



**Ecumenical Association of  
Academies and Laity Centres**

**Annual Report 2015**

Oikosnet Europe (OE)  
Annual Assembly 2014  
Corrymeela, 8-13 September 2015



**“Fear and Remembering in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”  
Draft Annual Report 2015 (of the Board)**

**1. Introduction**

The period covered by this Annual Report extends from the Annual Conference in Villigst (September 2014) to the Annual Conference in Corrymeela (September 2015). The report is based on different contributions of Board members and tries to give an account of the activities of the network between the two Annual Conferences as well as to raise issues about the future development of the network for discussion in Corrymeela. This is why this year’s annual report is more elaborated than in previous years. Last but not least, the annual report also serves as the collective memory of Oikosnet Europe (OE) and paves the way for the Annual Conference to take decisions on the future directions of the network.

The annual report at this stage is a draft, potentially to be altered by the Board meeting prior to the Annual Conference (AC). In its final version it is to be discussed and “received” by the AC, except for concrete recommendations (in bold). These have to be formally voted upon, either as part of the discussion of the Annual Report or as part of separate items on the agenda of the AC.

**2. Meeting in Corrymeela**

The Annual Conference 2014 decided to accept the invitation of the Corrymeela Community to hold its Annual Assembly 2015 in the Corrymeela Center (Northern Ireland). In as much Corrymeela is delighted and honoured (cf. below) to host OE, Oikosnet Europe is delighted and honoured to respond to the invitation. Corrymeela is one of the well-known members of OE with a long-standing academic and hands-on reputation in peace building and work for reconciliation and non-violent conflict management. As OE we are glad to be invited to learn from and to be stimulated by the Corrymeela experience, its hospitality, its community building.

The theme for the 2015 Annual Conference, selected jointly by the Corrymeela Community and the Oikosnet Board, is: “Fear and Remembering in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. Fear is a growing feature in our societies in Europe and worldwide. This report will only give a glimpse of where “fear” is also an underlying, often un-reflected, factor in our relationships and projects. The Annual Conference will allow in a much deeper sense to explore the issue.

By the way of invitation, the Leader of the Corrymeela Community, Pádraig O’Tuama writes to us: “The Corrymeela Community is delighted and honoured to be the site of hosting the 2015 Oikosnet Conference. Corrymeela celebrates 50 years this year and we have been

sustained by the prayerful and professional support and contacts with our Oikosnet partners and friends for these decades.

Corrymeela was begun in 1965 by Ray Davey, a former chaplain in World War II, and students from Queens University. During the war, Ray was captured in Dresden and there bore witness to the bombing of that city. This experience profoundly changed him. He returned to work as a chaplain in Belfast and became concerned at the tensions brewing between people of different political, religious and ideological differences in Northern Ireland. Corrymeela grew out of this concern. It began before “The Troubles and continues on after “The Troubles,” promoting tolerance between people of differing backgrounds and beliefs. Corrymeela offers space for an analysis of the underlying dynamics of conflict, fracture, scapegoating and violence that we see across so many spheres of our world today.

Fifty years later, we still have work to do - locally in our own fractured politics as well as in partnership with international peace and faith groups. We host over 10,000 people a year on programmes of peace, learning, faith and dialogue. We work alongside people from youth and school groups, family and community organisations, faith communities and political parties. We run group sessions using dialogue, experiential play, art, storytelling, mealtimes and shared community to help groups embrace difference and learn how to have difficult conversations. We work alongside visiting university groups as well as groups from other parts of the world who wish to learn from our experience, and learn how to apply the Corrymeela lens to fractures in their own societies.

All of this work helps us learn how to live well together. It helps groups learn how to work well together. Corrymeela believes in the power of people telling their stories, of shared hospitality, of telling the truth about the present, of turning towards each other and finding strength, life and hope in each other. Ultimately, the work of Corrymeela helps groups learn how to be well together.

For the Oikosnet Europe Conference in September 2015, we are exploring the theme of “Fear and Remembering in the 21st Century”. So many countries across Europe have histories that involve involvement in war, and the consequences of war go far beyond the immediate cessation of hostilities and carry on through stories told in families, and civic acts of remembrance. The purpose of this conference will be to explore narratives of politics, faith and identity that influence how we understand our national identities at this stage of our century and look at how ecumenical leadership can deepen the capacity of our countries and continent to live well together. We are honoured to be joined by some of the foremost political scientists and educators in Northern Ireland whose expertise is internationally renowned and who draw the links between theory and practice in a way that proposes models for political, faith and civic engagement.

