

Paper 17

Mission Committee

Worlds Council of Churches
Glasgow Assembly bid

United Church 2017
Church 2017
Reformed Church 2017
Church 2017



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World Council of Churches Glasgow Assembly bid

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Bernie Collins bernie.collins@thecrocker.net David Tatem david.tatem@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	<p>a) Mission Council endorses the Mission Committee's support for the principle of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland bidding to host the 2021 General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Glasgow, and asks the Mission Committee and the Synod of Scotland to take this forward.</p> <p>b) Mission Council asks Mission Committee to clarify what financial contributions would be required from URC Assembly funds, and to consult the Finance Committee on whether, and if so how, such money could be provided. Pending a future recommendation from the Mission Committee, Mission Council is not able to make any financial commitment yet regarding a possible WCC Assembly in Scotland.</p>

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The hosting of the World Council of Churches Assembly in Glasgow: to agree the URC's support for the bid.
Main points	Glasgow is hoping to bid to host the World Council of Churches General Assembly in 2021. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland is inviting churches to support this bid.
Previous documents	None
Consultation has taken place ...	Within Mission Committee

Summary of Impact

Financial	There will be a need to make some financial commitment to costs as yet unspecified.
External/ecumenical	Potentially considerable in raising the profile of the work of the World Council in the UK. Engagement with ecumenical partners.

World Council of Churches Glasgow Assembly bid

Preamble

- 0.1 At its meeting in February, the Mission Committee considered a request sent to churches by Bob Fyffe, General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), asking for their support for a bid by the City of Glasgow to host the 2021 Assembly of the World Council of Churches.
- 0.2 Conscious of various uncertainties at this stage concerning finance and the call on resources that could ensue, the committee nevertheless recognised the great opportunity that hosting the assembly could afford to raise the profile of the work of the World Council, to work together with ecumenical partners, to communicate the broad range of concerns of the churches within British society at a time of fragmentation and challenge and to present the gospel in important and relevant ways. It gave its support to the bid in principle and asked those involved to ensure that should the bid succeed, it would be followed up with a broad ecumenical involvement and sharing of resources.
- 0.3 The briefing paper that follows was provided by CTBI in January 2017.

Briefing paper

Introduction

1. The World Council of Churches' (WCC) Central Committee commissions its General Secretary to initiate the search for an adequate venue for the next WCC Assembly, an event that takes place every 7 to 8 years. There has been some discussion since autumn 2015 as to whether churches in the British Isles might submit a bid to host the next WCC Assembly, scheduled for 2021.
2. At a meeting in November 2016 convened by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), it was agreed by the representatives of member churches that CTBI should:
 - a) indicate interest in submitting a bid to the WCC, to initiate formal communication
 - b) commence work on a consultation document to be finalised at the CTBI trustees' residential meeting in January 2017 and then sent to member churches and partner organizations
 - c) seek a decision from member churches and partner organisations at its AGM in May 2017 as to whether they wish to continue developing the bid. There will be a final decision by member churches at a special meeting in October 2017.

The final decision on the venue will be taken by the WCC Central Committee in summer 2018. It is believed that Churches in Germany are also likely to be making a bid.

Why support a bid?

3. Meetings of the WCC Assembly are landmarks in the modern history of the global church. The Assembly has never taken place in the British Isles, and was last held in Europe in 1968. It would be very significant opportunity for the churches in Britain and Ireland to engage with the worldwide church that is increasingly represented in our own communities. Coming together to plan such an event could be a catalyst for transforming relations between the churches here, and indeed for enhancing contact between the churches and government at various levels.
4. The churches in Britain and Ireland would have much to offer to the worldwide church. We contain some of the key axes of diversity for global Christianity in a way that is, for the most part, constructive and positive. We have 'national' churches that continue to exercise a significant political, social and cultural role. Anglican and Protestant churches have had a leading political role since the Reformation, but the Roman Catholic Church has a strong presence in all four nations, and relationships here have been profoundly transformed over the past century. We have been affected in far-reaching ways by successive waves of revival since the eighteenth century, including more recently Pentecostal movements that have renewed the historic churches and generated new ones. The diversity of the Christian presence in these islands continues to grow, matching the increasing diversity of our societies.
5. At a time when there is a significant reworking of international relationships around the world (in the British context the effects of Brexit and the European Union) it is appropriate that we should continue to offer a warm invitation to the World church, both to continue giving and receiving. Even in contexts where it might seem that local projects have greater immediacy and need, it remains true that we require a broad vision that includes our partners and the wider Body of Christ.
6. Specific outcomes could include:
 - a) Dynamic, diverse and global character of Christianity brought to public attention, through national media coverage and engagement with government at all levels
 - b) Strength highlighted of the commitment of the global church to justice, including issues relating to climate change, and its expression in practical action
 - c) Dynamic, diverse and global character of Christianity in these islands affirmed and better understood by the churches themselves
 - d) Lasting and transformative relationships established between individuals and churches here and individuals and churches in other parts of the world
 - e) Deepening of understanding and trust between the churches in these islands through shared responsibility for a major undertaking of international significance.

Who would be involved?

