



The Lausanne Movement Responds to European Challenges

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The Western Church finds itself in a missionary situation because the radical secularization of Western society has changed old Christendom into a mission field.¹

(Lesslie Newbigin)

The recognition of today's Europe as a mission field is a central ongoing concern for the European Leadership Forum (ELF). At its annual 2015 conference in Poland, key leaders from the Lausanne movement and the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) met informally to discuss possible initiatives to strengthen Christian mission in Europe. Frank Hinkelmann, Thomas Bucher, Hester Zoutman, Lindsay Brown, Jean-Paul Rempp, and Ole-Magnus Olafsrud agreed to meet again to explore ideas. The group met at Heathrow airport for a day in 2016.²

The question they asked themselves and each other was *"How do we bear witness to Christ and all his teachings in the new Europe?"* A new Europe characterized by rapid secularization, profoundly changed by immigration, and battling climate change. Convinced that the Christian message had relevant answers for modern Europe, the group continued to meet in Barcelona and Oxford as well as virtually in zoom conferences.

Before Easter 2017, EEA decided to pull out of the talks. Though the initial hopes of a joint EEA/Lausanne Europe

conference were not realised, the Lausanne Europe (LE) team decided to continue and during a meeting in Oxford in 2017 the team agreed on major reasons for a major European Lausanne conference. One reason was the need for Lausanne Europe to reengage with the worldwide Lausanne movement, as this movement had experienced dynamic developments as a result of The Cape Town 2010 Congress ("Lausanne III") and The Younger Leaders Gathering (YLG) in 2016. The Oxford meeting also agreed that a European-wide conference would be strategic in fulfilling the Lausanne call for holistic mission, it would serve to strengthen relationships between generations of European evangelicals, and that such a conference would strengthen Lausanne Europe as a key enabler in terms of bearing Christian witness "in every nation, in every sphere of society and in the realm of ideas".³

Lausanne Europe 2020

In preparation for Lausanne Europe E2020 (LE2020), some 80 evangelical church and mission leaders met at the IBTS Center in Amsterdam in January 2019 to

seek God's direction for the upcoming conference. They included European church leaders, migrant church leaders, representatives from ministries to children, youth and students, evangelists, and mission agencies.

These leaders formed table groups and was encouraged to express their reaction to the initial plans. 11 out of 13 groups commented on the humility of the initiative. The groups also thought that partnership was essential and that the conference would truly unite evangelicals.

In addition, the table groups envisioned desired outcomes from the conference. They clearly expressed hope that evangelicals would overcome barriers between themselves and show unity. They also wanted the conference to impact local churches and lead to a renewal of the historic European churches. Many expressed hope that Christians would increasingly see Europe as a mission field, and that migrant leaders would be equipped with tools to reach Europeans. The table groups also wanted LE2020 to contribute to revival and to impact society by equipping churches to engage in every sphere of life.

In June 2018, Lausanne Europe had announced the continent-wide Lausanne Europe 2020 conference *Dynamic Gospel – New Europe* to be held 21.-25. October 2020 in Germany. The initiators hoped and prayed that the conference would contribute to

- a renewed confidence in the Bible as the Word of God,
- a greater international, intercultural, and intergenerational unity, partnership and collaboration amongst evangelicals,
- a stronger emphasis on transformational whole-life discipleship,

- a clear recognition of the unique contribution of majority world churches to mission in Europe and of Europe's ongoing role in world mission,
- a strategic production of new research and study resources to equip European Christians to live and speak prophetically in their context.⁴

The initiators agreed early on that, in order to reach these goals, and to maximize the impact of the planned conference, it needed to be more than an event. Jim Memory, a British missionary and church planter in Spain and a mission strategist with the European Christian Mission, took charge of what became known as the Process Team. A meeting in Copenhagen in 2019 agreed to a process named The Conversation, which would surround the conference itself, now called The Gathering, and enable the chosen delegates to wrestle with key conference issues over the course of a year, rather than just a few days.

The delegates would be encouraged to form Impact Groups, meeting monthly to discuss specially prepared materials, related to themes and issues to be featured at the Gathering. These groups would ideally consist of 10 to 12 people. This process had several advantages. The delegates would be reflecting on and familiarizing themselves with the issues. The Process Team had the dream that if every one of the 800 delegates were to initiate an Impact Group, 10.000 people might be engaged in discussing and praying around themes related to evangelism in Europe and how evangelicals should engage in the current debate and respond to the challenges posed by the increasingly secularized Europe. Jim Memory, at the time researching the state of mission in Europe, resulting in *Europe 2021: A Missio-*

*logical Report*⁵, published by the European Christian Mission, was thus uniquely qualified to lead this part of the Lausanne effort.

