

Ecumenical Position Paper

of the Protestant Church
in the Rhineland



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ECUMENICAL WORK

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FOREWORD

The Protestant Church in the Rhineland¹ (die Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland, EKIR) is named after the river that flows from south to north through this region. In many respects, the Rhine River conveys the history and life of this church: the source and mouth of the river, as with the origins and goals of this church, lie outside its bounds. Furthermore, just as many tributaries flow into the Rhine, so also is this church's life shaped by numerous influences and traditions. To these belong those of Lutheran and Reformed immigrants and congregations from earlier days, Roman Catholic sisters and brothers, the long tradition of Jewish communities, immigrants and refugees holding diverse faith traditions in our day, and people of widely differing heritages, all of whom have long lived by the banks of this river. Such influences have brought a rich diversity to the congregations of the Rhineland, throughout our history and into the present day.

As a river, the Rhine has been and remains both a means of transportation and connection, on the one hand, and a border, on the other. Thus, many theological impulses and expressions of piety have constituted and continue to shape this church's life, influencing our work of striving for a common identity.



In one sense, the sheer variety of landscapes along the Rhine suggests something of the diversity found in our churches, shaped as these are by varied expressions of faith and religious traditions and communities, both in the Rhineland itself and, on the basis of its wider life, within our church's global partnerships.

When the word "oikoumene" is used, most people think first of all of the ecumenical relationships between Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, and only then widen the frame to include other Christian churches and communities. But the word in its original meaning suggests "the inhabited earth," referring to the life shared by those of various forms of faith together with those who profess no faith, as well as to the communion of all living creatures as well as the entire realm created by God. The Protestant Church in the Rhineland "commits itself, therefore, to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation."² The theme chosen for the Eleventh General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), to take place in 2022 in Karlsruhe, Germany, underscores the meaning of reconciliation crucial for these aims: "The love of Christ moves, unites, and reconciles the world."

The position paper presented here offers a conceptual framework regarding our understanding of ecumenism in accordance with the German dictionary Duden, which specifies that it is "a program, [. . .] or work grounded in a perspective, leading idea, or intellectual approach." The work evident here does not stand alone, but must be understood in relation to the workbook *Ecumenism Locally and in Global Context* (*Ökumene vor Ort und Weltweit*), the process of intercultural opening in our society, our church's position paper devoted to the so-called Abrahamic religions, and the statement on peace³ ratified at our church's Annual Synod in 2018. This text invites careful thought, discussion, and further reflection in order that the Protestant Church in the Rhineland might continue to develop in a positive direction, while avoiding at the same time coming to a standstill. This document strives to be deeply grounded, like a river, and comprehensible to those who have not studied theology in a formal sense.⁴ Furthermore, it hopes to invite readers to engage in a journey, like the flow of a river, whereby they might bring their own thoughts and ideas into dialogue with themes explored here and, in the process, invite new insights these themes.





Photo: Thomas Fikar, 125 (from)

1

TO THE SOURCES – THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

1.1 “All my sources are in you” (Ps. 87. 7b⁹) – the biblical witness

The Bible bears witness to faith in God’s saving intent for “oikoumene,” here understood as referring to “the whole earth.” This witness opens with God’s great work of creation and closes with the last book of the Bible with its vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21.1). Through God’s election of Israel and in Jesus Christ, God’s mission to the world finds its completion, according to Christian faith; furthermore, it finds its fulfillment wherever the power of God’s Spirit blows and is at work (see Jn. 3. 8). Together with Christian churches throughout the world, the Protestant Church in the Rhineland belongs to

that “fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (from the Mission Statement of the WCC).

God turns God’s very being toward the entire world. We believe that the church is taken into the heart of this divine mission to the world. The global dimension of this “oikoumene,” or “ecumenical horizon,” and this mission belong together. Jesus’ petition, “that they may all be one, so that the world may believe”⁶ (Jn. 17. 21), points beyond any particular church, referring to all the faithful and the entire world. For the sacred power of the Spirit does not limit this unity, either

internally or in outward terms. As the letter to the Ephesians puts it, “mak[e] every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4. 3 – 6). In accordance with this calling, the Protestant Church in the Rhineland turns to “all peoples,” “to bring the good news to the poor [. . .], to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk. 4. 18; see also Isa. 61. 6). The church interprets this witness and action in terms of the entire inhabited world (oikoumene).



