

Oikosnet Europe
General Assembly 2021
The Sigtuna Foundation, Sweden
October 9

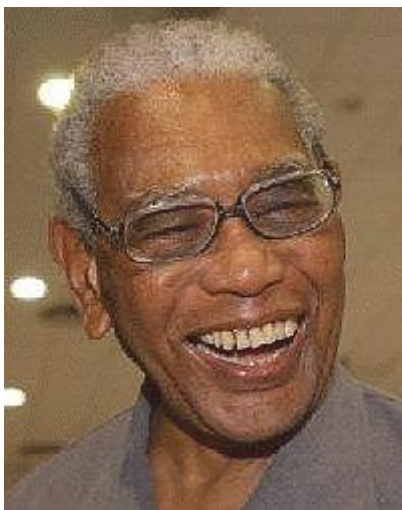


Annual Report 2021

"Only connect!"

Foreword by the President, Rev. Walter Lüssi

At a recent memorial service for the former general secretary of the World Council of Churches, a simple precept of Philip Potter's for the work of the ecumenical movement was recalled.



Philip Potter's simple statement was a reminder of what the ecumenical movement should actually be about: "*Only connect*". You have to connect people and things. Sometimes these connections bear fruit, sometimes not. But the connection alone creates the possibility. "*Only connect*" is a simple wisdom that our network of Oikosnet Europe has also been living from for more than 60 years. And sometimes a connection among us has borne fruit. But connection among people always has to do with living encounters.

It is well known: The last one and a half years have triggered an unimagined surge in digitalisation. Also in the European educational landscape and in the catchment area of the individual academies and houses of education. We older people, among whom I count myself and some who are involved in Oikosnet Europe, have been swept along as if by a maelstrom, which we might otherwise have resisted with reference to the tried and tested and to what has always characterised good old adult education. Now we are confronted with the various

educational formats, including digital ones, with all their additional possibilities and limitations. We would not have imagined this so quickly.

I recall the discussion we had two years ago at the Centro Ecumenico in Agape. At that time, it was about the question of whether we should still be able to afford the many air miles in the future on the board of Oikosnet Europe and every year for the General Assembly in view of climate change, or whether we should not move to a different rhythm. Now other ways of meeting have been forced upon us without being asked.

In the Swiss Plusbildung association, we are working together with the University of Zurich to examine the effects of digital education on our educational content, on theological formats and relational content by means of accompanying research and to question the didactic and methodological implications. In the meantime, we have all experienced that not everything that has been organised in analogue form has to remain analogue. In the board, which was exclusively virtual during this time, we met more often and thus had more active contact. That was good for some topics. We were able to invite people to webinars on developments in Belarus and on the concept of education with less effort. Phone calls between the President and the Executive Secretary were replaced by video telephony. In plus education, where we have to go trilingual according to the official languages of Switzerland, it was much easier and cheaper to work with simultaneous translations using Zoom. And the possibilities for methodologically differentiated moderation in breakout rooms and by means of virtual noticeboards, screen sharing and spontaneous polls, chat rooms, etc. are enormous and largely unexploited.

But: Potters "*Only connect!*" must obviously be viewed in a differentiated way today. Even if I take into account that the skills to set up virtual spaces - in contrast to analogue spaces - are not yet available in many places and that new moderation skills are needed, which we old people in particular do not yet possess to a large extent, we should also not conceal what we have lost and what we cannot do without for the binding togetherness of people locally and also in Europe. "*Interaction is 90% something else than speaking. It is small gestures, microlanguage, listening, breathing, the feeling of having an other person close to you*", says Kati Outinen, a Finnish actress (who has often played leading female roles in Aki Kaurismäki's films).

And that's what we're noticing today: experiences of fatigue due to multiple virtual contacts, a greater lack of commitment, despite all the efforts and virtual possibilities, no casual spontaneous encounters, no joint action and celebration

with all the senses, no contextual reference from one's own view and own experience.

