Meeting of the Commission on Ecumenical Education and Formation
Orthodox Faculty of Theology, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
9 to 13 October 2017

FINAL REPORT

RECOMMENDATIONS

The EEF Commission affirmed the recommendations made to the Central Committee in 2016 regarding its commitments to the body of work for which it is charged. The five recommendations that were presented to guide the work of the Commission for the 6-year period until the next assembly remain, with one amendment made to recommendation #3 to provide a broader engagement that includes the member churches and WCC partners within the regions. The Commission was challenged to be intentional in naming the member churches and partners as a part of the regional strategy for cooperation and communication. This change requires no action as it explicates the term “region” in the recommendation.

The commissioners continue to move forward the following five recommendations and the corresponding follow-up mechanisms that were created at the 2015 meeting at the Bossey Institute.

1. Encourage active engagement of all in all areas of EEF with an inclusive pilgrimage of justice and peace.
2. Suggest relevant themes and methodologies for continuing education opportunities for ecumenical formation.
3. Strengthen the cooperation and communication in and between the member churches, regions, partners and the WCC in the area of EEF.
4. Strengthen networking in and between the regions and facilitate cooperation of teachers of ecumenism.
5. Support initiatives for leadership development and formation within all EEF projects.

BACKGROUND

The members of the EEF Commission met for the second time from 9-13 October 2017 in Cluj Napoca, Romania. The Commission was hosted by the Romanian Orthodox Church and warmly greeted by H.E. Metropolitan Andrei Andreicuţ who emphasized the need for Christian unity.

The EEF Commission proceeded with its work through the engagement with staff from
the Bossey Institute, theologians from the local context, and an ecumenical pilgrimage of justice and peace with the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Romania, the Reformed Church, and the Romanian Orthodox Church including a visit with the community at the women’s monastery in Mihai Vodă, Turda. These member churches of the WCC and the Greek Catholic Church extended warm hospitality and shared their history and context.

The commission reaffirmed its commitment to the task of education and ecumenical formation with attention to the work of the past two years. The work of the EEF includes focus in the three project areas: (i) Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, (ii) Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE), and (iii) Ecumenical Continuing Formation. The Commission also discussed the need to be attentive to all the transversal areas within the WCC, and recommitted to be intentional in including all people in the work of EEF.

The commissioners spent time in dialogue with the GETI (Global Ecumenical Theological Institute) academic facilitators who gathered in Cluj in preparation for their theological education course/project with students in Arusha at the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in 2018. The engagement with these theological educators offered insight into concerns and challenges for education and ecumenical formation.

The Commission received with gratitude the reports of the Co-Moderators, Deputy General Secretary for Ecumenical Formation and the EEF staff. The Commission journeys in its advisory capacity with the staff as it implements the body of work that is EEF. The staff presented updates that reflect programmatic engagements that facilitate the five recommendations that were named. In two years, there are programmatic initiatives that fulfill these recommendations and move forward the work in the three project areas.

The Commission identified three groups to follow up on the five recommendations made in 2015. The groups were:
- Network of Institutions of Higher Ecumenical Theological Education (NIHETE)
- Pan African Women’s Ecumenical Empowerment Network (PAWEEN)
- Youth and Inclusivity.
Each group was charged with a specific recommendation for the two-year period between meetings, realizing that the work of accompaniment with the staff had to continue. The three groups worked with staff over the two years and also presented their reports to the Commission.

**STRENGTHENING COOPERATION AND COMMUNICATION**

The EEF Commission specified its intent for this recommendation, realizing that the use of “in and between the regions and the WCC” appeared to exclude the specific commitment to engage the WCC member churches and WCC partners in the region. This important distinction in the language points to the Commission’s intent which was in the narrative but not captured in the concise recommendation. The 2015 report clearly states: “Member churches in all regions ought to remain connected in order to strengthen their pilgrimage of peace and justice. Such regional encounters will help the development of methodologies and content for ecumenical education and formation, that is adapted to context.”
The regional connection of the churches offers possibilities for encounters to assist in contextual approaches to the development of methodologies and content for ecumenical education and formation. Also, noted in 2015 and affirmed by the Commissioners again in 2017, is the potential for these regional encounters to strengthen their pilgrimage of justice and peace. The regions have common issues producing challenges and opportunities to ecumenical theological education and formation. The commitment to the regions and their constituent bodies related to the WCC and EEF will enhance the future of theological education and formation with attention to the intersections with issues such as human rights, inter religious dialogue, care for creation and post-colonial realities which emerge from the regional and local contexts.