1.2 “Along the bank of the river” (Eze. 47. 6) – the witness of the church

The EKIR affirms the ecumenical understanding of what unity requires as formulated by the World Council of Churches at its 2013 General Assembly in Busan, South Korea: “The unity of the church, the unity of the human community, and the unity of the entire creation are interwoven with each other.” The unity of the church, the human

community, and creation establish the vision and purpose of ecumenical life and work within the EKIR. In what follows, this unity will be set forth in terms of the ancient creeds and Protestant confessions on the basis of which the EKIR understands itself. Our practice affirms the Apostles’ Creed together with the Nicene Creed, used in our congregations both in worship and for the sacrament of baptism.

1.3 On the Unity of the Church

The so-called “marks of the church” (*notae ecclesiae*) derive from the early church’s confessions of faith, which describe the church as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” Both through history and in the present day the church often has served and continues to serve these marks of recognition as a means of exclusion. But here and in what follows, these marks will be articulated as guides and goals, calling for the overcoming of boundaries.

The EKiR is not self-complacent, but rather exists in complementary relation to and in communion with other churches and in ecclesial partnerships with the churches of Jesus Christ. It is part of the one church. It understands the wealth of gifts of other church confessions as the diversity of this one church. It experiences this in our context, for example, in the Association of Christian Churches (ACK). The EKiR does not understand its purpose as a consensus about some presumed truth, but rather in responsibility to the fulfillment of human freedom in the face of God. Its ecumenical work aims to enhance the dignity found in diverse human experiences of sisterhood and brotherhood and in life that honors the dignity of all creation.

The EKiR is holy insofar as it is a communion of saints. Holy does not mean here that it is without failure or complete in itself, but suggests, rather, that we belong to God. The “communion of the saints” is a communion that is vital for the church’s development, formed according to God’s Word. The EKiR lives in response to God’s creation and purposes, affirming God’s mission to the world as a promise for the healing, liberation, redemption, and fulfillment of humanity and of the entire universe. The EKiR recognizes the difference between the invisible, or believed, and the visible church in its human and historical forms. It understands its purpose as that of relating the history of humankind and the existential questions facing all people to the grace and justice of God, from the creation to the fulfillment of the world.

The EKiR is part of the all-encompassing, universal church, which is to say a part of the catholic church, in the original meaning of that word. In this sense, our congregations, institutions, and agencies are only a small segment of the

many-sided global church. This self-understanding strengthens the community within the EKiR and at the same time opens it to the wider world: this catholicity makes possible relationships, dialogue, and solidarity with those of other Christian confessions as well as those from other religions and worldviews. It also obligates the church to be attentive to and care for the marginalized (see Mt. 25. 40). Die EKiR understands its responsibility within the horizon of the global Christian church as that of overcoming divisions and separations and pursuing “the preferential option for the poor.”⁷

The EKiR is an apostolic church. On the basis of the Holy Scriptures it is also bound to the earliest congregations. It underscores that the church listens to God’s Word, inquires after God’s will, and strives for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. It relates its life to God’s election of the people Israel and Jesus Christ, bearing witness to Christ as a model for the possibility of true personhood before God. Through Christ we are free and in Christ we experience that not even our failings—whether individual, societal, or institutional—can separate us from God. The EKiR understands its mission as making freedom possible through its relationship to Jesus Christ, and bearing active witness to God’s desire for healing and redemption.



1.4 “The unity of human community”

The “unity of community” includes all of humanity. This encompasses variety and diversity and does not imply uniformity. It makes possible a coexistence among those of the most diverse forms of life, cultures, languages, religions, and worldviews. Such unity also makes it possible to embrace and experience differences, creatively and peacefully, rather than approaching them confrontationally or with force. The process of intercultural openness within the EKIR invites us into this unity.

The Bible describes how humans are created in the image of God, thereby acquiring an inviolable worth and particular responsibility for each other. The human person is made in relationship to God and to each another, and in gendered diversity. Within the communion of God’s creatures and their worth, human persons are enabled to accept one another. Within the created bond with others, the love of neighbor should grow as a search for intimacy and active engagement on each other’s behalf.

