



# We Are Church

Pour une Eglise du Peuple de Dieu  
Für eine Kirche des Gottesvolkes  
Para una Iglesia del Pueblo de Dios  
Para uma Igreja do Povo de Deus  
Per una Chiesa del Popolo di Dio  
For a Church of the People of God

## **Response of “WE ARE CHURCH” INTERNATIONAL to the first draft of the revised CHARTA OECUMENICA.**

‘We Are Church’ International (WAC), a network of national groups committed to a renewal of the Roman Catholic Church, inspired by the Second Vatican Council, was founded in 1996 and is now present in some 20 countries around the world. We welcome with interest the proposal to revise the *Charta Oecumenica* (signed in 2001) so that it remains meaningful in the changed social and ecclesial context of our times. This document specifically relates to the invitation addressed by the *Conference of European Churches* (CEC) and the *Council of European Bishops’ Conferences* (CCEE) to all the continent’s Churches to discuss the draft prepared by the *CEC-CCEE Joint Working Group* and send comments, reactions and suggestions by 15 October 2024.

WAC, while positioning itself within the Catholic Church as a reform movement, has since its inception cultivated the dream of an “authentically universal Council in which all Christian denominations would behave as equals in the search for peace and friendship among themselves, in dialogue and respect with other religions and at the service of the world”. Significant milestones in view of this coveted and urgent dream/ambition were undoubtedly the European Ecumenical Assemblies of Basel (1989), Graz (1997) and Sibiu (2007).

WAC too, fully sharing the intention of soliciting the co-responsibility of all the baptised in the drafting of this document, is pleased to present its own observations and amendments to the *First Draft of the revised Charta Oecumenica for consultation*.

### **OBSERVATIONS AND AMENDMENTS**

Although the text seemed to us rather uneven in the balance between statements of principle and concrete proposals, in some cases too abstract and in others too specific, here and there repetitive or unclear, in some passages improving on the 2001 *Charta Oecumenica*, but in others less incisive, we hope that the revision process will be an opportunity for a relaunch of the ecumenical path in Europe, which has seemed to be stagnating for years, with churches always caught between the temptation to retreat into the affirmation of their own confessional identity and the awareness that they need each other to bear witness to Christ and make the proclamation of the Gospel credible.

While maintaining its non-doctrinal-magisterial, non-judicial-ecclesial character, it would be opportune to incorporate ‘implementation actions’ to favour its transposition in the individual Churches and processes for verification of the fulfilment of the commitments undertaken. WAC hopes that, once the new text of the *Charta Oecumenica* is signed, the Churches of each country

will jointly promote meetings for discernment aimed at translating the commitments contained therein into initiatives appropriate to their national context.

Please note that any amendment is an amendment to the text of the revised Charta.

## **0. Introduction**

Although included in the table of contents on page 2 of the Draft, a revised text of the Introduction is not proposed. Such a revision, in addition to updating the one written in 2001 (e.g. by recalling the European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu 2007), should:

- point out how the division between Christians is a scandal, but also, through the mysterious action of God, the source of the richness of the different Christian traditions, proclaim that the goal of ecumenical dialogue is not their annihilation in uniformity, but as stated in the ‘Common Official Statement’ annexed to the ‘Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification’ signed on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg by Catholics and Lutherans, the attainment of ‘full ecclesial communion, a unity in diversity in which the differences that remain would be “reconciled” and would no longer have the force to divide’;
- affirm that the ultimate aim of dialogue between the Churches is not only communion between them but above all, the service of Christians to humanity; today defined above all in action for justice, peace and the safeguarding of creation. Furthermore the overcoming of divisions between the Christian Churches would constitute a testimony of inestimable value for a world stricken by divisions and conflicts;
- recall and value the fact that the recent Roman Catholic rediscovery of synodality, already practised in its own forms in the Orthodox and Protestant Churches, opens the way to the possibility of new structures and procedures of ecumenical communion.

