ECEN Assembly 2026 Report

Renewing our passion for Creation in a time of trial

Franciscan Training Centre Maison Notre-Dame du Chant d'Oiseau, Brussels, 29 August- 2 September



Over 50 participants gathered for the ECEN Assembly in Brussels, drawn from 15 countries across Europe and representing denominations and organisations from many traditions (including minority churches, Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran and Orthodox traditions). This is the first Assembly since ECEN was established as an independent charity in 2025. The Assembly was chaired by Stephen Taylor of the Church of England with Claire des Mesnards from Eglise Protestante Unie de France as executive secretary.

Highlights

- The Assembly was a joyful affirmation of the work of ECEN
- It was energised by the participation of many young people and excellent presentations
- We were able to participate and contribute to the global launch of Season of Creation 2026
- We were deeply moved by contributions from Ukrainian participants. They face challenges working in a war zone, that most of us can scarcely imagine.

Notes compiled by Adrian Shaw, Claire des Mesnards, Stephen Taylor and Tamás Kodácsy, September 2026

SATURDAY 29 August

From the roots to bearing fruit Frank Dieter Fischbach (General Secretary, CEC), Claire des Mesnards (ECEN), Tamás Kodácsy (Reformed Church of Hungary)

- Frank-Dieter took up post as secretary at CEC in July 2024. He expressed encouragement about developing a working relationship between CEC and ECEN. A joint letter was sent to CEC member churches, inviting them to support ECEN. CEC no longer works on environmental issues and will refer questions of environmental issues to ECEN. However, CEC will endeavour to support ECEN where appropriate.
- Tamás reminded the Assembly that ECEN remains deeply rooted in the churches that called it to existence in 1998. He reminded us that CEC and ECEN share the same 'family DNA', just like a father and a daughter, even if ECEN is now independent.
- Claire explained how ECEN may continue the work in this new setting, focusing for example on advocacy towards the EU on environment and climate across Europe, including non-EU members.
- ECEN has a chance to decide now on its priorities, its structure and organisation, with the flexibility of a network that may decide autonomously on its scope and levels of action.

Business session

- Stephen explained that the "Association de Soutien au Réseau Européen Chrétien pour l'Environnement" (ECEN support association) was now constituted as a charity, registered in France. The enabling team has been working on updating ECEN's Structure and Organisation, which will be reviewed by the present Assembly and submitted to a virtual Assembly for ratification in 2027. The 2027 meeting will include all the nominated delegates from European churches. Elections to the Enabling Team will also be held at the meeting.
- Ulrich Rusen Weinhold, Eglise Protestante Unie de France and treasurer of the charity, presented a financial report. CEC transferred €57,000 to ECEN upon separation. ECEN is now seeking to develop income from church denominations and other sources. €15,000 has been promised from denominations in 2026 so far and some churches are allocating staff time to ECEN activities.
- Questions were asked about the vision, aim and purpose of ECEN and about who are the members or supporters. ECEN has a track record of sharing experiences and best practices, and it was suggested that this, along with advocacy, should remain its main activities. It was suggested that these priorities should be clarified in a report to denominations. ECEN also has access to the substantial academic resources of the European Ecotheology Research Network (ECErN), which was shaped last year from the ECEN theological working group chaired by the Prof. Tom Sverre Bredal-Tomren. This Assembly may also provide some priorities for action. Stephen invited nominations for members to join the enabling team for the year to come.