Cooperation in and between the regions opens the way for additional programming that brings aspects of the Bossey model to the regions for those who have a desire to pursue theological education and formation. Theological institutions in the regions continue to offer studies in ecumenism and are viable in their approaches and offering for contextual engagement. The Bossey model offers a lived ecumenical experience to students coming from a variety of traditions to live and study at Bossey. In addition to the option for regional education through Bossey, an enhanced use of on-line resources was once again named for further exploration.

Communication is critical to the work of EEF. Connecting with the regions, on-line resources and the pilgrimage of justice and peace all predicate on communication strategies that inform and highlight the opportunities available for theological education and formation, continuing education and networking that will provide support and connections to Bossey.

The small group tasked with this recommendation started the Pan African Women’s Ecumenical Empowerment Network (PAWEEN) which relates to the work of ETE. This is one of three emerging networks that advance the work of EEF. The Commissioners received the report of PAWEEN which included continuing education and regional engagements both at the Bossey Institute and in other parts of the world. PAWEEN has been intentional in living out the commitment to the transversals and inclusion of groups historically excluded from the life of the WCC.

The EEF Commission welcomed the presence of a member of the WCC Communications staff. Communication continues to be an issue of priority. The designation of a staff person to journey with the Commission is received with gratitude. The Ecumenical Review offers the opportunity for the Commission to share stories of its work and members with member churches of the WCC. Commissioners were urged to subscribe to the Ecumenical Review and to engage the Communications Department. Interviews with Commissioners were collected during the meeting for later use and sharing. Ecumenical Review is a place for Commissioners to potentially identify the trends facing theological education and how these trends are affecting ecumenism. A special issue on EEF will be scheduled for 2019, and Commissioners signed up to collaborate with the issue as authors and editors.

**COOPERATION OF TEACHERS OF ECUMENISM**

The EEF received the report of the group tasked with working on this recommendation. The networking of teachers of ecumenism is critical to ecumenical theological education.
commitment to leadership development for the life of the church requires attending to the multiple dimensions of theological education and formation. These theological educators are a source of support and learnings for each other and can contribute to the exchange of methodology and content in teaching ecumenism.

For example, the Commission heard from different contexts that “ecumenism” is defined in different ways and received in different ways, some of which are unfavorable. Teachers of ecumenism are a starting point for this discourse and can help in addressing new ways for undertaking the challenges posed by misunderstanding and miseducation about the ecumenical movement and the Church’s quest for Christian unity that was given through Christ. The pilgrimage of justice and peace offers new engagement for Christian unity for the Church, and offers to theological educators the opportunity for their pilgrimage together. This network offers other options including engaging new models for theological education, exchange of curricula and methodologies, as well as the sharing of experiences of theological faculties in the regions.

Emerging from the work of this group on the recommendation was the Network of Institutions of Higher Ecumenical Theological Education (NIHETE). This network is gathering theological educators and preparing a framework to support theological education at Bossey while offering opportunities for theological learning across the life of the WCC. In its 2015 report, the EEF “cited the need for on-going ecumenical learning,” noting “there are occasions and opportunities within the life of the WCC that offer additional options for ecumenical learning.” The presence of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) at the 10th Assembly in Busan raised questions for other opportunities for theological education in the life of the WCC.

Accompanied by NIHETE, the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism scheduled for Arusha, Tanzania from 8-13 March 2018 will offer theological education through GETI. GETI will provide with youth and spiritual life, two areas which the Commission name as “essential to the work of the WCC as a whole.”

