

Oikosnet Europe

General Assembly 2023

plusbildung / Mission 21, Basel

October 6



## Annual Report 2023

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# FROM COEXISTENCE TO TOGETHERNESS

Foreword by the President, Rev. Walter Lüssi

In this foreword I am for once getting very personal. I grew up in Switzerland as a Reformed at the foot of the Queen of the Mountains, the Rigi. That means at the same time in the diaspora or in Catholic lands. From the beginning, my religious socialisation was determined by this minority situation. Denominational diversity was present from the beginning, through my mother as a Catholic from the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland and through the fact that we lived in the immediate vicinity of the Catholic vicarage including the church and attended kindergarten in the same house, with the kindergarten teacher being a nun.

From an early age, I was interested in and also committed to the local ecumenical movement. My thesis at the University of Basel was about the religious upbringing of children in non-denominational families. It was published more than 40 years ago, and I can claim that I introduced the term «interdenominational marriage» (in German: konfessionsverbindend) instead of «mixed marriage» (Mischehe) in Switzerland. On the occasion of my ordination 1982, I was given a relief by the (Catholic) Lucerne artist Gottlieb Ulmi, who had

become aware of me, to which he had given the title «FROM COEXISTENCE TO TOGETHERNESS».



The ecumenical challenge runs through my whole life and has largely determined my theological existence. This, combined with my interest in church education, has also led me «into the clutches» of Oikosnet Europe. Oikosnet is rooted in a togetherness of confessions that includes reconciliation in Europe, a commitment to empowerment and participation for all, and co-responsibility for democratic decision-making processes. For more than 15 years, I have been working to create structures and provide funding in Switzerland that give a chance to the movement from coexistence of church education venues to togetherness.

This year we can look back on 10 years of plusbildung – ecumenical network for adult education in Switzerland. And that is how long it had taken – and even longer with all the preparatory work – for enough trust to grow and for the realisation to solidify that together we could play a more credible role that KAGEB, the Catholic national network for adult education, could fully integrate and dissolve into plusbildung.

I am extremely pleased that this year we are able to invite the General Assembly of Oikosnet Europe and also EAEE, the Protestant and Anglican Network for Adult Education, to Basel. Like reconciliation, «FROM COEXISTENCE TO TOGETHERNESS» is not simply a strategic goal, but the fundamental mission of our work and existence. However, it requires us to leave our comfort zone, or as we say today, our own bubble, and take on challenging relational work(!).

## **Activities of the Management Board**

*Alf Linderman*

### **2022-11-25 Oikosnet Board (Zoom Conference)**

#### **Present Board Members:**

Walter Lüssi, President  
Katerina Karkala, Vice President  
Lucia Leonardi  
Kjell Riise  
Heinz-Joachim Lohmann

#### **Board Members not present:**

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#### **Others present:**

Rüdiger Noll, Executive Secretary  
Alf Linderman, Treasurer Secretariat  
Sofia af Geijerstam, Secretariat

#### **Main themes of the meeting:**

This was the first board meeting after the General Assembly (GA) in Malaga. Thus, the main item for discussion was to evaluate the Malaga GA. All agreed on that the meeting had a good atmosphere and a new positive energy. The director of Lux Mundi, Gloria Uribe Sifuentes, who was hosting the GA did a tremendous job in the planning process as well as in hosting the meeting. It was also noted that the presence of some young participants and our new member Iona contributed to the positive atmosphere. The content of the study day was very much appreciated. One board member suggested to dedicate more time for interaction and reflection in smaller groups to stimulate the discussions. She would be happy to share some useful methodologies for the next General Assembly. The length of the meeting was also discussed. A five-day long assembly is too long for some members.

Beyond this, some other things were discussed. If the association should allow guests to participate in GA:s, Priority themes, potential new members, the situation in ongoing projects, and the Ownership and Leadership of the association were among the items discussed.

Some important decisions were also taken: It was decided to appoint Alf Linderman as the treasurer of Oikosnet Europe, to mandate Walter Lüssi to explore if the next GA could be held in Basel, and to ask Kjell Riise and Katerina Karkala Zormpas to work on guidelines for the management of OE.

### **2023-03-08 Oikosnet Board (Zoom Conference)**

#### **Present Board Members:**

Walter Lüssi, President  
Katerina Karkala, Vice President  
Lucia Leonardi  
Kjell Riise  
Heinz-Joachim Lohmann

#### **Board Members not present**

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#### **Others present:**

Rüdiger Noll, Executive Secretary  
Alf Linderman, Treasurer Secretariat  
Sofia af Geijerstam, Secretariat  
Vilma Luostarinen, Secretariat

#### **Main themes of the meeting:**

Initially, some concrete developments were discussed, among them that Alf Linderman will continue to work at the Sigtuna Foundation but will leave the position as the Executive Director. Helle Klein will be his successor. It was also noted that Rüdiger Noll will retire from his position at the Head Office for the German Academies, and thus it is not clear as to how to do with the Executive Secretary function of OE. Both these things will have to be discussed further.