## **1. Called together to the unity of faith**

The paragraph should make it clear that, if divisions between Christians are to be overcome, this does not imply pursuing a unity that erases the diversities that have developed in the different confessional traditions, which constitute a great wealth, which must not be lost in a process of *reductio ad unum* that is unfeasible today in the light of the self-awareness of the Churches and the plurality of cultures. Such a perspective opens up new possibilities for satisfying the widespread yearning for communion, including that of the table of bread and wine, at least in the form of Eucharistic hospitality; the commitment to make unity in the one faith visible should be made broader and more precise. In the draft, the statement that “the work of Christ and the mission of the Holy Spirit reach their fullness within ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic’ Church” is puzzling, thus establishing an identification between the Church and the Kingdom of God.

**Amendment n. 1:** after ‘within “one, holy, catholic and apostolic’ Church’ recover in part the original text of n. 6 of the *Charta Oecumenica*: “We belong together in Christ, and this is of fundamental significance in the face of our differing theological and ethical positions.” followed by “We recognize that no Church fully coincides with the Church of Christ, being, if anything, an authentic but not exhaustive realization of it”. We can strive for unity, we can overcome divisions because we are all rooted in that original communion that is God’s indestructible gift, founded in His unfailing faithfulness. It’s only from this communion of grace that we can move towards full visible unity, in which diversities are reconciled, addressing the differences in profession of faith, teaching and moral behavior that underlie the divisions between the Churches. In the disagreements over doctrine, ethics and church law that have led to ruptures between the Churches, special historical circumstances and different cultural backgrounds have often played a decisive role. In order to deepen ecumenical fellowship, endeavours to reach a consensus in faith must be continued

at all cost. Only in this way can church communion be given a theological foundation. There is no alternative to dialogue.

**Amendment n. 2:** after “...seek forgiveness and reconciliation” add: “Nevertheless, the Father, with the creativity of his wisdom, has drawn good from our sin, making the diversity of Christian traditions also a source of manifold spiritual riches, of which we must reciprocally make a gift to one another. Therefore, full ecclesial communion does not imply the standardisation of expressions of faith, but the reconciliation of their diversity, in the awareness that the mystery of God is beyond the possibility of any one person or Church to know it fully, and that the plurality of visions and experiences of belief enriches our image of the Triune God”.

**Amendment n. 3:** In the second commitment, after “...common discipleship of Christ” add: “and doing together all that can be done together”.

## **2. Listening to the Word of God and praying together**

Important in this paragraph is the commitment, albeit generic and backward compared to the practice already in place in some European countries, to “continue moving towards the goal of fellowship and hospitality”. The document could here also commit the Churches to using the fruit of ecumenical work and the texts of the different traditions in prayer, so as to make the “exchange of gifts” a common experience.

**Amendment n. 4:** as a fifth commitment insert: “to use the common prayers and scripture texts in the interdenominational version, to value prayers and songs of other confessions, to take into account the sensitivity of other Churches in the liturgy, invocations and hymns”.

**Amendment n. 5:** as a sixth commitment insert: “to encourage opportunities for shared listening to the Word of God, interdenominational Bible study, exchange of ambo with ministers of other Churches”.

**Amendment n. 6:** as a seventh commitment insert: “to promote the creation, at local level, of interdenominational Bible groups committed to the common listening, meditation and actualization of the Word of God”.

**Amendment n. 7:** as a last commitment insert: “to establish interdenominational liturgical commissions at the national level to prepare ecumenical celebration schemes and common song books”.

## **3. Towards a common witness**

The title of this paragraph does not seem appropriate, because it makes one think of a testimony ‘*ad extra*’, while the text focuses on actions ‘*ad intra*’. Here too the document should recognise the ambivalence of the divisions between Christians, a break in the communion of the one Church of Christ, but also a starting point for the development of the spiritual, liturgical and theological richness represented by the different Christian traditions. In addition, more concrete and advanced paths of mutual involvement and common journey should be identified.