Corrymeela is an open village for all people of good will. We look forward to welcoming you.”

In 2015, Corrymeela celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of existence, while Oikosnet Europe turns 60.

OE President Jaap van der Sar reminds us of common challenges in the decade that Corrymeela and Oikosnet were founded:

- The terrible acts of fascism were a main reason why many academies in Europe started their work in the decade after World War II. We had some predecessors after World War I, especially in the Nordic countries. Now there was a need to rethink the role of churches and

their institutions in society as a whole, be it at the national level or within the European context. Not just 'among ourselves with friends' but also in confrontation with those who suffered from acts or from ignoring atrocities of others.

- In 1955 Rosa Parks refused to stand up for a white passenger in the public transport bus, driving through Montgomery, Alabama. She expressed the anger against racism in a non-violent but powerful act of obedience to humanity. She was trained for her refusal to step away from her seats by similar institutions like ours.
- In 1961 the Berlin Wall, as part of the Iron Curtain, was established, symbolising deep mistrust between ideologies while 'normal' people suffered from the differences, which were put on them. And from both sides people tended to believe the constructed images.
- In 1962 the world kept its breath during the Cuba-crisis, when superpowers almost engaged in a nuclear war, which they wanted to avoid.
- Also in 1962 the USA-author Rachel Carson wrote her book 'Silent Spring', indicating a slow growing disaster regarding nature and environment.
- In 1964 there was the trial against Nelson Mandela and his followers. He was not sentenced to death due to public opinion in many countries. This saved a brilliant man for us.
- In the meantime, the world carried about 3 billion inhabitants, out of which almost 1 billion lived below the poverty-line, as arbitrary as the indicator might be.

And there are also common challenges ahead of us. Or better: there are new configurations of challenges which stem from our past. Just to name some:

- Globalisation doesn't mean that geographical tensions faded away. We are experiencing within our continent the re-emerging of cold relations. It is too early to speak about a cold war, but the conditions are chilly. Dialogue, meeting people in a real sense is very urgent.
- The challenges of climate change, destruction of nature, has increased. It got even more visible now. New technology increased the efficiency, but did not contribute to sufficiency. A stronger moral attitude is required than the world is showing. Pope Francis is one of the moral leaders who rightly pointed at this in his last encyclical letter 'Laudato Si – On Care for Our Common Home'. In this letter he connected the environmental challenge directly with the questions about justice between people.
- World population has grown to about 7 billion people – where still almost 1 billion live below the poverty line. A huge result for the world, feeding 6 billion people in a sufficient way every day. And at the same time the one billion is a severe accusation.
- The dominance of economic thinking caused huge problems in our world. We see examples in many continents – also in Europe. Effects are visible in Greece and in Lampedusa, too.
- Discrimination has changed in its attitudes. There is now a black president of the USA, singing 'Amazing Grace' at the commemoration of people, killed by a young man with strong racist motives. South Africa has left apartheid as the official doctrine. Changes for the better appeared to be far more difficult than changing the colour of the president.

There are enough reasons to keep ourselves on track. The world is waiting for acts of reconciliation, for small steps for individuals and groups, organisations and institutions which can lead to giant steps for humankind."

### **3. European/global developments – Oikosnet Europe in context**

As one of the strategic objectives of OE is to raise its "visibility as a competent voice in the ecumenical movement and in civil society" (cf. Oikosne(x)t- Document of 2012) and as the AC 2014 decided "to discuss issues, developments and trends in Europe, which are addressed by

or which are of interest to members”<sup>i</sup>, it is important for the Annual Conference to also discuss the broader context in which it is reflecting and acting.

It is impossible in this context to take up all relevant issues and developments. Speaking about common trends and developments in this context is just meant to stimulate discussion at the AC itself. How do we relate as Academies and Laity Training Centers to common challenges? What is our task? How do we co-operate vis-a-vis the challenges in order to bring a more pan-European rather than just national perspectives into the public debate?

