

# EEF - NET

News • Information • Discussions on Ecumenical Learning

*Edited by the Education and Ecumenical Formation Staff of the World Council of Churches*

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*Christian  
education  
belongs ...  
to the  
whole church*



## Dear Colleagues in Education and Ecumenical Formation

*The view of the trees from our office windows has taken us from the rich colours of autumn to the bare branches of winter. We know that it will not be too long before the green of spring reappears. There is nothing surprising or frightening about this – change is part of the natural order. We would be worried if it did not happen.*

*For ecumenical educators, change is also part of the natural order. We hope, if not expect, that individuals and communities will change – that what we know, what we can do, how we relate, the attitudes we hold are all open to change. The WCC has been bold enough to adopt God, in your grace, transform the world as the theme of its 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly to be held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in February 2006.*

*However, we know that fear of change is one of the factors that can prevent individuals and communities (even churches and the ecumenical movement) from learning. Perhaps it is part of our survival mechanism as human beings that we are able to reach an accommodation even with awful realities. Human institutions prefer the status quo even when it is unsatisfactory. So we should always ask, when people say they want ecumenical formation, whether they really do want to become ecumenical or just want to know something about ecumenism. To be ecumenical means being changed – our narrow horizons opened up, our attitudes, relationships and*

*behaviour transformed! The thought of radical change can be frightening.*

*In this issue we can read some signs of hope from those who have been prepared to risk change. The International Center of Bethlehem, one of the centres linked globally through OIKOSNET, offers possibilities of change to a seemingly hopeless situation. In an area suffering the effects of sectarianism, there is a testimony to the possibilities of integrated education in Northern Ireland. At the other end of the scale of things, we can read how the presence of autistic children in a congregation offered an opportunity for change. Mark Gibson tells us of his own experience of transformational education at the Asia Ecumenical Academy.*

*In a different way, articles on possible developments in ecumenical formation in Britain and Ireland and on Religious Education in Europe remind us of what we may do to open up the possibilities of change.*

*Whether we will be attending the WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre or not, we can prepare for and accompany it. If the prayer implied in the theme, God, in your grace, transform the world, is answered we had better welcome and be prepared for change!*

*The education and ecumenical formation staff of the WCC*

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## *Transformational Education*

*Mark Gibson*

### *A reflection on the experience of the 2004 Asia Ecumenical Academy*

As an ordained Presbyterian of Te Haahi Weteriana O Aotearoa (The Methodist Church of New Zealand) - serving in a small urban parish in the first few years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century - there is constant pressure to dedicate myself totally to the needs of the parish. My calling and ordination requires me to "build up the community of faith". My training and clerical cultural conditioning defines this ministry in increasingly congregational ways. In the context of institutional decline this tendency is only further accentuated. It is easy to get into the mindset that if only I work harder for the parish we will 'turn a corner' and begin to grow again.

Further to this the impact of globalisation is real but rarely acknowledged. One of the ironies of the globalisation process is that it fuels a counter-movement towards tribalism. In the face of the one world-market juggernaut people seek to ring-fence their particular identity. The church is not immune to this fragmentation of pan-tribal identities, and the rise of the small "we" as opposed to the big "we". In my own country there is clear evidence of a resurgence of denominationalism. Churches are giving greater priority to self-serving ministry and mission.

As someone who has been committed to ecumenism for around two decades I experience a growing indifference and even

hostility towards the ecumenical vision of unity in diversity. The national ecumenical body in Aotearoa New Zealand has had the life squeezed out of it by member churches and it's life will be terminated September 2005. A process is underway to negotiate the birth of a new ecumenical body but considerable uncertainty exists over what will emerge. For the ecumenical movement these are difficult times. It is a hugely challenging task to be ecumenical in a rapidly globalising world.

It is for these reasons that I took up the opportunity to participate in the 2004 Asia Ecumenical Academy (AEA) in Chiangmai, Thailand. As I understood it the aim of AEA was to create a learning community in which participants from around Asia-Pacific could experience ecumenical formation for mission. There is a complete absence of such opportunities in my own national context. I sensed the world in which I was ministering was rapidly shrinking, and I needed to be built up again in an ecumenical rather than denominational identity, and so regain a wider vision and perspective.

This was not the first time I had been to Asia to participate in ecumenical events. On five previous occasions my ecumenical wings had been expanded. My sense was that AEA had the potential to take me much further on my journey and this proved to be correct. To engage fully in ecumenical space for three

intense weeks does not leave you the same person when you return home. AEA was a transformational experience for me. It was a creative space in which the Spirit significantly changed my understanding of humanity, the world and Christian mission.

In the context of imperial power Paul warned the small Christian community in Rome to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God”. In the context of globalisation we face the same urgent challenge. The Roman empire sought to be the one in whom everyone lived and moved and had their being. Globalisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has a similar objective.

Paul knew that to conform to the dominant ideology of the world is to allow it to define our humanity. He dared to witness to an alternative conviction that it is “God in whom we live and move and have our being”, which was closely connected to the ancient Jewish belief that as human beings we are made in the “image of God”. It was clear to him that the erosion of this image in us is a dehumanising process.

In the face of empire the early church was claiming back the whole inhabited earth for God. They were saying that it is God’s vision of fullness of life for all creation that will prevail, and not the vision of domination and control of the empire. They were seeking to restore humanity to what God means us to be.

AEA was a place where this alternative understanding of humanity could grow in me, and a place from which I could much more clearly discern the will of God in the face of globalising forces. Put another way, it was a space in which the image of God in me

grew stronger than the globalisation of my mind. The educational process of AEA facilitated this personal transformation in a variety of ways.