**Amendment n. 8:** Replace “In the Spirit of the Gospel... joint witness to this world” with the more incisive original text of the *Charta Oecumenica*: “In the Spirit of the Gospel, we must reappraise together the history of the Christian Churches, which has been marked by many beneficial experiences, but also by schisms, hostilities and even armed conflicts. Human guilt, lack of love and the frequent abuse of faith and the Churches for political interests have severely damaged the credibility of the Christian witness”.

**Amendment n. 9:** after “... of the Christian witness”, continue as follows: “However, God has also made this division a source of richness in the development of different Christian traditions”.

**Amendment n. 10:** in the second commitment, replace “actively contribute to the joint study” with the more empowering “promote the joint study”.

**Amendment n. 11:** in the third commitment replace “to overcome the temptation of self-sufficiency, indifference or relativism” with the more explicit and precise original text of the *Charta Oecumenica* “to overcome self-sufficiency”.

**Amendment n. 12:** as a sixth commitment insert: “to adopt the style whereby the individual Churches, in defining their own position on the new problems which every day require discernment on their part, especially in the ethical field, know and value the judgement and experience of the other confessions and, if possible, develop reflection together, to this end organically involving representatives of the other Churches in their own processes and bodies for consultation and decision-making”.

**Amendment n. 13:** as a seventh commitment insert: “to promote twinning arrangements between parishes and communities of different denominations.”

**Amendment n. 14:** as a last commitment insert: “to introduce in the rites of consecration of pastors and ordination of presbyters the promise of fidelity to Jesus’ command for unity”.

#### **4. Proclaiming the Gospel together**

It is important to affirm the primacy of evangelisation as the primary task of the Churches and to emphasise that it cannot be carried out in a self-sufficient manner or even constitute a field of competition. How to proclaim the Gospel in a way that is meaningful and relevant to the men and women of their time is always the fundamental challenge for Christians, but it is particularly so in Europe today, and no Church can delude itself into thinking that it can respond to it alone.

**Amendment n. 15:** In the third commitment, after “entering into agreements with them” add: “to promote joint evangelisation initiatives and thus avoid...”;

#### **5. Continuing in dialogue and working together**

This paragraph confirms an extremely significant commitment: that of continuing dialogue amidst controversies. However, it should dwell not only on ethical and doctrinal issues, but also on ecclesiological ones, starting with the role of the Petrine ministry, given the prevailing weight they have today in obstructing the rapprochement between the Churches. A very important principle would be to make explicit the intention to act together “in all circumstances” where the difference in convictions is not such as to prevent this. Furthermore, it would be appropriate to make a commitment to revive the tradition of the European Ecumenical Assemblies and to create a permanent body for communion and dialogue between the European Churches. Undoubtedly, then, the commitment to ecumenical dialogue and the recognition of ‘unity in diversity’ between the Christian Churches would be made more credible by the effort of each denomination to also recognise human rights internally (e.g. through the adoption of transparent and guaranteed procedures for examining and overcoming theological controversies, with recourse to disciplinary measures only in extreme cases of disagreement on non-opinionable matters and after in-depth, fraternal dialogue), to accommodate existing cultural, theological, pastoral and opinion differences, and to support the pastoral action of those denominations that are ‘minorities’ in individual countries.

**Amendment n. 16:** as the first commitment insert: “to safeguard the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual in our Churches”.

**Amendment n 17:** in the first commitment of the draft, after “to act together” insert: “in all circumstances and at all levels of Church life wherever conditions permit except in cases where the difference between our beliefs is so fundamental that we have to walk separate paths”.

**Amendment n 18:** in the third commitment, after “our countries”, continue with “as well as to implement, as ‘majority’ Churches, a service of connecting dispersed Christians of other confessions with the communities to which they belong, supporting the ‘minority’ ones in pastoral action”.

**Amendment n. 19:** as a sixth commitment insert: “to promote European Ecumenical Assemblies every five years where important issues for the faith, the life of the Churches and their action in society can be addressed together”.

**Amendment n. 20:** as a seventh commitment insert” “to create at local and national level, Councils of Churches and to establish a European Council of Churches, a permanent body for communion, dialogue and debate between the Christian confessions of the continent”.