A team made up of six people committed itself to producing monthly material to be used by the Impact Groups. Among the early topics was "Nominal Christianity – A typical European phenomenon." The author Evert van de Poll is a professor at the Evangelical Theology Faculty in Leuven, Belgium, and an associate director of the Theological Commission of the European Evangelical Alliance. Another topic was "Transforming Communities: Making an Impact through Making Disciples." Jay Eastman, an American, wrote this material based on his experience doing community service and church planting in Berlin. The emphasis on Majority World contribution to missional efforts in Europe featured prominently throughout both the Conversation and the Gathering. The topic for October 2021 is an example: "Church planting in Europe: Perspectives of an African pastor in Romania." Peter Rong, originally from South Sudan, has pastored a Baptist Church in Romania for more than 20 years. In the article "The church in a sexualized Culture," the Swedish theologian Olof Edsinger provided advice and guidance in a difficult terrain. Edsinger, the general secretary of the Swedish Evangelical Alliance, has written extensively on LBTQ issues and how the church should approach this.

Probably no other Christian conference has been preceded to this extent by a period of conversation and study around a set of topics to be featured at the conference itself. Jim Memory and his team did not know how this experiment would turn out. He sums up the experience like this:

From the very first meeting of the planning team, I was pushing hard for us to think of this as a process rather than an event. The Process Team met to consider what this might look like and developed the idea of a virtual Conversation that would build momentum for nine months leading up to the gathering and help people to land their reflections and turn that momentum into action in the three months after the gathering. As things turned out, with COVID causing the postponement of the 2020 Gathering, the Conversation lasted for 20 months. Each month we generated materials for reflection and across Europe more than 50 impact groups met to discuss crucial issues in mission, reflect on discipleship and mobilisation for mission, and on the scriptural focus for the Gathering which was Paul's letter to the Philippians, and to pray. These impact groups and the relationships between their members were a true blessing. I wouldn't change anything other than wishing we could have done a better job of encouraging people to engage in the Conversation.⁶

Françoise Thoret, a senior Belgian Appeals Court judge, led an Impact Group with six members of different nationalities. In October 2021 the topic before the groups was "Muslims in Europe and the response of the Church." Bert de Rooter, who wrote the study article, suggested that Islamophobia, common among European Christians, has a negative impact on Christian mission. Thoret says that the conversation made an impact on her perception of the problem of immigration. As a judge she did not always see the good side of things, so "I was a bit reserved," she says. But through the conversation she became convinced that, not only do we have to minister to the refu-

gees as the Bible says we should, but that the mass immigration in Europe was part of God's plan. "As Christians and as Churches, we really must commit ourselves to work with the Lord," Thoret says.⁷

A rebuilt train station in Marburg, Germany, was the original venue for the Gathering, but the organizers realized that these premises would not be finished in time, so the Gathering was moved to hotel Golebiewski, Wisla, Poland, a facility used annually by the European Leadership Forum.

As Europe closed down due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Gathering had to be postponed to 2021. The project thus assumed the acronym LE20/21.

Engage

The LE 20/21 leadership felt that an event organized in October/ November 2020 would be a good way to mark the original dates planned for the Gathering and give the members of the Impact Groups a sense of being part of something pan-European. An online event entitled *Engage* was aired online on Saturday 24. October. This being the 10th anniversary of Lausanne III in Cape Town a portion of the 90-minute program was devoted to the outcome of this milestone congress. Chris Wright, who led the work on *The Cape Town Commitment*, gave a speech on the work that went into the document which has given inspiration and direction to mission work in the 21st century.

The second half of *Engage* was devoted to the Conversation and the impact groups. Jim Memory interviewed two Impact Group Leaders, one from Germany and the other from Portugal. The event was hosted from Oxford, UK, by Usha Reifsnider, UK, and Giovanni Donato who participated from his home in Siena, Italy. Located near Frankfurt,

Germany, a team of five technicians connected to Bild:werk and led by Markus Stähler made it all happen, as translators located in their homes in Germany, Spain and France provided simultaneous translations for non-English speakers. *Engage* opened with an all-European music video in which singers from Portugal, Ukraine, Germany, UK, Denmark, and Norway performed the psalm *Be still for the power of the Lord*, accompanied by a symphonic orchestra from Macedonia.