I am writing these lines at a time when we do not yet know in what way the Oikosnet General Assembly in Sigtuna can take place. But for us and for the substantive concerns and activities of our members, it is good and indispensable if we again have time and space to meet in analogue form and if, based on our experience with virtual formats, we can freely decide which forms of communication and meeting we need and prefer for what. "*Only connect!*"

Activities of the Management Board

2020/08/24 Oikosnet Board (Zoom Conference)

Present Board Members:

Walter Lüssi, president

Kristin Gunleiksrud Raaum, vice president

Karolína Silná, treasurer

Konstantinos Zormpas

Board Members not present:

Jürg Hübner

Others present:

Rüdiger Noll, Executive Secretary

Alf Linderman, Secretariat

Karin Sallander, Secretariat

Sofia af Geijerstam, Secretariat

The main focus of this meeting was to prepare for the General Assembly. One very significant precondition was that this would be the first digital General Assembly in the history of the association. Thus, nothing could be conducted the way we use to do things, but rather, everything had to be reconsidered as to how things can be done in a digital context. All items that normally would be included in the General Assembly would still be on the agenda, but we had to develop new ways in which to take care of and manage all parts of the typical General Assembly program.

Apart from the digital 2020 General Assembly, it was also decided that the next annual meeting of the association should be in Sigtuna. Bad Boll, which was the original place for the 2020 meeting, could not host the General Assembly in 2021. After some discussion and considerations, it was decided that the 2021 should take place at the Sigtuna Foundation in Sigtuna, Sweden. The 2022 General Assembly would then take place in Bad Boll, Germany. Additional suggestions for subsequent years were also discussed as very interesting options for future meetings.

2020/09/24 Oikosnet Board (Zoom Conference)

Present Board Members:

Walter Lüssi, president

Kristin Gunleiksrud Raaum, vice president

Jürg Hübner

Katerina Karkala - Zorba

Board Members not present:

Karolína Silná, treasurer

Others present:

Rüdiger Noll, Executive Secretary

Karin Sallander, Office

Sofia af Geijerstam, Office

The most important focus at this meeting was the review of the early September digital General Assembly. The general impression of the General Assembly was positive. There were more academies represented compared to the years before, some that Oikosnet Europe have not heard from for many years. The short input from Belarus at the General Assembly was also very much appreciated. The lack of seeing one another face to face and the possibility to meet in person was however a weakness that all agreed on.

As for the the study day the general impression was that it fulfilled its purpose to share some thoughts on the theme “The new green deal”. Having this part of the General Assembly using digital media did however have its limitations when it comes to interaction and discussion.

2020/11/30 Oikosnet Board (Zoom Conference)

Board Members, present:

Walter Lüssi, president
Kristin Gunleiksrud Raaum, vice president
Jürg Hübner
Katerina Karkala-Zorba
Karolína Sílna, treasurer

Board Members not present:

All board members present

Others present:

Rüdiger Noll, Executive Secretary
Sofia af Geijerstam, Office
Karin Sallander, Office

At this meeting, the focus was on various projects. In October, there had been two digital meetings in the context of Oikosnet Europe. First a meeting about the problematic situation for civil society institutions and for the population in general in Belarus. It was agreed that this digital conference was at the core of what Oikosnet Europe is all about, and something where Oikosnet can be relevant and of use to its members.

Another digital conference was also arranged in October where Oikosnet Europe was one of the organizers, and this was the Arab-Europe Citizens' Dialogue Conference. Since the AECD Crete Conference 2020 was postponed, it was decided to arrange a digital conference in October. The covid-19 pandemic had hit the entire world; with Europe and the Arabic world being equally affected, and thus the current situation was decided to be the theme for the conference. This topic was something shared by all participants. Overall, it was a good meeting. However, the differences in meeting culture, ways to present and address the theme, and dialogue culture were more obvious in the online conference situation than it is when met in person. The interaction between talks that take place in an IRL meeting, at meals, in between sessions etc. are greatly missed and are very difficult to create in online meetings.

Beyond this, there was also a discussion about the themes that should be the focus for the work of Oikosnet Europe in the coming years. This discussion resulted in a document about the matter that after the conference was sent out to all members of the association. There were also discussions about the content

of the 2021 General Assembly. Eastern European participation in the association and the events of the association was also discussed in this meeting.

2021/01/13 Oikosnet Board (Zoom Conferences)

Present Board Members:

Walter Lüssi, president
Kristin Gunleiksrud Raaum, vice president
Jürg Hübner
Katerina Karkala-Zorba
Karolína Silná, treasurer

Board Members not present:

All board member present

Others present:

Rüdiger Noll, Executive Secretary
Alf Linderman, Head of the Secretariat
Sofia af Geijerstam



The discussion about Oikosnet Europe Priority Themes continued at this digital board meeting. It was decided to organize a digital conference on one of the themes; education. Rüdiger was appointed to be responsible for the planning process of this digital conference on Education, and it was decided that this conference should take place on March 24. It should be a meeting over a couple of hours up to half a day, and Rüdiger would determine the exact time of the meeting.