The planning of the next General Assembly in Basel was also discussed. The GA will be held in the Mission House, Mission 21, in Basel. The meeting will also include significant cooperation with European Protestant and Anglican Network for life-long Learning (EAEE), and apart from the Business Sessions, all elements of the GA will be held together with EAEE.

In addition to this, the paper “Future of Oikosnet” written by Kjell Riise and Katerina Karkala Zormpas was presented and will be discussed further at the

next board meeting. The status of Membership fees, ongoing projects, and how to deal with elections in the upcoming GA were also discussed at this meeting.

### **2023-05-10-12 Oikosnet Board (Mission 21, Basel)**

#### **Present Board Members:**

Walter Lüssi, President

Heinz-Joachim Lohmann

#### **Board Members digitally present**

Katerina Karkala, Vice President

Lucia Leonardi

Kjell Riise

#### **Others present:**

Rüdiger Noll, Executive Secretary

Alf Linderman, Treasurer Secretariat

Sofia af Geijerstam, Secretariat

Gernot Meier, Evangelische Landeskirche in Baden/Akademie

#### **Guests**

Magdalena Zimmermann, Head of Department "Education Exchange Research", Mission 21

Heike Witzel, European Protestant and Anglican Network for life-long Learning (EAEE)

Veronika Matějková, EAEE

#### **Main themes of the meeting:**

The main theme of this meeting was to discuss the October General Assembly at the Mission House, Mission 21, in Basel. This discussion was conducted together with Magdalena Zimmermann, Head of Department "Education Exchange Research", Mission 21, Heike Witzel and Veronika Matějková. The last two persons both represented the board of the European Protestant and Anglican Network for life-long Learning (EAEE).

Several concrete items related to the GA were also discussed. How to deal with elections, the Study Day, The Excursion, Worship life, what Guests to invite, how to reflect the current situation in Ukraine, future cooperation with EAEE, etcetera.

The paper Development: Ownership and Leadership of Oikosnet Europe (written by Kjell Riise and Katarina Karkala) was presented by Walter Lüssi. As Kjell and Katarina only were present digitally, it was difficult to have an in-depth discussion about the paper in general. Among other things, it was noted that almost all academies are the result of the post-world war era, and that themes and projects connected to peacebuilding processes should be reflected in the aim and purpose of the organization. It was also mentioned that it is hard to find topics that really engage members and raised the question whether there are other ways to get people more involved. Walter Lüssi asked Katerina Karkala and Kjell Riise to work on an action plan based on their paper to be presented at the next Board Meeting. Such an action plan could be further discussed at the GA I Basel in October.

### **2023-06-26 Oikosnet Board (Zoom Conference)**

#### **Present Board Members:**

Walter Lüssi, President  
Katerina Karkala, Vice President  
Lucia Leonardi  
Kjell Riise  
Heinz-Joachim Lohmann

#### **Board Members not present:**

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#### **Others present:**

Rüdiger Noll, Executive Secretary  
Alf Linderman, Treasurer Secretariat  
Sofia af Geijerstam, Secretariat

#### **Main themes of the meeting:**

As the previous Board meeting, the main theme for this meeting was to address various concrete aspects of the upcoming General Assembly in Basel, Switzerland. Things discussed were practical details related to the venue, invitations and the registration process, worship life, the Study Day, the Excursion, Program schedule, Business sessions agenda and the process related to the Annual Report, Elections, Guests to invite, etcetera.

Kjell Riise also presented the paper on the “Future of Oikosnet” that was distributed at the previous meeting. It was concluded that more work is needed on this paper, but this is also by the input given from all board members.

The treasurer Alf Linderman also gave a report on the financial status of the association. Not all membership fees have yet been paid, but the association still has some financial assets from previous years and can thus continue to operate in a normal fashion. Thus, the association still can support collaborative projects among the members of the association with seed money. This is based on the ambition to raise the awareness of the potential the association has for collaborative projects of various kinds.

Some project reports were presented, and it was also concluded that the Oikosnet Europe website is in need of development.

### **2023-09-05 Oikosnet Board (Zoom Conference)**

#### **Present Board Members:**

Walter Lüssi, President  
Katerina Karkala, Vice President  
Lucia Leonardi  
Kjell Riise  
Heinz-Joachim Lohmann

#### **Board Members not present**

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#### **Others present:**

Rüdiger Noll, Executive Secretary  
Alf Linderman, Treasurer Secretariat  
Sofia af Geijerstam, Secretariat

#### **Main themes of the meeting:**

The meeting was entirely dedicated to the preparation of the General Assembly. The meeting was entirely dedicated to the preparation of the General Assembly, the concrete state of planning of the conference and in particular the discussion on the Future of Oikosnet as well as personnel issues. For the second part, the Nomination Committee was invited to present the concerns of the Board with regard to elections.