An *Engage II* online broadcast in June 2021 featured the Oxford professor emeritus John Lennox and the biopic film *Against the Tide*, produced by Khari Productions, Scotland. Viewers had the opportunity to ask questions, both directly to professor Lennox and through a chat room, monitored from South Africa. *Engage II* also gave an IT team, led by Janet Sewell, the opportunity to try out a digital platform named Scoocs under consideration for use during the Gathering.

The organizers used social media extensively. Albanian social media expert Delinda Mucollari managed to promote Lausanne Europe, and LE20/21 especially, successfully on Facebook and Instagram. On Instagram, 1133 followers were generated and 50.000 views each month on average. On Facebook there were 8.500 page reaches each month on average.⁸

The Gathering

The plan was to have a hybrid event in Wisla, Poland, in November 2021. This meant a physical gathering combined with a virtual output. But ten weeks prior to this date the leadership decided to go for an online only event. This decision was based on strong medical advice discouraging physical gatherings during the Covid-19 pandemic, which had hit

Poland hard. Another postponement was not an option.

Usha Reifsinder, serving as a program host, as member of the LE20/21 Coordinating Team (COT), and later appointed as Lausanne Europe co-regional director, reflected on the sudden change:

It was very difficult to imagine that an online gathering could replace a live gathering. As it became apparent that a live gathering was not going to be possible, as organisers we felt defeated. Thankfully we had the guidance and influence of a younger leader (Janet Sewell) who boldly stepped in and using her skills and network of contacts became the leading force to make the online event a huge success. The advantage or disadvantage of being forced to use new technology increased our knowledge of the future possibilities of gatherings but along the way made our relationships as a team much stronger.⁹

An enormous amount of work awaited the organizers if this change of plans were to succeed. They hired the Lighthouse International Church in Southampton as a venue, with the intention of turning it into a TV studio for the event. Markus Stähler and his German bild:werk team made that happen. They hauled all the necessary equipment from Frankfurt. Powerful studio lights were mounted, but they needed more electricity than the church usually consumed, so a powerful generator was hired. The owner of the generator demanded a 24-hour guard to watch his equipment, due to the rough neighborhood the generator was to be placed in for several days.

All the speeches needed to be prerecorded and edited. It would be too risky to base most of the Gathering on live performances, from speakers based all over

Europe. Not that the recording and editing did not have its challenges. By the time the speakers had recorded their messages, the organizers had less than three weeks to edit 150-200 videos. People engaged through Damaris Norway did most of the editing. The last videos were made ready during the Gathering.¹⁰

As the virtual Gathering got underway on November 17th, some 600 of the originally 850 invitees participated from their homes, churches, or offices. In addition, another 600 people availed themselves of the opportunity to follow the program. To fully participate, they had to log on to the Scoocs platform. This enabled people to communicate with other participants and speakers. The pre-recorded elements of the Gathering could also be watched on YouTube, but there the viewers could not participate in the program.

Scoocs turned out to be a well-functioning digital platform. It enabled the participants to meet in smaller or larger groups, almost as if the Gathering had been a physical event. The 19 teaching seminars had an average attendance of 70 participants. 47 networking seminars had an average of 54 people attending. The pre-recorded teaching gave the speakers a chance to focus on the discussion afterwards, instead of having to worry about technical problems of delivering the speech via their home computers. The discussions led by moderators worked very well.

Janet Sewell, the Lausanne Europe IT person, has mixed feelings about the online only event:

I believe the event both suffered from being online as well as strengthened. I think it suffered in the fact that we were unable to meet face-to-face. The deep conver-

sations that happen over a drink, the chance connections that happen as people bump into each other, didn't necessarily happen during this gathering, but what happened instead was that local groups were strengthened as they congregated to experience the online gathering.

It also spread further. Originally, we were planning this for 800 delegates, by the end, the estimated number was 1200 online participants. The platform we used, Scoocs, made a big difference in that it enabled delegates to organise their own meetings and connect outside of official sessions. The various seminars were also a great connection point, as the speakers facilitated the ensuing conversations. We organised meals between the delegates and the various plenary speaker... this all meant more connections were being made, albeit virtually instead of physically.

So, did the event suffer? Yes, I think it did a little. Did it have advantages? Yes, I think it definitely did, and I do believe that we managed to mitigate some of the adverse effects of taking the gathering online.¹¹

Ample time was dedicated to prayer in the mornings. No pre-recorded material was used here. All of it was live.

