

## **International Conference on Orthodox Diakonia**

Valamo Monastery, Finland, May 2004

### **ACTIONS**

1. WCC will serve as the administrative focal point in 2004.
2. WCC will involve and consult with conference participants.
3. Conference participants will remain in contact and exchange information.
4. WCC and conference participants will inform the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches about the process.
5. The continuation committee will meet in Autumn 2004 (meeting took place in January 2005) to finalize development plan.
6. Plans will be made for a second international conference to formally found an international association/network of Orthodox diakonia in 2006/2007.

#### **7. Members of the Continuation Committee:**

- Bishop Ioannis of Thermopylae, Church of Greece
- Bishop Youannes, Coptic Orthodox Church
- Fr Leonid Kishkovsky, Orthodox Church in America
- Ms. Margarita Neliubova, Russian Orthodox Church

#### **Staff representatives:**

- Ortaid
- International Orthodox Christian Charities
- World Council of Churches

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### **AGREEMENTS**

The participants of the conference agreed:

- To welcome the process and deepen collaboration in the area of Orthodox diakonia.
- To strengthen education, training, sharing of resources and information on diakonia.
- To deepen reflection and strengthen exchange on key social and justice issues and action, and raise consciousness that all members of the Church have a responsibility for diakonia.
- To move towards the formation of a network of Orthodox diakonia, and appoint a continuation committee with the responsibility to develop the objectives and identifying resources for follow-up.
- To finalize and disseminate the results of conference to participants and to Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox heads of churches using the conference website and other means.

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### **Working Group 1: Theology of Diakonia**

#### **A. Areas for further study and discussion**

1. There should be dialogue between theology/church/all church members with related social sciences, especially including medicine. Experts of these sciences can benefit our Christian understanding and work in diakonia.
2. We must promote our real and historic understanding of diakonia in the holistic sense as empowerment and affirmation of the dignity of all humans.
3. There should be further discussion on the ethics of wealth and poverty because wealth could be considered as “blessing” and poverty as “curse”.
4. We should discuss if there is a need for specific diakonia institutions run by church in our context. If yes, how can these institutions work with secular organisations.
5. There is a critical need for all church members to be actively involved in diakonia. How can each one be active and supported in their work and how can each one use their gifts in the church and the church diaconal work?
6. How we could manifest unity in our diaconal work? How can we improve solidarity within the Orthodox world? What kind of co-ordination and improving relationships does this require?

#### **B. Recommendations**

1. Renewal of education for diakonia in theological schools.
2. Multiplication of specialized encounters and meetings on specific issues relating to Orthodox diakonia, including the development of educational materials.
3. Active promotion of diakonia work at all levels.
4. Development of an Orthodox resource book and expansion of the [www.orthodoxdiakonia.net](http://www.orthodoxdiakonia.net) website.

### **Group 2: Pan-Orthodox Co-operation in Diakonia**

It was discussed as to which level the formal initiation of the pan-Orthodox exchange - at the NGO (field) level or at the hierarchical level – should take place? In other words, if there should be a cooperative effort, is it to be initiated from the bottom or from the top? Majority concern was expressed that the world does not view the Orthodox Church as speaking - as Dr. David Bryer expressed – *with one, clear moral voice* on such broad incontestable issues as child abuse, poverty, migration, health matters, social justice, human rights, and in addition, perhaps on more sensitive

issues, such as HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, environmental concerns, genetic engineering and bio-ethics. We feel that the lead for such pan-Orthodox cohesiveness and cooperation should come from the highest level of Church governance.

With respect to the foregoing the group **recommends** that the final statement and action plan strongly carries this message to our respective heads of churches.

Insofar as the immediate future is concerned, we **recommend** that a follow-up conference be convened. It is fair to say that in arriving to this conference few of us knew what to expect by way of practical content or possible outcomes. In addition, we had little feel for fellow conferees or for the chemistry of the event. With this invaluable experience behind us and with a judicious planning of schedule, we feel that a follow-up conference will prove of significantly greater practical value.

In preparation for any future follow-up pan-Orthodox conference, it is **recommended** that regional conferences take place, which would reflect the agenda of the follow-up event. The regions might be divided as follows: Middle East, the Balkans, CIS, Africa and the Americas, or any combination thereof.