The previous digital conference on the situation in Belarus was also discussed. Rüdiger informed about several activities carried through in the German context with reference to the Belarus situation and the situation for local churches and laity academies. In the context of this discussion, it was also decided that Oikosnet Europe should send a specific letter to Eastern European members to explore further how the association could maximize the benefit for these members.

In addition to these discussions, there were also more in-depth conversations on various aspects of the 2021 General Assembly at the Sigtuna Foundation. Among other things, it was decided that the main theme for the Study Day should be Digitalization. Alf was appointed to develop this further. There was also a

discussion on a project initiative from Agape in Italy, and on how to develop further relations to Iona and Corrymeela in Northern Ireland.

2021/03/12 Oikosnet Board (Zoom Conference)

Present Board Members:

Walter Lüssi, president

Jürg Hübner

Katerina Karkala-Zorba

Karolína Silná, treasurer

Board Members not present:

Kristin Gunleiksrud Raaum, vice president

Others present:

Rüdiger Noll, Executive Secretary

Alf Linderman, Head of the Secretariat

The main part of this meeting was discussing various concrete aspects about the General Assembly at the Sigtuna Foundation in October this year. This discussion included the Study Day, various other elements of the program, Invitations and preparations, the financial dimension of the conference, guests to invite, and not least how to include Gender perspectives as a constitutional component of the program.

The rest of the time was devoted to reports on various projects: the Arab-Europe Citizens' Dialogue; the Agape project; the Civil Society project; how to follow up the Belarus digital meeting; New EU Funding Initiatives, the European Pre-Assembly for the WCC gathering 2022; the European Christian Convention; and the Ecumenical Kirchentag in Germany.

2021/06/18 Oikosnet Board (Zoom Conference)

Present Board Members:

Walter Lüssi, president

Jürg Hübner

Katerina Karkala-Zorba

Kristin Gunleiksrud Raaum, vice president

Karolína Silná, treasurer

Board Members not present:

All board members present

Others present:

Rüdiger Noll, Executive Secretary

Alf Linderman, Head of the Secretariat

Sofia af Geijerstam, Communication

Karin Sallander, Administration



A letter had been sent out to members in Eastern Europe according to decisions made in previous board meetings. At this meeting, there was a discussion about the responses. Walter and Rüdiger Noll informed about the contacts with members and partners in the Eastern part of Europe. There are several reasons why they have difficulties as to joining Oikosnet Europe and engaging in Oikosnet Europe activities. Dimensions mentioned included lack of financial resources, the local political context and consequential preconditions for the work of members and similar organization, a constant need to focus on their own work, etcetera. However, many seem to be interested in having a conference where Eastern members and their situation should be the particular focus. It was recognized that for such an event to be successful, we need to be well prepared and it must be made clear why and how this meeting would be valuable for existing and potential Eastern members.

Apart from this discussion, the discussion of main themes for Oikosnet Europe was continued. And for natural reasons, there was also a continuation of the discussion about various elements in the General Assembly in Sigtuna in October 2021.

Activities of the President

Walter Lüssi

The possibilities to travel and visit Oikosnet members in other countries was not possible before. In some cases this was not necessary and important contacts could be maintained elsewhere. But there are Oikosnet members who were not allowed to receive groups of guests in their homes for a very long time and who were massively restricted in their activities by the Corona measures in their countries. Especially here, a direct exchange and a "going along in difficult times" would have been important. This was not possible with some members in Central and Eastern Europe, for example, but also with Liebfrauenberg in Alsace, France. We will have to talk about this and - as far as they can participate - also with the members concerned.

The Executive Committee decided to write a letter to the members to Central and Eastern Europe. Many could not reply, probably because they were too concerned with existential challenges or did not know what to expect from Oikosnet. The Executive Committee instructed the President and the Executive Secretary to actively enquire here and there. Based on the feedback, we will soon start talking to these members about a regional conference where their situation can be addressed.

8.11.20: Belarus Zoom Conference

Thanks to the initiative and connections of the Executive Secretary, the Executive Board was able to invite to an online conference on Belarus. It was important to get direct information about the situation in this country and to send a clear message of encouragement through the people who are connected to us. Since then, we have been regularly informed and we are checking what more can be done by us without endangering people even more through contacts towards the West. Thank you to all who have contributed here.

