting commitment: to take further steps towards the unity of the churches

2017 has changed ecumenism. It has reawakened the yearning of Christians for unity. It has reinforced the insight that we as Christians are constantly called to turn to Jesus Christ and has thus become an opportunity for ecumenism. Now is the time to take further steps towards the visible unity of the churches, designated as the goal of the ecumenical movement by the Charta Oecumenica. All the churches of the ACK have committed themselves to this goal. It is particularly important that the members of all churches see and feel concrete ecumenical progress. In particular those married couples and families crossing the denominational boundaries of our member churches deserve special consideration. The churches that are bound together in the ACK look forward to facing the ecumenical tasks jointly and with renewed courage in the coming years. The General Assembly has committed itself to pay particular attention to the question of what is meant by "visible unity of the Church" and the ways in which it can be achieved.

It is our conviction that our society needs the common witness of the churches, not only observing the signs of the times, but also offering answers from a Christian perspective. For example, with the Ecumenical Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation the churches are committed to the preservation of the environment in times of climate change⁶. In the face of xenophobia and religious intolerance, both of which have increased in our country too, the project „Do you know who I am?“⁷ in cooperation with other religious faiths sets a signal for dialogue, understanding and reconciliation. Above all, we want to testify jointly in the world to God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ.



Ecumenical worship service on 14 September 2017
in the Constantine Basilica, Trier.

The prayer of Jesus Christ in the face of his imminent death is an obligation to us: we want to become one, so that the world may believe that God has sent him for our salvation (cf. Jn 17:21). The year 2017 has strengthened us in our conviction: our reconciliation is a sign of hope for this world. The love of Christ urges us to make the coming years good years for ecumenism.



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- ¹ Charta Oecumenica. Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe, 2001 (signed in 2003 in Germany): www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ChartaOecumenica.pdf; www.charta-oecumenica.de
- ² Heillos gespalten? Segensreich erneuert? 500 Jahre Reformation in der Vielfalt ökumenischer Perspektiven (Quaestiones disputatae 277), herausgegeben für den Deutschen Ökumenischen Studienausschuss (DÖSTA) von Uwe Swarat und Thomas Söding, Freiburg i.Br. 2016; www.br.de/mediathek/video/alpha-logos-auf-ewig-geteilt-av:5a3c429000b072001ccf2bc8
- ³ Discover Anew the Bible's Treasures, Frankfurt 2017: www.oekumene-ack.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Publikationen/Discover_Anew_the_Bibles_Treasures.pdf
- ⁴ www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/weeks-prayer-doc/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20160531_week-prayer-2017_en.html; www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/xi-week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity/2017
- ⁵ Reconciled with one another. An Ecumenical Statement by the General Assembly of the Council of Christian Churches in Germany on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Frankfurt 2017: www.oekumene-ack.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Reformationsjubilaeum_2017/ACK_Versoehnt_miteinander_english.pdf
- ⁶ www.schoepfungstag.info; www.seasonofcreation.org
- ⁷ www.weisstduwerichbin.de