Expressions of concern were voiced that the collective Orthodox efforts in global outreach are insufficiently visible and that this issue might be addressed at a future meeting.

With this in mind, the novel **suggestion** was made that a pan-Orthodox fundraising event be held on an annual basis, one which would benefit a single designated global concern, such as AIDS relief or refugee resettlement. The purpose of such an event would be to offer an outward and visible sign of pan-Orthodox cohesiveness, not only to ourselves, but to the world at large. At this stage no specific recommendation is being made in this respect, but we feel that further discussion of the matter is warranted.

### **Group 3: Orthodox Church and Civil Society**

#### **A. Priorities**

1. *To identify the distinctive perspectives that the Orthodox Church has to offer.* When seeking ways to participate in civil society in a meaningful and productive way, we should be drawing on our theology and on such specifically Orthodox understanding.
2. *To identify where the Orthodox Church has point in common with other churches.* This applies both Orthodox and non (and perhaps even non-Christian faiths), and with other groups (NGOs, etc.)
3. *To establish and cultivate a public voice.* The Orthodox Church is, in general, less vocal on social issues. In some cases there is a space for our voice, just waiting to be filled; in other cases we need to struggle to claim that space.
4. *To establish a pan-Orthodox voice.*
5. *To be enough attuned to society to know what needs we can, and should try to fill.*

#### **B. Recommendations**

1. We should join forces – pursue links with other organisations when and where our concerns and perspectives are shared. Our voice will thus be more public, and we will be more successful in our aims.
2. In order to act in unison with other Orthodox Churches, we need to overcome ethnic isolation, where it exists.
3. In order to act in unison with NGOs, we need to learn a second language, beyond the ecclesiastical: we need to learn to speak in terms that they will understand, and in terms with which we can establish our common ground.
4. We must avoid a secretarian mindset. In the increasingly multicultural societies in which we live, in particular, it is important to be advocates and/or critics but in non-judgemental, non-self-righteous ways.
5. We must recognise and emphasise the importance of the parish, because much of the Church's potential role in civil society begins there. We must be continually trying to cultivate, within the parish, the model of society which we are proposing for the wider community.

#### **Group 4: Practice and methodologies of social action in Orthodox Church**

##### A. Proposal

- An Orthodox Interchurch Diakoconal Network to be established. A working group for the development of the network established, possibly facilitated by the Valamo lay academy.

##### B. Aims and tasks

1. Strengthening, empowering and developing the Church diaconal work
2. Strengthening the authority of the local Church related charitable organisations
3. Lobbying of common interests of member organisations
4. Fundraising for network projects

##### C. Priorities of the near future

1. Information exchange
2. Regular meetings and conferences
3. Coordination of network members' cooperation on publications, collection of information, developing of methodologies, organising professional training, providing effective management skills and educating clergy and students at theological seminaries
4. Develop website containing information on member-organisations, theological materials, manuals, examples of good diaconal practice, materials on PCM & fundraising, links, calendar of events
5. Lobbying for the interests of the network
6. Fundraising for network projects
7. Implementing joint thematic projects

#### **Group 5: Church leadership, stewardship and management**

Leadership = vision/strategy/give direction to follow

Stewardship = professional standards, accountability, fidelity to mission of diaconal service provided

Management = organization/implementation/tactical application

**A. Agreed priorities:**

1. Holistic diaconal vision experienced in fullness of life of the Church
2. Professional standards of NGO performance/improving quality of leadership/ stewardship/management (including transparency, accountability etc).
3. Coherence of diaconal service structure (vertical integration: national/ synodal/ patriarchal, diocese, parish, personal/individual in spirit of Christian love)
4. Continuity/sustainability of human and material/financial resources
5. Networking (for sharing of experience, best practice, possible cooperation etc.)

**B. Further study/discuss**

1. *Development of holistic vision of diaconal service of Orthodox Church* (“sacraments of: word, liturgy and service”): theological approach and practical implications
2. *Promotion of coherence of diaconal service structure in Orthodox Churches* (vertical integration: national/ synodal/ patriarchal, diocese, parish, personal/individual in spirit of Christian love)

**C. Recommendations**

1. *Development of “common values & professional standards” for diaconal service* (on the levels of leadership, stewardship and management).
2. *Search for continuity/sustainability of human and material/financial resources for diaconal service*
3. *Development of Orthodox network for diaconal service* (for close cooperation and communication, shearing of experience, best practices, etc.)
4. *Web side/ Knowledge based resource* (library development starting from 4 key articles from the mtg.) *CD* (experience, power points 15 May etc.)