9.11.20: National conference on quality assurance in continuing education - new business models

At the national level, I made an effort to observe developments in the educational landscape outside the church or church educational institutions. At a national conference on quality assurance in continuing education, new business models in continuing vocational education, adult education and political education were discussed. A model was presented that is comparable to online presences of subscription newspapers and television stations, where everyone can decide for themselves at what rhythm they want to learn and

engage with educational content. Analogue formats would then be supplementary and in-depth offerings.

12.-16.05.21: Ökumenischer Kirchentag Frankfurt

The Ökumenische Kirchentag in Frankfurt could not be held in the usual form, but only as a hybrid event. This gave it a rather exclusive touch for foreign participants. But of course it was not a real meeting place in Germany either and not a crowd with full halls as in other years. In terms of content, there were many good online offers and streamings, but as far as I can tell from my own participation, each with a very limited reach.

11.05.21: EAEE – Study 2021 in Switzerland

Already in 2020, it was planned that the study tour would lead the Protestant and Anglican Adult Education in Europe (EAEE) to Switzerland. Even before Corona, it was announced under the title "How deep is the water and why is it good to be able to swim" on the topic of Church-related Adult Education in the Digital Age. After the event had to be postponed to 2021 because of Covid19, it could not take place in its original form this year either. However, in cooperation with the Faculty of Theology at the University of Zurich, Plusbildung organised an international webinar on "Education - Theology - Digitisation: What do we gain, what do we lose?"

In this context, there were also various meetings between the EAEE board and me and discussions on the further development of our organisations. It is very likely that the board of Oikosnet Europe will soon be asked to enter into closer cooperation with EAEE.

Work of the Executive Secretary

Rüdiger Noll

Walter Lüssi gave his foreword to this Annual Report the title "Only connect!". At the time of Philip Potter this was probably to be understood as an encouragement for members of an anyhow vivid ecumenical movement. Today the technical possibilities to connect have substantially increased. And yet it needs more than ever a special effort to connect. And the Corona Pandemic added to this phenomenon, but it is not the whole explanation!

It, therefore, does not come as a surprise, that the Executive Secretary of Oikosnet Europe spent much of his time since the last General Assembly to keep

in touch with Oikosnet members and friends. This included individual telephone or zoom conferences with members as well as bringing academies together in order to reflect on potential joint project proposals.

In these contacts with individual members, it became evident that some Oikosnet members are especially hit hard, and times are and will be difficult for them as well as for Oikosnet Europe: The Protestant Academy of Oldenburg will close its door by the 31 March 2022 and Oikosnet will lose another member. The Academy in Liebfrauenberg (France) has issued a public appeal, asking other partners to join the Academy in common projects or to suggest another basis for future work. Invited are not only church-related, but also secular investors. The financial deficit is enormous. Oikosnet Europe, already times back, has offered to share in considerations for the future Liebfrauenberg. As Oikosnet Europe, we were happy when the Educational Center in Grodno (Belarus) joined the Association at the General Assembly (GA) in Agape. We were glad about the role our new member played in the turmoils in the country. Now the Bishop of the diocese was exchanged and the priest of the cathedral, to which our new member belonged, was assigned a new post. We do not know for sure as to yet about the future of the Educational Center in Grodno, but we are pleased to hear about the developments in Belarus during our General Assembly. These examples do not complete the list of Oikosnet members in danger of existence. Other centers might want to share their expectations at the General Assembly.

These are the occasions, where the President or the Executive Secretary would have wanted to travel during Corona times in order to express solidarity and to explore possibilities with members. Much had to be done via Zoom or telephone.

A special chapter at the end of this report is devoted to membership developments. It looks especially devoted to assessing the commitment of members expressed in paying their membership fees and their possibilities to do so. However, judged from personal contacts with Oikosnet members throughout the year, it is evident that many members live in a fragile situation. The fact that there are “only” 35 members left in the association is compared with the situation about a decade back shocking. And it is to be foreseen, that further members will (have to) leave the association for one reason or the other, in the years to come.

Therefore, as indicated in previous Annual Reports, it is high time for an Oikosnet General Assembly to discuss as to how we can support our members more effectively, how to develop OE into an association that delivers for its members. By the same token, OE needs to discuss as to how win more members, who have indicated their interest to join. (cf. last chapter of this report) The Board started

to look into this issues and also suggest to seek cooperation with like-minded networks. But inviting new members as well as cooperating with others presupposes to sharpen the profile of Oikosnet Europe.

“Only connect” – that this is not all too easy and needs special efforts is also the background of a critical reflection in the Board not only on the numbers of OE members, but also on the degree of participation of existing OE members in common efforts and projects. The reasons are manifold. These reflections led, upon initiative of the Executive Secretary, the Board to address especially the central and eastern European members with a letter, telephone calls, and emails in order to inquire about their approach. The issue is on the agenda of this GA and might lead to a special central and eastern European member consultation.

