



World
Communion
of Reformed
Churches

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Annual Report to WCRC Executive Committee Meeting

Martina Wasserloos
President of WCRC-European region

Under the conditions of the COVID pandemic, the work in the European area has mainly taken place digitally. During the reporting period, our work was led by the efforts to strengthen contact and communication within WCRC global and the European region, within the WCRC regions, within member churches in Europe, as well as, within European ecumenical bodies.

Some catastrophes are happening in certain regions, but they are challenging the whole communion

The threat of a war in Ukraine was the starting point for a very deep cooperation between the General Secretariat, through Hanns Lessing, and the President of the European Region. For weeks we were in consideration to organize to visit churches in Ukraine to express solidarity and to set signs for peace. A wider network of partners inside and outside WCRC was found to learn more about the situation in Ukraine and to get insights into the political situation there. Multiple Zoom meetings brought us Ukrainian people closer and made us aware of their challenges. Since the outbreak of the war, we have been working with them in a network, in regular meetings. Of course, our possibilities to help them are limited, but to be together – even via Zoom – to share and pray, is a sign of solidarity that is very important, as we always hear from our friends in Ukraine. We also try to identify ways we can help concretely, in joint mission with other denominations. We also hear some news we never read in our newspapers. This is an opportunity to find a position beside some fake news, we are hearing sometimes.

We are communion together with other regions

We feel that our communion needs to care for each other, it is inspiring to journey with others, with a shared mission. We are convinced that sustainability is first a question of common identity and the experience of doing things together, of sharing the gospel, and of being connected. Therefore, European church leaders met to discuss how we can strengthen the work of WCRC in that sense, to bring the regions more in contact, so that a common identity “WE as WCRC – colourful, diverse and united in Christ” can raise. We also discussed this with other regional leaders and found a great openness and a common understanding about the challenges that WCRC is facing. We asked the collegial Secretariat to organize a regional leaders’ meeting to find out, how we want to work with each other in future. We decided to look for more contact, for common action, if possible, for exchange to know what happens in other regions.

Prayer, awareness, understanding and sharing best practise

Since the beginning of war in Ukraine we are even more deeply connected with our member Churches in Eastern Europe. We have weekly Zoom meetings to hear how the work with refugees from Ukraine is managed, what the needs are, what ideas are good to share. The regular meetings are a forum for all those who need an ear. We are aiming to bring church leaders and other participants together, to learn from best practices and to search for help from other sides. The regular forum is also the place to share fears and concerns. Beside that the Steering Committee offered to support projects financially.

The President of the European region, Martina Wasserloos visited in April the Hungarian Reformed Church in Ukraine and in Romania to show solidarity in these times of war. She met Bishop Zan Fabian and his assistant to gain first-hand information about the worrying developments in the region, what that means for the local people and what their concerns are. It was clearly stated on the spot, that signs of solidarity– even if they are “only” signs, show the power of communion and the connectedness in Christ.

Bishop Zan of our sister Church in Ukraine is also a regular participant in our Zoom meetings.

To strengthen ecumenical contacts makes us stronger inwards and outwards

The Europe of pandemic and war has clearly shown us, that we as Protestant Churches and ecumenical bodies in Europe need more searching for common features than lamenting on differences. Speaking with “one voice” in times of secularization can make us stronger inwards and outwards.

The COVID pandemic has challenged churches in many ways: in their liturgical practices, in their spirituality, in the pastoral care, diaconal work, finances, communication policies, in the way to live the fellowship and solidarity between churches, and, last but not least, theologically and politically. The impact of the pandemic on the social and health policies in the various countries will also affect the work and witness of the Church. Some see it as an evidence, others claim for it: the time «after the crisis» won't and can't be a “go back to normal situation.” However, this crisis is also a chance to renew and rethink many issues and habits churches assumed so far to be standard or not questionable.

To discuss all these aspects on a wider perspective the European region organized with CPCE and the Protestant Church of Switzerland the conference “*Theological and ethical challenges for the Churches living with the COVID pandemic*” was held in Rome. It was our first joint project and it was very welcomed by participants and churches.