

Oikosnet Europe
Newsletter 1/2025
February 2025



Dear Brothers and Sisters!
Dear Friends and Colleagues!

2025 has come and already gone to the 2nd month. Slogan of the year is written in 1. Thessalonians 5:21 "Scan everything. Keep the good".

Centuries were on the quest for the greater good. They were looking for equality and peace, searching freedom, reconciliation and salvation.

Our time fights over if is there a good in the narrow borders of a country, a culture, an ethnicity or if is there a good overcoming borders and uniting humankind.

We have to scan our possibilities and make decisions. What issues bring us together as members of Oikosnet Europe? Where do we share the same approach? Where do we walk to the beat of different drummers? What are our common aims and goals? Where are we looking out of different perspectives and hopes to the coming kingdom of God?

In the General Assembly of last year's October, we worked on the relation of church and civil society and the challenges in Europe and the world. We looked at many issues but one fell short.

The question was raised to our point of view to the **conflicts in the Middle East** and how we and our Churches are dealing with it. We will pick it up in a **Workshop at March 19th from 9-12**, online.

Warsaw happened 4 months ago. We are looking back and take it to the present in the reports of Aga Wiśniewska . Thanks again to Anna Wrzesińska for all the work of preparation and settlement and the Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession for her hospitality.

The Preparations for this year's GA have started already. It will take place from the 17th to the 21th September 2025 in Wittenberg. The Study Day will be organized together with the Ecumenical Department and the women's organization of the Protestant Church in Central Germany. In the business part there are some major decisions to be made on the future of Oikosnet Europe. They will be prepared by the Working Group in the time until then. You find the dates at the end of this Newsletter and you are invited to join. If you like to sign up, send me a mail, please.

In the meanwhile Lucia Leonardi from Agape left the board in January 2025. She found a new job and now there is not enough space left for the work with Oikosnet Europe. We miss her already! Goodbye and Good Luck, Lucia!

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Heinz-Joachim Lohmann".

Heinz-Joachim Lohmann, Executive Secretary

Report from the President: Business Sessions Action Plan

At first, I would like to welcome **three new members**, whom we were pleased to accept into our association in Warsaw:

- The Christian Association for Adult Education in Norway
- Die Evangelische Erwachsenenbildung – Bundesverband e.V. (EE Bundesverband / Protestant Adult Education – Federal Association)
- The Church and Hussite Theological Faculty of Charles University, Prague, CZ

It is a strong sign for us that, in addition to the two former members of EAEE already mentioned, we have been able to accept two further members in the last three years. These were the Iona Community, UK, and the Remonstrants Seminarium/Arminius Institute in the Netherlands. Oikosnet Europe seems to be attractive in some ways. This also obliges us to further develop our cooperation.

The formal acceptance of the new members took place at the beginning of the first business session at the GA 2024. After a short presentation, *the Christian Association for Adult Education in Norway, die Evangelische Erwachsenenbildung – Bundesverband e.V. (EE Bundesverband / Protestant Adult Education – Federal Association)* und *the Church and Hussite Theological Faculty of Charles University, Prague, CZ* were warmly welcomed.

The meeting took note of **the Annual Report** and discussed in particular the contributions of the various ongoing projects. Among these, the **Youth Projects** are particularly noteworthy. *Lucia Leonardi* was involved on the part of the board. With the support of the Protestant Academy of Berlin and Oikosnet in cooperation with the Iona Community and WSCF Europe (Word Student Christian Federation), a workshop took place in Potsdam, Germany in advance of the GA. The idea for the workshop was born during Oikosnet's Annual Assembly held in Basel (October 2023) in response to a long-standing need to involve the younger generation and to listen to their demands. A delegation of participants in this event also took part in the GA.

The assembly formulated an appeal to all members to consciously send also younger delegates to the General Assemblies and other Oikosnet Events in the future. And in addition to a collaboration with European Christian Youth Organisations, it was pointed out that younger members should also be up for election at the GA 2025, when the entire board has to be re-elected.

The efforts made in terms of **Communication** were also highlighted. *Kjell Riise*, who has taken responsibility for social media communication, pointed out the importance of as many of us as possible signing up as followers for Oikosnet on the various platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram) and liking and sharing posts. As for the OE newsletter, responsibility remains with the board, and for the website, with the secretariat.

The Assembly approved **the 2023 Annual Accounts** and granted the board discharge. The reported deficit is understandable. Nevertheless, attention must be paid to the finances of Oikosnet in the coming years so that we do not end up with structural underfunding. In **the 2025 Budget**, which was also approved as presented, the board was authorised to use unclaimed project funds for its activities in the context of the Action Plan.