Some common challenges and developments have already been mentioned by the President in the previous chapter of this report. However, two recent crisis´ immediately spring to mind reviewing the period covered by this report: the financial and economic crisis in Greece and the refugee crisis affecting almost all of Europe and all of the world. Both crisis are not just national crisis for countries like Greece, Hungary, Germany or Sweden, there are pose questions on a European and global scale.

Both crisis raise questions on

- how the crisis are handled,
- whether Europe is still committed to its self-proclaimed values, such as the respect for and implementation of human dignity and justice. Or does the dominance of the economic system prevail: austerity vs solidarity, rejection instead of hospitality (philoxenia)?
- which repercussions the present crisis management has on the European integration project and the European idea as elaborated and discussed at our last AC. What does solidarity mean within Europe and between Europe and other parts of the world.

#### **4. Common Developments in the scene of academies and Laity Training Centers?**

This headline is just to indicate that an AC should also be an appropriate space for discussing and dealing with common trends, which, at times, effect the very existence or the vocation of our members. Some of such trends have been mentioned in previous ACs and at Board meetings:

- How to we deal with less resources?
- What is our relation to our home churches?
- How can we contribute to a “European public”, a European awareness?
- How do we relate to potential partners and potential competitors around us?
- How do we relate to political institutions and civil society?

The AC is invited to add to this list of issues, to share experiences and best practices as well as to suggest issues, which should be in a more formal way on the agenda of coming ACs.

#### **5. From Villigst to Corrymeela**

The results and decisions of the business sessions of the Villigst AC in 2014 are recorded in the minutes Doc:AC 2015-3rev. In addition, the Academy of Villigst has published the presentations of the study day on Europe in a publication, which also introduces Oikosnet Europe and the majority of members. This publication, which will be available at the AC in Corrymeela, can also be used by Oikosnet members to introduce OE to others. The network is, therefore, grateful to the staff of the Villigst Academy, which has put much effort into producing this documentation.

##### **5.1 Meetings of the Board and Elections**

In the period covered by this report, the Board met four times: in November 2014 (Corrymeela), in March 2015 (Berlin), in Mai 2015 (Sigtuna) and just prior to this AC. Main items on the agenda were the preparations for the AC and issues reflected in this report (especially under items 4 to 7).

Board Meetings usually were also attended by staff from the Secretariat, the Executive Secretary and Hermann Düringer. Unfortunately, the Oikosnet Vice-President Katalin Zoltani did not join Board meetings after Home of Hope from Brasov/Romania had left the association. Nevertheless, the Board wants to express its gratitude and thanks to Kati for almost six years in service as a Board member of the association.

The AC in Corrymeela will have to elect a President, a Vice-President and two additional Board members as the term of two years in office comes to an end for Jaap van der Sar, Marielisa von Thadden, Sören Lenz and Katalin Zoltani. Proposals for the election will come to the AC via the Nominations Committee to be elected at the beginning of the AC. Recommendations to the Nominations Committee can also be made from the floor.

**Recommendation:**

- 1. The Boards recommends to the Annual Conference to elect Kristin Gunleiksrud Raaum (replacing Caterina Dupré) as member of the Nominations Committee as from the beginning of the Annual Conference 2015.**

The Nominations Committee during the AC 2015 would then consist of Alexei Bodrov (St. Andrews), Kirsten Gudleiksrud Raaum (Norwegian Association) and Paul Krieg (Casa Cares).

- 2. As Paul Krieg will retire and attend his last AC as member of Oikosnet Europe, the Board recommends to the AC to elect Friedrich Kramer (replacing Paul Krieg) as a member of the Nominations Committee as from 14 September 2015.**
- 3. The AC, at its beginning will also have to elect two internal auditors upon recommendation of the Nominations Committee. The Board recommends to the Nominations Committee to invite Nils Ivar Agoy and Günter Renz as internal auditors.**

**5.2 Secretariat and Executive Secretary**

Since January 2015 the Oikosnet Secretariat has fully moved to the Sigtuna Fondation. Since then it serves as the first post in the chain for almost all Oikosnet matters and contacts. Members will have noticed the efforts in communication of the Secretariat (cf. item 5.6 of this report) and the electronic registration process for this AC. The coordinates of the Secretariat as well as of the President and the Executive Secretary are available on the website: [www.oikosnet.eu](http://www.oikosnet.eu).