On the basis of this background, the EKIR affirms the unqualified validity of universal human rights. Together with its ecumenical partners the EKIR stands for the implementation of such rights. In the face of new forms of populism, nationalism, and authoritarianism, human rights are being massively reduced, and those who work to uphold them face find themselves threatened, criminalized, and persecuted. The EKIR acts out of the conviction that humanity finds itself, in our global partnership, facing a common responsibility, namely, that of practicing justice, living in peace, and protecting the integrity of creation. In this regard, the EKIR has committed itself to become a “just peace” church, and for this reason supports the seventeen development goals found in the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations. A movement toward this unity, bound in various ways, enables a particular posture and invites a distinctive kind of dialogue: “We are born to share ourselves with each other in and through conversation.”

Unity with Judaism⁸

No river has power over its source (see Rom. 11. 18). Die foundation of the EKIR lies in God’s Word and its covenant with the people Israel, knowing itself closely bound to this people: this church believes that through Jesus, the Jew, it is taken into God’s covenant with Israel. Furthermore, it bears witness to God’s abiding faithfulness to Israel, and has voiced a clear rejection of any mission to the Jewish people. It hears God’s word within the witness of the Hebrew Bible, and finds itself bound to Israel in the hope that God will bring about a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21. 1). The EKIR understands its task, together with the Jewish people and in accordance with the wider biblical witness, as the call to work for peace. It accepts the responsibility of engaging in all that opposes antisemitism. The abiding renewal of Christian-Jewish relations remains a core responsibility of this church.



Unity with Islam

The EKIR sees the relationship of Christianity and Islam as grounded in the distinctive commitment of both religions to the biblical traditions, the Islamic honoring of Jesus as a special prophet, life shaped by God's justice and mercy. It affirms the faith of Muslims as a "covenant with the one God." In this respect, points of departure for theological dialogue offer themselves both in the commonalities shared and in differences acknowledged between Christians and Muslims. The EKIR considers this dialogue an ecclesial responsibility and encourages all to work for its growth. In our common life with persons of Islamic faith, the church finds its own witness strengthened and thus opens itself to dialogue with such persons. This shared work aims at the mutual recognition of each religion's value and the acceptance of a common responsibility in and for the world.

Unity with people of other religions and world-views

The unity of the church is no end in itself, but rather is bound to the unity of humanity (§1.4) and the unity of creation itself (§1.5). As an expression of the "marks of the church," the EKIR recognizes acceptance and hospitality as marks identifying and enabling human community. The Bible honors hospitality as a particularly worthy expression of what brings about human community. Hospitality makes possible becoming acquainted with strangers in a manner that is not always free of tensions. This mutual acceptance can be understood within the broad scriptural arc, beginning with Abraham and Sarah's hospitality at Mamre (Gen. 18) and encompassing the table fellowship practiced within Christian congregations (1 Cor. 11). Jesus' practice of table fellowship reaches from the pre-Easter communion of divergent persons to generations yet unborn.

On the way to the unity of humankind

The hospitality of the Lord's Supper, established by Jesus, reveals both an existing and a yet to be realized (eschatological) reality. The communion of the baptized, in the Lord's Supper, as it already exists, stands behind this promised bond that lies, in part, still in the future.

Indeed, the communion of the Lord's Supper can shape our approach to all peoples, regardless of their religion and worldview. Jesus Christ represents the image of "the new person" (see Rom. 5. 12 – 19 and 2 Cor. 5. 17) who lives out this acceptance and hospitality without restrictions.

The EKIR understands its task as that of living out a hospitality that reaches far beyond the existing communion of all the baptized at the table of the Lord.

