



The Conference of European Churches

Research in European Mission and Evangelism Project

BRIEFING PAPER No.1

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This Briefing Paper serves the purpose of providing general information about the work and progress of the CEC Research in European Mission and Evangelism for those with an interest in the Project, especially sponsoring partners.

It is not intended to replace the formal Reports presented to the Central Committee, Commission Meetings, or other committees of CEC.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In February 2004, The Revd Darrell and Beth Jackson were seconded by the Church Mission Society to work for the Conference of European Churches (CEC). Their task was to establish a new programme for Research in European Mission and Evangelism, relating to the Churches in Dialogue Commission of CEC. Their primary focus is upon the mission and evangelistic practice of the approximately one hundred and twenty CEC member churches, both Protestant and Orthodox. They are also charged with reflecting on the mission and evangelistic practice of churches outside the membership of CEC, including the Pentecostal, Charismatic, Free Churches, and the Roman Catholic Church.

The main Project objectives are the better understanding and promotion of programmes that facilitate joint reflection and effort together in mission by CEC member churches, and the mapping of new and existing European Mission and Evangelism programmes, initiatives, spiritualities, education, resources, agencies, religious societies, and movements.

2. RESEARCH PROGRAMME: 2004-2006

A. The principal project focussing on the churches response in mission and evangelism to the European context

1. "Seeking and reconciling in unity" Europe and its churches: mission and evangelism

a. This project will identify and describe new and emerging mission programmes, processes, institutions, Churches, and agencies that are, or appear to offer the potential for, fostering co-operation in mission.

Outcomes: Case-study material will be compiled and published electronically, resources catalogued electronically, and materials prepared for publication that enable local churches to learn from the practice and experience of new and emerging mission initiatives. It is suggested that a multi-lingual CD audio-visual study guide for use in local churches would prove useful.

Timetable: The collection of case study material will begin from the Autumn of 2004. The suggested CD study guide might be published for the Spring of 2006.

b. This project will explore the feasibility of fostering co-operation in mission through an interchange of personnel and ideas in a series of visits between and amongst staff of 'emerging mission programmes' and Churches.

Outcomes: The establishment by the end of 2006 of a trial programme of interchange visits at national, regional, and local level by church-leaders able to act as reflective listeners and observers, offering mission insight and experience into the situations visited, and taking back to their own ministry contexts insight and experience gained from their visit.

Timetable: The trial interchange project will be developed for conclusions to be drawn regarding the feasibility of an interchange programme by the end of the three year project.

B. Two projects focussing on the European context

1. "Searching generations" Europe and its churches: portraits from the margins

This project will stimulate the collection of descriptive portraits of individuals who stand at or beyond the margins of the Churches of Europe, in particular their attitudes towards values, worldviews, religion, spirituality, and the Christian church.

Outcomes: will include the *ongoing* collection and electronic publication of portraits, made available through the Research Programme's webpages and related forms of communication.

Timetable: The collection of portraits will be ongoing, commencing straight away. Work will draw to a conclusion early in 2006.

2. "Searching reconciliation" Europe and its churches: CWME and beyond

This project will identify important religious, social, political and economic trends emerging within Europe as they touch upon the 'healing of memories' stream at CWME 2005. Additionally, by contributing research findings relating to mission, evangelism, and proselytism as experienced by the CEC member churches, *Charta Oecumenica's* important achievements can be developed in new directions.

Outcomes: Case-study and other material will be prepared as a contribution to CWME 2005 and beyond. In particular it is suggested that a post-Athens European consultation, jointly hosted by WCC and CEC, would focus on Conference themes of importance for the Churches of Europe. The project's primary contribution would be to deliver the results of field research investigating mission, evangelism, and proselytism within Europe in order to supplement existing doctrinal and theological discourse and analysis of these issues.

Timetable: Case-study material will be collected by Autumn 2004 and planning for a European post-Athens consultation in the Autumn of 2005 will begin straight away.

3. WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED SO FAR?

A. Introduction

As the Researcher has begun to visit, consult, and travel, two questions have been constantly posed. These are, "What are you doing?" and, "What difference will this project make to our Churches?"