**Amendment n. 21:** as an eighth commitment insert “: ‘to legitimize, in the individual Churches, pluralism on non-essential questions of faith and to create spaces for free discussion on matters of theological and doctrinal controversy.”

## 6. Participating in the building of Europe

The text expresses a rather apologetic vision of Europe and mixes rather different aspects, which in some cases deserve a specific paragraph and in others are already contained elsewhere. It is also not very clear in what sense it speaks of the ‘integrity’ of Europe, while the commitment to the defence and deepening of democracy deserves explicit mention. Finally, the condemnation of violence should first and foremost translate into combating those instances occurring in the churches.

**Amendment n. 22:** after “inextricably bound up with its history” retrieve the text of the *Charta Oecumenica*: ‘However Christians have failed to prevent suffering and destruction from being inflicted by Europeans, both within Europe and beyond. We confess our share of responsibility for this guilt and ask God and our fellow human beings for forgiveness”.

**Amendment n. 23:** change “We condemn any forms of violence... against women and children” to “We condemn any forms of violence against the human being, including gender-based violence, in particular against women and lgbtq+ persons, and child abuse, including that occurring in our Churches”.

**Amendment n. 24:** as a third commitment insert: “to address the historical and theological responsibility of Churches in the formation and spread of patriarchal ideology and sexism;”

**Amendment n. 25:** rephrase the fourth commitment as follows: “to strengthen the position and equal rights of women in the Churches and society and to foster partnership between women and men in all areas of life;”

**Amendment n. 26:** as sixth commitment insert: “to promote democracy in every country and at the level of European institutions, encouraging its deepening in terms of recognition of civil liberties, widening of political participation and decentralisation of power”.

## 7. Deepening communion with Judaism

Important here is the rejection of all ‘Replacement Theology’ and the renunciation of action for the conversion of Jews.

**Amendment n. 27:** after “...all outbreaks of hatred and persecution” retrieve the passage from the 2001 *Charta Oecumenica* that more effectively and concretely states: “We ask God for forgiveness for anti-Jewish attitudes among Christians and we ask our Jewish sisters and brothers for reconciliation. It is urgently necessary, in the worship and teaching, doctrine and life of our Churches, to raise awareness of the deep bond existing between the Christian faith and Judaism and to support Christian-Jewish cooperation”.

**Amendment n. 28:** as a second commitment insert: “to purify exegesis, theological reflection, preaching and catechesis from any anti-Jewish prejudice;”

## **8. Nurturing relations with Islam**

This paragraph is well formulated and essential. Above all clear is the commitment against all Islamophobia. However, the use of the term ‘extremism’ is too vague and equivocal.

**Amendment n. 29:** As a first commitment to recover the text of the Charta in the 2001 version: “to conduct ourselves toward Muslims with respect;”

**Amendment n. 30:** In the third commitment, instead of “any forms of extremism” write: “any forms of intolerance and violence”.

## **9. Involving other religions and worldviews**

Significant in this paragraph is the assumption of Europe as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural continent. This should result not only in a commitment to promote inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, extended to non-religious beliefs, but also in the recognition that the secularity of public institutions, be understood as not coming from a viewpoint of irrelevance and therefore indifference of the state in the face of religion, but as a guarantee of respect for freedom in an increasingly multi-religious and multi-cultural Europe.

**Amendment n. 31:** after “new religious communities” add: “as well as non-religious humanist worldviews. This constitutes an enriching contribution to the understanding of the mystery of God, an opportunity to purify our Christianity from excessive identification with Western Culture and a challenge for Christians to witness more faithfully to the Gospel of Jesus”.

**Amendment n. 32:** as second commitment insert: “to respect those who profess different religions and non-religious world views”.

**Amendment n. 33:** as fourth commitment insert: “to sympathetically accompany experiences of spirituality, monastic life and social action that strive to bring people together and promote dialogue between different religious traditions;”

**Amendment n. 34:** as fifth commitment insert: “to renounce confessional privileges in public spheres and recognise secularism as a value, understood as a guarantee of respect for religious freedom in a regime of pluralism of faiths and cultures”.