Introductions

Participants were invited to share their stories. Examples included:

- Ecumenical Diaconal Year Network (EDYN), promotes long term volunteering abroad, in partnership with a range of churches and faith based groups. https://edyn.org/
- Florian Gonzalez of the United Protestant Church of Belgium (EPUB) welcomed us on behalf of its church and introduced us to how churches take climate action in Belgium
- Elfriede Dörr of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) described campaigning on Climate Justice https://lutheranworld.org/programs/climate-justice
- David Waller of Church of England introduced environmental projects from the Diocese in Europe https://www.europe.anglican.org/caring-creation
- Olha Sydii from Caritas Ukraine briefed the meeting about 'Wash in War': a project protecting water resources in a country at war https://washinwar.caritas.ua/en/
- Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) introduced the project 'Empowering Young Christian Voices: Spaces, Participation, and Advocacy in 2026' https://www.eyce.org/

SUNDAY 30 August

Activities included participation outdoor in 'Ecospirituality' with Christine Kristof (CUT: Chrétiens Unis pour la Terre) ; a service at Notre-Dame des Grâces with the local Roman catholic parish and Rev Laurence Flachon (EPUB) preaching; a forest walk outside Brussels; a walk in Brussels centre to visit the House of Compassion; and a Solar Energy project. In the evening there was an ecumenical Care for Creation service at the Anglican Holy Trinity Church. The Community Kitchen of the church project provided us with our evening dinner.

MONDAY 31 August

Keynote address by Ruth Valerio: "How to survive a world in crisis (and not grow weary of doing good)"
Ruth explored the emotional challenges of promoting climate justice in a time of trial and strategies for participants to cope, both to maintain their own well-being and to continue to lead others in promoting climate justice. Her book of this title was published to coincide with the Assembly. She sets out a series of steps we can adopt to continue to flourish under difficult circumstances: 1. Hold on to your vision; 2. Acknowledge the pain; 3. Find your community; 4. Take action; 5. Remember the Sabbath; 6. Connect with nature.

Workshops
Three workshops were offered
- Henrik Grape of the World Council of Churches introduced the Ecumenical Decade for Climate Justice and how to get involved https://oikoumene.org/what-we-do/care-for-creation-and-climate-justice/ecumenical-decade-of-climate-justice-action
- Corinne Bitaud proposed the project 'Churches in 2050' a workshop to examine the possibility of developing a foresight project in partnership with others across Europe
- Sarah Corbett offered participants the opportunity to get involved with 'craftivism' https://www.craftivist-collective.com/our-story/

Testimony by Ms Tetiana Stavnychy, Director of Caritas Ukraine
Ms Tetiana Stavnychy shared powerful testimony of the reality of war: chaos and destruction that shatter relationships, both with God, our neighbours and with the earth. She referred to the

relevance of *Laudato Si.* War is a denial of what makes us human: it goes against our created nature. At the deepest, war attacks communion and destroys truth. Thus, healing begins with empathy, as a place where the divine is present.
The terrible humanitarian and environmental consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine were documented with figures and images, from the beginning of the war to date. The notion of ecocide applies to different kinds of pollution created by the war but is particularly relevant to the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam on 6 June 2023, and its long-lasting consequences on biodiversity and on people's ability to access clean water. The Wash in War exhibition at the Franciscan centre depicts how Caritas Ukraine is taking action: not trying to repair what was there before, but building what survives the next strike. Tetiana witnessed that beyond despair, when we act, we are also healed, ourselves, as we are restoring the image of God in ourselves.

TUESDAY 1 September

Practices of Communion: The Task of An Integral Ecology by Carmody Grey, Professor of Integral Ecology, Laudato si Institute
Carmody introduced 'integral ecology' as a Christian approach to our shared life on this planet. It was developed in *Laudato s*i and adopted by Pope Leo. In age of precarity, dominated by technocratic thinking, it is necessary to reassert a communion between human, the rest of creation and God, based on love. She stressed the importance of motherhood -everyone has a mother -as an image of care and tenderness, for example understanding the earth as our mother, that can help us understand integral ecology. It is not possible to create an integral ecology, to change our relationship with the earth without revolutionary change. Our current economy is profoundly immoral as it based on destructive exploitation of people and planet.