As one measure to sharpen the profile of OE, the Board decided to concentrate on three priority issues. Prior to this decision all members were contacted. The three priority issues are: digitalization, European Green Deal and Education/Formation. All of these are on the agenda of this GA in the hope to find appropriate ways for OE together with its members to address these issues together with in a European context.

In order to keep in touch with OE members and to look on some priority issues, the Executive Secretary organized two Zoom conference since the last virtual GA, one on the situation Belarus (8 October 2020) and one on education (6 May 2021). Both were attended by more than 40 participants, not all from within Oikosnet Europe. The feed-back was throughout positive. The Zoom conference on Belarus led to an alternative knowledge of the situation and intensified contacts with the German Foreign Ministry, in which members from Belarus were involved and appreciated. The results of the Zoom conference on education are available upon request. One session of the GA is also devoted to the theme and is supposed to look onto how Oikosnet Europe can make a difference in the public debate.

In addition to these activities, the Executive Secretary was – as usual – responsible for organising the Board meetings, which included the establishment of agendas and of the documents for various meetings, providing input and offering oversight.

Finally it is worth to be mentioned that the Executive Secretary represents the German as well as the European Academies in World Conference on Religion and Peace and its follow-up meetings as well as in the German Kirchentag. In both cases, much work is done these days virtual rather person to person.

Activities Activities of the Board Members

Kristin Gunleiksrud Raaum: COVID19 in Norway: Some thoughts

As for Europe as a whole, The Covid 19 Pandemic affected Norway, and thus also Norwegian Church Academies strongly. Our Annual Conference was planned to March 15th-17th. On March 12th the whole society closed down. The day before we decided to cancel the Annual Conference. The next year very few of our planned conferences and seminars was possible to go through with. Norwegian Church Academies is a network organization, with 75 member academies all over the countries. We have no Centers, no buildings, but use local churches, libraries etc for our seminars. We held some of our seminar on the National level. They were streamed to all our member academies.

We soon learned to hold digital meetings and learned that Zoom and Teams are poorly suited for deeper, longer, strategical or dynamical topics, but well suited for shorter meetings and quick decision making.

All religious activities in Norway of course were affected. As was the Church. For the first time in history, all churches were closed. The impact was strong. 70% of the population are members of The Church of Norway (3,7 million people). The Church of Norway is the largest non-public facilitator of arrangements, including sermons, christenings, weddings, funerals and confirmations. Most of these were cancelled. Funerals were arranged, but with a limitation of 20 people present.

The Church of Norway very soon produced a Covid19 Guidance, for all parishes. This was soon used by other denominatons and religious communities. Most religious life in Norway was moved from churches, mosques, synagogues and other physical arenas to digital arenas. We are still learning what kind of impact this has had on religious life.

The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Norway (STL) also made a Covid19 Guidance on 27 languages, based on the one produced by the Church of Norway. They knew that religious leaders were essential in communicating the Governments rules and advices for preventing infection. Especially Imams were crucial, and they did an important information work, in pamphlets and videos, and by visiting members: making it clear that it was necessary to follow the guidelines.

But in the daily updates from the Health Governments in the media, Religious life was hardly present. Religious life was seldom mentioned at all, and when the

Government was praising the population and several institutions, as the educational system, art, culture, restaurants etc, religious life was never mentioned. Both The Church of Norway and the The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities (STL) had several meetings in the Ministry, making them aware of how important our effort in making (and carefully following) guidelines and our effort in spreading information. But still religious life was almost invisible – and still is, after a year and a half with Covid19. Even in the 450 pages long commission report, evaluating how the Norwegian government and society had handled Covid19, religious life was hardly mentioned. Religious leaders in Norway are very critical, and now discuss what we could do about this. We conclude that it has revealed that the national governments have a lack of understanding of the importance of religious life in general and how important it was that different churches and denominations took responsibility in this crisis.

In other words: the pandemic has revealed crucial insight in the role of religious life in society, and we will use this as an important basis of the discussion on the future for religion and society.

*Jörg Hübner: **Corona, climate, collaborations and communication***

During 2021, the communication of the Board of Oikosnet took place continuously digitally. Of course, there was a lack of direct, face-to-face exchange. But living in the digital space also brought advantages: all members of the board could be present. Travel times were eliminated, and climate-damaging consequences from air travel could be avoided.

