



**ECEN Assembly 2021:**

**Opening words:**

Fr. Martin Michalicek, General Secretary, CCEE

Dear friends gathered at the 13<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network

It is my great pleasure to greet you warmly from St. Gallen, seat of the CCEE Secretariat.

For over ten years, the Council of European Bishops' Conferences has been explicitly engaged in treating urgent questions regarding the environment, and now through the specific Safeguard of the Creation Section. Our engagements occurred in concordance with the magisterium of the last four Popes: Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis. They elaborated the topic connected with the ecological themes with growing intensity as time passed. The most important fruit of the continuous attention of the Catholic Church towards the environmental themes we find in the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, of which the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of publication was recently celebrated.

Already at the beginning of this document the Bishop of Rome underlines the ecumenical and interreligious dimension of this endeavour. In this context he quotes the Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew, who speaks about the sins against creation.

The topic of the Safeguarding of Creation was present at all three European Ecumenical Assemblies organised in collaboration between the CCEE and the CEC. At the second one in Graz, 1997, among the recommendations for Action and Background we read: "We recommend that CEC and CCEE create a network of persons with environmental responsibilities and recognise them as partners in church activities." The ECEN, founded one year after the Graz Assembly, is a response to this call.

Already with the first two European Ecumenical Assemblies in Basel and in Graz, the CCEE and the CEC assumed the task of expressing the commitment



of European Christians for peace, justice, and the preservation of creation. This desire was taken up in the Third European Ecumenical Assembly (Sibiu, 2007), and was heard in the final message in which participants recommended that "the period from the 1st of September to the 4<sup>th</sup> of October be dedicated to prayer for the preservation of creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles to help reverse the trend of climate change". I am pleased that the CEC and the CCEE continuously support the Season of Creation. One of the most precious experiences was the ecumenical prayer on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2018 with the participation of Presidents of the CCEE and of the CEC, respectively Card. Bagnasco and Rev. Krieger.

In the midst of the current pandemic, we experience how much the humanity failed in the stewarding of Creation. On the one hand, we realize that the misguided, even tyrannical anthropocentrism doesn't correspond with biblical teaching. On the other hand, we must admit with Pope Francis that "there can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology" (LS 118). In this sense I would like to underline the importance of integral ecology, because as Benedict XVI states, the book of nature is one and indivisible. In this logic we should achieve a better knowledge and consequently a greater respect not only for the rules and regularities of nature around us but also of our human nature inside of us. There should be no place for egoistic and pure pragmatical planning with the one and indivisible book of nature. In this optic of integral ecology as Christians, we shouldn't ignore the relationship between ecology and eschatology, always remembering our final destiny. There is no doubt that our belief in eternal life doesn't diminish our commitment to the safeguard of creation, but rather the opposite.

There are numerous challenges that we face in this current period.

I am glad that this ECEN Assembly, treating the theme *Reconciled with the Earth*, has a lot of potential to contribute on our way towards a sustainable future and towards the unity for which our Lord Jesus prayed and suffered. It is my deep wish that this two-day online event will bring more enthusiasm in the work for harmony between mankind and nature, harmony between us and God,



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and harmony among all people in building the brotherhood that is rooted in our Creator.

Have a good and fruitful assembly.