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## Activities of the President

Walter Lüssi

As always, I try to give a brief overview below of special events and encounters related to board work for Oikosnet:

### STUDY TOUR SWITZERLAND AND EAEE-GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN PARIS NOVEMBER 2022:

It was originally planned that the Association plusbildung would host the Study Tour of the European Protestant and Anglican Network for life-long learning (EAEE) in spring 2020. The Corona pandemic made the project impossible for two years. The EAEE Study Tour, under the original, now almost visionary theme "How deep is the water and why is it good to be able to swim? - Church related adult education in the digital age" had to be postponed. An online conference on "Education – Theology – Digitisation: What do we gain, what do we lose?" took place in June 2021.

Finally, it was then possible to invite to a joint conference in Kappel Abbey from 8 to 11 June 2022. At this point, however, it seemed appropriate to adapt the theme to the immediate challenges. The program was finally entitled "Finding Hope in Times of Corona, War and Climate Change".

"Education in Europe - Challenges and Chances": A delegation of the Working Group on Education of Oikosnet Europe was invited. The workshop explored the common interests and also addressed the responsibility of church education work for a democratic and peaceful Europe.

During these contacts - I was invited to the EAEE General Assembly in Paris in November 2022 - a few fundamental considerations matured in me that will now also be important for the meeting of Oikosnet and EAEE in Basel:

- First of all, international networking is time-consuming and requires perseverance and persuasion.
- As an educational institution, it needs to be convinced that it is not enough for itself, but that it is dependent on permanent further training, and therefore it needs to be willing to invest time and resources in its own further development.
- It is not only in church-based non-formal education that we are more dependent than ever on mutual networking and close cooperation between



different networks, beyond cultural boundaries, in order to assume our responsibility and play a role in European societies.

## RELIGION AND EDUCATION NETWORKING MEETING IN DECEMBER 2022

Bianca Kappelhoff, research associate at the Europe Comenius Institute in Münster, Germany, together with our General Secretary Rüdiger Noll, invited us to a networking meeting in Münster on 2 and 3 December 2022, which was combined with a regular CoGREE meeting. CoGREE is the coordinating group for religious education in Europe. Besides Oikosnet, a delegation from EAEE also participated. There we agreed among the CEC partner organisations to jointly write a letter to CEC to seek a new and concrete form of future cooperation. More on this from our Executive Secretary and in other sections of this Annual Report.

EAD – MEETING WITH THE GENERAL SECRETARY IN BERLIN JUNE 2023: Hanna Lorenzen, Generalsekretärin Evangelische Akademien in Deutschland e. V. (EAD)

The fact that Rüdiger Noll is retiring at the end of this year and will no longer be able to be the liaison person to the German Academies and other points of discussion with the Association of German Educational Institutions, which is so important for Oikosnet, led me to Berlin in mid-June 2024. There I had two discussions.

First, Hanna Lorenzen, Secretary General of the EEAS, received me in the presence of Rüdiger Noll and Heinz-Joachim Lohmann. The conversation was about the future cooperation between EAD and Oikosnet. We explored possibilities of how connections between the German academies and other European partner organisations, youth initiatives and their topics could be made fruitful. We also talked about the renewal process that the board of Oikosnet wants to initiate. We were pleased to see that Heinz-Joachim Lohmann is willing to take on the Oikosnet-EAD liaison role.

The second conversation was a meeting with the director of the Protestant Academy in Berlin, Friederike Krippner, and the deputy director there, Heinz-Joachim Lohmann.

It came as a pleasant surprise to me that the Protestant Academy in Berlin offered Oikosnet to release Heinz-Joachim Lohmann from his duties as Managing Director for the next two years on a 20 per cent basis.

## MEETING WITH PROF. DR. GOOS MINDERMAN, MODERATOR OF CCME (Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe) AND RECTOR AD INTERIM REMONSTRANTS SEMINARIUM / ARMINIUS INSTITUTE IN THE NETHERLANDS

After first meeting our Executive Secretary, Rüdiger Noll, with Goos Minderman regarding membership of the Remonstrants Seminarium / Arminius Institute in the Netherlands, I met Goos Mindermann rather by chance at the GA of EAEE in Paris, where he held a moderator role. Finally, on 5 July 2024, we had a ZOOM meeting where we discussed mutual interest in membership and agreed on the procedure and conditions.