7. Churches in Britain and Ireland, primarily as defined by the member churches and partner organisations of CTBI, with CTBI acting as the lead organisation. In addition, however, the suggestion within the bid suggests that all the Christian traditions across Britain and Ireland be invited to attend and participate in a celebration of shared witness and faith. This has never been attempted before across these islands and nations and could provide a legacy and momentum for new engagements and reconciliation.
8. The initial proposal suggests that the WCC Assembly delegates continue with the programme work and decision making that takes place at every General Assembly. In parallel however, there would be a programme of engagement between the different Christian traditions from around the British and Irish Churches. This engagement would take the form of shared participation in worship, shared programmes of speakers and discussion groups. The primary focus of this programme is to deepen fellowship in the Gospel and to generate a shared sense of prayerful concern for the world.
9. If the Assembly bid should be successful in June 2018, we will invite member churches to become more involved. This will mean utilising the skills and resources of each member Church can offer. This might mean offering the skills of some staff through secondment or might involve offering skills for use in a more local context through volunteering e.g. during the pre-Assembly phase. It might also mean some local fundraising to support local events that celebrate the Assembly. Plans are already advanced in terms of a Four Nations Co-ordinating Committee who will have oversight of the local Assembly planning process, and will work closely with the WCC Assembly Planning Committee (APC). In the event of a successful bid we will have places on the APC.
10. It is possible that not every member church will want to be part of the process towards an Assembly bid. It will be up to other member churches and the CTBI Trustees to discern whether the bid should progress through to the meeting of the WCC Central Committee in June 2018. There will clearly be an additional burden on the Scottish churches who will be more directly involved in hosting the main event. However, the broader vision for the Assembly bid is that this is an opportunity to bring together WITH the WCC delegates, the breadth and diversity of Christian life and witness from across the British and Irish Churches. It will require an effort and indeed a movement of the Holy Spirit to bring such a diverse group together to worship, share and listen to one another.
11. It is envisaged that Churches Together in Britain and Ireland will act as the body that brings together representatives from the member churches and from across the four nations. This is predicated on an understanding that CTBI acts as “a shared expression of the Churches”. It also means that Churches Together across the four nations are totally involved in this process. It is hoped and indeed expected that members will be involved in every aspect of the Assembly preparations and programme.

Why Glasgow?

12. A number of possible venues within Britain and Ireland were mentioned in informal discussion. Glasgow has emerged however as the venue under consideration, not least because initial consultation with the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre (SECC) there indicates that the detailed list of requirements from the WCC could be met, at a cost that would be very reasonable in terms of expected budget for an event of this size within the British Isles. There has been enthusiasm from potential civic partners as well as indications of support from the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church for exploring this possibility. Staff from the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau (GCMB) and the SECC have already proved generous with their time and expertise in thinking through the feasibility of making a bid.
13. Crucially, Glasgow has a particular historic role in linking the two islands through transport and through immigration, and continues to be a place from which it is easy to access the other three nations (as well as the rest of the world). On the middle weekend it is hope (and budgeted) to hold a linked televised event bringing together historic partners, initially Glasgow, Belfast and Liverpool with additional centres perhaps in Cardiff. At the same time, Glasgow itself reflects the 'dynamic, diverse and global character of Christianity' noted above, with good cooperation already existing between the churches and a serious engagement with issues of e.g. poverty, immigration and sectarianism that can provide a fitting context for reflection on the WCC's key theme of 'pilgrimage of justice and peace'.

What would it cost, and where would the resources come from?

14. The Central Committee of the WCC has indicated that it is not expecting the next Assembly to match the scale of the last one, in Busan in 2013, but has instead indicated a possible event cost of CHF 4.7 million (£3.88 million). Due diligence has been undertaken and Professional Conference Organisers engaged to draw up a realistic budget for the hosting programme.
15. Of the total costs, some will be met by WCC central funds and some by the hosts. The latter would certainly include infrastructure costs (e.g. venue hire, interpretation equipment), and the costs of transport within the host country. There is however scope for further clarity on this score, not least with regard to the number of people to be provided for. While there might be up to 7000 people on site in total on a given day, for instance, not all of these would be the direct responsibility of the hosting churches in terms of hospitality.
16. It is suggested that the total cost to the hosting churches of an event based in Glasgow to the WCC specifications would be likely to be a maximum figure of **£2.3million**. This figure covers a significant number of areas where it would be hoped that actual figures would be reduced. The remaining sum could be covered through:
 - Direct financial support from CTBI;
 - Grants from government at various levels, beginning with Glasgow City Council;

- Diversion of normally requested additional WCC contributions from member churches to defray Assembly costs to direct support of the Assembly in Glasgow;
 - Other fund-raising activities.
17. Host churches would be expected to bear the costs of 'church' based events, e.g major services organised at cathedrals and arrangements for delegates to participate in worship and fellowship with local congregations.
 18. It is certainly the case that significant work will need to be undertaken with the Border Agency in advance of both the bid and the Assembly itself.
 19. In addition to the immediate financial costs, there would be some demands on staff time. It is clear that the local organising committee would hope for support from members, but staffing the planning process, and delivery of the event, would be provided by CTBI staff (the budget provides for 10 full time staff employed for one year prior to the event), while using the services of a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO) to take on certain aspects of administration and management.
 20. Host churches will also need to form various working groups to accompany preparations and to liaise with local service providers. There is a specific request from the WCC for participants to be met at and returned to the airport. In terms of supporting the Assembly on the ground with volunteer labour, the burden of course is likely to fall on the Scottish churches and particularly those in the Glasgow area.
 21. Such an event might seem daunting, but provides an opportunity and a vision for Christian unity that many argue is sorely needed as we all endeavour to find our way in new political landscapes. Welcoming the World Church to these islands is a positive expression of our desire to remain open and welcoming.

Bob Fyffe 18 January 2017