The main task of the Executive Secretary in the last year was to support the organization of the meetings of the Board and the AC and to oversee the implementation of their decisions. He was also instrumental in keeping the individual communication with members alive.

With the Secretariat in place, Oikosnet Europe has now four centers in different parts of Europe, which are operational in certain sectors: the President, the Secretariat, the Executive Secretary and the Treasurer. The Board agreed on a division of tasks between them, and especially between the Secretariat and the Executive Secretary. As this is a

new construction, involving largely new responsible persons, this process needs some more fine-tuning.

The Board also wants to express its thanks to Hermann Düringer, who supports the Board in several tasks, especially in the minute-taking.

### **5.3 Membership Issues**

In the course of the last year two members have left OE: the Home of Hope in Brasov/Romania and the Paulus Academy in Zurich/Switzerland. Both mention financial constraints as one reason. In addition they state that Home of Hope has developed in a different direction from OE and the Paulus Academy saw difficulties in actively engaging with the network. Therefore, OE in August 2015 is left with 46 members from 19 European countries. The Board tried to get in touch with members, which neither communicated for several years nor paid their membership fees. As a consequence, the Board will look at the membership list in its meeting just prior to the AC and will come with an up-dated membership list to the meeting.

On the other hand, some centers and organisations have declared their interest in joining OE. The Board is in the process of following-up.

This raises the issue of criteria for membership. The Board would appreciate a discussion at the AC on criteria for membership. The present OE Constitution offers in § II.1 a very general description of potential members: "Oikosnet Europe – Association of Academies and Laity Centres (hereinafter referred to as "Oikosnet Europe") is an association of Christian academies and laity centres and national associations which pursue the aims stated in the Preamble, mainly by way of conferences." This would allow, for instance, also for all kind of laity centers and national associations to become members, like "Stadtakademien" and National Councils of Churches, which also offer laity training.

### **5.4 Finances**

#### **5.4.1 Accounts 2014**

The accounts of Oikosnet Europe for 2014 close at an amount (income and expenditure) of 29.298,05 €. The full accounts as well as the balance sheet are presented to the internal auditors and to the Annual Conference in Doc: AC 2015-5 for adoption. As this document shows, all income is, in principle, based on membership fees. The more important it is that all members pay their fees and that they pay their membership fees as early as possible in the year.

The accounts show a surplus in income and expenditure of 14.354,00 €. This surplus added to the reserves makes the balance of Oikosnet Europe result in the end of 2014 with a reserve of 113.442,11 €, out of which 70.250,45 € are kept in a savings account (in order to achieve higher interests) and 43.061,65 € in a transfer account.

This result could be achieved due to a responsible handling of finances by the Board (e.g. one Board Meeting could be attached to a consultation in Sigtuna and the Board is grateful to the Sigtuna Foundation for offering hospitality and carrying the majority of the costs; the Board meeting in Berlin took place without any costs for accommodation). It is, however, also important to take note of the fact that there were very few costs for administration and/or for activities in 2014. Administrative costs were compensated by Board members and the Executive Secretary, activity costs were carried by members, e.g. the Sigtuna Foundation for the "Religion, Media and Democracy" project. It is to be expected that costs will increase



in the future, with the Secretariat being in operation and with common projects supported by Oikosnet Europe. (cf. Budget 2016)

**Recommendations:**

- 1. After review of the accounts by the internal auditors, the Board recommends to the Annual Conference to adopt the accounts 2014 with income and expenditure of 29.298,05 € and to discharge the Board.**
- 2. The Board recommends to the Annual Conference to add the 2014 surplus of 14.350,00 € to the reserves of and to adopt the balance by the end of 2014 with 113.442,11 € in reserve.**

**5.4.2 Budget 2016**

The Budget 2016 is presented in Doc: AC 2015-6 with an expected income and expenditure of 44.350,00 €. The Budget foresees 11.500,00 € to be taken from the reserves in order to cover the expenses. The higher expenses in 2016 are mainly to be explained by 10.000,00 € needed for the running of the Oikosnet Secretariat and 15.000,00 € needed for investment in projects and in a consultation of central and eastern European members.

