

JOURNEYING TOGETHER – CULTIVATING CONVERSATION AND CALL TO ACTION

**FROM THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 14 JUNE 2019.
EUROPEAN EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE**

Introduction to the document

This is a document that we hope will cultivate conversation and inspire us to action around the issue of safety and security. At this General Assembly, we have had the opportunity to think deeply and carefully about these issues and process them together. It is our hope that our conversation will continue as we challenge one another with our understanding and encourage one another through our stories. We want to be able to cultivate the conversation with those who are not here, with churches, with our national EAs etc. This document is a starting point and not a conclusion to what has been said throughout these last 4 days. It is also not a summary, for the richness of our conversations would have filled many more pages than these. This document represents a starting point that gathers some thoughts from the various speakers, seminars, working groups and conversations. Our prayer is that you will add to this your own thoughts, ideas and suggestions which will be a catalyst to start the conversation in your own context. We pray that this conversation will be hope filled, saturated in love and Jesus-centred.

Safety and Security in history

When we look back at history we understand that “the good old days” were never really that “good”. There was not a time in history when people were “safe”. There were always threats and the fear of threats, including wars, attacks by outsiders, diseases, famines, floods, and other natural disasters. However, historically God was understood as the One who was in control, the One to whom mankind would all have to answer, the One who would bring justice. There was an eternal element in society’s understanding. Today, however, secularism has removed God and has left mankind in control. There is no higher power responsible, no one to answer to and no one to bring justice. Our perspective is temporal and limited to what happens on this earth. Fear has replaced trust.

Safety and security today

Today, we are not living in more dangerous times, but we are more aware of the dangers that surround us. While peace, freedom, stability, comfort and opportunity are the norm for many, it does not necessarily feel like that. Media, social media, and the internet have made instantly

available, in living colour and in up-to-the-second time, all forms of threats world-wide even when they present no direct threat to us. We are bombarded with bad news – of terror, crime, abuse, trafficking, predictions of environmental and health disaster. We are disoriented by change – of political, worldview, cultural and economic certainties shifting, of technological advance, of emigration and immigration, of neighbourhoods no longer feeling like home. Loss of jobs, our homes being flooded, our children threatened by gangs, facing old age without family nearby or adequate finances, a Christian asylum seeker harassed by Muslims or facing deportation to persecution, there are many reasons for fear.

Uncertainties and threats can be real. But what exacerbates the insecurity is fragility and a lack of resilience. We expect our governments to fix every problem and guarantee our safety – but they cannot. We invest too much of our security in money, sex, children, culture and the approval of others. Too often, we choose to insulate ourselves from danger by keeping our children indoors and staying away from those who are different. And fear grows.

Biblical perspective of Fear

What is fear and what does the Bible say about it? Fear is a natural reaction to anything that is unknown and which is perceived to be a threat. We have a very natural and biological reaction to fear: fight, flee or freeze. The Bible, from its very beginning encourages us to fear God (Proverbs 9:10). However, the fear that God expects is not one based on terror, or on uncertainty, it is based on awe and holiness. The fear of the Lord does not give us a fight, flight or freeze reaction; rather it gives us the desire to worship, to honour and to respect God (Revelation 1:11-17).

In the New Testament, the concept of fear is disputed by Jesus by challenging us to instead place our trust in Him and in His promises. It is not that Jesus ignores the concept of fear, indeed he acknowledges it, but He asks us not to give in to it. The consistent thought throughout the New Testament is that by the renewal of our minds, by living in perfect love, by keeping our eyes on Jesus and on our eternal hope, nothing in this world, including fear, ought to control us or dominate us. (Romans 12:1-3; Ephesians 4:23; I John 4:18; Revelation 2, 3). The message we receive directly from Jesus while living in a dangerous world are: “hold on” (Revelation 3:11) and “overcome”/“be victorious” (Revelation 2-3). These are not whimsical or naïve suggestions but are a Jesus-centred and focused understanding that this life is not all there is; that real fear belongs only to those who do not know Jesus and who will face Him at the judgment seat of Christ; that the only real security is eternal and insecurity comes from a life and an eternity without Jesus Christ.

A Call to Action

Our intention at this General Assembly is to continue on a journey of reflecting, praying and discussing the challenges Europe faces and the biblical truths God has promised. There are wonderful opportunities to draw closer to the Lord as we trust Him in all things and share the unshakeable hope that is offered by Jesus to all. We invite our Evangelical brothers and sisters to join us.

Let's journey together to:

- Grow in our ability to take our fearful thoughts captive each day and trust in the Lord no matter what trouble comes. We want to be people of gratitude, expecting good things from our heavenly Father but enjoying His green pastures even in the valley of the shadow of death.
- Live out our biblical hope and values without fear into our decisions and actions at home, at work, with our neighbours and at the ballot box.
- Find new ways to bring the hope of Jesus Christ to those around us, no matter how different they are. Let's share creative ideas and encourage one another to intentionally build neighbourliness, to respond to spiritual, emotional and practical needs and to enable people to flourish in their God-given identities. Very often, the most important thing Christians can give is time, respect and friendship.
- Find the courage to live sacrificially. When the Lord asks, will we serve others or speak out His truth, no matter the cost?
- Pray boldly for the authorities to be able to fulfil their God-given responsibility to serve the community, to strengthen peace, justice and righteousness, to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected and to provide the space for people to flourish in freedom.
- Seek ways to partner with the authorities at local, national and European level to bless society and strengthen the safety of all but also being unafraid of challenging them when we believe they are wrong, bringing in the God-perspective and suggesting appropriate measures to be taken.
- Communicate a determined trust and faith that there is indeed an end to evil, to live out, model and preach gracious eschatology that does not teach fear but instead teaches resilience, steadfastness, faith, joy and delight in the coming of our Lord Jesus in whom all things will be made new, true life and love restored, the end to tears and the abolition of fear.

Bad Blankenburg, 14 June 2019