It was foreseeable that there would be a lot to talk about the work on **the Action Plan** so far and how to continue the work. The assembly appointed an editorial team (*Katerina Karkala, Knut Refsdal* and *Veronika Maejkova*) under the leadership of the president to formulate a short description of what Oikosnet is and what it stands for, taking into account feedback and concerns from working groups: *“Theology, Education and civil society at the heart of Oikosnet Europe”*. The aim is to create a text for outsiders and those interested in Oikosnet that is easy to understand and, despite its brevity, also

incorporates the further development of the network, for example by welcoming new members from the field of adult education.

Finally, the assembly adopted an agenda for the further, participatory development of the Action Plan:

- Criteria for a new board
- Presuppositions for the work of Oikosnet: Office, staff
- Membership fees for the future
- Working Formats
- Advocacy Work
- Common Projects
- Involving Young People
- Communication and Social Media Activities

The implementation of this agenda requires that as many members as possible actively participate and take the opportunity to give Oikosnet Europe more significance again!

Walter Lüssi, President

Diary from the General Assembly in Warsaw 2024

Wednesday - 3.10.2024

On 3 October 2024, the Oikosnet Europe General Assembly began in Warsaw. The theme of this year's conference is "Churches and the Challenges of Civil Society". Over the next few days, we will participate in discussions on the challenges that the Churches must face in the face of the current socio-political situation in Europe.

We began the assembly with a joint service in the parish of the Holy Trinity. Then we were hosted at a gala dinner inaugurated by the Semper Cantamus parish choir. After the official welcome by Bishop Jerzy Samiec, we sat down to a joint dinner. The coming days promise to be busy and fruitful!

Thursday - 3.10.2024

The second day of the OIKOSNET EUROPE General Assembly in Warsaw was extremely busy, and therefore rich in new reflections and common agreements. Today's activities were divided into 4 parts and each took place at the headquarters of the Christian Theological Academy. Welcomed by the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences - Rev. Dr. Hab. Bogusław Milerski, we began our meeting with a lecture by Prof. Rafał Pankowski on the radical right in Poland - its genesis and the impact of its activities on Polish society, especially young people. The lecture allowed us to show our guests from abroad the challenges that Poland is currently facing on the social level and to explain some of the activities of Polish politics, which may seem unclear to those not interested in it. The second lecture scheduled for Thursday began with an introduction by Rev. Dr. Grzegorz Giemza - director of the Polish Ecumenical Council, who presented the scope of the council's activities and outlined its position on the ongoing war in Ukraine. After a few sentences, Rev. Dr. Giemza, we moved on to a very important topic: Bishop Pavlo Shvartz, who comes from Ukraine, spoke in an extremely moving way about how the approach of both Ukrainians and the countries supporting them has changed over the time since February 24, 2022. Bishop Shvartz placed exceptional emphasis on the emotional aspect of the whole situation, i.e. how one reacts and intervenes in the face of an ongoing war in a

close or neighboring country. The lecture sparked a very fruitful discussion on the values one professes as someone who wants to help their brothers and sisters whose lives are threatened by war. The third topic we touched on was the position of the Polish Evangelical Augsburg Church towards the migration of people to the territory of the Republic of Poland. Agnieszka Jelinek and Dr. Marcin Jelinek - representatives of Diakonia Polska told how the organization makes every effort to help refugees from Ukraine, from the border with Belarus, as well as Polish migrants in Western Europe, with a strong emphasis on people who left for the West to work, leaving their families in Poland.

The last topic discussed on October 3 was the involvement of young people in Christian organizations such as OIKOSNET and AGAPE. Young people from Germany and Italy told us about the workshops they participated in and the results of their participation in them. The results of the workshops indicated that young people also place great emphasis on discussions about migration and combating extremism. Listening to young people talking about their activities with passion and commitment fills us with hope for a better tomorrow for all of us.

The 2nd day of our deliberations is behind us. All participants are extremely motivated and committed to further developing the topics we are discussing during this year's edition of the assembly.

Friday - 4.10.2024

We began the penultimate day of our conference with a walk in the footsteps of the Warsaw Ghetto. Our guide introduced us to issues related to the history of the Warsaw Ghetto from its creation to its liquidation, and the indirectly related Warsaw Uprising. We spent the second part of our fieldwork at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews "POLIN", where we took part in a workshop devoted to the genesis of anti-Semitism in Poland. The workshop helped us better understand the causes of the contemporary view of Polish society towards the Jewish population and provoked reflection on combating discrimination against minorities.

We spent the rest of the day discussing the current mission of the OIKOSNET organization. Due to the very dynamic social, political and economic changes in the world, OIKOSNET is constantly facing new challenges that it wants to face in order to improve the situation of the world around us. We ended the day with a joint prayer, thanking God for a fruitful day and asking him for a peaceful night.

