



**Grand Opening of the EMS Focus 2009 – 2010**  
**“Giving Account of our Hope – Christian Witness in a Pluralistic World”**  
**Sunday Worship in Adenta Victory Church in Accra/Ghana, 21 June 2009**

**Information on the EMS Focus**

**by Rev. Ulrike Schmidt-Hesse**

**Head of Mission and Partnership Department, Deputy General Secretary of EMS**

Dear brothers and sisters,

The peace of Jesus Christ be with you.

It is a great pleasure for me to have this opportunity to present the programme of the EMS Focus to you.

EMS is an international fellowship of churches and missions in 10 different countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Some of these churches and mission societies have always lived in pluralistic contexts, often as religious minorities. Others have only recently been experiencing the presence of other religions. The internationalisation of economy and communication, the globalisation process, has its effects in all of our societies. The world is moving closer together. People with different faiths, ideologies, cultures and social and economic backgrounds are living together. And we are searching for ways to come to terms with these differences, which may be perceived as a variety of gifts and richness by some and as a threat or source of injustice by others.

How can Christians bear witness to the good news of life in fullness for all people in such a pluralistic world? The EMS focus invites churches and groups to embark on faith journeys together, thus exploring how to give account of our hope.

Journeying together towards Justice – Sharing faith – Encountering the Other- Celebrating the Fullness of Life: these are main features of our programme. We shall share stories of hope from the Bible and stories of people living today.

In the Mission Statement of EMS it is being said: We are on the way together sharing our hope for the kingdom of God. We have a distinct hope: Justice and peace will rule, suffering and death will be overcome, God will dwell among us. It is a costly hope: It stems from the cross, from Jesus' death and resurrection. And it requires action, participation in God's mission, in God's compassionate and transforming love to the world.



The EMS Focus aims at promoting and encouraging new experiences of faith and life within the context of religious and cultural diversity. Encountering the other, cooperating with others can enrich and renew our spirituality. Clear Christian witness and peaceful coexistence with people of other faiths and cultures are not contradictory. Witness and dialogue complement each other. Further, the EMS Focus will support joint initiatives for the protection of human dignity and for the development of just communities, thus fostering a spirituality of life.

As churches and individuals living in very different contexts we can learn from each other in the EMS fellowship and we can challenge and encourage each other to become witnesses of hope. In fact this morning in this worship service we can see and hear and feel what this means. This is such an inspiring experience!

The EMS focus comprises three areas of programmes:

1. There are four international activities.
2. Ongoing programmes of EMS such as encounters of partnership groups will deal with the Focus theme.
3. The projects of the year 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 will highlight initiatives within churches of the EMS fellowship which are exemplary for Christian witness in a pluralistic world, such as the work of the Schneller-Schools in the Middle East with Christian and Muslim children from poor families.

The four international activities are:

- a) Reading the Bible with the eyes of another
- b) Pilgrimage
- c) Theological training in the presence of the other
- d) Networking of Migrants' Centres

These activities will be started one after the other. Today we shall start the Bible reading programme. Rev. Bernhard Dinkelaker will present this later in more detail.

For the pilgrimage which will take place in May 2010 a group of participants from the world-wide EMS fellowship will embark on a journey of faith. Their pilgrimage towards Jerusalem will lead them through four countries in the Middle East, to holy and "unholy" places in this region which is equally important to Christians, Jews and Muslims. They will meet people of different faiths who are committed to peace and justice and will support them in their joint commitment.

In preparing for the Focus we learned that persons teaching theology in the presence of people from different religions can and must formulate their statements with great precision. The activity "Theological training in the presence of the other" invites theological institutions in different countries of the EMS fellowship to exchange their views on how to express their relationship to other religions in the content and teaching methods of theological training. Their aim is to obtain new stimuli to use in their own programmes.

Persons migrating to other countries to live and work there contribute to the development of pluralistic communities all over the world. In the fourth international activity initiatives set up by and for migrant men and women in different countries in the EMS fellowship will support each other and develop their programmes further. Congregations will be encouraged to open up to migrants living among them, to strengthen their rights and to combat factors such as poverty which force people to migrate.

Congregations, groups and individuals are cordially invited to participate in the activities and accompany them in prayer. Posters, flyers and workbooks are available. You can also visit the EMS website to obtain further information and you can contribute your experiences and insights to a forum. We will be pleased if you enter into dialogue with others on the subjects raised by the Focus in your congregations and communities and if you support the Projects of the Year with your donations.

I hope and pray that the EMS Focus will encourage us to be witnesses of hope!

Thank you very much for your attention.

May God bless you.

Rev. Ulrike Schmidt-Hesse

Head of Mission and Partnership Department and Deputy General Secretary of EMS

Rev. Bernhard Dinkelaker, General Secretary of EMS, then presented the first international activity in the framework of the EMS Focus: "Reading the Bible with the eyes of another."

He pointed out that groups in all churches in the EMS fellowship are invited to participate. In this international programme groups discover the Bible through different eyes in intercultural exchanges with partners. Every group has a partner group in another country which reads the same texts. The groups share their insights. This is based on biblical texts which speak about the witness of hope, about paths beyond cultural and religious boundaries and about respect for others. The method used is known as "Bible sharing" which ensures that all group members participate in the exchange. He presented the project workbook, which is immediately available.