The first dimension of AEA which was transformative for me was the corporate worship. We sat in all our diversity in a circle on the floor around a small indoor garden full of life and diversity. This in itself was powerfully symbolic of unity in diversity, and contrasted strongly with the linear and symbolically starved worship of my local church. Worship was a celebration of God’s community in the widest sense. The liturgies that we shared in around the garden were holistic, multi-sensory, multi-cultural, participatory and ecumenical in the truest sense. Included were not only prayers, songs and symbols from a diversity of Christian tradition, but from other faith traditions as well. Everyone shared leadership of the worship. Reflections connected with the context we shared as well as the contexts from which we came from.

The daily pattern and rhythm of gathering in worship at the beginning and the end of the day for three weeks began to have a profound affect on me from the inside out. It was a rich soil and climate in which I could feel myself spiritually growing after a long period of decline. I could sense myself healing deeply in the worshipping circle. It brought me closer to God and deepened my love for humanity and creation.

An act of worship that most powerfully connected me in this way was a prayer of confession that involved body, mind and spirit. We confessed our sins to mother earth and placed our hand on the ground. As we confessed our sins towards ourselves we placed our hands on our hearts. As we confessed our sins to each other and humanity we held hands.

AEA was an intentional learning community that incorporated both academic as well as more informal educational styles. For several days at the beginning of each week ecumenical theologians and leaders made presentations on the academy sub-themes. There was much in these lectures to challenge and encourage our thinking. Two took me out of my comfort zone and confronted me with aspects of myself that have limited my ecumenical openness in the past. These were the lectures on the Roman Catholic perspective on ecumenism, and the Islamic faith. In both lectures I felt myself moving beyond previously held-positions.

The opportunity for dialogue and group discussion following these lectures enabled further exploration to take place. It was valuable hearing wider perspectives from situations other than my own. The small group I participated in during the second week focus on “globalisation” was a particularly stimulating and fertile space for developing my thinking. As others shared my understanding deepened in many directions and so many new insights were sparking inside me that it was hard to keep listening. At the conclusion of the group we spontaneously flowed into a time of prayer to acknowledge the gifts we had received from each other in our sharing.

However there were many times during the three-weeks when the most transformational experiences were happening in the margins of the programme, or even outside it. I live in a city where air-conditioners are rare. It was a huge challenge to me to learn to live with them at AEA. During the first week I was finding it almost impossible to sleep with one on in my room. On the third night I decided to turn it off. The silence was deafening, and then I could hear the rooster and frog chorus outside. A question slowly

began to occupy my thoughts: “How often does the immediate noise of my life block out other voices that are on the outer but nearby?” It is an important ecumenical question that I continue to journey with.

Another transformational, cage-rattling experience that happened in the margins took place on the second day. I initiated a conversation with another participant who I sensed was struggling to be part of what was happening. I invited him to tell me about his life as a pastor in his home country. What he shared with me was rich and disturbing. I learnt much for the first time about the challenges and difficulties of being part of the Christian community in a largely hostile situation. The grace, gentleness and shrewd tenacity of the church he belongs to moved and inspired me.

Later in the day we got into conversation again and he shared with me that when he woke up that morning he was feeling ill. He said that the stress of trying to be part of the learning community was for him huge, as he battled with his limitations in the English language. He told me that during the community-building session after the opening worship he was very frustrated and unhappy with his self-introduction to the group. He had not been able to share what he wanted and needed to. All of this began to make him feel unwell, and the impulse to withdraw was strong.

It was humbling and life-changing then to learn that it was when I went out of my comfort zone to make space for him in my life, and invited him to share his story that he began to feel well again. In the one-to-one situation with he began to find the words he needed to express himself in the way he needed to. This experience was also a transforming one for him. For the rest of the

course I observed a man who had come right out of his shell, and was sharing powerfully in a range of ways. This experience formed a close bond between us, and led on to him inviting me to visit his country with my family, and to take up a particular ministry there during my forthcoming long-serve leave.

Much of my learning and growing happened through the informal conversations during meal times and in recreational time. In other one-to-one conversations I learnt much about particular countries and churches and cultures very different to my own. Many of my most powerful learnings flowed out of the day-trip four of us made as part of a tourist-package. The experience of riding on an elephant, and visiting tribal villages forced me to think more deeply about the impact of western tourism on both. I began to see these activities through new eyes, and even more so in conversation with another participant who made the journey with me.

Being a tourist for a day was inadvertently an extra exposure visit. The programmed exposures also contributed much to the overall educational process of AEA. Visiting AIDS orphans and the people who work with them; urban tribal slum communities; organic rice farmers; and Buddhist temples and activist monks were deeply humanising experiences that will have a lasting impact on my life. Images often have a far more powerful and enduring effect on us than words. It is the images of young children with HIV/AIDS seeking physical contact and affection; a dirt-floored, shack slum-village church; and a humble organic rice-farmer proudly and gently standing by his rice paddy with the bush-clad hills in the background that will stay with me the longest impacting on how I see the world and God's mission to it.

AEA was for me very much both an inward and outward journey. The space for writing and lection played a critical role in the educational process. There was always the sense of engaging in community learning, worship, recreation and sharing and then withdrawing for personal reflection and prayer. In the same way we engaged with the Thai context whether visiting the markets, temples, churches, bars, or just walking around the city, and then had space to reflect on what we had experienced and learnt.

This action/reflection, inner/outer process is intense, dynamic and transformational. There is always the sense of being a person in community, and feeling the challenge of joining and connecting with others without obliterating our differences. There is an excitement about learning more about myself away from home, but in returning to home and re-engaging in new ways.

The transformational impact of AEA can be seen in the fragile but real connections that continue between participants in cyberspace. As I celebrated in my first contribution to the community conversation on the net "We live on!". There is pressure in the local context to shrink and squeeze down to size again – to reduce the diversity in order to preserve a unity. Through the life-line of our cyber-community we can keep ecumenism and the mission of God alive. We can use the tools of globalisation to build up the community of faith in all its diversity and breadth, and to allow the Spirit to remake us in the image of God.