**FOCUS ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF YOUTH AND INCLUSION OF MARGINALIZED AND EXCLUDED PEOPLE**

The prioritization of an inclusive pilgrimage of justice and peace was named for the work of EEF. While the mandate is to attend to the transversals and ensure that all are engaged in all areas of EEF, the Commissioners are committed to focused attention in this area and with this body of work.

The commitment to leadership development is at the heart of this focus, while leadership development is inherent across the work of EEF. The EEF concluded in the 2015 report that: “...developing leadership at various capacities was identified as one of the important components for taking the commission from the present to a step forward with the experience, learning and sharing... Hence, ecumenical education and formation should be offered to all the people who are the present, past and future leaders both lay and ordained of WCC member churches.”

The Commissioners deliberated on the realities of these groups. There is capacity within the WCC to connect the work of EEF in these areas with the related programme areas in the
WCC. There are staff holding programmatic responsibilities for women, indigenous people, youth and other areas. These programmatic areas would help to connect with EEF, and EEF will benefit from engagement with ECHOS and other networks.

The ECHOS Commission at its meeting affirmed the inclusive intentions of EEF in saying “that EEF encourages member churches to create possibilities for exchange of ideas and experiences between young people as well as sending their young theologians to the courses of Bossey”. The EEF commission affirms its role for encouraging the youth to join the ecumenical experience at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey and affirms that empowering the role of the youth in the ecumenical movement is prioritized, not only for theologians and clergy, but that the space is opened for non-theologians and the laity as well.

The EEF youth commissioners believe it would be effective for them to have periodic virtual meeting every 6 months through an official subgroup, to contribute to the EEF Commission’s work, affirming broader youth engagement in the ecumenical movement on both educational and formation levels. The youth commissioners are official representatives of their churches, and as such, accessibility to further networks and youth projects is possible. The youth commissioners from EEF will continue to work with the ECHOS commission regarding the structure of ECHOS.

The EEF Commission received a document from the Gender Advisory Group, which provided a brief introduction about the history of the group, and their vision and mission. They recommended that the EEF “engage with schools of theology so clergy and theologians are equipped to address sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) in congregations, institutions and communities and are enlisted in the quest to make our communities a place where SGBV is clearly forbidden and human dignity of persons is protected.” They further recommended that “Bossey introduce an ethic of care curriculum to equip churches in their response to SGBV and its related trauma healing.”

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

The global religious landscape is changing religious life and potentially ecumenical theological education. Guided by the reflections of the Co-moderators, the commission noted the need to continuously reflect on what is meant by ‘ecumenism’ and ‘ecumenical formation’ within the paradigm of the pilgrimage of justice and peace. In their reports to the commission the Moderators identified challenges which include but are not limited to sustainability, ecclesial and academic legitimacy, relevance, and the need to identify the constituency.

Ecumenical education and formation need to resonate with the contextual issues such as: religious pluralism, secularization, as well as tension, competition, and violence among the churches. New players in the ecumenical education field such as Pentecostals need to be included, and newer ways of relating ecumenism and interreligious dialogue must be sought. Technological changes must also inform how ecumenical education and formation is to be done.

Further challenges and opportunities arise which point to the need for new approaches to Christology and interdisciplinary theological education. The rise of globalization, global
mobility, multiple identities and multiple religious identification will require attention for their impact on ecumenical theological education and formation.

These challenges and trends point to the amplified need of actively mentoring the next generation ecumenically. In this journey, the commission observed the need to focus on both long term and short term processes. There is also a need to pursue a communication policy that will help to put EEF on the agenda within and beyond WCC. Further, the commission highlighted the need to utilize newer avenues and emerging opportunities some of which are provided by modern technology. New ways of teaching ecumenism and new perspectives of ecumenical formation that resonate with emerging realities at the grassroots must continually be explored.

NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

The Commission continues to affirm that networking is one of the important mechanisms to carry on the work of education and ecumenical formation at local, regional and global levels in an efficient manner. Networks are important in the work of the Commission as these connections to the variety of constituents within the WCC advances the task of ecumenical education and formation. It is one of the components that is significant and essentially relevant in all three programmatic areas. The commission asserted the existing and emerging networks promoting the works of EEF and jointly working with EEF.