### **9a. Acting for social justice in Europe [insert new paragraph].**

In order to recall the ecumenical triple motto ‘justice, peace and the protection of creation’ and to give due prominence to the commitment of the Churches to the realisation of a Europe less marked by social inequalities, it seems necessary to introduce a new paragraph:

‘The history of Europe has been characterised, not without conflict, by the growing awareness of the fundamental equality between people and the effort to guarantee improved living conditions for all men and women, also making the community responsible for this, as witnessed by the development of the ‘welfare state’.

The Churches have also contributed to this, in various ways and not without contradictions, through an ever more profound reflection on the dignity of the person, created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26) and taking multiple initiatives for human promotion.

On the basis of our faith in the crucified and risen Jesus, icon of every victim of injustice, oppression, exclusion whilst also a promise for all and everyone, of liberation, redemption and salvation, we work for a fairer, more inclusive and united Europe; one built from the needs and

rights of the poor, the marginalised, the most excluded; in which the satisfaction of basic needs is not subject to the market, work comes before profit, life is not reduced to a commodity, so that every European can have an income, a home, access to education, health care in case of need and the chance to grow as an integral human being.

Only the drastic reduction of social inequalities within each country, between its constituent States and outside the continent can reconcile Europe and make it safe and stable. This requires the entire people of God to commit themselves to spreading the Gospel together within the public space of society, giving it value and credibility through social and political engagement.

We commit ourselves to:

- assume social and political responsibility guided by the preferential option for the poor;
- promote common initiatives of diakonia towards those who live on the margins of society;
- interface with one voice with national and European political institutions to defend the rights of the poor, the weak, those who are ignored, ensuring that their needs are at the centre of choices and programmes, according to the principle 'The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone' (Mt 21:42) ;
- support organisations within the Churches committed to social justice and ecumenical networks working for a society where there is room for everyone.'

## 10. Striving for peace in Europe

Paragraphs 10-14 extend the text of the Charta Oecumenica far beyond the narrower area of ecumenism. However, the topical issues mentioned here also all have an ecumenical component. This expansion of the range of topics harbors the danger of overloading the Charta and makes it even more difficult to reach a consensus on the overall work. On the other hand, however, it should be noted that the practice of recent years has shown that ecumenical action in these areas, which concern all Christians, is often easier than, for example, discussing fundamental theological issues together. Indeed, acting and striving together can even be a unifying bond that unites Christians of all denominations and helps them to overcome differences. We therefore welcome this extension of the Charta.

Considering that Europe has a long history of armed conflicts (often exported to other continents) and was the trigger and theatre of the two world wars, the paragraph appears weak and generic, especially if one takes into account the role played in these clashes by the religious factor not only in the past ('the religious wars' of the 16th-17th centuries), but also today (see Ulster, former Yugoslavia, Russia-Ukraine, etc.).

**Amendment n. 35:** after "...peaceful coexistence of all human beings" add: "Mindful of its history and responsibility in many wars, Europe must be a continent that promotes peace, reconciliation, non-violent conflict resolution through diplomacy, cooperation, humanitarian aid, and cultural exchanges".

**Amendment n. 36:** as a fifth commitment insert: "to support peace organisations of churches and ecumenical networks working for non-violent conflict resolution;"

**Amendment n. 37:** as a sixth commitment insert: "to jointly express a radical rejection of war as a means of resolving disputes between peoples and between States, delegitimising its alleged religious roots and working for the resolution of conflicts in Europe which are also caused by divisions between Churches;"

**Amendment n. 38:** as a seventh commitment insert: "to work for a Europe free of weapons of mass destruction (atomic, bacteriological and chemical) and actively committed to world disarmament".

## 11. Safeguarding Creation

Again, the paragraph appears rather sweetened in its analysis and vague in its commitments.

**Amendment n. 39:** after “... to plunder the earth” retrieve the passage from the 2001 *Charta Oecumenica*: “However, we are appalled to see natural resources being exploited without regard for their intrinsic value or consideration of their limits, and without regard for the well-being of future generations”.