The Budget 2016 indicates clearly, that the income from membership fees is not sufficient to cover all expenses for activities. The Annual Conference is invited to discuss as to how further income can be generated for activities and projects.

**Recommendation**

**The Board recommends to the Annual Assembly to adopt the Budget for 2016 as presented in Doc: AC 2015-6 with income and expenditure of 44.350,00 €.**

**5.5 Oikosnet as a Legal Entity**

OE, for the time being, is registered as an association in Germany according to the German legal provisions. As the Secretariat moved to Sweden, the Board discussed extensively to also move the legal personality of OE to Sweden and to register according to Swedish law. The present state of the discussions is reflected in Doc: BD 2015-21. However, the Board will continue the discussions in its meeting prior to the AC. It will come with a more detailed report and eventually with recommendations to the meeting in Corrymeela.

**5.6 Communication**

The communication among members and friends of OE is in the hands of the Secretariat. The Board expresses its thanks to Sofia af Geijerstam. One main tool of communication is the Oikosnet Newsletter. In the period since the last AC in Villigst, four newsletters were issued with information about Oikosnet as well as of its members. Also the invitation to the AC was first issued via the newsletter in order to make members aware of the importance of news items shared through it. It is worthwhile to be mentioned that the newsletter is not meant as a one-way-communication from the Board to OE members. Members are equally invited to share the news which could be of interest to other members through the newsletter. The AC is invited to offer its comments on the newsletter. Subscribers are invited to make the newsletter also known to their colleagues.

In addition, the Oikosnet website has been renewed and is online ([www.oikosnet.eu](http://www.oikosnet.eu)). For the time being, it contains the information of the newsletter and some basic information about Oikosnet. The latter is still in the process of being developed. One project is, for instance, to share information about Oikosnet members, using the portraits contained in the Villigst publication. Members who have not sent in their portrait yet are, therefore, invited to do so.



As a next step the development of a boosted Oikosnet presence in the social media (facebook) is envisaged.

## **5.7 Projects**

### **Last years adoption/questionnaire**

#### **5.7.1 The Role of Religion for Cultural Identity, Democracy and Peace (Sigtuna Foundation)**

After the Sigtuna-led network project on “Media, Religion and Democracy”, in which many OE members participated, came to a preliminary end by the OE Annual Assembly in 2014, the Sigtuna Foundation from 18 to 21 May 2015 invited to an exploratory conference for a successor project under the title “Visions for the Future. A European Dialogue Forum on the Role of Religion for Cultural Identity, Democracy and Peace”. OE was one of several cooperation partners and several participants in the conference represented OE members, for instance from Germany, France, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Russia, Finland ... . It is now up to the Sigtuna Foundation to evaluate whether this turns into a longer-term project in cooperation with OE. The start, however, seemed very promising. The organisers write: “All contributions were very valuable in their own right, giving inspiration, concrete examples and good ideas for the future. In the concluding discussion it was very clear that the members of Oikosnet Europe do have a lot in common when it comes to the challenge on how to create a future dialogue on religion and democracy, based on freedom of speech as well as on respect for one another’s differences. That would be a real “Vision for the Future”. The presentations from the conference will be published on the Oikosnet website.

#### **5.7.2 DPC - Dialogue for Peaceful Change**

A DPC training in Lviv/Ukraine took place in November 2014. 16 participants received their certificate for having participated in the first part of the DPC-training. Due to logistical and financial limitations, the full training wasn't possible. The challenge was how to deal with the history of this country, where so many inhabitants have memories of their own sufferings as well as from the past of the country. The present situation, with the influence through international policies, intensified this training very much.

Early 2015 a training took place in Ballycastle, Northern Ireland, where 20 participants showed up for their training, which was integrated in their participation in a longer course of the Irish School of Ecumenics.

During the year several applications of the DPC-methodology were developed. In general the applications are part of a wider framework, carrying the name 'Framework for Sustainable Change' (FSC). Within this framework trainees as well as trainers have worked within companies (example: a CEO recognizes that he isn't able to deal with conflicts properly, which causes quite some difficulties for himself as well as for his co-workers), within the health-sector (example: how to deal in a proper way with people which have a severe challenge regarding their overweight (Obesitas), as well as with people surrounding them) and public organisations. This work will be developed more in the years to come.

