

**Resource materials
for the keynote paper**

**I was a
stranger**

**and you
welcomed me**

Learning from ecumenical partnerships

Ecumenical partnerships equip us for Being Church in the Migration Society

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The issue and why it is worth exploring

The church has been ecumenical from the very beginning (see the story of Pentecost, Acts 2:5). The difference between their members constitutes a considerable part of their vitality and thereby also of their attractiveness.

- Ecumenical partnerships enable the church to encounter each other through encountering their distant brothers and sisters.
- This experience, acquired through mutual visits, could become part of everyday life of the church here in Germany, too, if it took account of the diversity of origin and cultures of people living nearby. The future and credibility of the church, particularly in the context of globalisation, becomes convincing in its ability to open up to diversity and differences.
- The identity of the church, where the gospel of God's love and salvation is lived out, is measured by its ability to welcome people of all nations, and integrate them with all their differences. The Pauline models of church as the "family of God" and "Body of Christ" describe a community where the love of God is the language of everyone. Ecumenical partnerships make this love visible by being communities of different people who get on. On the other hand, variety is the spice of life, as the saying goes. The charm of ecumenical partnerships consists in getting to know gifted, talented people who are not part of my usual environment.
- Faith opens access to God. The diversity of forms of faith shows us something of God's greatness and breadth. In order to be enriched by other forms of spirituality and expressions of faith, we need openness, acceptance, tolerance and a readiness to dialogue. Ecumenical partnerships have experience of this and help us to practise it. They can serve as empowering factors for change towards becoming an inclusive and integrative church and society.

Propositions and text modules from the keynote paper

- "In the stranger, Christ as the Lord of the Church gives himself to the church as a gift" (Praeses Annette Kurschus, Foreword, PDF page 4).
- 1.4 "The church of Jesus Christ in God's mission" explains the concept of *missio dei*, which is well-known in the international ecumenical movement. As a church we are part of God's movement towards people, which from the start has been directed to the redemption of all humankind and the whole of creation.
- "The bond with other congregations and worldwide Christianity is fundamental for the understanding of congregation and church" (3.1 Being church together, PDF page 32).
- "A service of worship keeps alive a long tradition. Many congregations here see the centre of community life. It is all the better when people bring in their experience with other worship traditions and other forms of spirituality" (3.2 Celebrating faith together, PDF page 36).
- "You can also feel that in the music. Protestant church music was exported worldwide through mission, but also in brass bands. Churches there took it over and made it their own tradition, in some cases. By contrast, gospel music and songs from the ecumenical movement have entered our services and hymn books" (3.2 Celebrating faith together, PDF page 36).
- "Above all, however, it is about getting to know biblical words and images that help to interpret and shape life. ... Our own and other stories begin to speak. That way personal encounter becomes a key to understanding the other person" (3.3 Passing on and witnessing to faith, PDF page 37).

Questions for group discussion

- What do you understand by ecumenism?
- What ecumenical events are there in your parish /in your district? What do they focus on?
- What do interdenominational and international ecumenism have in common?
- Can you contribute any experience to the topic of “church in the migration society”?

Materials and media

- Partnership manual and guidelines of the United Evangelical Mission/UEM: www.vemission.org/fileadmin/redakteure/Dokumente/Partnership%20Guidelines%20English.pdf
- The partnership agreements of the church districts
- Principles of the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK), www.ack.nrw.de

Practical ideas

- Find out about ecumenical partnerships in neighbouring parishes, or in the church district; listen to personal experiences, possible try to launch your own partnership.
- Inquire about school partnerships in neighbouring schools.
- Deliberately look out for members of the congregation (young and older) who have lived abroad for a time; invite them to report on their experiences.
- Hold a church service around your partnership.
- Include foreign-language elements in services and liturgies.
- Use liturgical materials from the World Mission Conference in Arusha (2018) and the WCC assemblies, www.emw-d.de, www.oikoumene.org
- Invite choirs from partnerships who are visiting Westphalia to a concert in your church, followed by a social evening to get to know them better.
- Take part in an exposure trip, or organise it yourself.

Contacts

- MÖWe regional pastors: www.moewe-westfalen.de/ueber-uns/team
- Partnership secretaries for the three regions of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM), www.vemission.org/ueber-uns/vem-in-afrika-asien-deutschland.html
- The chairpersons of partnership groups in the church districts