*Mark Gibson is an ordained Presbyterian of Te Haahi Weteriana O Aotearoa (The Methodist Church of New Zealand)*

# *A Religious Education in the Schools of Europe*

*Peter Schreiner*

*The office of the Intereuropean Commission on Church and Schools (ICCS) has moved from the Comenius Institute in Münster, Germany to the IKO/Church Education Centre in Oslo, Norway. Dr. Roger Jensen has become Secretary of ICCS, replacing Peter Schreiner who is now the Chair. At the official opening of the new office, Peter Schreiner commented on four issues around religious education in Europe.*

## **Speaking about Religious Education means speaking about education and schooling**

We need a clear vision about what education is when we deal with the aims and purposes of religious education. Education cannot be seen neutral; it has always to do with values, norms and interests of different stakeholders.

You can also ask: Does education need a religious or a spiritual dimension? And if the answer is yes, how should that be arranged? An often mentioned attainment target for education is to encourage "tolerance and respect for the culture of others". ICCS contributes to this debate in challenging limited views of education, focused mainly on economic needs and argues for a more comprehensive understanding of education.

This can be linked up with a report that was delivered a few years ago: Learning. The Treasure Within (1996). Jacques Delors the former president of the European Commis-

sion, the International Commission on Education for the twenty-first century. In this well received report to UNESCO, the commission based their work on four basic principles, four pillars, as a frame for formal and informal education:

- learning to know (acquiring the instruments of understanding);
- learning to do (to be able to act creatively on one's environment);
- learning to live together, learning to live with others (so as to participate and co-operate with other people in all human activities);
- learning to be (the aim of development is the complete fulfilment of man in all the richness of his personality).

These are no more than basic principles that should be taken seriously when it comes to formal education arrangements. The four principles underline the fact that the International Commission is in favour of a comprehensive understanding of education,

an integrated view, where body-mind-spirit are not seen as separate and independent parts of human beings and where spirituality and religion can achieve a new relevance. They describe the task of education as follows: 'Education must ...simultaneously provide maps of a complex world in constant turmoil and the compass that will enable people to find their way in it.' (Report 1996, 85). Orientation is needed in a comprehensive sense.

### **A new awareness of religion**

Religion has not disappeared. Interestingly, the religious sociologist Grace Davie speaks about 'believing without belonging', and 'vicarious religion' (2002). Her empirical studies prove the fact that there is more belief around than might be thought by activists in religious communities and that there is more sympathy to those who are still active than we might expect. These concepts explain why there are more in sympathy with religion in its institutionalised form than there are formal members or adherents. "The term 'vicarious' denotes "religion performed by an active minority on behalf of – that's the crucial phrase – a much larger number who, implicitly at least, understand and approve of what the minority are doing." (2002, 13, emphasis by G. Davie). Although the concept of 'secularisation', dominant for many years, has lost its momentum in social sciences (Luhmann 2000) it is a more or less accepted view that institutionalised religions, especially Christianity have lost their influence and relevance in society. Institutionalised religion is no longer a central system but one out of many sub-systems in a plural setting of other sub-systems (Luhmann speaks of functional differentiation of society). But religion has not disappeared, as some social scientists expected. It exists in more differentiated

and individualised forms. Religiosity has become – similar to identity – a task of self-determination. In the existing market place of religious and non-religious offers, a person has to create his/her own view on religion. The label of a 'patchwork religion' is often used for this kind of process. It is not about dealing with his/her own religion but facing a number of other religions and world views which are present in society and life world. In western societies no longer has one religion an exclusive situation, not even in the area of public schools. Plural settings in school and in the classroom become more and more common. More and more teachers are becoming sensitive to the individualised form of religion of their pupils as the context and content of the teaching. Their teaching task is to combine this with other dimension such as knowledge about the different world religions and experiences of their believers. Presenting a kind of "objective" knowledge about religions and world-views no longer seems to be adequate for Religious Education.

This new awareness of individualised religion can challenge the dominant relationship between education and religion.

Enlightenment and secularisation have led to a situation in Western Europe where religion is no longer a central issue in the area of education philosophy. More generally one can state that modern knowledge includes no spiritual dimension. Religion and spirituality no longer have a central impact in the mainstream disciplines of sociology, history, philosophy, education, or cultural studies. Mainstream education philosophers no longer normally refer to religious interpretations of life or to religiously based values and experiences. As for intercultural education, which has become increasingly relevant during the last twenty years with its aim at empathy towards the

other, dialogue and the competence of 'dancing with difference' (Moore 1998), the dimension of religion is neglected or ignored. The existing situation is perceived to be critical, especially by those who emphasise the necessity of recognising spirituality in education. "Educational authority at all levels is challenged to take the challenges of spirituality seriously; to allow it to change what constitutes learning" (Tacey 2002, 171). By introducing the word 'spirituality' we demonstrate our awareness of the increasing use of the term in casual expression and in different contexts, such as spirit of place, spirit of the time of the spirit of group. Indeed, in some countries, the spiritual development of students is increasingly a concern for schools, although this is chiefly in a 'secular sense'. By using 'spirituality', we share a broad understanding of the term including its religious or more general connotations. The central characteristics are the integral connection to education and a critical view to dominant models of modern education.

### **Developments in Religious Education**

There is widespread provision of Religious Education as a school subject in most of the countries of Europe. That is any kind of religious teaching and learning in public or private schools. It has to be differentiated from religious education developed in their own organisation by the religious communities.

Different countries, with their local, regional or national contexts give rise to different approaches. The reasons, among others, are the religious landscape, the relation between state and religion, the existing education system and its underlying philosophical assumptions. The range of ap-

proaches goes from no religious education in public schools (mainly in France, due to the principle of laïcité), through cooperative models where state and religious communities share responsibility for RE to confessional approaches where religious communities are responsible for Religious Education in schools.

