

Report of the General Council Planning Task Group

The May 2021 Executive Committee received a report that noted the following:

The planning of the General Council has been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors. The quick implementation of a robust planning process is therefore very important. Negotiations with Asian member churches are well developed but not yet concluded.

This process shall focus upon the following areas:

- location,
- finance,
- planning committee,
- staff resources,
- logistics,
- programme.

The mood and commitment of member churches toward the Communion are currently quite good. The planning of the General Council could foster this positive spirit and lead to a stronger Communion that shall be ever more determined to make an impactful witness. Such active mobilization may also lead to a higher commitment to contribute to the financial sustainability of the WCRC.

Through Action 11, the Executive Committee established a General Council Task Group which would “be coordinated by a member of the collegial general secretariat and will be composed from members of the following bodies of the WCRC:

- Officers and elected members of the Executive Committee;
- leadership of WCRC regions;
- representatives of the member churches in the region where the General Council will take place;
- representatives from different areas of the work of the WCRC.”

The specific responsibilities of the General Council Task Group adopted were:

- to propose a location for the 2024 General Council.
- to identify sources of income and to present a balanced budget for the General Council.
- to create the conditions for the appointment of the necessary staff resources.
- to propose a theme and suggest a general programme structure.

The Task Group has met three times since its inception and brings the following proposals to the Executive Committee for consideration:

1. That the General Council be held in Asia, with Chiang Mai, Thailand, being the preferred option.
The Church of Christ in Thailand is considering serving as the local host, but this decision can only be taken by autumn 2022 due to changes in the Church’s

leadership. In the meantime, alternative venues in Asia, including Indonesia, the Philippines, and India are also being explored as a firm back-ups.

2. That the General Council be planned to be held in 2025.
A group of Asian member churches which are supporting the General Council have made this request due to the pandemic impacting the general preparedness and ability to raise sufficient financial support. While the WCRC constitution notes that the General Council “shall ordinarily meet once in every seven years” it also states that the “time, place, and programme of a General Council shall be determined by the Executive Committee.” It can easily be argued that the pandemic has created a situation that is anything but ordinary, and a postponement would follow the practices of other ecumenical organizations.
3. That the Asian churches will form a consortium that will collectively support the General Council financially.
The 2017 General Council received significant funding from the German government. This is not a possibility in Asia. To compensate for this, a number of Asian churches have agreed to come together to raise funds for the General Council. This welcome initiative should be officially ratified.
4. That the hiring of a General Council Coordinator based in Asia be authorized upon receipt of sufficient funding.
The logistical coordination of a General Council held so far away from the Hannover offices necessitates a local staff member, whose work will include supporting the local host committee and coordinating the Asia consortium.
5. That a General Council Administrative Assistant based in Hannover be authorized upon receipt of sufficient funding.
Programmatic, worship, and registration work will all be based in the Hannover office. While current WCRC staff will all be involved in aspects of the next General Council, additional capacity is needed.
6. That the theme for the General Council be: “Endure and you will gain life” (Luke 21:19).
An exegesis of the passage and its suitability for a theme can be found in the addendum below.
7. That a General Council Planning Committee be established to continue the preparations.
The work of the General Council Task Group was purposefully limited in scope. It has now completed most of the tasks set before it, and recommends that a General Council Planning Committee be established to continue the work of planning and holding the next General Council.

Addendum: Exegesis

“By your endurance you will gain your souls.”—Luke 21:19 (NRSV)

Context

Jesus is with his disciples at Jerusalem’s temple, and they are in wonder at the magnificence of it. Then, Jesus starts to announce coming events before the fall of the temple (21:5-11). In 21:20-24, he announces the fall of the city of Jerusalem. In between those events, Jesus reveals what will happen before the fall of the temple and the city of Jerusalem (21:12-19).

In this short period Jesus, as a prophet, prepares his disciples for those events. He warns his disciples about political and religious persecution (v. 12), betrayal (v.16), hatred (v. 17), and even death (v.16) because of his name (v.12, v. 17). However, in the midst of such harsh times, Jesus sees a possibility for public witness (v.13). In addition, he assures the disciples that they will be empowered with wisdom to face those who persecute them (vv.14-15) and that not a hair of their head will perish (v. 18, also 12:7). Finally, Jesus instructs them to endure (v.19).

The events announced in these verses constitute the core of the narrative in the book of Acts. So, what is prophecy in Luke become past events for the reader of Acts. In this way the reader can test the veracity of the prophecy and also has the certainty of what was promised since in Acts.

Endurance

Luke twice uses the word “endure” (*hypomone*): 8:15 (parable of the sower) and in 21:19. This word in the New Testament is connected to a context of persecution (Romans 5:3-4; 8:25; 2 Corinthians 1:6; Colossians 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; Hebrews 10:36; 12:1; James 1:3-4; Revelation 13:10). According to The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament “while *hypoméno* is at first ethically neutral, *hypomonéno* becomes a prominent virtue in the sense of courageous endurance. As distinct from patience, it has the active significance of energetic if not necessarily successful resistance” (p. 582).

Theological reflection

Particularly in a time of pandemic, endurance or perseverance has become our reality. Life continues in spite of and not because of our present reality. But if we are to overcome and perhaps resist and transform our present reality, we have to continue, to persevere, and to endure. This is not a passive endurance but rather an endurance that has resistance built into it.

In the Biblical tradition the wilderness is often seen as a space for the preparation for transformation. Biblical characters often “endured” the harshness of the wilderness to be able to prepare for this transformation. And it is exactly this kind of endurance that we are linking into.

Further, in our “COVID and Beyond” process, from our Palestinian friends, we have learned of the concept of *sumud*. *Sumud* encapsulate this idea of perseverance in the times of tribulation with a view towards resistance and transformation. It is not passive, but it enjoins the idea of waiting and preparing.

It is these ideas that work to conceptualize our understanding of “Persevere and you will gain life.”