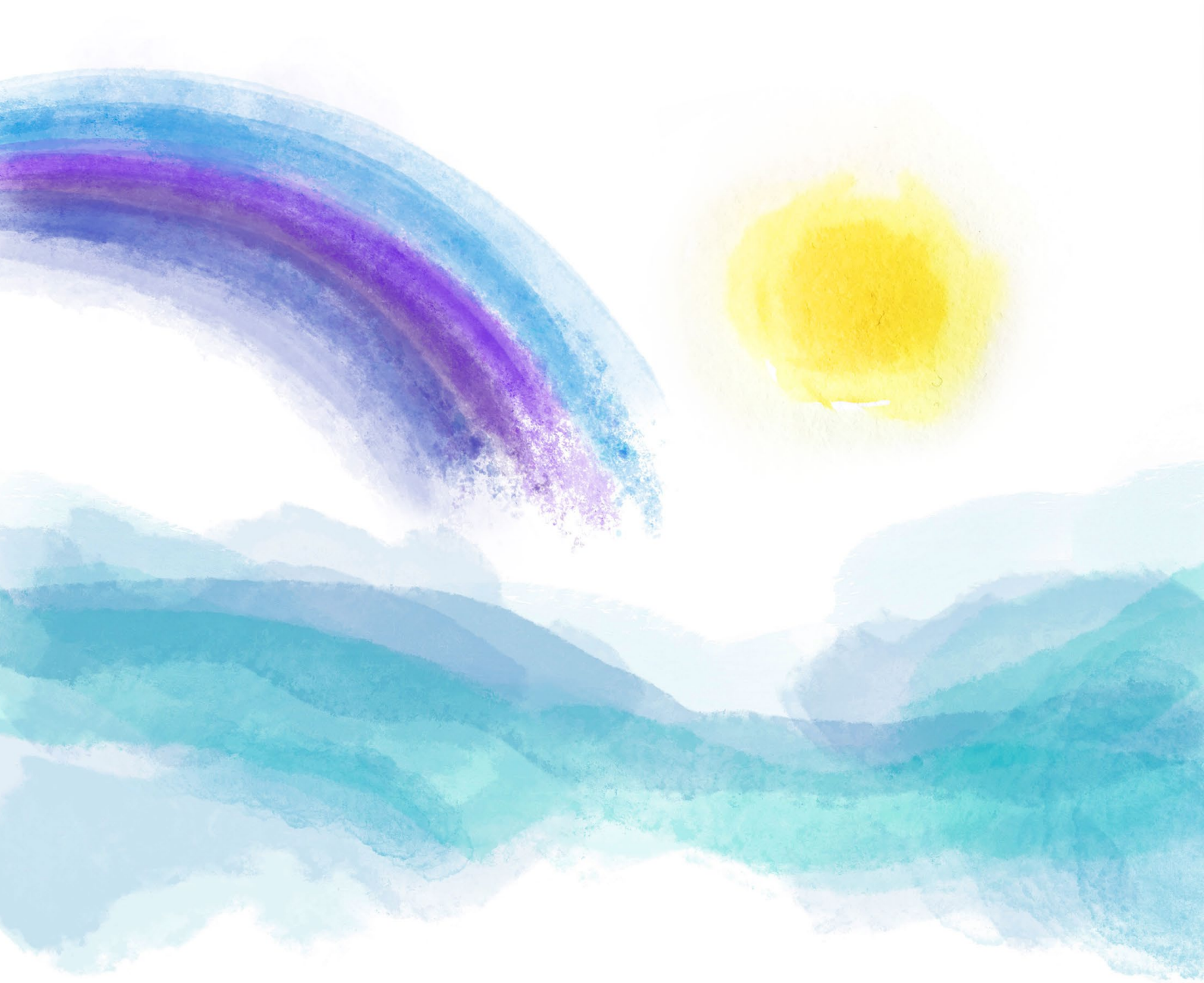
1.5 The unity of creation

According to our faith, God is the power of creation by which the world found its origin (Gen. 1). God is the power of reconciliation in Jesus Christ who was sent into the world, just as God is the Spirit's power living in all creatures, enlivening them, sustaining them, and leading them into the horizon of God's reign.⁹ The Jewish tradition developed an understanding of the "schechina" as God's inhabiting of the world.