In many countries there has been a development from a confessionally oriented approach to a non-confessional one, especially in those countries where a state church was dominant (or still is) such as England, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Where churches and religious communities still have a legal say in public education, they see their involvement in education and RE in public school mainly as a service to society and as a field of close cooperation with the state rather than primarily as an activity to nurture church members. (Labels cannot explain what really happens in the classroom.)

### **A new shape of Religious Education**

Issues such as secularisation, individualism, pluralism, and globalisation are marks of change with implications for RE. All existing approaches have to be developed carefully according to the changed situation. The denominational or confessional approach can no longer focus exclusively on one specific faith tradition. A much stronger emphasis should be given to ecumenical and inter-religious learning for the sake of mutual understanding and the promotion of respect towards other faith traditions and world views. Encouragement and competence for dialogue among believers from different faith traditions is needed as well as for a dialogue between believers and non-believers or agnostics.

The religious studies approach has included from the very beginning a variety of other religions and worldviews. An essential element was a comparative dimension concerning issues of festivals of rituals etc. Now we need more cooperation with faith communities, associations and organisations which give authentic testimony about beliefs and religious views.

There is also the view that there is no need of any kind of religious education in public schools. It is most evident in France with the dominant principle of laïcité. Nevertheless, even in France there is increasing criticism of the loss of the cultural as well as of religious knowledge as a result of the exclusion of religion from the curriculum. We cannot understand art, literature or music in Europe, unless we know something about the Christian tradition. A recent report by Régis Debray (2002), requested by the former French Minister of Education, states that knowing about religion as well as knowledge of the history of religion is essential for teaching and learning in public schools. He therefore proposes that know-

ing about religion should be an integrated element in existing subjects like history or art while confirming that the principle of laïcité must be preserved.

This overview of challenges to Religious Education demonstrates the difficulty of separating RE from the school and from school development, even if the role and place of RE are contested in some education systems. It seems that issues of a religious dimension in general education and of RE in school are unavoidable if schools are to contribute effectively to essential understanding between the existing cultural and religious traditions and views in a society.

*Peter Schreiner is a member of staff of the Comenius Institute and is a member of the WCC Commission on Education & Ecumenical Formation.*

*For more details of ICCS:  
[www.iccsweb.org](http://www.iccsweb.org)*

## *Integrated Education in Northern Ireland*

*Anne Kilroy*

Integrated education in Northern Ireland refers in particular to the bringing together of children and young people from Protestant, Catholic, and 'other' backgrounds. Such integration, or rather, process of 'integrating' is nothing remarkable in other parts of the world, but in a divided society, where sectarianism and separation are endemic, it is still a controversial issue.

I have been Catholic Chaplain in Lagan College, Northern Ireland's first Integrated School, for the past five years. While officially representing our own denominations, my Protestant colleague and I are there for all the students, including those who have no religious beliefs. Founded in 1981, with an initial roll of 28, Lagan College now has over a thousand students. The Integrated movement has grown in leaps and bounds, and at present there are approximately forty-seven such schools, most of them Primary. Parental demand continues to grow. Nevertheless, only about 4% of young people get the opportunity to go to an Integrated school.

Integrated Education is hardly the panacea for all the problems of Northern Ireland in a post-conflict situation. But I do believe it has an important contribution to make to the process of reconciliation and healing. Ultimately, it is about forming relationships, overcoming ignorance, dispelling misconceptions, and challenging perceptions. It is not enough, however, simply to bring young

people from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds together, and presume that integration happens automatically. On the contrary, we need to create and use opportunities to 'grasp the nettle' of divisive issues, whether of a political, cultural or religious nature. Such opportunities usually come unbidden in the course of the school year, e.g. current political events and developments, seasonal school Assemblies such as Remembrance Sunday and Ash Wednesday (giving scope to explore divisive symbols collectively), and the many informal conversations, which take place in our 'drop-in' centre. Teaching Religious Education in an integrated setting is both challenging and rewarding. It is not about finding the 'lowest common denominator' as some would suggest, but of exploring what we all share in common, while at the same time not glossing over the differences.

A year in the Irish School of Ecumenics led me to explore the Northern Ireland issue, and to become a member of Cornerstone, an ecumenical community of reconciliation, on the Peace Line in West Belfast. This, in turn, led me to Lagan College. Both Cornerstone and Lagan College came into existence in the early eighties, at a time of political turmoil and increasing violence. Both in their own way, continue to preserve their founding charism in a different, more hopeful climate, one which inches its way to normalisation, but still bears the wounds and symptoms of a long legacy of hatred and violence. Such movements, far from being redundant, are

needed as much as ever in the tortuous journey towards sustainable peace. I am privileged to be part of both.

While the ecumenical and the integrated movements are distinct, they do overlap. It is this overlap which adds an exciting dimension to my role as chaplain in an integrated setting, and which is experienced chiefly in the day-to-day relationships and discussions with my colleague and with other members

of staff. Preparing worship together provides a particularly rich source of theological and ecumenical dialogue. My ministry in an Integrated School has been a significant step in my ongoing ecumenical journey.

*This article first appeared in Unity, the newsletter of the Irish School of Ecumenics, Dublin.*

# *Learning to be Ecumenical from Children*

*Tomoko Fujimaki*

## *A reflection on inclusive worship from Japan*

There are various people like kids, autistic children, the disabled young and old in our church. Some children sit quietly during worship but others don't. Since babies cry and children talk or often walk around, our worship is very noisy.

