

Churches and Religious Heritage in transformation.

The potential of sacred spaces as ‘third’ and ‘fourth’ places

22–23 SEPTEMBER 2026

Secretariat of COMECE
Square de Meeus 19,
Brussels

DAY 1: 4:00 PM – 9:00 PM
DAY 2: 8:30 AM – 1:00 PM

REGISTRATION IS STRONGLY RECOMMENDED!

TUE. 22 SEPTEMBER 2026

4:00 PM **Welcome address**
Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto, General Secretary of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union (COMECE)

4:15 – 6:15 PM **PART I FRAMING THE SUBJECT: FOCAL AREAS AND KEY PERSPECTIVES**
Moderation: Stefan Lunte, COMECE

4:30 PM **Sacred Space as “Fourth Place”. Introductory Reflections on Concepts, Theories, and the Challenges of Respectfully Transforming Religious Heritage**
Prof. Anna Minta, Catholic Private University Linz and founding member of the NEB-Lab Renovation, transformation, and renewal of church buildings and religious heritage in the EU

4:50 PM **Beyond conservation: rethinking policies for rural religious heritage as a territorial asset**
Prof. Chiara L. M. Occelli and Prof. Irene Ruiz Bazán, Politecnico di Torino and member of the Interreg Europe projects RELiHE (Religious Heritage in Rural Areas)

5:10 PM **Parish, Circuit, Node – Churches and Mosques: Challenging religious “Fourth Places” in Sheffield**
Prof. Krzysztof Nawratek, University of Sheffield

5:30 PM **Discussion**

6:15 PM **Break**

7:00 PM **PART II TOWARDS NEW APPROACHES – RELIGIOUS HERITAGE AS “FOURTH” PLACES**
Moderation: Anna Minta, KU Linz

7:00 PM **Churches as ‘Fourth Places’ – Opportunities and Potential for Church Buildings**
Felix Hemmers, Project Manager Zukunft – Kirchen – Räume, Stiftung Baukultur NRW

8:00 PM **ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION including**
Prof. Sven Sterken, KU Leuven
Prof. Mariateresa Giammetti, University of Naples Federico II, Naples (UNINA)
Fr. Thierry Bettler, National Director of the French Bishops Conference for Sacred Art

9:00 PM **Reception**

WED. 23 SEPTEMBER 2026

8:30 AM **PART III TRANSFORMING RELIGIOUS HERITAGE – INITIATIVES AND APPROACHES**
Moderation: Stefan Lunte, COMECE

8:45 AM **Church transformation in two major denominations – the adaption of church buildings in East and West Germany**
Prof. Manuela Klauser, Bonn University and member of the DFG-Research Project TRANSARA – Transformation of Sacred Space

9:15 AM **Supporting the transformation of churches in the European French-speaking world. Between resignation and innovation through a missionary project approach**
Arnaud J. Lambert, Catholic University of Louvain (UCL) and co-founding director of EcclesiaLab

9:45 AM **Transdisciplinary dialogue and instruments: the five roles of the Flemish Future of Parish Churches Platform.**
Prof. Roel de Ridder, Coordinator Platform Toekomst Parochiekerken Belgium

10:15 AM **Discussion**

10:45 AM **Break**

11:15 AM **PART IV CHURCHES AS “FORTH PLACES” – ACTIVITIES, NECESSITIES, AND CHALLENGES**
Moderation: Manuela Klauser, Bonn University

11:30 AM **Jan Jaspers**, Expert for religious heritage and transformation

11:45 AM **Martine Van den Bergen**, President Eglises ouvertes

12:00 PM **Vanessa Fraga-Prol**, Advocacy and Partnerships Manager, Europa Nostra

12:15 PM **Discussion and Feedback Session**

Farewell-Reception