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Working Group on Bioethics

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CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES
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WORKING GROUP ON BIOETHICS

The Church and Society Commission of CEC is the body which enables Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox churches in the European continent to relate to the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe and the OSCE. In 1999 it established a Working Group on Bioethics. This continues the work done by the previous Working Group of the European Ecumenical Commission on Church and Society (EECCS) since 1992. The Working Group consists of representatives from European Protestant churches, ecumenical associations, and now also members representing Orthodox churches. Its terms of reference include :

- following and monitoring the work of the Council of Europe and the European Union on issues relating to bioethics and biotechnology, and
- formulating contributions to and comments on the activities of the European institutions in this field.

The Working Group consists of specialists in areas such as medicine, genetics, biochemistry, theology, ethics and law, representatives from European churches member of CEC. Since 1997 CEC has had observer status on the Steering Committee on Bioethics (CDBI) of the Council of Europe.

Developments in the biomedical sciences and biotechnology, like medically assisted procreation or genetic modification, arouse ambivalent public reactions. There is hope for new therapies, drugs and foodstuffs, but these developments may also raise questions about fundamental norms, values and beliefs, for instance by research on human embryos, cloning, genetic modification of animals and plants. For the churches, these and many other issues call for profound reflection from the perspective of Christian faith.

The approach taken in our churches is to allow and encourage open dialogue on these matters, guided in the Holy Spirit by the wisdom of the Bible and of the traditions of the Church. The task of the churches is to help believers to take their responsibility - both individually and as a community of faith - in following our Lord Jesus Christ in everyday life with the aim of "a good life with and for others, within structures which are just" (Paul Ricoeur). To use some biblical metaphors, our common calling (diaconia) is to be good stewards in the world, as men and women created and redeemed by God, our Father in Jesus Christ, so that it can become a place where life is worth living for all creatures. The task of the Working Group is to be seen in the light of this perspective.

On several occasions, the previous and the present Working Groups have contributed to public debate concerning the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, the European Union's Patenting Directive, and the areas of medically assisted procreation, the protection of the human embryo, cloning, stem cell research, and genetically modified food. They are currently working on predictive medicine, xenotransplantation and aging.

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