After Bible expositions on Paul's letter to the Philippians, plenary sessions engaged the participants on key issues facing mission in Europe and enabled them to listen to "muted" and marginalized voices on the continent. Here racism, antisemitism and the silencing of women were discussed. The continentwide audience also focused on how the gospel arrived in Europe, the present status of European evangelization, and what impact ongoing missionary work is likely to have. Among the plenary speakers were Sarah Breuel,

the director of Revive Europe and coordinator of evangelism trainer for IFES, Øyvind Augland, a pastor and church planter, and Steve Osei-Mensah, a consultant in business and mission who focuses on inspiring Christians to live out their faith in their place of work.

The online virtual format was new to most people and the organizing team gained valuable experiences. So did the participants. The feedback was mostly favorable. Some participants commented that the Gathering has been inspiring and that they now, as a result of this, saw their ministry in a new light. Others pointed out the importance of meeting other believers from across Europe or highlighted the quality of the speakers and the rest of the Lausanne Europe team. One person wrote: "I feel that the Lausanne movement is a fresh wind impulse that the Holy Spirit is pouring over Europe."

Jim Memory summed up the feedback this way:

All the feedback we have had on LE20/21 has indicated that it was a blessing to many. I think it also surprised many in the breadth of topics considered, the quality of the speakers, and the fresh voices that were featured, in particular the voices of Majority World leaders in Europe. I believe it made a real impression and has placed Lausanne Europe on the map for many leaders across the continent. The availability of all the sessions, both plenaries and seminars, on the Lausanne Europe website, has also given it a life of its own outside of the event itself.¹²

Ole-Magnus Olafsrud was part of the original group of people that met informally after the ELF 2015 meeting in Poland to discuss support for mission in Europe. Serving as the Vice chair of

LE20/21, he sums up his reflections on what came out of the exercise in this way:

We have deepened the relationships between and the networks across evangelical leaders in Europe around our theme *Dynamic Gospel – New Europe* – a deeper understanding of the situation of our continent and how the dynamic Gospel is more relevant than ever. We gave fresh impulses to the mobility of the gospel and holistic discipleship in Europe.

We developed a structure that ensured both hands-on-leadership and direction through the Coordination Team – and effective teams for each of the responsibilities. The team leaders for each of the responsibilities united around our goals in the Executive Year, led by Lars Dahle as the chair of LE20/21. Sporadically we gathered more voices in the Extended Executive Team to ensure representation of different points of view of Europe.

We have a whole new group of leaders coming out of LE20/21 committed to serving with us in fleshing out the Lausanne values. We developed a new awareness of teamwork across generations and ethnicities that we will harvest from in the future. Through the LE20/21 process Usha Reifsnider and Jim Memory took on increasing responsibility and were later appointed as the Lausanne Europe Co-Regional Directors.

Through our quota focus we ensured a healthy combination of church leaders, influencers in media, entertainment, academics and business, younger leaders, women, and Majority World leaders. This blended into a mosaic of disciples we will keep focusing on through the ongoing work of Lausanne.

The fact that we had around 100 Majority World leaders registered

was a breakthrough and a major step towards deeper respect and future synergy across ethnicities. This is one of the key areas we will work on in the future and part of our focus on “de-muting” the muted voices. We have a long way to go, though! Lausanne has got a face and is revitalized across Europe – as more than a convenor of conferences.

We lost a lot having to do it online; the emotional and spiritual proximity that comes from physical nearness. We also gained something through the fact that some 1200 people got glimpses through the online production. The preproduction of videos of Bible teaching, seminars, voices of Europe, issues, gave us an outstanding library to draw from in the future.¹³

Ole-Magnus Olafsrud also reflects on LE20/21 in terms of its contribution to evangelical mission in Europe in the days to come:

We are building on the new awareness of and understanding of the Lausanne contribution in Europe.

As the fruit of Lausanne grows best on the trees of others, the future is finding ways of serving our friends in each of the countries, in all their diversity – with the attitude of “How may we serve you and with you in your country?” Therefore, we are now meeting key leaders in each of the countries – country by country to build relationships and focus on how we may serve them.

Through LE20/21 and the present regional leaderships of both Lausanne and Evangelical Alliance we have a much better climate for synergetic partnerships based on mutual respect and understanding of how we better can serve together in complementarity.

LE20/21 was a huge answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17 about unity and love "so that the world may know ...". We are ready to join hands with one another to see this mark the gospel work in Europe towards Lausanne 4 – and to be part of the solution for Europe towards 2050.