Children and adults have attended worship together since 2000. Before that they worshipped separately. However, as children and their parents attended worship separately at their own time, they needed to stay in church for a long time. It was very hard especially for parents of autistic children. Then parents started to take their children with them during the adult worship. So gradually parents and children attended worship together. The reform in worship was caused by a need, which we analysed together. We affirmed that God welcomes children and adults at worship. In the process, we realized some important things:

First, we needed to change the form of worship to enable participation of children.

Second, we confirmed that children themselves should decide when they should be at worship.

Third, rearrangement of the chairs and other facilities in the chapel was necessary so that a child could feel comfortable

Two years passed since the children and the adults started to worship together. Now, more children come to church than before. The mothers of autistic children comment that the church is an invaluable place where their children can find comfort.

Other activities that bring together children and adults are: a peace festival in which children and adults learn together with other churches; a children's festival; at Christmas, a small Christmas tree decorated with paper bags containing cash contributions which are remitted to various projects for children in different parts of the earth. May these activities become one step towards ecumenical education.

*This reflection was first offered to the Asia Religious Educator's Forum.*

## *Exploring Possibilities for Peace and Reconciliation*

*Students holding WCC scholarships who are studying in the United States met together to reflect on the Decade to Overcome Violence. Around ten students each year are enabled to study in the United States through a combination of funding from WCC Scholarships and a 'free place' at a seminary.*

In April 2004, ten World Council of Churches international scholars from eight countries and ten denominations gathered at the Presbyterian Center in Louisville, Kentucky where they were warmly welcomed and graciously hosted by the Presbyterian Church USA's Peacemaking Program for a consultation to discuss issues of violence and to explore possibilities for peace and reconciliation in Jesus Christ. They joined by representatives of the churches and WCC staff.

The scholars from around the world, studying at various theological institutions across the United States, were called together by the World Council of Churches (WCC), who has set the years 2001 - 2010 as the Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace (DOV). The DOV calls churches, ecumenical organisations and people of good will to work together at the local, regional, and global levels with communities, secular movements, and people of all living faiths, to promote peace, justice and reconciliation.

The scholars, who focused their discussions on personal experiences of violence and peacemaking in the context of their home

countries and the United States, opened their time together with a worship service at the baptismal font. At the water, they gave thanks for God's wondrous gift of one baptism in Christ that transcended their diversity and united them as one body in the unbreakable bonds of love. As the Rev. Leng Lubang, WCC scholar from the Dubuque Theological Seminary who took the lead in organizing this event, commented, "The safe environment created by this gathering enabled the scholars to share their perceptions of living in the United States and experiencing American society at close hand for the first time. They were able to participate in a dialogue of the heart, where their theological thinking involved the mind, spirit and body."

After reading the theological reflection paper, "Nurturing Peace, Overcoming Violence: In the Way of Christ for the Sake of the World" prepared by WCC Faith and Order, the scholars engaged in a lively and at times very poignant discussion of the sources of power and the inspirations for peace in the contexts of their own countries. Excerpts from their reflections, which follow, also contain some observations of the United States:

- ▶ I like the concept of living for peace. We have too many who are willing to die for peace. It is harder to live and struggle to transform society. I prefer living for peace rather than dying for peace.
- ▶ I don't see many differences between the government in the United States and in the third world. What the churches are doing is what makes the difference. If churches stand with those who suffer, governments may notice. That's how we can hold ourselves accountable as brothers and sisters.
- ▶ America is blessed to have religious freedom, but it seems to me that it is Christians, themselves, who limit the freedom of religious expression.
- ▶ How we use language is so important. With words we can start a war or start peace. We can destroy or build up. We are not cautious enough about the words we use with one another.
- ▶ Peace can be maintained if all authorities realize that power is born not out of control or force, but out of solidarity in divine love.
- ▶ Every village has a chief. The whole problem with a global village is that we have a chief that is invisible. In African villages we have a chief that is for the people. But in the global village, we have a chief who is not for the people.
- ▶ When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers. This means that in the fight of big powers in the world, it is the grassroots whether from poor or rich countries that are adversely affected.
- ▶ Prayer is the loud voice of the churches for peace. Even in rural villages in the South Pacific, we pray for peace for the

rest of the world. What can prayer do when we ask for impossible things? Week by week we pray... and prayers are answered.

- ▶ Prayer has power. Prayer can make a difference. In the Orthodox Church in Romania, many have witnessed the power of prayer in the lives of the saints. Prayer does have the power to bring change.

In a personal response to the experience, The Rev. Lubang noted that she anticipated her ministry back home in The Philippines would be strengthened by her exposure to the stories of fellow scholars from around the world who broadened her own understanding of the need to heighten global concern for overcoming violence and the critical need for developing and sustaining initiatives for peacemaking. She also reflected on the "grace" of having an opportunity for all the WCC scholars studying in the United States to explore their respective experiences of this culture, and to compare notes on what had been the most challenging, and the most inspiring aspects of their time, here.

The benefits of having WCC scholars enrolled at the Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, motivated Eden's Director of Admissions, The Rev. Dr. Diane Windier, to drive WCC scholars attending Eden to Louisville for this consultation and to personally engage in the discussions. "We have found that international students bring a whole new perspective to theological questions, as well as providing a multicultural experience for our American students who are not able to travel," she said. "Their presence in our communities keeps us humble as an international power, helps us hold a global perspective for our congregations, keeps us honest in our theological dialogue."

# *Possibilities for Ecumenical Formation in Britain and Ireland*

*David Goodbourn*

*A consultation organised by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) took place in the context of a widespread perception that ecumenical awareness was diminishing. The following are edited extracts from the report.*

## **1. What is ecumenical formation?**

Ecumenical formation is not just learning about ecumenics, though it can include that. It is learning ecumenically - being formed in ways that are genuinely open to the insights of other church traditions, other cultures and (for some) other faiths. It has a particular relevance to those who lead the Churches, since they often set the tone and context in which others learn, but it is not confined to them.