The time of crises does not end with the Corona crisis: The climate crisis is becoming increasingly visible. In Germany, a flood catastrophe of unprecedented proportions has occurred. In the Mediterranean countries of Spain, Greece and Turkey forests are burning and temperatures are reaching new highs. It is often said that priority climate protection is nothing more than utopian thinking. In the meantime, however, thinking should be reversed in the face of these catastrophes: It is not priority climate protection that is utopian in Europe, but acting, doing business and living according to the motto "keep it up". The costs of adapting to climate change will cause the gross domestic product to fall continuously in the coming years. The resulting social consequences are incalculable.

Climate experts believe that the Mediterranean region will become the world's second climate change hotspot. Densely populated areas around the Mediterranean will suffer from high temperatures; reserves of water will be depleted and food production will become more problematic.

That is why we have started to launch a project on resonant tourism with the Academy in Crete.

The basis of this newly chosen term resonance are the thoughts of the sociologist Hartmut Rosa. According to Hartmut Rosa, in late capitalist society, man has taken human autonomy to the extreme and subjected everything to acceleration: Global race for growth, for more growth has emerged. And this growth must accelerate more and more, because it is less and less successful. Because in order to achieve even more growth, ever greater effort must be expended. Burnout and crisis developments all over the world are the result.

What is needed now, according to Hartmut Rosa, is a new way of relating to the world. He calls this not deceleration, but resonance. In such a world relationship, people become self-effective again. They listen sensitively to others. They detach themselves from the pure subject-object relationship and are in the mode of a reciprocal response-relationship with the other, also with the nature surrounding them. Resonance is an entering into relationship of two sides, each speaking with its own voice. Dominating then becomes dialogue, subjugation becomes opening to others, or subjugating the world becomes respect for the unavailable.

In the midst of the Corona crisis, these reflections are particularly significant. It is recognizable that man's relationship to the world is no longer in balance on all levels. The relationship to nature is broken, the social togetherness is facing great upheavals and also the question of God and the supporting spirituality is facing new challenges. In this respect, Hartmut Rosa's reflections on a new world relationship are more topical than ever.

This becomes particularly clear when it comes to the tourism of the future. Simply going away and resting in faraway places are more and more under suspicion. Who will bring Covid19 back with them? Isn't sitting in an airplane too cramped? Is flying still the right means of travel? Is it not also a form of acceleration? How do I experience nature at the destination of my journey? What about my spiritual sources – even on vacation?

Tourism as an essential branch of the economy in the countries of Spain or Greece is facing a change of path. What a sustainable tourism looks like has not yet been determined. This could be the fundamental question for a Europe project. Then it is really no longer only about sustainable tourism, but about resonant tourism. So far, the academy on Crete and the academy in Bad Boll are involved in the deliberations. Talks were held in the spring and summer of 2021. Discussions with the Academy in Malaga or other members of Oikosnet could

follow. The intention is to initiate a project that can be placed in one of the EU funding lines for the years 2021 to 2027.

Oikosnet also thrives on concrete practical cooperation. This could be tested on such an example.

Financial Report

Karolína Silná

Finances and accounts 2020

The accounts are reported with an income and expenditure of 24.100 € and have closed the year with a surplus of 11.838 €. This surplus has increased the total assets to 148.864 €.

The key income stream for Oikosnet Europe remains to be membership fees. The Covid-19 crisis affected the income, as some of the fees were paid later in 2021 and therefore will be added to 2021 accounts. But also the expenditures were much lower, than in the previous years - the board meetings and the General Assembly had to be held online and the costs were limited.

Recommendation

The Board recommends to the General Assembly to adopt the accounts 2020 with the income and expenditure of 24.100 € (Doc. GA 2021-7.1) and to discharge the Board.

The Board recommends to the General Assembly to adopt the closing balance sheet of 148.864 €.

The Board recommends to the General Assembly to add the 2020 surplus of 11.838 € to the reserves of Oikosnet Europe.

Activities of the Office of Oikosnet Europe

Alf Linderman, Karin Sallander, Sofia Af Geijerstam

The secretariat of Oikosnet Europe is located at the Sigtuna Foundation in Sweden. Alf Linderman is head of the secretariat, Maria-Pia Anderloni financial

officer, Karin Sallander administrative secretary and Sofia af Geijerstam information officer. The secretariat provides an interface for Oikosnet Europe with e-mail, post box, telephone, newsletters and website.