As Christians we confess that God dwells in the midst of the world and gives it life and diversity (cf. Jn. 1. 14, I.4 and 14. 2). God is to be distinguished from creation, while being present within it. Through God's indwelling, the cosmos itself becomes God's creation, and in communion with God, both the variety and diversity of creation serve life. The sinfulness of humanity, of course, can lead to competition and tensions within this creation, resulting in the exploitation of self-interest and other forms of misuse. In such ways, our actions come to deny God's presence and oppose God's "household order."¹⁰

To strive for unity thus requires humankind to establish an indwelling and living communion with the non-human realm. Such unity calls for a familial solidarity, a life respectful of this reality, and a greater awareness of our human dependence on the earth. The EKIR understands its task as that of taking responsibility for and protecting creation.

Creation continues to develop and change, as its character is one of process. It is not complete, yearning for liberation and awaiting to be fulfilled by God. In this sense, God's salvation history is woven into the history of nature itself, whose basic identity is found in "becoming," as created and sustained by God, in the past and into the future. We await the "new heaven and the new earth" (Rev. 21. 1), which will be brought about by God and establishes our goal. As a part of creation, we are not as humans able to bring this about on our own. God's proclamation of a new heaven and a new earth establishes the horizon of our action, one that both opens the space for our work and sets the boundaries for it. This horizon establishes an orientation for our lives.





2 RIVERSCAPE — THE DIMENSIONS OF FELLOWSHIP, WORSHIP, WITNESS, AND SERVICE

Fellowship, worship, witness, and service (*koinonia*, *leitourgia*, *martyria*, and *diakonia*)

Ecumenism, in the EKiR, is not one additional task alongside others. Rather, it penetrates and stimulates all areas of our work as a church. It also challenges us. Ecumenism is to be experienced in the classic fourfold definition of church: fellowship, worship, witness, and service. None of these stands alone, but each is related to the others and all mutually fructify each other.

2.1 Fellowship (*koinonia*)¹¹

Ecumenism has a fellowship-founding dimension for the EKiR in our encounter with other Christians, congregations, and churches. The call to enter into fellowship with God and humanity and support its development is a core responsibility of the church of Jesus Christ. Fellowship occurs in Christian mutuality (“communion”) within the EKiR, as well as in our relationships to Christians of other traditions. This fellowship knows no limits at the boundaries of other churches or denominations. Furthermore, in our familial relations with Judaism we come to realize this fellowship in a particular manner. Fellowship also occurs in the dialogue with Muslims and guides our encounter

with those of other faiths and no faith. Theological reflection is required for such concrete encounters, guiding us in how we come to tolerate differences and overcome polarities.

The strangeness of other traditions also challenges our own faith tradition. This can lead to flight and self-satisfaction as well as a lack of clarity as to which thoughts and actions are theologically responsible. Fellowship in diversity holds the promise of new, unexpected, and exciting realizations which can be both enriching and enlivening. It might also increase our awareness that fellowship among humans represents but one part of a larger communion with creation itself.



2.2 Worship (*leitourgia*)¹²

The EKIR has a lively variety of traditions related to worship, biblical interpretation, church music, and proclamation, drawing upon Lutheran, Reformed, and “united” church traditions. Shaped by the EKIR’s experience in its geographical setting as a minority church, we remain wide open to ecumenical influences. In its worship our church celebrates not simply its own liturgical traditions but embraces liturgical impulses from other churches. This give-and-take of worship styles is an important ecumenical enrichment for all churches. In this matter, the EKIR finds itself incorporated into the worldwide church (*oikoumene*). Furthermore, worship arises from God’s claim

that the congregation is to bear witness to the biblical Word, and is bound to do the “work of the just.”¹³ In both of these ways the church praises God (see Rom. 12. 1).

The EKIR also knows itself bound to Israel’s prayer traditions and is influenced in its understanding of the biblical text by Jewish forms of biblical exposition. It enjoys and safeguards a liturgical hospitality with other religions and welcomes multi-religious celebrations.



2.3 Witness (*martyria*)

To speak of *martyria*, or witness (*Zeugnis*), points to “the testimony of faith.” The message of God’s goodness and humanity will only become credible to those who hear it when the integrity of our living corresponds to the message of our proclamation – such that others are enabled to live well and with human dignity. That is, our missional witness and the recognition of our responsibility to care for the world belong together. Here, we must concede that the Western world continues to benefit from what has been and remains an unjust world-economic order. We recognize how opportunities for life within the two-thirds world are particularly burdened by the pressures of war, exploitation, environmental destruction, and climate change. The EKIR sees its responsibility for the historical background for this as well as the present situation facing humanity. In countless resolutions, our church has analyzed and supported the work for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. It has also made the first steps toward realizing just peace and climate justice. Examples include our global engagement on behalf of refu-

gees and the commitment to enact an imminent end to the opencast mining of brown coal in and beyond our region.

