

Catholic-WCC group pursues new mandate



13 April 2016

Future collaborative work of the Roman Catholic Church with the World Council of Churches (WCC) was the focus of the latest meeting of executives of their Joint Working Group (JWG) in Geneva, 11 -12 April 2016.

The JWG, a collaborative ecumenical effort begun in 1965 at the end of the Second Vatican Council, was one of the first fruits of the ecumenical spring engendered by the council and recently observed its fiftieth year. The executive group is planning for the next round of initiatives, to be taken up by the JWG plenary group in its September meeting.

Participants included, from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin, co-moderator; secretary of the PCPCU Bishop

Brian Farrell; Msgr Juan Usma Gomez, who heads the PCPCU's ecumenical outreach to Pentecostals and evangelicals; and Rev. Andrzej Choromanski, the PCPCU's point person for multilateral ecumenical initiatives. From the World Council of Churches, participants included co-moderator Metropolitan Nifon of Târgoviște, WCC associate general secretary Prof. Fr Ioan Sauca, director of Faith and Order Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus, and WCC special advisor Rev. Dr Martin Robra.

WCC's general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, welcomed the group, saying, "I am happy to see a new phase and a new modus for the Joint Working Group. It is open to the broader issues of the pilgrimage of justice and peace, and I hope it will explore interreligious encounter, especially with the Jewish community, seeking to implement the Paris accord in the life of the churches, striving together to address the dark side of religion in violence, and offering a witness of solidarity as churches against religious discrimination against Christians and others. Our quest for unity is also through shared theological reflection on the suffering world we serve."

Prompted by a request from the general secretary, and led by a presentation by Archbishop Martin, the group engaged in appreciative discussion of the new apostolic exhortation from Pope Francis, entitled *Amoris laetitia*, which offers moral and pastoral guidance on issues of the family, youth, sexuality, and education.

Along with reviewing recommendations from the previous executive committee, the group received updates on the WCC's [pilgrimage of justice and peace](#) and from its programmes on [migrants and refugees](#), [interreligious dialogue and cooperation](#), and the work of [Faith and Order](#).

Future undertakings will likely include explorations of interreligious dialogue in face of violence; the connections of religion and violence; refugees and migration; and support for the Day of [Prayer for the Care of Creation](#), promoted by Pope Francis after an earlier initiative by the Ecumenical Patriarch.

Said Faith and Order director, Odair Pedroso Mateus, "The ongoing work of Faith and Order on moral discernment in the churches is given added impetus by the apostolic exhortation. *Amoris laetitia* provides an entry point for our joint efforts to illuminate the process of moral formation and discernment with a view to preventing further divisions on this issue."

Said Robra, "Thanks to this work with the PCPCU and the impulses given by Pope Francis, the cooperation between WCC and the Roman Catholic Church has

significantly intensified in recent years - most notably with the Pontifical Councils for Interreligious Dialogue, the Pastoral Care for Migrant and Itinerant Peoples and Justice and Peace.”

In his congratulatory message on the anniversary last year, Pope Francis urged the group to dive ever deeper, noting, “We must recognize, though, that in spite of the many ecumenical achievements of the past half century, Christian mission and witness still suffer due to our divisions.... The Joint Working Group should not be an inward-looking forum. Rather, it must become ever more a ‘think-tank,’ open to all the opportunities and challenges facing the churches today in their mission of accompanying suffering humanity on the path to the Kingdom, by imbuing society and culture with Gospel truths and values.”

The next plenary of the JWG is scheduled for 13-17 September 2016 at the [Château de Bossey](#), Celigny, near Geneva.

Read also:

[WCC, Roman Catholic joint group celebrate 50 years of ecumenical work](#) (WCC press release of 25 June 2015)

[Ninth Report of the Joint Working Group](#) (2014)

[Archbishop Diarmuid Martin’s reflections on the pope’s new apostolic exhortation](#)