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### **Working Group 3: Orthodox Church and Civil Society**

#### **D. Priorities**

6. *To identify the distinctive perspectives that the Orthodox Church has to offer.* When seeking ways to participate in civil society in a meaningful and productive way, we should be drawing on our theology and on such specifically Orthodox understanding.
7. *To identify where the Orthodox Church has point in common with other churches.* This applies both Orthodox and non (and perhaps even non-Christian faiths), and with other groups (NGOs, etc.)
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9. *To establish a pan-Orthodox voice.*
10. *To be enough attuned to society to know what needs we can, and should try to fill.*

#### **E. Recommendations**

6. We should join forces – pursue links with other organisations when and where our concerns and perspectives are shared. Our voice will thus be more public, and we will be more successful in our aims.
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9. We must avoid a sectarian mindset. In the increasingly multicultural societies in which we live, in particular, it is important to be advocates and/or critics but in non-judgemental, non-self-righteous ways.
10. We must recognise and emphasise the importance of the parish, because much of the Church's potential role in civil society begins there. We must be continually trying to cultivate, within the parish, the model of society which we are proposing for the wider community.

### **Working Group 4: Practice and methodologies of social action in Orthodox Church**

#### **D. Proposal**

- An Orthodox Interchurch Diakoconal Network to be established. A working group for the development of the network established, possibly facilitated by the Valamo lay academy.

#### **E. Aims and tasks**

8. Strengthening, empowering and developing the Church diaconal work
9. Strengthening the authority of the local Church related charitable organisations
10. Lobbying of common interests of member organisations
11. Fundraising for network projects

F. Priorities of the near future

1. Information exchange
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4. Develop website containing information on member-organisations, theological materials, manuals, examples of good diaconal practice, materials on PCM & fundraising, links, calendar of events
12. Lobbying for the interests of the network
13. Fundraising for network projects
14. Implementing joint thematic projects

**Working Group 5: Church leadership, stewardship and management**

Leadership = vision/strategy/give direction to follow

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**A. Agreed priorities:**

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7. Professional standards of NGO performance/improving quality of leadership/ stewardship/management (including transparency, accountability etc).
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9. Continuity/sustainability of human and material/financial resources
10. Networking (for sharing of experience, best practice, possible cooperation etc.)

## **B. Further study/discuss**

3. *Development of holistic vision of diaconal service of Orthodox Church* (“sacraments of: word, liturgy and service”): theological approach and practical implications
4. *Promotion of coherence of diaconal service structure in Orthodox Churches* (vertical integration: national/ synodal/ patriarchal, diocese, parish, personal/individual in spirit of Christian love)

## **F. Recommendations**

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### **Working Group 4: Practice and methodologies of social action in Orthodox Church**

#### **G. Proposal**

An Orthodox Interchurch Diaconal Network to be established.

#### **H. Aims and tasks**

15. Strengthening, empowering and developing the Church diaconal work
16. Strengthening the authority of the local Church related charitable organisations
17. Lobbying of common interests of member organisations
18. Fundraising for Network projects

#### **I. Priorities of the near future**

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3. Coordination of Network members' cooperation on:
  - publications,
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4. Develop website containing information on member-organisations, theological materials, manuals, examples of good diaconal practice, materials on PCM & fundraising, links, calendar of events
19. Lobbying for the interests of the network
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Management = organization/implementation/tactical application

#### **A. Agreed priorities**

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12. Professional standards of NGO performance/improving quality of leadership/ stewardship/management (including transparency, accountability etc).
13. Coherence of diaconal service structure (vertical integration: national/ synodal/ patriarchal, diocese, parish, personal/individual in spirit of Christian love)
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15. Networking (for sharing of experience, best practice, possible cooperation etc.)

#### **B. Further study/discuss**

5. *Development of holistic vision of diaconal service of Orthodox Church* (“sacraments of: word, liturgy and service”): theological approach and practical implications
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