### **Work of the Executive Secretary**

Rüdiger Noll

As listed above, in the period covered by this report, 6 (including the meeting just prior to the GA 2023) 7 meetings of the Board took place, for which the Executive Secretary in consultation with the President established the agendas and provided the respective documentation.

Important in this period of time was again to maintain contacts with Oikosnet members, former members, potential future members and partner organisations. Due to the continuing war in Ukraine and the continuing violations of human rights, for instance in Belarus, it was especially important to maintain contacts in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus (often with the help of the good services of Alexei Bodrov). Several people were involved in supporting our member organisation in Grodno/Belarus. Also important in this regard was the growing relationship between EAEE and Oikosnet, which led, inter alia, to the joint and parallel Study Tour of EAEE and the GA of Oikosnet Europe in 2023. Following a joint meeting in Kappel in 2022 (cf. above), for which the Executive Secretary prepared a session on educational priorities, several coordination meetings took place via Zoom.

One of the main tasks of the Executive Secretary was to maintain contacts with the German academies via the umbrella organisation EAD. The Executive Secretary reported about Oikosnet at each of its Board meetings and member Assemblies. He EAD is at present working on a new publication on the role of protestant academies in Germany on discourse culture and political education, for which the Executive Secretary is one of the coordinators.

One priority in 2022 and 2023 was the preparation of the German Kirchentag in Nürnberg. The Executive Secretary as well as Gernot Meier together with other representatives of German academies were members of the preparation group for fora on democracy during the Academies. It was a pleasure that Georgy Roy, Alexei Bodrov and Katerina could also attend the Kirchentag in Nürnberg. The Kirchentag is also undergoing a major reform process, which is supposed to produce results in late 2023.

The main contents work of the Executive Secretary related to the work on one of the priority themes of Oikosnet on education (cf. below)

The Executive Secretary was heavily involved in the preparation of the Arab-European Citizens' Dialogue and was part of organising the 2023 consultation in 2023 on religion and civil society. In September 2023 Rüdiger Noll attended the 25th Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) and gave a presentation on the past and future of ECEN, which can be watched on youtube.

## **Activities Activities of the Board Members**

### *Kjell Rise*

**ACTION PLAN:** Together with Katerina Karkala-Zormpa, I have been working on the questions related to Development, Ownership and Leadership of Oikosnet Europe. A draft to an Action Plan will be presented for the Annual Assembly.

**CEC:** I had the pleasure of attending the 2023 Conference of European Churches' General Assembly in Tallinn, Estonia 15. – 20. June 2023 as a representative of Oikosnet. OE is one of the Organisations in Partnership in relations to CEC. It was an inspirational meeting, with the theme: "Under God's blessing – shaping the future".

During the GA, I met with other organisations in the field of education. The strategy document that was developed during these days and nights ended up with a sentence about CECs mission and goal, stating to support dialogue, mutual learning and cooperation on issues that are of concern to the churches of Europe such as

- Peace,
- Climate Justice,
- Migration (with the Churches Commission on Migrants in Europe),
- Human Rights,

- Education
- The Covid pandemic and its consequences

We are happy to recognize the terms mutual learning and education in this – thanks to the engagement of organisations in partnership.

*Heinz-Joachim Lohmann & Lucia Leonardi*

OIKOS net 2023: The protestant Academy of Berlin, the Centro Ecumenico Agape and the Ekumenická Akademie Prague, organized as members of OIKOSnet Europe in 2022 and 2023 workshops at the Centre Ecumenico Agape. The aim of the project is to initiate and promote a discussion about pressing topics that concern our shared future and us as people living in different nations, European citizens and human beings with cultural backgrounds from all over the world. Our main concern in the two workshops was a reflection on the socio-ecological transformation. We discussed possible pathways into a sustainable future that takes into account all dimensions of political, ecological, economic and social sustainability.

Our citizen-dialogues want to strengthen the European civil society and nourish with this the debate within the OIKOSnet network, too. Hence, they are crucial complements to top-down approaches represented in large-scale European political projects that try to manage social issues, such as the socio-ecological transformation, in sometimes too technocratic manner (see for example the Green New Deal). The invitations went primarily to young adults but also to a small number of participants of all generations to share ideas and knowledge, develop practices and get a vision how to organize for the future in the common European house. We shared and discussed these practices and visions starting from the everyday of our lives and the different historic trajectories of our regions and nations of Eastern, Northern and Southern Europe. The aim is to identify the most important topics, to look at the situation in the participating countries and develop ideas for possible changes.

In June 2022, our first workshop “No one should be left behind – the socio-economic presuppositions for a socio-ecological transformation in Europe” had as initiating question: How to organize a transition into a more sustainable future by taking into account the existing social and economic inequalities as well as the different starting points of regions in Europe – their histories and resources.

