



The gulf between rich and poor means social exclusion

Visitors to the German Protestant Kirchentag confirm an on-line questionnaire and define current burning social challenges. By Thomas Flügge.

The gulf between rich and poor is getting bigger. What was long regarded as a global North-South question has found its way into the prosperous societies of Western Europe. The social exclusion which arises from it is the greatest social challenge to Europe today. This result of an on-line questionnaire among CPCE member churches last year was confirmed a few weeks ago.

Visitors to the CPCE stand at the “Market of Possibilities” of the German Protestant Kirchentag from 20 to 23 May in Bremen had the opportunity to take part in a questionnaire. More than 200 people selected their personal hit list of urgent issues from 10 topics. What is the most urgent social problem in Europe?

For 62% of visitors it was clear that social exclusion through the gulf between poor and rich, which is getting greater, is a challenge that also needs an answer from the churches. With 39% of the votes – multiple choices were possible – there followed the integration of migrants, the lack of any intercultural dialogue and the problem of xenophobia. With 29% each the increase of violence in public was mentioned along with the social effects of environmental policies, including the rising costs of energy. 25% cited the growing need for old people to be looked after and cared for in an aging society. There followed the individualization of values with more one-person households, fewer children and above all seniors living alone (19%), demographic change (18%), the continuation of mass unemployment and the effects of economic globalization (each 14%) and the growing costs of the social insurance system (13%).

The answers will be included in the study process “New social challenges for the Protestant churches in Europe”, the results of which will be presented to the coming meeting of the CPCE Council in Geneva in October 2009. The study is to work out the specific challenges and criteria for the development of ethical judgments on social challenges. The results should help the churches of the CPCE to coordinate their activities and as often as possible speak with a common voice.

The results of the questionnaire were evaluated by Paul Henke.