In response to the first question we usually reply, "Gathering, analysing, and disseminating information about the mission of the Churches in Europe". The second question requires a more tentative response, "I believe so!" Ultimately, a more adequate response will only be possible when users of the research findings believe them to be of high-quality, useful, and not as readily, or as comprehensively, available elsewhere. That is our goal.

A note of explanation about the first eight months of the project might be in order. The work programme detailed below is in practice the result of only five month's intensive work. The first three months were a combination of relocating our home to Budapest, opening the new Research office, and Hungarian language study.

B. Main achievements

- ❖ Developed research priorities for the Programme
- ❖ Identified and begun initial assessment of existing research programmes within Europe
 - Existing agencies include: European Values Survey, Eurostats, Operation World, Global Mapping International, World Christian Database, various national and denominational research agencies, *et al*
 - Few of the 'global' research centres have a European presence and information is occasionally inaccurate.
- ❖ Implemented systems for collecting, archiving and collating research information
 - Country and regional files
 - Thematic files
- ❖ Identified and implemented 'levels' of research and begun initial collection and collation of research information
 - Internet and library research
 - Direct contact with Agencies and Churches
 - Consultation, conference, personal visits
- ❖ Identified and implemented suitable methodologies for reporting Research and other visits
 - To CEC member Churches and Associate Bodies
 - To others with an interest in the project
- ❖ Identified likely systems for disseminating research information
 - E-magazine, and web-based database
 - Conference, teaching, other writing/publishing opportunities
 - Direct contact with CEC member Churches and
- ❖ Entered initial and provisional phase of publishing reports and analysis

C. Research visits

An essential means of gathering field-information is to visit a representative range of European countries, often possible by prolonging an existing visit for conference or other purposes. The Researcher has been able to make initial observations of the mission practice of the Churches in the following countries:

Russia, Georgia, Denmark, and the United Kingdom.

Further research visits during 2005 will be prioritised to provide an as wide as possible initial encounter with the diversity of Europe's confessional, religious, regional, cultural, historical, and political realities. The primary purpose of the visits will be to gather information about the diversity of mission and evangelism *as practised* by the Churches of Europe.

D. People & Organisations consulted with

We have already consulted with representatives of the following organisations:

Methodist Church in Germany, Christian Research (UK), EMW (Germany), European Evangelical Alliance, Danish Missionary Council, Dutch Missionary, Swiss Missionary Council, Norwegian Missionary Council, Global Connections (UK), Icelandic Missionary Council, Finnish Missionary Council, Swedish Missionary Council, Århus University, Danish Lutheran Church, Baptist Union of Denmark, Conference of Protestant Churches in Europe, Lutheran World Federation, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Russian Orthodox Church, ELKRIS (Russia), Georgian Orthodox Church, Serbian Orthodox Church (Hungary), Evangelical Lutheran Church (Hungary),

Reformed Church of Hungary, Church of England, Church of Scotland, Baptist Union of Great Britain, Armenian Apostolic Church (Georgia), Roman Catholic Church (Georgia), University of Tbilisi (Georgia), Baptist Church of Georgia, Co-operative Baptist Federation (Europe), CMS (UK), Jesus Tag (Berlin), Centre for East-West Church and Ministry (USA), Keston Institute (UK), Emmaus (UK), Novi Sad Evangelical Seminary, Kiev evangelical theological seminary, St. Petersburg Christian University (Russia), Finnish Lutheran Church (Russia), St Petersburg Centre for Interchurch Partnership (Russia), Free University of Amsterdam, European Baptist Federation, International Baptist Theological Institute (Czech Republic), Gospel & Culture Network (UK), Romanian Evangelical Research Institute, Central and Eastern European Association for Mission Studies, International Association for Mission Studies, European Evangelical Missionary Alliance, Areopagus (Denmark), Church Integration Ministries – KIT (Denmark), Evangelical Missionary Alliance (Germany), World Council of Churches (various), CWME 2005, Lausanne International Research Network, Mennonite Missions (USA),

We have already arranged further consultations with representatives of the following organisations:

Habitat for Humanity (Hungary), Churches Together in England, Churches Commission on Mission (UK), Forum 18, United College of the Ascension (UK), Alpha (UK), Christian Research (UK), Church of Norway, Aeropagus (Norway), Global Mapping International (USA), Centre for East-West Church and Ministry (USA), Baptist Union of Hungary,