That we remain stubborn in opposing all resistance to these commitments and attempt to change our own lives are for us matters of faith. We must learn to live more simply and in greater solidarity with the vulnerable and marginalized, so that we all have the chance to survive together.

The grounding of our position and actions, in these matters, is Jesus Christ. We bear witness to this frankly before the world.



2.4 Service (*diakonia*)

Diaconia, or service, guides the EKiR in the “work of the just.” The church stands in the responsibility for just conditions of life. Its service is on behalf of all persons and the entire creation, in both local terms and the global horizon. Diaconic work orients itself, according to the biblical tradition, by making the thriving of those without rights, the poor, the defenseless, and refugees the measure of its own actions. In this work, persons of various faith traditions together serve to implement the biblical mandate for justice and peace. In congregations as well as the church’s diaconic institutions and agencies are to be found persons

who live in need. This work thus encompasses both those who are seeking assistance and those who are offering it.

The social structures of our nation are not adequate to guarantee the appropriate support and necessary protection of those in various situations and with diverse needs. In our day, many people have become victims of globalization, worldwide conflicts, and rising poverty. Alongside direction service, diaconic work calls for political advocacy in facing our responsibility to overcome unjust structures and prevent them from continued development in the future. Here, the EKiR knows itself, despite its own financial strictures, as a materially rich church. In the exchange with other churches and social organizations, it comes to recognize the ambivalence of wealth and its own entanglement in unjust structures. Thus, our ecumenical partners are never the object of our action, but rather sisters and brothers whom we strive to encounter on equal terms (i.e., “empowerment”). The consequences of international conflict, leading to extreme levels of poverty and human migration, together with the example of poverty among children and the elderly, set great challenges before us in this work. In order to address such matters, personal assistance must be bound to legal and political action. Both of these are accomplished more effective in ecumenical solidarity.





3

ECUMENICAL COMPETENCE

Gifts, competencies, and resources are needed in order that our actions flow into lived and lively ecumenism. These three cannot be considered as separate from each other:

Rivers originate from their source. As Christians we recognize the origin of our gifts in God. We affirm the diversity found within our congregations and search for and recognize this among our sisters and brothers of other churches. We desire to prepare ways for them to equip themselves, and to support them in their lives.

Rivers offer life. Within our ecumenical context it makes sense to draw forth from an abundance in order to “land” these gifts, share them, and cultivate them. The competencies required for this are learn-

able; we strive to nurture and encourage them, and know that we can depend upon them.

Rivers live through their tributaries. The resources of the ecumenical current become ever more diverse with the contribution of each tributary, and are enriched by each competency. Such tributaries, whether flowing to us from near or far, enliven us. We need not withhold from them our own strengths and possibilities.

In gratitude for these gifts and in order to further our common life, we commit ourselves to becoming and remaining ecumenically active. Our goal in this is to encourage ecumenicity through shared responsibility. We desire to strengthen ourselves and others in order that we might become prepared, in

both a formal and informal (or social) sense, to work for the fulfillment of this ecumenicity. A readiness for this is what we call ecumenical competence. The development of this preparedness is more than an instruction in problem-solving capacities that might enable us to overcome challenges. Our task is that of developing, together, a positive ecumenical perspective. For this, we pay special attention to the traditions and cooperative projects at work in the EKIR.

Within the scope of ecumenical competence, the following sub-competencies can be distinguished. Most of these are not limited to a particular realm of applicability, and none of them can be developed in isolation from the others. Furthermore, in their interwovenness, no sequence or completeness can be established for ecumenical work. Varied players might feel themselves called to choose, and develop, important competencies within their field of influence. The workbook *Ecumenicity in Local and Global Context* can lend support to this. These competencies include the following:

Dialogical competence

Ecumenical work depends upon exchange. People allow themselves to be challenged and enriched by engaging with and attending to others. They speak of their own faith in the process; they position this within a larger ecumenical context, thereby establishing their own point of view and finding themselves equipped to be able to change it. They come to recognize conflicts. This work calls us to nurture the courage to speak and the capacity to listen attentively within our congregations, not only for our own sake but in preparation for our encounter with sisters and brothers of other traditions.