Towards the fourth Lausanne Congress

LE20/21 was not only a conference focused on evangelizing the new Europe. It was also a step in the direction of the upcoming Lausanne 4 Congress (L4) to be held in Seoul, South Korea, in September 2024, to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the original Congress of World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974. Several regional conferences will be held around the world, leading up to L4.

Jim Memory says this about the European contribution to the run-up to L4:

LE20/21 was planned before the L4 process was initiated, though the first part of the L4 Listening Process did overlap somewhat. However, I am in no doubt that the momentum that has been generated around Lausanne Europe as a result of LE20/21 will contribute to the L4 process in the long run.

Our emerging future vision of strengthened national Lausanne movements will see 160 leaders from every nation of Europe gather in November 2023. This event will enable us to evolve national selection committees towards vital and ongoing national Lausanne movements that do much more than select participants for L4. This has the potential to influence a much greater number of leaders in each of those countries, engaging them in the process leading up to L4 and beyond.

When reflecting on the whole LE20/21 enterprise in view of Lausanne as a global evangelical mission movement, Chair Lars Dahle highlights the following:

It was a real privilege to be involved in the whole LE20/21 enterprise. For me personally, this grew out of my long-term involvement with the European Leadership Forum. Throughout the LE20/21 process, we as a team truly experienced together *the Lausanne spirit of humility, friendship, prayer, study, partnership, and hope*.

By God's grace, the LE20/21 project achieved more than we could have imagined. It contributed in a real way towards the L4 vision of accelerating global mission together. As I reflect back now, I would like to emphasize the following three key outcomes:

First, the project affirmed that Europe still has a role to play in global mission, alongside others and with partnerships and collaboration at the heart.

Secondly, LE20/21 revitalized Lausanne in Europe as a key evangelical platform for Gospel friendship, fellowship, and partnership.

Thirdly, the project highlighted a holistic theological and missiological framework for the way forward, i.e., mission as "bearing witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching, in every nation, in every sphere of society, and in the realm of ideas".¹⁴ Thus, mission includes both cross-cultural evangelization ("in every nation"), the everyday witness of the whole organic church ("in every sphere of society"), and holistic apologetics in relation to questions, objections, and worldview alternatives ("in the realm of ideas").¹⁵

Explore the Lausanne Europe website at
www.lausanneeurope.org

The Lausanne Europe 20/21 Conversation

- with a wide range of articles, media, and study resources
- <https://www.lausanneeurope.org/conversation/>

Engage 1 & 2 online broadcasts

- The Engage 1 online broadcast (October 2020), with Chris Wright & others:
<https://www.lausanneeurope.org/engage-2020/>
- The Engage 1 music video (October 2020): *Be still for the presence of the Lord*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0oS59ygakA>
- The Engage 2 online broadcast (June 2021), with John Lennox, Iain Morris, and Lars Dahle:
<https://www.lausanneeurope.org/engage-2021/>

The Lausanne Europe 20/21 Gathering

- *The Plenaries*: <https://www.lausanneeurope.org/le2021-gathering/plenaries/>
- *The Bible Expositions*: <https://www.lausanneeurope.org/le2021-gathering/expositions/>
– *with dramas*: <https://www.lausanneeurope.org/le2021-gathering/teoteatr-dramas/>
- *The Networking Seminars & Teaching Seminars*:
<https://www.lausanneeurope.org/le2021-gathering/seminars/>
- *The Voices of Europe*: <https://www.lausanneeurope.org/le2021-gathering/voices-of-europe/>

Notes

¹ Donald Le Roy Stults, *Grasping Truth and Reality, Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Mission to the Western World*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), p. 23.

² *Report on Dynamic Gospel New Europe*, p. 2-3.

³ "The Foreword", *The Cape Town Commitment*.

⁴ *Final Evaluation of LE20/21*, Appendix F.

⁵ See <https://www.europeanmission.redcliffe.ac.uk/latest-articles/europe2021>.

⁶ *Report on Dynamic Gospel New Europe*, p. 12.

⁷ Video included in "Engage 1".

⁸ *Report on Dynamic Gospel New Europe*, pp. 26-29.

⁹ Email to the author on 29th September 2022.

¹⁰ *Report on Dynamic Gospel New Europe*, p 29.

¹¹ Email to the author on 12th October 2022.

¹² Email to the author on 12th October 2022.

¹³ Email to the author on 20th October 2022.

¹⁴ «Foreword», *The Cape Town Commitment*.

¹⁵ Email to the author on 21st February 2023.