E. The diversity of expressions of the *missio Dei* noted within Europe

We have begun collecting and archiving material as it relates to the following aspects of mission and evangelism in Europe:

Migrant, indigenous peoples, and ethnic minority churches in Europe
South to North mission
Programmes for establishing new congregations
'New and emerging' churches
Christian mission and the internet
Gospel & Culture
Alpha, Emmaus and other forms of neo-catachesis etc.
Catechesis (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic)
Pilgrimages of witness (Eastern Orthodox) and Walks of witness (Protestant)
Chronicling mission history and biography (Eastern Orthodox)
Denominational and confessional mission statements and consultations
Missiological education
Indigenous ministry & mission supported from outside the national context
Diakonal mission
City/Urban mission
Mission and post-modernity
'Alternative' worship (Thomas Mass, Night-Church, Taizé, etc.)
Evangelising contemporary spiritualities
Mission and the workplace
Business as mission
Mission and the arts
Mission and popular culture
Bible in Mission
Mission, evangelism and proselytism

4. INITIAL ANALYSIS

After only six months of intensive research activity we are naturally cautious about offering premature analysis, recognising the need to spend further time observing, listening and reflecting. However, we believe the following questions represent the greatest potential for developing the conceptual framework within which our field-research will be framed and

ultimately presented. These questions are taking greater clarity for us as we reflect upon our observation of mission practice and field visits thus far.

1. Is secularisation, such an important theme for CEC's understanding of mission since the late 1960 onwards, still the only, or dominant, theoretical discourse within which to discuss European religion at the outset of the 21st century?
2. How may we describe the diversity of mission practice across Europe whilst retaining a meaningful sense or usage of the concept of *missio Dei*?
3. What principles are displayed by current mission initiatives that are successfully promoting or sustaining co-operative mission?
4. What is the nature of the dialectic that exists between the experience of *intra*-confessional diversity and that of *inter*-confessional diversity as these bear upon the bearing of witness to Jesus Christ?
5. Why, and how, is it possible for some churches to appear to present Jesus Christ in a more effective and authentic way than do others?
6. In a common contextual 'soil' some churches are more effectively faithful and fruitful than others. Can anything be learnt from them before too readily lamenting hostile contextual or environmental factors?
7. Is it still desirable, theologically/biblically and socially, for the Churches of Europe to persist in the search for means of co-operating in mission?
8. Is it possible for member churches of the ecumenical bodies to rehabilitate 'evangelism' as a means of narrating stories of faith in Jesus Christ, and inviting fellow seekers for truth to consider the personal and social impact of such stories, perhaps ultimately to consider *the* story of Jesus Christ?

5. TOGETHER IN MISSION?

The General Secretaries of the European Evangelical Missionary Alliances (EEMA) and the European Ecumenical Missionary Councils (EEMC) met at Nyborg Strand, Denmark from the 9-12 June 2004. At this meeting, the Researcher was able to facilitate a discussion about current trends in mission and evangelism that led to the following text being issued by the Research Project.

The task of the CEC research project is to identify and 'map' church projects and programmes that promote co-operation in mission. It is expected that these will be widely varied, as determined by differing contexts. An important step in identifying potentially informative and transformative examples is to identify the obstacles they have to overcome. As a part of their shared meeting together in General Secretaries and leaders from the main European Missionary Councils and Alliances, ecumenical and evangelical, met with the CEC Researcher in European Mission and Evangelism to address the following issues:

1. Which are the current obstacles that are external to the life of the churches and which hinder their mission in Europe?
 - **Secularism** and **secularisation** provide large numbers (possibly a majority) of the citizens of Europe with a framework for shaping ethical decisions, priorities, and action, worldview, 'beliefs', and their attitudes towards other individuals, social groups, and institutions, including the Church.
 - Within this framework **religion** has little or no value in the public realm and is considered to be **a purely private matter**.