Protestant competence

The encounter with people of other Christian traditions as well as those of other faiths or no faith enriches our capacity to speak about our own faith. We strengthen people's capacity to speak with each other about their own faith. We make room to value this within our congregations for the sake of this witness.

Apologetic competence

A knowledge of one's own traditions and their historical embeddedness is enriching for our dialogue with people from diverse Christian traditions or from other faiths. Through this effort space for



encounter and exchange arises. We become better informed and more articulate about our traditions and their historical development. We develop a sense for what might not be susceptible to unity.

Intercultural competence

Not all differences within the ecumenical context are of a theological nature. The encounter with other cultures enriches us through the encounter with one's own norms, values, and rules as these relate to the wider culture. We become aware of our own background and open ourselves to other cultures as the basis of ecumenical development within our congregations.

Interreligious competence

The encounter with those of other religions requires that we become clear about our own faith and engage it critically. We strive to practice a respectful attitude toward other forms of faith, and commit ourselves to work at overcoming our own prejudices.

A competence for inclusion

Ecumenical hospitality is more than an invitation to fellowship. It requires that we actively prepare the way for our partners so that they might accept our invitation. A competence for inclusion makes those barriers our own which, in others' experience, inhibit them from entering this fellowship, recognizing the work of overcoming them as a shared responsibility. We encourage each other in seeing such barriers and committing ourselves to actively overcome them as part of our own culture.

Liturgical and spiritual competence

The "practice of piety" (*praxis pietatis*) – the expression of Christian piety in prayer services, Bible study, and daily life – is part of our identity in the context of ecumenical encounter. We work to create opportunities for personal access to and exchange in such matters within our congregations. We support the development of personal piety and seek to enrich our spirituality in ecumenical exchange.

Prophetic competence

The study of the Bible requires us to see the world within the light of God's promises. We confront, with the prophets, injustices and stand with God's "preferential option for the poor." We call for change and stand for a world constituted according to God's will. This consciousness constitutes a precondition for ecumenical encounter and extends our fellowship with sisters and brothers throughout the world. In this sense, ecumenical work sets forth the difference between the way the world is and God's will for this world in prominent, wholistic and world-aware ways.

A competence for reconciliation

Ecumenical encounter transpires not in some presumed realm free of power, but rather often occurs

within the context of an historical background that reflects abuses of power. The confession of guilt and the need for reconciliation are instruments for the overcoming of injustice; we thus sensitize those in our church to the present effects of such misdeeds and the corresponding pain arising from unequal power relations. We also learn to bear what we can no longer change, and seek reconciliation for what we can.

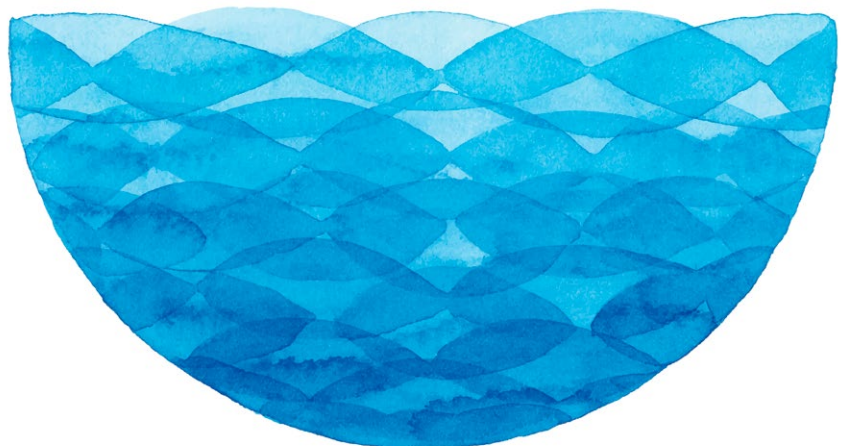
Action-oriented competence

The direct contact with ecumenical partners enables a practical action to grow from a theoretical knowledge within the one world we inhabit – and this takes concrete forms that support change in sustainable ways. Responsibility in this sense can be recognized both in small steps and in larger gestures, without capitulating to the enormity of the task. To be ecumenically engaged means to become active in offering encouragement in our engagement and to prepare paths for realizing our aims.