In August 2023, the second workshop “Power for a just future – How to live together and organize in Europe” built upon the main topics of the previous discussion, and took into account the rise of right-wing populism all over Europe.

As initiating question, we asked, how can we organize together to bring about change in the world, and how can we use power in a sustainable way to build a just future in Europe.

The discussion on the starting issues was facilitated through experiential methodologies, starting from the personal experiences of the participants and understanding their emotional, imaginative and bodily aspects in order to involve the whole person, and then articulated at a narrative level through collaborative writing techniques.

Both years saw the creation of a small group of participants, 21 in 2022 (15 participants + 6 organisers) and 23 in 2023 (16 participants + 7 staff), who for a week immersed themselves in the residential and community dimension of Agape, a centre that in itself represents a practical example of commitment to social-ecological sustainability, through education in the care of a shared space, environmental sustainability practices and active participation in community decision-making processes.

At the end of every workshop stands a written draft, documenting the views and the visions of the participants. In 2022, they dealt with Democratic Values, Equality, Capitalism, Food Production, Transport and the own role in the system's transformation. You can read the full manifesto here:<https://www.eaberlin.de/aktuelles/2022/niemanden-zuruecklassen/manifesto.pdf>. In 2023, the reflections turned to Right Wing extremism in Europe, Gender issues, the effects of Racism, Economic Injustice and Climate Crisis. Although the group of participants changed between the years, you can see similar topics emerging out of the discussions – with different nuances. We discussed some of the topics from 2022, such as equality, in more depth in 2023 under the titles “gender issues and the effects of racism”. The struggle for democracy was problematized more in our discussion in 2023, at one hand because we as organizers have put on this question more emphasis in the outline of the program, but at the other hand, the participants, too, were more concerned with the rise of right wing parties and the situation of our democracy in Europe.

## **Financial Report**

### **Financial Report**

*Alf Linderman, Treasurer*

#### *Finances and Accounts 2022*

The accounts are reported with an income of EUR 29'650:- and expenditure of EUR 35'894:- and have closed the year with a deficit of EUR 6'244. This deficit has decreased the total assets for Oikosnet Europe from EUR 148'578:- to EUR 142'334:-.

The main income for the association remains to be the membership fees. Since some members have experienced difficulties to pay their dues over the last few years, Oikosnet Europe have not been able to reach the financial goal assumed in the budget for 2022 (EUR 32'150:-). The Board has also upon requests granted some academies to pause their payment of their membership fees given specific financial difficulties. For obvious reasons, the financial situation for Oikosnet Europe is something that the Board continues to follow closely.

#### *Recommendations*

The Board recommends to the General Assembly to adopt the accounts for 2022 with the income and expenditure mentioned above and to discharge the Board.

The Board recommends to the General Assembly to adopt the closing balance sheet of EUR 151'282:-.

The Board recommends to the General Assembly to take the 2022 deficit from the reserves thus reducing these reserves in accordance with what is mentioned above.

## **Activities of the Office of Oikosnet Europe**

Alf Linderman, Sofia Af Geijerstam

The secretariat of Oikosnet Europe is located at the Sigtuna Foundation in Sweden. The secretariat provides an interface for Oikosnet Europe with e-mail, post box, telephone, newsletters, and website. Alf Linderman was the head of office until July 1. Due to his retirement, he has been replaced by Maria-Pia

Anderloni as head of office, but Alf remains as treasurer of OE. Maria-Pia has been the financial officer for the secretariat in the former years and has a well-grounded knowledge about the administrative work of OE. Sofia af Geijerstam is information officer. Since May 30, 2022, Vilma Luostarinen has been the administrative secretary for Oikosnet Europe, a position earlier held by Karin Sallander.

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.

In addition to the general tasks mentioned above, the Secretariat of Oikosnet Europe also wants to develop its capacity to engage further in collaboration with OE members. For the purpose of capacity building, the Secretariat sent the administrative secretary to attend the DPC training session at Corrymeela in the spring of 2023. The following section is Vilma Luostarinen's short report on this event.

## **Communication issues**

### *Sofia af Geijerstam*

The secretariat is responsible for the communication between the organization and its members, mainly by the official newsletter of Oikosnet Europe, the website [www.oikosnet.eu](http://www.oikosnet.eu) and the Facebook page of Oikosnet Europe. The Facebook of Oikosnet Europe have 129 followers, compared to 116 in 2022.

The newsletters of Oikosnet are generally read by a third of the 133 subscribers. During 2022 the newsletter was published at two occasions: April 21 and December 19. 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. Members are in every newsletter encouraged to share events, news and activities to members through the newsletter.