Recent fashion in learning theory and practice tends to stress individualised learning – distance learning, learning contracts, programmed learning. Ecumenical formation tends towards a different understanding. It sees people as “people in relationship”, learning through encounter. And it requires a community of reinforcement. Taking individuals out of their context, engaging them in ecumenical formation, then sending them back achieves little – even when they are themselves opinion formers. Ecumenical formation cannot, therefore, be effective unless it becomes part of the culture of the learning

community (office, ministry training programme, local church....) within which the learner operates.

Since ecumenical learning involves learning from other traditions and cultures, it also involves contributing to others' learning from one's own tradition and culture. The learner is part of the resource. Such exchange becomes possible when the learner engages from within their vulnerability, but not from within their fear. Vulnerability reduces the threat to others and helps one be open to the need for change. Fear generates defensiveness, and closes down the possibility of learning. Facilitating ecumenical formation and learning means developing an atmosphere of trust – and that needs time and space.

## **2. What motivates ecumenical learning?**

It is motivated most clearly when people are placed in communities where ecumenical learning is needed for them to function effectively. This can imply a number of different strategies:

- a) Placement of people in communities of other traditions and cultures, whether for a period of study or a period of work. This might be ministers in training, church “civil servants” or leaders, lay leadership groups from local congregations, committee or board members.
- b) Developing cross-tradition/cross cultural partnerships, that will require the partners consistently to learn from one another.
- c) Writing job descriptions that require people to engage with other traditions in cultures – and therefore require them to learn how to do so effectively. In the present British/Irish context, this applies particularly to local and regional leaders and to denomination civil servants. It is not enough to write the requirement in, if the culture rewards people who ignore it. There needs to be a genuine expectation that people will be ecumenically engaged (such that they will be pulled up in supervision or appraisal if they are not).
- d) Building ecumenical time into the working patterns of leadership groups (local, regional and national) and of job descriptions, and resourcing it adequately so it becomes an enrichment, not a burden.
- e) Creating occasions of encounter, where the time, space and method require genuine exchange – and therefore necessitate learning encounter.
- f) Rediscovering witness as a driver for learning together – ie ecumenical

learning does not precede ecumenical witness, it is a dimension of it (and needs to consciously built in as such).

It is worth noting that ecumenical space can often be a “safer” environment for exchange that mono-traditional space, since people are freer to explore and disagree.

### 3. Are the present omens good or bad?

There have been a number of recent significant losses to ecumenical learning. The tendency for colleges of one tradition to seek validation for their own degrees has diminished the university as a place of ecumenical learning. The end of the Selly Oak Colleges represents a lessening in ecumenical formation for mission. The closure of Scottish Churches Open College has been a particular loss in the Scottish context. And as inter-faith work has become more “sexy” than inter-church work, funding and energy for experiments in ecumenical learning are harder to find.

On the other hand, there are some very positive signs. Churches Together in England’s courses for ecumenical officers, the *Welcome to Wales* course, the learning fostered by Christian Aid and other ecumenical agencies, the development of Roots for Churches [editor’s note: *Roots is a lectionary-based resource programme for churches from all denominations, specially designed to support the worship and learning of the whole Church community.*], the continuing success of the ecumenical Lent course (selling roughly 30,000 copies a time) – all are signs of hope for ecumenical learning. The glass is half full as well as half empty.

#### **4. Some practical possibilities**

- ▶ Centres for promoting ecumenical learning. A concerted effort could be made to coordinate the work of the existing centres for ecumenical study and to look to the colleges and universities to play a bigger role in ecumenical formation. A possible focus could be the “ecumenical institute” under consideration by CTBI. It might also create opportunities for people to revisit their ecumenical histories (recognising that different churches and people read the same history quite differently), and encourage the kind of ecumenical theological reflection on issues and core principles that will slow down the rush to pragmatic decision-making.
- ▶ Create an ecumenical induction course for people moving into significant denominational positions, seeking to ensure that no one takes a senior administrative or spiritual leadership role without attending it.
- ▶ Research where cross-cultural/ international partnerships already exist, and maximise the use of them in terms of story-telling and placement.
- ▶ Write into the job description of every senior denominational postholder the expectation that they will work ecumenically and the time for them to do so (in the hope that this would eventually free denominational ecumenical officers from the role of ecumenical apologists in their own denomination to denominational sharers in the ecumenical field).
- ▶ Strengthen the role of ecumenical postholders so they can become advocates for the smaller denominations that cannot afford ecumenical officers (or other specialists) of their own.

*The report was offered to EEF-NET by David Goodbourn, the General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and a member of the WCC Commission on Education & Ecumenical Formation.*

## *A House of World Wide Encounter*

***The International Center of Bethlehem is one of the centres linked globally by OIKOSNET.***

On April 2, 2002 the Israeli invasion of Bethlehem caused much destruction to the International Center of Bethlehem (ICB) and to the whole Lutheran compound. However, the staff and beneficiaries of the ICB were determined to never give up on Bethlehem. The ICB is committed to continue to build and rebuild, to train and educate, to empower, to create life in the midst of despair, and to continue to call for justice and reconciliation in the midst of conflict and violence.

The ICB is a Lutheran-based, ecumenically-oriented institution serving the whole Palestinian community, with an emphasis on children, youth and women. It has a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach. ICB sees its mission as equipping the local community to assume a proactive role in shaping their future. Through empowering the local community, developing human resources, cultivating artistic talents, and facilitating intercultural encounters, the ICB actively promotes the building of Palestinian civil society.

The ICB joins with two other institutions to form the basis for their intergenerational, multi-faceted programs:

- ▶ The Dar al-Kalima School offers an alternative to the traditional Palestinian educational system. Communication, commitment to the community, critical

thinking, creativity and Christian values lie at the heart of this approach. The school aims at encouraging students to be pro-active participants in the educational process.