The Board of Oikosnet Europe decided to support the DPC-Training in Corrymeela prior to the Annual Conference with an amount of 4.000 Euros.

#### **5.7.3 Arab – European Citizens´ Dialogue**

After the 7<sup>th</sup> Conference in the framework of the Dialogue took place in Brussels (16-20 November 2014) under the title “On Equal Footing? – Shaping the Future of Arab-European Relationships”, with 21 European participants, the Dialogue went into a new phase and entered into a much closer relation with Oikosnet Europe. Fritz-Erich Anhelm and the Academy of Loccum

retired from the position of being the driving force of the Dialogue from the European side. Instead, the Oikosnet Secretariat became the counterpart to the partner from the Arab world, CEOSS. Alf Linderman and Rüdiger Noll are now members of the Steering Committee as well as the permanent members from the European side of the Acting Committee of the Dialogue. The Acting Committee, which met just recently in Cairo drafted a new concept note and prepared the next conference, which is to take place in the Orthodox Academy of Crete, 10-13 March 2016 with an emphasis on active citizenship. The concept note as well as a report on the Dialogue up until now are available upon request. Oikosnet members, who are interested in the Dialogue and/or may want to participate in the next conference in Crete, may approach either Alf or Rüdiger. Oikosnet supported the Dialogue financially in enabling European participation in the conference as well as in the meeting of the Acting Committee.

#### **5.7.4 A consultation for Oikosnet members from central and eastern Europe**

As the OE Board is monitoring membership developments at each of its meetings, it observed that the participation and engagement of central and eastern European members has become less over recent years. The participation at the Annual Conference in Villigst was an encouraging sign against the trend and a good starting point to re-emphasize the importance of the presence and active engagement of OE members from central and eastern Europe. Oikosnet Europe shares a pan-European and inclusive vision with all members meeting on an equal footing for sharing, ecumenical learning, co-operation and common projects addressing common European concerns.

As a first approach to gather centers from central and eastern Europe failed in 2014/15. The Liebfrauenberg is now inviting members from the region to a consultation and brain-storming from 23 to 26 February 2016. The main aim of the consultation will be to explore common concerns, expectations towards the co-operation in OE and ways towards common projects. The program, thus far, was elaborated by Liebfrauenberg and the Orthodox Academy of Crete. The Annual Conference in Corrymeela will provide a good platform to discuss with participants from central and eastern Europe in order to include even more their suggestions and expectations.

#### **5.7.5 “Sunny Greece”**

The project was initiated by the former Studyleader Jobst Kraus (Bad Boll) and the OE Executive Secretary. It was further developed and put into practice by the Orthodox Academy of Crete. The aim is to link citizens’ participation and the engagement for the use of renewable energy in founding, under the auspices of the Orthodox Academy in Crete, a cooperative promoting the use of renewable energy and by setting an example in equipping the Academy with a first solar installation. In the meantime, a founding meeting of the cooperative with prominent supporters in the region has taken place and the installation is ready for installment once some of the restriction of the Greek government due to the financial and economic crisis are lifted.

OE supported the project by issuing a fundraising appeal through its Newsletter. In May 2015, 12.068,00 € could be transferred to the Orthodox Academy of Crete for the project. Donations came mainly from an environmental consultation in Bad Boll as well as from three or four smaller donations, including one congregation in Baden Württemberg/Germany.

#### **5.7.6 History and Transformation Project**

The History and Transformation Project was initiated by the former Treasurer and OE member (Boldern) Walter Lüssi in 2013. A questionnaire had been sent to all Oikosnet members. The project wanted to link to main aspects: looking at the European origins and founding ideas of the church-related Academies and Retreat and Study Centers as well as on the changes the individual members and the movement as a whole have gone through in recent years.

As Walter Lüssi has assumed other responsibilities in his church, the project was put on hold in 2014. A revival is possible as one other OE member is willing to pilot the project.

## **5.8 Gender and Justice Network**

This new Network started last year in Villigst with a preconference. A group of 11 participants (one man, 10 women) attended the visiting community of the Gender & Justice network. The objective was to learn more about gender issues, specifically how the different European countries deal with prostitution and human trafficking.