**Amendment n. 40:** as a fourth commitment recover the first commitment of the 2001 *Charta Oecumenica*: “to strive to adopt a life-style free of economic pressures and consumerism and a quality of a way of life informed by accountability and sustainability;”

**Amendment n. 41:** as a fifth commitment recover the second of the paragraph of the 2001 *Charta Oecumenica*: “to support Church environmental organisations and ecumenical networks in their efforts for the safeguarding of creation;”

**Amendment n. 42:** as a sixth commitment insert: “to renovate buildings used for worship and pastoral activities and reorganise the initiatives that take place therein according to criteria of environmental sustainability.”

## 12. Migration and people on the move

The paragraph is very good in articulating the engagement of Christians in society. However, it would also be worth emphasising some actions addressed to Christian communities by including the following:

**Amendment n. 43:** as first commitment insert: “to make our communities welcoming spaces for migrants and open to their cultures and religious experiences;”

**Amendment n. 44:** as a second commitment insert: “to counter xenophobic and chauvinist tendencies in the Churches and delegitimise their alleged religious roots;”

**Amendment n. 45:** as a last commitment insert: “to support Church organizations and ecumenical networks that work for the reception, recognition of rights and social inclusion of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.”

## 13. New technologies and digitisation

This paragraph should clearly state that technology, and in particular artificial intelligence, must be placed at the service of the public good, within the framework of caring for the Common Home and enhancing solidarity as authentic human development. Moreover, given the enormous changes that artificial intelligence brings about in the economic, social, political, communication, etc. spheres, as well as the unprecedented challenges it poses to anthropology, philosophy and theology itself, reflection on it and its consequences should be acknowledged as an appropriate and priority terrain in which the Churches could work together. It should be noted that the first three commitments are vague and are not specific to new technologies or digitization and only the fourth is specific to the topic.

**Amendment n. 46:** as a first commitment insert: “to always state that technology, and in particular artificial intelligence, must be placed at the service of the public good and dignity of human beings;”

**Amendment n. 47:** as a second commitment insert: “to oppose the use of artificial intelligence for purposes of war or the destruction of human beings;”



**Amendment n. 48:** as a third commitment insert: “to develop together as Christian Churches the reflection on artificial intelligence and digital technologies;”

#### **14. Europe and the world**

This paragraph is important because it emphasises the role of Europe and European Christians, who for over a millennium constituted the vast majority of believers in Christ, but it does not appear well formulated, because it mixes references to the relationship of Europe and the European Churches with the rest of the world with other statements more related to the presence of Christianity in Europe. The commitment for Europe to play an active role in overcoming the imbalances between the North and the South also seems too bland.

**Amendment n. 49:** replace the sentence ‘Christianity has played an essential role.... Partner in other parts of the world’ with this text: “During the past five centuries Europeans have contributed greatly to the spread of Christianity throughout the world. However, this evangelisation has often gone hand in hand with the colonial expansion of European powers, the slave trade and various forms of imperialism and exploitation of indigenous peoples. The shortcomings of Christians have contributed to this evil. We confess our co-responsibility in this guilt and ask God and the people for forgiveness. Europe must therefore stand as an ark of peace and not an arch of war, as a welcoming home and not a closed fortress, as an example of generous cooperation and not a model of domination. The shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity towards the Global South requires the European Churches to recognise the distinct character of the Churches of the other continents and to renew and strengthen missionary cooperation with them”.

**Amendment n. 50:** in the third commitment delete the word “populists”, to which polemical use for political purposes has ended up attributing such a strong negative connotation to it as a generic term so as to render it unusable for descriptive purposes.

**Amendment n. 51:** as a fourth commitment insert: “to know and value the ecumenical experiences taking place in other continents, especially those arising from the “faith of the poor;”

**Amendment n. 52:** as a sixth commitment insert: “to work, in creative tension with public institutions and economic powers, for the modification of political, economic and cultural relations with the countries we call ‘Global South’, with a view to overcoming the poverty that afflicts a large part of their populations”.

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