The commission with its joint conversation with the GETI academic facilitators insisted on strengthening and networking in and between the churches in which the recently emerged networks such as NIHETE, PAWEEN and Youth in Leadership Network could be a platform to share the methods and methodologies, collaborating with the other networks, and make the excluded communities more visible in all the projects of EEF. Along with the appreciation for the work of emerged networks, the commission also insisted on further networking in all areas of EEF projects in terms of continuing the conversation beyond GETI and Bossey learning.

The Commission explored the possibilities for alumni networks of Bossey and GETI. These networks would be a bridge in connecting the students to continue their relationship within themselves from all over the world, to share their present works and how they practically carry on their ecumenical learning in their respective churches and regions in their own context. This space would also be a platform that would serve as a human resource to the projects of EEF in which the network would help the alumni to continue their conversations, collaborate with one another and share their resources, methodologies and contexts within themselves and with EEF and WCC.

The EEF commission along with the staff of EEF would support and promote the Alumni Network for Bossey Institute and GETI alumni, and use the networking capacity of the EEF Commission to support and promote the comprehensive work of EEF, serving as ambassadors for the work of EEF. Networking is also needed to create ecumenical spaces to the people at all levels to access the works of EEF and to be part of this work. Also, it would be a space for the EEF commission and the projects to reach out to all people irrespective of geographical locations.
Follow-up mechanism:

EEF affirmed the work of staff and Commissioners in the two years since the last meeting, see appendices and PAWEEN report(s). There are visible signs and evidence that the work and commitments of ecumenical education and formation are moving forward with success in this period. Three working groups were identified for the next two years:

- Youth and Inclusion (indigenous members of the commission to liaise with the Indigenous Peoples network through the mission from the margins office; address resource sharing, maintaining contact, what do IP bring to EEF?) Internal suggestions – 1. To EEF - young EEF members have space and time to meet, not necessarily linked to this working group, comprising virtual periodic meetings of “EEF youth caucus”. 2. To ECHOS - ECHOS to support upcoming WCC Youth & Leadership network and platform.
- NIHETE: Next 2 years – promotion of exchange of methodologies and content in ecumenical studies through a platform; possible meeting in conjunction with the evaluation of GETI 2018, enhancing the network of theological educators who join the network with ETE, methodology and content for new sub-network; considering regional as well as global collaboration, being inclusive of a broad range of denominations.
- PAWEEN (group approved the report from Angelique Walker-Smith who will condense it to fit present format in 4 points.) Summary a) promote mainstream of history and narratives of Pan African Women in Theological Education. b) promote theological education that reflects methodologies and perspectives brought by Pan African Women c) promote and provide faculty and leadership mentoring exchange. Promotion of young women coming along = mentoring, exchange among young women d) to partner with rest of WCC family and in particular communications department, CWME and GETI 2018, with International Affairs around the African Union agenda and UN decade in solidarity with people of African descent and with the WCC programme Just Community of Women and Men.

The three groups will continue to meet between now and the next meeting with the staff assigned for mutual accompaniment. These meetings will be necessary as it will be another two years until the next meeting of the EEF.

Three project areas the commission suggests are:

- That Bossey and ETE (GETI) create Alumni networks
- That the EEF Commission collaborate with the WCC Communications department to elaborate and publish stories of EEF commissioners in a systematic way
- That the EEF Commission work with the WCC Communications department to publish an issue of the Ecumenical Review with articles by EEF commissioners

CONCLUSION

This report reflects the updates to the work of the EEF from the past two years highlighting the achievements, the challenges and proposal for the next two years. Working with the Deputy General Secretary for Ecumenical Formation and the staff in the three program areas, the EEF Commission anticipates being fully engaged with EEF, especially through the three groups and the three projects. The EEF Commissioners bring these recommendations for the
affirmation of the Central Committee. The Commission appreciates the support given by the central committee in execution of its mandate.

Note: A first draft of this report was submitted end October 2017 for the WCC executive committee meeting in November 2017. This version varies very slightly from that version but only in terms of style, layout and spelling out of some acronyms, the content is unchanged.