- The privatisation of religion has tended to accelerate the incidence of **nominal religiosity**.
- The widely reported **suspicion towards institutions** has consequences for the Churches. Churches are accused of exercising undue power and influence over individuals and society and promoting mission merely as a means of extending their influence.
- Alongside increasing secularity, **individualism** is given extra impetus by what may be described as post-modernity.

2. Which are the current obstacles that are internal to the life of the churches and which hinder their mission in Europe?

- The fear of **proselytism**, real or perceived, paralyses some churches, whilst provoking a defensive, even hostile, response from others. Both responses hinder the missionary task of the Church and 'mission' is described negatively, usually dismissed as solely a Free Church activity.
- The churches are frequently unable to equip their members with the resources necessary to help them combat the **secularising tendencies** that surround them.
- This failure tends to foster **nominal religiosity** among church members
- Consequently church members demonstrate an attendant **lack of spirituality**
- The historic, institutional dominance of many of Europe's churches has led to the **misconception that mission is primarily an overseas activity** and that the European countries are primarily missionary-sending countries. There is correspondingly **little comprehension that Europe is a mission field** and its countries missionary-receiving countries.
- Such misconceptions are bolstered by a relative **lack of missiology in theological education and formation**. Such programmes are often relegated to elective lectures towards the end of a practical theology module.
- The failure to recognise that Europe's churches must become more missionary is reflected in the **relative inflexibility of Church structures** in adapting to the contemporary challenges of, for example, young people, the migrant peoples of Europe, secularised individuals and the search for a 'customised' spirituality.
- In short, too often we observe contemporary churches that are self-contained, self-satisfied, and with little or no interest in sharing with others with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. What existing and emerging strategies offer potential for addressing some of these obstacles?

- Ministers, Priests, and other church leaders who have taken the old step of offering **ministry in non-church contexts** (eg. pubs, clubs, factories, city centres, forms of chaplaincy)
- In some countries, promoting a '**Year of the Bible**' has been very productive and has proven effective at promoting partnership in mission between churches of different confessions and denominations.
- In order to stimulate the circulation of stories of good practice, one Church-related mission agency has organised a **competition** inviting churches to submit their best examples and stories of mission practice.
- There are some good examples of churches that are hosting **websites** that contain chat rooms, offering anonymity to those 'searching' for spiritual direction.
- In some places, **public institutions** that are widely seen to be '**failing**' (for lack of resource, personnel, or vision) have been 'adopted' by a local church or churches as a means of engaging in mission (eg. schools that might otherwise be closed)
- There is a growing number of creative and exciting new **Christian communities** and **movements** (often neo-monastic) in addition to the quite widely known Taizé and Iona

communities. The virtue of these movements is the space they offer for faith exploration alongside their commitment to mission engagement. Such movements are demonstrating an increasing capacity for transcending traditional confessional and denominational boundaries.

- There are a number of **Christian Festivals** that are demonstrating capacity to draw together Christians from across confessional and denominational boundaries, for example the ecumenical Kirchentag, Greenbelt (UK), the Thomas Mass (Finland), Jesus-Tag (Germany), Taizé (France), etc.
- In some places, **Alpha**, **Emmaus**, and other similar courses are helping to reverse negative impressions of the church, offering space for questioning and exploring faith in a highly relational way.
- There are some promising **Urban Mission** projects.
- Where they are working well, **local ecumenical fellowships** have the ability to support churches that are working co-operatively rather than out of a spirit of competition, as well as the ability to simultaneously guarantee individual freedoms.

6. PROJECT VALUES

- Committed to learning from the experience and reflection of others.
- Committed to a process of reflection upon our own practice.
- Committed to integrity and transparency of method.
- Drawing on both evangelical and ecumenical understanding and practice of mission and evangelism.
- Demonstrating and modelling a co-operative approach to mission.
- Committed to prayerful and faithful analysis and presentation of research findings.
- Committed to an approach that respects diversity, avoiding synthetic analysis that nobody feels able to own.
- Approaches the practice of mission and evangelism contextually
- Sympathetic to the diversity of mission practice and theology, consequently developing a research methodology that avoids undue synthesis of findings and recommendations.

7. YOUR CONTRIBUTION

You are invited to contribute to the development of this project by submitting comments, information, suggestions, etc. to the Research office at the Budapest address printed on the front cover of this Briefing Paper.

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