- ▶ The Dar al-Kalima Academy is a unique intercultural institution for higher education. The Academy offers training in music, arts and crafts, media and communication, cultural management, tourism and Christian ministry. The academy is developing strategic partnerships with several local and international colleges, the Scandinavian “volkshighschools” and European academies.

The ICB programmes and facilities include:

- ▶ The Ad-Dar Cultural & Conference Center which is located in the heart of the old city of Bethlehem. The Center is a unique place for local, national and international concerts, performances, conferences and encounters. A restaurant and café/bar offer opportunities for socialising.
- ▶ The Health and Wellness Center was created with the aim to bring hope and healing to a suffering community. It focuses on general preventive medicine, community health awareness and psychological health issues associated with the current situation in

Palestine. The Health and Wellness Center is also equipped with a swimming pool and several fitness rooms. The plan includes outdoor facilities, gardens and a natural reserve open for the community as a place for picnic, rest and exercise.

- ▶ The Al-Kahf Arts & Crafts Center which aims at reviving the local community's sense of beauty, strengthening the cultural identity, and cultivating the artistic talents. It seeks to:

- Create an infrastructure that is necessary for the rejuvenation of the cultural life in Palestine

- Conserve and revive the traditional Palestinian handcrafts that are slowly dying out, as well as evolve the handicraft industry so as to meet international standards

- Provide needed vocational training for young people, and hence creating job opportunities for young and qualified Palestinians

- Encourage human productivity and creative skills so as to enable people, through their own work, to participate in shaping their future.

- ▶ The Bethlehem Media Center (BMC). The BMC aims at empowering the Palestinians to tell their stories, promoting the human face of the Palestinian people and their religious communities and encouraging better and more balanced media coverage on the Palestine/Israel issue.

- ▶ Bright Stars - A Brighter Bethlehem, One Star at A Time. Children in Palestine constitute over 50% of the population.

In an environment of increased violence, the project focuses on expressing the emotions, fears, thoughts and visions of the young people. The ICB developed the Bright Stars project with a creative, holistic approach and a large variety of techniques to motivate and stretch the children's imaginations and possibilities. Children participating in this program are between the ages of 6-16. They are Christians and Muslims, girls and boys. Children gather in different art, music, sports, communication and environmental clubs according to their talents and gifts. The children are encouraged to develop these gifts and talents. Our hope is that, during the process, they discover themselves as Bright Stars in art, music, sports, communication and environment.

- ▶ Intercultural Encounter: At the very heart of our mission is a commitment to promote cultural exchange between Palestine and the rest of the world, providing people from different cultures, contexts and backgrounds a forum to meet. Whether as volunteers-in-mission, youth exchanges, educational workshops, theological conferences, academic consultations or grass-roots encounters, these programs help build bridges of understanding and create communities of fellowship between peoples globally.

- ▶ Authentic Tourism: Land, Culture & People Guided by a new theology of pilgrimage, the Authentic Tourism is a socially responsible travel offering a holistic approach to visiting the Holy Land.

*For more information: [www.annadwa.org](http://www.annadwa.org)*

## Resources

### Practising Ecumenical Learning

This CD-ROM of resources for ecumenical formation has been produced through a collaboration of Ecu-Learn, Germany and the education & ecumenical formation staff of the WCC. The WCC Round Table, which brings together agencies and specialised ministries of the churches who support the WCC, has identified the need for ecumenical formation for their members of staff. The experience of offering such opportunities and of working for the ecumenical formation of WCC staff has identified useful approaches, patterns, methodologies and resources which have been included on the CD-ROM.

The *Introduction* looks at the meaning of oikoumene and contains material on the ecumenical situation and the need for ecumenical formation.

On *Ecumenical Formation and Learning* examines what we mean by ecumenical learning and its spirituality. It also deals with ecumenical leadership development.

*Historical Documents* contains useful texts and visual aids for exploring the development of the ecumenical movement.

*The praxis of ecumenical learning* gives examples of methodologies and course plans that have been found to be useful in practice.

*Issues and themes* offers articles giving an introduction to the Christian confessions and

issues such as globalisation, violence, dialogue, mission, justice and unity.

*Self-understanding and structure of the WCC* offers texts and visual aids.

*Sailing for new ventures* helps people enter into the discussion taking place on the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement.

*Training Lay Leadership* includes resources developed by the members of OIKOSNET.

Initial feedback on the CD-ROM has been very positive. It is hoped to produce a revised and extended version in the course of 2005.

*Further information on the CD-ROM from the WCC or Ecu-Learn* ([www.eculearn.de](http://www.eculearn.de))

### Best Practices of Non-Violent Conflict Resolution in and out-of-school

During the year 2001, the Education Sector of UNESCO launched an initiative calling for "best practices" on the conflict resolution in the field of formal and non-formal education. To accomplish this initiative, it requested numerous partners - UNESCO National Commissions, NGOs, various associations, schools, research institutions and universities to contribute to this work by sending clear and simple written articles relating their experience in the prevention and transformation of conflicts.

This is to inform teachers, trainers, educators, parents, youth, students, who one way or the other, are confronted with the phenomena of violence in the school or in non-formal community education, and are looking for practical solutions. The intention of UNESCO in this project is to let them know about the best materials internationally related to education for peace and non-violence, but above all to supply concrete pedagogical tools to prevent and transform the violence with which they are confronted on a daily basis in their work.

*You will find the text of the publication on the UNESCO website:  
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001266/122679e.pdf>*

### **Journal of Christian Education & Information Technology**

The journal is published by the Korea Society for Christian Education and Information Technology. (KSCEIT). KSCEIT was founded in 2000 for the development of Christian higher education and Christian educational ministry in Korea. Its purpose is to develop a paradigm for the theory and practice of Christian education in the Korean context.