The main tasks throughout the year are to keep an updated list of the member organizations and administer the payment procedure of membership fees. The secretariat also supports the board with figures for the final accounts and budget process and administer all economical transactions within the Organization such as financial support for projects, conference fees and travelling costs. In addition to this, the secretariat also handles the archive of Oikosnet Europe saving all official documents of the organisation for the future.

The Annual Conference is the main event of the organisation and the Secretariat is significantly involved in the planning process. The secretariat takes care of the registration, the payment of the conference fees and the transfer of practical information to the arranging academy. The secretariat also supports the board in sending out invitations and documents to participants of the annual conference and the representatives of the member organizations.

Communication issues

The secretariat is responsible for the communication between the organisation and its members, mainly by the official newsletter of Oikosnet Europe, the website www.oikosnet.eu and the Facebook page of Oikosnet Europe (121 followers).

The newsletters of Oikosnet are generally read by a third of the 138 subscribers, sometimes just below. During 2020 the newsletter was published at four occasions: April 8, June 10, October 10 and December 21. In the first half of 2021 the newsletter was published in Feb 24, May 05 and June 23. Recurrent content is an editorial written by the President Walter Lüssi or the Executive Secretary Rüdiger Noll. The newsletter also gives updates from the Board meetings and information on the Annual Conferences. Cooperation projects like *Civil Society and Democracy in Central Europe* and the *Arab Europe Citizens Dialogue* are also represented in these newsletters.

During 2020 and the beginning of 2021, digital communication has been more needed than ever due to the very special situation caused by Covid-19. The secretariat gave administrative support to two digital conferences during 2020 and 2021. *The Conference on Belarus October 8, 2020* and *“The Role of Religious Education in Today’s Europe” March 24, 2021*. The secretariat had the responsibility of the invitational process and the registration for the conference on Belarus and took the responsibility of sending out invitations, the registration

process and hosting the meeting at the Conference on “The Role of Religious Education in Today’s Europe”.

Even though we all miss the opportunity of seeing one another in person, one should not neglect the opportunity of reaching out to both old and new members through digital events when economy or geography represents specific constraints. The Oikosnet Zoom Conference on Belarus had 29 participants from representing 26 Academies or faith-based organisations and the Conference on “The Role of Religious Education in Today’s Europe” had 33 participants from 17 different Academies or faith-based organisation. The learning process of arranging digital events will surely be most useful for Oikosnet Europe as an organisation even when we are back to a more normal situation again.

Activities of the Nomination Committee

Kristin Gunleiksrud Raaum and Karolina Karolína Silná have decided to leave the Board of Oikosnet Europe and not to stand for re-election. Kristin had the function of Vice-President, Karolina that of Treasurer. There will be an opportunity to acknowledge and thank their work at the General Assembly. The Board has forwarded these vacancies, for which new Board members are to be found, to the Nominating Committee. At the same time, seats will be up for grabs for the Nominating Committee.

Further development of projects

Arab-European Citizens Dialogue (Katerina Karkala-Zorba)

The Arab-Europe Citizen’s Dialogue started its process more than 10 years ago. Its main partners are CEOSS, The Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services and Oikosnet Europe. Seven Conferences have been organized in all these years, on the themes of Transformation and Formation of Identities, The Arab Spring and its aftermath, Citizenship and Religion in the Processes of Political Transformation, the Future of AECD Relations, Societies in Transition and Active Citizenship, Gender, Media and Religion, People from different faiths live peacefully together. The Corona Pandemic has postponed the 8th Conference from 2020 to October 26 to 29, 2021 with theme: “*The Role of Civil Society and Religious Institutions in Time of Crisis*”. An online Conference in

October 2020 has shown the interest of many participants for the AECD and we do hope that the Conference in October will take place and will bring together many participants from the Arab world and Europe at the Orthodox Academy of Crete in Kolympari.



Dialog for peaceful change (Colin Craig)

As Jaap van der Sar noted, last year, the Covid19 crisis has continued to significantly and negatively impact both the level and range of DPC programmes that we have been able to undertake.

The need and the interest have not so much diminished but our physical capacity to meet those needs, given the Covid restrictions has been unsurprisingly heavily restricted. Before Covid struck there were a range of developing proposals for the full 5-day Facilitator Training programmes alongside several shorter workshops. All of these were then either postponed or cancelled.