A very rich program introduced us to the «Frauenhilfe Westfalen» in Soest. This association exists since more than 100 years with today 70'000 members. It is independent but linked to church. The professionals of the association run different projects like education for staff in homes for the Elderly, for young families how to keep households, various seminars, etc. They also lead different additional and independent projects like counselling for human trafficking and for prostitutes especially young ones.

Prostitution was the main-theme and the group exchanged about it enriched with inputs from the different countries represented by the participants. We heard about the political situation in each country and stories about suffering and big problems coming out of these situations. The Swedish model was discussed: for some this is the only way to go further on in respecting gender issues and justice within a modern society. For others it seems to be a model which gives not enough rights to the sexworkers. What do we need in a contemporary gender compatible society? That's a question to discuss and reflect.

Discussed as well were the means of the new network, the finances, timetable, Responsibilities, the Communication between the meetings and the preparations for Corrymeela. Last not least Nicole Richter (Institute for Church and Society, Department for Women, Villigst) was elected as the Head of this new network.

In the following month Nicole Richter tried to organize a program in Corrymeela around the theme: "Care – who cares for whom?. This is not only a gender question. It is discussed globally nowadays. Women from the East and South are working in the North and West, have to leave their family and are underpaid and often maltreated. We need to think about redistribution, reduction and recognition - Care is a central part of economics. Inputs from the participants about the situation in their countries, excursions, speeches and discussion are planned.

Chances in Corrymeela made it difficult to organize it from faraway and to present a program on time. We have to find better ways of organization and to make it clear that this preconference needs the help of the hosts.

## **6. Partners and Relations**

### **6.1 Oikosnet International**

Oikosnet International held its last meeting in August 2014, just before the previous Annual Conference of Oikosnet Europe. At that conference we welcomed Ms. Afia Darkwa – Amanor, General Secretary of our African sister organisation ACLCA. She told us about the struggle in her continent regarding – at that moment especially – Ebola. And about difficult circumstances under which our sisters and brothers in Africa have to do their work.

Dedication is not enough; sometimes real food is required too. This became a challenge, at least for our sister-organisation in Africa. Can they afford a person who helps them with their meetings, their funding? In the last year there was a follow-up on the DPC-training, which

took place in Ghana, August 2014. Now research is done about possibilities to realise a network of trained people from ecumenical centers and beyond in dealing with conflicts properly. The envisioned strategy is to integrate the experience and wisdom of the Ghanaian people into the concept of DPC.

Our colleague from Aleppo, Syria, Rev. Serop Megerditchian, intended to participate in the meeting of Oikosnet International in 2014. He wasn't allowed to pass the border to Libanon then, so he could not come. Oikosnet Middle East isn't functioning anymore. Yet personal relationships are kept alive, from both sides. We were lucky to realise – in cooperation with the German Kirchentag organisation – the participation of Serop in the Kirchentag in Stuttgart, (Germany) early June 2015. Several people from different members of Oikosnet Europe have met with him during these days. We discussed with him the options for him as well his family in Aleppo. Changes are expected to come, at least since that city is almost completely ruined.

Our colleagues from Latin America communicated with us about their work. One of them, Mr. German Zarate, was put on a death-list of paramilitaries in Columbia. This was made public, also with the support of churches in North America as well as of colleagues in Oikosnet. So far, so good. The Oikosnet organisation in that continent is not continuing anymore with their work as a continental organisation.

This was almost the case for our North American colleagues as well. However, at the intended final meeting there was a strong desire to keep Oikosnet North America (ONA) alive. We are happy to hear from that discussion first hand through the expected presence of Mrs. Ishbel Munro at our Annual Conference in Corrymeela.

Our Asian colleagues have, according to their tradition, changed the leadership of the organisation. In November a completely new team stood up. They are very active in trying to start or to restart relationships with ecumenical bodies and organisations in Asia as well as beyond that continent. We invited their Secretary, Mr. Jegadish Ghandi of their Board for our Annual Conference. Due to logistical challenges, this was not possible at the end.

The way in which we continue our relations within Oikosnet International has to be discussed. At this moment the intention is to have a meeting of the Board of Oikosnet International in 2016. At this moment, two representatives of Oikosnet Europe are a member of the Board of Stichting Oikosnet International, Jaap van der Sar as well as Rüdiger Noll.