## **Further development of projects**

### *Arab-European Citizens Dialogue (AECD) (Katerina Karkala)*

The AECD is a cooperation between the Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services/CEOSS and Oikosnet Europe with its office at the Sigtuna Foundation in Sweden. The first meeting has taken place at the Orthodox Academy of Crete/OAC, establishing by this the continuation of the previous Egyptian-German Dialogue (since 2002).

In preparation of the 8th Consultation of the AECD, the members of the Advisory Committee, Dr. Andrea Zaki, Samira Luka, Dr. Alf Linderman, Rev. Ruediger Noll and Katerina Karkala-Zorba met from February 1-5, 2023, in Cairo, in order to discuss the program and organise the Consultation. This meeting as well as the Consultation herself, took place at the Headquarters of CEOSS in Cairo/Egypt. CEOSS offered hospitality (accommodation and lodging), while the travel costs for the European participants were covered by Oikosnet.

The 8th Consultation on the theme of “Religion and Civil Society” took place from June 14-17, 2023 in Cairo/Egypt, bringing together participants from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Germany, France, Jordan, Morocco, Russia, Greece, Austria, UAE, Tunisia, Poland, Sweden and Denmark.

The themes discussed were, among others: “What do we understand by Civil Society? What is the relation between religion and Civil Society? How to define CS? What are the challenges and obstacles?”

Throughout main keynote speeches, working and discussion groups, but also field visits the participants concluded that other topics should also be discussed, especially concerning the younger generation, living in a diverse and multicultural society. Community visits were considered as being very important, helping to understand the context of the concrete society. More personal or success stories could have been incorporated into the program and certainly there are more meetings, virtual and in presence, which should help the continuously exchange of our views and experiences. We do need the continuation of the Arab-



European Dialogue, but also an Arab-Arab Dialogue. New themes as Climate change and immigration issues, as well as a bigger attendance of youth or activists in civil Society should be envisaged.

In total the Meeting was considered as a very important one, showing the significance of the Dialogue and the need for further future discussions and meetings. Some open questions still remain, as about the understanding of CS and the role of religion in it, the cultural priorities and issues of human rights.



For the future meetings a meeting is organised at the Orthodox Academy of Crete from November 22nd – 25th, 2023, where a smaller group from Arab and European Countries (10-15 participants from each side) will think, discuss and elaborate the results and the status quo of the Dialogue, as well as its future.

Oikosnet Europe remains an important partner for CEOSS in this effort to keep open a channel of dialogue between Arab and European countries and Institutions.

### Working Group on Education (Rüdiger Noll)

The main focus in the area of education was on building a network of European Christian organisations in the field of education. As the Conference of European Churches (CEC), which held its Assembly in 2023 in Tallinn, underwent a restructuring process prior to its Assembly. This led to cancelling all of its working groups (inter alia on education) and engaging in a process of re-defining its relationships with its “Organisation in Partnership” (OiP), education does not seem to be a priority for CEC anymore, although the CEC Assembly highlighted the issue. Therefore, the OiP acting on education on a European level feel the need to reflect on their role in order to make the role of education on a European level heard and to establish a network on its own. The process began with a meeting in Münster in December 2022 (cf. above). Numerous coordination meetings were held ever since and in December 2023, the educational OiPs will meet in Vienna in order to consult with the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). Its regional group of churches along the Rhine took over the churches’ office in Strasbourg. Discussions on the future relationship between CEC and Oikosnet Europe are still pending.

*(Since the GA in Malaga last year and the fact that Colin Craig was our guest there, we have been talking more with DPC again. In March 2023 we were able to send delegates from Oikosnet Europe to Corrymeela to learn about the theory and practice of Dialogue for Peaceful Change. Together with the report by Colin Craig himself, this makes for a particularly – extensive – focus for this annual report.)*

### Capacity building – Dialogue for Peaceful Change - Facilitator Training 20-24 March 2023 - Corrymeela, Northern Ireland

*Vilma Luostarinen, Sigtuna*

In March 2023, an international group of people gathered at Corrymeela, Northern Ireland, for a week's training in Dialogue for Peaceful Change (DPC). Over the course of five days, Oikosnet member Colin Craig and his team,

comprised of Rachel Craig, Sofia Bratt-Graham and Iulia Picu, introduced us to the theory and practice of Dialogue for Peaceful Change. This peacebuilding method was born from the experience of the violent N. Ireland conflict and builds on decades of practical knowledge and wisdom. It was developed around twenty years ago by Colin Craig and Jaap van der Sar, by initiative of Oikosnet Europe. In other words, there is an inherent link between DPC and OE. OE offered funding for two people of the network to participate in the training in March, Lucia Leonardi from Agape Centro Ecumenico and Vilma Luostarinen from Sigtunastiftelsen.