Educational competence

The acquisition of such so-called competencies is meaningful and necessary not simply for ecumenical engagement. On the strength of such matters people are enabled to develop their own potential, coming to know themselves and meet others in new ways. We come to value the development of such ecumenical competencies as itself having a transformative educational facet.

Such competencies are developed within the ecumenical landscape in concert with each other. Individuals, congregations, church districts, agencies and institutions are all called to create incentives and opportunities for developing such competencies.





4

PEOPLE AT THE RIVER – BECOMING ACTIVE IN ECUMENICAL LIFE

Rivers have long been places where people have lived and worked. In a manner equally self-evident, the church is to be ecumenical at its core. For information on those involved in ecumenical work within our church as well as contact addresses and various initiatives supported by the EKIR, we refer you to the online website www.ekir.de/oekumene-aktiv which will be regularly updated.





Photo: Shutterstock, iStockPhoto.com

5

CLOSING WORD



“Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters!” (Isa. 55. 1)

This scriptural verse summarizes what ecumenism means for us: it serves as invitation, task, encouragement, and promise. An enriching diversity attracts. Ecumenical identity embraces the task of inner transformation, making us vulnerable and enabling us to be changed. We are encouraged to live out this identity and develop it further along the banks of these “living waters” (Jn. 4. 14). It promises that people and things can change for the good.

Much that transpires in ecumenical work does not show immediate results. Ecumenical encounters

remain challenges even while they bear witness to good deeds. They also bring us to our boundaries and allow us to grow beyond them. And, finally, they offer us the chance to experience life in other settings and under other conditions, an experience that expands the possibilities of life in our church.

God's word mediates the necessity of leaving the success of the work we accomplish, with freeing trust, in God's hands. Through all our endeavors on behalf of ecumenism, the wisdom of Ecclesi-

astes guides us: "Send out your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will get it back" (11. 1).

Ecumenism within the EKiR helps us to understand this work, both in its foundation and in its goal, in terms of the promise that God acts marvelously in our midst, so that we might all be one (Jn. 17. 21).).

A1

END NOTES

- 1 The Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland (hereafter, EKIR).
- 2 This phrase was the theme of the Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in its 1983 General Assembly there, and is generally abbreviated as JPIC.
- 3 Or, Friedenswort in the original text.
- 4 References to particular texts and documents as well as detailed discussions of technical matters are to be found in the footnotes of the original German draft.
- 5 This biblical citation and all further scriptural references cited in this document are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
- 6 This text serves as the missional basis of our partner church, the United Church of Christ, in the United States of America.
- 7 This familiar phrase originated in the work of Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ, Superior General of the Society of Jesus in a 1968 letter to the Jesuits of Latin America, and became a hallmark of liberation theology in succeeding years.
- 8 The German word used here, “Verbundenheit,” suggests being bound together with each other (“Bund” was the word used by early Protestant reformers to speak of our “covenant” with God).
- 9 The German phrase “das Reich Gottes,” used here, is often translated as the “kingdom of God,” but is here rendered as “God’s reign.”
- 10 This reference, here referred to as God’s “Hausrecht” in German, is from Patriarch Bartholomäus in his “Message upon the World Day of Prayer for the Protection of Creation” (1 September 2012).
- 11 The German word utilized here, “Gemeinschaft,” can also be rendered as “communion,” as in the technical phrase “Kirchengemeinschaft,” which is usually translated in English as “full church communion.” It is rendered here as “fellowship” to avoid a confusion with the same word as used in English to refer to the sacrament of the eucharist, or “communion.”
- 12 Here, we render the German word “Gottesdienst” as “worship,” rather than “liturgy,” and avoid referring to this, as is frequently the case in English, as “church services.”
- 13 In German, “Tun des Gerechten”; see §2.4.

LEGAL NOTES

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