

Orthodox synod “a spiritual gift” to other churches



Holy and Great Council. Photo: Sean Hawkey/WCC

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As the Holy and Great Council commenced this week in Crete, Greece, World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit attended celebrations of Pentecost with the Orthodox community, offering his prayers and support.

“It’s marvelous to be here, to be a part of this historic moment, and also to express support and prayers from the World Council of Churches for this

significant event. We hope this meeting will serve both the unity of the Orthodox churches and the unity of our whole family of churches,” said Tveit.

Ten of the world’s 14 self-governing Orthodox churches are present at the Holy and Great Council, which officially opened 20 June and will close 25 June. Orthodox primates are discussing the contemporary mission of the Orthodox church, marriage regulations, fasting guidelines, the place of Orthodox churches outside their historic venues, and ecumenical relations with non-Orthodox churches.

WCC Faith and Order director Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus also attended the council, and asked Christians around the world to pray for the synod as the manifestation of unity and mutual care among Orthodox churches.

“We in the ecumenical family have received many spiritual gifts from the Orthodox churches,” he said, “and very often we don’t recognize them.”

WCC is currently promoting the study of the Faith and Order Commission’s convergence text [The Church: Towards a Common Vision](#), which continues to be discussed by churches on a journey toward making manifest the unity of the church and how it is inextricably bound to a pilgrimage of justice and peace.

“We began to work on this text almost 30 years ago,” said Mateus. “At the very beginning, a prominent Orthodox theologian proposed that the focus of the text should be the church of Christ seen as an image of the communion of the Triune God. This approach has stayed and remained in the text throughout its writing. It is one of the strengths of the text.”

The agenda for the Holy and Great Council has been discussed for more than 50 years, a timespan that might surprise those unfamiliar with Orthodox

tradition, said Mateus. “We find this unbelievable. But this shows that, in Orthodox life, the synod is very important, and therefore requires a great deal of preparation so that all the churches would arrive at the meeting with a certain call in mind. The fact that the synod has been in preparation for more than half a century is another gift of the Orthodox church to the ecumenical movement: an expression of the importance of understanding Christian faith as a corporate faith before an individualistic faith. Nobody is saved alone! We cannot have God as Father if we do not have the Church as Mother.”

The difficulties encountered in the historic gathering are the kind of labors that yield mutual understanding and appreciation, added Mateus.

“The Holy and Great Council inspires us to persevere in the search for greater communion among the churches, even though it’s difficult. It’s our calling. We stay because we are called to it.”

Among the topics Orthodox leaders will discuss is the relationship of the Orthodox church with the rest of the Christian world, explained Archbishop Job of Telmessos, representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the WCC. “The aim of this Holy and Great Council is to address the issues that are relevant to the Orthodox church today. What is very important to understand is that the council is not just an event, it’s a process,” he said. “After the council, this will continue as we have the process of reception.”

Also see:

[The Holy and Great Council](#)

[Faith and Order Commission](#)