The Corrymeela Community was founded in 1956, with the purpose to contribute to a more peaceful N. Ireland. With their long experience, friendly atmosphere and beautiful location by the sea, Corrymeela proved to be an ideal location for learning the skills to navigate conflict and contribute to peaceful change among individuals as well as groups. The participants were an interesting mix of people of varied professional backgrounds and ages. Most of us came from Europe or North America. The training offered plenty of moments to share and collaborate, and the exchange between us contributed to the depth of the learning experience.

The purpose of the first module was to deepen our understanding of the nature of conflict, from a social, emotional, mental as well as physical perspective. What happens among people and within the human being when we encounter tension and conflict? Together, we reflected on what conflict vs. peace may mean, as well as our personal experience of conflict. How can we be present with the wounds within ourselves, others and today's fractured world? To deepen our knowledge of how conflicts emerge and develop over time, we were presented with several models, which are also to be found in the "Navigating Conflict and Change" DPC Handbook (2023). This rich and beautifully designed handbook can be highly recommended to all members of OE who want to familiarise themselves with the DPC method.

In the second part of the training, we were offered a practical tool kit to mediate conflicts and build resilience, relationships and reconciliation. Through roleplay, in which the participants took turns to be mediators or the ones involved in a conflict, the art of mediation was introduced and practiced. The method is structured around a number of steps that the DPC trainers guided us through, and thanks to their vast experience and engagement, as well as the openness of the participants, it was a joy to learn.

A few months have passed since the time in Northern Ireland. Has the DPC facilitator training borne any fruit so far? For Sigtunastiftelsen, it became the starting point for initiating a dialogue with other DPC facilitators and trainers in Sweden. Together with the Christian Peace Movement in Sweden, we are now exploring the possibilities of facilitating both DPC training and conflict mediation in the future. Considering the present situation in Sweden, characterised by escalating gang violence, a raised terrorist threat level and a general sense of unrest in the face of the war in Ukraine, every initiative to build resilience and to host hope seems very much needed.

*Lucia Leonardi, Agape*

This year OE financially supported the opportunity for two people from the network to attend the Dialogue for Peaceful Change (DPC) training week in Corrymeela, Northern Ireland.

Given the ongoing mediation work that the leadership of the Agape Ecumenical Centre is called upon to do within their community, I was highly motivated to learn this methodology to gain further skills and perspectives on conflict management. I am grateful for this opportunity, shared with Vilma Luostarinen from Sigtunastiftelsen, as it was a very enriching experience, both in terms of the content shared and the beautiful context that welcomed us.

Colin Craig and his team introduced us to the theory and practice of this peacebuilding method, whose great value lies in having been conceived and developed over the course of twenty years from the situation of conflict and socio-political violence experienced in Northern Ireland.

The method is the bearer of this long experience, which, together with further theoretical and multidisciplinary insights, has enabled the team to develop and transmit knowledge about the nature of conflict, the evolution of its possible dynamics, and the role that peacebuilding plays in bringing about change. In fact, the DPC methodology offers a conceptual framework and well-defined interpersonal models as well as a practical toolkit and methodology to manage key aspects of both interpersonal and group conflict.

During the week, a welcoming space was created, one of respect for the experiences and ideas of the individual participants, which thus triggered a group-supported experiential learning process where everyone was able to get involved. During the first training module, we were in fact urged to start from our own knowledge in order to facilitate the understanding of conflict in its

various facets and nurture a discussion that remained firmly anchored to concrete contexts, and then to reason about conflict on a broader social and political level.

In the second part of the training, we were offered a practical toolkit for conflict mediation and reconciliation. All the specific communicative mediation techniques that have been proposed are then accompanied by those relating to empathic communication based on active listening, a fundamental practice to facilitate the process of opening up and changing perspective. Overall, physical activities were proposed for the activation and creation of the group, role-playing games, collaborative games, alternating plenary activities with those in small groups, thus involving all personal and group resources. I am pleased to say that the methodology used for the transmission of the DPC is consistent in transposing the principles of the methodology itself.

Why does it make sense to promote the Dialogue for peaceful change methodology?

In the light of the current political situation in Europe, from the war in Ukraine to the rise of right-wing parties, together with the socio-economic problems that fuel tensions and conflicts, the DPC method can be considered a valid tool that responds to the need to manage the emerging problems, whether they are interpersonal or social and political in the broadest sense.

In this sense, sharing this method within the Oikosnet network can be useful for the implementation of a network that works in the field of adult education with a view to promoting dialogue and developing mediation skills towards reconciliation. In fact, the practice is not limited to providing temporary conflict management strategies but brings with it a broader political gaze, recognizing its historical origins and committing itself to creating reconciliation at the community level in the long term.

