

APPENDIX E

JESUS CHRIST HEALS AND RECONCILES IN EUROPE

**REV CANON WALTER LEWIS REPORTS ON THE 12th ASSEMBLY OF THE
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES**

MEETING IN TRONDHEIM, NORWAY, 25 JUNE – 2 JULY

Delegates numbering two hundred and seventy eight from the Churches of Europe and some fifty representatives from church-related organisations met in Trondheim to attend the 12th Assembly of the Conference of European Churches. Andrea Wills and I represented the Church of Ireland. The theme of the Assembly – ‘Jesus Christ heals and reconciles in Europe’ - helped the delegates to reflect on the various ways in which Jesus brings healing and reconciliation - to individual people, immigrants and asylum-seekers, to churches which have been divided, to relations between faith groups, to countries where there is, or has been, violent conflict, and also to the natural environment which has suffered abuse and neglect.

The delegates met in a range of different settings. The opening worship was held in the magnificent Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, conducted by the Bishop, the Rt Rev Finn Wagle, and attended by His Majesty, the King of Norway. The preacher was His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. During the Assembly, the Services of Lutheran Eucharist, Orthodox Vigil, Armenian Liturgy and Orthodox Liturgy also took place in the Cathedral. The Assembly closed with open-air worship, in a beautiful setting, beside the Nidelven River; the preacher was the Most Revd Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury.

Delegates came together in the huge Spektrum Conference Centre for all other parts of the programme. The Assembly was officially opened by His Excellency Kjell Magne Bondevik, Prime Minister of Norway, who is also a priest in the Church of Norway. The keynote address was given by Dr Kenneth Kaunda, Founding President of Zambia.

The programme included morning and evening worship, Bible study, plenary sessions, hearings and section meetings. There was a marketplace - ‘The Torg’ - for various religious stalls, which was also a meeting place for coffee.

In the course of a short report, it is possible to give only a flavour of the Assembly events. The main business, such as the adoption of various reports and recommendations, took place at the plenary sessions in the full assembly. The ‘Hearings’, on subjects like ‘Christians and Muslims in Pluralistic Europe’, ‘The Slave Trade -Trafficking in Women’, and ‘Sustainable Development’, drew large numbers.

The delegates divided evenly into four groups to examine the work of CEC since the Graz Assembly in 1997, and to identify future work for the organisation. Between Assemblies, CEC’s work is carried out mainly by three Commissions. The Commission on Churches in Dialogue encourages dialogue between and within Churches, and

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promotes ecumenical education. A main priority is fostering dialogue between the Orthodox and other member-Churches of CEC, and giving attention to the very constructive and positive relationship between CEC and the Roman Catholic Church.

The Church and Society Commission, whose office is in Brussels, engages with the political institutions of the European Union in dealing with such matters as bioethics, economics, environmental and social issues, European legislation, European enlargement, human rights and religious freedom, and peace building and security. The Churches in Solidarity body deals with migrants, refugees, uprooted people, racism and xenophobia, and the issue of violence against women and children.

In the groups, the delegates looked at the place of mission and witness in the work of CEC, and were unanimously of the view that mission should be at the heart of the work of CEC at every level.

There was much informal social exchange between delegates over coffee and at meals. This was one of the very productive spin-offs of a very busy Churches' Assembly. It was not surprising to sit at table with a layman from the Church of Scotland, a female priest from Hanover, a deacon from Uppsala, an Orthodox bishop from Cyprus, and a young theology student from Belarus. Such is the nature, variety and glory of the Church! During the Assembly, the Archbishop of Canterbury gave a reception supper for some guests.

Throughout the Assembly there was beautiful, sunny weather. Even at night, the sun did not set. Midnight in Trondheim was just like Belfast at midday. The theme of the Assembly was 'Jesus Christ heals and reconciles in Europe'. I am sure that those who took part in the Assembly experienced the healing of some of Europe's divisions - through the worship, the business, the new and deepened friendships and God's reconciling power. Andrea Wills and I left Trondheim, deeply appreciative of the wonderful experience of being there, and profoundly grateful for the honour and privilege of representing the Church of Ireland in Europe.