Interestingly and parallel to this, the impact of Covid has also generated some sustained interest as to whether we could helpfully offer some equivalent level of training and workshops through a virtual medium such as Zoom. I undertook to explore this and then pilot some possibilities. As Jaap has noted in his previous reports, we have been building a DPC Training Hub with Fryshuset [a major Youth Empowerment NGO in Sweden]. Given our ongoing relationship with Fryshuset, they offered an ideal opportunity for us to test what the strengths and weaknesses of an online version of DPC might look like.

What emerged was that “Yes”, you can complete some of the more technical and conceptual aspects within the “Understanding Conflict” Module of the Facilitator Training Programme. However, trying to train Mediative Communication Module through an online format significantly diminishes its learning impact in our view. Perhaps the greatest strength of the DPC methodology is through our commitment to engaging all the participants through a range of Experiential Learning activities. These are designed to be fully integrated to support the more conceptual elements of the methodology. The wisdom of this process is, in our view, in weaving together a learning experience that is rooted within our own lived experience creates a much more impactful outcome. Participants never have to stretch too far to encounter the relevance of the DPC methodology within both their professional and personal lives.

Having said that; there is no doubt that some of these new online formats can offer new ways of creating greater access to our methodology when it is often very difficult for people to access through the usual “in person” trainings. It will be interesting to see how this situation evolves especially in the emergent post-pandemic world. This has been a recent subject of ongoing discussion within our Trainer/Coach network.

At the time of writing, we all have been witnessing catastrophic wildfires in the USA, devastating flooding in Germany, a rapidly emerging 3rd [or is it 4th] wave of the pandemic and civil unrest in South Africa and across the world to name just a few of the immediate crisis. Where and when these situations only further increase peoples fears and sense of scarcity, we will certainly only see tensions increase and the potential for conflict to expand exponentially.

In such an environment, the Church itself will meet head on both opportunity and risk. Over recent years, as Jaap has reported on, we have had the opportunity to work directly with the Lutheran Church and other Churches networked through the Oikosnet network. To date much of our DPC work with the Church has been focussed at helping them “tool up” to meet the various external crisis’s they face in their context. One of our DPC Coaches in Canada has

been working in a series of Roman Catholic dioceses that have been so impacted by the revelations that have been emerging regarding the near genocidal impact of the Residential Schools policy that Canada's First Nations Children suffered.

As this work has been evolving, it has also caused several pastors and congregations to critically appraise the fault-lines that can also exist within and across their own congregations. At times this has highlighted their fears of then trying to open-up and deal with these fractures. As with many normal human experience, such internal fractures exist as the Church itself faces into the stress that change often involves. As we look forward, we already have several Facilitator trainings in planning for later in the year with two church communities to work on just such internal tensions.

To support this work, we hope to further build up the concept of Churches becoming "DPC Training Hubs" both for their diocese and local communities. This will allow a much greater level of local expertise to evolve and reduce the reliance that currently exists on the current cohort of Accredited Trainers and Coaches. It will also, over time, reduce the need for unnecessary international travel which will only aid our wider commitment to working in as sustainable a way as possible. To become accredited as a DPC Training Hub, the organisation will have to maintain a minimum of two fully accredited Trainers and run at least one fully Facilitator Training each year.

Civil Society Project (Rüdiger Noll)

As the project saw a reasonable good start in 2019 with two consultations in Berlin and Suprasl, which identified issues to be addressed for cross-border civil society meetings, the project was put on hold due to the Corona crisis. Stakeholders agreed that the personal contact is indispensable in the project and cannot be replaced by virtual meetings. A consultation planned to take place in Sigtuna on the media and civil society was postponed.

As we meet in Sigtuna for the GA, talks have started among stakeholders as to how to restart the process.

Membership development

There are presently 35 organizations in the membership list of Oikosnet Europe. In 2020, 20 of these members paid their membership fees in full. This

somewhat discouraging result must be viewed in the light of two specific circumstances. Many churches in Europe are under financial pressure, and many of the Oikosnet Europe members are primarily or in part funded by European churches. Thus, weaker church economies will in many cases result in reduced contributions to the work of academies connected to Oikosnet Europe.

As if this was not enough of a problem, the pandemic hitting the world in early 2020 has had massive impact on society at large, but specifically on the kind of institutions that organize meetings and dialogue – *id est* Oikosnet Europe member academies. This is something that threatens the financial stability of members as well as the association and continue to be something that we will have to bear in our minds as we look toward the future.

At the same time, it could be argued that in difficult times, the association is needed more than ever. During the last year, there are also academies that have approached Oikosnet Europe with an expressed interest to become members. How the economic situation develops in Europe over the next couple of years will be important for the future of Oikosnet Europe.

September 21/WL