Aga Wiśniewska

Schedule of Oikosnet Europe in 2025

General Assembly 2025 17th to 21th September

General Assmblly 2025 takes place in Lutherstadt Wittenberg/Germany. In the Business Session we will discuss the results of the working group from the Action Plan and elect a new President, Vice-President and Board. The Study Day is called "Path to Peace: Church between the responsibility for nation and the world".

Working Group of the Action Plan

As the President has mentioned already, these are the tasks for the working group in 2025:

- Criteria for a new board
- Presuppositions for the work of Oikosnet: Office, staff
- Membership fees for the future
- Working Formats

- The discussion of a short description of what Oikosnet is and what it stands for
- Advocacy Work
- Common Projects
- Involving Young People
- Communication and Social Media Activities

Therefore the working group will meet online at:

20.2.2025, 10.15h-12h

20.3. 2025, 10.15h-12h

24.4. 2025, 10.15h-12h

5.6. 2025, 10.15h-12h

If you want to join, please send a message to the Executive Secretary: lohmann@eaberlin.de

Oikosnet Europe's Youth Project

From 2022 to 2024 Young People and in the beginning mixed Generations met in the Ecumenical Center of Agape to reflect their points of view on important issues for the future and write down their thoughts:

<https://www.eaberlin.de/aktuelles/2022/no-one-should-be-left-behind/>

<https://www.eaberlin.de/aktuelles/2023/reflections-on-the-way-to-a-just-future/>

<https://www.eaberlin.de/aktuelles/2024/hoping-against-hope/>

The meetings in Agape were a start to develop and express own convictions and perspectives as citizens of Europe and under the umbrella of three members of the Oikosnet network of Christian academies in Europe, the Ecumenical Academy in Prague, Ecumenical Center Agape and the Protestant Academy of Berlin.

In 2024 there was a second meeting in Potsdam including Iona Community and several organizations which are not members of Oikosnet Europe:

<https://www.eaberlin.de/seminars/data/2024/09/social-minorities-solidarity-and-new-cohabitations/>

From the **26th to the 28th March we will meet in Agape/Italy** to discuss the next steps of the project and who will be participants: minors or young adults and the range of their age. If you and your academy are interested to join the Oikosnet Europe's Youth Project contact the Executive Secretary: Heinz-Joachim Lohmann, lohmann@eaberlin.de.

Oikosnet Europe and the situation in the Middle East

Hamas' terrorist act on Israel on October 7, 2023 was an unprecedented attack on Israel's people and the country's security, as a result of which Israel asserted its right to self-defense and responded with all determination. As much as this was understandable and justified in principle, one cannot help but notice that Israel's military response and the subsequent fighting in the Gaza Strip resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians. Nearly two million people have been displaced within the area and hundreds of thousands are facing acute food shortages. The human misery on the part of the Palestinians is also shocking. The rocket fire from Iran on Israel shows the dramatic development and spiral of violence in the region, which has now also affected Lebanon.

In Germany, the church stands on Israel's side without ignoring or downplaying the suffering of the Palestinian people. At the same time, there is a significant increase in anti-Semitism across Europe. And also people complain that in some countries it is nearly impossible to demonstrate for the Palestinians without being called an anti-Semite.

Where do we stand as network of lay academies, spiritual communities and other institutions of Christian education across Europe in this conflict? What connects us, what separates us, are there common or different perspectives?

In the workshop we are in conversation with **Yariv Lapid**. He writes about himself: "My focus has been the development of dialogue on the meaning of the Holocaust between societies with differing, and at times contradictory and competing collective memories. An important aspect has been the development of strategies for the reflection of evil actions and motivations as an aspect of normative human behavior and their incorporation into a moral self-image. A central challenge of my work has been the integration of critical, self-reflective attitudes into national institutions. My work is focused on education at memorial sites, and after leading Yad Vashem's work with European educators, I moved on to establish the education department at the Mauthausen Memorial in Austria, later directing the Center for Humanistic Education at the Ghetto Fighters House in Israel. Since 2018 I work for the US Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, first as director of Levine Institute for Holocaust Education, and currently developing the concept for a new research center on Holocaust education."

And **Christian Staffa**, Head of Studies for Democratic Culture and Church/Education at the Protestant Academy of Berlin. He covers the topics of Jewish-Christian conversation, anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, as well as antigypsyism and racism with a specifically theological approach. He is the representative of the Evangelical Church in Germany for the fight against anti-Semitism.

We will meet online at **Wednesday; 19th March from 9h-12h** online. Please register yourself here: claudia.gust@gemeinsam.ekbo.de

(Don't be surprised when you get this invitation again. We will spread it a little bit among the members)

There will also be a workshop on this topic at the General Assembly and we will meet again in between if necessary.