To this end, DPC also offers a model that articulates values and ethical principles underpinning the process of conflict transformation and reconciliation, such as interdependence, a sense of belonging, diversity and recognition of the uniqueness of personal stories, the equity and equal opportunities, openness to the transcendent gaze as a commitment to change. These same values implicit in the DPC can form good foundations for a broader discussion on the values that unite the Oikosnet network.

## *Dialog for peaceful change (Colin Craig)*

Since I was with you, the year has seen a further surge in interest and requests for both the DPC Training of Facilitator [ToF] programmes and several Training of Trainer programmes [ToT]. The work continues to expand internationally, and while that is exciting, it also will require us to review and set some of our organisational systems. All in all that is, no doubt, a good problem for us to have to meet. The following offers an overview of these developments.

*Sweden:* In Sweden, our work has gone from strength to strength. One of our core partners there is an NGO called Fryshuset. They work across the breadth of Sweden and focus much of their work on gang and youth violence alongside the community and political fracturing that has become prevalent. They now have several core staff led by Sarah Nilsson Dolah as their DPC Programme Director. The range of their work has been expanding significantly over these last three years, and DPC now functions as a core operational methodology for many of their programme staff. They have also begun to build programme partnerships with various municipalities and the police. DPC ToF trainings are now occurring every few months, and they have an expanding and excellent cohort of Accredited and Associate Trainers covering these developments.

Earlier in the year, we also introduced the DPC methodology to the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation [SweFoR] with the support of a close colleague, Eric Nilsson, one of their Regional Programme Directors working extensively in the Sahel in North Africa. They are also in discussion with the new Director of the Sigtuna Academy and are exploring how they may further collaborate using the DPC methodology. This will additionally require a new range of DPC ToF programmes in 2024.

*USA:* Over the last year, our work with the Presbyterian Church in Baltimore and Washington DC has led to us now having trained six Associate Trainers. They are all Pastors and are currently working through a number of ToF programmes under the guidance of a DPC coaching team. That work will continue well into 2024. If all goes well, we will hopefully have 4-6 DPC Accredited Trainers working within and across the Church and wider communities. As with Sweden, our broader strategic intention is that they can become a fully functioning DPC Hub at that point.

Following a very successful DPC ToF Open Programme held in March at Corrymeela, we also have had a request from a Priest in the Delaware Episcopal Church to explore running the DPC ToF programme for them somewhere in 2024. If that timing works out, we can also draw on some of our Baltimore and

Washington trainers to help support this. We have also had a very active follow-up from two wonderful Educationalists in Minneapolis. They plan to run an introductory DPC programme initiative within some of the School districts in that area.

*Lithuania:* We were invited to run two introductory DPC ToF programmes for the LCC University based in Klaipeda on the Baltic Coast in Lithuania. As can be imagined, the war in Ukraine has generated significant tensions across the country. As they have some 800 students [mainly from the former Soviet Republics], those tensions also manifested within the student body. The Mennonite University decided to develop a Peace Institute within the campus, and they wish to establish DPC as one of their core methodologies. In August, we will run a Training of Trainers for six of their campus faculty. It is then hoped to roll out a range of ToF programmes through 2004 – 5.

We are also in discussion with the British Council in Lithuania, as they are interested in exploring how we might develop some initial DPC workshops focussing on building mediative skills and awareness within the school's sector.

*Corrymeela:* As mentioned earlier, we ran a very successful open DPC ToF programme in Corrymeela, Northern Ireland, in March, and it was fantastic to have with us both Vilma Luostarinen from Sigtuna and Lucia Leonardi, Director of Agape, attending from the Oikosnet Network. A number of those I met at last year's conference in Malaga had also reached out about potential programmes, but unfortunately, the timings did not quite work. We will be running another open ToF programme starting the 18th of March 2024 at Corrymeela again, which may offer some further opportunities for Oikosnet members to attend. We are also discussing with Corrymeela about running an additional Open training, perhaps in the early winter period.

*Future Programme Development:* One of my DPC colleagues, Michael Gibbs, has been in extensive discussions with Amnesty International, and it appears a real possibility that they will ask us to run several DPC ToF programmes for their staff. If this comes to fruition, these programmes will be across various international settings.

*Organisational Development:* Our DPC Global team of Trainers and Facilitators have recognised that our current minimal organisational systems must be designed to meet this level of international programme interest and delivery effectively. We have coped well so far but need to step up our overall organisational systems and structures. To deal with this, we have a team meeting in late August to oversee this organisational development process.

A year after our meeting in Malaga, it remains clear that the many fractures that continue to impact our human and ecological world are growing in intensity. We understand that DPC is just one small 'tool kit' to help strengthen our capacity to meet these challenges. On behalf of the DPC network, we sincerely appreciate the ongoing impact that Oikosnet continues to seek to make to heal these divisions. In so far as we can help with this mission alongside Oikosnet, we are fully committed to exploring that further with you.

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