The two issues of the journal received (April 2003 Vol 4 and April 2004 Vol 5) published mainly in English contain articles by Christian education luminaries such as John H Westrhoff (The Pastor as Teacher, 2003) and Thomas H Groome (Total Catechetical Education, 2004). The other authors are Korean or American some working in higher education in the other's country. In each of the issues there are one or

two information technology based articles (eg Internet Use in Cyber Community, 2003). Otherwise the articles are theological/pedagogical centred.

Although the purpose of KSCEIT is to contextualise Christian education in Korea, the theological and educational influences described in the articles are almost exclusively western. One hopes that as the process of reflection continues Korean paradigms will emerge that owe as much to the local as to the global culture. Certainly the investment in KSCEIT is to be respected and encouraged. Many of us working in other contexts would find value in reading the journal.

*For more information about KSCEIT:  
[www.ksceit.com](http://www.ksceit.com)*

## *News from the WCC Education and Ecumenical Formation Staff*

Congratulations to Tara Tautari on the birth of her son, Manaia, on 21 May 2004.

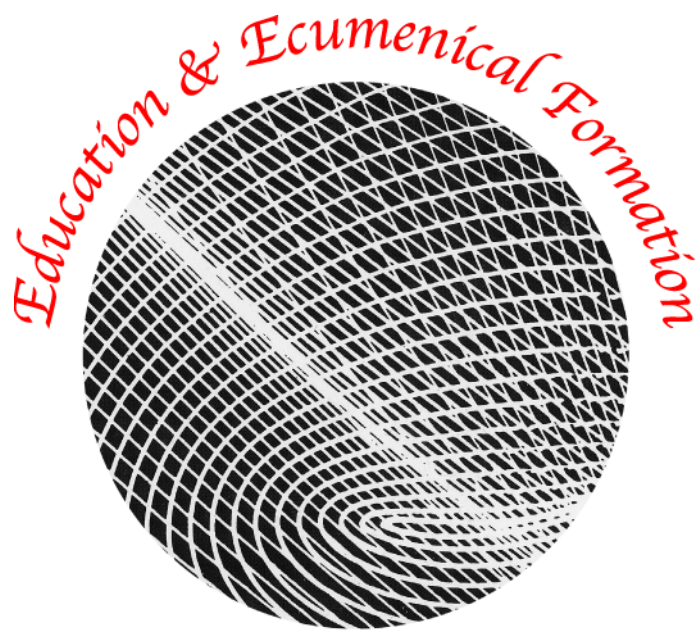
Some of the highlights of our work up to November 2004 are:

- ▶ A consultation on Education for Unity and Unity in Education involving theological and religious educators from Orthodox and protestant churches in Central and Eastern Europe.
- ▶ The formulation of a proposal to the Conference of European Churches (CEC) by a joint CEC-WCC working group for the development of a strategy for ecumenical formation which will concentrate on involving existing European networks rather than establishing new structures.
- ▶ Work with staff of agencies and ecumenical bodies on their ecumenical formation has continued.
- ▶ A visit to China by an ecumenical team of theological educators from Germany and Asia under the leadership of the ETE consultant for Asia/Pacific.
- ▶ Library training on archive management attracted 40 librarians of theological institutions in Asia and the Pacific and a forum of sharing and learning together for the leadership of theological associations in that region.
- ▶ The anglophone and lusophone zones of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians held a workshop in South Africa on creating a curriculum on "Gender and Theology: Engendering Theological Education in Africa". The Francophone zone met in August 2004 in Cameroon.
- ▶ ETE collaborated with EDAN (Ecumenical Disability Advocacy Network) and organised a five-day workshop on Disability Discourse and Theological Colleges. Participants came from most of the regions and drafted a curriculum that will be shared with colleges as an attempt to address issues and concerns raised by people with disability in the WCC interim theological statement: A Church of All and for All.
- ▶ The annual meeting of the ETE working group, held in St Petersburg where the ETE Consultant for Central & Eastern Europe is based, to reflect on and analyse theological education trends in different parts of the world, the challenges and opportunities of offering an ecumenical perspective and to decide on funds for the projects.
- ▶ Two meetings of the Scholarships working group which, as well as deciding on the award of scholarships, established the five yearly external evaluation of the programme which will take place in 2005. The regional initiative where a block grant was given for the past two years to the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, instead of individual scholarships was positively evaluated.

- ▶ OIKOSNET Meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This annual meeting brings together two people of each of the regional associations which make up OIKOSNET. The laity centres and organisations they represent are not prestigious institutions by worldly standards but can be extraordinarily effective within their national and local contexts. One of the main items for discussion was the future structure of OIKOSNET. A transition group had undertaken a great deal of work since the decision of the WCC to cease to administer OIKOSNET. This had been informed by the evaluation and by the last annual meeting in Cairo. It is proposed that there will be an OIKOSNET foundation established in the Netherlands managed by a Board of representatives of the regional associations. The annual meeting will continue to be the forum where ideas and experiences are exchanged, the budget (including allocations to the regional associations) agreed and plans made for global activities (eg CLLTs). Reports were given on the

context of each region and the activity of the regional association. This would be the last meeting where Jonah Katoneene represented ACLCA. He has give great service to the work in Africa and globally. A report was given on what has now become a project on "Dialogue for Peaceful Change" being undertaken in association with the Oikos foundation in the Netherlands. This may become a significant programme which can be undertaken by member associations and centres.

By the time this issue appears, the meeting of the WCC Education & Ecumenical Formation Commission will have been held in Cuba. This will be that last Commission meeting before the WCC Assembly in 2006 and time is being given to reflecting on what has been done since Harare and the advice to be given on future priorities and styles of work.



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