## **6.2 World Council of Churches**

Oikosnet Europe has had strong relations with the WCC. However, due to changes in their policies as well as in their possibilities, there was a change about one decade ago. From then on relations were kept on a personal level between staff members of both organisations. We learned from our Asian partners in Oikosnet International, that they are trying to establish new and productive relations with the WCC. Helpful is the fact that their president is also a member of the Central Committee of the WCC. So far we haven't seen or heard of results in this regard. Personal contacts with members of the WCC-staff have not led to changes in perspectives or expectations – but they are kept alive as much as possible.

## **6.3 European Christian "Convention" and Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag**

Two events were important for Oikosnet Europe in the last year that are connected to the Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag. First there was a conference in the Protestant Academy in Bad Boll from 1 to 3 June 2015 to start the preparatory process for a European Christian "Convention". This meeting of 70 people from 20 European countries was initiated

by the Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag. A number of members of Oikosnet Europe have been participants. The result was a paper that describes the way that should be followed as a "Roadmap to a European Christian "Convention". Furthermore Katerina Karkala-Zorba and Rüdiger Noll were elected as members of the provisional Coordination Team that will prepare the next steps in the process. Its task is to explore those organisations and churches that are prepared to join the process and to propose an organisational structure in the next meeting in 2016. Another result was that Oikosnet Europe and its members were seen as an inspiring and important player when it comes to involve the laity movements of Europe, its churches and Christian movements.

The second event was the Kirchentag itself in Stuttgart - from 3 to 7 June 2015. Its theme came from psalm 90, "that we may become wise". Around 100,000 people attended - almost half of them have been actively involved in contributing to the programme. Our General Assembly has decided at the Annual Assembly in Liebfrauenberg to be present for the first time and share a booth with the Protestant Academy of Baden and the Protestant Academy of Bad Boll. The theme was used as a background inscription for photos and on giveaways like postcards and buttons. We took the opportunity to inform there about our centers and their possibilities, their work and used it as a meeting point. The Orthodox Academy of Crete was sharing and informed about her work, especially their courses on Icon painting. The Market of Opportunities is one of Germany's largest events for communication between civil social groups and initiatives. No matter whether you are of religious or sociopolitical background, active as a volunteer or employee, all are invited to present and discuss here. At the Market of Opportunities all are welcome to openly present their views and perspectives, without fear of criticism or dispute. And we should decide if we will be present at the next Kirchentag in Berlin and Wittenberg in 1917. Beside the booth quite a number of us have been speakers, moderators and/ or organizers during the Kirchentag in Stuttgart.

## **7. Outlook**

### **7.1 Next Annual Conference 2016**

During the Annual Conference in 2014, we were not able to decide about a proposal for our Annual Conference in 2016. An option was mentioned – having the meeting in Prague. This was an option, which was further investigated recently. Our colleagues in Prague don't have facilities for Board and Lodging of their own. As a consequence they have to rely on the use of a place, where the 'own atmosphere' is not defined by our member, the Ecumenical Academy in Prague. This member has a special interest in questions of economic developments and justice – a theme with a high relevance in Europe and the rest of the world. Proposals will be prepared for decision at the Annual Conference in Corrymeela.

### **7.2 Where do we want to see OE in the near future?**

Our members have their background and challenges of their own. History suggests themes and working styles for all of us. It is not only history which defines our work. We see that globalisation in many different forms influences our work too. Here the effects are for all of us on the receiving end, for instance through the challenges of climate change, through the huge economical and financial powers. Smart and effective ways to cope with these challenges will also require an acting attitude regarding globalisation. Oikosnet Europe is part of the ecumenical movement and by consequence has the option of becoming a global player. This is not led by a Board of any Oikosnet brand, but by cooperating members which have met and which have brought resources together. Here the way we are able to deal with the challenges, which we all recognise, can be increased, can get more effective and by consequence more common for all our members. This is what we are looking for.

---

<sup>i</sup> Such session at Annual Conferences could meet several purposes:

- to discover and address trends and developments together
- to stimulate the cooperation of members around common issues
- to develop common projects owned by Oikosnet Europe and facilitated by (a) member(s)." (cf. Doc: "Criteria for supporting projects by Oikosnet members through Oikosnet Europe", 2014)