**General Secretary reports to CPCE General**

Dr Mario Fischer, General Secretary of the Communion for Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) presented a reported that reflected on past work and future aspirations of the communion.

He said: “The future is becoming unpredictable again. Even church future programmes generally no longer anticipate scenarios beyond ten years. At most, demographic and financial forecasts go one generation further, i.e. 30 years. Gone are the days when the church thought in terms of centuries. And with its strategy paper for the next six years, the CPCE also seems to be following this trend, although the timescale for planning its work has always been from General Assembly to General Assembly.

“We need a new perspective with which to face the future. It is time to talk about hope in a new way.”

On the past six years’ work, the General Secretary focused on 11 points and began by emphasising the importance of the decision to amend the CPCE statute at the last General Assembly which came into being in January 2019.

He said: “This paved the way for the CPCE to obtain its own legal status.” This the CPCE “from a corporation under church law, as set out in the statute of Budapest, to a corporation under public law (KöR) in the Republic of Austria”.

In June 2020 the word “community” was replaced with “communion” in the CPCE’s English name. Legally this made no impact but theologically, now expresses the theological understanding of the Communion.

“As a communion of churches,” he said, “we belong to the one Church of Jesus Christ.”

Through the Leuenberg Agreement, the CPCE can introduce “a model of unity into the ecumenical discourse that is attractive to many churches”.

He said: “The CPCE is thus possible to achieve the goal set out in the strategy” which is to “to promote church communion with additional churches” and is able to “practice a model of church communion that is open towards other churches that share the same understanding of the Gospel.”

Dr Fischer went onto explain how regional groups have proven to be a great tool for cultivating relationships.

He particularly referenced the Conference of Churches on the Rhine (CCR) and its work, especially after the joint office of the CCR and Conference of European Churches (CEC) in Strasbourg closed at the end of 2021. During the General Assembly, the CPCE will aim to clarify in what form and on what topics it will contribute to the CEC.

The church communion has shown itself to be not only one of solidarity, but also one of mutual learning said Dr Fischer, paying regard to the CPCE’s focus on church aid projects targeting “Euro-orphans” – children whose parents have emigrated to another European country, usually for economic reasons, and have left them behind, often in the care of older relatives.

Dr Fischer expressed gratitude for the generous support of the Waldensian Church in Italy, which, he said, had provided the CPCE with 150,000 euros annually for social projects from the Italian Otto-per-Mille culture tax.

“Through this we have been able to support and connect Euro-orphan projects over several years in cooperation with the Gustav Adolf Foundation,” said Dr Fischer.

The General Secretary explained to Assembly a series of head office changes, and also how the office was able, at the height of the pandemic, to adopt a communications strategy that saw the redevelopment of the CPCE website, a monthly newsletter and member churches being sent greeting cards at Easter.

As the CPCE has traditionally focused on classical printed materials, the documentation and all study texts from the previous General Assembly have been published as books.

The work of the CPCE is funded by annual contributions and project-related support from member churches.

Dr Fischer expressed gratitude for the continued financial support, saying: “I am aware that the resources of the member churches for the work of the CPCE are also decreasing due to falling membership numbers and rising costs.” Saying that for this reason, the CPCE “must manage its limited resources responsibly and prioritise commitments wisely”.

The General Secretary ended his presentation with a note of personal thanks towards his two predecessors, Dr Wilhelm Hüffmeier and Dr Michael Bünker, for all that they achieved in their years in office.

“Over the past few years, they have always provided me with friendly advice and support. Together we represent 35 years of CPCE history, even if my time represents the smallest part of it.”

At the General Assembly in Basel in 2018, Dr Fischer became the youngest General Secretary in the ecumenical world at the age of 41.

At present, he is the longest serving General Secretary of the European-based ecumenical organisations; all the others at the WCC, LWF, WCRC, CEC, COMECE, CCEE or EBF have since changed. Now aged 47, Dr Fischer remains the youngest of the General Secretaries.

“I have enjoyed this time very much so far,” he said.

However, last year, Dr Fischer informed the Council that he would be ending his time as General in the middle of the coming Council term. He will use his remaining time in the role to develop the new work processes that will be established during General Assembly 2024 and contribute his experience and relationships with the member churches.

“Once these are up and running,” explained Dr Fischer, “another person can take over the helm of the CPCE ship.”

He ended his presenting by thanking the Presidium and the Council.