Taking action at European level, Nicolas Ștefănuță, Green MEP from Romania.
Nicolas grew up in rural Transylvania and is a member of the Orthodox Church. He noted with concern the reaction against the EU Green Deal and the growth of far-right politics across Europe. We have lost time in responding to climate change, particularly as climate sceptic dictators or autocracies now dominate many nations across the world. Compassion and understanding of our differences is essential and churches have a role to play in promoting this. As practices of domination tend to reign in the political spheres where the key decisions are made, he reminded us of the need to be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10, 16). He left us with the call not to let the powerful ones do evil in the dark, but to shed light on it.

Charta Oecumenica, Fr Manuel Enrique Barrios Prieto, Secretary General of the Commission of the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (Comece) and Joint Committee of CEC-CCEE (Council of Bishops Conferences of Europe)
The Charta Oecumenica (CO) was first launched in 2001, promoting ecumenical relations across Europe. It was renewed and relaunched by CCEE and CEC in 2025, including a presentation to Pope Leo. It includes a revised section on safeguarding creation (chapter 12). It was noted, with some confusion, that CEC has signed the CO but will not work on environmental issues. It is now up to ECEN to help make chapter 12 of the CO a reality and turn its commitments into actions, with the active support of those churches represented in the CEC-CCEE constituency. How this might be achieved now needs strategic reflection.

Celebration of the Season of Creation: ECEN joined the online global celebration. Tamas Kodacsy from the Reformed Church in Hungary co-hosted the global launch from the Assembly.

Walk in search for living water. We experienced the spiritual search for living water by walking together from the Franciscan Centre to the last remaining watermill on the River Woluwe, passing through Brussels' parks, its modern buildings and traffic, and the peaceful ponds of the Woluwe Valley.

Quick evening presentations included

- **Natalia Kulia of the Institute of Ecological and Religious Studies in Ukraine** described the work of IERS in delivering environmental education during the war. They have demonstrated that nature education can help children recover from trauma. 'Our hope and strength lie in our action.' https://iers.org.ua/en/home/
- **Aline Nussbaumer described the global work of Arocha** and invited participants to use the resources available at https://arocha.org/en/
- **Laura Lee Lovering of BMS World Mission** described their carbon footprint tool and other services available on the website https://climatestewards.org/
- **Sharon Nordley described how SIL** promoted language awareness and faith, including faith and farming connecting faith, scripture engagement, and restorative agriculture. https://sites.google.com/sil.org/faith-and-farming
- **Waseem Raza presented his research poster** comparing stewardship theology in *Laudato si'* and Al-Mizan, Creation texts drawing on Christian and Muslim scriptures. He witnessed how, as a theologian from the Global South, ECEN's work and community mattered to him.
- **Climate march in Paris, 26 September and Climate march in Brussels, 11 October: all are invited to attend!**

WEDNESDAY 2 September

Last business session discussed the opportunity of regional working groups; advocacy projects at EU level and ECEN Structure and Organisation.

- Greetings and encouragement were shared by Arianne van Andel from the Bamboo Collective, a regional network similar to ECEN in Latin America.
- Damian Kessi from the Protestant Church in Switzerland offered to host the 2028 Assembly
- New members were added to the Enabling Team: Marijke van Duin, Ilkka Sipiläinen, Josefína Kinclová, and Damian Kessi.
- Amendments to the "ECEN Structure and Organisation" document were proposed by the Assembly. The revised document was approved by the Assembly who requested the Enabling Team to incorporate the requested changes: see here the updated document.
- A training project on climate security for all politicians could be promoted at European level

Conclusion: a memorable Assembly

We shared caring time together in the Assembly. Loneliness was left behind and new friendships have been shaped. New ideas and resources, previously unheard, were shared, recognised and understood. We experienced a sense of community, helping to restore broken relationships. Together we remain committed to return to our churches and organisations with renewed energy, to build new bridges and to embody our vision in action. ECEN will continue to share stories and resources, promoting environmental work by churches at the political level and it will be a voice for people and the planet.